

**How social media facilitate public participation in the
election of a new government: A critical analysis of
Twitter discourses in Zimbabwe during the 2013 elections**

By

Leonard Makombe

Dissertation presented in fulfilment of the requirements for
the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy (Journalism) at

Stellenbosch University

Journalism Department

Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences

Supervisor: Dr Gabriël Botma

December 2017

Declaration

By submitting this thesis electronically, I declare that the entirety of the work contained therein is my own, original work, that I am the sole author thereof (save to the extent explicitly otherwise stated), that reproduction and publication thereof by Stellenbosch University will not infringe any third party rights and that I have not previously in its entirety or in part submitted it for obtaining any qualification.

December 2017

Copyright © 2017 Stellenbosch University

All rights reserved

Abstract

This research is hinged on three overlapping fields namely, political studies, journalism, and media studies and explores how Twitter, a relatively new information and communication technology (established in 2006) was used during a very critical election in Zimbabwe in 2013. Zimbabwe is considered oppressive, with a very restricted media, thus the advent of new web-based content generating and sharing technologies, such as Twitter, were seen as critical for public political participation. This is so because technology optimists argue that new information and communication technologies including Twitter, bridge participatory gaps as they present almost anyone, with the right technology, an opportunity to publish their views. Additionally, technology optimists argue that new information and communication technologies undercut the role of “elites” who would otherwise have dominated discourse during important events such as a national election. Through the emerging networks, technology optimists further argue, users are able to challenge oppressive governments and establish weak ties, to work towards achieving shared goals. Most of the inspiration for such conclusions was drawn from the hope raised in 2009 in Iran and Moldova as well as late 2010 to 2011 when protests in some Middle East and North African countries were inappropriately called “Twitter Revolutions”. Technology optimists ascribed so much power to media by calling the protests “Twitter Revolutions”. This was despite the fact that not much empirical evidence was presented to support the supposition that Twitter was used to topple governments.

This research uses critical theory to analyse the role played by Twitter in facilitating public political participation during the 2013 elections in Zimbabwe. Empirical evidence gathered through a systematic collection, archiving and analysis of tweets has shown that the potential role of social media in facilitating public political participation in Zimbabwe in 2013 was exaggerated. An analysis of the quantitative data has shown that a very small minority, around 10 percent, of the participating users, dominated the discourse on Twitter. This is a sign that despite its openness, Twitter has subtle barriers to participation, which result in such asymmetries.

Qualitative analysis, through discourse historical analysis, a variant of critical discourse analysis, has shown that Twitter was a site for ideological conflict, which dispelled any attempt to classify the platform as a new public sphere. The irrational nature of communication on Twitter, together with ideological conflicts showed that Twitter was more of a public space and not public sphere.

Opsomming

Hierdie navorsing betrek drie oorvleuelende velde, naamlik politieke studies, joernalistiek en mediastudies, en ondersoek hoe Twitter, 'n relatief nuwe inligting- en kommunikasietegnologie (gestig in 2006) tydens 'n belangrike verkiesing in Zimbabwe in 2013 gebruik is. Zimbabwe word beskou as 'n onderdrukkende samelewing, met 'n beperkte media. Die koms van nuwe webgebaseerde inhoud, soos op Twitter, kan gesien word as 'n nuwe bydrae tot openbare politieke deelname. Dit is so omdat tegnologie-optimiste argumenteer dat nuwe inligting- en kommunikasietegnologieë, insluitende Twitter, nuwe geleenthede vir deelname skep, aangesien dit aan almal met die regte tegnologie 'n platform bied om hul sienings te publiseer. Daarbenewens beweer tegnologie-optimiste dat nuwe inligting- en kommunikasietegnologie die rol van “elites” ondermyn, wat andersins die diskoers tydens belangrike gebeure soos 'n nasionale verkiesing sou oorheers. Deur die opkomende netwerke, so beweer tegnologie-optimiste verder, is gebruikers in staat gestel om onderdrukkende regerings uit te daag en bande te smee, sodat gesamentlike doelwitte bereik kan word. Die inspirasie vir sulke gevolgtrekkings is geput uit die hoop wat in 2009 in plekke soos Iran en in 2010 tot 2011 in sommige lande in die Midde-Ooste en Noord-Afrika ontstaan het. Dit is onvanpas “Twitter-revolusies” genoem deur tegnologie-optimiste wat baie mag aan die media toegeskryf het. Dit was ten spyte van die feit dat nie veel empiriese bewyse aangebied is om die veronderstelling te ondersteun dat Twitter gebruik is om regerings omver te werp nie.

Hierdie navorsing gebruik kritiese teorie om die rol van Twitter in die fasilitering van openbare politieke deelname tydens die 2013-verkiesings in Zimbabwe te ontleed. Empiriese bewyse wat spruit uit 'n sistematiese insameling, argivering en analise van tweets het aangetoon dat die positiewe verwagtinge van sosiale media in die fasilitering van openbare politieke deelname in Zimbabwe in 2013 oordrewe was. 'n Ontleding van die kwantitatiewe data het getoon dat 'n baie klein minderheid, sowat 10 persent van die gebruikers, die diskoerse op Twitter oorheers het. Dit is 'n teken dat Twitter ten spyte van sy oop platform tog subtiele belemmerings vir deelname het, wat ongelykhede tot gevolg het.

Kwalitatiewe analise, deur middel van diskoershistoriese analise, 'n variant van kritiese diskoersanalise, het getoon dat Twitter 'n platform vir ideologiese konflik was. Dit het pogings om die platform as 'n nuwe openbare sfeer te klassifiseer, belemmer. Die irrasionele aard van kommunikasie op Twitter, tesame met ideologiese konflikte, het getoon dat Twitter meer van 'n openbare ruimte was, en nie 'n openbare sfeer nie.

Acknowledgements

I would never have been able to finish my dissertation without the guidance of my supervisor/mentor Dr Gabriël Botma. His tremendous guidance and the incisive comments he made assisted me to come up with this research. Dr Botma showed a lot of patience and gave unfailing support throughout the journey. Many thanks to my parents, especially my late father, who saw the beginning of this journey but passed on before I completed. His emphasis on hard work helped me work through this thesis. Special mention to my mother who taught me to be thorough, to think critically and be dedicated to everything I do. I also would like to thank my three brothers and three sisters for the support they offered me as I walked through this journey. Finally, I would like to thank my wife, Sheilah, and our three sons. Sheilah was always there cheering me up and stood by me through the good times and even when chips were down. I will forever be grateful for the encouragement and inquisitive questions particularly when she always asked me: “How far with the thesis?”

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Declaration	i
Abstract.....	ii
Opsomming	iii
TABLE OF CONTENTS.....	v
List of Figures	xiii
List of Tables	xiv
Chapter 1 – Introduction	1
1.1 Motivation for the research	1
1.1.2 Research problem.....	1
1.2 Media control and political participation in Zimbabwe.....	3
1.2.1 State monopoly over the airwaves and the battle to control and own broadcasting services	4
1.2.2 Independent Zimbabwe’s decline into authoritarianism and the adoption of alternative media platforms for information access and distribution	6
1.2.3 The context of the 2013 elections against a background of the previous polls.....	7
1.2.4 Background to the debate on the role of social media in political participation	8
1.2.5 Contextualising social media use in Zimbabwe.....	11
1.3 Problem statement and focus	12
1.3.1 Why study the use of Twitter?.....	13
1.4 Theoretical points of departure and research questions	14
1.4.1 Critical approaches to the study of social media.....	16
1.4.3 Brief overview of the network society	17
1.4.4 Critical theory approaches to network society.....	20
1.4.5 What is political participation?	21

1.4.6 Do social media usher in a new form of public sphere?.....	21
1.6 Research design and methods	24
1.6.1 Research design	24
1.6.2 Data Collection	25
1.6.3 Data coding and analysis	26
1.6.4 Ethical considerations	27
1.7 Chapter layout.....	27
Chapter 2 – Literature review	31
2.1 Introduction	31
2.1.2 Process of collecting materials for literature review	33
2.2 What is Twitter?	34
2.2.1 Background to Twitter	34
2.2.2 How Twitter has evolved since 2006	34
2.2.3 The use of #, @mention and retweet (RT) on Twitter	36
2.2.4 What constitutes a Twittersphere or is it a community?	38
2.3 How does Twitter facilitate political participation?.....	38
2.3.1 Arguments for Twitter facilitates political participation	41
2.3.2 Twitter does not facilitate political participation: Dissenting voices	43
2.4 Media and political participation in Zimbabwe, the recurring concepts	47
2.4.1 Historical development of Zimbabwean media	47
2.4.1.1 Media ownership patterns.....	50
2.4.2 Media as an instrument for hegemony for Zimbabwe’s ruling elite	50
2.4.3 State control/regulation of the media in Zimbabwe	51
2.4.3.1 State control of the media: A necessary evil?	52
2.4.3.2 Ever shifting ground of state/media relations	54
2.4.4 New media as enablers for political participation in Zimbabwe.....	55

2.4.4.1 Mobile phones as enablers and tools of empowerment	58
2.4.5 Role of the media in facilitating political participation in Zimbabwe.....	60
2.4.5.1 Role of media in elections: Liberal democratic approach	61
2.4.6 Media in Zimbabwe as a public sphere	63
2.4.6.1 SMS creating sites for mass protests?	63
2.4.6.2 The state versus “independent media”: conflicts and struggles for space	64
2.4.7 New media as liberating technology	68
2.4.7.1 Pessimistic views on role of internet in Zimbabwe.....	70
2.5 Conclusion.....	72
Chapter 3 – Theoretical Perspective	74
3.1 Introduction	74
3.2 What is critical theory? Origins and applicability to study of social media	74
3.2.1 Brief introduction to critical theory.....	75
3.2.2 How can critical theory be defined?.....	76
3.2 Critical theory: Steering off technological determinism and essentialism	78
3.2.1 Critical theory of technology	79
3.2.2 Do technologies facilitate political participation?.....	80
3.3 New communication technology and political participation	81
3.3.1 Political Participation	81
3.3.2 Critique of social media and political participation	83
3.3.2 How does the network society facilitate political participation?	84
3.3.2.1 Nodes of ideology within network society	86
3.4. Critical approaches to Network Society	87
3.5 Social media, a new public sphere?	89
3.5.1.1 What is the public sphere?.....	89
3.5.1.2 Redefining the public sphere	91

3.5.1.3 From the public sphere to public spheres	93
3.5.2 Criticism of the Habermasian concept of the sphere.....	94
3.5.2.1 Is Twitter a public sphere	95
3.5.3 A public sphere in the internet age?.....	97
3.5.4 Does the new public sphere influence political participation?.....	99
3.6 What is an ideology?.....	100
3.7 Conclusion.....	101
Chapter 4 – Methodology.....	103
4.1. Introduction – Using a mixed method approach.....	103
4.1.1 What is CDA?.....	104
4.1.2 CDA – working with critique, power and ideology	106
4.1.3 What is discourse-historical analysis? – An overview of discourse-historical analysis	107
4.1.3.1 Vital principles of discourse-historical analysis.....	108
4.1.5 Steps undertaken to do DHA	110
4.2. Twitter and political discourse: Is it necessary to depart from traditional approaches?.....	112
4.2.1 Why use the four hashtags for data collection?	114
4.2.2 Delimiting the elections timeframe	116
4.2.3 Selecting the most appropriate tweet collection and archiving tool.....	117
4.2.4 How were the hashtags selected?.....	118
4.2 The data collection process	120
4.3.1 Quantitative data collection methods – challenges and opportunities.....	121
4.3.2 Tweeting patterns over the 51 day period.....	122
4.3.3 Getting the numbers: How many tweets and how many Twitter users?	122
4.3.4.1 Some users tweet more than others. Segmenting the unique users	123
4.3.4.2 Going beyond figures, sampling 100 top users for each hashtag	125
4.3.5.1 Extracting retweets from the dataset	126

4.3.5.2 Investigating the nature of the dialogues	127
4.3.6.1 Ascertaining the dialogic nature of the Twitter conversation: Getting the replies	128
4	129
4.3.7.1 What is in a tweet with a link? What do links direct us to?	129
4.3.7.2 Sampling tweets with links	129
4.3.8 – Sampling of tweets for analysis	130
4.3.9 – What networks emerge from the use of Twitter during the 2013 elections?	131
4.4 Conclusion.....	133
Chapter 5 Quantitative Data Analysis.....	134
5.1 Introduction	134
5.1.1 The Tweeting patterns during the 2013 Zimbabwe elections	134
5.1.2 Looking at the volumes of tweets and what they tell us.....	138
5.3 Segmenting the Twitter users, some tweet more than others.....	140
5.4 Who are the top twitter users (super nodes) per hashtag	141
5.4.1 Analysing the category of users	142
5.4.1.1 Media related users’ categories and what they mean	143
5.4.1.2 Activists tweeting and what this means	144
5.4.1.3 When organisations tweet and what it means	145
5.4.1.4 Individuals tweeting in their own capacity	145
5.4.1.5 What resources were used to tweet	146
5.5 Where do the top Twitter users come from?	148
5.6 When did the top users join Twitter?	151
5.7 Ascertaining the original tweets and retweets	152
5.7 The dialogic nature of the Twitter discourse on Zimbabwe elections.....	155
5.7.1 Looking at @reply	156
5.7.1.1 Who initiated discussion and got replied to?	157

5.8 The nature of Twitter networks that emerged during the 2013 elections	158
5.8.1 Visual analysis of the networks that emerged.....	158
5.9 Conclusion.....	161
Chapter 6 – Qualitative Data Analysis	163
6.1 Introduction	163
6.2.1 Contextualising tweets (Discourse context)	164
6.2.2 Themes/Topics and subthemes within the tweets: The discourse topics.....	164
6.2.2.1 Election oriented tweets and subthemes	165
6.2.2.2 Personalities of contesting candidates and the subthemes	167
6.2.2.3 Party policies and subthemes	167
6.2.2.4 Media role and its subthemes.....	167
6.2.3 Language usage.....	168
6.2.3.1 Language as an instrument of silence, exclusion, and oppression	168
6.2.3.2 Language as resistance and instrument for participation.....	169
6.3 Discursive strategies: Situating the ideological discourse.....	170
6.3.1 Nomination and categorisation: Exposing partisan ideologies and identities.....	171
6.3.1.1 Referencing Mugabe and/or versus Tsvangirai: Exposing the power / ideological struggles between oppositional forces	172
6.3.1.2 ‘Positive us’, ‘negative them’ referencing of Mugabe and Tsvangirai.....	172
6.3.1.3 Referencing of ‘non-partisan’ social actors: Rita Makarau, chairperson of the election commission	177
6.3.1.4 Stereotyping and critiquing international bodies/organisations	178
6.3.1.5 Stereotypical reference to social actors	180
6.4 Ideological/discursive struggles.....	180
6.4.1 Ethnic/racial.....	180
6.4.3 Gender and Maleness	184

6.5 Social tensions	185
6.5.1 Tensions over election preparation	185
6.5.1 Sexual orientation	189
6.6 Linguistic means	190
6.6.1 Humour.....	191
6.6.2 Jokes.....	191
6.6.3 Humorous verbal formats and satire	192
6.6.4 Cartoons	193
6.6.6 Satire/mockery/sarcasm.....	194
6.6.7 Pictorial	195
6.6.8 Linking text to other text to enhance debate.....	199
6.7 Conclusion.....	201
Chapter 7 – Conclusion.....	204
7.1 Introduction.....	204
7.2 Overview of previous chapters	204
7.3 Discussion of specific research questions.....	206
7.3.1 Who initiated key discourses on Zimbabwe’s elections on Twitter?	206
7.3.2 Which portions of society were addressed in the Twitter discourse during the 2013 elections? 207	
7.3.3 Which topics or themes were addressed within the Twitter community and what were their broader social, cultural and political contexts?	207
7.3.4 Did the Twitter users who conversed on elections in Zimbabwe in 2013 demonstrate key features of a “network society?” and “public sphere?”.....	208
7.4 Discussion of main research question	209
7.5 Discussion of the quantitative findings	210
7.6 Discussion of the qualitative findings	210
7.7 Discussion of theoretical contribution of the study.....	211

7.8	Discussion of methodological contribution of study	211
7.9	Discussion of empirical contribution of study	212
7.10	Limitations and suggestions for further research	212
7.11	Conclusion.....	213
	References.....	214
	Addendum A	236
	Addendum B	237
	Addendum C	238
	Addendum D.....	243

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 5.1	136
Figure 5.2	136
Figure 5.3	137
Figure 5.4	137
Figure 5.5	158
Figure 5.6	159

LIST OF TABLES

Table 4.1	120
Table 5.1	139
Table 5.2	139
Table 5.3	140
Table 5.4	142
Table 5.5	142
Table 5.6	147
Table 5.7	147
Table 5.8	150
Table 5.9	150
Table 5.11.....	151
Table 5.10.....	151
Table 5.12.....	152
Table 5.13.....	153
Table 5.14.....	153
Figure 5.15	154
Table 5.16.....	154
Table 5.17.....	155
Table 5.18.....	160
Table 5.19.....	160

Chapter 1 – Introduction

1.1 Motivation for the research

When growing up, in a village in Zimbabwe in the 1980s and early 1990s, I often saw elders huddled around a shrilling radio receiver, visibly straining their ears to get the latest news updates. I was then bewildered by the power of the radio, and later television, to inform people and always tried to understand the technology that allowed a person to speak from a “box” and influence public discourses. The elders, who would have huddled around a radio, engaged in animated discussions on politics, after listening to the person speaking from a “box”. I could pick out names of prominent politicians from their discussions, thus my conclusions that they were talking politics. This experience was to inform not only my professional choice later in life but it also shaped my academic interest. What started as bewilderment turned into an interest and this saw me training and working as a journalist as well as studying computers and political science.

I was fortunate to start the academic journey at a time when there were many rapid changes in information and communication technology (ICT), especially the spread of internet use and the introduction of new information processing devices. Studying computers, albeit at a low level, increased my curiosity to understand how the changes in information technology impacted political participation. It was thus interesting, to be working in the mainstream media in Zimbabwe when crucial elections were held in 2002, 2005 and 2008. This was interesting because print and electronic media, at that time, were the main sources of information. My career as a media practitioner coincided with the emergence of new forms of media and we debated, as journalists, how these affected our work and society at large. Out of interest, I was reading materials on how social media, mainly Facebook and Twitter, were influencing political participation.

1.1.2 Research problem

My interests influenced the desire to ascertain how social media impacted political participation. Additionally, political developments in Zimbabwe after 2000 encouraged me to take a critical look at the role of the media against the backdrop of a deteriorating socio-economic and political situation. Zimbabwe’s political environment had become contentious after 2000 with serious

polarisation occurring between different groups, mainly the ruling Zimbabwe African National Union (Patriotic Front) [Zanu (PF)] against civic society, including labour, non-governmental organisations, the privately owned media and opposition political parties, particularly the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) (Mutanda, 2012). Conflicting opinion on socio-political and economic issues reflected the combative nature of the political environment, and it got worse in 2008, when elections results were disputed (Onslow, 2011). The Southern African Development Committee (SADC), the United States of America and Britain, put Zimbabwe under pressure to resolve the socio-economic and political problems (Mapuva, 2010; Raftopoulos, 2010). Resultantly, Zanu PF and the two formations of the MDC (the three parties had participated in the disputed elections) agreed to form a unity government in September 2008 (this became operational in March 2009). This government promised to reverse restrictions on political freedoms including lifting punitive requirements to start a newspaper (GPA, 2008: ARTICLE XIX & MISA-Zimbabwe, 2004).

While there were restrictions on the operations of traditional media (Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung [FES], 2012), it was evident that a significant number of people in Zimbabwe were using the internet (see Addendum A and B). As such, internet users seem not concerned about the haggling over repealing laws governing traditional media as many had found an alternative, in the internet and mobile phones, for information exchange. More and more people were turning to Facebook and Twitter (especially after 2009, see Addendum A and B) among other social media platforms as well as accessing satellite television (Gallup, 2012). Some organisations, corporations and media houses had started using social media to engage citizens on various socio-economic and political issues, as they would get immediate and comprehensive feedback, unlike the case with most traditional media. Factors enabling more people to turn to social media platforms include a) increased mobile penetration as well as the spread of mobile data b) reasonable drop in data costs c) assumed safety of social media platforms (Kamwendo, 2013; Ntuli, 2013; Ruhanya, 2013; Zaffiro, 2001)

The media reforms promised under GPA took long with parties to the agreement wrangling over what was to be done (Matyszak & Reeler, 2011:27). Thus, when the revolts in Tunisia and Egypt erupted in late 2010 and early 2011, it opened debate if the same could happen in Zimbabwe (Ntuli, 2013; Boka, 2011; Makombe, 2011). There was excitement that regimes had been toppled,

reportedly with the assistance of technology such as Facebook and Twitter. As a journalist with an interest in the topic, I followed the events and tried to draw parallels with the local political environment. I then realised that while there was literature and researches on the use of technology for political participation in the Middle East and North African (MENA) countries, there was no serious study on the impact of Twitter on the local political arena. For me, this presented an opportunity to take up a detailed study on how social media facilitate public political participation. For me, researching Twitter's role in elections would be an invaluable addition to the existing literature and a vital reference point in the continuation of research on the subject matter.

1.2 Media control and political participation in Zimbabwe

As Moyo (2012a) argues, the state played a significant and controlling role in broadcasting and the press in both colonial and independent Zimbabwe as consecutive governments used the mass media as mouthpieces for state propaganda. Successive governments have used the Broadcasting Act (1957) and Broadcasting Services Act (2001) to control broadcasting (Moyo, 2004:11). The colonial state monopolised broadcasting services and “jammed nationalist [Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU) (later to be called Zanu PF) and Zimbabwe African People's Union (ZAPU)] shortwave frequencies and prohibited all but FM receivers in rural areas” (Moyo, 2004:13). This was meant to stop the nationalist organisations from using radio to mobilise the people to support the liberation war (fought from 1966 to 1979) against the minority government. ZANU and ZAPU, (the nationalist organisations separately fighting for the liberation of Zimbabwe) broadcast on shortwave from Zambia, Mozambique, Egypt, Russia and Ghana from 1963 to 1980 (Morsia, Riddle & Zaffiro, 1994). This war over control of the airwaves was expected to end at independence as the new government adopted a policy of reconciliation, something like a local version of the Russian glasnost, the opening up of the state.

However, at independence, the new government adopted media policies “fundamentally interconnected in efforts to perpetuate authoritarian, personalistic, de-facto one-party rule” (Zaffiro, 2001:102). The government reigned in the press by buying out “foreign shareholding in major newspapers” particularly Argus publications which controlled two daily newspapers and three weeklies (Zaffiro, 2001:113) to establish Zimpapers, on which political elites maintained a stranglehold (Dube, 1995). Despite government's attempts to control the print media, a weekly

independent *Financial Gazette*, which had started publishing during the colonial era, continued and even experimented with a daily publication, *The Daily Gazette*, from October 1992 until Christmas Day in 1994, when it printed its last edition (Rønning, 2003:203). *The Zimbabwe Independent* and *The Zimbabwe Standard*, both owned by private investors, started publishing in 1996 and 1997 respectively, together with another privately owned newspaper, *Zimbabwe Mirror*. By 1999, a new stable, the Associated Newspaper Group of Zimbabwe, owned by a consortium of private investors, started the *Daily News* together with other regional publications across the country (Rønning, 2003:206).

1.2.1 State monopoly over the airwaves and the battle to control and own broadcasting services

Developments in the print media in independent Zimbabwe would appear a huge step forward when contrasted with what was happening in broadcasting. In 1980, the new government appeared genuine in its desire to transform broadcasting in the country. This is understandable, as the new government was seized with a task of transforming “subjects into modern, educated citizens” as they had up to then been “imagined as bad, volatile crowds vulnerable to manipulation and a threat to the status quo” (Willems, 2014:82). The intended transformation faltered, for example, the recommendations by a British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) taskforce, commissioned by the new government to examine the existing television and radio services were not fully implemented (Rønning, 2003:214). The taskforce recommended that the programming of the Zimbabwe Broadcasting Corporation (ZBC) was supposed to be strengthened so as to reflect the interests and cultural diversity of the newly independent state.

Despite the government’s acceptance of some of the recommendations, the ZBC became financially and politically dependent on the state, receiving an annual grant from the fiscus with additional funding coming from radio and television licences and advertising (Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung [FES], 2012:44). As a result, as was the case under colonial rule, especially after the 1965 Unilateral Declaration of Independence (UDI)¹, broadcast played a central role in the management of political change and legitimisation efforts after independence (Rønning, 2003:214).

¹ The UDI was when the white minority government in the then Rhodesia declared its independence from Britain

The electronic media remained closed to new players, and the four radio stations and two television stations established at the recommendation by the BBC taskforce remained in operation (Rønning, 2003). Thus in 2008 when an agreement on a government of national unity was reached, the issue of opening the airwaves was highlighted (GPA, 2008; Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung [FES], 2012)

Television in Zimbabwe is subjected to commercial and state control (Rønning, 2003:215) resulting in news and current affairs programming characterised by the absence of controversial and investigative journalism. ZBC was accused of biased reporting (Attwood, 2010) and private investors looked at ways of starting new TV and radio stations. The main stumbling block was the seemingly legalised monopoly of the ZBC, which, however, was challenged and the Supreme Court (the then highest court of appeal) ruled (in 2000) that such monopoly was ultra-vires the constitution of the country (Mazango, 2005:50; Capitol Radio (Pvt) Limited v.s Broadcasting Authority of Zimbabwe and Others, 2001). Thus Capitol Radio, the company that had brought the case to the courts, started providing broadcasting services within the country on the basis of the ruling (Rønning, 2003:217). The government responded to the ruling by passing the Presidential Powers (Temporary Measures) Broadcasting Regulations 2000 and banned Capitol Radio and impounded its equipment (Ifex, 2000). This was the last independent radio station to attempt to broadcast from within the country. The Government of Zimbabwe went on to repeal the broadcasting laws, replacing the Broadcasting Act (of 1957) with the Broadcasting Services Act (2001), further entrenching ZBC's monopoly (Moyo, 2004). Having realised the futility of trying to challenge ZBC's monopoly, new pirate radio stations started broadcasting from outside Zimbabwe's borders (Moyo, 2012b). Only two radio licenses, one for Zimpapers (the same media company where the state has majority shareholding and has maintained a stranglehold [Dube, 1995]) and another for an investor with close links to Zanu PF, Supa Mandiwanzira, were issued in 2012 since the enactment of the Broadcasting Services Act (2001) (*The Herald Online*, 2012; Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung [FES], 2012). During the 2013 elections, Supa Mandiwanzira went on to stand as a Member of the House of Assembly, representing Zanu PF and won (*The Herald Online*, 2013). Mandiwanzira was subsequently appointed Deputy Minister of Information, Publicity and Broadcasting Services (*The Herald Online*, 2013).

1.2.2 Independent Zimbabwe's decline into authoritarianism and the adoption of alternative media platforms for information access and distribution

Active public participation through traditional media such as newspapers and radio which held promise at independence in 1980 had arguably declined thereafter as Zimbabwe developed into an authoritarian regime with less credible elections and low voter turnout (Sithole, 2001:160; Sithole & Makumbe, 1997:123). A rapid legislated closure of political space since 2000 (Freedom House, 2012), coinciding with the steep economic decline, negatively impacted public participation as the electorate focussed on survival, not politics (Schlee, 2011:1). This also came against a background of concerted efforts by the state to further reign in the media especially through the promulgation of the Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act (2001) (ARTICLE XIX & MISA-Zimbabwe, 2004:2). *The Daily News*, a newspaper critical of the government, was forcibly shut down in September 2003 after the Supreme Court had ruled that it was operating outside the law “by refusing to register under AIPPA” (Mazango, 2005:49). *The Daily News* had challenged the constitutionality of the Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act (2001), especially the requirement that journalists and media houses needed to be accredited with the Media and Information Commission to operate in Zimbabwe (Moyo, 2005:109).

The stifling of political space hindered mainstream media's role “as watchdogs and custodians of the public good and active citizens” (Moyo, 2011:2), giving momentum to emerging alternative media platforms. Activists and grassroots organisations initiated innovative strategies to broadcast and publish content (Moyo, 2012b:484; Windeck, 2010). The content was distributed through channels attempting to by-pass direct state regulation or control. These included online news sites, shortwave radio stations, roadcasting (distributing pre-recorded audio materials), podcasting, mass short message services (mass SMS) and interactive voice responses. Roadcasting contravened the Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act (2001) (Moyo, 2012b:485), as the distribution of audio materials required registration with the Media and Information Commission. Mass SMS could be monitored under the Interception of Communications Act (2006), while shortwave broadcasts were interfered with by the state using equipment bought in China (Mavhunga, 2008:2).

The internet, and especially social media, thus emerged as a popular site for citizens seeking alternative information (Kelly & Cook, 2011; Zaffiro, 2001). This trend gave rise to “a new reform

based emergent alternative media narrative that encourages, articulates and stimulates public participation” (Mutsvairo & Columbus, 2012:8). The internet became a platform to distribute content as well as “an avenue to discuss a taboo subject without fear of being reprimanded by the secretive and authoritarian state” (Mpofu, 2009:1).

Despite a growing body of literature on the use of social media in Zimbabwe (see Mutsvairo & Columbus, 2012; Kelly & Cook, 2011; Masuku, 2011; Moyo, 2011), no previous study has focused specifically on how Twitter facilitate public participation during elections. As such, the 2013 elections was an opportunity to undertake a study on how Twitter was used to facilitate public participation in the election of a new government. In addition to this, the 2013 elections were critical in that, unlike in 2008 or earlier elections, Twitter use had widened tremendously (Nyaruwanga, 2014; Biriwasha, 2012) and as shown in Addendum B below.

1.2.3 The context of the 2013 elections against a background of the previous polls

As will be shown in Chapter 5, most of the Twitter users who participated through any of the four hashtags selected for this study to discuss the elections in Zimbabwe joined the platform after 2009. This could mean that there was minimal, if any, tweeting on the 2008 elections in Zimbabwe, making the 2013 elections probably the first to be widely tweeted. The 2013 elections were held against a background of disputed polls held in 2008, which were marred by accusations of intimidation, violence and rigging, echoing similar allegations raised about elections held in 2005, 2002 and 2000 (Mapuva, 2010; Raftopoulos, 2010). As such, the 2013 elections in Zimbabwe were seen as important for a number of reasons, for example, they were seen as an opportunity to usher in a legitimately elected administration that would solve the debilitating economic crisis. As discussed above, under 1.2, the disputed 2008 elections were resolved through the formation of a government of national unity that was supposed to create an environment that allowed for “free and fair” elections. The 2013 elections were also important in that the electorate was electing a president, a member of parliament and a local councillor at the same time. This tripartite election was called the “2013 Harmonised elections”, unlike a situation where parliamentary elections were held separately from presidential or local authority polls.

1.2.4 Background to the debate on the role of social media in political participation

“...the internet is the most democratising innovation ever seen...” Joe Trippi (quoted in Hindman, 2009: 2).

Debate on social media’s potential to facilitate public participation in political processes was evident from the 2000s onwards (Dahlgren, 2014; Breindl, 2010:43; Vergeer & Hermans, 2008; Atton, 2004). Trippi’s sentiments (quoted above) underscore optimism in new media technologies. This is despite a gathering momentum against unqualified optimism about the role of social media in facilitating public participation in the 2009 post-election protests in Iran and Moldova as well as the so-called Arab Spring² (Starbird & Palen, 2012; Shirky, 2011; Mungiu-Pippidi & Munteanu, 2009). Some studies confirm social media’s catalysing effects in revolts, also termed “Twitter Revolutions” (Shirky, 2011), claiming that social media provided “tools to facilitate interaction and responses to questions they (activists) would have found difficult to answer offline” (Aouragh & Alexander, 2011:349). Social media platforms “represent an important instrumental resource,” (Eltantawy & Wiest, 2011:1212) bridging participatory gaps, empowering and mobilising citizens to participate both online and offline. Shirky (2008: 172) sees social media platforms as presenting opportunities for assembling and advocating for changes in society by arguing that,

...to speak online is to publish, to publish online is to connect with others. With the arrival of globally accessible publishing, freedom of speech is now freedom of press and freedom of the press is freedom of assembly.

For utopians, it is this freedom or ability to assemble that has potential to facilitate public participation in political processes.

²Popular protests that started as what was termed the Jasmine Revolution in late 2010 in Tunisia resulting in the change of government before spreading to Egypt and other Arab and North African countries.

Critics, however, contend that social media bring inconsequential change as protests could still have occurred without them (Alterman, 2011; Gladwell, 2011; Morozov, 2011). Gladwell (2011) emphasises the historical role of the word of mouth as more important than social media. Critical theorists (including Fuchs, 2014a; Meijas, 2012; 2011) further posit that the architecture of the internet and the social media platforms are structured in a way that the users do not have equal opportunities and resources to participate. This is a clear drawback on the supposition that the use of the information communication technologies bridges participatory gaps (as argued by Eltantawy & Wiest, 2011, for example).

Meijas (2011), writing on his popular blog, takes an even more radical approach by maintaining a critical theory view that “although internet’s original architecture encourage openness, it is becoming increasingly privatised and centralised”. Meijas (2012) and Fuchs (2014a) argue that the portrayal of the role of social media in enhancing and facilitating political participation by technology optimists ignores the structural issues such as “power imbalances” that may affect participation.

As such, an examination of the role of Twitter in public political participation should go beyond looking at the affordances that come with social media platforms and look at other factors that facilitate or inhibit participation and their effects. Affordances can be defined in the simplest terms as a description of “how a medium or a tool afford uses to individuals” (Nagy & Neff, 2015:2). Affordances, therefore, refer to what a user of a platform is able to do without making changes to a site, for example posting a short message of less than 140 characters on Twitter. Feenberg (2014:116) adds that the internet may not be a neutral tool but its affordances can be combined and appropriated in ways that allow for the opening of paths that are influential in future.

Thus taking a critical approach lays bare the configuration of the power structures in society and their effects on access and the use of social media. Fuchs (2014a: 56) posits that the technology utopians’ approach “focus on technology without taking into account its embeddedness into power structures”. In so doing, I will argue, technology optimists may end up giving reductionist explanations and conclusions. This line of argument is taken further by Christensen (2011) who, by discounting the fact that there were “Twitter Revolutions” or “YouTube Wars”, says:

A great deal of discourse – often revolving around sexy phrases such as Twitter Revolutions or YouTube War – has reinforced the central role of technology in anti-government dissent, only for critical questions to be raised shortly afterwards regarding the actual level of the use and effect of such technologies. (Christensen, 2011:155)

The statement above shows the growing groundswell against technology optimism and elicits questions about the use of social media in Zimbabwe in relation to these diametrically opposed viewpoints. Christensen (2011) and Morozov (2009) argue that technology use is ambiguous because both the “liberators” and the oppressors, for example, Iranian authorities, used the latest technology for surveillance and repression.

This debate has taken many forms and can be distilled into two broad opposing viewpoints, namely technology optimists (utopians) and technology pessimists (dystopians) (Mejias, 2011). If the analyst’s evaluation sees the relationship between technology and society as favourable with opportunities, then they are utopian while those viewing it unfavourably and underline risks are dystopians (Fuchs, 2012:387).

The utopian versus dystopian debate is far from being settled as each side has presented empirical evidence to support their standpoint. For the purpose of this study, it is important to “acknowledge the struggle rather than assuming that it has already ended with the victory of business or government or some ill-defined notion of democracy as do many current approaches” (Feenberg, 2014:117). Additionally, as Dahlgren (2014:63) puts it, it is not about getting an ultimate evaluation or universally valid conclusion regarding the role of social media and participation in public affairs but:

Rather we should see this common sense question as a springboard for continual analysis of media’s evolving role in democracies which are also in transition...optionally, we should strive for provisional conclusion relevant to concrete, ever shifting circumstances.

Thus, this study adopts a critical theory approach and uses available information to get to a provisional conclusion on how Twitter facilitates public participation in the election of a new government. In doing so, this research borrows from Christensen (2011:156) who, despite being dismissive of the tech optimists, argues for:

...balancing (intellectually and theoretically) the relation between the affordances of social media technologies and the materialities of the offline world. Considering the affordances and the materialities is, in essence, a reminder to consider the importance of socio-political context in the analysis of social media.

It is thus imperative to be cognizant of the socio-political context when analysing the use of Twitter to facilitate political participation during the 2013 elections in Zimbabwe.

1.2.5 Contextualising social media use in Zimbabwe

In Zimbabwe, new information communication technologies (ICT) altered the media landscape allowing “alternative voices to proliferate” (Zaffiro, 2001:114). Despite signals weakening relative to the distance from urban centres, internet access through mobile phones had spread across the country (See Addendum B) in 2013. The literature on social media use in Zimbabwe before the elections (see for example Kamwendo, 2013; Ntuli, 2013; Ruhanya, 2013) shows great optimism in its role in facilitating participation. Moyo (2011) and Windeck (2010), also subscribe to the supposition that social media create opportunities for participation. This echoes assertions by scholars who see new media platforms as transforming the way people participate in public affairs (see Starbird & Palen, 2012; Shirky, 2011; Diamond, 2010). By 2013, media outlets, politicians, political parties, activists, interest groups and ordinary citizens used Twitter for political information, discussion and feedback. Examining how Twitter facilitate political participation in Zimbabwe will yield imperative insights on claims by cyber-optimists that social media offer an alternative, affordable and cost-effective platforms for public participation within repressive societies (see Starbird & Palen, 2012; Shirky, 2011; Mungiu-Pippidi & Munteanu, 2009).

Tweets were systematically collected, archived and analysed (see 1.5.1 below and Chapter 4 for a detailed discussion on methodology). A critical analysis of the collected and archived tweets has to be premised on the power relations within society especially the asymmetrical and hierarchical nature of social media platforms (Fuchs, 2014a). This approach allows for a critical scrutiny and appraisal of the entire network that emerges through the use of the given keywords pertaining to the Zimbabwe elections. Such an approach is supported by Paßmann, Boeschoten, and Schäfer (2014:334) who argue that it is essential to look beyond content because Twitter's social network infrastructure and hierarchies are complex. This will be discussed in detail below in subsection 4.3.

1.3 Problem statement and focus

Zimbabwe is considered a repressive and not free country (Freedom House, 2012) with decreasing active public participation in national elections (Sithole, 2001) and a muzzled traditional media sector (Moyo, 2011). There is a clear citizen disengagement from participating in politics as shown by the rapid drop in election turn out from an estimated 93% in 1980 to 40.1% in 2008. The lowest voter turnout was in 1995 when 30.59% of registered voters cast their ballots (Idea, 2013). Citizen retreat from public affairs is not unique to Zimbabwe but Dahlgren (2014:62) argues that, despite the visible retreat in traditional participation, there is actually increased participation in various other forms. This “repoliticisation” (Dahlgren, 2014), if we may call it, manifests not only in diverse political persuasions but also in new ways of doing politics, new modes of political involvement which may signal some transformation in political culture itself. It is vital to look at Twitter use during elections as a form of “repoliticisation” and see if and how it amounts to genuine participation.

A repressive political environment and stifled mainstream media has potential to unlock opportunities for social media use for new forms of participation. The new way of doing politics manifests in the use of Twitter among others social media (see 1.3.1 and Chapter 2). It is, however, important to mention that the mere presence of ICT and gadgets used to access and broadcast information does not entail “repoliticisation” or participation. Dahlgren (2014:64) points out that “access is a necessary element but not sufficient in genuine participation”. The quality of participation is governed by the power relations in a given society and “participation is ultimately

about power sharing and if this is structurally absent or systematically undermined, then whatever is being called participation must be seen with utmost scepticism or indeed be labelled fraudulent” (Dahlgren, 2014:64).

1.3.1 Why study the use of Twitter?

Twitter was founded by Jack Dorsey and associates in San Francisco in 2006, bringing together two subcultures, that is new media coding culture and the radio scanning and dispatch enthusiasm (Rodgers, 2014:X). Twitter calls microblog posts by users “tweets”. Each tweet has a 140-character limit. Twitter is a social media platform that is made possible by the affordances that come through the use of information communication technologies. Social media refers to a group of internet based applications that allow for the creation and exchange of user-generated content (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010:61). Social media take various forms, like social networks, blogs, weblogs and video sharing platforms. A more detailed discussion on what Twitter is presented under section 2.2.

A researcher is spoilt for choices as there are various forms of social media that can be studied. However, there are practical issues which have to be considered before one picks a specific form of social media for study. In this case, the practical issues that were considered include:

- 1) Twitter allows third part application-programming interface (APIs) which can be used to collect and archive tweets (in this case TAGS v5³ was used)
- 2) The fact that Twitter allows one to follow another user without them following back (directional relationships) makes a unique network worthy further exploration.
- 3) The use of hashtags makes it easy for a researcher to collect, archive and analyse specific tweets and how they facilitated a discourse.
- 4) As a further development of the point above, I also realised that Twitter does not have restrictive visibility permissions (compared say to Facebook where messages do not go

³ An application-programming interface (API) is a set of programming instructions and standards for accessing a Web-based software application or Web tool. TAGS v5, (Twitter Archive Google Spreadsheet Version 5) is an open source API that automatically collects and archives tweets around a given hashtag in the form of a Microsoft Excel document. See Chapter 4 on methodology for more detail.

beyond a user's immediate circle of friends) as hashtags allow for conversation as anyone can search for them and easily pull/collect tweets and store them for analysis.

- 5) In contrast to other platforms, for example, blogs, which are longer are more formal, tweets are shorter and informal and can be sent rapidly to capture what is happening.
- 6) As a Twitter user myself, I had come to understand the way the platform works thus I foresaw no problems studying its use during the election of a new government in Zimbabwe

1.4 Theoretical points of departure and research questions

Theories on social media are still being discussed and developed as the field still in its infancy. However, while there is in some respects a visible break between social media and traditional media, it can be argued that the evolution of theories of the press in the 20th century can still help us to understand the changing relationship between social media and society today.

Siebert, Peterson and Schramm (1956), employing a normative approach, categorised the world press into four models namely: authoritarian, libertarian, social responsibility and Soviet Communist. The four theories evolved into five and then six theories (with the addition of developmental and democratic participant theory) but none the less remained under constant criticism and revision because of continuous developments in the media and ICT, specifically internet and satellite television (Firdaus, 2001:11). For instance, trying to fit the Zimbabwean press into any of models is problematic, as it may be classified under different categories simultaneously.

Changes in media and ICTs prompted scholars like Hallin and Mancini (2004:10) to call for the “decent burial” of the Four Theories and to move on to the development of “more sophisticated models based on real comparative analysis”. They proposed three categories instead: liberal, democratic corporatist and the polarised pluralist model. The media in Zimbabwe arguably reflects the polarised pluralist model, because it is integrated into party politics, display a weak historical development of commercial media, and provide a strong role for the state (Hallin & Mancini, 2004:11). While these new theories were suited to describe media within a certain context and time frame, the changes in technology meant that still newer theories that could explain the prevailing situation were needed.

Theorising mass media remains problematic as the field is characterised by fragmentation and insufficient coherence (Dahlgren, 2005). Chaffee and Metzger (2001:374) question the validity, applicability and relevance of mass communication theories assuming “a centralised mass media system” (for example the Four Theories) within a “decentralised and demassified” environment. Social media enables more diversified content, more worldviews and no clearly identifiable mainstream, rendering some mass media theories irrelevant. As a result of these changes, it is vital to set the communication processes beyond “the realm of mass communications, acknowledging thus a wider field of its practice, where communication process is addressed not only in representative terms (for the people) but in participatory terms as well (by the people)” (Vatikiotis, 2005:4). Given this background, it is acknowledged that the study of how Twitter facilitated political participation during the 2013 Zimbabwean elections has to be done through the lenses of theories which specifically look at social media and not mass media in general.

Social media platforms provide new opportunities to various groups and give power to people whose agendas would not have been reported in major mass media. Some scholars argue that with social media, power is moved from elites to a greater proportion of media users, thus eliminating induced hegemony (Chaffee & Metzger, 2001). The push towards “social interaction in content production and distribution favours the emergence of new media models, centred on gathering of individuals into variously articulated and distributed communities” (Mattina, 2007:1). Social media platforms have a dialogical complexity lying in their “flexibility that communicators often have with regard to where to post messages, who to engage with and the language to use during interaction” (Rambe, 2012:297). This dialogical complexity may manifest in the various Twitter mechanisms which include following, @replies, @mention, retweeting (RT) and using hashtags. These mechanisms are important to this research and they will be briefly discussed below and in more detail in Chapter 4.

New communication technology developments have provided the infrastructure that supports and encourages political action, and these create arenas for a free engagement of citizens in deliberation and public debate (Vatikiotis, 2005:8). Fuchs (2009b) argues that alternative media enable people to experience a much greater diversity of ideas, leading to a democratic state of affairs. This creates a “networked public sphere” allowing for individual autonomy and freedom as it breaks the elite stranglehold on democratic discourse and draws diverse interests and talents into the common

arena (Benkler, 2006:23). (The concept of public sphere is discussed below under 1.4.4 and in Chapter 3.) Resultantly, there is an active discussion of public issues from various points of views and the participation of normally excluded viewpoints. Such public spaces allow for the free flow of information and unrestricted debate on issues and problems affecting societies. Dahlberg and Siapera (2007:3) acknowledge that new communication technologies increase public participation since the internet is considered as “supporting, advancing and enhancing autonomous and democratic public spaces”.

1.4.1 Critical approaches to the study of social media

This study adopts a critical theory approach to the study of how Twitter is used for political participation. Critical theory was adopted as opposed to positivism because the methods used in the latter lead a researcher to become too focused on the facts and not analyse how these facts came to being (Agger, 1991:119). Thus, positivism allows only one dimension of knowledge to become imperialistic and halt other forms of knowing (Agger, 1991:109). Positivism suggests that one can perceive the world without making assumptions about the nature of the phenomenon under investigation (Agger, 1991:109). This approach suggests a neutral observation of the phenomenon being investigated and a value-free scientific approach to investigation. These could be suppositions on the potential of the internet, as scholars who embrace positivism do not give empirical evidence to buttress their points of view.

As mentioned above, critical theory avoids the neutral observation of language and the value-free ideal of scientific knowledge. This is a clear difference from the positivistic approach that “leads people to assume that if social research is done properly it will follow the model of the natural sciences and provide a clear, unambiguous road to the causes of certain social or psychological phenomena” (Ryan, 2006:13).

In order to avoid some of the assumptions of the positivist approach, critical theory looks at the conflicts within societies and how these shape the language that is used. This is important when dealing with a phenomenon such as the exchange of views via a social media platform.

Scholars agree that social media is interactive but differ on the effects of this interaction. Critical theorists (see Lovink, 2012; Robert, 1999) call for a critical theory of social media in order to

properly analyse the interplay between technology, media and society to take place. Critical theory assumes that media or technology have multiple potential effects on society and social systems that can co-exist or stand in contradiction to each other (Fuchs, 2009a). The realisation of the potential depends on how society, interests, power structures and struggles shape the design and usage of technology in multiple ways that are potentially contradictory (Fuchs, 2009a).

This research takes a critical theoretical approach and analyses how Twitter as both media and technology was used and how it facilitated public participation in the 2013 elections in Zimbabwe. In so doing, one has to avoid the sweeping, one-sided and subjective assumptions by cyber-optimists that technology adoption brings certain and positive changes to society and the “deterministic assumption that technology has its own autonomous logic of development and is an invariant element that once introduced bends the recipient social system to its imperatives” (Feenberg, 2002:138). One has to “decentre the analysis from technology” (Fuchs, 2012:387), which is the context, to also look at the content (the tweets). This study goes beyond analysing technology by looking at the media in Zimbabwe, focusing on who contributed to the discourse via Twitter during the 2013 elections in Zimbabwe as well as detailing the various characteristics of the discourse actors.

By adopting critical theory, one is able to question and provide alternatives to technological determinism, a reductionist theory reducing an entire society to some part (Hofkirchner, 2010:192) and causal relationships of media and technology on one hand and society on another (Fuchs, 2009a). Fuchs (2011:19) further posits that critical theory allows analyses of and questions “domination, inequality, societal problems, exploitation in order to advance social struggles and liberation from domination so that a dominationless, cooperative and participatory society can emerge”. Furthermore, critical theory has “a normative dimension – it argues that it is possible to logically provide reasonably grounded arguments about what a good society is, that the good society relates to conditions that all humans require to survive” (Fuchs, 2014b:13). This tallies well with Robert (1999:148), who urges critical theorists to articulate, question and openly discuss differing assumptions about the objective world.

1.4.3 Brief overview of the network society

The internet, as Dick and McLaughlin (2013) point out, “is a structure that radically unmoors the communication points of the network from centralised control”. This significantly impacts social media platforms that are built around the decentralised structure of the internet as it brings new affordances which are different from centralised media. The use of social media, including Twitter, gives new dimensions to network theory. One proponent of the network society theory, Castells (2000) has argued that traditional societies were characterized by a vertical social structure but in the network society, there is a horizontal communications system. These networks “[H]ave taken a new life in our time by becoming informational networks powered by the internet” (Castells, 2000:501).

Social media differs from unidirectional traditional media by allowing the sending and receiving of messages thus enabling “mass self-communication” (Castells, 2009a: 56) which is “a more horizontal style of communication without a hierarchy” (Lilleker & Jackson, 2008: 6). Horizontal communication allows the “forging of weak ties with strangers” to establish networks “where social characteristics are less influential in framing or even blocking communications” (Castells, 1996: 388). Additionally, the non-hierarchical and decentralised character of the social media platforms enables communication between people who would otherwise not have been active in political discussions and increase opportunities for non-professionals to disseminate their thoughts over a wide geographical area (Vergeer & Hermans, 2008:38).

Network society proponents, including Castells (2009a; 1996) and van Dijk (1999), have shown how social media facilitate the formation of networks among users. The ICT, according to van Dijk (1999:23-25), have generated a complex social and communicative structure that is different from the mass society. These social networks offer “an interactive system which features feedback effects and communications from anywhere to anywhere within the network” (Castells, 2009a: 7) and anyone with the right technology can publish opinions in “real time to mass audiences” (Luoma-aho, 2011:3).

Castells (1996:469) sees a major shift from statism concentrated bureaucracy and hierarchies organised along national lines to a system whose “structural logic is made of adaptable information communication technologies networks spread across the globe influencing social life”. These networks are not limited by national and political boundaries. This system logic (Castells, 2000:375) is however discriminatory as “a considerable number of humans, probably in a growing

proportion, are irrelevant both as producers and consumers”. This means that in as much as the new information and communication technologies have created platforms for the establishment of networks, technology may also increase social polarisation with certain “black holes” in informational capitalism (Castells, 2000:367). These black holes may include people lacking equipment, tools or training to access or use information technology. Notwithstanding these black holes, Castells (2012) strongly supports the supposition that networks have a potential to transform societies and attributes the Arab Spring to such networks stating that:

It (the revolutions) began on the internet social networks, as these are spaces of autonomy, largely beyond the control of government and corporations..... By sharing sorrow and hope, in the free public space of the internet, by connecting with one another and by envisioning projects from multiple sources of being, individuals formed networks regardless of their personal views or organisational attachment. (Castells, 2012:2)

This is a proposal that the Arab Spring was hinged on “networks of hope” that emerged and were inclusive for the single purpose of confronting regimes that caused problems in society. Social media in repressive societies, Castells (2009:263 – 264) argues, see the emergence of insurgent communities as individuals perceiving an oppression “transform their shared protest into a community of practice, their practice being resistance”. Resultantly, these networks facilitate public participation in political processes, for example during elections. The resultant networks comprise actors or nodes along with a set of ties of a specified type that link them (Borgatti & Halgin, 2011:2). These networks take the form of polycentric nodes “thus offering a communication structure which can foster democratic social relations” (Dahlgren, 2014:67). By networking, the participants, who make the nodes, avoid the debilitating effects of isolation and help form collective identities. Crozier (2002), summarising Castells (2004), says networks do not have a centre and operate according to the binary logic of inclusion/exclusion as well as being composed of solely that which is necessary or useful for its existence.

Another scholar, van Dijk (1999:239) takes a theoretically different standpoint arguing that a network is both able to disperse and to concentrate power, with the reality showing a

preponderance for the latter especially when “no adequate measures are taken to counteract this process. Additionally, van Dijk (1999:239) sees the new network society as “a form of society increasingly organising its relationships and media networks gradually replacing or complementing the social networks of face to face communications”. According to Crozier (2002:176), van Dijk acknowledges that social and media networks are contextually embedded and cannot be disconnected from their social, physical and biological context. Van Dijk (1999:2) shows the scholar’s scepticism on the ubiquity of networks saying it is with “little exaggeration, we may call the twenty-first century the age of networks”.

A synthesis of Castells (2004) and van Dijk gives a network society that is internet based, and is increasingly gaining currency over traditional face-to-face communication and is paradoxically designed in a manner that allows both concentration of power and its dispersal. These networks may empower citizens and enable them to take part in the election of a new government. However, this is only a potential and this study looks at how this was realised or otherwise. As such, this study analyses network patterns around selected hashtags on Zimbabwe’s 2013 elections to reveal the social relationships in terms of nodes (actors) and ties (how they are linked).

For the 2013 Zimbabwe elections, the researcher identified four important and widely used hashtags namely (#zimelections, #zimdecides2013, #zimelection and #zimdecides), whose use established a communicative structure allowing those with the right technology to publish opinions or access them. It is very easy to identify potential “horizontal communication” (Lilleker & Jackson, 2008:6), for example through the use of the @reply or @address and “interactive systems which feature feedback effects and communications” (Castells, 2009b:7) such as through the use of @reply and retweet.

1.4.4 Critical theory approaches to network society

Critical theorists (for example Lovink, 2011; Fuchs, 2009b) question the veracity of some of the assumptions of the “network society”. Lovink (2011) and Bouchard (2011) acknowledge the nature of the networks emerging as a result of the internet but question the credibility of the claims that these networks are horizontal and nodes (actors) are equal. Bouchard (2011:296) goes on to state that networks would, over time, organize themselves into a hierarchical system composed of

leaders and followers. There are what Bouchard (2011:292) calls “super nodes” and one has to avoid taking the networks that have emerged through the use of Twitter as horizontal with all actors being equal in terms of influence.

It is thus important to underline the different power relations among users when approaching this study. The networks that have emerged are shaped by the technology that is used, in this case, the internet and the platforms that enable the sharing of content and microblogging. However, one also has to think of and acknowledge the other features such as inequality, class, capitalism or crisis (Fuchs, 2012:776).

1.4.5 What is political participation?

Verba, Scholzman and Brady (1995) define public political participation as an activity that has the intent or effect of influencing government action or selection of people who make policies. Online political participation may include writing opinions, comment, or posting a link. This means that posting hashtagged tweets, for example, #zimelection, may constitute political participation. Conceptually, one could opt for a very broad notion of participation and say that all forms of civic practice constitute participation. Alternatively, one could be more restrictive and define participation as practices that have to do with some way in decision making (Dahlgren, 2014:65). This research leans to the more broad definition of participation as it allows for the location of participation deep in the informal “micro-meshes of everyday life of democracy” (Dahlgren, 2014:65). (A detailed analysis of political participation in an era that is characterised by social media is given in Chapter 3 under 3.3.)

