



UNIVERSITY OF NAIROBI

COLLEGE OF HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES

School of Journalism and Mass Communication

**Political activism and Democracy: the use of online spaces by the  
#ThisFlag movement in Zimbabwe**

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## DECLARATION

I, Shamiso Michelle Matswayi, do hereby declare that this research project is entirely my own work, and where there is work or contributions of other individuals, it has been dully acknowledged. To the best of my knowledge, this research work has not been carried out before or previously presented to any education institution in the world for similar purposes or forum

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Supervisors' Approval

I do hereby certify that this research project has been presented for examination with my approval as the University of Nairobi Supervisor.

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## **DEDICATION**

I dedicate this project to my mother, Sekai Christine Mukura, who will always be my role model. It was through your scriptures and words that kept me going when I was about to give up. Psalm 91 will always remain in my heart. I can finally say “mama I made it!!!”

I also appreciate my family, the Muzhingi family, who pushed me to pursue this degree and gave me strength to go on, my grandparents who were sad to see me leave but pushed me with kind and wisdom words to finish.

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## ABSTRACT

This study is about Political activism and democracy. Specifically, it studied hashtag this flag movement in Zimbabwe, commonly referred to as “the #ThisFlag Movement”. The study was carried out between April 2016 and August 2018. The research is guided by the following objectives: To do an appraisal of the #Thisflag movement on the use of online spaces; To do an assessment of people’s reactions generated by videos on Facebook, To identify how hashtags were used in delivering a message from the #ThisFlag movement and lastly to examine the effectiveness of online activism for democracy in Zimbabwe. The study was guided by the Public Sphere theory and Relative Deprivation theory. The research used Convergent Parallel Mixed methods approach. Data was gathered from a sample of 10 videos downloaded and purposely selected. The sampled videos were subjected to content analysis and semiotic analysis. In addition, three key informants that is, the founder and, activist of the movement, prominent city of Harare Mayor and Movement for Democratic Change – Alliance Secretary for elections were interviewed. The video speeches were transcribed into text to allow for content and semiotic analysis. Content analysis focused on the comments generated by the videos in order to generate the various themes and public opinion of activism and democracy in Zimbabwe. Content analysis also enabled the researcher to use descriptive statistics through the number of reactions generated. Semiotic analysis was used to compliment content analysis by enabling the deconstruction of images, signs and sounds in the videos selected as well as the comments. Using codes and themes generated from content analysis it emerged that #ThisFlag movement used the online space for freedom of expression, mobilisation and a space to air out emotions towards the existing government. The use of emotional appeal resonated with the participants as they responded with the emotions in the videos. The use of the online space saw the inclusion of the diaspora community to participate in political discussions. The study found out that in as much as the activists called for freedom of expression, the participants largely viewed the videos and did not comment, like or share the videos. The participants were mostly passive audiences, and this was due to fear. The study, therefore, recommended for educational awareness on citizens human rights. Through educating citizens on their human rights will increase their participation in demonstrations as they will be fully equipped on their rights. The study also found out that the mobilisation strategies of the movement were effective and peaceful. This was noted from the success of the Zimbabwe shutdown movement. Thus, the study recommends the mobilisation strategies by the #ThisFlag for peaceful protests.

## **ABBREVIATIONS**

<b>AIPPA -</b>	Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act
<b>CBD -</b>	Central Business District
<b>MDC-A -</b>	Movement for Democratic Change - Alliance
<b>POSA -</b>	Public Order and Security Act
<b>RBZ -</b>	Reserve Bank of Zimbabwe
<b>ZANU-PF -</b>	Zimbabwe African National Union- Patriotic Front
<b>ZEC -</b>	Zimbabwe Electoral Commission
<b>ZBC -</b>	Zimbabwe Broadcasting Corporation
<b>ZTV -</b>	