1.4.6 Do social media usher in a new form of public sphere?

The question if the social media networks are ushering in a new form of public sphere is central to the issue of facilitating public participation. The public sphere, in the Habermasian sense, entails a platform that facilitates the formation of public opinion. On this ideal platform all citizens have access, can confer or debate in an unrestricted fashion. The public sphere is constituted by

communicative rationality, inclusive, equalitarian, reflexive, reasoned and reciprocal argument aimed at mutual understanding and agreement (Dahlberg, 2013b:4). According to Fraser (1990:57), the public sphere in the Habermasian sense

Designates a theatre in modern societies in which political participation is enacted through the medium of talk. It is the space in which citizens deliberate about their common affairs, hence, an institutionalised arena of discursive interaction.

This suggests that there are very minimal entry barriers to private persons intending to participate within the public sphere. However, criticism against this one-sided conceptualisation of the public sphere has shown that Habermas did not look at the gender and class induced expulsions from the public spheres. Susen (2011:53) calls the Habermasian approach an idealistic picture of the public sphere.

Given his one-sided emphasis on the fact that the bourgeois public sphere poses a “rational critical” character (Habermas) tends to overestimate the significance of the emancipating features of modern public life and therefore underestimate the influence of its repressive elements.

Additionally, it has to be conceded that the public sphere is no less permeated by power relations than society as a whole. The use of information communication technologies for participation in the public sphere brings some barriers such as knowledge on how to use the gadgets or in the case of Twitter knowing which hashtags to use. There are attempts to show the relevance of Habermas’ description of the public sphere to social media sites which have become quite ubiquitous and are incorporated into political communication “as they are used both for parliamentarian and alternative politics, blending the political and the social with the personal, with consumption and pleasure” (Dahlgren, 2014:73).

Papacharissi (2010:164) sees social media use serving "...primarily to connect the personal to the political and the self to the polity and society". This brings forth a new form of public sphere with the participants' online activities constituting:

...an expression of dissent with public agenda...these potentially powerful acts of dissent emanate from a private sphere of interaction, meaning that the citizen engages and is enabled politically through a private media environment located within the individual's personal and private space. (Papacharissi, 2010:131)

The resultant "collapse" of the boundaries between private and public space means that individual engagements on social media platforms (with a set of friends or followers) have a significant impact on the public sphere. The social media platforms themselves enable the emergence of a networked public sphere because "the easy possibility of communicating effectively into the public sphere allows individuals to reorient themselves from passive readers and listeners to potential speakers and participants in a conversation" (Benkler, 2006:213). These interactions can be organised in such a way that they may challenge dominance or advocate for significant political changes.

From the above arguments, it is clear that critics (Papacharissi, 2010; Benkler, 2006) have questioned the idea of a singular notion of the public sphere and the obtaining of communicative rationality, and have suggested the plurality of public spheres or spaces in some instances. These arguments and the divergent views on the singularity and plurality of the public sphere are looked at in detail under 3.5 below.

This research can give an insight into what form of networks emerge as Twitter users participate in discussions around an election to choose a new government in Zimbabwe. The research methods used will probe the nature of the "public sphere" that emerge as a result of the use of social media, specifically Twitter during a given period. It is, however, clear from the above that the public sphere concept may have significantly changed over the years as a result of the new information communication technologies. As such, Chapter 3 under 3.5 takes this discussion

further with the main argument being that the public sphere concept has changed to the extent that Habermas himself has made some modifications to his earlier postulations.

1.5 Research Questions

Flowing from the theoretical points of departure a general research question is formulated: How did Twitter facilitate public participation in the election of a new government in Zimbabwe in 2013?

Following from the general research question are four specific research questions:

- 1) Who initiated key discourses on Zimbabwe's elections within the Twitter community?
- 2) Which portions of society were addressed in the Twitter discourse during the 2013 elections?
- 3) Which topics or themes were addressed within the Twitter community and what were their broader social, cultural and political contexts?
- 4) Did the Twitter users who conversed on elections in Zimbabwe in 2013 demonstrate key features of a "network society?" and "public sphere?"

1.6 Research design and methods

1.6.1 Research design

This research uses both quantitative and qualitative methodology. A mixed method approach, as will be fully discussed in Chapter 4, under, 4.1, allows a researcher to collect and analyse data using both quantitative and qualitative means (Tashakkori & Creswel, 2007). What this entails is that this research used quantitative methods for data collection and analysis. As is shown below under Chapters 4 and 5, this approach will give important numbers on how Twitter was used in Zimbabwe to discuss the 2013 elections.

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), a qualitative method, whose origins is in critical theory, will be used to collect and analyse data. CDA is an approach that focuses on "how social relations,

identity, knowledge and power are constructed through written or spoken texts in communities, schools, the media and the political arena” (Fairclough, 1989:20). CDA is an analytic tool that can be used “in the close readings of editorials, op-eds, columns, adverts and other public texts” (Huckin, 2002:159). This includes social media posts, I would argue. CDA emphasises the relationship between what is communicated and the social realities tied to that communication, and as Milner (2013:2363) points out, CDA is focussed on:

...intertextual and interdiscursive relationship in public commentary which is a bridge by which statements can be recontextualised, transferred from one setting to another in order to create a juxtaposition, produce a metaphor or posit a universal truth.

1.6.2 Data Collection

Adopting CDA as a tool to collect and analyse Twitter content presents opportunities to work with huge data sets on human communication around a certain issue, what Karpf (2012:649) calls “a siren song of abundant data”. boyd and Crawford (2012:669) note that researchers working on Twitter are not getting the “firehose” of the complete content stream, but merely a “gardenhose” of very limited number of tweets. This means that this study had to come up with mechanisms to “trap” and archive the data and employ data collection methods that improve the representativeness of sampled data. Representativeness is not possible in CDA, a critical, qualitative research theory and method.

Twitter only keeps tweets available to the public for at most 10 days (University of Cornell, 2015), thus I had to use TAGS v5, which archives tweets online by date, with the latest tweet on the top and can be downloaded and stored for access even if one is offline.

Tweets were collected over 51 days, starting 25 days prior to voting day (on 31 July 2013) and continuing for 25 days after. The 51-day delimitation was made because this is the period that best describes election time. It is within this timeframe that nomination of candidates is finalised and the delimitation of constituencies is made. Elections results are also announced within the same period.

1.6.3 Data coding and analysis

Data coding, which is a “systematic way in which to condense extensive data sets into smaller analysable units through the creation of categories and concepts derived from the data” (Lockyer, 2004:1) makes information manageable and sensible. Following Wodak and Meyer’s (2009) recursive steps, the first step during data analysis entails identifying the patterns from the dataset. The patterns to be discerned include the number of Twitter users contributing to each of the identified hashtags, the contribution of tweets across the networks, that is, who tweeted most and who did so least. Additionally, patterns include ascertaining the nature of the network, whether all nodes are of the same weight or not as well as getting to know what was tweeted, that is, the text, the links and the photos. Categorisation will be done by manually going to the profile information of each of the top 100 users and where they are tweeting from (time stamp and location).

The initial step is crucial in answering Research Question 1 (RQ1) (Who initiated key discourses on Zimbabwe’s elections within the Twitter community?) as it gives detail on who are the Twitter users who made use of the four hashtags discussed above. This answers who Twitter users are by looking at the geographic location (if given) and profile of the user (that is whom they say they are). It is important to identify the unique users as well as get to know how much they contributed in relation to the total number of tweets and see if discourses are not dominated by particular individuals or interest groups. Furthermore, this step helps answer RQ4 as it gives insights as to who uses Twitter and analyse to see if this constitutes a new public sphere. The data set will then be analysed for the number of @replies, the number of retweets and number of tweets with additional links (URLs) embedded in them. This helps answer RQ1 as well as give important insights into RQ2 (Which portions of society were addressed in the Twitter discourse during the 2013 elections?).

Step two entails randomly sampling tweets and downsizing the data (coding). The selected tweets will then be manually categorised for the theme and topic. This helps answer RQ2 and RQ3 (Which topics or themes were addressed within the Twittersphere and what were their broader social, cultural and political contexts?). Additionally, the tweets will be analysed for discursive strategies, social tensions, ideological struggles and linguistic means to expressing all these.

Finally, it is also important to gain insight pertaining to what non-textual elements were posted (these appear as URLs embedded in tweets.) URLs⁴ could be links to other information or to a photo that has been uploaded on Twitter. All tweets which have embedded URLs will be identified and quantified, and links selected, analysed and coded. This will result in the data that would further help in answering RQ1, RQ3 and RQ4.

1.6.4 Ethical considerations

This research will be guided by the University of Stellenbosch ethics policy and the researcher received ethical clearance prior to its commencement. All tweets collected for the purposes of this research, names of Twitter users and any correspondence with Twitter users will remain confidential and will not be shared with anyone outside the precincts of this research. All data has been stored in an external drive under a folder that is password protected. (This is a zipped folder). The folder has a dummy name, not linked to this research this is a way of further protecting the data. All files are password protected which means one needs a double breach, that is, to have a password for the folder as well as individual files to have access. As a backup, some files have been encrypted and uploaded to Google Drive. This is a secure platform to store documents because one need to access my password to get to the files. The files remain useless, even in an unlikely event of accessing them online, as they have to be decrypted.

1.7 Chapter layout

This chapter introduced the research by looking at how the media has been used in Zimbabwe. It was shown that the state uses the media as its propaganda mouthpiece and at the same time use various legislation to muzzle the media. This has spurred the use of the internet which is considered less risky and easily accessible. The use of the internet changed the media landscape which opened

⁴Uniform Resource Identifiers (URIs, aka URLs) are short strings that identify resources in the web: documents, images, downloadable files, services, electronic mailboxes, and other resources. (<http://www.w3.org/Addressing/#background>)

debate on what role new media play in political participation. This debate is not unique to the Zimbabwean situation as it has been evident since the spread of the internet and gathered momentum with the post-election protests in Iran and Moldova in 2009 and the Arab spring a year later. The debate on the role of social media in facilitating political participation has seen two diametrically opposed schools of thought, those seeing a positive role (utopians) and those seeing no change at all (dystopians).

It was also discussed if the new media networks constituted a public sphere in the Habermasian sense. A discussion of critical theories of the media showed that a critical theory approach to the study of the media enables one to lay bare the factors that hinder effective participation. These are relevant to evaluate and analyse the levels of domination and inequality within a society. This chapter also introduced and discussed network society theory which is very relevant to the study of the role of Twitter in facilitating political participation. The research design and methodology to be used in this research were briefly explained in this chapter.

Chapter Two - Literature review

Following the first chapter, the succeeding section builds on the literature that has been consulted during the preparation of Chapter 1 to lay a firm foundation for a detailed literature review. This chapter has a detailed review of texts on 1) what is Twitter 2) Twitter and the revolutions in Moldova, Iran and the Arab Spring 3) media and politics in Zimbabwe.

Chapter 3 - Theoretical framework

This chapter tackles the major theories on social media, critical theory, political participation and public sphere as a basis for analysing the role of social media in facilitating public political participation. Key issues to be discussed include the relevance and adequacy of critical theory in analysing a 21st century technology. This is further linked to the assumptions of the network society, which sees a development of new networks as a result of the new information and communication technologies. Furthermore, the concept of the public sphere is discussed, tracing

its origins, its weaknesses and how the recent information and communication technologies have changed it.

Chapter 4 - Research methodology

Quantitative research methodology is discussed in this chapter. The quantitative approach enabled me to ascertain the “numbers” and this laid the foundation for detailed quantitative analysis in Chapter 5. Additionally, critical discourse analysis and methods of doing discourse-historical analysis are discussed in detail, including the steps undertaken to clean up the data and the coding thereof. The process of data cleaning is discussed in detail below in Chapter 4, showing how the data set was cleaned before coding

Chapter 5 - Discussion of analysis and findings (Quantitative data)

This chapter looks at the quantitative data, for example how many tweets were posted during the 51 day period, who was tweeting, that is their characteristics such as professional background and when they joined Twitter. Additionally, this chapter looks at the number of retweets, the number of links in the tweets and the number of @mention and @reply. While the quantitative data seeks to answer the overall research question, it can be further stated that this data specifically answer RQ1 on who “Who initiated key discourses on Zimbabwe’s elections within the Twitter community?” The data will show that the “who” in this case does not refer to the person (Twitter user) only but their position in society, that is, professional background for example. In addition to answering RQ 1, quantitative data also help give insights pertaining to RQ 4 on whether the conversation demonstrates key features of “network society” and “public sphere” as explained above under 1.4.6 and in more detail in Chapter 3 under 3.5. This process also helps to answer RQ 2 on “Which portions of society were addressed in the Twitter discourse during the 2013 elections?” with a qualitative process in Chapter 6 fully answering the research question.

Chapter 6 - Discussion of analysis and findings (Qualitative data)

This chapter looks deeper into the tweets to see what themes and topics were addressed. In addition, there will be an analysis of the links in the tweets to get to know what they were referring to as this also gives one a deeper understanding of the discourse during the 51 day period. The analysis of this data help answer the main research question: How did Twitter facilitate public participation in the election of a new government in Zimbabwe in 2013? This is done through a detailed analysis of the tweets using discourse-historical analysis thereby answering RQ 2 on “Which portions of society were addressed in the Twitter discourse during the 2013 elections?” This process goes on to give important insights into the nature of discourse thereby answering RQ 3 on “Which topics or themes were addressed within the Twitter community and what were their broader social, cultural and political contexts?” The qualitative data analysis process partly answers RQ 1.

Chapter 7 - Conclusion

This chapter rounds up the key findings of the research and gives conclusions on the role of Twitter in facilitating political participation during the 2013 elections in Zimbabwe.

Chapter 2 – Literature review

2.1 Introduction

Twitter reportedly facilitated post-election protests in Iran and Moldova in 2009 and it is credited for the revolutions that took place in Egypt, Tunisia and other Middle East and North African countries in late 2010 to 2011 (Starbird & Palen, 2012; Aouragh & Alexander, 2011; Shirky, 2011; Mungiu-Pippidi & Munteanu, 2009). Tellingly, these political upheavals in 2010 – 2011 have been dubbed “Twitter Revolutions” (Shirky, 2011).

The so-called “Twitter Revolutions” preceded the important harmonised elections in Zimbabwe in 2013 and it was anticipated that social media was similarly going to play a major role (Ntuli, 2013). In addition to this, the media and the political environment in Zimbabwe encouraged political participation through social media as the mainstream media had been muzzled by the government through legal instruments such as the Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act (AIPPA).

The development of the media (print, broadcast and social media) has a bearing on how new media platforms, such as Twitter, are utilised. It is thus significant to take a historical, descriptive and critical look at media in Zimbabwe as it gives a firm foundation to the present analysis. It is necessary to look at relevant literature tackling issues such as media control by the state, the legislation and policies governing media, media ownership patterns, media diversity, how technology impacted Zimbabwean media as well as state – media relations.

A simple internet search shows that significant literature on Twitter was produced starting with Java, Song, Finin and Tseng (2007). Notably, Java et al (2007) produced their ground-breaking work only a year after the microblogging site was launched. Attention to the platform was honed by propositions that Twitter was so influential that it “caused revolutions” (Starbird & Palen, 2012; Aouragh & Alexander, 2011; Shirky, 2011; Mungiu-Pippidi & Munteanu, 2009) only three years after its launch in 2006 (Rodgers, 2014) in the case of Iran and Moldova and less than five years in the case of the Arab Spring. Such optimism, understandably, makes the study of Twitter an exciting enterprise.

Inevitably, a range of studies, papers and books were written about the microblogging platform. Unfortunately, for this project, these researches have largely been concentrated specifically on the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) nations. Scholars outside African institutions provide the lion's share of these studies. Sub-Saharan Africa appears to have been omitted from the growing body of research on the trending social media platform. The dearth of researches does not suggest that the microblogging platform is not used as there are media reports and analyses on its use in business, politics and social interaction (see for example Noonan & Piatt, 2014; Dahlberg, 2013a).

Research on how Twitter facilitates political participation in Zimbabwe is rare. This paucity, to some extent, is a reflection of how scholars tend to take up studies on issues in the country. Research on Zimbabwe, post-1980, can be divided into three categories namely: those analysing the transition of government power, pressure of democratisation, and authoritarianism in the country (Laakso, 2003:1). These three categories fall within three, but overlapping, periods. The periods are: consolidation of power of the ruling party during the 1980s, World Bank and the International Monetary Fund sponsored economic liberalisation in the 1990s and deepening economic crisis since the turn of the century.

In the first few years after independence, the majority of scholars focused on political economy, for example, Mandaza's (1986) *Zimbabwe: The political economy of transition - 1980 – 1986*. What is telling from the articles in the volume is that they shied away from political topics and chose to focus more on economic transition. This meant that the “very repressive government reactions to opposition or criticism were not in research during the first decade of independence” (Laakso, 2003:1). This changed towards the end of the first decade of independence, mainly because of internal transformations (the unification of the two main political parties Zanu PF and PF Zapu and the ensuing efforts to establish a one-party state) and external pressures, especially the end of the Cold War. In response to changes within the country and the external developments, the research focus shifted to addressing issues of democracy, especially towards the 1990 elections (see Mandaza & Sachikonye, 1991; Banana, 1989). The 1990 elections created a lot of excitement and surprisingly, Moyo (1992), in a detailed study of the polls, only mentioned the media in passing. This is unlike what Makumbe and Compagnon (2000) did with reference to the 1995 polls, where they devoted an entire chapter to the analysis of the role of the media in the elections.

Subsequent studies undertaken have focused on the role of the media in the 2000, 2002, 2005 and 2008 elections (Mutsvairo, 2013; Waldal, 2005).

It is understandable that research on how media in Zimbabwe facilitates political participation concentrate on elections. This is comprehensible in the sense that elections are elite sanctioned windows of opportunity for the majority of the people to partake in political processes. Many people usually become dormant after elections, until the next voting period.

2.1.2 Process of collecting materials for literature review

At first, a Google search with the keywords “Zimbabwe media” “Media Zimbabwe” “Zimbabwe ICT” and “Zimbabwe New Media” was done. This initial search retained a huge number of articles (there were more than a million articles from the first search). This was expected as the search query was somehow vague with a possibility of returning many unrelated results. Search engines use some complex computational mechanisms to rank and display pages with the main articles relevant to a topic within the first 10 pages of Google Search (Brin & Page, 2012:3825). As such, the first 100 articles were further analysed for relevance. It was found that refining the search query would help return more relevant and scholarly articles. This was achieved by adding more information to the search query. For example, a query “Zimbabwe media” was changed to “Zimbabwe media after 1980”.

In addition, information was obtained at websites such as www.researchgate.net and www.academia.edu. The two platforms bring together scholars and researchers who want to make their work public. In most cases, these works can easily be downloaded. However, there were some instances where it could not be downloaded. www.researchgate.net has a facility where one can request for an article directly from the author. There were some articles, for example, Varnali and Vehbi (2014), Mungiu-Pippidi & Munteanu (2009) and Wodak (2009), which were requested from the author and a link was sent to the researcher so as to download the document.

To further widen the list of relevant literature, a manual search at the University of Zimbabwe and Harare City libraries was made so as to select more articles. This method listed books which may not have particularly looked at the media but with sections that deal with the issue, for example, Makumbe and Compagnon (2000).

The researcher also made use of his personal library. This is a library that was built over more than 15 years and has books dealing with media in Zimbabwe and includes books like Rusike's (1990) *The politics of the mass media: A personal experience*.

After going through the stages described above, there were up to 30 relevant materials identified. Interestingly, research on media in Zimbabwe is diverse. Research topics are influenced by time period, nature of the research or the funder, for example, Willems (2012) looks at liberal democracy and how it has influenced scholarship on democracy and elections while the same author (Willems, 2014) looks at media audiences in Zimbabwe. Following the identification of literature, a first reading accompanied by note taking was undertaken. The concept-centric approach was then adopted because it ensures "that one's literature review does not become a subjective process stitching together a patchwork quilt of references, or the unilateral cherry picking of references that supports a preferred point of view" (Klopper & Lubbe, 2011:403).

2.2 What is Twitter?

2.2.1 Background to Twitter

When launched in 2006, Twitter was considered an urban lifestyle tool for updating friends on one's whereabouts (Rodgers, 2014:X). It was originally designed that tweets were to be shared via short messaging services (SMS) and thus were limited to 140 characters (boyd, Scott & Gilad, 2010). Until 2009, the platform asked its users: What are you doing? (Rodgers, 2014: XII). The platform users understandably answered this question in a way that led many who studied Twitter to conclude that the content on the platform is mundane, banal and phatic (Rodgers, 2014) or creating a noisy environment. The change of the question to users to: What is happening? shows that the microblogging platform was focusing more not on the individual but what is happening around them. Interestingly, these changes were effected in 2009 (Rodgers, 2014) the year when for the first time it was suggested that the protests in Iran and Moldova were "Twitter revolutions".

2.2.2 How Twitter has evolved since 2006

Writing about the microblogging platform more than eight years after inception, Weller, Bruns, Burgess, Mahrt & Puschmann (2014) give an interesting account of how the platform has

transformed communications. The title of the book, *Twitter and society*, is evidence that the authors acknowledge the platform's impact on society. In the chapter introducing the work, the authors trace the path that the microblogging platform has trodden since 2006. Weller et al (2014: XXIX) posit that alterations to the platform have not changed the basic idea behind the service, that is, "users may post short messages of up to 140 characters and follow updates by other users". As Twitter users embraced the "technology and its affordances, a series of new conventions emerged that allowed users to add structure to tweets" (boyd et al, 2010). Twitter users developed ways to reference other users, converged on labels to indicate topics (hashtags) and devised language to propagate messages (boyd et al, 2010). Resultantly, the new structure has encouraged the formation of a complex follower network with "unidirectional and bidirectional connections between individuals, but also between media outlets, NGOs and other organisations" (Weller et al, 2014: XXX). It is apparent that Twitter has become an important tool for communication and it is not only used by individuals but business entities and not for profit organisations as well. Weller et al (2014: XXX) go on to argue that "Twitter is increasingly used as a source of real-time information and a place to debate news, politics, business and entertainment". This means that the networks that emerge from the use of Twitter bring entities with different capacities together. It is evident that the platform has altered the media ecology.

However, it is important to further question if the openness of the platform, which makes large NGOs participate as equals with individuals, empowers previously disadvantaged groups. This helps one to ascertain if all users have equal access. Access to Twitter, though open, is dependent upon a number of factors, including having the right technology, basic literacy, knowledge of how the platform works, and the ability to join existing networks.

It is also important to acknowledge how social media platforms have incorporated changes and harnessed communications in an effort to monetise the data (Langloes & Elmer, 2013:2). Changes in Twitter's outlook and "this shift has been realised materially in the architecture of the platform including not only user interface, but also affordances of its API and associated policies affecting the ability of third-party developers" (Puschmann & Burgess, 2013: 3-4). This has seen the firm changing policies regarding access to data as it continues to ring-fence its treasure trove and limit third party access to the archived tweets (Bohn, 2012). This is made worse by the fact that the public can access tweets that are a maximum 10 days old (University of Cornel, 2015), raising

compelling and pertinent questions on who owns the content that is produced on the platform. In addition to adopting user initiated innovations that the platform has incorporated, Twitter has also responded to the need to enhance communication through the platform by developing tools that allow users to evade censorship (Twitter-Blog, 2011).

Important to mention, however, is the point that users have generally benefitted from the spinoffs from instituted changes. Twitter has worked hard to get more users as big data means more revenue from advertisers. As further proof, the platform listed on the NYSE in 2013 (Oran & Shih, 2013), in the same way as other Web 2.0 companies such as Facebook, showing that it is a business and that the pursuit of profits could have driven these changes. Twitter also plays to the whims of the powerful, for example in 2009, it was asked to postpone its scheduled maintenance for Iran servers by the United States government and it obliged (*Guardian*, 2009). This was at the height of the protests in Iran and it is speculated that it obliged so that the use of the platform could ignite more protests. In the case of this research, there were no significant business decisions taken by Twitter that had an impact on the collection of tweets during the 51 day period.

2.2.3 The use of #, @mention and retweet (RT) on Twitter

Studying Twitter entails coming up with methods of “capturing” tweets and as argued in Chapter 1, one way of doing so is through the use of hashtags. In a very insightful presentation, Bruns and Burgess (2011:3) underline the importance of the hashtag as a “central mechanism for the coordination of convergence on Twitter”:

Hashtags are vital for a conversation on Twitter because they allow users to follow posts thus enabling users to: Communicate with a community of interest around the hashtag topic without necessarily needing to go through the process of establishing a mutual follower/followee relationship with all or any of the other participants. (Bruns & Burgess, 2011:3)

It is possible for anyone with a Twitter account to be able to follow a hashtag and communicate with other users even if they do not follow each other. Twitter's privacy settings allow a user to block another user so that they will not be able to see their tweets. This does not affect hashtagged tweets when searched for by using the Twitter search engine. It thus facilitates conversation with anyone interested in the topic. Additionally, it is also possible to search hashtagged tweets even if one is not a Twitter user.

Hashtags make it easy for users to respond to breaking news or new development of a topic of interest and as Bruns and Burgess (2011: 3) point out, "...new hashtags can be created ad hoc, by users themselves, without any need to seek approval from Twitter administrators". The freedom to create a hashtag enables users anywhere in the world to address a topic be it of local or international significance. This echoes the postulations by the advocates of a network society who argue that those with the necessary tools can broadcast content from anywhere at any time. While this may be taken as an advantage, it also has a downside as it is possible that those contributing to the hashtags may not be affected by the topic under discussion. For example, it could be someone tweeting from a remote location with no real attachment to what is happening in Zimbabwe (see Addendum C & D showing the location of those who tweeted on the elections in Zimbabwe using the four hashtags).

While Bruns and Burges (2011) prepared a very informative article giving some important insights, it falls short of clearly explaining how conversation takes place on Twitter. The major question which remains unanswered is: Does it mean if one uses a hashtag, they have entered a conversation? In addition to failing to address this question, the two authors make a very simplistic assumption, that by creating a hashtag, users will naturally join the "conversation". Additionally, a tweet by one with many followers is likely to be noticed more than one with a few followers. Some Twitter users are likely to post more than others, which means that the conversations if they are called that, are not done in the normal way that everyday conversations take place. In addition to this, users may not know which hashtag to use and others may not be using hashtags at all. In so doing, they may be considered outside a conversation when in fact they may be using certain keywords related to the topic.

Finally, the use of hashtags, while commendable, suggests prior knowledge of the discussion or topic, which means those not aware may be sidelined. This raises questions on who initiates a

hashtag and makes it popular or acceptable over other competing hashtags. This issue is not discussed in the article by Bruns and Burgess (2011). This may explain why we have as many as four hashtags for the same event, that is, the 2013 harmonised elections in Zimbabwe. In another interesting article Messina (2007) argues that:

A drawback to the ad hoc and non-supervised emergence of hashtags is that competing hashtags may emerge in different regions of the Twittersphere or some hashtags may be used for vastly different events taking place simultaneously.

Thus while the hashtag is a very powerful affordance that comes with Twitter, its Achilles heel is that without centralised control, there are chances that many hashtags can mean different things and the same one can mean different things to different people. This poses a danger to any researcher as they have to be sure that they are collecting tweets which are related to the topic they are studying. (The researcher employed a simple method to eliminate this potential pitfall which will be discussed in Chapter 4)

2.2.4 What constitutes a Twittersphere or is it a community?

The affordances brought by Twitter allow users to create a community and at the same time make sure that there is an audience that is following the topic under discussion (echoing the supposition that there is an emerging network). This clearly lays a firm foundation for horizontal communication, brought about by the affordances embedded in Twitter, including the use of the hashtag, the @reply and retweeting, possibly facilitating communication between two or more people without any mediation, (in most cases it is from one to many as anyone has access to information that is published on Twitter).

2.3 How does Twitter facilitate political participation?

From 2009 (after the April Moldova and June Iran post-election uprisings) to the Arab Spring, there has been a cacophony over what role, if any, Twitter played in the unrests. Opinion is divided between those who saw a positive influence of Twitter during the revolts to the extent that these

are called “Twitter Revolutions” and those who dismiss it. By extension, authors who support this viewpoint fall within the cyber-optimists category, as briefly discussed in Chapter 1. Some authors, however, argue that there were no “Twitter Revolutions”, accusing scholars, journalists and activists of playing up the role of Twitter despite glaring facts on the ground which show otherwise. The Arab Spring and the post-election protests in Moldova and Iran have induced a surge in researches on the role of Twitter in facilitating political participation. The focus on the role of Twitter in political participation by researchers has enriched our understanding of this subject but it is not an exhaustive focus. Equally important and related to this subject matter is research on how Twitter facilitates political participation in other parts of the world or different political contexts, for example in Zimbabwe.

Whereas the Arab Spring in late 2010 and early 2011 could be credited for bringing to the fore the role of Twitter in facilitating political participation, it is important to mention that debates about its role preceded and even outlived these events (Varnali & Vehbi, 2014; Hosch-Dayican, Aurit, Aarts, & Dassen, 2014; Simões, Carmo Barriga, & Jerónimo, 2011;). Research only spiked with the unexpected events in the MENA countries and there is a danger that when researching this topic one focuses only on the role of Twitter in the context of the so-called “Twitter Revolutions”. It is thus important to widen the literature review and not limit it to the works on “Twitter Revolutions” and include works that look at how the platform facilitates political participation in other political contexts.

It is remarkable to note that those scholars participating in the cyber-optimist versus cyber-pessimist debate have all presented evidence to prove their standpoint. Noticeably, those who wrote immediately after the revolutions were bound to romanticise the role of Twitter and other social media while those writing with more time to reflect were more critical and not overly optimistic. A good example in this regard is Wojceiszak and Smith (2014:92) who are clearly sceptical about the role of social media in causing revolutions which they say led to a “conviction that led to attractive monikers such as ‘Twitter/Facebook Revolutions’”. The problem in analysing the part played by social media in the Arab Spring is that there are very few analytical tools. Additionally, what happened then was very new, catching analysts by surprise. Scholars and journalists used weak and at times archaic toolkits to explain what was happening within a few weeks of the fall of the Tunisian and Egyptian regimes only to reflect latter in a more soberly

manner. Alterman (2011:104) finely captures and outlines the logical fallacies which informed scholarship and media reportage on the Arab Spring and these include:

- 1) Arguing that since the diffusion of the internet in the MENA countries is new and the new movements that emerged used the internet, therefore the advent of the new ICTs caused the revolutions.
- 2) The internet is mainly in English, thus outside observers can follow what is happening and can empathise with the English speakers who are appealing for their help thus the outside world should pay attention.
- 3) Western social movements use the internet and if it works for them then it should work for everyone else.
- 4) The Arab internet narrative has attractive heroes, youthful, English speaking and full of energy, unlike the terrifying images of the likes of Osama Bin Laden which had come to be associated with Arabs. As such, these should be connected with and be helped to effect political changes in their countries.
- 5) The West has cosied up to autocrats in MENA thus the new narrative of the revolutions (made possible by Western technology) relieves them of the burden of guilt they felt for allegedly working together with the strongman in the MENA countries against the people.

These logical fallacies may, to some extent, explain some of the simplistic conclusions that were made especially by the media as the revolts broke out in Tunisia and started spreading across the Middle East and North Africa. It is also important to note that these fallacies may not be limited to MENA countries but across the globe. Some of the cyber-optimists ignored the role of the traditional media and other grassroots organising methods and thus prematurely declared that social media had caused the revolts. Alterman (2011) takes a very critical approach and even dismisses those seeing the role of social media as important to Western scholars and not the people on the ground. Building on the growing septicism about the romanticised role of Silicon Valley technologies in facilitating public political participation, including allegedly toppling regimes, this research seeks to take an objective look at the collected data in order to find out how Twitter was used during the 2013 elections.

Amongst the flood of research papers explaining the role of social media in the Arab Spring, there were scholars who chose to be ambivalent without siding with either the cyber-optimists or the cyber-dystopians. Aouragh and Alexander (2011:1345) argued that the turmoil that was taking place in the Arab world “presented an opportunity to finally test theoretical assumptions about the internet” as the revolts “have become a social lab offering us the kennel of material”. This was a call for more detached observation with an objective analysis of the situation that avoids falling into the pitfalls of taking a cyber-utopian or the cyber-sceptic slant. This approach is also supported by Christensen (2011) who argues that when considering the interplay between affordances and materiality, the socio-political context is important.

This is in line with the critical discourse analysis approach which encourages the use of different methodologies as well as the use of various sources of information to understand a phenomenon. In so doing, this research avoids the fallacies identified by Alterman (2011). In the process of balancing the opposing views of the cyber-optimists and the cyber-dystopians, it is important – also within a critical approach - to strive for balance and make use of analytical tools that give empirical evidence based on what has been studied. The presentations by Alterman (2011) and Christensen (2011) are appropriate to this study as they give a very firm analytical starting point.

2.3.1 Arguments for Twitter facilitates political participation

The utopian viewpoint (Lotan, Graeff, Ananny, Gaffney, Pearce & boyd, 2011; Papacharissi, 2010; Shirky, 2008) is premised on the logic that the affordances that come with information communication technologies facilitate public political participation. In a report on the role of social media in the uprisings in the MENA states in 2011, Howard, Duffy, Freelon, Muzammi, Mari and Mazaid (2011) painted a colourful picture of the role of Twitter, Facebook and YouTube. The research focused mainly on Egypt and Tunisia, where the authors created maps of the important Egyptian websites and examining conversations in the Tunisian blogosphere. The authors analysed more than three million tweets based on keywords used and tweeted during the revolutions and concluded that “for the first time, we have evidence confirming social media’s critical role in the Arab Spring” (Howard et al, 2011:2). More so, Howard et al (2011:5) concede that democratic

movements predated the uprisings but are quick to mention that “technologies have helped people interested in democracy build extensive networks, create social capital, and organise political action”.

Important to underline here is the point that technologies help people already interested in politics, not new entrants. According to Howard et al (2011:6), the new technologies were not only instrumental in organising for political action and the building of networks as they also facilitated the participation of women. From their Twitter dataset, Howard et al (2011:6) concluded that the contribution of women was 30 percent of the Twitter conversations inside Tunisia and 33 percent in Egypt during the revolts.

In answering the question: Who uses Twitter, Howard et al (2011: 9 – 10) state that:

As a group, Twitter users are probably more educated and wealthy than the average person and more likely to be found in major cities, and these were likely to be opinion leaders for whom Twitter served as an important tool for carrying a conversation...

This attests to the critical theorists’ proposition that despite being accessible, it is not everyone who uses Twitter and its use is skewed towards those with the means or resources, including time, education and knowledge to use the platform. It is clear, from this, that even though Twitter was accessible, it was not all Egyptians and Tunisians who tweeted.

It has to be accepted that Howard et al (2011) made a detailed research of the role of social media during the Arab Spring and it ranks as probably one of the first such reports on the uprisings. Their conclusions, to a great extent, show what happened during the uprisings. The dataset from where they draw their conclusions is quite rich and it was systematically collected. However, some of the conclusions and observations by the authors raise various questions. The conclusions in this report, coming hardly after the dust had settled, were based on the optimism that the Silicon Valley technologies had caused “revolutions” in Egypt and Tunisia. If the segment of the people the research identified as using Twitter is to be taken as a measure, then it is abundantly clear that these could not pass for ordinary Tunisians but people of means. This is important to this study as

it is necessary to ascertain who was tweeting and what segment of society they occupy, that is, their professions or whether they are politicians, celebrities or opinion leaders or ordinary Zimbabweans.

In their analysis of the Moldova uprising of 2009, which was triggered by allegations of vote rigging, Mungiu-Pippidi and Munteanu (2009:138) make almost similar conclusions to those made by Howard et al (2011) by attributing the large turnout during the post-election protest to Twitter as “word had been spreading rapidly via Twitter and other online network services”. Mungiu-Pippidi and Munteanu (2009) give background to the “Twitter Revolution” in Moldova, highlighting the socio-economic and political factors that had been simmering in the country since the 1990s. In their conclusion, the authors decried the failure of the revolution and blamed it on the absence of a unified opposition that would have driven it forward. The official media in Moldova had blacked out the post-elections protests but the accounts, pictures and video of the rally were appearing in real time on Twitter and YouTube. The protestors tried to occupy the government buildings but were repelled by the security forces. Despite a very promising title to their paper, the two authors are not clear on what they mean by “Twitter Revolution.” For them, the “Twitter Revolution” appears to be along the same lines as the Colour Revolutions that took place in the former socialist countries in Eastern Europe. As such, their article does not give much detail on the role that the internet played in the post-elections protests in Moldova. For example, they attribute the coming together of protestors to the internet (captured by their subtitle: “Crowds, courtesy of the internet”) but there is nothing to show how the internet was used. The authors may have added value to their observation by looking at the nature of the tweets, who was tweeting and how the state responded to the use of the internet. The failure of the revolution as pointed out by the authors is another sign that social media platforms can only be used as tools that enhance traditional mechanisms, such as grassroots organisation.

It is clear that cyber-optimists continue to credit new technologies for the political changes that took place in Iran and Moldova in 2009 as well as in the Middle East and North African countries. From the above, it was shown that the main weakness of the argument by cyber-optimists is that they have not been able to systematically collect data to support their positions.

2.3.2 Twitter does not facilitate political participation: Dissenting voices

For Hofheinz (2011:1418), hopes that technology would cause revolutions predate the internet. This fascination with revolutions in technology has facilitated “the impetus to discover the revolutionary effects that technology might have on state and society” (Hofheinz, 2011:1417). The firm believers in the power of the new media to change the world are mostly activists and journalists. But also:

Much of the academic literature has oscillated between the search for revolutionary developments and the admission that too high hopes for radical, techno-driven political change have not been borne out. But this admission has not killed the dream. (Hofheinz, 2011:1418)

Accordingly, the events in Egypt and Tunisia in early 2011 rekindled the dream that a technology revolution was going to take place. This, according to Hofheinz (2011), was not a new development as faith in the revolutionary power of communication devices could be traced back to television, radio and even printing, but had been heightened in the 1990s because of the internet and satellite television. As such, the fall of the Egyptian and Tunisian governments led to “fresh flurry of exchanges on the role of the internet, in particular, the role of ‘social media’” (Hofheinz, 2011:1422).

The flurry of exchanges, Hofheinz (2011) opines, shows that research has not gone past the stages of hypothesis building, and in the absence of systematic research, cyber-utopians and cyber-septics will continue to argue on the issue whether or not social media was effective in bringing about a revolution. Apart from the absence of systematic researches on social media’s impact on politics, Hofheinz (2011) poses the question: “Do new media have real consequences for contentious politics?” The response to this question depends on where one stands in the cyber-optimists versus septics debate.

The observations by Hofheinz (2011) could give important directions for those who wish to get to know more about the revolutions in MENA countries. The suggestion that there should be systematic research on the issue is important in coming up with conclusive findings which would definitely narrow the gap between cyber-utopians and the cyber-septics.

In his analysis of the post-elections protests in Iran in 2009, Morozov (2009:10), in a clearly cyber-septic fashion, asserts that the role of technology in driving the protests remained unknown. Morozov (2009) is of the view that it was atavistic to think that Western technology was causing political changes in Iran. The author goes further to claim that it was American, not Iranian, bloggers who are culpable of blowing the role of technology out of any proportion. The people who were involved in the protests through blogs, this argument goes, did not see the role in the way that has been projected by the Americans. Morozov (2009:10) argues that the narrative that the Iranian protests were a “Twitter Revolution” was easily accepted because, in the 1990s, the people had seen something similar in Eastern Europe when the “exultant hordes of attractive, obstreperous young people, armed with fax machines and an occasional Xerox copier taking on dictators...” As such, scholars and analysts quickly accepted the view that technology would facilitate toppling of dictators because of what they had seen in the 1990s.

Morozov (2009) is clearly against rushed conclusions, especially by Western scholars pushing for explanations on what happened in other countries without concrete evidence to support their viewpoints. He maintains that these explanations are being imposed by scholars outside the environment and may be distortive of the situation. As such, Morozov (2009) argues that it is easy to dismiss the Twitter Revolution as a product of wild imagination or excessive optimism. In addition, the Western analysts may be good at giving good analyses of technology’s role in national affairs but invariably flounder when analysing the role of technology in global politics. This means that the term Twitter Revolution is based on flawed analysis.

Another cyber-septic, Alterman (2011) questions the veracity of the propositions that social media prompted hundreds of thousands and then millions of Tunisians and Egyptians to pour onto the streets and peacefully demand change. Alterman, (2011:103) argues that what was striking about the political movements in the Middle East “is not much the power of 21st century media but rather the power of 20th century media,” as social media role was “intimately related to traditional media”. This is a clear criticism of the optimistic analysis of the revolts which earned them the term “Twitter Revolutions”. For Alterman (2011:104) traditional media, specifically, television’s role was downplayed because “television isn’t sexy to Western audiences, but is both ubiquitous and powerful”.

Alterman (2011) did well to analyse the role of social media in influencing political events in the MENA countries. This article was written at a time when there was a flurry of articles and researches on the subject. This seems a rejoinder to the cyber-utopians who were arguing that the revolutions had been tweeted. In the final analysis, this is a very important addition to the scholarly literature on the subject.

Simões, Carmo-Barriga, and Jerónimo (2011) look at how Twitter facilitate political participation, not in the context of mass protests but in general. They are not very optimistic about the role of Twitter in enhancing political participation, arguing that:

Some authors, the most optimistic toward new technologies, underestimate or do not even take into account in their researches the crucial issues of political skills regarding political participation. According to their technological deterministic approach, new technologies are just enough to create political involvement. (Simões et al, 2011:56)

This is a sobering observation and needs attention as one critically looks at how Twitter facilitates political participation in any given context. The authors go on to mention that the social differentiation factors such as gender, academic qualifications, and professional categories “filter citizens who participate both in the real world politics and in the digital one” (Simões et al, 2011:56). This line of argument is also supported by a report prepared by Social Media and Political Participation Lab (2011) which showed that only one percent of the users constituted 80 percent of tweets during a Turkish protest. “The implication of this asymmetry is that a minority of users act as the main source of information. They are the authorities, the authors of the messages that resonate through the higher number of users” (Social Media and Political Participation Lab, 2011:5). As such, the Twittersphere could be a mirror reflection of how society is constituted and without making rushed conclusions, it is important to also analyse who contributes to the given hashtag. This helps to understand who participates and to see if they are new voices. This is what this research seeks to do. The essence of social asymmetry will be discussed in Chapter 5.

It is clear that cyber-pessimists try to be very realistic about their observations on the role of Twitter in facilitating political participation. The cyber-optimists’ (realists) major weakness is that

they have failed to move from theoretical analyses to empirical research to support their viewpoints.

2.4 Media and political participation in Zimbabwe, the recurring concepts

Going through the literature on how Zimbabwe media are used for political participation, one realises that most of it focus on what Trottier and Fuchs (2014:3) call Lasswell's formula; how the media is used, by whom, for what purpose and having which effects. Most of the scholars tend to focus on the state versus media conflict without factoring in the media audiences and consumers.

2.4.1 Historical development of Zimbabwean media

The current state of the media in Zimbabwe is a construction or development of the media in the country since the attainment of independence in 1980 as well as its colonial legacy. Rønning (2003:196) gives a thought-provoking historical overview of the advance of the media in Zimbabwe, concluding that the “the media policies and the media situation in Zimbabwe reveal the contradictions between authoritarianism and democratic impulses in the political development of the country”. At independence, the new government showed its intention of having a new media policy and this was very well articulated through the founding of the Zimbabwe Mass Media Trust (ZMMT) in 1981 with the aim of having the trust serve as:

a vehicle not just for changing staff and editorial policy of the papers (under the new Zimpapers namely Manica Post, The Herald, The Chronicle, The Sunday Mail and The Sunday News) but also to see the transition in the management and operations of the public media from white minority control to serving the interest of the broad section of Zimbabwe society. (Rønning, 2003:197)

With such intentions, it was expected that the media in post-colonial Zimbabwe would be free from the strictures of the state, an anticipated departure from what was the case during minority rule. However, the new ruling political elite realised that they needed to answer the question “if the media were indigenised, which local interests should be allowed to control them?” (Rønning,

2003:197). Political elites realised that notwithstanding a desire to open the media, control of the media had to reside within their grasp.

As a consequence of the state's desire to control the media, the newly founded ZMMT ended up a mere stooge as government directly controlled editorial policies at Zimpapers-owned newspapers. The state control of major newspapers created space for new forms of media, which would become alternative voices to the state-controlled media, for example, *The Daily Gazette*. *The Daily Gazette*, Rønning (2003:206) states, operated for slightly over two years from October 1992 to Christmas Day in 1994 when it published its last edition:

The achievement of *The Daily Gazette* was proof that it was possible to challenge Zimpapers monopoly. It showed that it was possible to create alternative, more open forms of journalism. Thus the paper together with other alternative media developed a form of critical journalism which at its best has contributed to the opening up of Zimbabwean society.

With *The Daily Gazette* blazing the trail, two other publications, *The Zimbabwe Independent* and the *Zimbabwe Standard*, started publishing in 1996 and 1997 respectively, (Rønning, 2003) possibly to fill the vacuum created by the folding of *The Daily Gazette* as well as a realisation that the media could be pluralised. The editorial policy of *The Zimbabwe Independent* from the very beginning "included support for meaningful 'black empowerment' measures, the economic reform programme, and consistent criticism and exposure of government mismanagement, corruption and abuse of power" (Rønning, 2003:206). The *Zimbabwe Independent* and its sister paper, the *Zimbabwe Standard*, targeted the urban professional. The *Zimbabwe Mirror*, characterised by a form of radical nationalism and quite different from the business based attitude of its competitors, started publishing in 1997.

In 1999, the Associated Newspapers Group (ANZ), supported by a consortium of institutional, corporate and private investors started publishing a number of newspapers. This consortium was backed by investors and individuals with publishing interests in the United Kingdom, New Zealand and South Africa (Rønning, 2003). This was in clear contrast to *The Daily Gazette* which was launched on a very thin capital base which in some way contributed to its demise. Despite the

seemingly stable financial backing, ANZ faced financial problems and shut down some of its provincial publications (Rønning, 2003) and was later bailed out by the Southern Africa Media Development Fund (SAMDEF), an offshoot of the Media Institute of Southern Africa (MISA). SAMDEF gives financial support and technical training to independent media in the region as a way of strengthening them. ANZ's flagship, *Daily News*, had an impact as:

It played a very significant role as counterweight to *The Herald's* blatantly partisan election reporting by adopting a professional journalistic attitude and particularly highlighting incidences of violence and abuse of power. (Rønning, 2003:209)

The independent media, according to Rønning (2003), did well to expose government mismanagement. It was also taken to be more professional compared to *The Herald* and other newspapers under the Zimpapers stable. It is clear that the presentation by Rønning (2003) does well to give a detailed analysis of the development of the media in Zimbabwe, but some questions nevertheless remain.

Rønning's (2003) analysis seems overly biased towards independently owned press as some of the conclusions show. For example, he excessively appraises the *Daily News* saying it was more professional than state media. Furthermore, a comparative analysis between *The Herald* and the *Daily News* as done by Rønning (2003) may be misplaced as the newspapers were controlled by very different interests and at the same time expected to serve different purposes.

The presentation by Rønning (2003) also shows that investment in the media is usually for a number of reasons, including but not limited to, the pursuit of profits or propagation of a certain ideology. As such, the independent media in Zimbabwe can be taken as investments by owners of capital and that could be used as a vehicle to drive their ideology. As mentioned above, the *Zimbabwe Independent's* editorial policy at inception was to support black empowerment and a new economic policy, which all were meant to benefit the new black elite, especially the *comprador* elites some of whom were investing in the new publications at a time when the Zimbabwean economy was being liberalised under the Economic Structural Adjustment Programme (ESAP). Other newspapers, exhibited different ideologies, for example, *The Daily News*, was driving a neo-liberal ideology, together with *The Standard* while the *Zimbabwe Mirror*

exhibited a radical nationalist ideology. These are business ventures which may have been driven by a desire to make profits. This means that while the independent media is celebrated as an alternative to *The Herald*, there is nothing much different in terms of ideology and enabling the participation of the previously disenfranchised groups in political processes. As such, one has to be very careful when analysing the role of the independent media in opening up the media landscape in the country.

2.4.1.1 Media ownership patterns

The mass media ownership patterns in Zimbabwe point to the different levels of conflict in the country. It is clear from the foregoing that the state, in the process of keeping a stranglehold on the media, created opportunities for the private press. Investors realised opportunities to invest in the media in Zimbabwe. The private press thus served a dual role, as a vehicle for the realisation of profits for the investors and at the same time creating alternative platforms that gave space to opposition political parties, the civil society, and other interest groups. As such, the state owns media for hegemonic purposes while private investors may seek to propagate their own ideology and/or realise profit through media ownership (see more in 2.4.2). It is against this seemingly complex setting that Rønning (2003) made an analysis of the media in Zimbabwe. Rønning's (2003) liberal approach saw him making abrasive conclusions by equating the presence of the private press to a more democratic society. Additionally, the liberal approach, as propounded by Rønning (2003), criticises the state for owning the media, wishing for a situation where all media is in private hands. One difficulty with such an approach is the assumption that private ownership of the press may facilitate the participation of previously disadvantaged groups in political processes. It is also possible to have independent investors, who share common ideologies with the ruling elite, owning newspapers. Taking a critical approach, one can also add that the use of privately owned media should not be equated to participation by the citizens, but one has to look deep and get to know who is using the media and what they are communicating through such media. This research acknowledges the role played by privately owned media platforms which are not controlled by the state.

2.4.2 Media as an instrument for hegemony for Zimbabwe's ruling elite

In 1980, the state was faced with an intricate situation of decolonising and democratising, but at the same time nationalise the media. Despite initial indication towards democratising the media, this was abandoned as the Zanu PF introduced its desire for one party state and took hegemonic control of the political sphere (Rønning & Kupe, 2000:140). As a result, the state came to dominate the newspaper market through its control of Zimpapers and this “raises serious doubt about media democracy in the country”, write Rønning and Kupe (2000:142). Interestingly, the control extended to broadcasting which:

... was and is used to consolidate regime power, smother opposition, and legitimate the ruling party’s policy agenda by defining political reality on its own terms, behind the shield of developmental journalism. (Rønning & Kupe, 2000:142)

According to this view, the state maintained a hegemonic control over the media and would make sure that the media would not threaten this hegemony or offer alternatives to those projected by the state. However, this view becomes doubtful when one looks at how limited the state is when it comes to controlling new media. Social media platforms such as Twitter bypass state control and can be used for counter-hegemonic purposes, notwithstanding the attempts by the Zimbabwe Government’s surveillance through an act of parliament that allowed security agencies to “snoop” into information and communication technologies use. As such it is also important to look at how these new media platforms are being used in Zimbabwe as is done in this study.

2.4.3 State control/regulation of the media in Zimbabwe

The desire to use the media for hegemonic purposes has seen the post-independent government, just like the preceding administration, instituting various policies and legislation aimed at controlling the media. Both administrations viewed the media consuming citizens with contempt or suspicion (Willems, 2014). The media policies and legislation from the 1940s to date reflect how the state views the citizens. In the 1940s and 1950s, the mass media specifically targeted primarily the urban middle-class audience and thus leaving out the rural population (Willems, 2014). This changed in the 1960s and 1970s when regular radio service was introduced to Africans.

2.4.3.1 State control of the media: A necessary evil?

Scholars writing on the state's control and regulation of the media give differing perspectives on the reasons why the government seeks to control or regulate the media. Mugari (2010), for example, attempts to explain the structure and the operations of the media in Zimbabwe using a systems approach. This novel approach employs Easton's systems theory to "understand the impulses that gave rise to the shift in policy direction with regard to structure and operations of the media" (Mugari, 2010:3). Mugari's study on media reforms in Zimbabwe is an important addition to researches on the operations of the media, especially the role of the state in controlling the media. Mugari (2010:4) makes a bold conclusion, sympathetic with government positing that:

In terms of this study's findings, the problem with the media was a result of over-liberalisation of a strategic sector resulting in government loss of its prerogative over all important power to name and define Zimbabwean reality to its people and the world in a way favourable to the party's political elites.

The author did not clearly tell us how he came to this conclusion. More importantly, the author did not define over-liberalisation or give examples to show what he meant by it. This approach does not appreciate the collaborative nature of media as it seeks to have the state control all media facets on the basis of it being a strategic sector. It will be very interesting to situate this argument in the context of a changed media landscape, especially after the wide use of social media where the government has very minimal, if any, control. Looking at social media was possible as this paper was written in 2010.

The government remained uncommitted towards opening the media space, even at a time of liberalisation of key industries. According to Mugari (2010:4), this posed

[S]erious threats to the perpetuation of the political status quo (which can be interpreted as Zanu PF hegemony) [own parenthesis] manifested in the shape of serious political competition as the policy of liberalisation extended naturally from the sphere of economics to the sphere of politics.

With liberalisation, the political-economic environment influenced policies and the media landscape, especially the print media, went through rapid changes between 1991 and 2000, for example, the increase in the number of publications (see 2.4.1 above). However, upon realising that the state was losing out on its prerogative to name and define Zimbabwean reality, the state instituted a raft of changes by passing the Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act (AIPPA), the Broadcasting Services Act (BSA), and the Public Order and Security Act (POSA.) As Mugari (2010:4) states:

The outcome (of the laws) amounted to whittling the embryonic privately owned media which government characterised as local megaphones of western imperialist forces to the Mugabe government's nationalist policies.

The laws, from a systems approach as applied by Mugari (2010), were a move aimed at reclaiming the role of the state which seems to have been captured by the new privately owned media. Ultimately this meant that there was a conflict between the state and the media. However, this conflict is multifarious because it came at a time when the opposition voices in the country started to mobilise and demand political and economic changes. This was a clear attack on the hegemonic control by the state. This conflict became evident when:

Pro-liberal groups challenged the Zanu elites, ascribing a watchdog role to the media.....it defined the media problem in Zimbabwe after 2000 in narrow oppositional terms as one of too much state intervention stifling free flow of information and the development of free press. (Mugari, 2010:7)

From the above, it is very clear that Mugari (2010) sees the new media laws and policies as a state response to the shift in the power to disseminate information and determine which content should be accessed by the people. These laws and policies, according to Mugari (2010), were an attempt to recapture lost hegemonic control. Absent from Mugari's (2010) analysis is the role of ICTs in general and more specifically social media platforms. The new media platforms pose an equally

potent danger as that of the private media if one accepts Mugari's (2010) argument. The social media platforms can easily evade the restrictions of AIPPA and BSA. The two acts may have specifically targeted the mass media with little or no effect on new media. It is equally important to analyse how the social media, specifically Twitter, is used for political participation, which is the focus of this research.

The systems approach adopted by Mugari (2010) only looks at how the state responds to the changes in the environment, without looking at how the people also responded, especially the adoption and use of ICT for political participation as well as by-passing state control. The systems approach, as used in Mugari (2010), does not look at how the environment responds to the state's actions. Like in the case of the state's decision to maintain the monopoly of ZBC in broadcasting in Zimbabwe, the environment responded in ways outside the state's control. One such way was the switch to free to air satellite channels or tuning in to pirate radio stations. Ironically, the emergence of pirate radio stations or use of the internet is attributed to the state's policy of keeping ZBC's monopoly in the broadcast sector, as mentioned in Chapter 1. This means that despite it being a powerful tool and a very innovative approach to understanding the media environment in Zimbabwe, the systems model, only tells part of the story. This approach also suggests that the state also influences the environment, and in so doing this line of argument ignores other equally important actors such as journalists, investors, non-governmental organisations and the media consumers. Ignoring how other players within the system may react to a government policy is a major problem in Mugari's (2010) analysis.

2.4.3.2 Ever shifting ground of state/media relations

Chuma (2007) acknowledges that the media policies in Zimbabwe are not static as the state and the media owners and journalists respond to a changing local and international political environment. According to Chuma (2007:76):

The relationship between the press, state, and capital in Zimbabwe is not viewed as a linear one, or rather it comes as a complex dialectic that is conditioned by factors which sometimes are located outside these institutions, and which shifts in time and space.

The state used a combination of “coercion and coaxing” which they inherited from the colonial government and initial reforms in independent Zimbabwe were characterised by attempts to expand service provisions in line with the new political dispensation of majority rule (Chuma, 2007:79). Newspaper circulation remained very low and this left the radio as one of the most accessible media. The post-colonial government made no effort to promote newspaper growth and retained the colonial legal arsenal that was used to muzzle the press (Chuma, 2007:84).

Chuma’s (2007) analysis is in sync with other authors (see Willems, 2014; Mugari, 2010) who have studied the media and its role in Zimbabwe. What Chuma (2007) fails to show is the role of the ordinary citizens in the post-colonial media landscape. The impression is that media consumers did not change behaviour and attitudes with the changes in the technological, political and economic policies. It is not clear whether the increased media access at independence also meant increased participation by the ordinary citizens. It is clear, however, from Chuma’s (2007) research, that media policies serve political elites. The elite stranglehold on the media is acknowledged, but the author does not pursue this and clearly show how it affects participation in the production of media products by the ordinary citizen. The author seems contented at showing how the state and elites control the media without also showing how the ordinary citizen responds to that control. This study seeks to fill these gaps and investigate the response of ordinary citizens through Twitter use during the elections of 2013.

Mugari (2010), Chuma (2007) and Willems (2014) focus more on the role of the state, how it responded to the changes in the media environment and sought to influence them. However, with social media, the role of the state is being significantly diminished, because users may bypass state control.

2.4.4 New media as enablers for political participation in Zimbabwe

There are structural and economic factors which hinder access to media products and this, in turn, affects how Zimbabweans use media for political participation. Rusike (1990) states that in Zimbabwe, media, particularly newspapers, are distributed around the main centres of economic activities which are located along the main railway and road network in the country. Interestingly,

the telecommunications network has followed the same pattern with the mobile and data network (as shown in Addendum A) is found in the major cities and towns and the signal strength weakening as one moves away from these centres.

The advent of new Information Communication Technologies has been viewed in a somehow contradictory manner with some (for example, Attwood, 2010) seeing mobile phones as equalisers while others (such as Moyo, 2010) view them as out of reach of many. Attwood (2010:86) argues that the state-run daily and weekly newspapers, radio and television stations “are widely acknowledged to be laden with bias and propaganda” thus leaving many Zimbabweans looking for alternative sources of information. In this case, the internet became the readily available alternative source of information. However, according to Attwood (2010:87), these alternative sources of information were also compromised as “the high unemployment rate in Zimbabwe meant that fewer and fewer people can access the internet or even email via the workplace”. The situation was made worse by the intermittent power supply which reduced the potential of internet access further, argues Attwood (2010). What Attwood (2010) does not mention is who creates the content on the internet or answer the question: How would the end users of such content differentiate it from state propaganda?

Accordingly, Zimbabweans were left with few options and to participate in the 2008 elections, they turned to mobile phones. Attwood (2010:102) argues that the mobile phones are “access equalisers, used across gender, class and social divides more effectively than satellite television, internet, and independent newspapers”. Attwood states that an analysis of how Zimbabweans used the Kubatana⁵ platform in 2008 shows that women are more likely to own or have access to a mobile phone than access to a computer. A breakdown of the messages posted on the Kubatana platform shows that most messages were about issues like where to vote and the outcome of the election.

Messages from subscribers peaked during the 2008 general and presidential runoff. A look at the difference in content and feeling from these two

⁵ Kubatana is a non governmental organisation that was started in 2001 to archive information on other NGOs in Zimbabwe as well as disseminate information to citizens.

periods gives a good indicator of the Zimbabweans' attitude more generally during these two events. (Atwood, 2010:102)

The paper by Attwood (2010) gives essential and fascinating insights relating to the content posted on the Kubatana SMS platform during the 2008 general elections and the presidential runoff. The contents as summarised by Attwood (2010) show how Zimbabweans used the platform for political participation as they asked questions on where they could vote or the outcome of the election. These are important issues in the context of the 2008 elections as information on where voters could cast their ballots was not readily available. The voters were also eager to get to know the outcome of the elections after the announcement of the final count in the presidential vote was delayed for up to a month. In this regard, it is clear that Kubatana played a critical role, one that the mainstream media may have failed to play. It is also important to state that Kubatana, which started in 2001, aims to create “a central online library/archive of civic and human rights information published by NGOs in Zimbabwe,” and in addition it seeks “to create an online NGO directory so that we could strengthen networking and collaboration between all sorts of groups and people” (Kubatana, n.d). This is important as it helps one understand how Attwood (2010) approached the use of the platform during the 2008 elections.

What is not clear from the approach used by Attwood (2010) is the breakdown of the statistics of participants to show important details, such as how many women contributed on the platform. Additionally, it is too simplistic to say mobile phones are access equalisers as one still has to buy airtime (phone credit) so that they will be able to send an SMS and be able to participate. Additionally, mobile phone users were fearful of state surveillance. More so, mobile phone users needed to be aware of the Kubatana platform to be able to contribute. Mobile phone penetration at that time was very low due to unavailability of starter packs, and handsets were expensive (Moyo, 2010). In addition, it would have been more informative if the author had spelled out the geographic location of some of the contributors, to show if they were rural or urban based.

Moreover, it has to be mentioned that it has not been verified that SMS activities took precedence over the internet during the 2008 elections, as is claimed. Notwithstanding the intermittent power supplies, access to the internet and its use thereof during the 2008 elections arguably increased

compared to the 2000 and 2005 (Moyo, 2010). In the final analysis, it has to be mentioned that Attwood herself is a key person in the running of Kubatana and this may have compromised her analysis of the use of SMS during the 2008 elections. It has to be acknowledged that since Kubatana is a non-governmental organisation whose objectives are to increase citizens' participation in political processes through SMS, the analysis may have been meant to get more sympathy from the funders. This could have subsequently compromised the objectivity of the article. This is buttressed by the fact that in 2013, Kubatana was very active on the Zimbabwe Twittersphere as is shown in Addendum C and D below. Access to Kubatana platform was limited to a few people who were aware of the existence of the platform and trusted it. The citizens who live in areas where there is no cellphone coverage were not able to participate. It can also be argued that the platform does not create horizontal communication as Kubatana acted as a hub, coordinating all communication. There was no way participants would bypass this hub and communicate among themselves. In contrast, Twitter users are able to communicate horizontally and establish networks. This means that this research would be able to look at the horizontal communications and the established networks to come up with a provisional conclusion.

2.4.4.1 Mobile phones as enablers and tools of empowerment

Moyo (2010) seems in agreement with Attwood (2010) regarding the role of mobile phones and other information communication technologies in empowering the citizens during the 2008 elections. These (mobile phones/other technologies and platforms like Kubatana) provide an alternative space which is not as partisan as the mainstream press (Moyo, 2010:8 – 9) because they allow anyone with the right technology to produce content.

Moyo (2010) further states that the independent media operate from a very weak economic base which makes them take donor money and end up promoting the ideas of the donors. Despite claiming to stand for the ordinary citizens, the independent media did not meet all the media consumers' needs. This means that instead of giving more space to the citizens, the media dependent on NGO support serve as the ideological mouthpieces for the funders.

As a result of this, Moyo (2010:6) states:

The advent of mobile phones and the internet, which provide many to many and one to one horizontal communication channels that bypass political or business control of communication, therefore, creates new possibilities for citizens to produce more reliable and credible information about their elections.

The point here is that the new media are enablers as it allows access to platforms and facilitates the creation of new content and possibly new audiences. By this, the ordinary citizens become empowered as they are able to take part in the creation of the content which also transforms them from being onlookers to activists in the political processes. Moyo (2010:3) is, however, cautious as to the degree of empowerment, and argues:

while new media – plus an intersection between new and old media – are making tremendous inroads towards the empowerment of ordinary citizens to monitor electoral processes in Africa, there is need to assess the degree of agency exercised by the *ordinary citizen* in order to understand the nature and extent of empowerment derived from these technologies (own emphasis).

The request to assess the degree of agency as suggested by Moyo (2010) is an important step in analysing how Zimbabweans use social media for political participation. This is a call for research to move away from the simplistic and rather overly optimistic conclusions on the role of the new media on political participation. The suggestion to locate where the ordinary citizens stand and their role in the use of new media for political participation is very important and it seeks further clarity on how new media is being used for participation. As Moyo (2010:8) adds: “It can be argued that placing a mobile phone in one’s hand does not necessarily transform one into an activist or citizen journalist”. This clearly shows that Moyo acknowledges the difference between having a device and using it for political participation. This is a clear rejection of technology determinism.

The mobile phones were used to monitor the 2008 elections as individuals, members of civil society and opposition political parties “engaged in capturing and sharing information about the conduct of elections in their constituencies including election results once they were posted outside

polling centres using their mobile phones” (Moyo, 2010:10). This means that citizens came together and used mobile phones to collate results and by so doing, the mobile phones users engaged in direct political participation and bypassed the official channel for communicating elections results, which is the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission. Despite these somehow glowing attributes to the role of mobile phones together with other technologies in monitoring the 2008 elections, Moyo (2010:12) argues that “mobile phones are out of reach of many as the cost of phoning and prepaid lines were around US\$30 in 2009⁶.”

While Moyo (2010) gives a sobering account of the role of mobile phones during the 2008 elections in Zimbabwe, it has to be acknowledged that there are identifiable gaps. One such gap is a failure to demographically breakdown participations so as to ascertain the number of women, age groups, location and income levels or educational level. The other weakness in the paper is a failure by the author to give a clear-cut definition of what elections monitoring entails. Elections monitoring is the fulcrum of the paper and it would have helped to explain what it is and locate it within the context of 2008 elections. It is ironic that even after collating the election results, the “participating citizens” could only stand and look as the official electoral body took more than a month to announce the election results. In addition, it is not clear if collating and sharing of results can be equated to political participation. It would have been more informative if the author had dug deeper to show how this amounts to political participation.

2.4.5 Role of the media in facilitating political participation in Zimbabwe

What role do the media play in politics in Zimbabwe? How does this enhance political participation? These are some of the questions that have seized scholars (Ndlela, 2010; Ranger, 2005; Makumbe & Compagnon, 2000; Rønning & Kupe, 2000;) especially after 1990. Ranger (2005:10), draws comparisons between the Zimbabwean press and the British and United States media (which serve the national and imperial interests of the respective countries) and sees the rise of what he calls “patriotic journalism” in Zimbabwe as representing something qualitatively different.

⁶The cost of mobile phones and prepaid lines (starter packs) significantly reduced after 2009 with the adoption of the use of the United States dollar which stabilised the economy.

According to Ranger (2005), patriotic journalism is a part of an orchestration of propaganda. This shows that the media play a propagandistic role pushed by the political elite who control the media in Zimbabwe. As shown above (Moyo, 2012a), this has been the case in both colonial and independent Zimbabwe. The term “patriotic journalism” ascribed to journalists working for state-controlled media is a novel way of addressing the media practitioners. However, a question crops up: Is the patriotic journalism (as a practice) an initiative by the journalists or it is dictated to them by the political elites? In addition, while it is true that the media’s role is to orchestrate propaganda, this has to be contextualised. As mentioned above, the political elites in the ruling party maintained a stranglehold on the media and made sure that the media under its control be the first line of defense against attacks from within the country and from outside. In the process of defending the government policies, the media ended up churning propaganda, thus earning the label “patriotic journalism”. Ranger (2005) brings the issue of state control and gives a descriptive explanation of what prevails. The explanation, however, is silent on the emergence of alternative media. It suggests that all media in Zimbabwe is owned by the state, this is despite the fact that there were other media organisations, independent of the state, which were also operating at the time.

2.4.5.1 Role of media in elections: Liberal democratic approach

Makumbe and Compagnon (2000) made a detailed analysis of the role of the media with a particular focus on the 1995 elections. For Makumbe and Compagnon (2000), the free expression of ideas is critical for a healthy democratic society, as almost everywhere where there has been a significant degree of success in establishing democracy, there has been a noticeable contribution from the free media. However, the authors observed that “in Zimbabwe, the media are seen as a political resource which can be utilised for the benefit of one and to the detriment of another in the political arena” (Makumbe & Compagnon, 2000:184). With regards to the media in Zimbabwe, Makumbe and Compagnon (2000) set to answer critical questions about the role of media and the effect of state control of key elements of mass media as well as the implications for democracy of the state’s use or control of the mass media. In answering these critical questions, the authors start by positioning the role of the media in society using a liberal democratic theory. The argument is that “a free and fair electoral process is virtually impossible without the active participation of an economically healthy, free and active media” (Makumbe & Compagnon, 2000:185). In addition

to the health of the media, the organisational and ownership structure of the major elements of the media determines the level of effectiveness which is attainable in the electoral process (Makumbe & Compagnon, 2000).

According to Makumbe and Compagnon (2000), the state-controlled media had a higher circulation, outnumbering the independent media 25 to 1. With such lopsided circulation figures, the state allowed the “relative press freedom to give a false impression of general press freedom, knowing that the limited circulation of these papers does not threaten the party’s almost monopoly of information towards the masses” (Makumbe & Compagnon, 2000:193). Thus, the role of the media in Zimbabwe was for the perpetuation of the discourse of the hegemonic power. As such it is not surprising that the opposition parties “were denied equal opportunity to be heard and seen by the electorate” and this biased coverage was observed not to be limited to the election period but was a permanent feature (Makumbe & Compagnon, 2000:199).

While the state-controlled media were used for hegemonic purposes by the political elites, the independent media showed “lack of maturity” and instead of contributing to the national debate in a positive manner, it “excelled in making nasty comments on the government and ruling party” (Makumbe & Compagnon, 2000:205). This means the independent media failed to play a role necessary for national debate through or by the media. The serious shortcomings in covering elections, according to Makumbe and Compagnon (2000), can be traced to the overall dominance established by government control of the media, especially regarding general and political information, which is the legacy of attempts to establish a one-party state. The recurring theme of the state’s control of the media reappears here. In this case, the authors acknowledge the role of the media but decry its control by the state.

It is, however, problematic to equate less government control to media freedom and openness. Such a rational choice model approach in which the “media offers information to enable citizens to make well-informed decisions in elections” (Willems, 2012:553), downplays the ideological role of the media in constructing a particular version of reality. This means that by focusing on the role of the media in elections, Makumbe and Compagnon (2000) may have missed the underlying ideologies that inform the construction of a particular version of reality. This applies to both government controlled and privately owned media during and after elections.

It is evident from Makumbe and Compagnon (2000) that the assumption is that the independent media is neutral in the production of ideas or information, though they seem to suggest otherwise if the media is controlled by the state. This approach also places much emphasis on the role of the media in society. However, it is always important to also look at who owns the media, just as it is important to look at the role of the state.

The definition of a democratic society is contentious. In the case of Makumbe and Compagnon (2000), there are no clear definitions made, but it is assumed that the democratic society is taken as counter-hegemonic. By this, they mean it is a society where the current ruling elite are challenged or they are voted out of power

2.4.6 Media in Zimbabwe as a public sphere

In Zimbabwe, political elites dominate and influence media (Ndlela, 2010:87) and this dominance narrowed the public sphere and thus impoverished democracy (Moyo, 2010). As a result, the internet emerges as an alternative public sphere (Manganga, 2012:104) and can be instrumental in demystifying the “ruling elite’s social engineering that is usually projected as natural and common-sensical by the mainstream media” (Moyo, 2011:5).

2.4.6.1 SMS creating sites for mass protests?

Apart from arguing that the internet ushers in an alternative public sphere, Moyo (2011) posits that other information communication technologies, such as mobile short message service, provided another communicative space during the 2008 elections. As Moyo (2010:11– 12) states, when the 2008 elections were delayed:

..in a context where spontaneous mass rallies are outlawed through POSA, SMS messages in a way provide the space for mass protest, which was articulated through jokes, rumours, and other such parallel information.

It is, however, taking the role of mobile phones too far as the effect of their use during the 2008 elections remained insignificant. For example, despite sharing the parallel information via mobile phones, there were no protests even after the election results were delayed by up to a month. It would have emboldened the argument if Moyo (2011) had further elaborated how jokes, rumours and parallel information amount to mass protest and with what effect on political participation as defined 1.4.5 above and 3.3 below is about influencing government policy or the selection of those who make the policies.

2.4.6.2 The state versus “independent media”: conflicts and struggles for space

In an analysis of the role of *The Daily News* in the Zimbabwe mediascape, Moyo (2005) states that the state’s interface with the media and its dominance of the only broadcaster (the Zimbabwe Broadcasting Corporation) and the monolithic Zimpapers, resultantly narrowed the public sphere and impoverished democracy. There was evidently a need for alternative voices to the dominating state narrative, which was worsened by the fact that the few independent newspapers that were there (*Zimbabwe Independent*, *The Standard*, *The Mirror* and *Financial Gazette*) were elite papers whose target audience was the middle-class based in urban areas (Moyo, 2005:112).

This situation prevailed at a time when the opposition was very weak. Thus, the emergence of *The Daily News* in 1999 filled the void and assumed the role of coordinating the disparate voices within the opposition as it focused on the mass market (Moyo, 2005:113). *The Daily News*, according to Moyo (2005), made an immense contribution to further open up political space in Zimbabwe as it brought to public attention issues which up to then had been suppressed by the state media.

It will be very interesting to critique the performance of the independent media in the context of its role in offering an alternative public sphere in the Habermasian sense. Notwithstanding the pursuit of profits which may have prompted the investors to start the newspapers, it can also be argued that these publications ensured media pluralism, as Mouffe (2002) supposes. Additionally, they broke the elite stranglehold on the print media by the Zanu PF elites by giving space to alternative voices and political players.

Interestingly, while Moyo (2005) mentions the “public sphere”, there is no clear definition of the term notwithstanding the fact that this is a hotly debated issue. In addition, it appears that the author

romanticises the role of the privately owned press. The author states as a given that privately owned media, for example, *The Daily News*, opens up political space. It is not clear from the discussion how *The Daily News* created alternative public spheres. More so it is also not clear how the author would pick only one publication as being responsible for opening up political space in the country especially given that it was launched at a time when other privately owned newspapers had already been in existence.

Moyo (2011:2) further argues that laws such as AIPPA and BSA as well as other extra-judicial tactics:

not only neutralised the public and private media as spaces of civic engagement and public debate but also had a constraining impact on freedom of journalistic and other constitutionally guaranteed civic liberties and human rights.

In this regard, the media is taken as a platform for the realisation of journalistic and other constitutionally guaranteed civil liberties as well as other human rights. The continued constriction of the media impinges on the realisation of these rights. Further, the spaces provided by the media “were seminal to public discussion and thus became informal counter-hegemonic public spheres where public opinion could be formulated, nurtured and sustained” (Moyo, 2011:2). As a result, the media in its various forms became new sites for public participation on issues that affected the citizenry. According to Moyo (2011:3):

A theoretically sound framework of alternative media must pay attention not only to various forms that alternative media take, but also the nature of their content and their production and distribution process.

Although not taken further by Moyo (2011), the issue of a holistic approach raises important questions and gives directions as to how one can study the use of media for political participation. However, this also raises questions regarding the way this blogosphere opened up political space. It supposedly gave such space to those critical of the government. One wonders if such anti-regime homogeneity reflects what the entire population thinks. Moyo (2011:11), in an analysis of the

Kubatana platform, shows that almost all bloggers “who used the Kubatana blogosphere were critical of the state and political order, though not of the market and economic order”. This could be a sign of what characterises the Zimbabwe “blogosphere”. It appears, from Moyo (2011), that the bloggers chose to ignore other social factors and focussed on politics, further denting prospects of diverse and open interaction on the internet. It could mean that the new public sphere is obsessed with fighting against political hegemony while relegating the interplay between capital and economic order and the political developments in the country. As such, none of the bloggers criticised “the subversion of economic democracy by most colonial settler capital or the global forces that resisted agrarian reforms and administered the failed economic reform of the 1990s” (Moyo, 2011:11). These observations are consistent with the critical theory approach that the author adopted in the analysis of how bloggers participated in the 2008 presidential elections run-off. The central argument is that the so-called Fifth Estate, while important in its counter-hegemonic endeavours, did not dig deep into some of the salient dynamics that characterised the Zimbabwe political environment at that time. This could be explained in a number of ways, the chief being that the Kubatana bloggers could not be described as representative of the ordinary person. In fact, it means that the so-called public sphere is merely an elite dominated political space, something that echoes Habermas’ initial postulation.

Moyo (2011) further argues that alternative media can be conceptualised in terms of their counter-hegemonic role in society and online participation is taken as a right. In defence of citizen journalism/alternative media, Moyo (2011:4) argues that mainstream media represented “institutionalised, capitalised and professionalised methods of storytelling that privilege the powerful elite at the expense of the ordinary citizen”. In support of this supposition, Moyo (2011:5) further argues for the case of citizen journalists, saying their role was more than information dissemination as it embodies “a philosophy of journalism that seeks to emancipate citizens from state and corporate propaganda”. This approach echoes the critical theorists’ assumptions as well as those of cyber-optimists who see the alternative media that come as a result of the affordances brought by the internet as liberating technology. Interestingly, taking this viewpoint fits well in the thrust of this research as it specifically looks at Twitter.

According to Moyo (2011:09), alternative media move the centre from the “grand narratives”, giving space for self-articulated and self-published “small narratives”. This undercuts the

omnipotent role of the political elites in discourse, giving many ordinary people from different local places to articulate different viewpoints. Moyo (2011) further argues that the bloggers who used the Kubatana blog during the 2008 runoff had multiple identities. They were active citizens, concerned activists and in some circumstances journalists who produced and distributed news about what was happening in their communities. Thus, according to Moyo (2011:9):

When force dominate consent making institutions such as in Zimbabwe, then the hegemonic grip of the elite on the masses would have slipped away thus opening an opportunity for alternative media to become the new epicentre of hegemony for resisting classes.

Furthermore, Moyo (2011) argues that in spite of the liberal posturing of sections of the mass media it serves an ideological and hegemonic role and is controlled by the political and business elite. In this case, the ordinary citizens are left with no option but to look for new space for political participation. It is thus important to critically analyse the role that alternative media in general, and Twitter in particular plays in facilitating political participation during elections. It is vital to ascertain if Twitter became an “epicentre” of anti-hegemony for the resisting classes who include workers, students, peasants or opposition groups. Moyo (2011) did well to move away from simplistic conclusions. However, by overly playing up the role of citizen journalism and alternative media, the author failed to acknowledge the barriers to participation. These include geographic location, income levels and literacy on how to use the new media.

In addition, it is clear that most of the scholars have failed to give a concise definition of what they meant by “public sphere.” As explained in the introductory chapter, this is a term that has been interpreted differently and within given contexts and historical epochs. Despite writing of the “new public sphere” in Zimbabwe within the context of the post 2000 political environment, there is no consensus on what the scholars mean and very little attempt to give clear definitions. It is thus important to give a concise definition of the term “public sphere” as a foundation for a detailed discussion of what a new public sphere entails. A thorough definition of often vague terms like “elite”, “resisting classes” and the “masses” could have been informative. In contrast, this research

seeks to give a clear definition of the public sphere and explain the debates around the concept then link it to the use of social media for political participation.

2.4.7 New media as liberating technology

It has been argued that new media has a liberating effect (Diamond, 2010). This contention has been countered by scholars who argue that the liberating technology claim is a technological determinism approach. This argument was touched on in the preceding chapter and will be dealt with in more detail in the next chapter under theoretical overview.

In Zimbabwe, scholars (see Mutsvairo, 2014; 2013; Ndlela, 2010; Ndlovu, 2009) have touched on how new media has a liberating effect on society. These authors have premised their arguments on the internet's affordances. As such, Ndlela (2010:93) boldly declares that:

The prevalence of online newspapers engaged in political commentary is indicative of the liberating function played by new technology for pro-democracy movements contesting structural constraints.

Ndlela (2010:90) argues that the state's domination of the media landscape as well as attempts to manipulate and control the indigenous communication systems creates space for a media that is not controlled or monitored by the state. This media is characterised by interactivity and anonymity that enable "many to be heard without fear of victimisation and reprisal" (Ndlela 2010:93). Ndlela (2010:87) calls this alternative media "falling outside formal corporate mainstream media and for the media to be considered an alternative, they must embody the Gramscian notion of counter-hegemonic". Thus the liberating effect of the new media which Ndlela (2010:87) also terms alternative media lies in its being counter-hegemonic and "open to all actors".

Admittedly, Ndlela (2010) as well as Ndlovu (2009), raise important issues pertaining to how new media is used to bypass the state or create new space for disenfranchised actors. Interestingly, the authors see government control of media as the cause of the growth of alternative spaces. It is clear from their separate analyses that new media creates new spaces. However, a closer look into the assertions shows some gaps. Taking on Ndlela (2010), one sees that while conceding that the mass

media are strongly influenced by the ruling party elites (mainly from Zanu PF which is the dominant political party in post-colonial Zimbabwe), it is not clear from the analysis if new media qualifies as open and accessible to all. For Ndlela, (2010:88), the new media may not be controlled by the state and may revitalise political public sphere by giving access to oppositional and social movements that could easily not access formal public sphere. This could be taken as a sweeping statement which was not adequately addressed given the scope of the research. Such gaps (such as failing to give a clear definition of terms and clearly explaining on who has been able to make use of social media) in an otherwise well-presented paper, present an opportunity for further research.

The argument that technology could be liberating is also presented by Ndlovu (2009), who argues that new media allow for both production and consumption of content at the same time, unlike mass media where production is centralised. The review by Ndlovu (2009:46) focuses mainly on blogs by claiming these blogs “provide fresh voice and contribute significant observations on the political front”. The bloggers have taken up media roles such as monitoring, expanding people’s access to information and opening public debate in a manner that traditional media has not been able to do (Ndlovu, 2009:46). A critique of Ndlovu (2009) shows that while giving a descriptive analysis of the role of blogs within the Zimbabwean context, it is not clear if those blogging are fresh voices, as Ndlovu claimed. The three bloggers analysed or mentioned in the article, namely Cont Mhlanga, Cathy Buckle and Eddy Cross, are already dominant political actors. Mhlanga and Cross were a councilor and Member of Parliament respectively (Zimbabwe Electoral Commission, 2013) while Cathy Buckle is a known writer and blogger⁷. This is not to say there may be no new voices. As such, it is vital for those researching blogs to give a deep analysis of the Zimbabwean blogosphere and get to know the main actors and see if they are the fresh voices as claimed. In like manner, a study of Twitter use should also take into consideration how widely distributed the contributions are so as to be able to make conclusions if new or fresh voices have been given an opportunity to participate. This is what this research seeks to do.

While Ndlela (2010) and Ndlovu (2009) are excessively optimistic about the role of new media in enabling participation on the political front, Mutsvairo (2013; 2014) takes a radically different view. Mutsvairo (2013) sees the potential brought about by affordances of the new media technology but concludes that these are not yet realised in Zimbabwe. Mutsvairo (2013:186)

⁷ For Cathy Buckle’s articles see <http://www.cathybuckle.com>

acknowledges an upswing in internet usage in Zimbabwe post the 1997 Dakar Declaration on the Internet and the African media. However, this increase has not trickled down to all the citizens as despite the promising figures on internet and mobile phone penetration, “the internet is still very much controlled and accessed by members of an elite club” (Mutsvairo, 2013:186). Those accessing the internet are usually urban dwellers. Mutsvairo further argues that the failure by those accessing new media technology to use it for political participation is not because of their inability but “the citizen’s unwillingness and powerlessness to actively participate in politics due to their fear of the unknown” (Mutsvairo, 2013:191). Unlike the cyber-optimists who see the liberating effect of the media, Mutsvairo (2013) sees no improvement and claims that anonymity is not a guarantee for participation. This raises an interesting point as it is diametrically opposite to what Ndlela (2010) and Moyo (2011) say about the uptake of technology in Zimbabwe. Such opposed standpoints can best be narrowed through the presentation of empirical evidence to support a taken view.

Additionally, Mutsvairo (2013:193), building on the previous claim that the new media technology has not been used homogenously but skewed in favour of urban dwellers, further posit that even these privileged new media users are not participating politically. The new media users are very informed but do not participate in politics because they are not able to “overcome the fear of the unknown, that is, fear of government secret service” (Mutsvairo, 2013: 193).

2.4.7.1 Pessimistic views on role of internet in Zimbabwe

The line of argument adopted by Mutsvairo (2013) is partly against technology determinism. However, there is a need for caution as it is not empirically proven that those with access to the internet are not using it for political participation. Preliminary research, prior to the preparation of the proposal to this study, showed that Zimbabweans are using Twitter and Facebook for political participation.

Building on his “pessimistic” view, Mutsvairo (2014) undertakes an ingenious research to show how rural folk appears disconnected from the mainstream new media technology but undertake roles of participatory journalists. Unlike in the previous researches and papers (Ndlela, 2010; Ndlovu 2009), where there is so much optimism about the role of new media, Mutsvairo (2014)

starts by acknowledging the rapid emergence and seamless exposition of new media technologies and the attendant researches on how they are celebrated as springboards for social democratic change. Mutsvairo (2014:43) goes on to ask critical questions including the difference in terms of participatory paradigms between citizen journalists in urban and those in a rural setting. For the rural citizen journalists, participating in community affairs is not dependent on their exposure to technology. In a clearly anti-technology determinism fashion, Mutsvairo (2014:51) posits that:

New technologies have indeed helped activists build up their case against tyranny. However, technology only plays an enabling role, citizens will always participate in issues that affect their communities and even though they may find citizen journalism an interesting platform, they may as well do without it.

This line of argument not only questions the cyber-optimists' point of view but disputes the technological deterministic approach. The dispute between those seeing a potential that is already being realised from the use of media and those seeing nothing and arguing that citizens can always participate even without the technology is reflective of the cyber-pessimist versus cyber-optimist debate highlighted in Chapter 1. Mutsvairo (2014; 2013) disqualifies the central role played by technology to enable citizen journalism, especially during elections. It is possible for one to participate even without the new media technology (Mutsvairo, 2014) while those accessing the new media technology do not participate because of fear of the unknown and powerlessness.

Mutsvairo (2014) presents interesting observations and these fly in the face of the cyber-optimists, especially the supposition that new media technology facilitates participation because of anonymity. However, it may not have been possible to come to the conclusion that Zimbabweans do not participate online because of fear, basing this on the methodology used in the study, for example, 50 questionnaire-based interviews would have been much more appropriate if these were administered to potential voters living in Zimbabwe. However, half of the respondents are Zimbabweans based in Britain (Mutsvairo, 2013:183) whose input may not inform much on how the internet is used for political participation in Zimbabwe. It would have been more convincing

if the interviews were done in Zimbabwe with potential voters or those likely to participate in local politics.

Mutsvairo (2014) raises particularly important and provoking issues pertaining to the interplay between technology and society. The conclusions of his research are that technology plays a peripheral role in citizen journalism in rural Zimbabwe as they can still practice it without the modern technology. This is a very interesting point as it confirms the argument that society can choose what to do with technology, not the other way round. However, this approach may not actually capture what is prevailing in society. For example, internet penetration and mobile phone use has been on the increase in Zimbabwe which is the new reality. This means that studying citizen journalism in the absence of technology, like what Mutsvairo (2014) does, is to scrap on the surface. These are some of the identifiable gaps in a research that is strong on a number of issues for example how it defines citizen journalism and identifies the shortcomings in the prevailing attempts to define it. Additionally, the research is very innovative and it provides an important baseline, not for the study of non-technology use but how rural communities have adopted new technology.

2.5 Conclusion

This chapter, building on the literature consulted and referred to in Chapter 1 reviewed the literature relevant to the study of how Twitter facilitates the election of a new government in Zimbabwe. It was shown that Twitter has brought new affordances with a potential to enable many people to participate in political activities. It was, however, highlighted that despite these affordances, the people may not be able to participate. Furthermore, it was shown that there is a debate on the role of social media during the Arab Spring and this debate has not been concluded. This is because those who saw a significant role of Twitter have argued this position while the sceptics point to other factors. This debate is a continuation of the cyber-utopians versus dystopians which continues to rage.

It was also shown that the development of the media in Zimbabwe is a reflection of the socio, economic and political situation in the country. The state, from independence in 1980, has played a critical role as it sought to reign in the media. In so doing, the state's role has been seen as

undesirable and muzzling the press. Resultantly, there have been efforts to either challenge the state's monopoly (by starting new publications, challenging the legality of the laws and pirate broadcasts) and this has seen a state versus media conflict. The state has harshly responded to these challenges and passed the Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act and the Broadcasting Services Act which have been used to stifle the media. The closure of the media space has opened opportunities for alternative media. This was speeded up by the spread of the internet and new information communication technologies. Given this context, Zimbabweans would naturally enjoy using social media and thus the use of Twitter has been on the increase. This means that Twitter, for example, would be used to facilitate political participation in a manner that the muzzled mainstream media would not have been able to do.

Chapter 3 – Theoretical Perspective

3.1 Introduction

Critical theory, borrowing from Fuchs (2009b), I would argue, can be a very strong analytical tool for exploring the relationship between media and society, society and technology as well as how the public may make use of technology for emancipation. Inversely, critical theory can also describe how technology may be used as a tool for domination/exploitation/suppression. Thus, critical theory can be used to analyse how modern technology can be used as instruments of emancipation or suppression (Fuchs, 2014b:13). As Fuchs, (2009b:245) puts it, critical information theory goes beyond studying the role of information and information concepts “but how it is related to processes of oppression and can be redesigned for a freer society [.....] and for the abolishment of domination”. Thus, analysing the role of Twitter, a relatively new information communication technology, in facilitating political participation during important elections, entails looking at how the technology was used and by whom, and how it shifted the balance of power within society. By adopting critical theory, this research seeks to broaden the analysis and understanding of the role of Twitter in political participation beyond the easy and reductionist conclusion that sees a causal relationship between the presence of information and communication technologies and certain effects within society (a technology deterministic approach).

This chapter starts by looking at what constitutes critical theory, establishing its relevance and adequacy to investigate how social media facilitates political participation. The chapter then looks at the critical theory of technology to get vital insights on how ICT may enhance political participation. Subsequently, the chapter then addresses two key theoretical concepts, public sphere and network society theory, which are relevant to the study of political participation. Important to mention is that in this chapter, critical theory is the hub with all the other theoretical concepts hinging on it. As such, all the concepts discussed in this chapter are looked at using critical theory lenses.

3.2 What is critical theory? Origins and applicability to study of social media

3.2.1 Brief introduction to critical theory

If we look around us, the role of theorists has been taken over by commentators and journalists..... As in most countries, there is only a weak institutional representation of media theory in the US..... The post-media tendency results in a withdrawal of theory in favour of largely uncritical tools and methods that are eagerly being implemented by mainstream social science. (Lovink, 2014:7-8)

An observation like the one made by Lovink (2014) cited above raises an even more pertinent question about where critical theory is located regarding analyses of how social media impacts society. The location of critical theory has been muddled because of the dominance of commentators and journalists using uncritical tools and methods. Moving away from reductionist commentary and simplistic explanations, one asks if it is possible to use critical theory whose origins can be traced to as far back to 1923 – 1930, (Bohman, 2005), as a tool to analyse social media which is a much more recent phenomenon, precisely a 21st century technology?

Latour (2004:231) seems exasperated and sees critical theory as having “run out of steam”, as the title of his paper suggests, adding that there have been rapid changes which require a self-introspection by critique and see if it is still relevant as:

History changes quickly and that there is no greater intellectual crime than to address with the equipment of an older period the challenges of the present one. Whatever the case, our critical equipment deserves as much critical scrutiny as the Pentagon budget.

There are problems with by Latour’s (2004) argument, for example, it is not explicit what should replace critical theory and how this could be done. Without necessarily agreeing with this postulation, it is prudent to ensure, by making use of critical theory, that one is not committing an intellectual crime by using outdated and irrelevant instruments to analyse society.

The relevance of critical theory has been confounded further by the fact that while critical theory is reflectively related to Marxism, the development of history has decentred Marxism just as it has decentred the construction of critical theory (Demirović, 2013). However, despite the de-centring of critical theory, it remains appropriate as a project:

[i]n which they interrogate emancipatory practices and theories in order to determine where we stand today in respect to the Enlightenment and emancipation and whether our concepts of Enlightenment do not promote the project of a Counter-Enlightenment. (capitalisation original) (Demirović, 2013:370)

Thus the whole endeavour of using critical theory to study how social media influenced political participation entails interrogating Twitter's emancipatory nature within a given setting, in this case within the Zimbabwean context. In so doing, it is vital to be aware of the possible pitfalls that may trip up or cloud a proper analysis. Such pitfalls include failing to come up with a clear definition of what constitutes critical theory. Since this research is hinged on critical theory, it is vital to give a concise definition of what constitutes critical theory in the 21st century as a necessary foundation for a study of how social media facilitates political participation in the election of a new government.

3.2.2 How can critical theory be defined?

According to one of the prominent critical theorists, Horkheimer (1972), critical theory stands out when compared to traditional theory because of the practical purposes to which it may be applied. Critical theory takes a normative outlook as it seeks to liberate and emancipate society from all forms of domination or slavery and it works “to create a world which satisfies the needs and powers” of societies (Horkheimer 1972: 246). In the process of analysing society, critical theorists argue for the merging of the poles of philosophy and the social sciences, which is explanation and understanding, structure and agency, regularity and normativity (Bohman, 2005). The merger of the poles of philosophy and the social sciences allows for critical theory “to be practical in a distinctively moral (rather than instrumental) sense. They (critical theorists) do not merely seek to

provide the means to achieve some independent goal, but rather seek ‘human emancipation’ in circumstances of domination and oppression” (Bohman, 2005) and as such critical theory is “thus informed by a critique of domination and a theory of liberation” (Kellner, 1989: 1).

Emerging from the descriptions above is a clear picture portraying critical theory as being pre-occupied with the emancipation of society. The complexity of the varied dimensions of domination of human societies in the 21st century requires one to further refine the definition of critical theory to reflect the changes since the 1970s. Fuchs (2009a) sums up the definition of critical theory in current society as the “...analysis and questioning of domination, inequality, societal problems, exploitation in order to advance social struggles and the liberation from domination so that a dominationless, co-operative, participatory society can emerge”. In the process of advancing for the society that it desires, critical theory “is not merely descriptive, it is a way to instigate social change by providing knowledge of the forces of social inequality that can, in turn, inform political action aimed at emancipation (or at least at diminishing domination and inequality)” (Rush 2004: 9).

What Fuchs (2009b) and Rush (2004) say makes it easy for one to critically look at a technology and its attendant platforms and see how it can be used to transform society. In so doing, one has to refrain from assuming causal relations but interrogate the interplay between the technology and society in the context of the obtaining power relations. Power relations in this context may include political, ideological and cultural assumptions of society and how these are used for domination.

Fuchs (2009a) concurs with other critical theorists (Rush, 2004; Kellner, 1989; Horkheimer, 1972) that a definition of critical theory of communication and media studies as given above is inherently normative and political.

Furthermore, critical theory, as Fuchs ([2014b:13] in reference to Ben Agger) states, is premised on seven foundations which can be summarised as:

- i) Critique of positivism and assumption that theory is value free
- ii) It argues for a better future without domination and exploitation
- iii) It sees domination as a social problem
- iv) It assumes that human beings living in structures of domination tend to reproduce these structures of false consciousness

- v) It is interested in everyday life such as family or workplace
- vi) Conceives structure and agency as dialectical as they are not static but are always in a state of conflict and change
- vii) Sees liberation as a process that must be accomplished by the oppressed and exploited

An inquiry into the seven pillars (mentioned above) shows that critical theory takes a deeper look at the structure of society as well as the exploitation that obtains therewith. Critical theory can be used to analyse social media use within a given context, from larger society to everyday use. This is possible because it is appropriate to employ critical theory to interrogate the power relations on different levels within society which have a bearing on the use of technologies. Critical theory further analyses how the exploited classes within society fight to liberate themselves. Furthermore, critical theorists question how technology is employed and exploited for the furtherance of these struggles for emancipation. It then follows that critical theory can also be applied to the study of the use of Twitter during the election of a new government in Zimbabwe in 2013.

3.2 Critical theory: Steering off technological determinism and essentialism

...if you want to have a free society, just give them the internet. And the reason why is that the Internet [helps] help you fight the media war. (Wael Ghonim, Egyptian blogger, Google employee and political activist quoted in Fuchs [2012: 385])

This quotation underlines the technological determinism that opaque critical thinking after the political upheavals in the Middle East and North African countries from late 2010 (Tunisia) to 2011 during the so-called Arab Spring. Such a technological deterministic approach only scratches the surface. As such, it cannot be used to come up with a detailed understanding of the use of new information and communication technologies in society. Additionally, the technological deterministic approach does not acknowledge the historical power imbalances and asymmetries

which, to a greater extent, may continue to debar public participation even if the internet is availed to a society.

The quotation of a statement by Wael Ghonim, cited above, was a description of events in 2011, but should not be viewed in isolation as it can be located within the continuum of technological deterministic theories whose genesis can be traced back to the immediate post World War Two period (Kellner, 2015). These technological deterministic theories “either celebrated technology’s modernising features or blamed it for the crisis of Western civilisation [.....] Deterministic theories thus devolved into essentialism, both of positive and negative sort,” (Kellner, 2015). Boeder (2005) states that the dominant currents in the philosophy of technology “essentialise technology, decontextualise it and abstract it from culture and human meaning”. This, it can be argued, leads to a causative or reductionist analysis of the role of social media in influencing public political participation. The essentialism is still evident in the tech-utopianism (positive) and techno-dystopianism (negative) debate that was briefly looked at in Chapter 1. It can be argued that such essentialism may cloud a proper evaluation of the role of technology in society as the essentialist approach sees a cause and effect relationship in the use of technology in a given society without paying attention to the power relations, the social structure and other dynamics which may influence political participation.

3.2.1 Critical theory of technology

Critical theory of technology enables one to rise above technological determinism and essentialism. Simply put, it is necessary to contextualise the use of technology, a point Fuchs (2009b:269) expands by arguing that:

New media as such do not have clear-cut effects; they are antagonistically structured and embedded into the antagonisms of capitalist society. The antagonism between co-operation and competition that shapes modern society, limits self-determination, and participation, also shapes the techno-social Internet system.

Analysing these power relations helps to explain whether these technologies are emancipatory or are in fact instruments of oppression. By virtue of not being neutral, technological systems can be changed to suit the expectations or the aspirations of society.

Critical theories of technology (Feenberg, 2014; 2009;1999, for example) develop a dialectical approach to technology that perceives both negative and positive uses and effects (Kellner, 2015). This approach sees technology not as neutral as claimed by social constructivists (see for example Henwood, Miller, Senker, & Wyatt, 2000:10) but as a field that can be reconstructed in the struggle to achieve certain human needs and goals. Critical theory of technology argues that technologies are not neutral tools as they are “implicated in the socio-political order they serve and contribute to shaping” (Feenberg, 2009:146). Such a dialectical approach repudiates both technological determinism and its counterforce, technological optimism as well as essentialism. This is so because the public, in its use of a given technology, may use it not for the intended purposes but modify it for their own struggle. This approach makes technology somehow flexible.

This theoretical approach raises pertinent issues on how the public may use technology, for example how Zimbabweans may have used Twitter for political participation during the 2013 general elections. As Feenberg (1999: 201) argues, it is essential to have an approach that “provides a systematic locus for socio-political variables that actually diversify its historical realisations”. Using the Feenberg (1999) way of looking at technology enables one to question its use and impact within a given historical context as well as looking at it against the light of empirical evidence on how it is used. This critical look at technology is essential for this study as it recognises the potential for the public to use technology during an important election in Zimbabwe.

3.2.2 Do technologies facilitate political participation?

The impact or influence of technology on society, I would argue, may not be predictable but can be understood if empirically observed within the context of the power relations within a given society. This means that the power relations within the Zimbabwean society have a bearing on how the citizens would use Twitter, for example, for political participation during an important election. Thus, without being a technology determinist, one may have an objective and critical

analysis of a technology, in this case, Twitter, and ascertain its role in political participation. In the case of Twitter, it is interesting to note that it is a technology which is still in a flux and the users and the developers continue to interact and make changes to the platform (Rodgers, 2014; Bruns & Burgess, 2012).

As stated in Chapter 1, the users of Twitter managed to come up with at least four hashtags (#zimelections, #zimdecides, #zimdecides2013 and #zimelection) which is one of the several patterns that emerged as a result of the use of technology during the 2013 elections in Zimbabwe. There is significant leeway on the part of the Twitter users to determine, for example, which hashtags to use, and as will be argued in the next chapter, who to follow and which topics to follow. However, this openness to change and alteration may be misleading as it may be one dimensional or one-sided thus limiting public participation (Fuchs, 2012:387).

3.3 New communication technology and political participation

3.3.1 Political Participation

Political participation may have changed significantly since the Verba et. al. (1995) definition mentioned in in Chapter 1 (1.4.4 above). As such, it is important to rephrase political participation in the context of a changed political and technological environment and come up with a functional definition of the subject. This functional definition will then be used to analyse the emerging patterns of political participation using social media and then see how this can be applied to the Zimbabwean situation. Casteltrione (2015), writing for *First Monday*, an online journal, picks up Verba, et al.'s (1995) theorisation of political participation, to further explain that in their account, it aims to affect governments' actions and, consequently make political participation a government-oriented activity.

However, in the last couple of decades, citizens' participatory repertoire has been subject to a restructuration and expansion due to changes in the ways citizens perceive politics and relate to political institutions, and to the rise and diffusion of new channels of participation, like the Internet (Casteltrione, 2015).

The new channels of participation seem to give an alternative to the traditional forms of political participation. Hooghe, Hosch-Dayican and van Deth (2014:343) acknowledge that the classical definitions which are usually quoted emphasise the instrumentality of political participation, that “is intended to influence the decision-making process directly or indirectly”. Hooghe et. al. (2014:343) argue that the social and technological alterations called for newer accounts of political participation:

...political participation today is more generally perceived as taking part in the expanded domain of politics rather than solely contributing to the policy-making processes. Activities in this new political sphere are accordingly prone to be marked by a less instrumental, but a more symbolic or expressive character.

These pointers, focussed more on the environment, are important in steering one away from the classical definitions of political participation. Casteltrione (2015) takes up the issue and defines political participation as:

...a set of activities influencing or aiming to influence governments’ actions and other individuals’ political behaviours, and/or reflecting individuals’ interest and psychological involvement in politics.

This definition is sufficient when one looks at political participation during elections. In the case of this research, it is necessary to see which activities were undertaken on Twitter and what their intended effect on government and other users of the platform’s political behaviour was. Van Deth (2014: 351 - 352), in giving what he calls a conceptual map of political participation, further refines the concept by giving four descriptive characteristics which can be summarized as:

1. First, political participation as depicted as an activity (or “action”) – simply watching television, visiting websites or claiming to be interested in politics - does not constitute participation.
2. Second, political participation is understood as something done by people in their role as citizens.
3. Political participation should be voluntary and not enforced by law, rules or threats.
4. Political participation deals with government, politics or the state in a broad sense of these words (“political system”, “policy process”) and it is not restricted to specific phases nor specific levels such as elections.

These characteristics are important when analysing the use of Twitter during the 2013 Zimbabwe elections as it will be easy to categorise actions that can be construed as political participation and those outside the stated parameters. These characteristics plus the definition by Casteltrione (2015) above give a very clear benchmark against which to measure how social media was used for political participation in Zimbabwe during the 2013 election. In as much as the fourth characteristic above says political participation is not restricted to a specific phase, this study has, for practical reasons, demarcated a 51 day period during an important election, because this best describes a time when people participate.

3.3.2 Critique of social media and political participation

The advent of social media allows for more expressive behaviour by citizens, for example uploading videos, posting and forwarding (in the case of Twitter it could be retweeting) content. The different approaches to political participation through social media make various assumptions without acknowledging the inherent social, political and economic inequalities in society. Simões, Carmo Barriga, and Jerónimo (2011:56) ask if the unequal distribution of political participation could be mitigated or reinforced by the use of ICTs. Simões et al (2011:56 – 57) further argue that digital political participation is socially stratified in the real world context and “social differentiation factors, such as gender, academic qualifications and professional category, filter citizens who participate”. Any analysis should not ignore filters such as attempts to control speech, surveillance information, and access inequalities. Dahlberg (2011:87) takes a similar standpoint saying, “Even after a couple of decades of decreasing costs and increasing diffusion of digital

technology, it is clear that there are still significant digital divides in access, however, they are defined". Dahlberg (2011: 85) argues that Web 2.0 studies show that there are inequalities in digital technology use "and more specifically with respect to web participation, adding to inequalities in society". This situation should be construed as a dent on the potential of new information communication technologies to facilitate political participation. This research analyses the digital inequalities by collecting data of the people who participated via Twitter and, ascertain their professional backgrounds or political affiliation. Additionally, it is also paradoxical that while the advent of social media may have widened and broadened, the avenues for political participation, it has also increased the capacity of the state or the powerful to increase surveillance as "the powerful are looking at those very interactions, and using them to figure out how to make us more compliant" (Tufekci, 2014). It is vital, in this context, to also look at what and how the government of Zimbabwe may have tried to harness social media for surveillance during the 51-day period.

It is abundantly clear that a critical approach to the study of social media and its influence on political participation will show the inherent inequalities in technology use as well as increased surveillance on society which may reduce the levels of participation. Surveillance or its threat, I would argue, may be more prevalent in countries such as Zimbabwe where the state has worked hard to control information gathering, processing, and dissemination including legislatively through acts of parliament. It is thus important to acknowledge these drawbacks and use them when analysing the use of Twitter in the 2013 elections in Zimbabwe.

3.3.2 How does the network society facilitate political participation?

It is clear from the above (1.4.4) that Bouchard (2011), Kreiss et al (2011) and Lovink (2011) recognize the nature of the networks that emerged as a result of the internet but question the reliability of the claims that these networks are horizontal and nodes (actors) are equal. Bouchard (2011:296) goes on to state that networks would, over time, organize themselves into a hierarchical system composed of leaders and followers. Relating this to Twitter use in Zimbabwe particularly during the 2013 elections, one can see that not all users had the same number of followers, tweets, retweets, and replies.

The networks emerging from the interaction on the Twitter platform may become hierarchical further exposing inequalities or become exclusionary as:

What is outside the network must either be ignored (as irrelevant to the network) or eliminated (if it is a threat to the network vis-à-vis its goals or performance). Nodes that become dysfunctional or superfluous are phased out of the network, and the network rearranges itself while some nodes are more important than others, they all need each other while in the network. (Crozier, 2002: 174)

This argument clearly shows that there are what Bouchard (2011:292) calls “super nodes”. The emphasis on the nodes within networks is the approach’s major undoing, as Mejjias (2012) argues that the

networks undermine the productive forms of sociality by over-privileging the node. To the extent that the network is composed of nodes and connection between nodes, it discriminates against the space between the nodes; it turns this space into a black box, a black spot.

Apart from the intra-network inequalities, it is also vital to mention that there are other features that may affect participation and these include class, capitalism or crisis (Fuchs, 2012:776). In addition to exhibiting the hierarchies, inequalities and class differences that characterise society, networks follow a power law of distribution as they “do not scale, instead the top few are much more popular than the middle few, and the middle few are vastly more popular than the bottom few” (Dean, 2005: 59 – 60). This strand of argument will be looked at in more detail in Chapters 4 and 5 below, especially when looking at the number of tweets per user.

Furthermore, Mejjias (2012) argues that the internet reinforces the stay-in-network concept as one has to remain in the network and adapt the network’s ontology of what constitutes a node or risk being left out. This returns the questions posed by other critical theorists on the role of those outside the said networks. It shows that this approach potentially leaves out other non-nodal players who

may be critical and relevant to the struggles. While acknowledging these weaknesses, this study focuses specifically on the ad hoc network that emerged during the 2013 general elections in Zimbabwe. This is not to discount the role of those outside the said community.

3.3.2.1 Nodes of ideology within network society

In addition, the nodes (actors) within the network play different roles, informed by their ideological leanings. Participation in a discourse, more so, a discourse on elections, is very ideological. Failing to distinguish between the various roles of actors within the network seems to be one of the main problems of the network society approach, especially when one looks at the role of Twitter as a network that facilitates public political participation. It seems the network society approach as propounded by Castells in *Networks of outrage and hope* (2012) takes for granted the actors in a network. This approach assumes that actors in a network produce content, which is aimed at achieving the same goal. It is further assumed that these movements (networks) have considerable communicative independence from power structures. As such, Castells (2012:229) underlines the pivotal role of networks during the Arab Spring because “it is through these digital communication networks that the movements live and act”. This seems to suggest that important institutions, for example, the state, play no role in these networks.

According to Castells (2012:168), the movement’s geographically encompassing nature mirrored its ability to spread information in cyberspace; after all, the leaderless “movement was born on the internet, diffused by the internet, and maintained its presence on the internet”. As such, Castells (2012:103) maintains that “the Internet networks provided a space of autonomy from where the movements emerged under different forms and with different results”. This approach casts a blind eye on the various ideological struggles that take place within a discursive event. For example, the state could still play a critical role within the emerging networks and such roles could be overt or covert and crowd out the citizens from the anticipated “space of autonomy”. In the case of Zimbabwe, for example, it has been shown in Chapters 1 and 2 that the state enforced and enjoyed a monopoly of information dissemination and used mass media for hegemonic control of the population. This means that the decentralised, horizontal and de-massified communication channels, in the form of Twitter, pose a threat and could curtail the bureaucratic control of information distribution and ultimately the hegemonic control. As such, there are chances that the

state could also become an actor in the network in cases where it fails to bar participation of the people through legislation or technological interference. It thus calls for caution as there are chances that the state could have employed resources and participated in the emerging networks with a view to influence and control discussion, as was the case with mass media.

3.4. Critical approaches to Network Society

The use of social media, including Twitter, gives new dimensions within society as it possibly enables the formation of new networks that are made possible by current technologies. These technologies include the internet, the global financial network, global telecommunications, and transportation systems. The advent of the internet and attendant communications networks has led to the emergence of a network society which is characterised by horizontal communications compared to the vertical social structure in traditional societies (Castells, 2012; 2001;1996). Castells (2009b:56) states that “with the diffusion of the internet, new forms of interactive communication emerged, characterised by the capacity of sending messages from many to many in real time or chosen time”. These networks “have taken a new life in our time by becoming informational networks powered by the internet” (Castells, 2000:501). Castells (2004:221) seems to address those who may accuse him of postulating a technology deterministic approach when he states that:

Of course, we know that technology does not determine society. But we also know that without specific technologies some social structures could not develop. For example, the industrial society could not have emerged without electricity and the electrical engine.

This can be interpreted as meaning that technology preceded the formation of networks which configure themselves in a real-time and on a global scale according to the electronics based technological paradigm. The resulting “networked organisations outcompete all other forms of organisation, particularly the vertical, rigid, command-and-control bureaucracies” (Castells, 2004:224).

Critical theorists (for example Lovink, 2011; Fuchs, 2009b) question the veracity of some of the assumptions of the “network society”. While Castells (2004) sees a shift of power from institutions and large corporations to the emerging networks, it is clear that there are some significant gaps in the argument, for example by suggesting that power has shifted from the large corporations. The large corporations, for example, Google and Twitter, own and control the networks and there have been mergers and acquisitions of smaller social media related companies which have made them even bigger. As such these companies wield and concentrate more power (Papacharissi, 2009). This argument is supported by Lovink (2011:23) who asks: “if networks are so distributed and decentralised, then why don’t they oppose the economies of scale of the Googles and the Facebooks”. Lovink (2011:3) acknowledges the network society’s dysfunctionalities regarding usability, access, and privacy but argues for a need “to investigate that slippery nexus between the internet’s reinforcement of existing power structures, parallel – increasingly penetrating – worlds where control is diffused”. This strand of argument is also taken by Bouchard (2011:292) who states that:

The notion that the network is a horizontal mesh of links equally distributed among large numbers is not quite an accurate representation...While it is true, for example, that I can reach any point on the network because there is no distance between any of them, it is equally true that I will probably resort to an intermediary node as a booster in my search for sake of convenience.

Arguing along the same lines, Kreiss, Finn and Turner (2011) take a very radical view by saying that barriers used by bureaucracies to monopolise the egalitarian distribution of power and expertise are also evident within the network society. Kreiss et. al. (2011:251) take a Weberian approach to the network society and conclude that:

Yet, as Weber’s discussion of bureaucracy helps reveal, the social dynamics that underlie voluntary forms of peer production involve a host of other forms of regulation that are less transparent than bureaucratic forms. Moreover, precisely because it is voluntary and usually temporary, peer

production may not support the institutions upon which its own continued success depends.

Such a proposition is important not only in terms of further understanding the network society but also to assist in a critical analysis of the networks that emerged due to the use of Twitter for political participation in Zimbabwe during the 2013 elections. It is clear that the networks may be transient, something that is confirmed by the temporality of the network that emerged through the use of Twitter during the 2013 elections.

Juel (2012) teasingly states that classical critical theorists such as Horkheimer and Adorno would be able to find some very positive aspects in the development of modern social media. This is so, Juel (2012:767), points out, because what Horkheimer and Adorno “were criticizing was the one-way mass media of their day in all its aspects and therefore not just the content of the media but also its technological development and form,[and] they concluded that the latter aspects favoured central control and standardization”. Juel (2012), however, is quick to point out that the classical critical theorists would not be overly impressed with the social media as “the liberating and creative potential of Web 2.0 has not yet been realized to any large extent; it seems perhaps to be more of a romantic’s dream”. This is so because, according to Juel (2012), the majority remain net consumers on the internet without providing content and at the same time the internet is controlled by large companies, which are profiting from it. This was in some ways similar to the situation during the days of Adorno and Horkheimer, one would argue when there was centralised communication control.

3.5 Social media, a new public sphere?

3.5.1.1 What is the public sphere?

The major points around the public sphere concept were briefly discussed under 1.4.5 above where it was pointed out that the Habermasian approach to the public sphere was seen as bourgeois and

exclusionary. The public sphere concept is discussed here in more detail. First, an outline of its original assumptions is provided, and the discussion will show how this view of the public sphere has been contested. In relation to these changes, the section also looks at how information communication technologies influence the current configuration of the public sphere. Analysing the changes to the understanding of the public sphere and how new information communication technologies may have altered the public sphere, makes it possible to then analyse if the Twitter community that used the platform for public political participation in the election of a new government in 2013 constituted a public sphere.

The public sphere concept has been central to theorizing the democratic role of the media. By way of introduction, it is relevant to refer to questions raised by Poster (1995) which are: If there is a public sphere, who populates it and how? What kind of beings exchange information in this public sphere? What kind of community can be in this space? What kind of disembodied politics are inscribed so evanescently in cyberspace? (It is very interesting that Poster [1995] writing before internet use became widespread would use terms like cyberspace and cyberdemocracy. It is also worth mentioning that the questions raised by Poster [1995] remain very relevant even when the cyberspace has been transformed by social media. Furthermore, there is congruence between what Poster [1995] sought answers for and the research questions for this study.)

To be able to see if the use of social media amounts to a new public sphere, it makes sense to build on the brief explanation given under 1.4.5 above and further explain what constitutes a public sphere. The concept of the public sphere was originally postulated by Habermas (1989)⁸ with his pioneering and enduring publication *The structural transformation of the public sphere*, whose focus was on the historical emergence of new forms of public interaction from the intimate sphere of the family, to coffee houses, salons, and finally to parliamentary debates. According to Habermas (1989:109), the public sphere is “a realm of our social life in which something approaching public opinion can be formed”. Habermas (1989) sees the public sphere as a space allowing for critical debate in a free and rational manner. It is assumed that there is homogeneity and it is possible to reach a consensus as participants within the public sphere discuss issues. The

⁸ Whereas the German version of the work was published in 1961, this research makes use of the translated version published in 1989.

public sphere is more than mere critical debate because it goes beyond to include both the quality of the debate and the number of people participating, (Calhoun; 1992:17) argues.

In the context of this study, it is vital to analyse how the Twittersphere is a realm in which something approaching public opinion can be formed. It is also vital to critically analyse the tweets and ascertain what form of debate they constitute. In this public sphere, according to Cammaerts, (2007:3), “discourse becomes democratic through communicative rationality” and has “connotations of a non-coercively unifying consensus-building force of a discourse in which participants overcome their, at first, subjectively based views in favour of a rationally motivated agreement”. This ideal participation, according to Seidman (1989:231) is informed by a prior knowledge that there is “the guarantee that they may assemble and unite freely and express and publicise their opinions freely as individuals”.

From the above, the public sphere is underlined by communicative rationality, a guarantee of freedom, voluntary participation and consensus building. The use of Twitter for political participation could be taken as voluntary. The anonymity that comes with the use of the platform guarantees freedom in expressing views and opinions, but the same cannot be said about communicative rationality. It is also not clear if there is consensus building on Twitter. It is thus important to see if the posted tweets portray communicative rationality and at the same time if they contributed to consensus building. This shall be looked at in detail in Chapters 5 and 6.

3.5.1.2 Redefining the public sphere

When Habermas wrote his pioneering work (Papacharissi, 2009:232 calls it seminal), it was assumed that the bourgeois public sphere he was analysing was on a decline mainly because it was being commodified. Habermas (2004) argues that commercialized mass media prioritise objectives of public relations and this compromises the rational and democratic public discourse, which are the main objectives of the public sphere. Papacharissi (2009:231) acknowledges that the modern public sphere was “plagued by forces of commercialization and compromised by corporate conglomerates” and the dominance by commercial interests transforms it into a vehicle for capitalist hegemony. However, there is hope as the internet “promises unlimited and unregulated discourse that operates beyond geographic boundaries, [which] would suggest a virtual

reincarnation of the public sphere” (Papacharissi, 2009:231). It is thus important to further probe if the internet has rescued the public sphere. In so doing it is important to first trace the changes in the conceptualisation of the public sphere by various scholars. Habermas himself has moved from his earlier conceptualisation of the public sphere to define it as:

The public sphere can best be described as a network for communicating information and points of view (i.e., opinions expressing affirmative or negative attitudes); the streams of communication are, in the process, filtered and synthesized in such a way that they coalesce into bundles of topically specified public opinions. (Habermas, 1996: 360)

This more updated definition of the public sphere by Habermas (1996) acknowledges the changes in media and communication. It is clear that Habermas, in the 1996 definition, is accommodating the changes that emerged, including the emergence of information communication networks. However, this reformulation of the public sphere does not mention the capture of the networks by conglomerates, a *déjà vu*, as the same had happened when corporations “colonised” the public sphere when there were centralised mass media. Large corporations like Google bought YouTube while News Corporation incorporated MySpace.com and these “new ventures become commodified, they transition from public spaces to commercial spaces and thus compromise their democratizing potential” (Papacharissi, 2009:242).

The capitalist commodification of the media leads to what Dean (2005: 55) calls “communicative capitalism” (a clear contrast to Habermas’ communicative rationality) which “designates that form of late capitalism in which values heralded as central to democracy take material form in networked communications technologies”.

It is clear, from the arguments above, that Twitter enhances horizontal communication, but in a commercialised context? Twitter’s potential to enhance horizontal communication can fully be realised if certain factors such as knowing the hashtag being used or having the right gadgets are met. The use of the hashtag, while enhancing conversation, may elbow out potential community members if they are not aware of which hashtag to use.

3.5.1.3 From the public sphere to public spheres

The perception of a singular public sphere (as originally postulated by Habermas) has been criticised as well as its failure to theorise power and exclusions (Karppinen, 2007: 497). As such some scholars have argued for a reformulation of the public sphere concept. Ritzi (2014:179) argues that a “post-democratisation of the public sphere goes along with the changes on three dimensions namely the criteria of equality of different group of actors, their openness to different matters and discourse rationality”. This means that participants in this new form of public sphere are equal, not polarised and must be characterised by discourse rationality. Boeder (2005) is spot on when he states that “Habermas’ coffeehouse discourse has evolved in the direction of mediated communication within electronic networks”. These electronic networks are what constituted the Twittersphere discussing the 2013 elections in Zimbabwe and it has to be acknowledged that they are not an “organic community or nation” that is tied to a specific territory (van Dijk, 1999:164). Dahlberg (2001:8) taking the argument further and in applying the public sphere concept to the internet argues that there are six fundamental criteria to be fulfilled for the internet to be considered a public sphere. These can be summarised as:

- 1) Autonomy from the state and economic power
- 2) Exchange and critique of validity claims
- 3) Reflexivity
- 4) Ideal role taking
- 5) Sincerity
- 6) Discursive inclusion and equality

This characterisation of the public sphere is supported by Dean (2003:96) who summarises it as having:

a set of norms: equality, transparency, inclusivity, rationality. The architecture of the public sphere is based on the following concepts: site, goal, means, norms and vehicle. The actors in the public sphere are conceptualised as free and rational agents [...] The public sphere, in

principle, is open and inclusive. Anyone could access that which was discussed in the public sphere in terms of public use of reason.

Karppinen (2007), Dean (2003) and Dahlberg (2001) point to a very broad characterisation of the public sphere which can be synthesised as open and inclusive, consensus building. This synthesised version retains some of the original elements of the public sphere, for example, rationality, but also move ahead and include concepts such as transparency and inclusivity, which were not mentioned in the original postulation. It is thus vital to see if Twitter use during the election of a new government in Zimbabwe may be construed as a public sphere in this sense. To answer this, the data collected shall be analysed to ascertain if they show the characteristic of a public sphere.

3.5.2 Criticism of the Habermasian concept of the sphere

Notwithstanding its changes, there has been criticism of the public sphere concept. Especially Habermas' original postulation is often described as an exclusionary and bourgeois space that does not cater for the working class as well as women (Susen, 2011) or is too idealistic or abstract (Koivisto & Veliverronen, 1996:22). There are two approaches to the revision of the concept of the public sphere. Some call for a critical reassessment or even its replacement (Bruns & Highfield, 2016:62). Informative in this regard is the proposition by Chantal Mouffe (Carpentier & Cammaerts, 2006:975) to avoid references to "public spheres" altogether and rather term them "public spaces". This is in the plural because "I think it is a multiplicity of public spaces. There are many forms of articulation between all different public spaces and it is important to work at all those different levels" (quoted in Carpentier & Cammaerts, 2006: 975). Mouffe (2005: 158) argues that these public spaces "are always striated and hegemonically structured," and is different from the Habermas' concept of the public sphere which is a place where rational consensus takes place. According to Mouffe (2005: 158) such a public political space, as advocated by Habermas, may be impossible as there is "a struggle in the very configuration relations around which a given society is structured, it is a struggle between opposing hegemonic projects which can never be

reconciled rationally”. This is clearly a departure from the communicative rationality that Habermas (1990:315) said would inform debate within the public sphere.

Additionally, Mouffe (2002: 8-9) argues that given the hegemonic struggles identified within society, it was vital to look at ways of arriving at a consensus not based on exclusion, adding that “...what is important is that conflict does not take the form of antagonism (struggle between enemies) but of ‘agonism’ struggle between adversaries. The aim of democratic politics is to transform potential antagonism into agonism.” Mouffe (2005: 20) defined agonism as a relationship where the conflicting parties, although acknowledging that they are adversaries, operate on a common symbolic ground and see themselves as belonging to the same association. Accordingly, Mouffe (2002), argues that agonistic pluralism is more realistic than the public sphere in the Habermasian sense. It is thus vital, to see if Twitter discourse passes for public space.

3.5.2.1 Is Twitter a public sphere

Habermas’ (1996) revised the conception of the public sphere to imply a network for communicating information and points of view seem to give further credence to the supposition that discussions on Twitter may pass for a public sphere.

In as much as Habermas has revised the conception of a public sphere, seemingly trying to accommodate criticism leveled against his initial position, not all aspects could be addressed. As was shown above there are scholars who have tried to relocate and transplant the concept of the public sphere and either make it an international phenomenon or pluralise it. Rolfe (2010:366) speaks against this development arguing that:

Such pluralising is achieved by draining the public sphere of its conceptual substance provided by its normative model of democratic participation and rational public debate, which raises questions about the analytical worth of concepts of public sphere to these arguments.

As such, it makes sense to explore more critically what the “coming together” of various Twitter users to discuss the 2013 elections in Zimbabwe meant. A much more critical observation,

informed by Miessen (2007:109) shows that the Twitter platform cannot be termed a public sphere because the Habermasian approach ignores that “there is a possibility of a struggle between different interpretations of shared principles”. Taking the Twitter platform as an example, one would argue that most of the discourse participants shared principles such as the need for a solution to the socio-economic problems that Zimbabwe faced but differed on how this could be achieved. Some discursive participants said better economic conditions can be achieved through a change of leadership (regime change) while others argued that President Robert Mugabe’s continued (regime continuity) rule would achieve it. As such, Mouffe’s (2005:158) proposition of an agonistic model, where the public space “is a battleground where different hegemonic projects are confronted without any possibility of final reconciliation” would make sense.

It is clear from the example cited above, of how the discourse participants differed on how to improve the economy, that the Twitter platform was a place of struggle of different ideological projects. This contrast sharply with Habermas’ approach where rationality prevails and there is an eradication of conflict with something approaching public opinion prevailing. Mouffe (2002:8) argues that conflict cannot be eradicated as “adversaries fight each other because they want their interpretation to become hegemonic but do not question opponents’ right to fight for victory of their position”. The position taken by Mouffe (2005; 2002) shows the inherent ideological and hegemonic struggles within discourse and how they play out. Taking this to Twitter discourse affirms that the platform cannot be taken as a public sphere but a public space which is characterised by a hegemonic struggle which consists “of an attempt to create a different form of articulation among public spaces” (Mouffe, 2005:158).

This gives an interesting perspective especially when one looks at how the different users posted on the Twitter platform in Zimbabwe in 2013. It is evident that there were hegemonic struggles on the Twitter platform and this further pulls Twitter away from being a public sphere to a public space. This new “public space”, according to Papacharissi (2002:9) is not “synonymous with a new public sphere” and this is so because “as a public space, the internet provides yet another form of political deliberation”. It can thus be concluded that, for this research, we are taking the Twitter platform to be a public space where various hegemonic and ideological struggles are waged not with a possibility of a rational conclusion but an agonistic consensus, as Mouffe (2005) suggests.

3.5.3 A public sphere in the internet age?

When the concept of the public sphere was first discussed, the media landscape was characterised by one to many in the sense of broadcasting and the print media. In this 20th century society, with its "...high barriers to entry associated with radio, television and print media, political discourse had been monopolised by a handful of monolithic mass media institutions" (Geiger, 2009:2). These changes from one to many media, to many to many (mass self-communication as Castells [2000] puts it) has seen postmodern theorists, for example, Poster (1997: 218), argue that the public sphere conception "is systematically denied in the arenas of electronic politics," because it:

loses its validity in relation to cyberspace because communicative rationality assumes a modernist, rational subject, which is radically decentred in online communication as subjectivity becomes detached from materially fixed, embodied contexts and is dispersed and multiplied continuously through digitisation.

This is a very relevant point and this research will see if the Tweets show characteristics of communicative rationality or elements of agonistic pluralism. Lunt and Livingstone (2013:93) concede that the original postulations of the public sphere are a "good starting point," but caution against sticking to them without accepting changes as:

his (Habermas') account of the media was surely better suited to mass media in the context of post-war social reconstruction and Cold War politics of America and Europe than to the complex, multimedia environments that we now inhabit.

Thornton (1996) sees the commercialisation and commodification of the internet as inevitable but sees a revitalisation of the public sphere if internet use was to be widened to previously excluded groups. Dahlberg (2015:2) takes the argument further by stating that the democratising potential of the internet was "seen as related to both extending the public spheres to formally democratic political systems as well as supporting the democratic transformation of more explicitly

authoritarian regimes”. The situation prevailing in Zimbabwe in 2013, a muzzled media, contested political space and an authoritarian regime, could have created an adequate atmosphere for the use of the internet to widen the public sphere or space. Ideally, the internet creates a new media environment, according to Dahlberg (2005:93), and provides an alternative to corporate and state-controlled mass media as the

two way, decentralised medium offers greater opportunity (for those with access) than state and/or corporate controlled mass media for voicing views, performing identities, encountering diverse ideas and information, and engaging in dialogue and debate with difference.

As Benkler (2006:272) observes:

The network (of individual citizens who have come together to participate in a conversation) allows all citizens to change their relationship to the public sphere. They no longer need to be consumers and passive spectators. They can become creators and primary subjects. It is in this sense that the Internet democratizes.

This view should not be taken as a point acknowledging that the internet enhances participation without a downside as Dahlberg (2005:92) states that there are “significant factors limiting open and reflexive debate online, including inequalities in access and participation, unreflexive communication, fragmentation of discourse into like-minded deliberative enclaves, and state surveillance and censorship”. The point on state surveillance is expounded on further by Boeder (2005) who states that the internet can be used for “panoptic surveillance, for the control and misinformation of citizens, a process which could possibly undermine or even eliminate discourse within the public sphere”.

This then raises questions if the internet, which has arguably altered the media landscape, has revived the concept of the public sphere. It is clear that there have been opportunities and threats that have been brought on by the internet regarding public political participation.

It can be contended that Ritzi (2014), Dean (2003), Dahlberg (2001) and Thornton (1996) as cited above have shown that there are changes and opportunities to the public sphere concept. Mouffe (2005) has even gone further to dismiss the public sphere concept, opting to call it a public space.

It would be premature to conclude that platform constituted a form of a public sphere in the Habermasian sense because as shown above there is exclusion as those without the appropriate technologies are not able to participate. As such, to avoid falling into the trap of such a premature conclusion, it is vital that one goes on to see what was tweeted, by who and with what intended effect. To be able to do so, this research goes beyond curating tweets using certain hashtags to probing the contents of the tweets by using critical discourse analysis (see Chapters 5 and 6).

3.5.4 Does the new public sphere influence political participation?

As argued above, the original concept of the public sphere has been criticised and has been altered. It is thus vital to ask if the resultant form of the public sphere encourages or enables political participation. An additional question is how this concept of the public sphere can be used to analyse political participation during elections in Zimbabwe. Koivisto and Veliverronen (1996) are very useful in this regard as they give very important and pertinent directions linking the public sphere and the daily struggles of a given society. Koivisto and Veliverronen (1996:31) argue that:

We need to move from the normative/abstract and analyse how public forms of societal organisations emerge, how they are differentiated from and related to the private and how they are characterised both by relations of power and resistance, that is hegemonic struggles. In this sense, it is important to see the public sphere not only as a separate domain but also as an aspect of social practices.

What the two authors are calling for is to link the public sphere to everyday life. The two authors are warning against abstracting the concept from society. As such it was shown in this chapter that this current study links the public sphere to everyday life including political participation. This is very relevant to the present study as it uses a critical theory approach to try and understand the

public sphere. This approach outlines the parameters, in some cases extending the boundaries of such parameters, guiding one's analysis of the public sphere vis-à-vis political participation. It is vital to refer to critical theory to see how the public sphere as currently constituted and expanded to allow enhanced citizen participation for the emancipation of society.

3.6 What is an ideology?

Public political participation, including through social media platforms such as Twitter, is ideological as discourse participants seek to promote or legitimise their interests against competing or opposing groups. Eagleton (1991:28 - 29) sees ideology as the production of ideas, beliefs, and values in social life. This description of ideology converges with Fuchs' (2016) understanding of the subject matter. For Fuchs (2016:370) ideology can be expressed in many different forms and for various intentions.

By ideology I understand thoughts, practices, ideas, words, concepts, phrases, sentences, texts, belief systems, meanings, representations, artefacts, institutions, systems or combinations thereof that represent and justify one group's or individual's power, domination or exploitation or other groups or individuals by misrepresenting, one dimensionally presenting or distorting reality in symbolic representation.

Fuchs' (2016) understanding of ideology gives us clear directions to analyse the use of Twitter in public political participation as the various tweets are a representation of the interests of the discourse participants. This is further buttressed by Fuchs (2016:394) when he argues that tweets, together with other online activities, contain user-generated ideologies which are a representation of existing ideologies and these "ideological topics and texts created online tend to interact with other texts". What this means is that the tweets that were collected over the 51 day period were, in fact, a product of the ideological standing of the discourse participants and at the same time interacted with other text with a resultant convergence or divergence. It is critical, thus, to look at how the text (tweets) produced interacted with other texts especially in the context of the conflicts that prevailed within society.

Since “ideologies usually control the thoughts of a social group based on their identities, goals, norms, values, positions and resources” (Ramanathan and Hoon, 2015:59), it will be interesting to see how each distinct “group” of Twitter users, for example, supporters of a political party, would use the platform to control other social groups. This is what Reisigl and Wodak, (2009:88) call “an important means of establishing and maintaining unequal power relations through discourse”. This raises another important feature, exposing the possible binary of ideology, as it is likely that some discourse participants may seek to promote and possibly legitimate their interests when at the same time there are others opposing it. This means that ideologies can be contested or resisted by oppositional forces.

Further to the binary of the ideology, it is vital to refer to Matic’s (2012: 54 – 55) argument that individuals or groups in society accept “some social construct, that is, some ideology, either because it enables them to achieve their goals or because they truly believe that it gives the right answers to the challenges and problems”. Such a reference makes one understand what shaped the discourse during the elections in Zimbabwe in 2013. This means that the individuals contributing to the discourse accepted and advocated certain ideologies as a means to achieving goals, for example, a better economy and good governance.

It is possible to expose the accepted ideologies in society because as a system of beliefs they can be expressed in “symbols, rituals, discourse and other social and cultural practices” (van Dijk, 1998:26). The Twitter discourse during the elections in Zimbabwe in 2013 is a clear illustration of how the various ideologies were expressed, as will be shown below and illustrated in Chapter 6. As such, it is important to critically look at the discursive acts during the election period in Zimbabwe as it gives us an opportunity to ascertain the various ideological struggles at play.

3.7 Conclusion

The main thrust of this chapter was to lay a theoretical foundation on which to build a detailed analysis of the role that Twitter played during the 2013 elections in Zimbabwe. The research findings will give vital insights on how social media platforms facilitate political participation. The adoption of critical theory is important in that the approach does not offer to give an easy explanation on the interplay between society and technology (technological determinism) but

interrogates the power relations prevailing in society and how they influence the use of technology. As such, it was shown that political participation, public sphere, network society, and technology are concepts which can be looked at using the critical theory lenses. This approach lays bare the struggles within society and how technology, for example, can be used for the emancipation of society. Regarding the public sphere, it was shown that while the internet has ushered in a new public sphere, one has to be cautious as there are inherent structural barriers to effective participation in the public sphere. Acknowledging such strictures is imperative as it enriches the probe on how Twitter was used for political participation, especially how the emergent public sphere was configured and how it enhanced political participation. It was also shown that the network society concept is applicable to the community of Twitter that emerged during the election period. However, the network society may also be a source of exclusion and inequality as some nodes are side-lined or excluded. This is relevant to this study because in answering if the Twitter community exhibits the characteristics of a network community, one also acknowledges the weaknesses of the concept. All this is relative to the research and is vital for the next chapter that deals with data collection and analysis.

Chapter 4 – Methodology

4.1. Introduction – Using a mixed method approach

The preceding two chapters gave a detailed look at theoretical perspectives, particularly how critical theory, public sphere theory, and political participation theory relate to the use of social media for public political participation. This chapter builds on this discussion and links the theoretical perspective to data collection and analysis. This research uses both quantitative and qualitative methodology. The mixed method approach, according to Tashakkori and Creswell (2007:3) is when the investigator “collects and analyses data, integrates the findings and draw inferences using both qualitative and quantitative approaches”. Lots of energy has been expended on differentiating between qualitative and quantitative research approaches. Sale, Lohfeld and Brazil (2002) differentiate the two approaches arguing that quantitative paradigm is based on positivism, that is characterised by empirical research reducing all phenomena to numbers while, in contrast, the qualitative paradigm is based on interpretivism and is characterised by multiple realities. Sale et. al. (2002:46) go on to state the veracity of using the mixed methods arguing that:

They are also united by a shared commitment to understanding and improving the human condition, a common goal of disseminating knowledge for practical use, and a shared commitment for rigour, conscientiousness, and critique in the research process.

It is for this reason that this research combines quantitative and qualitative approaches so as to gather data for analysis from a diverse range of sources.

The chapter starts by looking at critical discourse analysis in general and then zoom in on discourse-historical analysis, which is a variant of critical discourse analysis. The discourse-historical analysis is used as the foundation for data collection and analysis because of its practical relevance to a research of this nature. By the same token, this chapter takes a thorough look at how the data was collected and broken down into various units to make it ready for analysis. The central point of this chapter is to link the theoretical perspectives and the methodology in order to answer the research questions.

4.1.1 What is CDA?

Critical discourse analysis (henceforth CDA), could be distinguished from other discourse analyses in that its main focus is on mediation between language and social structure (Wodak & Meyer, 2009:21). This is fundamental in that CDA uses language and text, for example, as a starting point towards a detailed study of society. CDA, in the process of studying society, looks at relationships between discourse and society and regardless of what one is looking at, be it “ideas or the interaction between people, or on the forces that govern such interaction, discourse analysis entails in-depth study of communication” (Chigona, Pollock & Roode, 2009:6). Moreover, CDA draws the researcher’s attention to “the conditions in which texts and genres are produced, received and accessed and how these processes are reflected in social practices” (Boyd and Monacelli, 2010:53). This clearly shows that while CDA has its origins in linguistics (Van Dijk, 2003) it is a vital analytical tool that can be used to study other fields of study (Van Dijk, 1995) including the present one. Fjørtoft, (2013:68) puts it across simply by arguing that CDA is “problem-oriented, that is, it does not focus on linguistic units per se, but on complex social phenomena that have a semiotic dimension”. In the case of this research, the social phenomenon is to get to know how social media, especially a Twitter platform, is used for political participation as a means to making a difference in society. In so doing, CDA focuses on larger units than isolated words and sentences to look at the discourses, texts, conversations and the communicative events (Wodak, 2009).

As an approach, CDA is an analytic tool that can be used on public texts (Huckin, 2002:159), and focuses on “how social relations, identity, knowledge, and power are constructed through written and spoken texts in communities, schools, the media and the political arena” (Fairclough, 1989:20).

Huckin’s (2002) and Fairclough’s (1989) argument allows one to critically look at social media posts and get to know how information communication technologies enable citizens to address socio-economic issues that matter to them. In the process of analysing society and social interaction, CDA pays particular attention to the context and “treats the linguistic visual choices

as subtle indicators of the power of the media technology to represent the world to us and to orient us towards this world” (Chouliaraki, 2008:696). In relation to this research, the tweets pertaining to the 2013 harmonised elections in Zimbabwe (the context), are analysed, using the CDA method to ascertain how social media technologies are used by the citizens for political participation (a discursive act).

Discourse is defined by Fairclough and Wodak (1997:258) as being a social practice, thus implying “a dialectical relationship between a particular discursive event [for example use of Twitter for political participation] and the situation(s), institution(s) and social structure(s) which frame it. The discursive event is shaped by but also shapes them”. This argument can be refined more to say that discourse shapes situations, identities of participants and relationships between those participating while at the same time, this is shaped by the environment within which discourse takes place. From above, it has been shown that CDA focuses on public commentary, contextualises it and looks at how linguistic and visual choices are presented to us. One can use CDA to critically look at the text for indicators on how the users want to represent the world. Text in this sense broadly refers to various posts that were created by Twitter users and may include language, photos or links to other information. Social media employs text for discourse and according to Hacker and Van Dijk (2000), these allow for public discourse without limits of time, place or other physical conditions, enabling citizens to seek to address socio-economic issues that matter to them.

Wodak and Meyer (2009:96) suggest recursive steps which could be followed when using CDA for qualitative research. The eight steps are: consulting with preceding theoretical knowledge; systematic collection of data with a focus on genres/topics, themes and texts; the selection and preparation of data; specification of the research question; a qualitative pilot analysis; a detailed analysis of the data; the formulation of a critique, and finally the application of the detailed analytical results. This study is guided by these eight recursive steps, but it will not necessarily be applied in the order listed above, depending on practical challenges and circumstances. A detailed discussion of these steps is given under 4.1.5 below.

4.1.2 CDA – working with critique, power and ideology

There are three concepts which feature indispensably in CDA namely: that of critique, of power and of ideology (Wodak, 2009: 31) thus using CDA as a tool of analysis would help prise open these three features. Additionally, critical in the sense of CDA means, “not taking things for granted, opening up complexity, challenging reductionism, dogmatism, and dichotomies” (Kendal, 2007:2). This critical outlook or stance “should be understood as gaining distance from data and embedding the data in a social context, clarifying the political positioning of discourse participants” (Reisigl & Wodak, 2009:87). What this outlook requires for this research is to have a clear approach that categorises the Twitter users (discourse participants) in a manner that helps one to analyse their standing (political positioning) in society. The political positioning, one would argue, may not only be about political affiliation but also about their professional background and the organisations they belong to. In so doing, it will then be possible to account for the role of the discourse participants and how these may influence political participation. This approach makes critical theory “essentially for the critical task of CDA, which starts out from the assumption that social theory should be oriented toward critiquing and changing society in contrast to understanding it” (Fjørtoft, 2013:68). This is also pointed out by Weiss and Wodak (2003: 14) who added that CDA, like other critical theories, seeks to “root out a particular kind of delusion”. This is a very interesting perspective, as we critically look at Twitter’s role in political participation against the supposition of techno-optimists as well as in some reductive journalistic comments in the run-up to the elections (for example, see Ntuli, 2013).

Fjørtoft (2013), as well as Weiss and Wodak (2003), clearly show that the use of CDA requires a researcher to be more reflective regarding the analysis of a certain phenomenon. As such, applying CDA and its variants to analyse how social media facilitates political participation during an election, entails a critical appraisal of the conditions under which the elections were held. These conditions include the media landscape, the role of the state as well as that of the media in political participation (and these were looked at in detail in the preceding chapters). This requires a relook at some of the assumptions which have been made regarding the role of social media in political participation. This viewpoint is supported by Weiss and Wodak (2003:2), who conclude that the focus of CDA is on the criticism of “scientific-theoretical results...they are challenged with other

options, examined for contradictions and considered in an overall context”. Thus, when looking at the role of social media in facilitating political participation, one has to look at the collected tweets, and examine contradictions as well as analyse them within the context not only of the 2013 elections but the interplay between media and political participation.

4.1.3 What is discourse-historical analysis? – An overview of discourse-historical analysis

Discourse-historical analysis shares CDA’s core orientation but “among the various strands of CDA, it has most consistently referred to the Frankfurt School as the foundation of its critical stance. This critical stance is focussed on changing or emancipating society” in contrast to a mere understanding of the social dynamics (Fortchtner, 2011:2). Boyd and Monacelli (2010:55) state that discourse-historical analysis is one of the main sub-branches of CDA “representing the social-political orientation of critical theory with its primary focus on political texts and discourse practices”. Apart from focusing on the discourse practices, the discourse-historical analysis also looks at the “discursive strategies, which are seen as intentional plan[s] of practice adopted to achieve a particular social, political, psychological or linguistic goal” (Reisigl & Wodak, 2009:94). This makes discourse-historical analysis a very relevant tool to analyse the role of Twitter in facilitating public political participation.

Furthermore, Wodak (2000:5) adds that discourse-historical analysis “analyses the historical dimension of discursive actions by exploring the ways in which particular genres of discourse are subject to diachronic change”, which is the change that happens over time. This is a practical approach that avoids “getting lost in the theoretical labyrinths...and rather develop conceptual tools relevant for specific social problems” (Wodak & Meyer, 2009:6). In this practical approach, discourse-historical analysis follows a conception of social critique that analytically embraces three interconnected aspects (Wodak, 2009: 31) and these can be summarised as:

- 1) text or discourse immanent critique aimed at discovering inconsistencies, contradictions, paradoxes, and dilemmas in the structures internal to the text or discourse;

- 2) socio-diagnostic critique concerned with demystifying the manifest or latent (possibly persuasive or manipulative) character of discursive practices. Here the analyst makes use of her or his background and contextual knowledge and embeds the discursive event in a wider frame of social and political relations, processes and circumstances. On this level we also draw on social theories to interpret the discursive events;
- 3) prognostic critique: This form of critique contributes to the transformation and improvement of communication.

From the above, it can be argued that for this research, the socio-diagnostic critique is very relevant. This is so because, this study uses text (tweets) to take a look at society and discursive events, particularly voting for a new government. This is done by making use of critical theory and at the same time employing the researcher's background, having worked as a journalist in Zimbabwe as well as having read political sciences, thus having an in-depth understanding of the interplay between politics and the media in the country. Socio-diagnostic critique is also relevant as this research attempts to expose the manipulative nature of discourse practices. The end product of this endeavour is a provisional understanding of the role that Twitter plays in facilitating political participation, particularly, electing a new government.

4.1.3.1 Vital principles of discourse-historical analysis

In sync with what has been mentioned above, Reisigl and Wodak (2009:95–96) point out that the 10 most important principles of discourse-historical analysis can be summarised as (with the researcher's input in parenthesis):

- 1) interdisciplinary (for example in the case of this study, the researcher uses background experience in journalism and undergraduate studies in the social sciences to carry out the research)
- 2) problem oriented (the issue/problem, in this case, is to ascertain the role of social media in facilitating political participation in an election.)
- 3) various theories and methods are combined (in as much as this is a qualitative research, there are certain quantitative methodologies which are going to be used to analyse the data collected.) Additionally, while premised on critical theory, the study also draws from

network society theory and the public sphere concept for a deeper and more detailed understanding of the topic.

- 4) the research incorporates fieldwork or ethnography (the researcher was an active Twitter user before undertaking this research and continued to contribute to the platform.)
- 5) research moves recursively between theory and empirical data (the researcher always went back to engage with theories as data was being collected and analysed)
- 6) numerous genres and public spaces, as well as intertextual and interdiscursive relationships, are studied. (In as much as Twitter is the main focus, it is clear from the foregoing that the research has also looked at the media landscape in Zimbabwe, focusing mainly on the traditional media.)
- 7) the historical context is taken into account in interpreting text and discourses (the analysis and descriptions which were undertaken in Chapters 1 and 2 clearly expose the historical context of the 2013 elections in Zimbabwe)
- 8) categories and tools are not fixed once and for all
- 9) grand theories (focused on conceptualising relations between social structure and social action) are used for foundation but middle range theories (specific social phenomena, for example, conflict) give a better theoretical basis
- 10) application of results and the communication of them to the public is important

Additionally, one of the main principles of discourse-historical analysis is that of triangulation “which enables the researchers to minimise any risk of being too subjective. This is due to its endeavour to work on the basis of a variety of different data, methods, theories and background information” (Wodak, 2001:65) in order to “analyse, understand and explain the complexity of objects under investigation” (Reisigl & Wodak, 2009:89). This means that discourse-historical analysis procedures, making use of triangulation, ensure the validity of the final analysis. Triangulation, according to Silverman, as quoted by Wodak and Meyer (2009:32), remains appropriate “whatever one’s theoretical orientation or use of quantitative or qualitative data”. As such, triangulation takes a wide array of empirical observation (a dataset of tweets in this case) refers to theories (as was done in Chapter 2) as well as background information (Reisigl & Wodak, 2009:89). Wodak and Meyer (2009:32) further postulate that the discourse-historical analysis’s triangulatory approach is mainly theoretical and based on the concept of context, which takes into

account four levels which can be summarised as 1) the immediate language- or text-internal context, 2) interdiscursive / intertextual relationship between utterances, texts, genres and discourses, 3) the social level / context of the situation, and 4) broader socio-political/historical analysis. These levels are quite relevant to a study of this nature.

4.1.5 Steps undertaken to do DHA

According to Reisigl and Wodak (2009:324), a thorough discourse-historical analysis consists of eight stages. For this research, the steps were taken as a guide and they were followed as they relate to the necessities of the current research and how practical it could be undertaken. Using the eight recursive steps outlined above, this researcher undertook the following tasks:

- i) Activation and consultation of prior theoretical knowledge

The researcher undertook a reading of the discussions on the existing research on the topic. This was done over a long period, prior to the preparation of the research proposal. The wide reading that was undertaken was meant to get to know what theoretical knowledge existed.

- ii) Triangulation: systematic collection of data as well as contextual information from multiple genres

This was informed by the political events in Zimbabwe prior to undertaking the research as well as the feasibility of the preferred data collection methods. However, there was always an exploration on how best to work with the data, thus this was a continuous step throughout the study.

- iii) Selection/preparation of data for specific analyses

Data collection was done over 51 days. However, it is worth mentioning that the preparation for the kind of data to be collected as well as the methodology was initiated well before the collection

started. The type of data to be collected was informed by the theoretical perspective underlining this research as well as the practical aspects including the researcher's ability to come up with proper mechanisms to archive the tweets.

- iv) Specification of research questions, formulation of assumptions and/or hypothesis

As a logical succeeding step to i) above, the researcher, using the readings in the theoretical knowledge (literature review) as well as observations on the use of social media in Zimbabwe and the debates on Twitter's role in the political dispensation in the country, formulated the main research question. In order to answer the main research question, four other specific research questions were also formulated and these assist in answering the main research question.

- v) qualitative pilot analysis of case studies: a systematic pilot study of at least two detailed case studies after the pilot analysis has been conducted; the whole range of data can be systematically analysed while applying the tools and categories tested in the pilot analysis

There was no pilot study save to say that the author used his observation of the use of Twitter as a means to understanding how the platform operates as a way of making sure that the categories are clearly spelled out.

- vi) detailed case study after the pilot analysis has been conducted; the whole range of data can be systematically analysed while applying the tools and categories tested in the pilot analysis

This process was taken as a continuous one from the beginning when the proposal for this research was drafted. The analysis, as shown in Chapter 1, entailed looking at how social media was being used, not only for political participation during the 2013 elections but as a natural option within a constricted media environment.

- vii) formulation of critique - the 3 levels of critique should be applied explicitly, interpreting results, testing possible readings while including contextual information

This step will be undertaken in Chapters 5 and 6.

- viii) Application of analytical results

This is done at the conclusion of the research.

4.2. Twitter and political discourse: Is it necessary to depart from traditional approaches?

This study analyses the use of social media in political participation and in so doing add to the existing body of research on how media is used for public political participation. It gives a new perspective as no research has been undertaken on the specific topic in Zimbabwe. One metric of Twitter, the hashtag, was used to collect tweets which will then be analysed to get to a provisional conclusion on how the micro-blogging platform facilitated political participation. This is different from traditional research methodologies that use surveys, ethnography or interviews. This novel way of data generation and collection has its problems, for example, it is difficult to ascertain with any precision the demographic characteristics of the Twitter users. Additionally, as Edwards, Housley, Williams, Sloan & Williams (2013: 247) state, there is “little in 140 characters of a tweet formulation, about the age, gender, ethnicity, social class, and other attributes of the tweeter in question”.

This means that this research may not conclusively speak to the demographic characteristics of users. However, one can argue that these may not be of significance in a study of this type. Tweets give rich insight into a discursive event because they capture the interaction between discourse actors and provide “valuable information for academic, marketing and policy-making,” (Anusha & Singh, 2015: 348). In addition, there is more that comes with a tweet, apart from the 140 character limit, including meta-data which may be very useful or of interest (Bruns & Burgess, 2012).

Taking the tweets collected by using TAGS v5 for example, the meta-data contains a great deal of information which can contribute to a better understanding of the characteristics of the discursive event and its actors. Some of the important data which are readily available when using TAGS v5 include:

- i) `id_str` - *which is a unique numerical ID attached to each tweet*
- ii) `from_user` - *the user name of the person posting the tweet*
- iii) `text` - *the text contained in the actual tweet not exceeding 140 characters*
- iv) `in_reply_to_user_id_str` - *if the tweet is a reply or another user has been mentioned using the @ symbol*
- v) `in_reply_to_status_id_str` - *if the tweet is a direct reply to another Twitter user's status update. A status update is usually a tweet that is sent; not a retweet or reply to another tweet.*
- vi) `profile_image_url` - *link/URL to the user's profile picture on Twitter*
- vii) `user_followers_count` - *the number of Twitter users following the user*
- viii) `user_friends_count` - *the number Twitter users that the user follows*

This meta-data (with the explanations in italics being adapted from Bruns and Burgess, [2012:161] as well as the researcher's own observations) are very useful for a fuller understanding of how Twitter is used for political participation and it shows that there is more to a tweet than the 140 characters. This additional information may also be used to get a fuller picture of the use of the micro-blogging platform. For example, in this research, the "text", the "user friends count", the "user followers count" and "in reply to" are very important and have been analysed further as will be discussed below under section 4.3.6.1 and 4.3.6.2.

Furthermore, it can also be argued that using meta-data that is generated online such as the user's total followers online (some of it without the Twitter user's knowledge or control) may give incisive insights comparable or of higher value compared to that which is collected by traditional data collection methods. This allows "for new ways of computer-based, quantitative analysis that goes beyond traditional, hermeneutic approaches typically known in the humanities" (Burghardt, 2015:74) for example the various tweets which have both biodata and metadata which can be analysed to give insights into a phenomenon. Additionally, this data is a "by-product of

interactions in an online service (Twitter) and are not collected by a research instrument” (Jungherr, 2015:27) which means that they are “naturally” occurring, compared to the data that is generated through the traditional methodologies, such as the survey. What merits further attention, regarding the data collected via Twitter APIs is that “social media language data is user-generated, that is regular people communicating with each other” (Burghardt, 2015:74) and these data are event based (in this case the event was the 2013 elections in Zimbabwe) and they document interactions through the online service (Jungherr, 2015:28).

Despite identifiable challenges, Edwards et. al. (2013:247) go on to argue that social media data is distinctive as it allows for the “production of naturally occurring or ‘user-generated’ data at the level of populations in real or near real-time”. Using Twitter, for example, platform users were posting tweets as they observed what was happening during the elections period in Zimbabwe in 2013 (as demarcated by the researcher for this study) thus giving the real-time effect. The focus of this research, thus, is to tap or mine into these naturally occurring content for purposes of getting an understanding regarding how new media technologies facilitate public political participation. It is safe to argue that despite its downside, in comparison to traditional research approaches, the use of social media, particularly Twitter, can give us important insights into the interplay between politics and social media within a Zimbabwean context.

4.2.1 Why use the four hashtags for data collection?

Twitter has transformed from being a banal platform (Rodgers, 2014) to a useful tool used in crisis communications (Bruns & Burgess, 2014; Bruns & Liang, 2012), mass mobilisation (Theocharis, Lowe, Deth, & Gema, 2013) and debating political issues, especially elections (Larsson & Moe, 2014). Bruns and Burgess (2014) point out that the debanalisation and legitimisation of Twitter have drawn journalistic and academic attention and this was mainly a result of the hashtag, which the two authors termed a “killer app” (meaning a very useful application or tool). Collecting data from Twitter is a means to answer the question if the “communicative data available for anyone social media platform represent the full breadth of communicative activities taking place on the platform” (Bruns & Stieglitz, 2014:240). As such, the data collection methods adopted for this

research are those that show how much Twitter is able to represent itself. There are several methods that can be used to demarcate tweets, and these include by author/user (Cheng, Caverlee & Lee, 2010) by keyword or hashtag (though the two may be different), or location (Hecht, Hong, Suh & Chi, 2011). These methods have respective efficacy and may be applied to specific research problems.

Twitter has a horizontal and flexible communicative structure where “users interested in specific topics can easily find one another through the rapid and ad hoc establishment of shared hashtags related to a crisis event” (Bruns & Liang, 2012). Whereas Bruns and Liang were writing specifically looking at a crisis event, it can also be shown that the hashtags have also been used for communicative purposes during elections (Bruns & Burgess 2014; Bruns & Burgess, 2011), political upheavals or even during important sporting events. This basis made the hashtag a natural metric for use in selecting tweets for analysis. There are additional practical limitations that come with the use of the other Twitter metrics, such as the @mention or @user, which may have rendered the data collected rather useless. For example, it was possible to collect tweets from a specific user or a number of users, but this would have raised pertinent questions if data would have been representative of all Twitter users in Zimbabwe. The same could be said with the use of tweets from a certain geographic location. Additionally, there are challenges that come when one selects either of the two methods, for example, in as much as it would have been possible to attempt to use tweets from certain users there are chances that they could have stopped posting or could have tweeted tweets not relevant to the elections. The methods would also have shut out other contributors who would have joined after the selection of specific users. Furthermore, the selection of specific contributors may have entailed a biased data collection method. This does not mean that there are no problems that may arise out of the use of the hashtags for demarcating tweets. One potential pitfall may be to make use of a hashtag that does not “contain any relevant textual markers” (Bruns & Stieglitz, 2014:241) or that the Twitter user may be unaware of the central hashtag, hence the tracking of four different hashtags in the case of this research.

As such it is imperative that the methodology adopted pays attention to the potential pitfalls and come up with mechanisms to widen the collection of tweets to ensure that they are representative. One reason why the hashtag method was used is because it is suitable for identification of

information streams on Twitter (Gonzalez-Bailon, 2013:154) and provides “an opportunity to examine how communities gather and interact around shared topics” (Bruns & Stieglitz, 2014:241). In addition, as Halivais (2014:36) points out, “hashtags represent a way of indicating, textually, keywords or phrases worth indexing” and by using a hashtag, the Twitter user has an intention of improving “searchability and allowing third parties to track the conversation on a topic remains key”. Additionally by using a relevant hashtag, “the user might intentionally be trying to reach beyond her immediate circle of followers and contribute to a larger ‘issue public’ concerned with the topic to which the hashtag is referring to” (Jungherr, 2015:40). By adding a hashtag to a tweet, I would argue, a Twitter user may be aware of the discussion around the topic and may be contributing their opinion or related materials. It is important, however, to mention that the hashtags were used as a mechanism to collect tweets for purposes of analysing the text. This is not a research on hashtags, but the metric was used as a means to pull out a number of tweets during a given period.

4.2.2 Delimiting the elections timeframe

When the date of the harmonised elections was promulgated (Government of Zimbabwe, 2013b), it became necessary to delimit the days in a manner that best describes what can be called the election period. In the case of the Zimbabwean situation, there are processes and procedures which are followed before and after voting (Mass Public Opinion Institute [MPOI], 2007) what can be termed immediate pre – and post-electoral activities. There were various activities that included public rallies as well as debates on radio and television, and the special vote of the armed uniformed forces which was done a fortnight before the general elections⁹. These activities had to be included within the time delimitation as the discourse around them will help give important insights pertaining to how people were using the micro-blogging platform for political participation. As such, tweets were collected 25 days prior to voting through to the voting day and the continuous archiving only terminated 25 days after voting. This brings to 51 the number of

⁹Armed forces and the police voted earlier than others to allow them to be deployed to help in the administration of the elections

days when tweets were continuously archived, including the voting day, July 31, 2013, as the midpoint.

Apart from delimiting the time frame, it was also important to come up with a data collection method that would allow for the archiving and possible interpretation of the dataset. As was stated above, there are two types of Twitter streams (Bruns & Stieglitz, 2014), the firehose and the garden hose (boyd & Crawford, 2012:669). The firehose is a feed provided by Twitter allowing 100 percent access to all public tweets. The garden hose refers to the tweets accessed via a Twitter Streaming API that allows retrieval of 1 percent of public tweets (Morstatter, Pfeffer, Liu & Carley, 2013:400). An API facilitates data exchange between applications and allows for the creation of new applications (Murugesen, 2007:3). Getting the firehose is very appealing, but the catch is that the higher volume access is only via commercial data resellers such as Gnip and DataSift (Bruns & Stieglitz, 201:91) which implies a financial cost on the part of the researcher. This is a major drawback and the alternative would be to make do with the 1 percent garden hose, which may not suffice for a research of this nature especially for quantitative analysis. This left the firehose option the most viable, that is if there were sufficient financial resources to have a third party firm retrieve the tweets. The financial implications for use of a firehose is a major handicap and it is also important to acknowledge that this “streaming API requires more infrastructure and technical management,” compared to the search API that needs fewer resources but “yields lower volumes of data (more, however, if data collection needs to go back in time)” (Gonzalez-Bailon et al, 2014:18).

4.2.3 Selecting the most appropriate tweet collection and archiving tool

Whereas there is a financial implication to using the firehose, there are some free search APIs, which tap into the firehose and retain the tweets on a given hashtag or keyword and assist one to gain some insight from the data flowing around a given hashtag. This researcher used Twitter Archiving Google Sheet (TAGS¹⁰) v5, an open source tweet collecting tool that automatically archives tweets around a given hashtag or keyword in the form of a Google Spreadsheet document.

¹⁰<https://tags.hawksey.info>

TAGS v5 utilises Twitter streaming API and search API functionality to capture, in real time, any tweets containing keywords selected by the operator and saves them in a Microsoft Excel file with the posts in chronological order, the newest on top. The fact that TAGS v5 works in Google spreadsheet means that one needs to have a Google account to be able to use it. TAGS v5 collects a maximum 18 000 tweets around a hashtag, and because of this rate limit, it made sense to set up multiple archives for the four hashtags. The rate limit is because the Twitter Search API limits to 100 tweets per call and 180 calls per hour this means you could potentially get 18 000 tweets in one hit. In the case of the high volume hashtag, #zimelections, it was clear that the rate limit of 18 000 tweets was to be surpassed, thus the researcher opened a new archive each time it was clear that the collected tweets neared 10 000. Resultantly, there were seven different spreadsheets archived with tweets containing the hashtag #zimelections.

Using TAGS v5 for data collection is unobtrusive. Using a specific hashtag to collect tweets means that tweets which were not preceded by the # sign may not be collected, but in the case of TAGS v5, keywords not preceded by a hashtag could also be collected. This only leaves private tweets as being outside the purview of the data collection dragnet. TAGS v5 collects an average 90% (González-Bailón et al, 2014) of all public tweets on a given hashtag, which is close to a firehose if one is to go by the explanation given by boyd and Crawford (2012).

4.2.4 How were the hashtags selected?

In selecting the hashtags to be used for data collection, there were questions which the researcher asked so as to come up with the most representative dataset. After identifying the hashtag as the metric that was to be used for data collection, there was a need to see which hashtags were to be used. The use of hashtags to denote a discussion to a particular election had become common (see Zappavigna, 2015). These elections hashtags, for example, show the country name and the word vote, for example, #ausvote (for Australian elections). The researcher used prior knowledge of the possible hashtags that could be used to come up with a provisional list which had these: #zimelections, #zimvotes, #zimelections2013, #zimelection, #zimdecides2013, #zimdecides, #zwelections and #263elections. The last hashtag was included as there was a chance that some

Twitter users could use Zimbabwe's international dialing code (+263) in place of the usual Zim. The same was the case with ZW, which is the Internet country code top-level domain (ccTLD) for Zimbabwe. However, after a preliminary observation of the tweets before actual collection started, it was discovered that there seemed to be an agreement on which hashtags to use. This is understandable as it is the first elections to be tweeted in Zimbabwe because, as the evidence below shows, when the 2008 elections were held, very few Zimbabweans had joined the platform (see Addendum C and D below). Inevitably, there was likely to be a number of hashtags to be used. Twitter users were aware of the potential of using multiple hashtags for the same event and this is captured well in a discussion on Twitter on 11 July 2013 (20 days before the actual voting) as shown in Fig 4.1 below.

SirNige	#Twimbos Some use #ZimElections #ZimbabweDecides #ZimDecides #ZimElections2013 Seems like media uses it's own hashtag? #263Chat
SirNige	#Twimbos #263Chat I suggest we keep it simple & short #ZimElections Thoughts please (democracy style)?
keddah83	RT @SirNige: #Twimbos Some use #ZimElections #ZimbabweDecides #ZimDecides #ZimElections2013 Seems like media uses it's own hashtag? #263Chat
Redemptab	@SirNige i think #ZimElections is good, thought we had already agreed to this though.
DutchEmbassyZim	RT @SirNige: #Twimbos Some use #ZimElections #ZimbabweDecides #ZimDecides #ZimElections2013 Seems like media uses it's own hashtag? #263Chat
DutchEmbassyZim	RT @SirNige: #Twimbos #263Chat I suggest we keep it simple & short #ZimElections Thoughts please (democracy style)?
SirNige	RT @redemptab: @SirNige i think #ZimElections is good, thought we had already agreed to this though.// We had. NewsDay DailyNews have theirs
Kuwa_dzana	@SirNige I agree, #ZimElections is short and sweet.
Kuwa_dzana	RT @SirNige: #Twimbos #263Chat I suggest we keep it simple & short #ZimElections Thoughts please (democracy style)?

ZimToBeHeard	@SirNige What # would external observers search for. My guess is something generic & related specifically to the event itself> #ZimElections
SirNige	My thoughts exactly RT @Kuwa_dzana: @SirNige I agree, #ZimElections is short and sweet.
keddah83	RT @SirNige: My thoughts exactly RT @Kuwa_dzana: @SirNige I agree, #ZimElections is short and sweet.
ResurrectZim	RT @SirNige: #Twimbos Some use #ZimElections #ZimbabweDecides #ZimDecides #ZimElections2013 Seems like media uses it's own hashtag? #263Chat
Phathisile	@SirNige #ZimElections for me too #263Chat

Table 4.1

The tweets above are arranged in a manner that the first one on the topic is on top. This was done for ease of reference as they were stored in reverse order in the original Excel file. Transposing tweets has no effect on the data as it is done, in this case, for ease of reference. It has to be mentioned that it is only those tweets, which “talked” about the appropriate hashtags which have been curated and included in Fig 4.1 which means those which may have “talked” about something else are not included here. The “discussion” on which hashtag to use, seems to have ended with an agreement that #Zimelections is the most appropriate hashtag. Despite such an agreement, the researcher realised that other hashtags which were deemed not necessary or appropriate, for example, #Zimdecides and #zimelection were used. It is clear, from Fig 4.1 above that the hashtag to be used may be a choice of the user though there is a tendency to either collectively decide or make use of precedence. It is worth mentioning that TAGS v5 is not case sensitive thus tweets that had #zimelections were captured just like those that were written #Zimelections.

4.2 The data collection process

The use of CDA, a qualitative approach to textual analysis, does not exclude employment of quantitative data collection methods. The data collection process was informed by the theoretical perspective and this meant that the researcher had to constantly refer to initial findings from the data being collected and this would inform further data collection. This is consistent with the

discourse-historical approach as mentioned under 4.1.3 above. Such an approach is in line with what Wodak and Meyer (2009:21) call “theoretical sampling” and in this procedure “data collection is never completely concluded nor excluded and new questions may always arise that require new data or re-examination of earlier data”. In our case, constant reference to the dataset was instrumental in the summarisation process. Summarisation is helpful before any data analysis “because it would simply be impossible to read through millions of tweets” (Sharifi, Inouye & Kalita, 2009:2).

4.3.1 Quantitative data collection methods – challenges and opportunities

After settling on the four hashtags (#zimelections, #zimdecides, #zimelection and #zimdecides2013), the researcher opened four files to start the tweets collection and archiving per respective hashtag and enabled the TAGS v5 to update tweets saved under each of the Google Spreadsheets after every one hour. This means that tweet archiving was continuous even when the researcher was offline. The first files were created on July 5, 2013. After 60 days of data collection, that is on the 6th of September, 2013, the researcher terminated all the tweet collecting files. Resultantly, there were seven different files collecting tweets using #zimelections while the other hashtags had less than 18 000 tweets and thus were contained within one file. Creating a new file and terminating the archiving of tweets in the other meant that there were chances that some tweets would appear in both files. This is so because TAGS v5 uses the search API which means that tweets which are up to nine days old could be archived. It thus meant that all seven #zimelections files had to be merged into one to make data coding and analysis easier. This merging of files meant that the duplicate tweets (appearing on at least two separate files that were merged) were still present. As such, it was necessary to ensure that the duplicate tweets would be deleted. Eliminating duplicate tweets was easily done using Excel built-in mechanisms to that effect. It was also realised that there were chances that the files with less than 18 000 tweets could also have duplicates and the same process was repeated. Duplicates had to be eliminated because they distort the data.

Following the data collection method mentioned above, there was a file each containing tweets using the hashtags #zimelections, #zimelection, #zimdecides and #zimdecides2013. This entire process looked at what can be termed as time-based data series and this includes the overall volume of tweets during the 51 days, the total for each original tweets, retweets, replies and those that contain links, and the number of unique users for each of the four hashtags. Additionally, this process gives important user-based data series, including the distribution of activity (who are the heavy users versus the casual users), user profiles and who posts tweets with links. It is also possible to get to know a user's visibility from the number of retweets that they receive or the number of times they are mentioned or responded to.

4.3.2 Tweeting patterns over the 51 day period

In addition to investigating the tweets, it is also important to get to know the tweeting patterns in the 51 days. As such, the dataset for each of the four hashtags was imported into a statistical software that is called JASP¹¹. JASP is a freeware application that works like commercial statistical software such as SPSS. By using JASP (this is not an acronym see: www.jasp-stats.org), the researcher was able to determine the number of unique users contributing to each of the hashtags. The frequency of date was used as descriptive statistics. This was then exported to excel and a graph was prepared to show the daily volume of tweets over the 51 day period. The resulting graphs are presented under 5.1.1 below with a detailed discussion accompanying the presentation.

4.3.3 Getting the numbers: How many tweets and how many Twitter users?

After the basic data cleaning process, each file containing tweets for each of the four hashtags was given a unique name that did not show any relationship to the research and saved in a folder on the researcher's Google Drive account. (This was done for safe keeping as well as making sure that the data is well protected as one had to crack a strong password to be able to access the tweets. The files which were downloaded for data cleaning and subsequent analysis were also kept in a

¹¹ <https://jasp-stats.org/>

password protected external drive with all the files encrypted.) After the initial data cleaning, each file was then analysed to ascertain the basic quantitative qualities, for example, the number of tweets in each file. It was also necessary to get to know how many users had contributed to either of the hashtags. It was thus ideal to get an application that would help exploit the data further and bring out more quantitative information. It was easy to work with JASP because it can easily import Excel files. What is needed is to convert the Excel file into a comma-separated values (CSV) file, which allows data to be saved in a table structured format, thus making it easy to “read”. The conversion from an Excel file to .csv does not change the data structure. Using JASP, the researcher analysed the four different files to ascertain the number of unique users contributing as well as the number of tweets per hashtag. A unique user is a Twitter user who posted at least one tweet containing any of the hashtags during the 51-day period. To magnify the picture, a simple operation to ascertain the average tweets per user was done. This was achieved by dividing the number of tweets by unique users. The information is presented and discussed in detail below under 5.1.2.

4.3.4.1 Some users tweet more than others. Segmenting the unique users

In order to answer critical questions pertaining to this research, it is important to get to know what the contribution of the top users was, compared to the rest of the users. This requires one to segment the users into the top 1 percent, the top 10 percent and the rest (90 percent). Given the nature of the dataset, it is possible to ascertain how many tweets each unique user contributed to a given hashtag. It is also possible to use JASP to segment the users as per contribution during the 51-day period.

These were the steps which were undertaken:

- i) Each of the four files containing tweets with the respective hashtag was converted into a .csv file and imported into JASP.
- ii) Using the JASP’s built-in functionality, each of the files was analysed for the frequency of the occurrence of each unique user in the entire data set. The computation of the occurrence of the unique user in the dataset was done under the column “from user”.

This was done to avoid a situation whereby the @mention within the dataset could be taken as an occurrence and thus distort the information. Therefore, this frequency reflects on how many times they “tweeted” not about how many times they appear in the entire dataset. Using JASP, the list of unique users had the user names automatically arranged in alphabetical and descending order. The information was saved as a JASP file which was then exported as an Excel file.

- iii) Using Excel, the users were then arranged by order of frequency. This meant that the researcher would sort the data with the user with the highest frequency at the top and the least at the bottom.
- iv) To segment the data further, it was vital to get to know how many users contributed to top 1 percent, 10 percent and bottom 90 percent of the tweets. The researcher calculated 1 percent of the total tweets per hashtag. For example: working with #zimelections, we have to calculate the users segmented into categories of the top 1% followed by the 10% and the rest.
- v) We calculate 1 percent of the users from the number of unique users using a simple mathematical formula:

$$1/100 * \text{number of tweets} = 1\% \text{ of unique users.}$$

This figure was rounded to the nearest whole number

- vi) The next step is to ascertain how many tweets the top 1% of users contributed by going to the Excel file and calculating the sum of the top 1% of users for the hashtag.

Steps v to vi were repeated for the top 10 percent users and how many tweets they had contributed. (Note that the 10 percent is inclusive of the top 1 percent). Calculating the rest of the users (remaining 90 percent) was done by subtracting the total tweets by the top 10 percent from the total number of tweets. The steps i to vi above were repeated for each of the hashtags and this resulted in the quantitative data that is presented and discussed in full detail in the next chapter under section 5.4.

4.3.4.2 Going beyond figures, sampling 100 top users for each hashtag

In addition to getting the numbers of the 1, 10, 90 percentile, it is relevant to further probe these and get a more focused view of who tweeted most. This is important for answering Research Questions 1 and 2. To do this, each of the four files was sorted according to the total number of tweets contributed. The process is almost similar to 4.3.3 above, save to say that the top 100 top users were taken. After getting the top 100 users for each of the four hashtags, the next step was to categorise them. Instead of having predetermined categories, the researcher used the dataset to generate a list of the categories. To get the category of a Twitter user, the researcher went to their profile on Twitter (<https://twitter.com/@username>) to see what they said about themselves. For example, <https://twitter.com/lmakombe> is a link to the researcher's Twitter account profile where one can get information on the user's location when they joined Twitter, the language they use and in some cases their personal website address. Getting to know the top 100 users is important for both quantitative and qualitative analysis. As will be shown in 5.4 below and 6.6.8 below, analysing these top users' contribution to the discourse is vital as it gives insights regarding how they participated.

Further to ascertaining the biodata of the Twitter user, it was also important to get to know how many people followed them. This is vital as it illustrates the size of the user's potential audience. In most cases, a follower makes a deliberate and conscious effort to follow Twitter users so as to get regular updates. Getting the user's total followers could be very tricky as the number may not remain constant as more followers may be joining while others may be "unfollowing". Unfollowing is when a user chooses to stop getting updates of another user they previously were following. To get around this possible challenge, the researcher ensured that the total number of followers as per the last tweets for any of the hashtags were used. Using the number of followers, the unique user had as of the last tweet they posted may not be an accurate measure of how many Twitter users constituted the "audience". However, this measure helps to illustrate how big the imagined audience was. Furthermore, the number of followers one gets on Twitter grows gradually, with very rare occasions when there is a sudden spike. Resultantly, the categorisation of the top 100 users for #zimelections and #zimdecides are presented in Addendum C and D. Only two hashtags out of the four were taken for categorisation of the top 100 users because the hashtags

#zimdecides2013 and #zimelection had fewer unique users (60 and 336 respectively, compared to 8 627 unique users for #zimelections and 1 977 for #zimdecides). It would not have made sense to categorise fewer users for the two hashtags that were omitted. The categorisation of the unique users gives some important pointers regarding who were the main Twitter users for the respective hashtags. Important information that can be deduced from the categorisation process includes their location, their profile, number of followers and how many people they followed.

4.3.5.1 Extracting retweets from the dataset

Retweets are an important metric when one wants to understand a discursive event like the 2013 elections in Zimbabwe. Retweets are an important metric in the sense that they show us how many of the tweets were original and how many were created by someone else with another user re-broadcasting it to their list of followers. As such, the researcher had to get a way of isolating retweets from original Twitter posts or replies to other users. A retweet is denoted by an RT which usually precedes the text, and in the case of a quoted tweet that is being retweeted, it could be a case of the RT being within the body of the tweet. The fact that an RT denotes a retweet makes the isolation of retweets from other tweets a bit easier if one can come up with a script to curate all retweets from each of the four files. The scripting could be easy as the files are already saved in Excel sheet. As such the following steps were undertaken:

- i) A new file name was given using the “save as” functionality. This was done to make sure that the original file was not changed as it has important data that will be worked on.
- ii) The new excel file was made into a table. (This step has no material effect on the data set but it makes it cleaner to work with tabulated data.)
- iii) A new column was inserted at the beginning of the Excel sheet and it was named Retweet.
- iv) In order to be able to flag a tweet that had a Retweet, the following formula was inserted in cell A2:

=IF (ISERROR(FIND("RT",[@text])), "Without RT", "With RT")

What this formula does is to flag each tweet in the Excel sheet, those with an RT will have "With RT" in column A while those without will have "Without RT". A quick check was made on the tweets to make sure that the script was correct.

- v) Now that we know which tweets have RT and those without, it is possible to ascertain the actual quantities by sorting the data using Column A. If the data is sorted descending, it means we will have all tweets with RT first before those without. Thus it will be a simple count to see how many tweets have an RT.

The five steps above were done for all the four files and resultantly the statistics on the total retweets per hashtag were extracted. The analysis of what these figures mean is done in Chapter 5 under section 5.5. The resultant data collected from the steps under 4.3.5 above point one to an informed understanding of the number of retweets against original tweets. It makes sense to go beyond the number of retweets and get more detailed information for example on whether all users stood the same chance of being retweeted. To get information on this, the investigation undertaken is explained in the next section.

4.3.5.2 Investigating the nature of the dialogues

To further probe the retweets, the researcher selected all retweets using the process mentioned above and then saved the file as an Excel spreadsheet. A portion of the tweets was then selected using random sampling following these steps:

- i) The randomise functionality in Excel was used. A new column, "Randomised Retweets", was created and the function "RAND()" inserted and this was repeated in all the cells within the column. The result was that there were random numbers between 0 and 1.

- ii) The random numbers were copied and the pasted within the same column as values. This was done because the random values would change each time the file was refreshed. This sort of “locked” the random numbers.
- iii) The dataset was then sorted using the randomised numbers. This was done by clicking the column with random numbers and then sort in ascending order. This meant that the tweets were now randomly arranged.
- iv) From the sorted data, 5 % of the tweets with links were selected for analysis.

The analysis of randomised tweets entailed looking at who was retweeting and what was retweeted as well as whose tweet was being retweeted.

4.3.6.1 Ascertaining the dialogic nature of the Twitter conversation: Getting the replies

The dialogic nature of Twitter can also be analysed through the way users respond to each other. As stated in Chapter 3 above, in the public sphere, there is a discussion on a topic that affects people as they seek to find solutions. Rationality will prevail in the public sphere should there be a dialogue of some form. As such, this research takes a look at the “in reply to” metric of Twitter to get important insights pertaining to the dialogical nature. There are two forms of “in reply to” and the first one refers to a situation when one types in another user’s name within a tweet. This is done to bring their (the other user’s) attention and, it can be argued, is a way of initiating or perpetuating a debate. The other reply to metric refers to a direct response to what one would have tweeted on their status page. Twitter has a button that allows one to directly reply to a status tweet. The same button can also be used when one is responding to a discussion that is already taking place. In both cases, clicking the reply button entails having all the other users mentioned in the tweet being responded to automatically be added.

To ascertain the basic measure of tweets which were created either in reply to a status or to another tweet, the researcher made use of JASP. Each of the four files was imported (from Excel) into JASP. JASP was then used to calculate the tweets that were a reply to another tweet.

4

4.3.7.1 What is in a tweet with a link? What do links direct us to?

Links are an important component that can be found in a tweet. Links are important in that they may be containing important information which may not be adequately addressed in 140 characters. The facility to shorten links has made posting tweets with links even more convenient. As such, this research sampled some of the links to get to know what was contained in the links that were posted within the tweets. This answers the question on themes addressed during the 51 day period in the Zimbabwe elections.

In order to get tweets with links, it was necessary to come up with a script to be used in the Excel sheet, similar to the one used to ascertain tweets with RT, mentioned 4.3.5.1 above. Following the same steps as those mentioned under 4.3.5.1 above, the following script was used.

```
=IF(ISERROR(FIND("http",[@[text]])),"Without Link","With Link")
```

Despite the various link shortening facilities that are available, all links are preceded by http (hypertext transfer protocol – the foundation for data communication on the internet) and this made it easy to come up with a script that will pick every tweet that had “http”. After running the script, the phrase “With Link” appeared on all tweets that had an http while those without had “Without Link”. Like was done with the retweets, the datasets were sorted so that tweets with links are separate from those without.

4.3.7.2 Sampling tweets with links

Getting to know which tweets had links is only one step towards understanding the data. Additionally, it was necessary to get a way of sampling some of the tweets to get more information on what the links contained. As such, the process of getting tweets with links was repeated for each of the four files. The tweets with links were saved as a different file. A random sample of the tweets had to be made to ensure that those selected for analysis would be representative of the entire dataset. Sampling the tweets was done following the steps mentioned under 4.3.4.2 above.

4.3.8 – Sampling of tweets for analysis

Following the CDA approach, the next step entails randomly sampling tweets from the entire dataset so as to investigate what was being tweeted during the 51 day period. The sampling procedure will be the same as that mentioned under 4.3.4.2 above. Each tweet shall also be analysed for discursive strategies. Through discourse, social actors constitute knowledge, situations, social roles as well as identities and interpersonal relations between various interacting social groups. Discourses play a decisive role in the genesis, production, and construction of certain social conditions and beliefs (ideologies) or transformation of the same. Additionally, textual analysis shall be employed per tweet to identify the theme and topic

To be able to identify the themes, 50 tweets were randomly selected. These tweets were then written down, separately from the dataset. The next step entailed going through another set of 50 tweets and fit the tweet to a theme. To come up with a list of subthemes within the text, the researcher arranged all selected tweets by theme, to further analyse for the subthemes. A sample of tweets under each of the themes was analysed to identify possible subthemes. This was repeated until it was certain that the identified subthemes covered all the tweets. This step helps address RQ2 and RQ3 as it answers questions on the topics and themes raised or discussed on the tweets collected as well as ascertaining who was addressed.

It is also vital to ascertain the social actors. This entailed going through the sample tweets and getting the list of names of people or institutions mentioned. The names were then categorised based on who or what they were.

It very important to ascertain how the dominant discourse participants used Twitter during the 2013 elections in Zimbabwe and to be able to do so, I needed to sample specific tweets from the platform's top users. Selecting the tweets for sampling will follow these steps:

- 1) Save the dataset under a new name and arrange the tweets by user alphabetically
- 2) Refer to the list of top 100 users and highlight tweets by these users
- 3) Select tweets by the top 100 users and copy into a new Excel sheet

4) We then follow the steps listed under 4.3.5.2 above

After going through these steps, I then used discourse-historical analysis to ascertain how these dominant users participated during the 2013 elections in Zimbabwe.

4.3.9 – What networks emerge from the use of Twitter during the 2013 elections?

There are networks that emerged as a result of the use of Twitter during the 2013 elections in Zimbabwe and it is important that these be probed as a means to answer some of the research questions. The networks that emerged go beyond the use of the hashtags, as the use of the reply to and mention functionality of Twitter allows for the formation of a network of users. Borrowing from the network society approach, the Twitter users, who contributed to the four hashtags during the 51 day period act as nodes. Interactions between Twitter users through the @reply and @mention can give one an important insight into the nature of networks and ascertain if the networks show the characteristics of the network society. To get a full picture of the networks, one has to work on the data so that the links and the connections between nodes are exposed.

To be able to map the networks that emerged as a result of the use of the four hashtags, it was important to use other programs. Additional simple scripting skills may also be required to work on the dataset to establish the nature of the networks that emerge. The researcher has basic scripting skills and where in doubt would consult a number of internet sites including:

- i) www.excel-easy.com/vba.html
- ii) <http://analysistabs.com/excel-vba/codes-examples-macros-how-to-most-useful-basics-advanced/>

It may have been possible to make use of online data visualisation tools but it has its limitation as it is not possible to further probe the data as has been done below. The following steps, which are partly informed by the researcher's prior knowledge of social network analysis and use of social network software, as well as consulting www.martingrandjean.ch, were taken.

- 1) Each file was saved under a new name and had all but two columns, from user and text, removed

- 2) The new file, with two columns only (from and text), was saved as .csv file
- 3) Since the researcher was using Gephi, (an open-source and free visualization and exploration software for all kinds of graphs and networks¹²) it was necessary to first of all further clean the files and prepare them so that they are easily read by Gephi
- 4) To further clean the data and prepare it, for easy reading by Gephi, the research made use of OpenRefine (formerly Google Refine, a tool for working with messy data: cleaning it; transforming it from one format into another, and extending it with web services and external data¹³).
- 5) The .csv file was opened in OpenRefine, as a new project, and an additional column (From) was added based on the from user column and this short script was inserted:

(str "@ " value)

6. The purpose of the script was to prefix Twitter users' names with the @. Thus, for example, Imakombe became @Imakombe thus the values in the column "From" now started with the @ symbol
7. Another column based on the Text column was also created and the following script was inserted:

(apply str (interpose "," (filter #(contains? #{\# \@} (first %)) (.split value " "))))

8. What the script in step 7 does is to filter text from the @mentions and the #tags within the new column. The text is automatically discarded leaving @mentions and #tags in the new column which was named "To"
9. The two original columns "From user" and "Text" were removed to remain with the two new columns ("From" and "To")
10. Using OpenRefine's the "To" cells were split "with multivalued cells" with "," separator
11. In the rows mode, the empty cells were filled down and to clean the data further the script was used:

¹² <https://gephi.org/>

¹³ <http://openrefine.org/>

(.replace value “.” “”)

12. The script under 11 above had the effect of removing characters which do not belong to names. The file was exported as .csv and opened in Gephi
13. In Gephi the data was further cleaned with non-nodes, such as To and From which had been read from the .csv file removed.
14. Relevant labels were activated and the appropriate layout selected and applied.
15. With these steps, a network graph could be played in the preview mode of the Gephi.

4.4 Conclusion

This chapter linked the theoretical perspectives to the collections of data so as to be able to answer the research questions underpinning this study. This entailed further expanding on the exploration of CDA, to confirm its relevance and adequacy as a methodology that can be adapted to address the research questions. It was shown that CDA is premised on a critical theory stance that is interested in social involvement and change. Although not claiming objectivity, CDA uses triangulation, which entails using different data collection methods to help further interrogate a phenomenon and increase validity and reliability of the final information that is presented. Triangulation was used extensively in this chapter as the researcher made use of various data collection tools and approaches. The collected data, both qualitative and quantitative, will be further interrogated in the next chapter to help answer the research questions and in so doing expose the participatory patterns on the Twitter platform that emerged in Zimbabwe during the 2013 elections.

Chapter 5 Quantitative Data Analysis

5.1 Introduction

The data collection methodology adopted for this research unavoidably leads to quantitative and qualitative findings. For practical purposes and for clarity, the discussion and presentation of the findings of the quantitative and the qualitative data analyses will be done separately in two chapters (Chapter 5 and 6). The separation of the data is by no means an attempt to give prominence to one approach over the other but to ensure that adequate attention is given to each methodology. Ultimately, all data analyses are done to answer the overarching research question, that is, How did Twitter facilitate public participation in the election of a new government in Zimbabwe in 2013? as well as the four specific research questions. As such, this chapter focuses on the quantitative findings and relate them to the research questions, particularly RQ1 (on who initiated key discourses on the 2013 elections in Zimbabwe on Twitter). Quantitative analysis also helps answer RQ4 (if the networks that emerged exhibit characteristics of the network society and public sphere, though characteristics of a public sphere may not be fully analysed using quantitative data). There are instances, within this chapter, where the data analysed also help answer RQ2 on which portions of society were addressed within the Twitter discourse. Critical theory lenses are going to be used to analyse the findings in this chapter and the succeeding one. As pointed out in Chapters 1 and 3 using critical theory allows one to question the veracity of the supposition that technology use will bring change in society. Critical theory allows us to question if the presence of Twitter as a communication platform in 2013 facilitated public political participation and if so, to what extent.

5.1.1 The Tweeting patterns during the 2013 Zimbabwe elections

The total collected tweets, across the four selected hashtags, show that #zimelections was the most widely used hashtag with 62 699 tweets followed by #zimdecides with 11 106. The other hashtags (#zimelection and #zimdecides2013) have a significantly lower number of tweets at 811 and 87 respectively. The low volume in terms of the number of tweets for #zimelection and #zimdecides2013 makes it rather difficult to perform certain statistical analyses as the findings

may not be helpful in giving us insights that help answer the research questions. Thus there are instances, in this chapter and the succeeding one, where only #zimelections and #zimdecides are used because of the acceptably high number of tweets.

Pertaining to the number of tweets, it can be argued that the 811 tweets for #zimelection, could be a typographical variation or even error. A Twitter user may have wanted to use #zimelections but omitted the last letter. Alternatively, given Twitter's character restrictions, it could be a way of making sure that the tweet is within the 140 character limit. Regarding #zimdecides2013, it is understandable that there are so few tweets (87) mainly because of the character limit (this hashtag consumes 15 characters compared to 11 characters used in #zimdecides. The number of characters used in a tweet is very important as anything beyond 140 characters may not be posted and thus, in this case, every character counts and users try to truncate them as far much as possible). The significant differences in the number of tweets that were collected for each of the four hashtags also show that there were varying levels of understanding of which hashtags to use. Having only 87 tweets collected under #zimdecides2013, against say, 62 699 for #zimelections, over a 51 day period shows that there could have been some users who failed to join the mainstream discussion.

For insight into the tweeting patterns over the 51 day period, it is vital to know how many tweets were posted per day. The process of ascertaining tweets per day was discussed in detail above under 4.3.2. The frequency, in this case, and all the other cases within this chapter, refers to the number of tweets which were recorded per day using a specific hashtag. It has been termed frequency because we are looking at the number of times that the hashtag appears within a day.

The resultant information can then be presented in a graph:

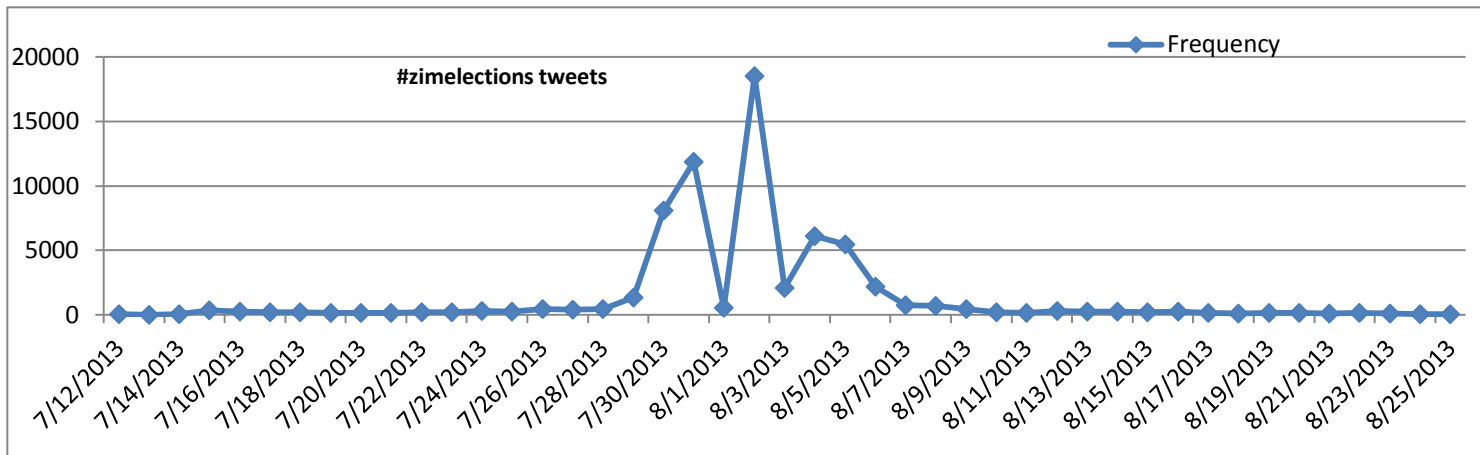


Figure 5.1

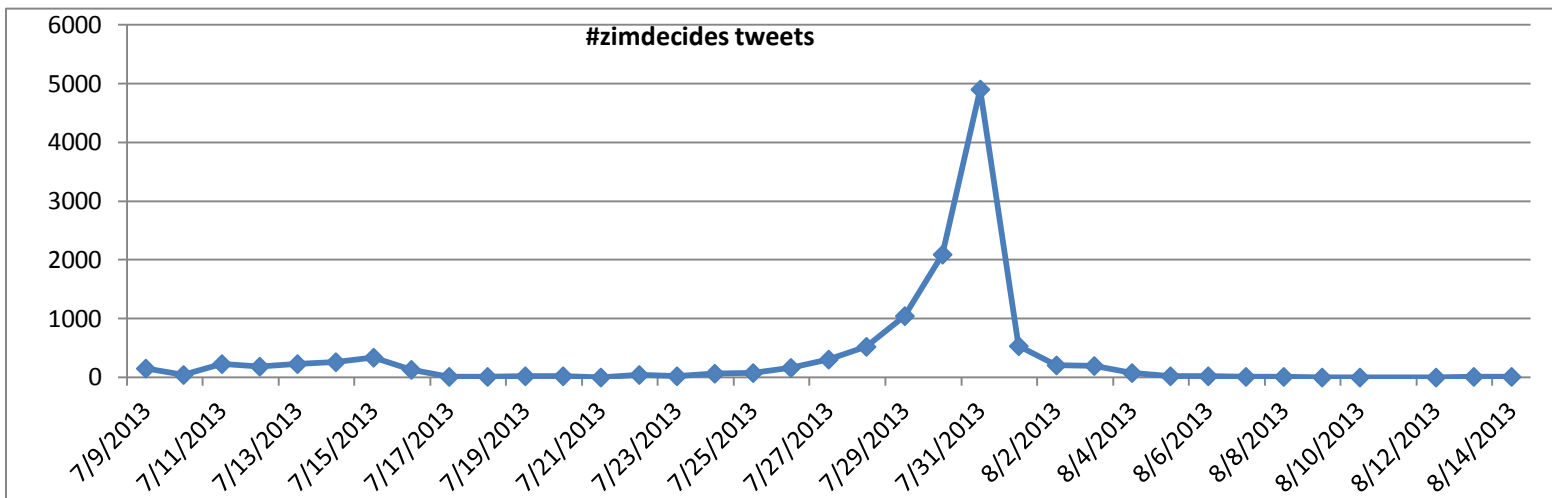


Figure 5.2

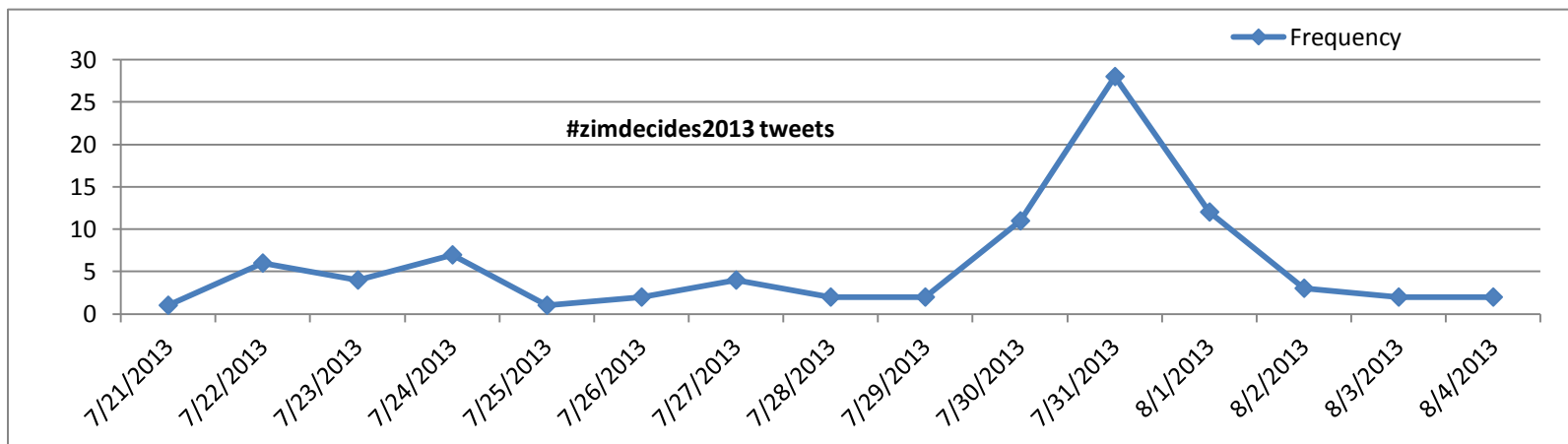


Figure 5.3

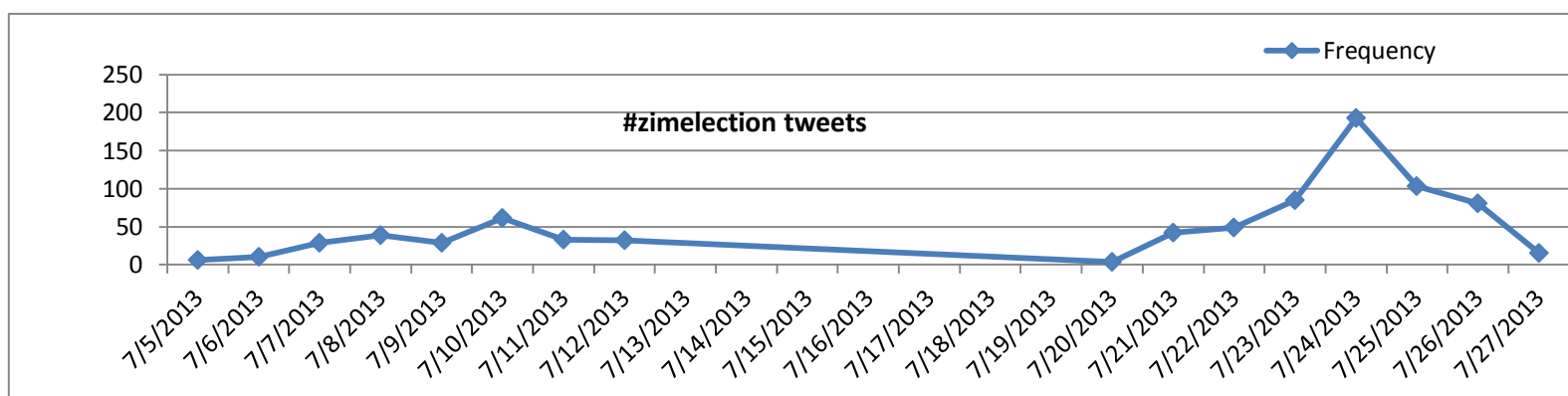


Figure 5.4

The graphs above show that tweeting around all the four hashtags started low but gained momentum over time and spiked on the 31st of July or a day or two after. Subsequently, volumes started ebbing immediately after the elections day. Interestingly, the tweets using #zimelection peaked before elections day, then rapidly receded. Tweets using #zimelection terminated about four days before voting started. There could be a number of reasons for this, one being that the people using this hashtag realised the popularity of the other two that is #zimelections and #zimdecides and joined it. Alternatively, it could have been caused by a problem with the system, this is very unlikely given that TAGS v5 is almost self-running and only has problems when it reaches the 18 000 tweets limit. There were very few tweets around #zimelection making the first explanation more plausible. The data collected for #zimelection will be analysed as it is.

The Twitter activities shown on the graphs above mean that users definitely made use of the platform during the 2013 elections in Zimbabwe. This is further buttressed by the rapid increase in the number of tweets a few days before the elections for #zimelections, #zimdecides and even #zimdecides2013 which has very few tweets. This means that with all the discussion on the elections, be it offline or in the mainstream media, Twitter users started using the platform to discuss the pending elections. The gradual drop in the number of tweets for #zimelections and #zimdecides after the voting period (July 31) and the announcement of the results (August 1–2) shows that interest in the topic had started to recede. While giving indications which can answer the central research question on how the social media platform facilitated public political participation during an election, this does not present the full story as it does not answer the specific research question on who initiated key discourses on the platform during the election period in Zimbabwe in 2013. The figures above show that there was access to the platform but the story should not end there. In 2013 the official statistics showed that 39.8% of the population, that is 5.2 million people, had access to the internet up from 4.4 million in the previous year (POTRAZ, 2013). This rapid increase has a bearing on how the Twitter platform could be used for public political participation as more people access the internet. However, it will amount to a technology deterministic approach or conclusion if one was to use these figures as a testimony of the role of the Twitter platform during the 2013 elections in Zimbabwe without probing deeper, as will be done below. This is not to discount the information as it is important for laying a basis for the next level of critical analysis, that is, ascertaining: “Who initiated key discourse on the Twitter platform during the 2013 elections in Zimbabwe?”

5.1.2 Looking at the volumes of tweets and what they tell us

As presented under 4.3.3 above, tweets using any of four hashtags were separately collected and archived using TAGS v5. There were further processes undertaken as explained in Chapter 4, to enumerate unique users contributing to each of the hashtags. Resultantly, the number of tweets and the unique users contributing to each of the hashtags can be presented as:

Hashtag	Number of users	Number Tweets
Zimdecides	1 977	11 106
Zimelections	8 627	62 699
zimdecides2013	60	87
zimelection	336	811
Total		74 703

Table 5.1

The figures presented in Table 5.1 can further be broken down to give us an idea of the activity of the unique users, that is an average of how many tweets each contributed to the hashtag. The average tweets per user can be presented as:

Hashtag	Number users	Number Tweets	Mean tweets per user
Zimdecides	1 977	11 106	5.62
Zimelections	8 627	62 699	7.27
zimdecides2013	60	87	1.45
zimelection	336	811	2.41

Table 5.2

Using a measure of central tendency, that is the mean, helps give an idea of the activities of the unique users but it has a disadvantage of discounting for the outliers. Giving the average contribution per user over the 51 day period gives a blurred picture of the users' activities and may not be telling the story well. For example, using #zimdecides, it was shown that each user contributed an average 5.62 tweets, which can be rounded as 6 tweets during the 51 day period. This would mean that a user was contributing a tweet on average every 8 days. To move closer to the actual activities of the various users, it is necessary to further probe these figures and ensure that the activity per user can be shown. This will illustrate the role that the platform played in facilitating public political participation and ensure that we do not make conclusions which are not supported by what was prevailing then.

5.3 Segmenting the Twitter users, some tweet more than others

It is logical to further break down the data for deeper analysis and this would help shed more light on who initiated key discourses during the elections in Zimbabwe in 2013. As explained above under 4.3.4.2 Twitter users were segmented into the top 1%, the next 10% and the rest by contributions. The 10%, in this case, is inclusive of the top 1% thus it can be represented as the 1/9+1/90 approach. Using this approach gives us the following figures:

Hashtag	Number Tweets	Tweets by top 1% users	% tweets by top 1% users	Tweets by top 10% users	% tweets by top 10%	Tweets by lower 90%	% tweets by rest of users
Zimdecides	11 106	1 833	16.5	5 290	47.63	5 816	52.37
Zimelections	62 699	19 233	30.68	39 343	62.75	23 356	37.25
zimdecides2013	87	5	5.75	10	11.49	77	88.51
zimelection	811	117	14.43	412	50.8	399	49.2

Table 5.3

It is interesting to note that the top 1% for the two most widely used hashtags that is #zimelections and #zimdecides, contributed 30.7% and 16.5% of the total tweets, respectively. This means a very tiny minority of Twitter users contributed most of the tweets. The figures are more telling when one looks at the contribution of the top 10% of the users. In the case of #zimelections, the top 10% of users contributed to 62.7% of the total tweets while 47.6% of the tweets with #zimdecides came from the top 10% of the users. Already, it is clear that there is a divide on the Twitter platform as there are those who participate actively while there are others who seem to do so casually. There should be a reason for this and to establish such a reason will help us answer RQ1.

The dominance of the platform by a small number of users, who can be said to be super nodes in the language of network society theory, makes us go on to the next level of analysis as we seek to ascertain who they are and what makes them so. It is rather surprising that there is such a significant divide online when technology determinists had seen it as giving a voice to previously

unrecognised groups. It will be interesting to know if the dominant players are those that could not have their voices heard through the traditional media. This will further refine our understanding of “Who initiated key discourses on Twitter during the 2013 elections in Zimbabwe?”

5.4 Who are the top twitter users (super nodes) per hashtag

Getting to know the top 100 Twitter users for two of the hashtags (#zimelections and #zimdecides), see Addendum C and D, further adds to our understanding of the discursive actors and at the same time answer Research Question 1 and 3. As argued in 4.3.4.2 above, it makes sense to get the 100 top users for these two hashtags as the other two, that is #zimelection and #zimdecides2013 have very few users, less than 100 in the case of the latter. An analysis of the top 100 users for each of the two hashtags shows a very interesting category of users and how frequently they appear on the list.

Frequencies for category of top 100 users imelections

Category	Freque
NA	19
Activist	19
Individual	18
Journalist	13
Media Organisation	10
International	2
ICT Specialist	2
Civic Organisation	2
Media Organisation	1
Internet Radio	1
ICT specialist	1
Human Rights	1
Human Rights	1
Film Organisation	1
Embassy	1
Elections	1
Digital content	1
Civic Orgs Coalition	1
Citizen platform	1
Author	1
Organisation	1
Political scientist	1
Zim Radio Station	1
Total	10

Table 5.4**Frequencies for category of top 100 users**

Category	Frequency
Individual	20
Journalist	18
NA	16
Activist	12
Media Organisation	8
Organisation	6
Radio Station	2
ICT Specialist	2
Religious Organisation	1
Publisher	1
Political Party	1
Media Organisation CEO	1
Journalist / PR	1
Internet Radio Station	1
International organisation	1
ICT specialist	1
Embassy	1
Elections Organisation	1
Editor	1
Civic Organisation	1
Citizen platform	1
Blogger	1
Author	1
AU Commissioner	1
Total	100

Table 5.5

5.4.1 Analysing the category of users

For #zimelections, there are 22 identifiable categories among the top 100 users while there are 23 categories for #zimdecides. The coding for the categories as explained above in Chapter 4, were not predetermined. The researcher had to go to each individual profile and come up with categories when going through the list of the top 100 users. Initially, there were challenges as some of the

Twitter accounts were no longer in use. A Twitter account can be suspended for a number of reasons including spamming, that is if the account is used to send certain undesirable messages or abusive language is used in some tweets.¹⁴ Additionally, there were Twitter profiles which though active, were not clear as to how to categorise the user. Instead of leaving these out, the researcher came up with a category that is labeled NA. This categorisation makes it possible to capture all the users who contributed to the hashtags during the 51 day period.

5.4.1.1 Media related users' categories and what they mean

The categories are not cast in stone as there are instances where they may overlap, for example in the case of #zimelections media organisation, media organisation CEO, internet radio station, human rights writer, film organisation, digital content producer, Zim(babwe) radio station and journalist have one thing in common. The common factor for these is that they are into media and information processing. For #zimdecides, the categories exhibiting common characteristics are journalist, media organisation, radio station, publisher, media organisation CEO, journalist / public relations, internet radio station, editor, author, and blogger. Media organisation is taken as a being because organisations do not tweet but people working there do so. If it is a media organisation, chances are the person/people tweeting on behalf of the organisation is most likely a media professional. These have been categorised as separate entities for the reason that lumping them together may have failed to articulate the differences in a manner that gives us a better understanding of the different discourse actors.

Taken together, the nine categories which have a common interest under #zimelections give us a sum of 29 users who are involved in the collection, processing, and dissemination of information. This is close to 30% of the users, meaning almost 3 in every 10 top users were involved in the collection, processing, and dissemination of information. In like manner, the 10 common categories of users using #zimdecides and have media and information dissemination as their background add to 35. This means that seven in every 20 users were those whose profession was to collect, process and disseminate information. The picture becomes clearer when one looks at

¹⁴ <https://support.twitter.com/articles/15790>

the volumes of tweets by these users. For example, if we take #zimdecides, the media related users accounted for 45.61% of the 4 107 tweets by the top 100 users. This means that the media related users posted nine out of every 20 tweets by the top 100 users. For #zimelections, 6 507 of the 20 469 tweets by the top 100 users originated from the media related category, giving a 31.79% total contribution. What makes these people super users and how does it answer RQ1?

Using a hashtag means someone is aware of the rules, that is, they know that to enter the discussion one has to use a certain hashtag. Using any one of the hashtags is a sign that they were aware of the existence of the hashtags and there was a deliberate effort to use their own discretion to pick what they thought was the most appropriate hashtag. Additionally, one has to have resources to be able to tweet. Resources may mean time, information and the requisite technology to post on the platform. This is understandable as media personnel have adequate time and the information to post as it is their professional requirement. It is also possible that they have connectivity, that is, they are living in those areas where they can connect to the internet or are able to post on the Twitter platform. Thus when answering RQ1, it can safely be argued that those who initiated key discourses on Twitter were mainly media related personnel among others. This was so because they had resources as well as the capacity to follow trends as is required by their profession. Section 5.4.1.6 below further explores the issues of resources and how they may influence public political participation on Twitter in Zimbabwe in 2013.

5.4.1.2 Activists tweeting and what this means

Apart from those involved in the business of information dissemination, the other category comprises users who mentioned on their profiles that they were activists or described themselves in a manner that showed that they were such. There were 19 activists among the top 100 users for #zimelections which is close to a fifth and the figure was significantly lower for #zimdecides at 12. Taking #zimdecides, for example, the users falling into the activist category contributed 401 tweets to the 4 107 total tweets by the top 100 users to the hashtag. This brings to 9% the total contributions and it means that activists were contributing close to 1 tweet for every 10 that were posted. Activists, like information dissemination professionals, may get involved in tweeting about elections because of the professional requirements or they are made to do so by the organisations

they work for. In this regard, it can be argued that the activists have a professional duty or are duty bound to post tweets as it is most likely related to their activities. They may also have the resources, that is, the time, the information, the technology, connectivity and the capacity to tweet.

5.4.1.3 When organisations tweet and what it means

Some of the users who used the Twitter platforms to tweet about the Zimbabwe elections in 2013 mentioned on their profiles that they are organisations. There are seven such categories of users who used #zimelections and these have been coded as organisation, international organisation, civic organisation, human rights organisation, elections organisation and civic organisations coalition, and these have a total of 18 users. For #zimdecides, there are six such categories with a sum of 10 users. The categories for #zimdecides are a civic organisation, elections organisation, international organisation, political party, religious organisation and one mentioned as an organisation. The one that is coded as an organisation could not be further categorised but it is clear from the profile that they are an organisation. What these categories and numbers show us is that there is close to a fifth of the top 100 users who used #zimelections, who are organisations, while the figure is at one in 10 for #zimdecides. Organisations do not tweet but certain people do so on their behalf. What this means is that organisations make use of their capacity and resources to send certain messages. Interestingly, there are organisations such as Kubatana, which feature prominently in this category. Kubatana's main mandate is to spread information and encourage citizen sharing of information through various platforms as mentioned in Chapter 2. This was their focus in 2008 elections and they seem to have continued on this path in 2013. As such, like media related users and activists, organisations are possibly users with resources allocated specifically for information dissemination and would influence the discussion.

5.4.1.4 Individuals tweeting in their own capacity

Interestingly, there are some Twitter users whose profiles showed no relation to an organisation or stated that they were tweeting on their own behalf, thus their contributions could be taken as personal. These users constitute 18% and 20% respectively for the top 100 users using

#zimelections and #zimdecides. These are most likely ordinary people who have an interest in the elections and to have one in five of the top 100 comprising such users is very informative. It is testimony that there a noticeable number of ordinary people who used the platform to express their views, share information or ask/respond to questions. This altogether brings a new trajectory, as it brings into the mix a new category of users who felt the need to use the platform for expression of most likely personal views. However, a further analysis shows that despite contributing to 20% and 18% to the total of 100 top users for #zimelections and #zimdecides respectively, the actual contribution in terms of tweets is significantly lower. The 20 users who are on the list of top 100 users for #zimelections contributed 3 038 tweets out of the 20 469 total tweets. This gives us a 14.84% contribution. A significantly lower number of tweets is evident for the 18 users who are on the list of top 100 users for #zimdecides who contributed 575 tweets out of a total of 4 162 total, which amounts to a 13%. It is thus clear that despite the openness of the platform, there are some factors which could have favoured the activist, media personnel or organisations over the individual. As discussed below under 5.4.1.5, one of the major constraints could be resources in the form of the right technology devices and access to the internet.

5.4.1.5 What resources were used to tweet

Resources have a decisive role on whether a Twitter user is able to tweet or not. Some of the resources include the technology devices (computers, phones or iPad), internet access (that is connectivity as well as enough credit to access the internet) and informational resources such as being a Twitter user and knowing how to tweet as well as which hashtags to use. Additionally, time and what to tweet were resources necessary for one to join a discussion. While it may not be possible to ascertain how each of the resources may have influenced public political participation in Zimbabwe during the 2013 elections, it is possible to analyse the platforms that were used to post tweets as the measure will give us an insight into the significance of resources. Analysing the platforms used to post the tweets allows us to see which devices and platforms were used to post the tweets and what it may mean for public political participation in elections. The tables below show the 10 most widely used platforms and how much they contributed to the total tweets.

Frequencies for source #zimelections		
Platform	Frequency	Percent
Web	16685	26.1
Twitter for BlackBerry	9716	15.2
Twitter for iPhone	9579	15
Twitter for Android	7976	12.5
Mobile Web (M2)	3690	5.8
TweetDeck	3659	5.7
Twitter for iPad	2254	3.5
Tweet Button	1532	2.4
UberSocial for BlackBerry	1481	2.3
RoundTeam	1228	1.9

Table 5.6

Frequencies for source #zimdecides		
Platform	Frequency	Percent
Web	2982	25.1
Twitter for Android	1563	13.1
Twitter for iPhone	1445	12.1
Twitter for BlackBerry	1204	10.1
Mobile Web (M2)	1169	9.8
TweetDeck	1013	8.5
Tweet Button	272	2.3
Twitter for iPad	246	2.1
HootSuite	215	1.8
Facebook	206	1.7

Table 5.7

Tables 5.7 and 5.8 above show us that most of the tweets were sent via the web platform, with an almost the same percentage (25% for #zimdecides and 26% for #zimelections) contribution to the total. What this means is that the majority of those who may have posted during the 2013 elections used laptops or personal computers to post their tweets from the Twitter website (<http://www.twitter.com>). The Twitter website is publicly accessible but one has to log in and use your user name and password to be able to post a tweet, reply to a post or retweet. One needs to have internet access to be able to use the Twitter web. The other top platforms that were used after the web included smartphones (iPhone and BlackBerry), and this means that one needed to have been able to buy such phones, install the necessary apps and have enough data to be able to participate. With 15% of the tweets under #zimelections coming from users posting via Blackberry and a similar percentage for those using iPhone, one can argue that these smartphones accounted for about 30% of the tweets that were posted. The figure is slightly lower at about 22% for #zimdecides. Smartphones are not ordinary phones as they may not be compared to entry-level phones in terms of prices. As such, over and above the other requirements, the user should have been able to buy the phone and know which software (mostly referred to as apps) to install and start participating. These requirements for one to be able to participate using a smartphone may be considered as covert entry barriers. Participation via Twitter meant that one had to overcome these covert barriers through knowing which apps to install, having enough money to buy a smartphone and have enough data credit to be able to connect and post tweets. This could be exacerbated by the fact that internet access is not evenly distributed within the country and it is mainly concentrated in the urban areas (see Addendum A).

5.5 Where do the top Twitter users come from?

As part of answering RQ1, it is vital to locate where the top users contributing to the hashtags come from. This answers the question related to who participated via Twitter as one should not only look at the characteristic of the user but also their location. It is vital to confirm that the people tweeting on the elections are from Zimbabwe or have mentioned their locations. This is possible as there are times when BOTS¹⁵ are used to either retweet a certain hashtag or post a certain link.

¹⁵ a software application that runs automated tasks (scripts) over the Internet

Using the steps mentioned in Chapter 4 above, the location of the top 100 users for the two most used hashtags can be represented in tables 5.9 and 5.10 below.

There are 16 and 17 different locations identifiable in the location of the top 100 users for #zimelections and #zimdecides respectively. This does not include the NA, a location which either entails a discontinued/suspended account or where one does not specify where they are located. Interestingly, for both hashtags, there are users who mention their location as Zimbabwe, while others chose Harare. Fewer and insignificant users mentioned other towns in Zimbabwe. As such, the two, Harare and Zimbabwe, refer to the same location and when doing data analysis the two are combined. One other outstanding statistic is the significantly high number of top users who declare that they are domiciled in South Africa. This could be a result of the influx of Zimbabweans to the neighbouring country or it could be because there are many people living in South Africa who closely follow Zimbabwe politics.

Answering RQ1, it is evident from the information below that those using these hashtags were in most cases domiciled in Zimbabwe and were directly concerned about and connected to the elections in 2013. This, however, has to be married to the fact that there is also a significant number of outsiders who showed interest in the elections. This could be explained by the number of Zimbabweans living out of the country or the interest elections in Zimbabwe attract because of the allegations of rigging and violence.

Frequencies for Where they

Country	Frequency
Zimbabwe	37
South	17
NA	17
Harare	9
Africa	4
UK	3
New York	2
Brazil	2
USA	1
Qatar	1
Namibia	1
Global	1
Germany	1
Falls	1
Durban	1
Canada	1
Australia	1
Total	100

Frequencies for Where they are

Country	Frequency
Zimbabwe	48
NA	18
South Africa	5
Qatar	5
Harare	5
USA	3
UK	3
Africa	2
Uganda	1
Thessaloniki	1
Namibia	1
Malawi	1
Kyrgyzstan	1
Italy	1
Germany	1
Durban	1
Denmark	1
AU	1
Total	100

Table 5.8**Table 5.9**

This is confirmed by the spread of users across the world. This is a clear testimony of the global nature of the communications networks that emerged as a result of the use of the platform to discuss the 2013 elections in Zimbabwe. The location of the Twitter users helps us tell who initiated key discourses during the elections in Zimbabwe. With the majority coming from Zimbabwe, it can safely be said that Zimbabweans largely initiated key discourses on Twitter during the elections in 2013. This further enlightens our understanding of the role of the platform

in facilitating public political participation. What may not be clear or conclusive is which type of Zimbabweans used this platform.

5.6 When did the top users join Twitter?

Looking at the two widely used hashtags, the year that the users joined Twitter can be presented as:

Year joined #zimelections	
Year	Users
2007	4
2008	4
2009	34
2010	8
2011	10
2012	10
2013	8
NA	22
Total	100

Table 5.10

Year joined #zimdecides	
Year	Users
2007	2
2008	3
2009	33
2010	10
2011	12
2012	11
2013	9
NA	20
Total	100

Table 5.11

Another way of answering RQ1 is to also look at the profile of the top users and get to know when they joined Twitter. The time that one joined Twitter is important in that it shows us if these are casual users or they are seasoned users. Interestingly, most of the users joined Twitter after 2009, with the majority having done so in that year and this could be attributed to the so-called “Twitter Revolutions” in Moldova and Iran as discussed in Chapter 1. The increase in the number of users in 2011 for both #zimelections and #zimdecides could also be linked to the so-called Arab Spring, where the mainstream media and activists attributed the success of the revolts to the use of social media, including Twitter (See Chapter 1 and 2 for a detailed discussion).

The fact that most users joined in 2009 means they are not casual users but are attracted to the platform and know how it operates. They are mature users, who joined the platform not specifically for the impending elections which may also mean that they use Twitter for other purposes and they bring these experiences to the discussion on the 2013 elections in Zimbabwe. What this also means is that these are users who know how to use the platform, especially the use of certain metrics and functions such as hashtags, retweeting or @mentioning or @ replying.

5.7 Ascertaining the original tweets and retweets

Separating the original tweets from retweets helps give further information pertaining to the dialogical nature of the discourse on Twitter during the 2013 elections. An analysis of the retweets also helps to analyse the power relations as not all Twitter users are retweeted the same. From the total tweets, the following retweets are found:

Hashtag	number users	Number Tweets	Total number Retweets (RT)	% RT to total tweets
Zimdecides	1 977	11 106	5 637	50.75
Zimelections	8 627	62 699	31 777	50.68
zimdecides2013	60	87	18	20.69
zimelection	336	811	294	36.25

Table 5.12

A reading of Table 5.13 shows that retweets constituted slightly more than half of the tweets for the two most widely used hashtags (#zimelections and #zimdecides). This further confirms that the bulk of the content on Twitter on the 2013 elections in Zimbabwe was rebroadcasted, that is, it was posted several times on the platform.

In addition to getting the total number of retweets per hashtag, it is also found that the power relations pertaining to who and what is retweeted reflects the online power relations and organisational capacity. It is clear that in as much as the Twitter users shared information via the platform, the retweeted information follows a certain pattern.

	1%	10%	90%
Total tweets	14875	23847	7353
% contribution to all	47.67628	76.43	23.57

Table 5.13

	1%	10%	90%
Total tweets	1647	3675	1845
% contribution to all RT	29.83	66.57	33.42

Table 5.14

To start with, for the two widely used hashtags, there is a dominance of retweets by a minority. The two tables, (table 5.14 and 5.15) show that the top 1% of the users to be retweeted account for close to 48% and 30% of the total for retweets under #zimelections and #zimdecides respectively. The dominance of retweets by the minority is even more pronounced when one looks at the top 10% for the two hashtags. The top 10% of those retweeted account for 76% and 67% respectively for #zimelections and #zimdecides. This is clearly an illustration of the attention divide that prevails on Twitter. There are some tweets which stand a better chance to be rebroadcast (retweeted) than others. It could be a case of a certain category of people getting the attention, or dominating it to the extent that most of their posts get rebroadcast.

In order for us to be able to tell why a minority of users managed to get most of the retweets, it is important to further break down the information presented above. This is in line with answering RQ1, as the users who get retweeted, to some extent, initiate a discussion which gets the attention of others who decide to broadcast it. As such, it is necessary to have a look at the users who received the top retweets for the two most widely used hashtags as shown by the two tables (Table 5.16 and 5.17) below.

Frequencies for Who was RT #zimdecides (top 1%)			
User	Frequency	Percent	Category
@xyy ¹⁶	910	16.5	journalist
@BBCAfrica:	344	6.2	News Organisation
@AJELive:	134	2.4	News Organisation
@radiodialoguefm:	130	2.4	Radio Station
@Xyz ¹⁷	129	2.3	Activist

Figure 5.15

Frequencies for #zimelections RT top 1%

Category	Frequency	Percent
Activist	2	6.9
Entrepreneur	1	3.4
Individual	1	3.4
Journalist	6	20.7
Media Organisation	8	27.6
Media Organisation + journalists	1	3.4
Media Organisation CEO	1	3.4
News Organisation	1	3.4
Organisation	5	13.8
President Media Organisation	1	3.4
Writer	1	3.4
Total	26	100.0

Table 5.16

¹⁶ For ethical reasons, the user's profile name has not been used here. The organisation profile names are used as they are public organisations and they even list the Twitter profiles on their websites

¹⁷ For ethical reasons, the user's profile name has not been used here. The profile names are used as they are public organisations and they even list the Twitter profiles on their websites

Using the coding scheme that was used in 5.4 above, the top 100 users to be retweeted were also put into certain categories. It remains consistent that media organisations, media personnel or those associated with information processing and dissemination dominate the list of those who were retweeted for #zimelections and #zimdecides. For #zimelections, 19 out of the 26 users are related to information processing and dissemination. In the case of #zimdecides, four out of the five users are within the category of those entities or individuals who are into information processing and dissemination. This is understandable as these have access to requisite resources and thus may be producing more information compared to other users. However, this raises a question if this dominance led to the public political participation. Such a dominance by a minority with special interest in the election may not have enhanced the platform's role to facilitate public political participation. The dominance of the minority in terms of the tweets sent and chances of being retweeted shows the power dynamics within the Twittersphere and the well-resourced seem to always dominate the less well resourced. This shows that there is also an attention divide as Twitter users are attracted more to certain information from a specific category of users.

5.7 The dialogic nature of the Twitter discourse on Zimbabwe elections

As shown in the preceding chapter under section 4.3.6.1, the @mention and the @reply metrics are vital in ascertaining the level of engagement. It was found that from the collected tweets, the overall mentions and replies could be summarised in a table as:

Hashtag	Number Tweets	In Reply to screen name	In reply to status ID
Zimdecides	11 106	799	644
Zimelections	62 699	5 421	4 250
zimdecides2013	87	10	6
zimelection	811	324	244

Table 5.17

A further analysis of the dialogic nature gives a deeper understanding of the nature of the discussions, the power dynamics at play as well as the dominant actors in these discussions. An

analysis of the volumes of @mentions and @reply gives a pointer to the levels to which there was engagement. An analysis of these @replies and @mentions shows the dialogical nature of the discursive event. Sometimes, @mention may mean one wants to draw the attention of another user to some information or opinion. Given the above, it is important to analyse the @mentions and @replies in a manner that also communicates with the discussions on the main contributors, their professional backgrounds and countries of origins and thus answer RQ1.

5.7.1 Looking at @reply

An @reply is a response to another user's Tweet. There were 5 421 @reply from the 62 699 tweets using #zimelections which means that 8.6% of the tweets from the total are @replies. On the other hand, #zimdecides has 799 @reply giving us 7.19% of the total. These basic statistics show us that for every 100 tweets, close to nine were some sort of engagement for users using #zimelections while the figure was slightly lower at 7% for #zimdecides. It is vital to look at who was replied to at most because this adds to our understanding of the Twitter users who initiated discussions during the 2013 elections in Zimbabwe. It has to be mentioned that not all users were replied to. Some got more replies than others did. As such, it is important to go beyond the numbers and ascertain the @reply dynamics. From the list of the users who have had their tweets responded (replied) to, one can make an analysis to further helping our understanding of RQ1.

Using the 1/1+9/90 approach, it can be shown that the top 1% of those users using #zimelections who got replies account for 18% of the total replies. The top 10% Twitter users who used #zimelections and were replied to account for 2 958 replies, representing 54.5 % of the total. Additionally, it can also be shown that the range of @replies for the top 100 range from 10 to 166 replies to a user. These numbers show that the @replies were not evenly distributed among the users even within the "elite" group of the users who were being replied to. Similarly, despite having much fewer users who were replied to, the figures from #zimdecides show an equally skewed contribution. There are 217 users, contributing to #zimdecides who were replied to. From the 217, the top 1%, that is the top two users, account for 10% of all the replies. The top 10%, that is the top 21 users replied to under #zimdecides, account for 39.79% of the total @replies. It is thus vital to probe this further and ascertain some of the characteristics of the top 100 Twitter users who got

@reply. This answers the question on who was replied to most and in the process, it also gives us an important pointer as to who initiated discussion. In this case, being replied to means one has raised an interesting issue which attracts the attention of the other users. Probing these numbers entail further analysis of the top 1% and 10% for the two hashtags, that is, #zimdecides and #zimelections and see who they are. In the process, we will answer RQ1.

5.7.1.1 Who initiated discussion and got replied to?

Building on what has been mentioned above, a further look at the top 1% of the users who were replied to for both #zimelections and #zimdecides gives us an interesting outlook. The top 1% for #zimdecides, two of them in this case, are both media personnel. One works for an international media organisation while the other runs a media business in Zimbabwe. For the Twitter platform users who were replied to under #zimelections, the top 1% (that is 10 users) has six media practitioners, one politician, an activist and a user who could not be identified. Regarding the top 10% of the users who were replied to under #zimdecides, it can be seen that there are 10 media personnel, two activists and the same number of individuals, three organisations, two politicians, one political party and a user who could not be identified.

Using the logic of the argument presented in 5.4 above, it is very evident that those with resources or are duty bound to tweet top the list of those who were responded to. There is, however, a new dimension as politicians and political parties rank among the top. Political parties, just like organisations, do not tweet, but people with an affiliation to the party do so. What this means is that it was not the number of tweets that made people respond to a user but most likely an issue that they raised. This is so because those making it to the top of the two hashtags (#zimdecides and #zimelections) in terms of being responded to do not necessarily make it among the top users in terms of the number of tweets. This phenomenon seems to fall off when dealing with the media personnel who tweeted much because they were also responded to more than other users. This may mean that given professional privileges, media personnel had information which caught the attention of the other users who in turn saw it fit to respond. The argument is that it is not the number of tweets that made one most likely to be responded to. This is further buttressed by a comparison of top 100 users in terms of volume of tweets with the top 100 by number of those

who were replied to. It is not all the people who made it to the top of either list who also appear on the other. Thus to answer RQ1, the information so far shows us that those who initiated discussions were those who had access to resources, such as journalists or those who were strategically positioned to be able to post information that would cause the others to respond.

5.8 The nature of Twitter networks that emerged during the 2013 elections

The networks that emerged from the use of Twitter during the 2013 elections in Zimbabwe give very interesting insights regarding their nature and what they mean to the general research questions of this study. One sure thing is that these networks did not exist before the elections, and their nature changed with the increased interest in the elections as shown by the steady increase in the number of tweets using any of the four hashtags during the 51 day period, as shown under 5.1.1 above. These transient networks, to a certain extent, are testimony of how the platform was used for political participation

5.8.1 Visual analysis of the networks that emerged

The interactions via Twitter during the 2013 Zimbabwe elections can be presented via a network graph. The network graphs for each of the two widely used hashtags can be shown as:

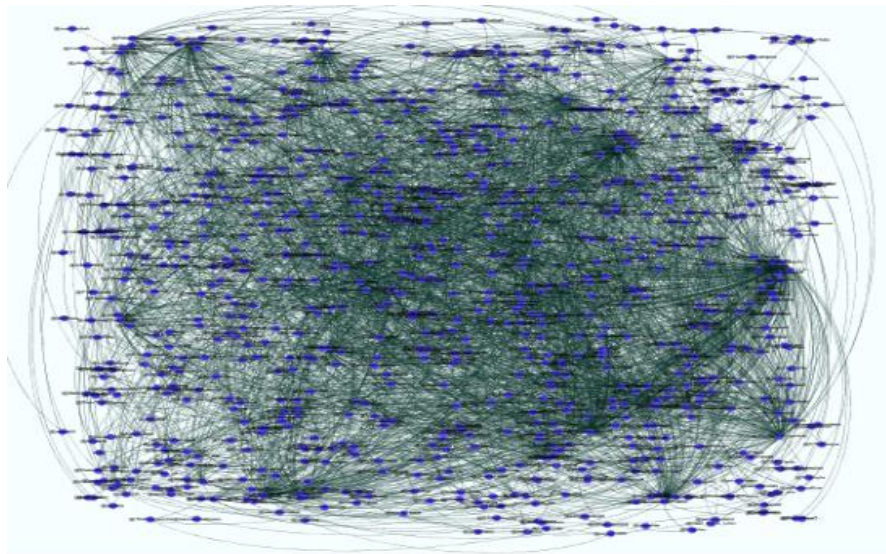


Figure 5.5

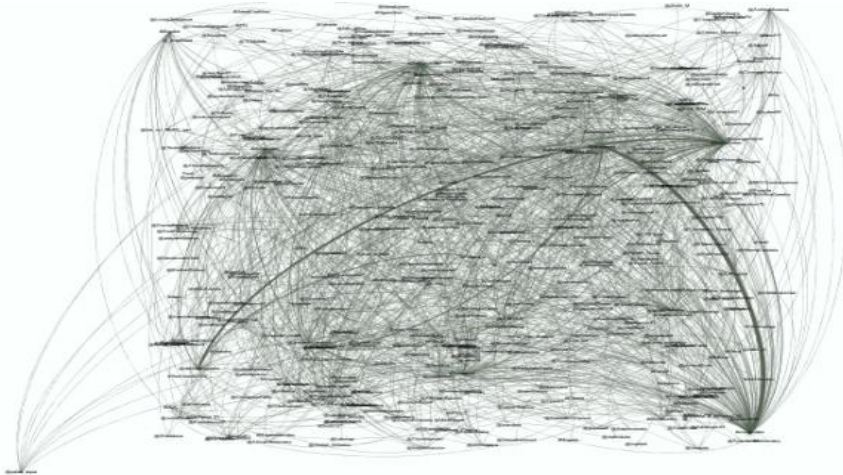


Figure 5.6

An interpretation of the above diagrams shows how the different structures answer the question on the nature of the network that we are looking at. Despite different densities, the two diagrams show something in common. The common thing is that they exhibit that there are some nodes that are central to the discourse. These super nodes get most of the attention and these visualisations attest to the observation above, under 5.6, that there is a clique of users who dominate the discussion as they contribute the most tweets, get replied to and also have their posts rebroadcast. It further confirms the supposition that while the architecture of Twitter promises equal participation, there are other factors which may determine who participates. Even as all users participate, there are some who get more attention than others.

From the two diagrams, it is shown that there are nodes which seem to be on the edge of the network. They play a peripheral role in the network and in some cases, they are not connected to other nodes in the network. A closer look at the graphs would show that the connections (edges) are not of the same strength (size/thickness) and they are not evenly distributed. It is clear there were such super users, as shown by the very thick connecting lines. Super users are also denoted by the many lines connecting them with others. This then answers RQ4 (if the interactions show the characteristic of a network society). It is clear that as argued in Chapter 2 the two figures above show that there are characteristics of the network society. One characteristic of the network society that is shown in these figures is that there is a horizontal interaction between users. However, it has to be mentioned that there are some nodes which look like they are isolated from the network. A further probe of the nature of the network will help answer the question if the nodes (Twitter

users) were of the same importance as well as the equality in terms of how the tweets were responded to. As a starting point, it is vital to ascertain the number of nodes and edges for the four datasets:

Hashtag	Nodes	Edges
Zimelections	12 061	142 049
Zimdecides	3 371	33 459
Zimelection	935	2670
Zimdecides2013	131	205

Table 5.18

Using Gephi, one can further manipulate the dataset to expose some of the hidden metrics which may have a bearing on the analysis of the networks that have emerged from the use of either of the hashtags during the 2013 elections. By using the Gephi built-in functionality, it is possible to get metrics such as:

Metric	#zimelections	#zimdecides	#zimelection	#zimdecides2013
Average degree	6.36	6.63	4.19	2.50
Ave weighted in degree	11.77	9.93	2.86	1.57
Modularity	0.361	0.634	0.546	0.634

Table 5.19

By looking at the average degree, that is the mean number of people that one user (node) can reach directly, one realises that Twitter users who tweeted #zimelections and #zimdecides, could reach out to six people within the network. The number of people reached within the network falls to four in the case of #zimelection and to two in #zimdecides2013. What this means is that while #zimelections and #zimdecides show a characteristic of a social network, it is less evident with #zimelection and almost none existent with #zimdecides2013 as it is an average of two users connected.

In terms of the average weighted in degree, that is an average of how many users reach out to the user, there are is an average 11 users reaching out to another user using #zimelections. The figure is close to 10 users reaching out under #zimdecides. However, it is significantly lower at two and

one for #zimelection and #zimdecides2013 respectively. What this means is that the larger networks have more interactions compared to the smaller ones.

The table above shows that there is very low modularity. This means that there are no nodes that are more densely connected together than to the rest of the network. Such a graph shows that interaction was spread among different users, unlike a case where users prefer to communicate with like-minded users or only respond to a given set of users. This means that any user, anywhere within the network, was able to post and is responded to.

The above metrics are very important for further probing the nature of the network that has emerged and thereby assisting in answering Research Questions 1 and 4. In as much as the metrics have been presented in averages, in most cases, the data analysis procedure in the succeeding chapter shall entail going deeper and further probe the metrics for selected nodes.

5.9 Conclusion

This chapter presented the quantitative findings and show how these help answer RQ1 of this research: Who initiated key discourses on the 2013 elections in Zimbabwe on Twitter? By answering RQ1, we are also approaching an answer to the overarching research question on what role Twitter played in facilitating public political participation to elect a new government. Data presented in this chapter also touched on RQ4, on the nature of the network that emerged and sees if it shows the characteristics of a network society. It was shown in this chapter that in order to be able to amply answer RQ1, it was necessary to go beyond presenting the numbers and further break them down and show the deeply seated dynamics on the social media platform. In so doing, it was shown that the architecture of Twitter allows for the participation on the platform for all who may have wanted to contribute to the discussions which were ongoing during the elections period in Zimbabwe. However, there were covert barriers which could debar potential Twitter users from participating, including the availability of resources. Resources have been identified as those dependent upon a user and those outside the control of the Twitter user. Resources dependent upon the user include the right devices to tweet, enough data, knowledge of the hashtags, having information to tweet and also having the time to do so. Exogenous resources which also influence

participation may be covert and could be missed in a general discussion of the role of Twitter in public political participation. One such covert factor influencing the use of Twitter is access to the internet which is important for one to be able to follow events, follow tweets as well as being able to post their own comments. This means that those without access to the web were disadvantaged and may have failed to participate. Additionally, it was also found that the devices used to send the tweets, especially smartphones, may not be as readily accessible to the ordinary citizen. As such, it is not surprising that the majority of those who tweeted are personnel from those already interested in information processing and dissemination. Resultantly, the participation on Twitter during the 2013 elections in Zimbabwe shows that there is a centralisation by a cohort of users who are better placed to surmount these barriers.

It has also been highlighted that the resources haves (that is those with the resources) are more likely to participate on Twitter. This is shown by the fact that only a minority dominated the number of tweets, retweets, replies, and mentions. This shows that there is an evident divide on the social media platform and it favours some at the disadvantage of others and as a result, not all users have an equal opportunity to participate. This online divide is further exacerbated by the attention divide on the Twitter platform. It was shown that tweets are treated differently with those from certain users, such as politicians, journalists and media houses more likely to get a reply or retweet. This leaves the ordinary citizen less able to participate.

To put it in a nutshell, it is safe to say that in approaching an answer to RQ1, it is the well-resourced users, most likely working for a media-related organisation, or an activist, who initiated key discourses on Twitter during the 2013 elections in Zimbabwe. This is so because there were structural barriers to the participation of the ordinary citizen, with those who would have managed to overcome such barriers also suffering from attention divides. As such, there is no guarantee that those surmounting these barriers will be able to participate at the same level with those who are well resourced.

Chapter 6 – Qualitative Data Analysis

6.1 Introduction

As was stated in Chapter 4, the research methodology adopted for this study marries qualitative and quantitative methods, which analysis and findings, however, have been separately presented. In this chapter, qualitative data is analysed using CDA's discourse-historical approach to answer the overarching research question as well as the specific research questions. I am using discourse-historical analysis to ascertain how societal structures and processes are encoded in the elections discourse through Twitter. As shown above, Twitter discussions, which are a form of public discourse, reflect the asymmetries within society. It was presented in the preceding chapters that Twitter may be used to construct, reaffirm and perpetuate hierarchy, power, hegemony, and ideology within society or used to resist these. Building on the quantitative analysis and findings in the previous chapter, I incrementally peel away the layers around the collection of tweets to reveal the ideological and discursive struggles within texts. Additionally, chipping away these layers helps expose how power, hegemony, suppression, exclusion, manipulation, and prejudice were enacted through tweets and its implications for public political participation. This approach will see me adopt a three-step analytical procedure proposed by Reisigl and Wodak (2009) as a guide with necessary modifications, for example, adding other fields of analysis.

Firstly, as suggested by Reisigl and Wodak (2009), I am going to identify the discourse topics (themes) within the tweets. This gives perspectives regarding RQ3, that is: Which topics or themes were addressed by the Twitter users posting on Zimbabwe elections in 2013 and what were their broader social, cultural and political contexts? Answering RQ3 paves way for one to approach RQ4: Did the Twitter users conversing about elections in Zimbabwe in 2013 demonstrate key features of a “network society” and “public sphere?” In answering RQ3 and RQ4, I will also be able to give insights into RQ2: Which portions of society were addressed in the Twitter discourse during the 2013 elections?

In line with the guide by Reisigl and Wodak (2009), the next step is to investigate the discursive strategies. Identifying the key themes and topics only give a broad, but not detailed and critical understanding of the ideological and discursive struggles as well as social tensions identifiable from the discussions of the 2013 elections in Zimbabwe. As such looking at the various discursive

strategies deepen understanding of the power struggles, the domination of one group by another, manipulation, prejudice as well as how the Twitter users either perpetuated or resisted hegemony or ideology. After identifying the various discursive strategies, the next step will see me looking at the various ideological and discursive struggles that are evident through the tweets. This will help me understand the subtle or covert struggles that were performed via the Twitter platform and their implications on public political participation.

Finally, as proposed by Reisigl and Wodak (2009), this chapter looks at the linguistic methods used to enact the various ideological and discursive struggles during the 2013 elections. This entails looking at the genres that were used and their ideological position as well as the influence on public political participation.

6.2.1 Contextualising tweets (Discourse context)

The production, dissemination, and negotiation of the meaning of the tweets were informed or shaped by the environment within which the discourse was taking place. It is thus vital to ascertain the context within which the discourse was taking place. Contextualisation, which is the initial step towards a full analysis and understanding of the tweets, is in line with Wodak's (2009) triangulatory discourse-historical analysis as pointed out in 4.1.3.1. It is, however, necessary to reaffirm some of the arguments presented and the observations made above. While the architecture of Twitter appears to support and enable openness and equal participation, it is important to underline some of the findings presented in Chapter 5, particularly, the issue of resources necessary for participation and skewed attention. A critical theory approach to the study of the text (that is tweets) exposes unequal access to resources, which means that there are unequal means to production, dissemination, and access to the tweets. What this means is that the conditions for the production of tweets, their dissemination and reception did not give the discourse participants equal opportunities to do so.

6.2.2 Themes/Topics and subthemes within the tweets: The discourse topics

As pointed out in Chapter 4, categorising of tweets, by theme and topic is one step towards a more detailed understanding of the text. Categorising tweets by themes entailed going through each of the randomly selected tweets and ascertain the main topics addressed.

After the dataset was cleaned, the researcher, as explained in Chapter 4 under section 4.3.8, first went through 50 randomly selected tweets to identify the themes. Four distinct themes were identified and these are:

- Election
- Policies of various parties
- Personalities of the contesting candidates
- Media role in the elections

These themes strongly point to the potential role of Twitter in public political participation. Such topics are vital to raise, particularly in the Zimbabwean context as shown above in Chapters 1 and 2. These four main themes point to the main topics that were discussed during the 2013 elections in Zimbabwe. Furthermore, the four themes show that the primary audience, that is, the people addressed via the tweets, are Zimbabweans, presumably those following the elections with a possibility of voting. The nature of the platform could, however, not bar those observing the elections from a distance, from participating in the discourse. These themes are evidently too broad and thus it was vital to identify subthemes for each of them. This refinement reduces ambiguity and reinforces our understanding of the discourse. Following the process explained above, 4.3.8, each of the themes was analysed for subthemes and the results can be discussed thus:

6.2.2.1 Election oriented tweets and subthemes

This is a very critical theme as the discourse participants appear focussed on ensuring the credibility and legitimacy of the elections. Tweets on how the elections were administered draw the attention of discourse participants who may not be voters themselves. This could be to bring to their attention the credibility or flaws within the election for them to pass a verdict on the polls.

It appears frivolous, on the surface, to have “elections” as a theme within a discourse on elections in Zimbabwe. However, when going through the process of categorising tweets by theme, it was

found that there were tweets which specifically focused on elections administration, how voting proceeded and encouraging others to go out and vote. Looking at the context within which these tweets were produced gives us a better understanding of what these subthemes mean. Tweeting on how elections were administered, for example, the state of the voters' roll:

“@Zimelections13: current Voters Roll has 838 000 duplicate names;same add, same DOB, different ID numbers. #ZimElections” RT@theJeremyVine

Or about the maintenance of peace

We have promoted peace before during&after the #Zimelections tshirts with peace msgs have been distributed across Zim <http://t.co/gTXOphTnYA>

The credibility of the elections had a significance especially against a background of the disputed elections in 2008 as pointed out in Chapter 1. The Twitter users tweeted on these issues as a way of bringing to the fore for both immediate attention as well as in the long term when one looks at the credibility and or legitimacy of the elections.

Tweeting about progress on the elections on the voting day can be seen as a continued focus on having free and fair elections, something akin to a watchdog role of social media. Additionally, it is also clear that tweeting on the voting process was an update on what was taking place, showing an involvement of the discourse participants. The same can be said about posting of elections results, which were unofficial results as the electoral body was the only institution legally mandated to give official results. In this way, the posting of the election results can be seen as providing a counter-narrative to the official record, especially against a background of the delayed announcement, by up to a month, of the election results in 2008.

It can also be seen that by encouraging others to vote, the Twitter platform users were ensuring that those registered to vote would do so. This comes against a background of decreasing number of voters who were casting their ballots, as shown above under 1.3. It is thus clear that by discussing elections, the Twitter users sought to address issues around the credibility of the elections and at the same time ensure the participation of potential voters and this by any measure can be construed as political participation. Such acts can be said to be facilitating public political participation.

6.2.2.2 Personalities of contesting candidates and the subthemes

The 2013 elections were tripartite as the electorate was voting for the president, a member of the house of assembly, and the local councilor. However, discussions inevitably focused on the personalities of the two dominant political parties, that is, Robert Mugabe of Zanu (PF) and Morgan Tsvangirai of the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC). Interestingly, the personalities of either individual were taken as representative of the viewpoint of the political party they led.

By discussing the personalities of the leaders of the two main political parties, Twitter users were bringing to the attention of discourse participants the morality, ages, characteristics, strengths, weaknesses, and potential of the presidential candidates. Interestingly, there is an element of scandalising the participating presidential candidates, which could be seen as a form of projecting a positive us and negative other as well as taking a light-hearted approach to politics

6.2.2.3 Party policies and subthemes

This theme shows that the tweets indicated that the discourse participants had the potential to make decisions based on the discussions on the Twitter platform. These discourse participants used the Twitter platform as a channel to advocate for a certain ideological position. Under the party policies theme, the subthemes include discussion on different party manifestos, how each party proposed to tackle the socio-economic problems the country faced as well as references to past performances of the parties. The opposition parties were assessed on the basis of their performance in the unity government, while Zanu (PF) was judged on its performance in the 33 years it has been in power.

6.2.2.4 Media role and its subthemes

Twitter users acknowledged the importance of media, including social media, in elections, and there was a detailed discourse on the subject. Three distinct subthemes: media's role, social media's role and biases in the media, emerged. These subthemes are expected as the history of the

media in Zimbabwe (see Chapter 1 and 2) showed it to be a site of struggle for control and dominance. These subthemes underline how the Twitter users viewed the role of the media in the elections. The electronic media is largely under state control and radio and television are said to be biased against the opposition. It is thus inevitable that Twitter users would discuss the role of media during the elections. This was so because it was now possible to bypass the mainstream media and share elections information.

6.2.3 Language usage

Most tweets were in English, with a few mixing it with a local language, either Ndebele or Shona. (The researcher has excellent understanding of Shona and a fair knowledge of Ndebele, thus did not face challenges in analysing the tweets).¹⁸ The language used gives pointers to the possible portions of society that were being addressed.¹⁹ In this case, the predominance of the three languages shows that discourse participants on Twitter understood any of the three languages and were addressing those who understood these languages. The use of English, which constitutes the majority of the tweets, shows that Twitter users, by using a universal language, sought to reach a wider audience. It is also indicative of the post-colonial acceptance and dominance of English as lingua franca in Zimbabwe.

6.2.3.1 Language as an instrument of silence, exclusion, and oppression

Interestingly, the use of English, Shona, and Ndebele for posting tweets shows the power relations on the platform, as there are other “minority languages” which have been suppressed. Zimbabwe recognises 16 official languages, including English, Shona, and Ndebele (Zimbabwe Constitution, 2013:17). The use of the three languages to the neglect of, say, Tonga, Kalanga and Barwe, languages which are also recognised (Government of Zimbabwe, 2013a:17) strongly evidences the dominance of English, Shona, and Ndebele. It also shows that the speakers of the “minority

¹⁸ Twitter users at times shorten words, for example, remove vowels so as to be within the 140 character limit. The researcher managed to make sense of all the sampled text.

¹⁹ All tweets cited in this study have not been edited as they were copied from the excel sheet and pasted into the text with the only alteration being the formatting.

languages” may be forced to use the dominant languages for acceptance and discourse participation. In addition, this shows that Twitter discourse during the elections was an exercise of power and dominance through the use of language. This is a subtle enactment of dominance through which the so-called minority languages may continue to be suppressed or risk exclusion from discursive participation.

As such, language use on Twitter, apart from displaying the domination of one group over others, could have been an invisible barrier to political participation or a form of silencing other ideologies. This is so because by using the “acceptable” language(s) Twitter users had to identify with the dominant languages (as well as groups) and not use their own language which is understood by their own people.

6.2.3.2 Language as resistance and instrument for participation

However, on another level, it can be argued that the use of the three dominant languages by the minority language speakers could be a strategy used to resist being silenced. Using the “accepted” or “acceptable” languages meant the minority language speakers could ideologically engage in the ongoing discourse and have their own ideas, values and beliefs get attention and at the same time contest or resist other ideological positions. This means that at another level, using the dominant languages was a form of resistance to the silencing strategies employed by other discourse participants, to ensure that they join a discourse, which they could otherwise have been excluded from.

Furthermore, it can also be argued that language use was also a pointer to the ethnic conflict within Zimbabwe. Shona and Ndebele are the languages spoken by the dominant ethnic groups in Zimbabwe. As such, those posting in Ndebele, spoken by about 8 percent of the population (Brand, 1981), could have done so to counter the dominance of Shona (spoken by about 90 percent of the population). Inversely, Shona speakers could have posted in their language as a way of trying to perpetuate a hegemonic dominance over the Ndebele speakers on Twitter.

It can thus be concluded that language use on Twitter during the elections in Zimbabwe did not portray characteristics of a public sphere as it was used, largely, as an instrument of domination and exclusion. Furthermore, it was not possible to reach a consensus or enable discussion to usher in something approaching public opinion. When used as an instrument of inclusion, in case of the minority language speakers who used either Shona or Ndebele, it can be argued, language was still used for domination and perpetuated the domination, exclusion, and manipulation already existent within society. Furthermore, language use showed that Twitter use during the elections in Zimbabwe in 2013 did not display the characteristics of a network society as, despite an ability to broadcast messages for as long as one had the right technology, there were covert barriers to mass self-communication. One barrier was that some of the minority language speakers had to adopt the major languages to be able to broadcast and get an audience. As such, using language use as a measure, one can safely argue that Twitter use was not facilitating public political participation because it excluded other voices, enhanced domination of certain groups as well as encourage the use of the language of the colonial and/or post-colonial oppressor.

6.3 Discursive strategies: Situating the ideological discourse

The collected tweets, across the four hashtags (#zimelections, #zimdecides, #zimelection and #zimdecides2013), cover the topics/themes which were pointed to above under 6.2.2. But one has to move from the general thematic macro-analysis and get into in-depth discourse analysis. One way of doing so is to look at the discursive strategies and get to know their ideological implications. It is important to ascertain the ideological implications because “ideology is significant in modern societies to sustain and reinforce social structures and relations” (Teo, 2000:11). In so doing, it will be possible to analyse the impact of the ideologies that underline the Twitter discourse on the elections in Zimbabwe in 2013 and expose the prejudice, power relations, dominance and hegemony and how they were enacted. Thus a close and systematic reading of the tweets enables us to identify the ideologies underpinning of the discourse and in so doing further enrich our understanding of the role that the platform plays in facilitating public political participation.

According to Reisigl and Wodak (2009), getting to know the discursive strategies entails answering five questions, which can be refined as referential, predicational, argumental, framing or perspectivation and mitigation. Referential questions look at how actors and events are named

and referred to, while predicational ones look at which characteristics, qualities, and features are attributed to social actors, events and processes, (Reisigl & Wodak, 2009:93). Reisigl and Wodak (2009:93) add that argumental questions look at what arguments are employed while perspectivation looks at the perspectives from where the nomination and attribution are made and finally mitigation looks at how the respective utterances are articulated overtly.

6.3.1 Nomination and categorisation: Exposing partisan ideologies and identities

For practical purposes and for clarity, nomination and categorisation, that is referential and predicational discursive strategies have been analysed within the same breath as it is difficult to separate the two because of many overlaps. The best way to ascertain how these discursive strategies were used, is to start by looking at the social actors who are identifiable from the Twitter discourse during the 2013 elections in Zimbabwe. Our approach in this section is to see how the main social actors were referred to and in so doing, we expose what different ideologies are represented through the various forms of reference.

Following the process mentioned under 4.3.8 above, the identifiable social actors are politicians, political parties, international organisations, regional blocs and election administrators. Politicians, Robert Mugabe, leader of Zanu PF, and Morgan Tsvangirai, president of the MDC, predictably, were the social actors referred to most frequently because they represented the two largest political parties in terms of support and votes in the 2008 elections. Apart from the politicians, Rita Makarau, the chairperson of the Zimbabwe Election Commission, surprisingly becomes one of the social actors to be referred to frequently, particularly before casting the ballots. The role of the election body in ensuring credibility and legitimacy may explain why Makarau was referred to so frequently. Other identifiable social actors are SADC (both as a bloc as well as the election observers sent on behalf of the organisation), the African Union and its chairperson then, Nkosazana Dhlamini–Zuma, as well as the United States of America.

The underlying ideological struggles between supporters of the contesting political parties during the elections are evident through the manner in which the social actors were referred to. There was

no homogeneity or consensus in the naming of social actors as the same politician would be positively referred to by one Twitter user and at the same time be negatively referred to by another. This in itself shows the social and ideological tensions and polarisations. Four social actors who are representative of categorisation and referencing will be looked at in detail to deepen our understanding of the discursive strategies employed by discourse participants during the 2013 elections.

6.3.1.1 Referencing Mugabe and/or versus Tsvangirai: Exposing the power / ideological struggles between oppositional forces

A detailed analysis of how the actors are referred to or categorised brings out a very complex illustration of the contradictions, conflicts, complexities, polarisation, resistance, and critique that characterised the Twitter discourse on Zimbabwe elections in 2013. Referencing and categorisation of Mugabe and Tsvangirai, on Twitter, prior to actual voting was influenced by a number of factors. As explained in Chapter 1, the disputed elections outcome in 2008, and the subsequent formation of a government of unity were seen as political developments that were to end with free and fair elections in 2013 and this shaped the discourse prior to actual voting. Additionally, elections were seen as an opportunity to end Mugabe's rule, which on the other side meant Tsvangirai taking over. Others saw Mugabe as a bastion against imperialism and wanted him to continue ruling as Tsvangirai was seen as a Trojan horse of the "imperialists". When the results of the elections were announced, showing Mugabe and Zanu PF winning, some disputed the outcome, citing irregularities and this is shown in the way discourse participants referred to and categorised Mugabe. Others, however, argued that Tsvangirai and MDC had lost because of their weaknesses, not rigging or irregularities and used Twitter to refer to this.

6.3.1.2 'Positive us', 'negative them' referencing of Mugabe and Tsvangirai

Discourse participants on Twitter during the 2013 elections in Zimbabwe showed their ideological preferences through the manner in which they referred to the participating politicians. Predictably, it is evident that there was "positive us" and a "negative them" within the discourse. The "positive

us” and “negative them” referencing shows that Twitter users sought to discredit a politician or political position and inversely they were persuading discourse participants to support the other, most likely own position. These examples will further clarify the point:

#Mugabe is a fraud, a tyrant, oppressor & dictator. A despot who is power hungry & who will stifle any outcome not in his favour.#ZimElections

Or

Of course, there will be vote rigging #Zimelections. Mad Bob will win at any cost. #despot

The cited tweets show that while the “negative them” is clear, the “positive us” is sort of assumed as it is not explicitly mentioned. For example when the Twitter user says “Mad Bob” it is assumed that his opponent is a reasonable and rational politician.

On another level, there are instances where Twitter users would compare and contrast Mugabe and Tsvangirai, within the same tweet thus explicitly underlining the ideological struggles prevailing on Twitter at the time that the elections were held in Zimbabwe in 2013. Characterisation and contrast or comparison within a single tweet gives a clearer ideological position of the Twitter user as it is less ambivalent or ambiguous and it is usually designed in a manner that denigrates one leader and upholds the other. Examples are:

Tough choice: Anti-imperialist corrupt dictator or pro-imperialist democrat? #zimelections

It can be shown from the tweet cited above that the discourse participants who compared Mugabe and Tsvangirai within the same tweet did so in a manner that showed both politicians in a negative light. Such a comparison of the political leaders of the two main political parties in Zimbabwe at that time shows the level of division within public opinion regarding the two most popular leaders of political parties. It further confirms the ideological struggles that prevailed and the platform’s affordances that allowed for different users to participate within discourse.

Whereas contrast and comparison within a tweet would portray “positive us” and “negative them” referencing, there were instances where this was not the case, further highlighting the contradictions and paradoxes within the discourse on the elections in Zimbabwe in 2013.

@OnlyWengerKnows @SirNige @263Chat its either you are with the puppets or not; or you are with theiving oligarchs or not #ZimElections

Mugabe says Tsvangirai is a puppet of e West. Tsvangirai says Mugabe is a puppet of the army. Is it a game of puppets? #Zimelections

Essentially what Zanu PF are saying in their campaign is that we R choosing between a womaniser & a murderer #ZimElections #ZimbabweDecides

Mutambara z bald-headed,Tsvangirai z big headed well Ncube z long-mouthed!Non cn lead #ZimDecides<E othr z OLD,Nid a new kid on e block then

It is clear from the tweets above that the politicians are both referred to and characterised in negative terms, that is “puppets”, “womaniser”, “murderer” and “thieving oligarchy”. This shows the complexities of the discourse on the elections in Zimbabwe in 2013 as it goes beyond the binary referencing to a mono “negative them” referencing. This may be a sign that the users were frustrated with the politicians and were dismissive of both or they were supporting the lesser known politicians. The fourth tweet above dismisses all four leaders of the political parties that participated in the elections. The tweets show that Twitter as a platform was used to critique politicians without necessarily showing support for their opponents.

In some cases, the categorisation and characterisation of the politicians are done in a manner which may not be described as “positive us” and “negative them”. Such references are usually made to an individual politician, not in comparison to their opponents. This is evident in the collection of tweets particularly after the announcement of the election results. Most of the tweets in this category referred to Mugabe, which could be as a result of the outcome of the elections and allegations of vote rigging.

"Cry the beloved land. Its so sad that a ninety year old thief can subject an entire population to such suffering"- McAaron #ZimElections

Or:

@ReutersAfrica of course he does! Blame everybody else. Absolutely nothing to do w/his dictator ways... #Idiotic #Psychopath #ZimElections

These tweets expose how the Twitter platform, which enabled those with the right technology to publish their opinion, posted commentary and critique of the outcome of the elections. Mugabe is referred to as a “thief”, “dictator” and by using other terms such as “tyrant” or “despot”. This naming, post-announcement of the results, could be so because of the allegations of fraud or manipulation of the elections. Terms like dictator, despot or tyrant are somehow contradictory as they refer to political leaders who shun elections. In terms of public political participation, these terms were used with the aim of resisting the governance of the winning candidate by questioning their legitimacy. By labeling Mugabe’s character as “idiotic psychopathy”, the Twitter user could have been drawing to the attention of others some of the “characteristics” of Mugabe which could have made him unfit for public office. These acts are also very ideological in that they illustrate the frustration of some of the Twitter users with the outcome of the elections, where their preferred candidate, who would have represented their interests, had failed to win.

Interestingly, there are tweets which portray Mugabe positively, despite allegations of electoral fraud. For example:

Zimbabweans have reaffirmed the legacy of the leader of their revolution against the wishes & interests of imperialism #ZimElections

This Twitter user sees the win, which was disputed on allegations of fraud and vote rigging, as a victory, not only for Mugabe but all those standing up against imperialists across the globe. At another level, the tweet aims at contextualising the disputed elections result not as a Mugabe versus Tsvangirai duel but Mugabe fighting against imperialists. By so doing, the dispute on the outcome of the elections is not about how Mugabe may have won but the implications on the outcome to the “imperialists”.

What this means is that there are users who took an ideological standpoint of equating Mugabe with the fight against imperialism or colonisation or neo-colonialism. Such an ideological standpoint, it can be shown, is in direct opposite with other references to Mugabe such as:

We will not be infatuated by Mugabe is anti-imperialism policies, his evil deeds for masses overshadow everything #ZimElections

There are times when the forms of reference exhibit a somehow contradictory format. These are contradicting referencing because of different and diametrically opposing characterisation of the same person. These three tweets would further illustrate this point:

Tsvangirai is the most unpleasant puppet in all fiction #ZimElections

History will remember #Tsvangirai as the witless black puppet that was used to fight land reform, to call for sanctions. #Zimelections

So, if not Tsvangirai, who is your "savior"? @samwelk @semakalengm @nqobani_nyathi @BekiMpfu #ZimElections

It is clear that the terms used to refer to Tsvangirai exhibit the diametrically opposed views on the politician, which is a reflection of how Twitter users appreciated his participation in the elections. A politician who at one time is referred to as a “saviour” will also be described as “unpleasant puppet” or “witless black puppet”. This underlines the antagonism within the discursive struggle.

Using the word “puppet” to refer to Tsvangirai is very ideological and it seeks to maintain a certain hegemonic understanding of the politics of Zimbabwe. Despite Tsvangirai being a Zimbabwean who may be exercising a right to form and lead a party, there are some discourse participants who saw this not as his own actions. Such tweets show that the users wanted to influence how the electorate would view Tsvangirai. Furthermore, Tsvangirai is referred to as a “witless black puppet” suggesting that he was used, possibly by whites. Additionally, Tsvangirai is accused of being used (possibly by the whites) to fight land reform. Analysing this further shows that Tsvangirai is taken as one who was used to fight land reform in Zimbabwe. Ideologically, such a tweet suggests that Tsvangirai is in the elections to reverse the land reform in Zimbabwe.

The manner in which the social actors were referenced and categorised reflect the antagonism, conflict, polarisation, and contradictions within society at the time that the elections were held in Zimbabwe in 2013. The tweets show that instead of using the platform to close ranks within society, Twitter users further wedged society along ideological preferences. Twitter was used as a platform to influence how discourse participants view a political actor and possibly influence their choice when voting.

6.3.1.3 Referencing of ‘non-partisan’ social actors: Rita Makarau, chairperson of the election commission

A closer look at how Rita Makarau, the head of the electoral body responsible for administering the elections, a supposedly neutral position, shows that Twitter users saw her as favouring Zanu PF. For example:

These erections seem to be strong! Rita Makarau cant handle them #ZimDecides

Or that Makarau was incompetent and complicit in the rigging of the elections:

Either Ms. Rita is completely clueless, what us Shonas call 'dondo', or mo worryingly, sh knows exactly what she's doing #ZimElections

It is clear from the tweets above that the discourse participant’s view of the head of the elections body is in a negative light. With some sexism in the mix, the discourse participant suggests that the ZEC chairperson was not competent. Additionally, the discourse participant uses puns and innuendo, for example instead of “elections”, they use “erection” which has sexual innuendo. Apart from characterising the ZEC chairperson as incompetent, there are Twitter users who view her as not being independent, by alleging that she was following orders:

Dear Makarau and Kazembe. As the Nuremberg trials of the Nazis showed, "I was just following orders" isn't a valid excuse #ZimElectionss

What this tweet, which interacts with other text, means is that the chairperson of the election commission is only occupying the post so as to implement the orders and desires of other people and in this case, Zanu PF. The reference to Nuremberg trials²⁰ in this tweet shows a complexity of the discourse that was taking place for a number of reasons. This illustrates the complexity of the discourse because of a reference to another event, that is remote in terms of distance and history, to the Zimbabwe audience. Additionally, the complexity is in the manner in which the Twitter user referred to the Nuremberg Trials in comparison to what was happening in Zimbabwe

²⁰ <http://www.history.com/topics/world-war-ii/nuremberg-trials>

in 2013. By this, the Twitter user wanted to draw to the attention of the discourse participants the gravity of the injustices of the system.

There are some Twitter platform users who commented not on what Makarau was doing but her physical appearance.

#ZEC Chair Ms Rita Makarau has a striking resemblance to Uncle Bob! #ZimElections

This tweet can be open to multiple meanings as the resemblance can also mean that there is a relationship between Makarau and Mugabe. Additionally, the tweet may also be an attack on Makarau as the Twitter user sees the resemblance between a middle-aged woman and an 89-year-old man. The appearance of an elections chief has nothing to do with the duties expected of her and the tweet seeks to elicit humour and derision. Furthermore, the reference to resemblance is not qualified to show if it is physical or behaviour.

Such a negative and evaluative attribution of the chairperson of the electoral body shows that the discourse participants are driving an ideology that ZEC was incompetent and biased in its handling of the elections. This means that the ultimate results of the elections could have been manipulated and questions the credibility of the elections and the results.

6.3.1.4 Stereotyping and critiquing international bodies/organisations

Interestingly, the discourse participants took the international bodies with an interest in the elections as social actors. As such, international bodies such as the European Union, SADC, and the African Union were characterised and referred to in terms that were also used for individual social actors. The terms used to refer to these social actors show the different ideological struggles at play as some discourse participants wanted the international bodies to play a more critical role in the elections and the outcome. The discourse participants wanted the African Union and SADC, the international bodies accredited to cover the elections, to play a more decisive role in the elections. For example:

#SADC observers should man up, and go to the rural areas no spend time driving around harare. Go to the rural areas plz #SADC #zimelections

This tweet points to a number of issues, one that SADC is seen as coming only to rubber stamp the elections as they only drive around Harare instead of going to rural areas. This further shows the issue of the possibility of violence, intimidation or rigging away from the glare of SADC observers. Furthermore, this tweet shows the misogamism embedded in society as “manning up” which is presumably some sort of bravery that is associated with maleness.

There were some discourse participants who, however, saw the involvement of the European Union and the United States in the elections as interference. Such ideological position can be seen as a continuation of the anti-colonial struggles in Africa. It further suggests that the elections were an opportunity, according to the discourse participants, to reinforce their own independence and decide a future they want. These two tweets capture this point:

#zimdecides why US/EU wanna decide for us ,or Shangarai is working for them?#ZimElections

@Reuters So Kerry now knows what the will of the Zimbabwean people is? Had no idea he had the gift of prophecy #ZimElections

These two tweets show that there were some discourse participants who questioned the role or interests of the USA and the EU in the elections in Zimbabwe. For these Twitter users, the EU and the USA seemed to want to decide for the people of Zimbabwe. As such, there were accusations that Tsvangirai (Shangarai) was working for them in pursuing those interests. Western countries, which imposed sanctions on Zimbabwe as shown above under 6.2.3.1, had an interest in the elections with the discourse participants taking this as an atavistic approach. By highlighting these “interferences”, Twitter users have shown that the platform allowed them to respond to ideological positions of the global powers. This could not have been possible with one-way mass communication, for example, television. It can also be seen as a counter-narrative to the dominant international media news coverage.

6.3.1.5 Stereotypical reference to social actors

From the above, it is clear that predication as a discursive strategy exposes how Twitter users referred to and characterised the social actors in a manner that can be termed as irrational, emotional, affective, personalising and at times scandalising. There are consistencies and inconsistencies that are found in the patterns of referring to and characterising the politicians. It is evident that some of the references are informed more by what is happening during the election period as well as what ideological positions discourse participants sought to emphasise at a given period and thus would change when circumstances change. It was shown above that the Twitter users did not assess politicians based on what they said they would offer when elected but on subjective and judgemental impressions of their personality. The terms used to refer or characterise and categorise social actors on Twitter during the 2013 elections in Zimbabwe bring a number of interesting perspectives regarding whether this resembles a public sphere. There was no consensus among Twitter users about the characterisation of social actors during the 51 day period. Furthermore, it is clear that there was no rationality or something approaching public opinion, in the strictly Habermasian public sphere sense. In fact, it is evident that the discourse on Twitter during the 2013 elections can be seen as being closer to a public space in the sense that Mouffe (2002; 2005) stated. It allowed a number of various users to post their disparate views. In addition, it is clear that the mass self-communication argued by Castells (2009) under network society is visible. Users could post tweets where they could refer to Mugabe as a “dictator” or even “thief” which could not have happened with the elite media especially within the Zimbabwean context as shown in Chapter 2 above. However, beyond mass self-communication, it is difficult to point out how the nomination and categorisation of social actors would amount to a network society, with networks of hope and outrage. There is clearly an ideological conflict within the text. Thereby the Twitter activity does not fully subscribe to the notion of a network society, which has a common and shared ideology.

6.4 Ideological/discursive struggles

6.4.1 Ethnic/racial

Apart from the ethnic tensions that were played out and portrayed through language use (see section 6.2.3), there are some tweets which showed deep-lying ethnic and racial tensions within discourse. For example this tweet:

RT"@zanu_pf: #votezanupf to stop the Western pale invasion from the South. Down with the witch @helenzille and her puppets."#zimelections

It is clear that the user takes Zanu PF as a bastion against “Western pale invasion” which can be read as white invasion especially when one looks at the further qualification when the user says “down with the witch @helenzille” presumably referring to Hellen Zille, then the leader of the opposition Democratic Alliance in South Africa. The supposition by the user is that by voting Zanu PF, the people would be stopping an invasion by the whites. Ideologically, what this user is implying is that those voting for any party other than Zanu PF could be assisting in the white invasion. This whips up memories of the white invasion of the country which presaged colonial rule in 1890. Opposing Zanu (PF) made one appear complicit in the “recolonisation” process. Furthermore, there was no formal relationship between Hellen Zille’s DA and the MDC in Zimbabwe. As such linking the two could be aimed at creating a non-existent relationship between the two political parties which were domiciled in separate countries. In the same manner, there are tweets which showed the relationship between the MDC and white farmers as a cause for its political failure.

RT @Whirisha: #ZimElections MDCs will always fail because of the close alliance with white farmers and Western powers + still no clear mess...

The MDC had participated in elections in 2000, 2002, 2005 and 2008, before the 2013 elections. They won significant parliamentary seats and defeated Mugabe in the first round of the 2008 presidential elections, though the party failed to garner the required 50% plus 1 vote. By associating the MDC with whites and attributing this association to the MDC’s “failures”, the ideological leanings of some of the Twitter users in the context of racial relations are exposed. Complex electoral issues, such as why a party wins or loses, are given a rather shorthand explanation. Such simplicity shows that the Twitter users were not only explaining the MDC “failure” in retrospect as it was also a “projection” of what was likely to happen during the 2013 elections. The history of black-white relations in Zimbabwe, like most of the other African

countries or former colonies, is that of oppression and suppression. As such drawing the attention of the Twitter users to the relationship between the MDC and the whites is to bring an emotive issue to the fore, which is aimed at exploiting existing prejudices to portray a specific political party in bad light.

Apart from the tweets exposing the racial tensions, one can also observe that there were ethnic tensions running like a silver thread across the collection of tweets about the elections in 2013 in Zimbabwe. The manner in which these ethnic tensions are expounded raises questions on whether Twitter is a liberating technology or a tool that could be used to further divide a nation state along racial and ethnic lines. It seems the Twitter users used the platform to highlight some of the ethnic differences, for example, tweets like:

4 candidates.. evenly split btwn ndebele and shona.. this is a defining moment..#ZimElections

Hilarious to see on @sokwanele how many seats ZANU PF "won" in Matabeleland in #ZimElections. My oh my oh my. Ndebele such a forgiving lot.

The tweets above raise some significant issues pertaining to the ethnic relations and ethnicity in Zimbabwe. One wonders why the Twitter platform user would prefer to frame candidates not in terms of what they offer but in terms of their ethnic background. The user seems to take the participation of the four candidates (presumably presidential candidates Mugabe, Tsvangirai, Welshman Ncube and Dumiso Dabengwa, the last two are Ndebele speaking while the first duo is Shona) as some sort of ethnic balancing. The 2013 elections were national elections and thus it made no sense for the Twitter user to make references to the ethnicity of the candidates as if they were representing their ethnic groups. Additionally, there is nothing to show that the presence of two candidates each of Shona and Ndebele descent makes it a defining moment. It looks like an effort to frame the elections as Shona versus Ndebele. This is further illustrated by the following tweets:

Hehehe, President Mugabe speaking more Ndebele in Harare today than yesterday on Bulawayo. #ZimElection2013 #ZimElections

Politicians. If you're going to do a Ndebele campaign ad, use a 1st language speaker.
#ZimElections

The two tweets above exhibit the other level of ethnic tensions expressed around the use of language. In the first tweet, the user seems surprised and mocking Mugabe for speaking “more Ndebele” in Harare than he had done in Bulawayo the previous day. The assumption is that Mugabe should be using Shona in Harare, as it is dominantly Shona speaking. This is despite the fact that there are significant numbers of speakers of other languages, for example, Ndebele, Kalanga or Barwe in Harare. Another important fact regarding Mugabe rallies is that they were broadcast live on national television, that is, Zimbabwe Television (ZTV) and some radio stations owned by Zimbabwe Broadcasting Corporation. As such, Mugabe’s audience extended beyond the people attending the rally to include all tuned to the television and radio station. In this regard, it would make no sense to restrict Mugabe to speak in a language that is mostly used by people in Harare. Ethnic tensions exhibited through the use of Twitter show how discourse participants focused more on what divided them or society than tackled elections issues, such as the proposed policies of the different parties.

There are tweets which explicitly showed the tensions between the Shona and Ndebeles. The tweet below illustrates such explicitness:

RT @Nana_Sosa_300: Ndebele people know better than Shona people #ZimElections

It can be said that despite the context, the tweet borders on provocation as it portrays one ethnic group as more knowledgeable than the other. Such statements further stoke ethnic tensions in society.

It can be deduced from the above that the way ethnic tensions played out on Twitter during the 2013 elections in Zimbabwe exposed a divided society. Twitter as a technology was used, during the elections, to further highlight the tensions within society and by so doing, further divided society along ethnic lines, especially Shona versus Ndebele. It can be seen that regarding the ethnic tensions, the audience addressed by the tweets included those people who were either Shona or Ndebele and were aware of the ethnic tensions. This discounts the suggestion that Twitter can bring together various people to form a network society, as the community of Twitter users displayed differences and tension. The people brought together to discuss elections in Zimbabwe

in 2013 also exhibited that they did not constitute a public sphere, as the ethnic tensions displayed did not portray rationality or anything approaching public opinion. In fact, the Twitter users showed more of an agonistic public space where anyone with the right technology managed to post. It was also shown that in terms of the target audience, the tweets cited above were addressed to a specific ethnic group.

6.4.3 Gender and Maleness

The 2013 elections in Zimbabwe were dominated by male participants at all levels. All four presidential candidates were males, while only 90 women, compared to 663 males, participated in the parliamentary elections (VOA, 2013). This in itself may be a pointer to how women are treated in society, particularly concerning political participation. Going through the collections of tweets not only confirms that most of the gendered commentary is on women, but also that “feminine issue traits” and what can be argued as gender stereotyping is evident. It seems the locus of gender stereotypes did not change with the use of Twitter. Women are taken as vulnerable, just like children, while in other cases they are taken as objects of admiration. These tweets illustrate how gender stereotyping was exhibited on Twitter:

Amnesty: At least 6 women left home with their 12 young children after facing intimidation to reveal who they voted for #ZimElections

In cases of political violence women and children suffer the most. When you speak sow seeds of love and peace will grow. #ZimElections

Concern raised as women and children flee ZANU PF violence <http://t.co/6iB4BVpRPQ>
#Zimbabwe #Zim2013 #ZimElections

Sad that women and children have to flee to the mountains to escape political violence, in 2013? #ZimElections #Dailynews

Chipinge and Headlands: Women being made to confess b4 the youths whilst holding Bibles that they will never support MDC again. #ZimElections

The above tweets show that the platform users assumed women to be vulnerable and victims of post-elections violence. This is cast in a manner that portrays women as weak and not able to defend themselves. While this is not to discount the possibility of violence against women, who in some cases are defenseless, the point is that the Twitter platform users may have perpetuated this view of women.

In some of the cases, the manner in which the Twitter users referred to the women exhibits sexism. This tweet will elaborate:

Nothing as sexy as an Afrikan woman in her kanga @harumutasa: #zimelections zanu pf women celebrating in mbare <http://t.co/Y3Z8I7DnQY>"

The tweet cited above shows that some of the platform users (probably males) take women as objects of admiration. In so doing, the platform became an instrument of the further subjugating of women, and not empowering them.

Reference to the women candidates within tweets also shows how these politicians were viewed. For example:

What are the female candidates promising women? #ZimElections

What this tweet implies is that the female candidates had to promise other women something so as to win the elections. What the tweet shows is that the female politicians are seen as joining politics and participating in elections so that they will represent other women and not everyone. Such a portrayal of women does not emancipate them as is expected in some quarters with the use of social media platforms. In this case, the use of Twitter could have further debarred women from participating as some of the comments clearly show male chauvinism. As such, using Twitter in this manner could have been exclusionary, thus moving the platform from qualifying as an inclusive public sphere.

6.5 Social tensions

6.5.1 Tensions over election preparation

As has been discussed throughout this research, elections in Zimbabwe are usually marred by allegations of violence and vote rigging. As such, it was inevitable that the Twitter users would discuss the credibility and legitimacy of the elections and as shown above (6.3.1.3) the administration of the elections was an issue up for discussion. A close reading of the collected tweets shows that in the process of discussing the administration of the 2013 elections in Zimbabwe, there emerged some conflicts regarding the credibility of the elections. Such conflicts show the underlying ideological positions of the participants in the discussion. The credibility of elections would give legitimacy to the winner. In 2008, when the announcement of the election results was delayed by up to six weeks amid allegation of manipulation and vote rigging. The collection of tweets shows the conflicts in opinions over the handling of the elections and how this influenced the outcome of the polls. There were some discourse participants who argued that Mugabe could not win elections without rigging, for example:

Nothing short of a miracle will save #ZPF from defeat, not even rigging #ZimElections
#263Chat

@garyjacob Rigging is the only way for Mugabe win <http://t.co/ue8mahTyUa>
#ZimElections

All those "GHOST" voters will cast their ballots in favour of the 89 year old tyrant
#zimelections #Mugabe RIGGING.

These tweets were posted before the elections and could be seen as having set the tone for disputing a poll victory by Mugabe as is shown by the following:

Last week's Zimbabwe elections appear less violent overall, but Mugabe "wins" thru vote-rigging and cowed populace. #intpoli #zimelections

Anyone claiming there was no rigging in #Zimbabwe election, is either very stupid, very naive or a #Mugabe apologist. #ZimElections

Evidence of Vote Rigging mount. 1 million dead voters, 350 000 people over 85 years old, 109 000 over one hundred years old #ZimElections

It is clear from the tweets above that there were some discourse participants who explained Mugabe's win as being a result of poll manipulation and or rigging. However, one can also show that there were other Twitter users who held that the allegations of voting could not be substantiated or deter people from exercising their right to vote. For example:

Pple saying "they already rigged the election so why vote?" If they are rigging it then let my vote be rigged aswell. #ZimElections

RT @Xreje: Hoping the people will go out enmass and overwhelm the rigging machinery #ZimElections

These tweets show that there were some who maintained that by voting they would be able to make sure that the rigging would not take place. In contrast to the tweets cited above, another category of Twitter users represented those that were "optimistic" about the process. This category of users could have been posting tweets as a way of encouraging others to participate in the elections, while those alleging electoral fraud before voting took place could have aimed at dissuading others from participating in the elections.

Furthermore, there are some Twitter users who "defended" Mugabe's win, dismissing the allegations of vote rigging as unfounded or unsubstantiated. These examples illustrate this category:

im not sure how people are going to take a Mugabe win... #ZimElections" its obvious, they will say rigging"

"@bramaclenthabi: So the feeling is should Morgan win #ZimElections its a fair result, should Robert win he will be accused of vote rigging"

These two tweets, posted before the elections, show that there were people who questioned the "rigging" allegations, arguing that it was a way of discrediting Mugabe win. In the same vein, there were tweets after the elections which further dismissed the rigging allegations saying, for example:

RT @ChiefThabo: I doubt MDC had evidence of vote fraud & rigging, #ZimElections

About this rigging theory, can someone please present us with some evidence that wld possibly stand in a court of law #ZimElections

This election rigging thing is geting so old can't we atleast move on? (-_-) #ZimElections

It was shown above that the discussions on the credibility of the elections, especially with regards to rigging, was divided into three distinct sets. Some said that Mugabe won as a result of rigging, which was disputed by another set of Twitter platform users, while the third group showed that the rigging could be stopped. This showed the extent of conflict over the legitimacy and credibility of the elections in Zimbabwe in 2013. Such conflicts, it can be argued, did not only end with the announcement of the elections results, as the Twitter users questioned the legitimacy of the final winner. Taking a winning candidate as a fraud is meant to delegitimise their win.

It can thus be concluded that discussion on the allegations of rigging the elections or a legitimate win showed how Twitter facilitated public political participation. This is so because the platform allowed the discourse participants an opportunity to publish an opinion on the allegations of rigging. In so doing, Twitter users were using the platform to play a watchdog role in terms of how the next government was elected. It is also clear from the cited tweets that publishing opinion on the subject of rigging did not mean that there was consensus on what actually transpired. What this shows us is that the discourse on Twitter during the 2013 elections on whether the elections had been rigged or not shows that despite allowing the publishing of various opinions, the debates was not rational, or even approaching rationality.

As such, it is not convincing to say that when one looks at the Twitter discourse on allegations of rigging during the 2013 elections in Zimbabwe, there are patterns portraying a public sphere. Thus it is more compelling to look at it as a public space, allowing for various opinions to be published and discussed without reaching a consensus on whether the elections were rigged or not. The tweets cited above show that the discourse participant showed how agonistic the topic was as each side (those who alleged rigging and those denying it) went on to state their position. There was no consensus on whether the elections were rigged or not. Discussing this subject also gives pointers as to who the discourse participants were addressing. As is shown above, the discourse participants could also be seen as addressing potential voters, urging them to go out and vote.

6.5.1 Sexual orientation

The discourse participants also used the Twitter platform to post their opinions on the subject of sexual rights. Zimbabwe has in the past grappled with the issue of sexual rights, with Mugabe expressing homophobia. This has been an emotive topic in Zimbabwe's legal and political processes to the extent that the constitution that was adopted in 2013 clearly legislates against homosexuality (Government of Zimbabwe, 2013a:38). Mugabe's stance on sexual rights was taken as Zanu PF's position on the subject. There were other discourse participants who used the platform to advocate for acceptance of sexual rights. These opposing views underline the tension within society on the topic and this was carried over to Twitter. There were some discourse participants who argued that homosexuality was alien to Africa, for example:

@JimbleJay RT @azadessa: Mwaywra 35: We are black,we are African, we are Zimbabwean,we don't support homosexuality like Obama #ZimElections

or

Rigging is a foreign word says Mugabe. Apparently, homosexuality is one too <http://t.co/SKiUQmJ4th> #ZimElections

It is clear from the above tweets that the discourse participants' argument against recognising sexual rights was premised on the supposition that it was alien to Africa. The discourse participants gave weight to their argument by describing recognition of homosexual rights as alien. This is very ideological in that these Twitter users were clearly against the recognition of these rights. The two tweets appeared before the announcement of the election results. There were some discourse participants who also saw the win by Mugabe, however, disputed, as a result of his stance on homosexuality. This tweet captures this:

#ZimElections: #Mugabe wins. Not surprised but these remarks 'Never, never, never will we support homosexuality in #Zimbabwe' #AfricaLGBTI

On the other hand, some Twitter users supported gay rights and attacked Mugabe's stance on the topic. In fact, these Twitter users argued that Mugabe was supposed to be removed from office because of his stance on homosexuality.

Oust Mugabe and his ridiculous views on homosexuality <http://t.co/VLJR2e0EWu>
 #ZimElections #mugabe #zimbabwe #lgbt #equality #HumanRights

At another level, some took Mugabe's stance on the subject to portray him as a cruel and heartless person suggesting crude methods of dealing with homosexuals:

#ZimElections: President Mugabe says all homosexuals deserve to be 'burdizzo' - castration which involves large clamp - Video #newspoint

One reason why sexual rights became an issue for discussion on Twitter is because it may not have found space in the mainstream media or at rallies. It is also possible that Twitter users would ride on the anonymity that comes with the platform to give their own opinions because of the controversies around sexual rights in Zimbabwe. It can thus be concluded that Twitter discourse during the elections in Zimbabwe showed tension over the recognition of sexual rights. The way arguments for or against recognition of these rights were presented, is quite informative. It shows that the platform allowed for those with the right technology to be able to post their opinions even "taboo" topics which are rarely discussed in the mainstream media. However, it can also be shown that in as much as the arguments posted were very ideological, they did not exhibit some of the tenets of the public sphere, mainly because there was no consensus on the topic. The conflict and the different opinions on the subject make the discourse align more to the public space than a public sphere. Additionally, the use of Twitter did not allow for consensus but a further expression of the differences in society.

6.6 Linguistic means

Discourse participants strategically used a number of linguistic means as a way of playing out the ideological struggles underlying the 2013 elections. The linguistic means that were used by the Twitter users discussing the Zimbabwe elections in 2013 is strategic in the sense that the Twitter users drew upon the widely understood topics/themes and cultural and political references, which can be interpreted as a way of making sure that their message could easily be accessible. As will be discussed below, the use of easily understood topics/themes as well as cultural or political references was clearly strategic and aimed at ensuring that one user would influence others, that is, ideological influence.

6.6.1 Humour

In this section, we look at how humour was used as a discursive strategy and how its use relates to the public sphere concept in the Habermasian sense. Alternatively, what does the use of humour say about the public space conception? Additionally, who is addressed this way? These arguments assist in answering the question how Twitter facilitates public political participation. Humour was used to discuss some of the main themes or topics as identified above, that is, elections, party policies, the personalities of politicians and the role of the media. However, a humorous reference to the personalities of politicians was the most dominant. It was not one social actor that bore the brunt of the humour, as it was aimed at Mugabe and Tsvangirai, as well as others such as AU and SADC observers or African leaders. Some of the identifiable political humour genres from the collection of tweets are jokes, humourous verbal formats, pictorial as well as satire or sarcasm.

Whereas politics is a serious subject, the Twitter functionalities, especially the 140-character limit, makes it possible to move from the profound to the light-hearted. Apart from riding on the Twitter character limit functionality, the use of humour makes it possible to reach out to a larger audience using a language that the Twitter users following the posts/tweets will easily comprehend and identify with. The language of humorous tweets is usually illustrative or vivid for the ease of reference and decoding. The use of humour in tweets was evident throughout the election period.

Humour, it was found, was used as a very important linguistic method to retain the interest of whoever was reading the tweet. Political humour as contained in the tweets was used as a tool for an ideological struggle between different participating groups. It was evident that through humour, some Twitter users were able to convey criticism against an ideological position. At the same time, the use of humour, in the various genres, was aimed at deriding or reviling an ideological opponent.

6.6.2 Jokes

These are usually short narratives, and in most cases, the language is very plain and it is easy to recognise that this is a joke. In as much as these are meant to elicit laughter, jokes are also ideological in that they carry within them ideas, values, and beliefs aimed at influencing others. The example below further illustrates this:

"Our party won by 4 thirds majority" Chinotimba #humour @263Chat @mrtsvangirai @mdczimbabwe #rigging #ZimElections

There is clearly something funny in this tweet, which has a statement attributed to one of the winning candidates for Zanu PF. There is a play at the assumed innumeracy that one fails to realise that it is not possible to have four thirds. Saying the party got a four-thirds majority, in the context of allegations of fraud, is meant to dramatise the level of “rigging”. This suggests that the “rigging” machines did not know when to stop. At another level, this tweet suggests that the winning parliamentarians did not understand basic mathematics. This is aimed at deriding the winning candidates and by so doing, the Twitter users were further raising the issue of electoral fraud as well as the issue of clueless people winning elections and possibly forming the next government.

6.6.3 Humorous verbal formats and satire

The humourous verbal formats are close to jokes, but the funny element within the tweet may not be very apparent as illustrated by these tweets.

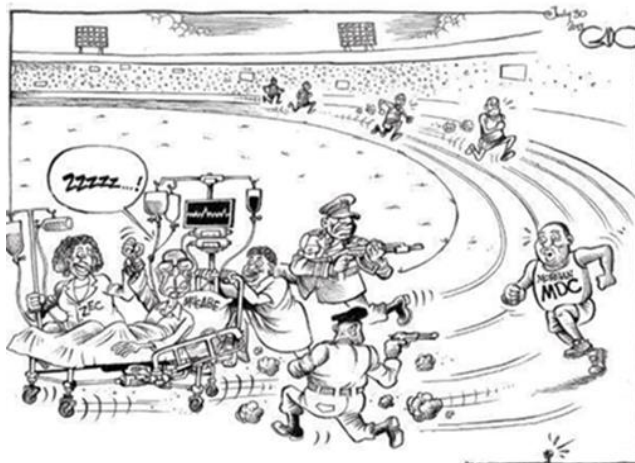
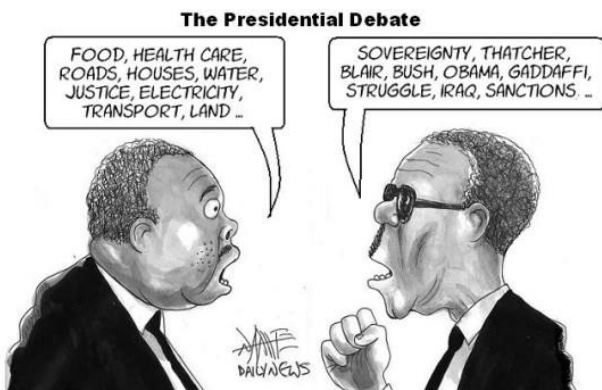
RT @DwayneMarshal: RT@tinostamk Grade 2 dropout walks to Parliament <http://t.co/JY3lXX6QVJ> ... #ZimElections #Badpeople

#RobertMugabe retains his vice like grip upon the poor saps in #Zimbabwe by winning the election with 102% of the votes... #ZimElections

One may need to have prior information about the issues raised to be able to realise the funny side as the tweets refer to other texts. As is the case with the cited tweet, one needed to know what the capacities of a Grade 2 dropout were. This enriches their understanding of the humour. As with jokes, tweets like this, are very ideological in that they seek to transmit certain ideas, beliefs, and values. In this case, the Twitter users seem to portray the winning parliamentarians as not well educated. They are taken as people who only had two years of education. The tweet on 102% win is almost similar to the one on four-thirds majority, only that this is subtle, yet funny and one may need to have prior information on the issue to easily recognise it. This is another way of referring to the allegations of vote manipulation.

6.6.4 Cartoons

Cartoons are ideological in that they take a position against or in support of a certain issue that is up for discussion. The question now is: How does the use of cartoons in discussing the Zimbabwe elections in 2013 facilitate public political participation. The three cartoons below, help us answer this question. These cartoons originated on other platforms, most likely the online versions of newspapers. As such, there is a reason why the discourse participants decided to share them on Twitter. This is probably for a wider reach as well as ideological influence.



Cartoons, as is shown above, are another form of capturing what was happening in Zimbabwe during the elections in 2013. The three cartoons above show some of the themes that were

identified earlier on in this chapter and these are elections administration (as shown by the allegations of “ghost” voters casting ballots and how the military and ZEC helped Mugabe win) and party policies as shown by the cartoon showing Mugabe and Tsvangirai in a “Presidential Debate”. The cartoons are very ideological and betray an ideological position that the cartoonist preferred. For example, from the above, it can be seen that the cartoonists’ held that the Zimbabwe elections were unlikely to be free and fair. This is so because two of the cartoons touching on how the elections were administered show Mugabe manipulating the system so that he would win. The essence of the cartoon was to lightheartedly comment on the issue of the voters’ roll, which had names of dead people. The assumption was that Mugabe was to manipulate such names and these will end up as votes for his party.

Similarly, after the elections, the Twitter platform also shared cartoons that depicted not only the outcome of the election but how some of the strategic national institutions such as the army and ZEC were said to have played a role in making sure Mugabe won. It can be argued that both cartoons point towards a possible manipulation of the results of the election either through the use of dead people on the voters’ roll or by making use of the military and ZEC. The actions by ZEC seem supported by the military, which is shown as making sure that MDC (meaning Tsvangirai) does not overtake Mugabe in the race. The cartoon on the presidential debate is highly ideological as it portrays Tsvangirai as addressing real issues while Mugabe focuses on Western leaders, some of them who have left office, suggesting that Mugabe lives in the past and does not acknowledge the problems facing the country. As a linguistic means, cartoons were used to further deepen how the Twitter platform users viewed the elections in Zimbabwe in 2013.

Despite appearing light-hearted, cartoons send a message across as they are easy to decode and this helps drive the message home. In so doing, cartoons are an effective vehicle through which certain ideologies are advocated and debated.

6.6.6 Satire/mockery/sarcasm

There were tweets which displayed mockery or sarcasm and these were posted mainly to ridicule a political position or a development during the 2013 elections in Zimbabwe. Sarcasm was used as a linguistic means aimed at influencing a change of an idea or belief. In some cases, the sarcastic

comments were aimed at bringing to the attention of other platform users, a development or an event that the Twitter user usually does not agree or subscribe to. For example:

RT @Another_craig: So apparently, a 135 year old soldier actually voted in #Zimelections last week. Ah, the benefit of regular exercise.

#ZimElections sadly are an unexpected result. It's not #Zimdecides but #Mugabedecides. Only 3 things certain in life: death, taxes & #Mugabe

#ZimElections Congrats to Africa's oldest dictator. What a win what a rig. We so proud!

The first tweet takes a sarcastic look at the issue of the credibility of the 2013 elections in Zimbabwe. The Twitter user takes the issue of the voters' roll (which allegedly had names of deceased people) and adds that a soldier aged 135 voted in the elections. The tweet suggests that the 135-year-old soldier managed to live long because of regular exercise. This is absurd as soldiers are retired as soon as they reach 60 years. This tweet is meant to highlight the issue of vote manipulation.

Sarcasm is also evident in the tweet below as the congratulatory message seem not genuine especially when one looks at the play with words, 'old president...I mean new.'" The Twitter user effectively makes use of ambiguity in the word old as it may mean incumbent of a reference to Mugabe's age.

Congrats to all Zimbabweans on our old president..... I mean new president or is it old new president ? #263Chat #ZimElections

6.6.7 Pictorial

It was found that the various pictures posted by Twitter users during the 2013 elections in Zimbabwe served a number of functions. Pictures were meant to give information or entertain or both. There were some which were posted to question, critique or dispute certain positions, for example:



Such a picture is very ideological in that it puts to question the idea that Zimbabwe had the best education. The discourse participants who tweeted or retweeted this photo critiqued the type of education offered in Zimbabwe. This could be a form of counter-power or narrative to what government was saying regarding education in Zimbabwe. This could be a photo taken from some of the remotest parts of Zimbabwe and shared. On another level, there were photos that can be categorised as humorous. These may not be cartoons but they have an element of humour in them. An example of this type of pictures is:



The source of the laughter in the first picture is Mugabe's statement that he would resign if he lost the elections. The other one is a manipulated photo of Mugabe celebrating his win. These photos elicit laughter. It is a commentary on how people viewed Mugabe's statements on resigning if he lost elections. The other one elicits laughter as it shows Mugabe celebrating in complete disregard of the etiquette expected of a president. The photos while eliciting laughter are also ideological in that they transmit ideas and values about Mugabe.

On another level, there were pictures which were posted as a way of celebrating a party's membership, especially during rallies. Such pictures are very ideological in that they seek to promote the ideas of one party over those of other contesting political parties. In so doing, such pictures functioned as campaign tools for the different political parties. The way in which the various pictures posted were taken also tells a story about the ideological standpoint of the discourse participant. For example, there are cases where the picture of the crowd attending a rally is taken in a manner that portrays that there were many people for example:



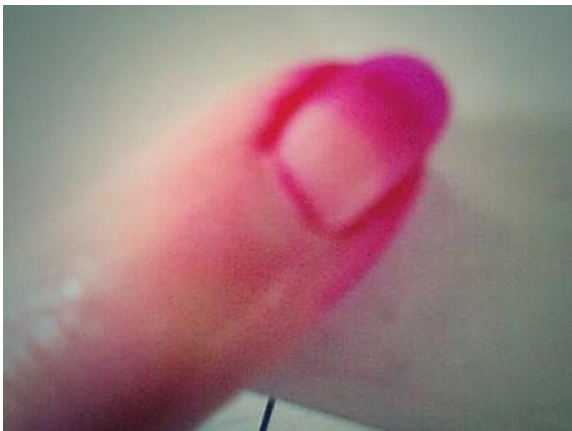
These two photos show attendance at two rallies by Zanu PF and MDC. It is clear that the posting of these photos is very ideological as the Twitter users want to show how well attended the rallies were. Rallies are held to further expound policies and at the same time, they are also a platform to celebrate membership. As such, in the above cases, the Twitter users ensured that the posted photos could show massive attendance. This was aimed, probably, at influencing others to support the party as it was supported by many.

This can be contrasted to these photos:



The two photos above, are very ideological in that they showed “poor attendances” at rallies addressed by Zanu (PF) and MDC leaders. These pictures are ideological because they sought to “show” that there were few people attending the rallies. This meant that few people subscribed to what either party was saying.

There are other photos posted on Twitter during the 2013 elections in Zimbabwe which served to give people update on what was happening, especially on the elections day or supporting peace. The following pictures help to elaborate this:



These two photos are interesting in that they are very neutral when contrasted with the preceding ones which are clearly ideological and aim to propound a position that opposes others. The first

picture shows a voter proudly showing off a finger with pink ink, a sign that they had voted. This could be seen as an endeavour to encourage others to go out and vote. The other picture shows supporters of the main political parties hugging. This was aimed at promoting peace, especially given the fact that the previous elections in Zimbabwe had been marred by violence and allegations of it. The second picture is also ideological because it belies the fierce tension between the parties. The first two cited photos show the ideological struggles within society as the discourse participants wanted to show their party as the one that was attracting more people over the rivals.

6.6.8 Linking text to other text to enhance debate

As explained above, Twitter has a character limit of 140 characters, but the use of links ensures that a user may refer to other texts away from the platform for more information. This, I would argue, is another form of linguistic means, used by platform users to widen the debate. In the case of the discourse on Zimbabwe elections in 2013, the linked content includes pictures or cartoons or news articles, press statements and opinions on websites and other social media platforms such as Facebook.

An analysis of tweets with links posted by the dominant users gives very interesting insights on how discourse participants widened topics under discussion. These tweets are more “rational” when compared to those posted by individuals. For example:

Botswana says its position on Zim has not changed' via @swranews:
<http://t.co/vMTQF5CKvr> #zimelections

This is a link to a news site where the Government of Botswana questioned the manner in which the elections in Zimbabwe were handled, saying they were not free and fair. The tweet cited below has a link to court papers prepared by the MDC in challenging the outcome of the elections.

Read @mdczimbabwe Presidential #ZimElections Constitutional Court petition -
 @mrtsvangirai vs Robert Mugabe et al <http://t.co/9WfkwhNUYf>

The two tweets cited above show discourse participants, in this case, an organisation and a media house, used the platform to link Twitter users to external text. The three tweets below also show

that there were organisations and media houses which used Twitter to share information on how to vote, the outcome of the elections as well as news on the 2013 polls in Zimbabwe.

Interactive table of #zimelections results. Explore comparisons between 2008 and 2013:
<http://t.co/1lhBr4ERbD> <http://t.co/aDrQiwPtic>

Google creates Zimbabwe election hub <http://t.co/e5piMOIjnF> #zimbabwe #ZimElections
 #263Chat

RT @kubatana: V helpful resource - Step-by-step guide to #ZimElections process -
<http://t.co/vH9fVifWch> @263Chat @sokwanele @ZESN1 @ZLHRLaw...

It is clear that the linked content would have gone through a professional and systematic production process with quality assurance checks. This shows that there are some Twitter users, in this case, organisations and media personnel, who used the platform to give information that would widen public discourse. An analysis of the language used in these tweets also shows formality. This is very different from the “irrational” tweets which were posted by individuals as quoted above. This gives new perspectives on the whether Twitter ushers in a public sphere. The “rational” tweets pass for content that is consistent with discussion within the public sphere as these tweets facilitate discussion that shapes public opinion.

On another level, the resourced participants, in this case, the media organisations or media personnel, took Twitter as a means to increase traffic to their own website. For example:

#263Chat on 6 Aug 2013 on Life in Zim Post #ZimElections <http://t.co/oqYd0Xz148>
 #Twimbos #263Chat

#zimelections AU Obasanjo abt to go live on aljazeera now <http://t.co/byrApJd4VJ>

The first tweet is by a social media organisation, inviting Twitter users to join the debate on the elections in Zimbabwe. The second tweet is by a journalist working for Al Jazeera, inviting Twitter users to tune in to the station to watch the AU Head of the Observer Mission speak on the elections. What this means is that the well-resourced participants leveraged their position (resources, a large number of followers and great attention) to ensure that they capitalise on their presence on the Twitter platform to increase their dominance or further their own interests. This could be a pointer

to the fact that media organisation and personnel's use of Twitter during the 2013 elections in Zimbabwe was more than just impromptu, as was the case with ordinary users, but well coordinated.

On another level, the dominant users posted important information on the polls. Such information includes polling stations, updates on the administration of the elections as well as the election results. For example the following tweets:

#zimelections AU press conf abt to start

Magwegwe Zanu Ndonga 38 MDC-1852 ZAPU-150 MDCT-4996 ZPF-1289 Indep-392
ZEC Official #ZimElections result (as transcribed from radio)

#ZimElections mugabe "we make our own decisions, masters of our own destiny. We don't listen to Europe. What they say is not what we say"

Takwirira Pri Sch P/Station, Chipinge South 356 voted so far, 38 turned away
#ZimElections

The first tweet is on a press conference on the elections while the second one is an update on what Mugabe was saying during a press conference on the eve of the elections. These two tweets show that the dominant users were playing a transmission role, giving important information. In most cases, the ordinary citizen would not be able to attend a press conference and these tweets were aimed at updating those following on what was happening. The last two tweets show that the platform was used to give information on the voting process as well as the outcome of the elections.

It has to be mentioned that posting a tweet is in itself very ideological. However, unlike the ordinary users, the dominant platform users, used a rather neutral language. As can be shown by the tweets above, the language is not evaluative and subjective. The postings by these dominant users are "rational". This is consistent with the debate within the public sphere.

6.7 Conclusion

This chapter took a deep dive into the collection of tweets and used CDA as a way of ascertaining the role of Twitter in facilitating public political participation. The qualitative approach used in this chapter helped me to understand the election discourse more and tally this to how it enhances public political participation. I am aware of the asymmetries of participation using Twitter, as presented in the preceding chapter. After establishing the major themes within the tweets, the questions which the topics addressed were answered. From this, the analysis of the tweets was further refined to look at the language(s) which was/were used. This analysis showed the silencing and oppression through language use as well as attempts to resist this by adopting the language of the oppressors and silencers for discourse participation. This showed the ideological struggles and social tensions that characterised discourse on elections in Zimbabwe in 2013. Such ideological struggles and social tensions were evident in the discursive strategies employed by discourse participants. The referencing and categorisation were seen to be mainly binary, with the “positive us” and “negative them” referencing. Such referencing and categorisation exhibited the ideological preferences within society and how discourse participants strived to ensure that their standpoint becomes more dominant than that of their opponents. Such polarisation, it was shown, does not only end with those holding opposing political views as it extended to racial, ethnic, gender and sexual rights conflicts. The discourse participants used a number of linguistic means including jokes, cartoons, satire, and sarcasm to further project their views. It was found that while the Twitter platform enabled horizontal participation, allowing discourse participants to post views, it is difficult to conclude that this constituted a network society in the way Castells (2012) has argued. It is clear that Twitter was not a space of autonomy with a potential to be one of hope and outrage. Additionally, it has been conclusively shown throughout the chapter that there was nothing to show that this was a public sphere in the Habermasian sense, particularly given the ideological struggles inherent within discourse. There was no sign of critical debate that was undertaken in a disinterested manner. In fact, it is clear from the ideological struggles and the social tension, that there was no consensus emanating from the debate. What can be seen are agonistic public spaces in the sense that Mouffe described it.

Twitter users including media personnel and those posting on behalf of media houses, seem to be very different from the “irrational”, evaluative and subjective tweets posted by the other users. It was found that their tweets were “rational” and were cast in a manner that encourages debate in the public sphere manner.

Chapter 7 – Conclusion

7.1 Introduction

In this research, I sought to answer the question: How can Twitter facilitate public political participation in the election of a new government? It has to be conceded that when the idea of this research was being incubated, around 2012, there was a flurry of activity aiming to understand the role of new social media platforms in facilitating public political participation. What had happened in Moldova and Iran in 2009 and during the so-called Arab Spring in Tunisia, Egypt and other Middle East and North African countries was unique and motivated many scholars to revisit this topic and rush to conclude that technologies were facilitating public political participation especially in repressive environments, including Zimbabwe. It was also a time when dissenting voices started growing louder, calling for empirical evidence to prove the causal relations between new technology and political participation.

Zimbabwe, with pending elections in 2013 against a background of a constricted media environment and protracted political and economic crisis, was one of the best places to gather empirical evidence on the topic. Intrinsically, instead of a speculative analysis of the subject, it was possible to capitalise on the opportunity and present a substantive standpoint on Twitter's role in facilitating public political participation in Zimbabwe. A marriage of quantitative and qualitative research methodology and data analysis made it possible to present empirical evidence on the role that Twitter played in facilitating public political participation during the 2013 elections in Zimbabwe. Resultantly I am able to add new dimensions to the growing literature on the interplay between technology and political participation as well as help shape the debate on the topic.

7.2 Overview of previous chapters

The first chapter of this research looked at how the media were used as propaganda mouthpieces by both the colonial and independent governments in Zimbabwe. It was also shown that promulgation of legislation to muzzle the media spurred internet usage. The internet is considered more secure from the prying state. Additionally, the internet became easily accessible especially with the expansion of data network coverage. The use of social media platforms significantly altered the media landscape, inevitably this opened debate on the role of new media in political participation. The introductory chapter also discussed critical theory and its relevance to the study of how Twitter facilitated the election of a new government in Zimbabwe in 2013.

Chapter 2, building on the foundation laid in the introduction, critically looked at various literature apposite to the research. The initial reading had made me fully aware of the debates on the role of technology in facilitating public political participation. As such, my approach to the literature was guided by Dahlgren's (2014) proposition that the debate should not be about having universally valid conclusions but provisional ones, given the ever-changing circumstances. A thematic approach to literature review was adopted and the range of literature included journal papers, books, book chapters and articles on how Twitter facilitates public participation. A literature review on media and politics in Zimbabwe was carried out in the second chapter.

Chapter 3 focused on the theoretical framework, touching on major theories on social media, critical theory, political participation and public sphere/space concepts. This paved the way for a critical analysis of the role of social media in facilitating public political participation. The data collection and analysis for this research was grounded in critical theory because it enables one to interrogate social structures and get to know how these affect the use of technology for political participation.

In Chapter 4 I detailed the research design and methods of doing discourse-historical analysis. This chapter discussed the process of collecting, archiving and analysing the data. Both quantitative and qualitative methodologies were used as complementary approaches. The adoption of TAGS v5 to collect and archive tweets was discussed, showing its cost-effectiveness and efficiency. The scripts used to clean the data and code it were also explained and the logic behind each of them.

In Chapter 5 I used quantitative analysis to understand how Twitter was used for public political participation. By looking at the numbers, for example; how many tweets were posted during the 51-day period, I was able to answer RQ1 on who “Who initiated key discourses on Zimbabwe’s elections within the Twitter community?” In addition, quantitative data gave insights pertaining to RQ4 on whether the conversation demonstrates key features of “network society” and “public sphere.” The “numbers” only gave a very broad picture of what was happening and thus I needed to zoom in on the discourse that was taking place through qualitative analysis.

Chapter 6 uses CDA, a qualitative approach to further ascertain the role of Twitter in facilitating public political participation. The analysis of this data help answer the main research question as well as all the four RQs. Following the CDA recursive steps, this chapter identified and discussed the themes (discourse topics), discursive strategies, ideological and discursive struggles as well as the linguistic means.

7.3 Discussion of specific research questions

The quantitative and qualitative data analysis enable me to answer the research questions that guided this study. My responses to the four specific research questions are:

7.3.1 Who initiated key discourses on Zimbabwe’s elections on Twitter?

A quantitative data analysis exposed that there is “attention divide” where, on the surface, participation appeared widespread to include media organisations, civic organisations, journalists, activists, politicians, political parties and individuals participating in their private capacity. A more detailed analysis showed that while there were many discourse participants, they were not equal in terms of influence and contribution. There were “super nodes”, that is, discourse participants who were dominant. The “super nodes” include media houses, journalists, interest groups and non-governmental organisations. This was testimony that there were covert barriers to participation. An analysis of the dominant users shows that they were very well resourced to take part in the

discourse. Identifiable resources necessary for participation include access to appropriate technology, time to do so and information. This leaves out the less resourced and those living where there was no access to technology. A close reading of the geographic spread of the top 100 contributors shows that the majority are, as expected, in Harare, followed by South Africa. As argued above, the high number of contributors from South Africa and Britain reflects the presence of Zimbabweans in those countries. This confirms that discourse participants were mainly those interested in the election.

7.3.2 Which portions of society were addressed in the Twitter discourse during the 2013 elections?

As expected, the target audience of the Twitter discourse during the 2013 elections in Zimbabwe comprises those that were interested in the polls, that is, their credibility, legitimacy, and outcome. More interesting, however, is that there are other multiple and varied audiences which were also addressed. These audiences may not have been concerned about the elections per se, as they picked on issues such as racism or ethnicity, which were not elections issues. Additionally, the Twitter discourse was also initiated by male chauvinists and sexual rights activists, who took the discourse moment to propound certain ideological positions.

7.3.3 Which topics or themes were addressed within the Twitter community and what were their broader social, cultural and political contexts?

Four broad themes were identified from the tweets on Zimbabwe elections in 2013. These broad themes are: i) elections, that is the legitimacy and credibility of the polls, ii) policies of parties participating in the elections, iii) the personalities of the contesting candidates and iv) role of media in elections. Other topics raised within the discourse include ethnicity, race relations, gender/maleness/masculinity and sexual orientation. The four main themes illustrate a number of issues pertaining to the social, political and cultural context in Zimbabwe in 2013. These topics showed that the elections were an opportune moment to address or raise issues politicians may have omitted or tried to suppress. Firstly, the four themes highlighted above show that the primary

audience, that is, the people addressed via the tweets are those following the elections. These four themes and their subthemes were consistently raised during the 51 day period. Such a consistency of themes, coming from a variety of Twitter users over a 51 day period shows the desire of the Twitter users to have free and fair elections in Zimbabwe. It is seen that the Twitter users, in raising the topics aimed to achieve a number of goals, for example encouraging public political participation in a peaceful environment. This is understandable, given the history of violence during elections in Zimbabwe. Furthermore, Twitter users addressed issues around the credibility of the election in Zimbabwe in 2013. The concerns raised by the Twitter users on the legitimacy and credibility of the elections reflect the perennial accusations of electoral fraud as shown in Chapter 1 above. Twitter users also addressed the issue of ethnicity, exposing the underlying ethnic tensions between especially Shonas and Ndebeles. This reflects the ethnic tensions that prevail in Zimbabwe.

7.3.4 Did the Twitter users who conversed on elections in Zimbabwe in 2013 demonstrate key features of a “network society?” and “public sphere?”

The diagrammatic representation of the network that emerged also showed that it was possible for anyone in the network to communicate with other nodes, thereby removing the elites from the centre. This, however, did not dispel the inherent skewed participation capacities as it was found that there were nodes that were more pronounced than the others and had better powers of distribution as shown by the $1/9+1/90$ approach (discussed above under 4.3.4.2). Some of the users had better economies of scale that enabled them to be more active than others, get more attention or retweeted. The emergence of super nodes put a caveat to the supposition that Twitter enabled the emergence of networks of hope and outrage. A situation where discourse participants had power over and within discourse echoed traditional mass media.

The Twitter users’ network that emerged in 2013 during the elections in Zimbabwe portrayed openness and inclusivity, which are some of the characteristics of the public sphere. Furthermore, there was unlimited and unregulated discourse, with no known or visible government regulation

of what was taking place within the Twittersphere, which further confirms the public sphere concept. The characteristics of the Twittersphere are further evidenced by the topically defined public opinions that emerged on the Twitter platform, for example regarding elections credibility. Despite showing these characteristics, it was also shown that the public sphere waned when one looked for communicative rationality from the text (tweets) that were analysed.

The “communicative irrationality” and the failure to get to something approaching public opinion largely discredits the view that the Twittersphere was a public sphere. The Twitter users are not equal because there are power dynamics and the economies of scale at play. As such, it was found that there are elites within the Twitter network and these are either as a result of the number of tweets they contributed, the replies they got or how many of their tweets got retweeted. The emergence of elite users, to a certain extent, reflects the dynamics around resources for participation including the right technology, connectivity, information to tweet and knowing how to tweet. As such, resourced Twitter users such as media houses, journalists, organisations and politicians emerged as the dominant players within the community with a potential of controlling discourse. Additionally, it was clearly demonstrated that the Twitter platform became a site of ideological and discursive struggles as well as racial, ethnic, gender and language conflicts, further highlighting how this was an agnostic public space and not a public sphere. The appearance of openness and inclusivity buries the deep-seated barriers to participation which were exposed by both the quantitative and qualitative analysis.

Another observation was that media professionals and organisational users of Twitter used the platform to widen discourse by referring to other texts which otherwise would not have been available on the platform. This can be seen as an attempt to have “communicative rationality” as the text that is referred to, for example, newspaper articles or opinions, would have gone through a process of quality checks. In this regard, the use of Twitter would have demonstrated some of the characteristics of a public sphere.

7.4 Discussion of main research question

The potential Twitter has to enhance public political participation seem to be over-exaggerated or too technological deterministic as it suggests that all things are equal and fail to recognise other

factors which have a bearing on the role of social media in political participation. Twitter use in Zimbabwe in 2013 showed that despite being an open platform where anyone with the right technology could participate, there were other factors which influenced its use. For example, in 2013 one needed to have the right technology (a phone or computer), be within the range where they could access the internet, and knew how to use Twitter to be able to participate. This meant that those without these resources were not able to participate. In addition, I also found that not all Twitter users were equal. This was because some users, for example, journalists or media organisations, had a competitive advantage over the other users and had more time to tweet as well as the relevant information to share. This led to an attention divide as those with more resources go more retweets or replies to. As such, more resourced participants were better positioned to perpetuate or challenge a certain ideological standpoint.

7.5 Discussion of the quantitative findings

Vital insights into the use of Twitter for public political participation were gained from quantitative data analysis. It was found, as expected, that the number of tweets steadily increased and peaked on the voting day or day after then started to ebb thereafter. It was expected that the number of tweets would increase over time because interest in a discourse event gains momentum as the dates draw closer, peaking immediately before, during or soon after. The number of tweets for the most widely used hashtags (#zimelections and #zimdecides) started significantly low but increased over the elections period and peaked on the voting day. Thereafter, the number of tweets started gradually receding and in the case of #zimdecides2013 and #zimelection, they ceased even before terminating the collection of data on August 25. This illustrates the temporary nature of the network that emerged.

7.6 Discussion of the qualitative findings

Twitter became a site of struggle as discourse participants contested over a number of issues including which language to use, ideologies, sexual orientation race, and ethnicity. Qualitative analysis of the dataset clearly showed that Twitter, as a technology, may be used to perpetuate

certain ideologies, such as maleness or masculinity. This confirms that this is a site where varying points of views are posted with no consensus or something approaching public opinion coming out. The situation is, however, different when one looks at how the media personnel and the organisational users of the platform used Twitter. The posts by this segment, which also constitute the dominant users, shows “communicative rationality”.

7.7 Discussion of theoretical contribution of the study

Critical theory helped to illustrate how power structures, as they are configured in the Zimbabwean society, affect the use of social media. In so doing, it was possible to interrogate the use of Twitter for public political participation in a society that is considered oppressive. The quantitative and qualitative findings of this research clearly reject “technology determinism”, as it was shown that there were filters to social participation. In its rejection of the narrow presumptions about the universality of digital experience, this research has shown that there are dominant users who contribute most of the content. This shows that there is a subtle disempowering as a seemingly open platform is used differently depending on how much resources a user has. This research gives an important critique on the oversimplification of the role of technology in public political participation.

7.8 Discussion of methodological contribution of study

This is the first time that tweets on elections in Zimbabwe were collected and archived in real time for future analysis. The use of TAGS v5, coupled with basic computer coding skills enabled cost effective data collection methodology, which can be adopted for future researches. TAGS v5 is ideal because it enables the collection and archiving of tweets on an hourly basis even at a time when the researcher is offline. TAGS v5 is open source thus one can tweak the original code to include new fields of analysis which may not have been included in the version used. Additionally, the merging of quantitative and qualitative methodology, coupled with the other innovative data collection and cleaning methods are important novel approaches, which can help future analyses on the subject matter. In addition, the use of discourse-historical analysis, a variant of CDA, is helpful as it pays particular attention to the historical context of a discursive event. Building on

information gathered through literature review and a historical background that was given, it was possible to contextualise the role of Twitter in Zimbabwe. Discourse historical analysis' interdisciplinary approach enabled this researcher to take a detailed analysis of available literature as well as the data, then link to the research question so as to enhance the understanding of the use of the topic.

7.9 Discussion of empirical contribution of study

The use of Twitter for public political participation follows a binary logic, that is, it is either you use it or you do not. The reasons for not using the social media platform may vary, from lack of resources to failure to appreciate its use. Twitter use during the 2013 elections was widespread with free engagement by and between various users. However, in spite of the widespread use, there emerged a sort of “elite stranglehold” on the discourse as resourced users dominated in terms of the number of tweets and attention they got as shown by how they were retweeted or responded to. This puts a caveat to the supposition that social media enables the dispersion of power as the “super nodes” concentrated the power over discourse. This research enables us to move away from reductionist conclusions that see a causal relationship between the presence of ICT and its use for public political participation. There are many subtle and at times overt power imbalances within society, which debar equal opportunities for participation. It was found that Twitter was a site of ideological struggle as different interest groups converged on the platform in an attempt to shape the discussion in a manner that supports certain ideological dispositions.

7.10 Limitations and suggestions for further research

This has been a very specific research project, looking at how Twitter was used for public political participation in the election of a new government in Zimbabwe in 2013. There lie vast areas for further research to help understand how Twitter among other social media is used for public political participation. Future researches may look at the next polls in 2018 or undertake a comparative analysis of how social media is used for public political participation in Zimbabwe and Zambia or South Africa. Further researches may look at how certain or specific population groups, demographic groups or gender and social actors use Twitter for political participation.

Additionally, it is possible to code for additional fields under TAGS to include gender and geographic location of the Twitter user, than do it manually, after the data is collected as was the case with this research. It is also possible to further enrich future researches by not only relying on the data collected online by also administering questionnaires.

7.11 Conclusion

It was found that while Twitter has a potential to facilitate public political participation, this was not realised in Zimbabwe in 2013 because of structural constrictions, and societal prejudices that debarred it. Resultantly, Twitter was a site for struggle and conflict, while certain role players attempted to control and entrench certain ideologies within society. As such, attention divide was very evident with resourced users getting more responses or retweeted than others. This illustrates the power asymmetries that characterised the Twitter platform during the elections in Zimbabwe in 2013.

References

- Agger, B. 1991. Critical theory, post-structuralism, post-modernism their sociological relevance. *Annual Review of Sociology* 17:105-131.
- Alterman, J. 2011. The revolution will not be tweeted. *Washington Quarterly* 34(4):103-116.
- Anusha, A., & Singh, S. 2015. Is that Twitter hashtag worth reading? In Proceedings of the Third International Symposium on Women in Computing and Informatics Kochi - India: WCI. Pp. 347-352.
- Aouragh, M., & Alexander, A. 2011. The Egyptian experience: Sense and nonsense of the internet revolution. *International Journal of Communication* 5:1344-1358.
- ARTICLE-XIX, & MISA-Zimbabwe. 2004. *The access to information and protection of privacy act: Two years on*. Harare: MISA Zimbabwe.
- Atton, C. 2004. *An alternative internet; radical media, politics, and creativity*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Attwood, A. 2010. Kubatana in Zimbabwe: Mobile phones for advocacy. In Ekine, S. (Ed). *SMS uprising. Mobile phone activism in Africa*. Cape Town: Fahamu/Pambazuka. Pp. 86-104
- Banana, C. 1989. *Turmoil and tenacity: Zimbabwe 1890-1990*. Harare: College Press.
- Belden, C. 2009. Democratic elitism in the name of participatory democracy: A critical-theoretical analysis of state supported “publics” in Brazil. *McNair Journal* 5(1):1-9.
- Benkler, Y. 2006. *The wealth of networks*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Biriwasha, M. 2012. Why Twitter is the next big social network in Zimbabwe. *Development Age* home page: <https://developmentagezim.wordpress.com/2012/12/11/why-twitter-is-the-next-big-social-network-in-zimbabwe/>. Accessed 2015-01-20.
- Boeder, P. 2005. Habermas’s heritage: The future of the public sphere in the network society. *First Monday* 10(9): firstmonday.org/ojs/index.php/fm/article/view/1280/1200. Accessed 2015-06-23.

- Bohman, J. 2005. Stanford encyclopaedia of philosophy. *Critical Theory* home page: <http://seop.illc.uva.nl/archives/spr2007/entries/critical-theory/>. Accessed 2015-06-01.
- Bohn, D. 2012. Twitter dictates third-party app form and function in new API, gives six months to comply. *The Verge* home page: <http://www.theverge.com/2012/8/16/3248079/twitter-limits-app-developers-control>. Accessed 2015-02-23.
- Boka, L. 2011. *Impact of the North African revolutions on Sub-Saharan Africa*. Cape Town: Open Society Institute - Africa Government and Monitoring Project (Afrimap).
- Borgatti, S.P., & Haglin, D. 2011. One network theory. *Organisation Science* 22(5):1168-1181.
- Bouchard, P. 2011. Network promises and their implication in the impact of social network on teaching and learning. *Revister de Universidaad del Conocimento (RUSC)* 8(1):288-302.
- boyd, d., & Crawford, K. 2012. Critical questions for big data. *Information, Communication and Society* 15(5):662-679.
- boyd, d., Scott, G., & Gilad, L. 2010. Tweet, tweet, retweet: Conversation aspects of retweeting on Twitter. Unpublished paper read to the HICSS-43 IEEE: Kawai, HI. 6 January.
- Boyd, M.S., & Monacelli, C. 2010. Politics, (con)text and genre: Applying CDA and DHA to interpreter training. *The Interpreters' Newsletter* 15:51-70.
- Brand, C. 1981. The anatomy of an unequal society. In Stoneman, C. Ed. *Zimbabwe's Inheritance*. Macmillan. London. Pp 36-57.
- Breindl, Y. 2010. Critique of the democratic potentialities of the internet: A review of current theory and practice. *Triple C (Communication, Capitalism & Critique)* 8(1):43-59.
- Brin, S., & Page, L. 2012. Reprint of: The anatomy of a large-scale hypertextual web search engine. *Computer Networks* 56(18):3825-3833.
- Bruns, A., & Burgess, J. 2014. Crisis communication in natural disasters: The Queensland floods and Christchurch earthquakes. In Weller, K. Bruns, A. Burgess, J. E. Mahrt, M. & Puschmann, C. Eds. *Twitter and Society*. New York: Peter Lang. Pp. 373-385

- Bruns, A., & Burgess, J. 2012. Notes towards the scientific study of public communication on Twitter. *Science and the Internet*:159-169.
- Bruns, A., & Burges, J. 2011. The use of hashtags in the formation of ad hoc publics. An unpublished paper read to the 6th European Consortium for Political Research General Conference. University of Iceland, Reykjavik, Iceland, 26-27 August 2011
- Bruns, A., & Highfield, T. 2016. Is Habermas on Twitter? Social media and the public sphere. In Bruns, A. Enli, G. Skogerbø, E. & Olof, A. Eds. *The Routledge Companion to Social Media and Politics*. New York: Routledge. Pp. 56-73
- Bruns, A., & Liang, Y. E. 2012. Tools and methods for capturing Twitter data during natural disasters. *First Monday* 4(2): firstmonday.org/article/view/3937/3193/. Accessed 2015-12-09.
- Bruns, A., & Stieglitz, S. 2014. Twitter data: What do they represent? *Information Technology* 56(5):240-245.
- Bruns, A. & Stieglitz, S. 2013. Towards more systematic Twitter analysis: Metrics for tweeting activities. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology* 16(2):91-108.
- Burghardt, M. 2015. Introduction to tools and methods for the analysis of Twitter data. *10plus1: Living Linguistics* 1:74-91.
- Calhoun, C. 1992. Introduction: Habermas and the public sphere. In Calhoun, C. (Ed), *Habermas and the public sphere*. Cambridge Massachusetts, MIT Press. Pp 1-48
- Chaffee, S., & Metzger, M. 2001. The end of mass communication? *Mass Communication and Society* 4(4):365-379.
- Cammaerts, B. 2007. Citizenship, the public sphere and media. In Bart, M., & Carpentier, N. Eds. *Reclaiming the media: communication rights and democratic media roles*. Bristol. Intellect. Pp. 1-8.
- Capitol Radio (PVT) Limited v.s Broadcasting Authority of Zimbabwe and others, 162/2001 (Supreme Court of Zimbabwe 2001).

- Carpentier, N., & Cammaerts, B. 2006. Hegemony, democracy, agonism, and journalism: An interview with Chantal Mouffe. *Journalism Studies* 7(6):964-975.
- Castells, M. 2012. *Networks of outrage and hope*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Castells, M. 2009a. *Communication power*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Castells, M. 2009b. Foreword. In Linchuan, Q.J. *Working class network society: Communication technology and the information have-less in urban China*. London: MIT Press. Pp. IX-XI.
- Castells, M. 2004. Afterword: Why networks matter. *Demos Collection, 2004*:221-224.
- Castells, M. 2000. *The information age: Economy, society and culture*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Castells, M. 1996. *The rise of the network society: The Information Age: Economy, Society and Culture, I*. Malden: Blackwell.
- Casteltrione, I. 2015. *The internet, social networking web sites and political participation research: Assumptions and contradictory evidence*. First Monday 20(2): <http://firstmonday.org/ojs/index.php/fm/article/view/5462/4403>. Accessed 2015-07-30
- Cheng, Z., Caverlee, J., Lee, K. 2010. You are where you tweet: A content-based approach to geolocating twitter users. *Proceedings of the 19th ACM International Conference on Information and Knowledge Management*. Toronto: York University. Pp. 759-768.
- Chigona, W., Pollock, M., & Roode, J. 2009. South Africa's socio-techno divide. *SACJ* 44:3-20.
- Chouliaraki, L. 2008. Discourse analysis. In Bennett, T., & Frovo, J. Eds. *The SAGE handbook of cultural analysis*. London: SAGE. Pp. 674-698.
- Christensen, C. 2011. Twitter revolutions? Addressing social media and dissent. *The Communications Review* 14(3):155-157.
- Chuma, W. 2007. *Mediating the transition: The press, state and capital in a changing Zimbabwe 1980-2000*. Unpublished PhD Thesis. University of Witwatersrand. South Africa.
- Cilia, R., Reisigl, M., & Wodak, R. 1999. The discursive construction of native identities. *Discourse and Society* 10(2):149-173.

- Crozier, M. 2002. The network society thesis: Theoretical adequacy and research possibilities. In Considine, M. Ed. *Knowledge networks and joined up government*. Melbourne: Melbourne Centre for Public Policy, University of Melbourne. Pp. 169-185.
- Dahlberg, L. 2013a. *Impact of the internet in Africa: Establishing conditions for success and catalysing inclusive growth in Ghana, Kenya, Nigeria and Senegal*. Johannesburg: Dahlberg.
- Dahlberg, L. 2013b. The Habermasian public sphere and exclusion: An engagement with poststructuralist-influenced critics. *Communication Theory*, 1-21.
- Dahlberg, L. 2011. Web 2.0 divides: A critical political economy. *Media and Journalism* 18(10:1): 84-99.
- Dahlberg, L. 2005. The corporate takeover of the online public sphere: A critical examination, with reference to 'the New Zealand case'. *Pacific Journalism Review* 11(1): 90-112.
- Dahlberg, L. (2004). The Habermasian public sphere: A specification of the idealized conditions of democratic communication. *Studies in Social and Political Thought*, 10: 2-18.
- Dahlberg, L. 2001. The Habermasian public sphere encounters cyber-reality. *The Republic* 8(3):83-96.
- Dahlberg, L. & Siapera, E. 2007. Introduction: Tracing radical democracy and the internet. In Dahlberg, L. & Siapera, E. Eds. *Radical democracy and the internet*. London: Palgrave Macmillan. Pp. 1-16
- Dahlgren, P. 2014. Participation and alternative democracy: social media and their contingencies. In Serra, P., Camilo E., & Gonçalves, G. Eds. *Political participation and Web 2.0*. Covilhã: Livros LabCom. Pp. 61-86
- Dahlgren, P. 2005. The Internet, public sphere and political communication: Dispersion and deliberation. *Political Communication Number* 22:147-162.
- Dean, J. 2005. Communicative capitalism: Circulation and the foreclosure of politics. *Cultural Politics* 1(1):51-74.
- Dean, J. 2003. Why the net is not a public sphere. *Constellations* 10(1):95-112.

- Demirović, A. 2013. What does it mean to speak of the actuality? *An International E-Journal for Critical Geographies* 12(2):366-379.
- Diamond, L. 2010. Liberation technology. *Journal of Democracy* 21(3):70-76.
- Dick, M. D., & McLaughlin, R. 2013. *The desire network*. C Theory: www.ctheory.net/articles.aspx?id=727 Accessed 2014-03-14.
- Dube, J.N. 1995. The consequences of government control on the work of Zimbabwean journalist, the case of Zimpapers, 1980 - 1994. Unpublished masters' dissertation, University of Kwazulu-Natal, South Africa.
- Easley, D., & Kleinberg, J. 2010. *Networks, crowds, and markets: Reasoning about a highly connected world*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Eagleton, T. 1991. *Ideology: An introduction*. London: Verso.
- Edwards, A., Housley, W., Williams, M., Sloan, L., & Williams, M. 2013. Digital social research, social media and the sociological imagination: Surrogacy, augmentation and re-orientation. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology* 16(3):245-260.
- Eltantawy, N., & Wiest, J. 2011. Social media in the Egyptian revolution: reconsidering resource mobilization theory. *International Journal of Communication* 5:1207-1224.
- Fairclough, N. 1989. *Language and power*. London: Longman.
- Fairclough, N., & Wodak, R. 1997. Critical discourse analysis. In Van Dijk, T.A. Ed. *Discourse studies a multidisciplinary introduction Volume 2. Discourse as social interaction*. London: Sage. Pp. 258-284.
- Feenberg, A. 2014. Great refusal or long march: How to think about the internet. In Fuchs, C., & Sandoval, M. Eds. *Critique, social media and the information society in the age of capitalist crisis*. New York: Routledge. Pp. 109-124.
- Feenberg, A. 2009. Critical theory of technology. In Oslen, J.K. Pederesen, S.A., & Hendriks, V. F. Eds. *A companion to the philosophy of technology*. London: Blackwell. Pp. 146-153.

Feenberg, A. 2002. *Transforming technology: A critical theory revised*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Feenberg, A. 1999. *Questioning technology*. London: Routledge.

Fjørtoft, M. R. 2013. The critical element of critical discourse analysis. *SYNAPS* 28(2013): 67-75.

Firdaus, A. 2001. Past and present of Siebert & colleagues' four theories of the press: Sequential modifications of press theories associated with the media's social obligations within the framework of the social environment of the day. *Malaysian Journal of Media Studies* 14(1):1-16.

Fraser, N. 1990. Rethinking the public sphere: A contribution to the actual existing democracy. *Social Text* 25(26):56-80.

Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES). 2012. *African media barometer the first home grown analysis of the media landscape in Africa; Zimbabwe 2012*. Namibia. Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES) fesmedia Africa.

Freedom House. 2012. *World freedom 2011*. Freedom House Home page: <http://www.freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2011/zimbabwe> . Accessed 2012-05-01

Fuchs, C. 2016. Red scare 2.0: User-generated ideology in the age of Jeremy Corbyn and social media. *Journal of Language and Politics* 15 (4):369-398.

Fuchs, C. 2015. *Culture and economy in the age of social media*. New York: Routledge.

Fuchs, C. 2014a. Critique of the political economy of informational capitalism and social media. In Fuchs, C. & Sandoval, M. Eds. *Critique, social media and the information society*. New York: Routledge. Pp. 51-65.

Fuchs, C. 2014b. *Social media: A critical introduction*. London: Sage.

Fuchs, C. 2012. Behind the news: Social media, riots, and revolutions. *Capital and Class* (36)3: 383-391.

Fuchs, C. 2009a. *Critical theory of information, communication, media, technology*. Glossarium home page: <http://glossarium.bitrum.unileon.es/Home/teoria-critica-de-la-informacion/critical-theory-of-information>. Accessed 2014-06-15.

Fuchs, C. 2009b. Towards a critical theory of information. *tripleC (Communication, Capitalism & Critique)* 7(2):243-292.

Gallup. 2012. *Zimbabwe media use 2012*. Washington: Broadcasting Board of Governors.

Geiger, R. S. 2009. Does Habermas understand the internet? The algorithmic construction of the blogo/public sphere. *Gnovis Journal*, 10(1). <http://www.gnovisjournal.org/2009/12/22/does-habermas-understand-internet-algorithmic-construction-blogopublic-sphere/>. Accessed 2015-06-20.

Gladwell, M. 2011. Does Egypt need Twitter? *The New Yorker*, 2.

GPA: Agreement between the Zimbabwe African National Union-Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF) and the two Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) formations, on resolving the challenges facing Zimbabwe. (Harare September 15, 2008).

Gonzalez-Bailon, S. 2013. Social science in the era of big data. *Policy & Internet* 5(2):147-160.

González-Bailón, S., Wang, N., Rivero, A., Borge-Holthoefer, J., & Moreno, Y. 2014. Assessing the bias in samples of large online networks. *Social Networks* 38:16-27.

Government of Zimbabwe. 2013a. Constitution of Zimbabwe amendment act (No 20) Act 2013. Harare: Fidelity Printers and Refiners.

Government of Zimbabwe. 2013b. Statutory instrument 86 of 2013. Harare: Government Publishers.

Guardian. 2009. *Obama Iran Twitter*. Guardian Online: <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2009/jun/17/obama-iran-twitter>. Accessed 2015-04-15

Habermas, J. 2004. *The divided west*. Malden, MA: Polity Press.

Habermas, J. 1996. *Between facts and norms; Contributions to a discourse theory of communications and democracy*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Habermas, J. 1990. *Moral consciousness and communicative action*. Cambridge: MIT Press.

Habermas, J. 1989. *The structural transformation of the public sphere*. Cambridge: MIT Press.

Hacker, K., & Van Dijk, J. 2000. Models of democracy and concepts of communication. In Hacker, K., & van Dijk, J. Eds. *Digital Democracy: Issues of Theory and Practice*. London: Sage. Pp. 166–183.

Hallin, D., & Mancini, P. 2004. *Comparing media systems: Three models of media and politics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Henwood, F., Miller, N., Senker, P., & Wyatt, S. 2000. *Technology and in/equality: Questioning the information society*. London: Routledge.

Herald. 2013. *President Mugabe set to announce cabinet*. The Herald home page: <http://www.herald.co.zw/breaking-news-president-mugabe-set-to-announce-cabinet/>. Accessed 2014-05-03.

Hecht, B., Hong, L., Suh, B., & Chi, E.H. 2011. Tweets from Justin Bieber's heart: The dynamics of the location field in user profiles. Proceedings of the SIGCHI Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems. Vancouver, Canada. May 7 – 11, 2011. Pp. 237-246

Hindman, M. 2009. *The myth of digital democracy*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Hofheinz, A. 2011. Nextopia? Beyond revolution 2.0. *International Journal of Communications* 5 (2011):1417-1434.

Hofkirchner, W. 2010. A taxonomy of theories about ICTs and society. *tripleC: Communication, Capitalism & Critique* 8(2):171-176.

Hooghe, M., Hosch-Dayican, B., & van Deth, J. W. 2014. Conceptualising political participation. *Acta Politica*: 49(3):337–348.

Horkheimer, M. 1972. *Critical theory: Selected essays*. Translated by Matthew J.O'Connell et al. New York: Continuum.

Hosch-Dayican, B., Amrit, C., Aarts, K., & Dassen, A. 2014. How do online citizens persuade fellow voters? Using Twitter during the 2012 Dutch parliamentary election campaign. *Social Science Computer Review*: ISSN 0894-4393

Howard, P.N., Duffy, A., Freelon, D., Hussain, M.M. Mari, W., & Mazaid, M. 2011. *Opening closed regimes: What was the role of social media during the Arab Spring?* Project on Information Technology and Political Islam. Working Paper 2011.1

Huckin, T. 2002. Critical discourse analysis and the discourse of condescension. In Burtic, E., & Stygall, G. Eds. *Discourse Studies in Composition*. Hampton: Hampton Press. Pp 155-182

Idea. 2013. *Elections*. Idea homepage: <http://africanelections.tripod.com/zw.html/>. Accessed 2015-02-22.

Ifex. 2000. *Police raid and silence new broadcaster, new broadcasting legislation approved*. Ifex home page: https://www.ifex.org/zimbabwe/2000/11/17/radio_station_s_equipment_returne/. Accessed 2015-02-20

Java, A., Song, X., Finin, T., & Tseng, B. 2007. Why we twitter: Understanding microblogging usage and communities. *Proceedings of the 9th WebKDD and 1st SNA-KDD 2007 workshop on Web mining and social network analysis*. Pp. 56-65.

Juel, H. 2012. Social Media and the dialectic of enlightenment. *tripleC: Communication, Capitalism & Critique* 10(2):765-770.

Jungherr, A. 2015. *Analysing political communication with digital trace data*. Zurich: Springer International Publishers.

Kamwendo, L. 2013. *Perception from a youth, media and governance survey as Zimbabwe prepares for elections*. Kubatana Blogs: <http://www.kubatanablogs.net/kubatana/perceptions-from-a-youth-media-and-governance-survey-as-zimbabwe-prepare-for-elections-78284/>.

Accessed 2014-07-12

Kaplan, A.M., & Haenlein, M. 2010. Users of the world, unite! The challenges and opportunities of social media. *Business Horizons* 53(1):59-68.

Karpf, D. 2012. Social science research in internet time. *Information, Communication and Society* 15(3):639-661.

Karppinen, K. 2007. Against naive pluralism in media politics: On the implications of the radical-pluralist approach to public sphere. *Media, Culture & Society* 29(3):495-508.

Kellner, D. 2015. *Review: questioning technology*. Heathwood Press home page: <http://www.heathwoodpress.com/review-questioning-technology-andrew-feenberg>. Accessed 2015-07-20.

Kellner, D. 1989. *Critical theory, Marxism and modernity*. Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press.

Kelly, S. & Cook, S. 2011. *Freedom on the Net: A global assessment of internet and global media*. New York. Freedom House.

Kendal, G. 2007. What is critical discourse analysis? Ruth Wodak interview with Garvin Kendal. *Form Qualitative Social Research* 8(2).

Klopper, R., & Lubbe, S. 2011. Using matrix analysis to achieve traction, coherence, progression and closure in problem-solution oriented research. *Alternation Special Edition*:403-419.

Koivisto, J., & Veliverronen, E. 1996. The resurgence of the critical theories of public sphere. *Journal of Communications Inquiry* 20(2):18-36.

Kreiss, D., Finn, M., & Turner, F. 2011. The limits of peer production: Some reminders from Max Weber for the network society. *New Media and Society* 13(2):243-259.

Kubatana. n.d. *About Kubatana*. Kubatana home page: <http://www.kubatana.net/contact-us>. Accessed 2015-04-14.

Laakso, L. 2003. Research debates: From analysis to practice. In Darnolf, S., & Laakso, L. Eds. *Twenty years of independence in Zimbabwe. From liberation to authoritarianism*. New York: Palgrave MacMillan. Pp. 1-14.

- Langloes, G., & Elmer, G. 2013. The research politics of social media platforms. *Culture Machine* 14:1-17.
- Larsson, A.O., & Moe, H. 2014. Twitter in politics and elections. In Weller, K. Bruns, A. Burgess, J. E. Mahrt, M. & Puschmann, C. Eds. *Twitter and society*. New York: Peter Lang. Pp. 319-330.
- Latour, B. 2004. Why has critique run out of steam? From matters of fact to matters of concern. *Critical Inquiry* 30:225-248.
- Lilleker, D., & Jackson, N. 2008. Politicians and Web 2.0: The current bandwagon or changing the mindset? *Web 2.0: An International Conference*. London: University of London.
- Lockyer, S. 2004. Coding qualitative data. In Lewis-Beck, M. Bryman, A. & Liao, T. Eds. *The Sage Encyclopedia of Social Science Research*. Thousand Oaks: Sage. Pp. 137-138.
- Lotan, G., Graeff, E., Ananny, M., Gaffney, D., Pearce, I., & boyd, d. 2011. The revolutions were tweeted: Information flows during the 2011 Tunisian and Egyptian revolutions. *International Journal of Communication* 5 (2011):13751405.
- Lovink, G. 2014. Hermes on the Hudson: Notes on media theory after Snowden. *e-flux journal* 54:1-10.
- Lovink, G. 2012. What is social about social media? *e-flux journal*:1-40.
- Lovink, G. 2011. *Networks without a cause: A critique of social media*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Lunt, P., & Livingstone, S. 2013. Media studies' fascination with the concept of the public sphere: Critical reflections and emerging debates. *Media, Culture & Society*, 35 (1):87-96.
- Luoma-Aho, V. (2011). Is social media killing our theories? Unpublished paper read to the Viestinnän Tutkimuksen Päivät (Communication Research Days). 12 February 2010.
- Makombe, L. 2011. *Mubarak, Mugabe regimes - so many parallels to draw*. The Zimbabwe Independent home page: <http://www.thestandard.co.zw/2011/02/25/mubarak-mugabe-regimes-so-many-parallels-to-draw/>. Accessed 2014-07-21

- Makumbe, J., & Compagnon, D. 2000. *Behind the smokescreen: The politics of Zimbabwe 1995 elections*. Harare: University of Zimbabwe Publications.
- Mandaza, I. Ed. 1986. *Zimbabwe – The political economy of transition 1980-86*. Dakar: Codesiria.
- Mandaza, I., & Sachikonye, L. Eds. 1991. *One party state and democracy: The Zimbabwe debate*. Harare: Southern African Political and Economic Series (Sapes).
- Manganga, K. 2012. The internet as public sphere: A Zimbabwean case study (1999-2008). *Africa Development XXXVII(1)*:103-118.
- Mapuva, J. 2010. Government of national unity (GNU) as a conflict prevention strategy: The case of Zimbabwe and Kenya. *Journal of Sustainable Development in Africa 12(6)*:247-263.
- Mass Public Opinion Institute (MPOI). 2007. *The Zimbabwe electoral process and attendant issues: The voters' views*. Harare: MPOI
- Masuku, J. 2011 The public broadcaster model and the Zimbabwe Broadcasting Corporation (ZBC): An analytical study. Unpublished masters' dissertation, University of Stellenbosch, South Africa.
- Matic, D. 2012. Ideological discourse structures in political speeches. *Komunikacijal Kultura Goding iii(bro3)*:54-55)
- Mattina, N. 2007. *Elements of social media theory*. Spiderless home page: http://spiderlessweb.com/?attachment_id=18. Accessed 2014-03-21
- Matyszak, D., & Reeler, T. 2011. *Articles of faith: Assessing Zimbabwe's "GPA" as a mechanism for change – a legal perspective*. Harare: Research and Advocacy Unit.
- Mavhunga, C. 2008. The glass fortress: Zimbabwe's cyber guerrilla warfare. *Concerned African Scholars 8*:21-27.
- Mazango, E. M. 2005. Media games and shifting of spaces for political communication in Zimbabwe. *Westminster Papers in Communication and Culture Special Issue 2005*:33 – 55.

- Mejias, U. 2012. *Liberation technology and the Arab Spring: From utopia to atopia and beyond*. The Fibreculture Journal homepage: twenty.fibreculturejournal.com/. Accessed 2014-02-16.
- Mejias, U. 2011. The Twitter revolution must die. *Mejias' Blog*. 30 January [Online] Available: <http://blog.ulisesmejias.com/2011/01/30/the-twitter-revolution-must-die/>. Accessed 2014-02-16.
- Messina, C. 2007. Groups for Twitter or a proposal for Twitter tag channels. *Factory City* 5. August [Online]. Available <http://factoryjoe.com/blog/2007/08/05/groups-for-twitter-or-a-proposal-for-twitter-tag-channels/> Accessed 2014-03-21
- Miessen, M. 2007. Articulated power relations – Markus Miessen in conversation with Chantal Mouffe. *Roundtable*. Available <http://roundtable.kein.org/node/545>. Accessed 2016-08-18.
- Milner, R.M. 2013. Pop polyvocality: Internet memes, public participation, and the Occupy Wall Street Movement. *International Journal of Communication* 7:2357-2390.
- Morozov, E. 2011. *The net delusion: The dark side of internet freedom*. New York: Public Affairs.
- Morozov, E. 2009. Iran: Downside to the "Twitter Revolution". *Dissent (Fall 2009)*:10 – 14.
- Morstatter, F., Pfeffer, J., Liu H., & Carley, K.M. 2013. Is the sample good enough? Comparing data from Twitter's streaming API with Twitter firehose. *International Conference on Weblogs and Social Media*. Pp 400-408.
- Morsia, L., Riddle, C., & Zaffiro, J. 1994. From revolutionary to regime radio: Three decades of nationalist broadcasting in Southern Africa. *Africa Media Review* 8(1):1-24.
- Mouffe, C. 2005. Which public space for critical artistic practices? In *Cork Caucus* Cork: Cork Caucus. Pp 149-171.
- Mouffe, C. 2002. Politics and passions. The stakes of democracy. *Centre for the Study of Democracy (CSD) Perspectives*:1-16.
- Moyo, D. 2012a. Mediating crisis realigning media policy and deployment of propaganda in Zimbabwe, 2000 - 2008. In Chiumbu, S., & Musemwa, M. Eds. *The Multiple Dimensions of the Zimbabwe Crisis*. Cape Town: HRSC Press. Pp. 176-198.

- Moyo, D. 2010. The new media as monitors of democracy: Mobile phones and Zimbabwe's 2008 elections. Unpublished *paper read to the Conference on Election Processes, Liberation Movements and Democratic Change in Africa*. Maputo, Mozambique. 8-11 April 2010.
- Moyo, D. 2005. The "independent" press and the fight for democracy in Zimbabwe: A critical analysis of the banned Daily News. *Westminster Papers in Communication and Culture* 56:109-128.
- Moyo, D. 2004. From Rhodesia to Zimbabwe: Change without change? Broadcasting policy reform and political control. *Current African Issues* 27:12-28.
- Moyo, J. 1992. *Voting for democracy: Electoral politics in Zimbabwe*. Harare: University of Zimbabwe Publishers.
- Moyo, L. 2012b. Participation, citizenship, and pirate radio as empowerment: The case of Radio Dialogue in Zimbabwe. *International Journal of Communication* 6:484-500.
- Moyo, L. 2011. Blogging down a dictatorship: Human rights, citizen journalists and the right to communicate in Zimbabwe. *Journalism* 12:745-760.
- Mpofu, S. 2009. *The power of citizen journalism in Zimbabwe*. Fesmedia home page: http://www.fesmedia-africa.org/uploads/media/The_power_of_citizen_journalism_in_Zimbabwe2_01.pdf/. Accessed 2012-11-13
- Mugari, Z. 2010. Dynamics of elite power and the clash of media reform agenda in contemporary Zimbabwe. Unpublished paper read at the *World Journalism Education Congress: Journalism in Age of Radical Change*. Grahams Town, South Africa. 23 June 2010.
- Mungiu-Pippidi, A., & Munteanu, I. 2009. Moldova's "Twitter Revolution". *Journal of Democracy* 20(3):136-142.
- Murugusen, S. 2007. Understanding web 2.0. *IT Professional* 9(4):34-41.
- Mutanda, D. 2012. The local media and Zimbabwe's land reform program. *Journal of Sustainable Development in Africa* 4(3):262-279.

Mutsvairo, B. 2014. No technology but still participatory journalists: Viewpoints from Zimbabwe's rural folks. *Ejournalist.com.au*: 42-58.

Mutsvairo, B. 2013. Are new media technologies positively influencing democratic participation? Evidence from the 2008 elections in Zimbabwe. *Global Media Journal-African Edition*, 7(2):181-200.

Mutsvairo, B. & Columbus, S. 2012. Emerging patterns and trends In Citizen Journalism in Africa: A Case of Zimbabwe. *Central European Journal of Communication* 5(8):123-137.

Nagy, P., & Neff, G. 2015. Imagined affordances: Reconstructing a keyword for communication theory. *Social Media and Society* (June - December):1-9.

Ndlela, M. 2010. Alternative media and the public sphere in Zimbabwe. In Howley, K. Ed. *Understanding Community Media*. Thousand Oaks: Sage. Pp. 87-95.

Ndlovu, N. 2009. Blogger: The new watchdogs on the Zimbabwe block. *Rhodes Journalism Review*:45-46.

Noonan, C., & Piatt, A. 2014. *Global social media directory*. New York: US Department of Energy.

Ntuli, D. 2013. *Social media: An elections game changer*. The Zimbabwe Independent home page: <http://www.theindependent.co.zw/2013/07/26/social-media-an-elections-game-changer/>.

Accessed 2014-07-14

Nyaruwanga, T. 2014. *The rise of Twitter use in Zimbabwe*. Techno Magazine home page: <http://www.technomag.co.zw/2014/02/21/the-rise-of-twitter-in-zimbabwe/#sthash.CP5ffnhw.dpbs/>.

Accessed 2015-01-20.

Onslow, S. 2011. *Zimbabwe and political transition (IDEAS strategic update)*. London: London School of Economics and Political Science.

Oran, O., & Shih, G. 2013. Twitter shares soar in frenzied NYSE debut. *Reuters home page*. <http://www.reuters.com/article/2013/11/07/us-twitter-ipo-idUSBRE99N1AE20131107/>.

Accessed 2015-02-23.

- Papacharissi, Z. 2009. The virtual sphere 2.0: The internet, the public sphere and beyond. In Andrew, C., & Philip, H. Eds. *Handbook of Internet Politics*. Routledge: New York. Pp. 230-245.
- Papacharissi, Z. 2010. *A private sphere: Democracy in a digital age*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Paßmann, J., Boeschoten, T., & Schäfer, M. 2014. The Gift of the Gab: Retweet cartels and gift economies on Twitter. In Weller, K. Bruns, A., Burgess, J.E., Mahrt, M. & Puschmann, C. *Twitter and society*. New York: Peter Lang. Pp. 331-343.
- Poster, M. 1997. Cyberdemocracy: Internet and public sphere. In Porter, D. Ed., *Internet Culture*. Routledge. New York. Pp. 201-215.
- Poster, M. 1995. *Cyberdemocracy: The internet and public sphere*. UCI homepage. <http://www.humanities.uci.edu.mposter/writings/democ.html/>. Accessed 2015-03-12.
- Puschmann, C., & Burgess, J. 2013. The politics of Twitter data. Unpublished paper read to the *Humboldt Institute for Internet und Gesellschaft (HIIG) Discussion Paper series*. Berlin, Germany 6 January 2013.
- Raftopoulos, B. 2010. The global political agreement as passive revolution: Notes on contemporary politics in Zimbabwe. *The Round Table Commonwealth Journal of International Affairs* 99(411):705-718.
- Ramanathan, R. & Hoon, T.B. 2015. Application of critical discourse analysis in media discourse studies. *The Southeast Asian Journal of English Language Studies* 21(2): 57-68
- Rambe, P. 2012. Critical discourse analysis of collaborative engagement in Facebook postings. *Australiasian Journal of Education Technology*:295-314.
- Ranger, T. 2005. The rise of patriotic journalism in Zimbabwe and its possible implications. *Westminister papers in Communication and Culture Special Issue*:8-17.
- Reisigl, M., & Wodak, R. 2009. The discourse-historical approach (DHA). In Reisigl, M., & Wodak, R. Eds. *Methods of critical discourse analysis 2nd Edition*. New York: Sage. Pp. 87-121.

- Ritzi, C. 2014. Neoliberal hegemony and the post-democratisation of the public sphere: An analytical framework to evaluate the democratic quality of political discourse. *Revista Científica de Informacion y comunicacion*:167-187.
- Robert, C. 1999. Communication theory as a field. *Communication Theory* 9(2):119-161.
- Rodgers, R. 2014. Debanalising Twitter: The transformation of object of study. In Weller, K., Bruns, A., Burgess, J.E., Mahrt, M. & Puschmann, C. *Twitter and society*. New York: Peter Lang. Pp. IX-XXVI. .
- Rønning, H. 2003. The media in Zimbabwe: The struggle between the state and civil society. In Darnolf, S., & Laakso, L. *Twenty years of independence in Zimbabwe. From liberation to authoritarianism*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan. Pp. 196-221.
- Rønning, H., & Kupe, T. 2000. The dual legacy of democracy and authoritarianism: The media and the state in Zimbabwe. In James, C., & Park, M.J. Eds. *De-westernising the media*. London: Routledge. Pp. 138-156.
- Rolfe, M. 2010. The pleasures of political humour. *Australian Democracy*. 34 (3): 363-376
- Ruhanya, P. 2013. *New media can play a key role in Zimbabwe*. Nehanda Radio homepage: <http://nehandaradio.com/2013/01/11/new-media-can-play-a-key-role-in-zimbabwe/>. Accessed 2014-07-14.
- Rush, F. 2004. Conceptual foundations of early critical theory. In Rush, F. Ed. *The Cambridge Companion to Critical Theory*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Pp. 6-39.
- Rusike, E. 1990. *The politics of the mass media: A personal experience*. Harare: Roblaw Publishers.
- Ryan, A. B. 2006. Post-positivist approaches to research. In Education Maynooth Adult and Community, *Researching and Writing your thesis: a guide for postgraduate students*. Maynooth: MACE. Pp. 12-26.
- Sale, J.E.M., Lohfeld, L.H. & Brazil K. 2002. Revisiting the quantitative-qualitative debate: Implications for mixed-methods research. *Quality & Quantity* (36):43-53.

- Schlee, B. 2011. Economic crisis and political apathy in Zimbabwe. In proceedings of the *ISPA-ECPR 2011*. Sao Paulo. Pp. 1-23.
- Seidman, S. 1989. *Jugern Habermas on society and politics: A reader*. Boston: Beacon Press.
- Sharifi, B., Inouye, D., & Kalita, J.K. 2009. Summarization of Twitter microblogs. *The Computer Journal*. 1-26.
- Shirky, C. 2011. The political power of social media. *Foreign affairs*, 90(1):28 – 41.
- Shirky, C. 2008. *Here comes everybody: The power of organising without organisations*. London: Penguin.
- Siebert, F., Peterson, T., & Schramm, W. 1956. *Four theories of the press: The authoritarian, libertarian, social responsibility, and soviet communist concepts of what the press should be and do*. Urbana: University Illinois Press.
- Simões, M.J., Carmo Barriga, A., & Jerónimo, N.A. 2011. Brave new world? Political participation and new media. *The First International Conference on Socio Economic Informatics*. IARIA. Pp. 55-60.
- Sithole, M. 2001. Fighting authoritarianism in Zimbabwe. *Journal of Democracy* 12(1):162-163.
- Sithole, M. & Makumbe, J. 1997. Elections in Zimbabwe: The ZANU (PF) hegemony and its incipient decline. *African Journal of Political Science* 2(1):122-139.
- Social Media and Political Participation Lab. 2011. *A breakout role for Twitter? The role of social media in the Turkish protests*. New York: New York University.
- Starbird, K., & Palen, L. 2012. (How) will the revolution be retweeted? Information diffusion and the 2011 Egyptian uprising. In Proceedings of the ACM 2012 conference on computer supported cooperative work. ACM. Pp. 7-16.
- Susen, S. 2011. Critical notes on Habermas's theory of the public sphere. *Sociological Analysis* 5(1):37-62.

- Tashakkori, A. & Creswel, J.W. 2007. Editorial: the new era of mixed methods. *Journal of Mixed Methods Research* 1(1):3-7.
- Teo, P. 2000 Racism in the News: A critical discourse analysis of news reporting in two Australian newspapers. *Discourse and Society* 11(1): 7-49
- Theocharis, A., Lowe, W., Deth, J.W. & Gema, G.A. 2013. Using Twitter to mobilise protest action: Transnational online mobilisation patterns and action repertoires in the occupy wall street, indignados and aganaktismenoi movements. Unpublished paper read to the ECPR Joint Sessions of Workshops. Mainz Johannes Gutenberg University, Germany, 11 - 16 March, 2013.
- Thornton, A. 1996. *Does internet create democracy?* <http://www.zip.com.au/~athornto//thesis1.htm/>. Accessed 2015-06-14
- Trottier, D., & Fuchs, C. 2014. *Social media, politics and the state: Protests, revolutions, riots, crime and policing in the age of Facebook, Twitter and YouTube*. New York: Routledge.
- Tufekci, Z. 2014. *Is the internet good or bad?* Matter homepage: <https://medium.com/matter/is-the-internet-good-or-bad-yes-76d9913c6011/>. Accessed 2015-07-31
- Twitter-Blog. 2011. *The tweets must flow*. Twitter Blog: <http://blog.twitter.com/>. Accessed 2015-04-14
- University of Cornell. 2015. *University of Cornell library guides*. University of Cornell: <http://guides.library.cornell.edu/c.php?g=31735&p=200993/>. Accessed 2015-02-23
- Van Deth, J. W. 2014. A conceptual map of political participation. *Acta Politica* 49(3):349 – 367.
- Van Dijk, J. 1999. *The network society: Social aspects of the new media*. London: Sage.
- Van Dijk, T.A. 2003. Critical discourse analysis. In Schiffrin, D., Tannen, D., Hamilton, H.E. Ed. *The handbook of discourse analysis*. Oxford: Blackwell, Pp. 352-371.
- Van Dijk, T.A. 1998. *Ideology*, London, Sage
- Van Dijk, T.A. 1995. Aims of critical discourse analysis. *Japanese Discourse* 1: 17-27.
- Van Leeuwen, T., & Wodak, R. 1999. *Discourse studies*. Thousand Oaks: Sage.

- Varnali, K., & Vehbi, G. 2014. A social influence perspective on expressive political participation in Twitter: the case of # OccupyGezi. *Information, Communication & Society* 18(1):1-16.
- Vatikiotis, P. 2005. Communication theory and alternative media. *Westminster Papers in Communication and Culture* 2(1):4-29.
- Verba, S., Scholzman, K.L., & Brady, H. 1995. *Voice and equality: Civic voluntarism in American politics*. MA: Harvard University Press.
- Vergeer, M., & Hermans, L. 2008. Analysing online political discussions: Methodological considerations. *Javanost - The Public* 15(2):37-56.
- Voice of America (VOA). 2013. *Gender disparity in Zimbabwe parliament upsets women*. <http://www.voazimbabwe.com/a/zimbabwe-women-parliament-of-zimbabwe-proportional-representation/1743760.html>. Accessed 2016-09-14
- Waldal, R. 2005. *Politics and persuasion: Media coverage in Zimbabwe's 2000 elections*. Harare: Frontline Publishers.
- Weiss, G., & Wodak, R. 2003. Introduction: Theory, interdisciplinarity and critical discourse analysis. In Weiss, G., & Wodak, R. Eds. *Critical Discourse Analysis Theory and Interdisciplinarity*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan. Pp. 1 – 34.
- Weller, K., Bruns, A., Burgess, J.E., Mahrt, M., & Puschmann, C. 2014. Twitter and society: An introduction. In Weller, K., Bruns, A., Burgess, J.E., Mahrt, M., & Puschmann, C. Eds. *Twitter and Society*. New York: Peter Lang. Pp. XXIX-XXXVIII.
- Willems, W. 2014. Producing loyal citizens and entertaining volatile subjects: Imagining audience agency in colonial Rhodesia and post-colonial Zimbabwe. In Butsch, R., & Livingstone, S. Eds. *Meanings of Audience: Cooperative discourses*. Abington: Routledge. Pp. 80-96.
- Willems, W. 2012. The ballot vote as embedded ritual: A radical critique of liberal democratic approaches to media and elections in Africa. *African Studies* 71(1):547 – 563.
- Windeck, F. 2010. *Political communication in sub-Saharan Africa and the use of new media*. Johannesburg: Konrad-Adenauer Stiftung.

Wodak, R. 2009. The semiotics of racism. A critical discourse-historical analysis. In Renkema, J. Ed. *Discourse of course: An overview of research in discourse studies* Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company. Pp. 311-326.

Wodak, R. 2001. The discourse-historical approach. In Wodak, R. & Meyer, M. Eds. *Methods of Critical Discourse Analysis*. London: Sage. Pp. 63-94.

Wodak, R. 2000. *Does sociolinguistics need social theory? New perspectives in critical discourse analysis*. Unpublished Keynote address to the SS2000. Bristol, England. 27 April 2000.

Wodak, R., & Meyer, M. 2009. *Methods for critical discourse analysis*. London: SAGE.

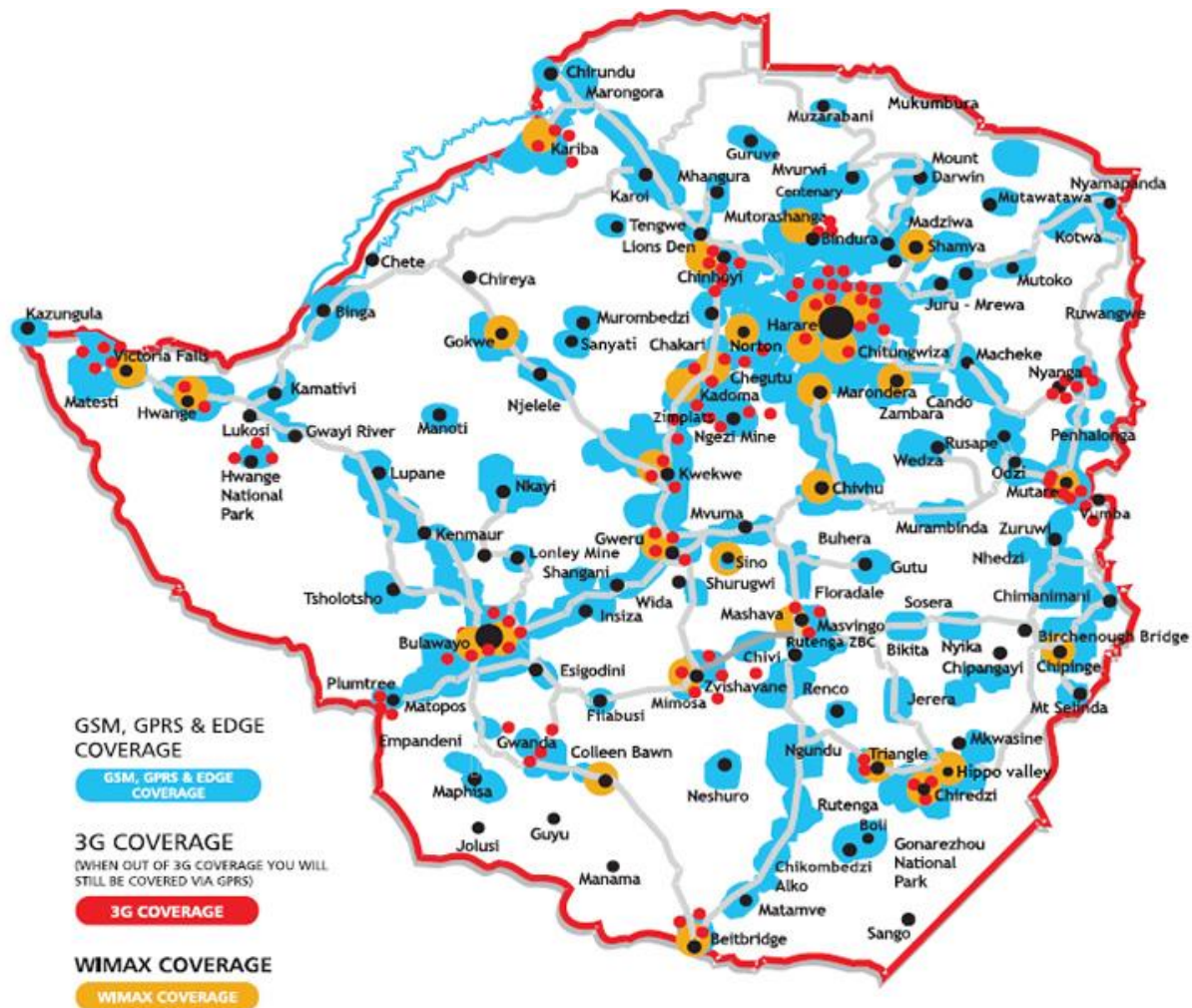
Wojceizsak, M., & Smith, B. 2014. Will politics be retweeted? New media use by Iranian youth in 2011. *New Media and Society* 16(1):91-109.

Zaffiro, J. 2001. Mass media and democratisation of politics and society: Lessons from Zimbabwe 1990 - 2000. In Tomaselli, K., & Dunn, H. Eds. *Media, democracy and renewal in Southern Africa*. Colorado: International Academic Publisher. Pp. 99-122.

Zappavigna, M. 2015. Enjoy your snags Australia ... oh and the voting thing too #ausvotes #auspol: Iconisation and affiliation in electoral. *Global Media Journal* 8(2):1-16.

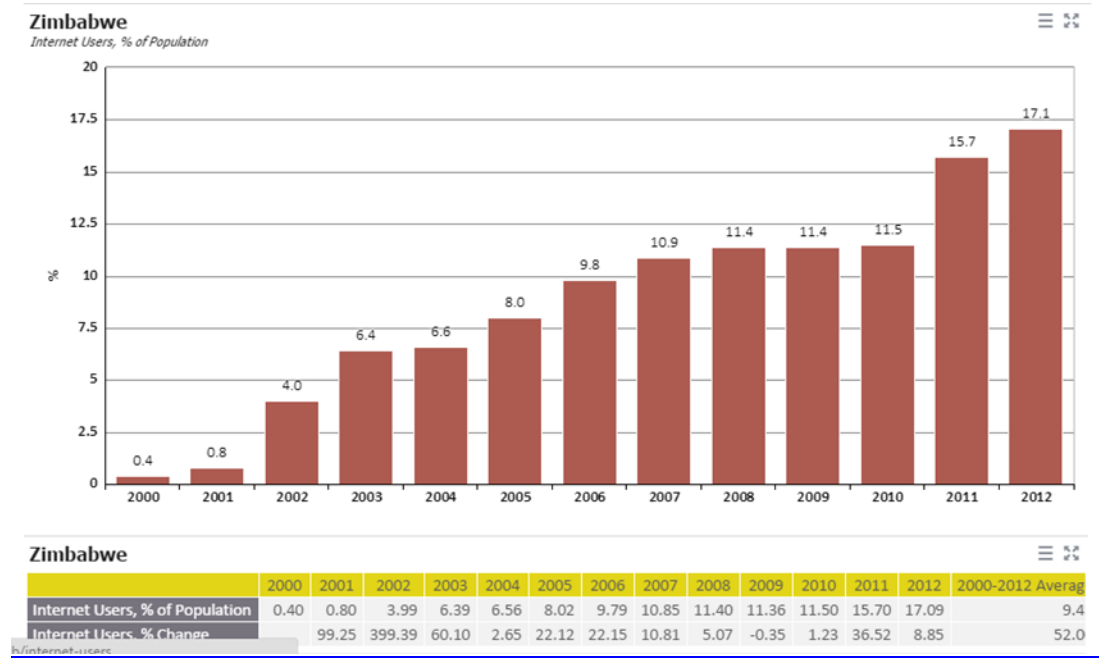
Zimbabwe Electoral Commission. 2013. *The 2013 elections results*. <http://www.zec.gov.zw/election-notice-board/by-election-results>. Accessed 2015-09-14

Addendum A



Internet coverage Zimbabwe. Source: <https://www.econet.co.zw/services/coverage-maps> (Accessed 2013-06-13)

Addendum B



[Zimbabwe internet users from 2000 to 2012 as percentage of population source:](http://zimbabwe.opendataforafrica.org/sylzcb/internet-users)
<http://zimbabwe.opendataforafrica.org/sylzcb/internet-users> (Accessed 2016-02-14)

Addendum C

<u>User (#zimelections)</u>	<u>Frequency</u>	<u>Percent</u>	<u>Category of user</u>	<u>Where they are (location)</u>	<u>When they joined</u>	<u>Followers</u>	<u>Follo</u>
1. ZimelectionsTV	1015	1.6	Individual	Harare	08/2013	44	07
2. harumutasa	872	1.4	Journalist	Harare	06/2009	3328	219
3. Zimelections13	764	1.2	NA	Harare	NA	3756	195
4. kubatana	613	1	Civic Organisation	Harare	04/2009	6000	914
5. BekiMpofo	574	0.9	NA	NA	NA	1340	1423
6. SirNige	564	0.9	Media Organisation CEO	Harare	05/2009	6991	3071
7. 263Chat	516	0.8	Media Organisation	Harare	10/2012	6948	6007
8. ChiefThabo	437	0.7	Political scientist	South Africa	08/2010	40389	992
9. sokwanele	417	0.7	Civic Organisation	Zimbabwe	11/2007	4843	676
10. Afrotonomy	412	0.7	NA	NA	NA	5038	1585
11. SWRAnews	391	0.6	Zim Radio Station	UK	01/2009	7260	900
12. UpenyuMakoni	363	0.6	Activist	Zimbabwe	07/2013	1196	374
13. AJELive	345	0.6	Media Organisation	Qatar		459959	314
14. VoteWatch263	293	0.5	Citizen platform	Zimbabwe	07/2013	234	206
15. zimflamelily	282	0.4	NA	NA	NA	667	414
16. kudakups	274	0.4	Individual	Falls Church	04/2009	50	91

17. azadessa	273	0.4	Journalist	Durban	07/2008	10054	1147
18. RickyEMarima	266	0.4	NA	NA	NA	486	1445
19. HarareChatShow	265	0.4	NA	NA	NA	273	150
20. NewZimbabweNews	264	0.4	Media Organisation	Zimbabwe		4096	167
21. crisiscoalition	264	0.4	Civic Orgs Coalition	Zimbabwe	03/2010	2715	347
22. Smith_RFKennedy	263	0.4	Human Rights Writer	USA	06/2012	995	460
23. tinosamk	256	0.4	Digital content producer	Zimbabwe	12/2011	412	853
24. cemambo	252	0.4	Journalist	Zimbabwe	05/2012	460	305
25. rcmlimited	244	0.4	ICT Specialist	Zimbabwe		164	156
26. ABU_4911	233	0.4	NA	South Africa	06/2011	82	138
27. t4t3nd4	229	0.4	NA	NA	06/2009	339	1676
28. NehandaRadio	227	0.4	Internet Radio Station	Zimbabwe	04/2009	8847	232
29. DearZimbabwe	219	0.3	NA	NA	NA	55	73
30. MrsChida	215	0.3	Individual	South Africa	08/2010	135	187
31. MwanaWaJukwa	214	0.3	Activist	Africa	06/2013	97	686
32. Imakombe	205	0.3	Journalist	Zimbabwe	11/2009	928	662
33. Zim_Uprise	200	0.3	NA	NA	NA	1097	975
34. Africanelection	189	0.3	Elections Organisation	Africa	04/2009	2831	342

35. LanceGuma	188	0.3	Journalist	UK		6365	246
36. ZimbabweUpdate	187	0.3	Media Organisation	Zimbabwe	06/2011	1622	50
37. nowisthetime_13	184	0.3	Activist	Zimbabwe	07/2013	29	125
38. lovechild	182	0.3	NA	NA	NA	242	255
39. amy_wawn	175	0.3	NA	NA	NA	28	139
40. Bollie2	167	0.3	Activist	South Africa	06/2009	1997	2167
41. ZimRights1	167	0.3	Human Rights Organisation	Zimbabwe	06/2012	1052	170
42. SaffaZimbo	160	0.3	Individual	South Africa	09/2009	619	610
43. shonatiger	158	0.3	Individual	Namibia	06/2008	1659	1351
44. LivingZimbabwe	155	0.2	Media Organisation	Zimbabwe	08/2009	705	899
45. i_amten	153	0.2	Journalist	Zimbabwe	03/2009	791	926
46. CdeMarcKatsaura	152	0.2	Activist	Harare	01/2011	175	314
47. joebblackzw	151	0.2	Journalist	Harare	01/2011	1369	296
48. emmajoyjoy	150	0.2	Activist	UK	05/2009	223	664
49. City_Press	149	0.2	Media Organisation	South Africa	06/2009	123907	447
50. anthony31	148	0.2	NA	NA	NA	85	262
51. ngobani_nyathi	148	0.2	Journalist	Zimbabwe	07/2011	1760	1779
52. ComradeFatsoo	144	0.2	Activist	Zimbabwe	11/2009	1634	184
53. dubbydacious	143	0.2	Activist	Zimbabwe	06/2009	875	386
54. LeviKabwato	136	0.2	Activist	South Africa	06/2009	1147	1317
55. johannesmyburgh	135	0.2	Journalist	Brazil	08/2009	2287	1129
56. AshleyMwanza	134	0.2	Activist	Zimbabwe	02/2009	369	408

57. guzuraSA	133	0.2	Activist	Africa	11/2009	1929	2122
58. cynthiamanjoro	131	0.2	Activist	Zimbabwe	04/2009	1523	675
59. amnesty_munich	128	0.2	International Organisation	Germany	02/2012	167	324
60. ehudnyambayo	128	0.2	Journalist	Harare	01/2012	933	879
61. MissChiMystique	127	0.2	Activist	Zimbabwe	04/2009	1668	919
62. petergodwin	127	0.2	Author	New York	06/2009	36077	3046
63. Jacanews	122	0.2	Media Organisation	South Africa	06/2009	36077	3046
64. kwirirayi	122	0.2	Journalist	Zimbabwe	04/2009	2858	289
65. africastrategy	121	0.2	International Organisation	Africa	07/2009	17570	7637
66. DutchEmbassyZim	117	0.2	Embassy	Zimbabwe	NA	2441	614
67. CuthbertTembo	116	0.2	NA	NA	NA	528	657
68. Zichivhu	116	0.2	Activist	Canada	03/2009	1129	875
69. George_Ruzv	114	0.2	NA	NA	NA	395	737
70. ResurrectZim	113	0.2	Activist	Zimbabwe	02/202	1865	963
71. dustytinash	112	0.2	Activist	South Africa	08/2008	410	569
72. ChenguGold	110	0.2	Activist	Zimbabwe	06/2011	9640	314
73. RebuildZimbabwe	108	0.2	Organisation	Zimbabwe	05/2009	6497	4932
74. JIRI263WP	106	0.2	Individual	South Africa	02/2013	46	252
75. carienduplessis	106	0.2	Journalist	South Africa	09/2010	23060	1024
76. fungaijustbeing	106	0.2	Activist	Zimbabwe	06/2011	1576	513
77. promise_kumalo	103	0.2	ICT Specialist	Zimbabwe	01/2011	179	165
78. seandlovu	102	0.2	ICT specialist	Zimbabwe	10/2009	211	177

79. KalabashMedia	101	0.2	Media Organisation	Zimbabwe	03/2013	264	267
80. RobinJen79	100	0.2	Individual	New York	07/2011	10	43
81. sharoewacho	100	0.2	Individual	Zimbabwe	10/2010	57	276
82. kimrampling	99	0.2	Individual	Australia	07/2007	187	201
83. philmagaya	99	0.2	NA	NA	NA	390	345
84. HeinrichMuller	97	0.2	Individual	Brazil	06/2010	113	280
85. rangamberi	97	0.2	Journalist	Zimbabwe	06/2010	2634	760
86. HumanRightsFilm	96	0.2	Film Organisation	Global	02/2011	1871	2055
87. Zoid96	96	0.2	Individual	South Africa	05/2009	90	598
88. RueMuchie	92	0.1	Individual	Zimbabwe	07/2010	181	178
89. cmrr85	92	0.1	NA	NA	10/2012	09	91
90. eNCAnews	92	0.1	Media Organisation	South Africa	07/2013	109341	372
91. gilbert makore	92	0.1	Individual	Zimbabwe	02/2009	295	440
92. BusieBhebhe	90	0.1	Individual	Zimbabwe	03/2012	534	206
93. edza63	88	0.1	Individual	South Africa	09/2010	20	163
94. gib_zzz	88	0.1	Individual	South Africa	01/2011	175	246
95. IamTN_Cheru	85	0.1	Individual	South Africa	06/2012	102	265
96. ZimboFeed	85	0.1	Media Organisation	Zimbabwe	05/2012	256	544
97. meshwiires	85	0.1	NA	NA	NA	52	194
98. Wekwa_Mapaya	84	0.1	NA	NA	NA	232	1090
99. Justinsylvester	84	0.1	Activist	South Africa	07/2010	415	969

100.	Queensibanda	83	0.1	Individual	Zimbabwe	05/2013	09	39
------	------------------------------	--------------------	---------------------	----------------------------	--------------------------	-------------------------	--------------------	--------------------

Addendum D

Twitter User (#zimdecides)	Number of Tweets	Percentage	Category of user	Where they are (location)	When they joined	Followers	Following
1. azadessa	299	2.5	Journalist	Durban	07/2008	10054	1147
2. radiodialoguefm	250	2.1	Radio Station	Zimbabwe	05/2009	1997	641
3. SirNige	122	1	Media Organisation CEO	Harare	05/2009	6991	3071
4. Zimelections13	93	0.8	NA	NA	NA	3756	195
5. amnesty_munich	85	0.7	International organisation	Germany	02/2012	167	324
6. nandimbondiah	82	0.7	Activist	Zimbabwe	09/2011	651	158
7. VoteWatch263	81	0.7	Citizen platform	Zimbabwe	07/2013	234	206
8. 263Chat	77	0.6	Media Organisation	Harare	10/2012	6948	6007
9. AJELive	77	0.6	Media Organisation	Qatar		459959	314
10. fungaijustbeing	72	0.6	Activist	Zimbabwe	06/2011	1576	513
11. kwirirayi	72	0.6	Journalist	Zimbabwe	04/2009	2858	289

12. HarareChatS how	70	0.6	NA	NA	NA	273	150
13. The Mos Na tive	69	0.6	Individual	Zimb abwe	01/201 3	36	48
14. BekiMpofu	67	0.6	NA	NA	NA	1340	1423
15. i amten	66	0.6	Journalist	Zimb abwe	03/200 9	791	926
16. seannlovu	66	0.6	ICT specialist	Zimb abwe	10/200 9	211	177
17. SoAfricaAIU SA	55	0.5				670	287
18. kubatana	52	0.4	Civic Organisation	Harar e		6000	914
19. LanceGuma	51	0.4	Journalist	UK		6365	246
20. AmaiJukwa	49	0.4	Activist	Zimb abwe	01/201 3	1569	66
21. ehudnyamba yo	49	0.4	Journalist	Harar e	01/201 2	933	879
22. Zibonele	48	0.4	Journalist	Zimb abwe	09/200 8	1482	1211
23. harumutasa	47	0.4	Journalist	Harar e		3328	219
24. campionmere ki	46	0.4	Individual	Zimb abwe	11/201 2		
25. DutchEmbass yZim	45	0.4	Embassy	Zimb abwe	NA	2441	614
26. Afrotonomy	44	0.4	NA	NA	NA	5038	1585
27. DazMSmith	43	0.4	Publisher	South Afric a	11/200 7	6946	7626

28. AshleyMwanza	41	0.3	Activist	Zimbabwe	02/2009	369	408
29. TwimboChurch	40	0.3	Religious Organisation	Zimbabwe	02/2013	172	317
30. mikemadoda	40	0.3	Journalist	Zimbabwe	05/2010	4710	294
31. munyar	40	0.3	Journalist	Zimbabwe	04/2009		
32. shonatiger	40	0.3	Individual	Namibia	06/2008	1659	1351
33. zimflamelily	39	0.3	NA	NA	NA	667	414
34. ArtherChatora	38	0.3	Journalist	Zimbabwe	03/2009		
35. KalabashMedia	38	0.3	Media Organisation	Zimbabwe	03/2013	264	267
36. Wekwa Mapaya	38	0.3	NA	NA	NA	232	1090
37. malonebarry	38	0.3	Editor	Qatar	01/2009	6042	491
38. Zimtweets	37	0.3	Organisation	Zimbabwe	05/2009	10183	6292
39. NehandaRadio	36	0.3	Internet Radio Station	Zimbabwe	04/2009	8847	232
40. jessiedendere	36	0.3	Journalist	Zimbabwe	08/2009	536	236
41. Africanelection	34	0.3	Elections Organisation	Africa	04/2009	2831	342
42. ThreeMenOnABOat	34	0.3	Media Organisation	Zimbabwe	10/2011	1400	106

43. mrnelazz	34	0.3	Individual	Zimbabwe	10/2011	222	204
44. GeorgieBC	33	0.3	Author		08/2010	6071	991
45. dalindebele	33	0.3	NA	NA	NA	528	1190
46. Imakombe	32	0.3	Journalist	Zimbabwe	11/2009	849	566
47. nigeltkay	31	0.3	Individual	Zimbabwe	08/2011	123	109
48. SolomonADe rso	30	0.3	AU Commissioner	AU	01/2012	422	104
49. kay_sweets	30	0.3	NA	NA	NA	401	543
50. BillyChikwas ha	29	0.2	Individual	Zimbabwe		152	346
51. feyaXfeya	29	0.2	Organisation	Zimbabwe		255	114
52. lskmakani	29	0.2	ICT Specialist	Zimbabwe	05/2010	1900	104
53. ncubs	29	0.2	Individual	Zimbabwe	04/2010	192	252
54. AJEnglish	28	0.2	Media Organisation	Qatar	04/2007		
55. DjKalamity	28	0.2	NA	NA	NA	161	226
56. Moadow	28	0.2	Journalist	Qatar	04/2009	11586	862
57. Mr_Bulgari	28	0.2	Individual	Zimbabwe	12/2009	336	299
58. rcmlimited	28	0.2	ICT Specialist	Zimbabwe		164	156

59. MsFuzzyhead	27	0.2	Journalist	Zimbabwe	01/2009	878	611
60. ComradeFatsooo	26	0.2	Activist	Zimbabwe	11/2009	1634	184
61. Sharon Nyasha	26	0.2	Individual	USA	06/2012	294	255
62. YoungZimbabwe	26	0.2	Media Organisation	Zimbabwe	12/2012	285	758
63. sharoewacho	26	0.2	Sharoewacho	100	0.2	57	276
64. Pablo di Don	25	0.2	Individual	Africa	04/2011	295	436
65. asteris	25	0.2	Journalist	Thessaloniki	10/2007	12654	883
66. iamskuts	25	0.2	Individual	Zimbabwe	07/2011	49	160
67. DobinsonM	24	0.2	NA	NA	NA	307	305
68. SWRAnews	24	0.2	Radio Station	UK	01/2009	7260	900
69. Techzim	24	0.2	Media Organisation	Zimbabwe	10/2009	5190	1040
70. ThomasMadhuku	24	0.2	Individual	Zimbabwe		241	522
71. cee_divine	24	0.2	Individual	USA	06/2012	118	99
72. twimboz	24	0.2	Activist	Zimbabwe	03/2010	1219	903
73. Hasanpatel	23	0.2	Journalist / PR	Qatar	02/2009	1220	499

74. ResurrectZim	23	0.2	Activist	Zimbabwe	02/202	1865	963
75. dubbydaciou s	23	0.2	Activist	Zimbabwe	06/2009	875	386
76. team_zim1	23	0.2	NA	NA	NA	211	422
77. capriconza3	22	0.2	Individual	Kyrgyzstan	07/2011	471	1564
78. cemambo	22	0.2	Journalist	Zimbabwe	05/2012	460	305
79. AsherWilliams	21	0.2	Activist	Malawi	07/2011	42	62
80. GautengANC	21	0.2	Political Party	South Africa	04/13	436	404
81. George Ruzv	21	0.2	NA	NA	NA	395	737
82. MyZimVote	21	0.2	Organisation	Zimbabwe	06/2013	484	216
83. Sally51	21	0.2	Individual	South Africa	06/08	102	151
84. YoungNationZim	21	0.2	Organisation	Zimbabwe	11/2007	1234	2000
85. bsanganza	21	0.2	Individual	USA	11/2009	1085	1088
86. dustytinashe	21	0.2	Activist	South Africa	08/2008	410	569
87. justdelta	21	0.2	NA	NA	NA	862	202

88. michaelkaliika	21	0.2	Individual	Zimbabwe	06/2009	242	710
89. slowbut sure	21	0.2	NA	NA	NA	169	174
90. LivingZimbabwe	20	0.2	Media Organisation	Zimbabwe	08/2009	705	899
91. MukaiDzudana	20	0.2	NA	NA	NA	50	228*
92. SAnkjaergaard	20	0.2	Journalist	Denmark	04/2013	50	228*
93. TendaiMbofanana	20	0.2	Individual	Uganda	05/2011	616	424
94. Zoid96	20	0.2	Individual	South Africa	05/2009	90	598
95. cynthiamanjiro	20	0.2	Activist	Zimbabwe	04/2009	1523	675
96. izzymutanhanurwa	20	0.2	Blogger	UK	04/2009	507	366
97. lenoxmhlanga	20	0.2	Journalist	Zimbabwe	04/2010	1074	689
98. moose_oo	20	0.2	Individual	Italy	11/2009	132	302
99. tarimaviyo	20	0.2	NA	NA	NA	1562	596
100. zimpo llstories	20	0.2	Organisation	Zimbabwe	07/2013	43	174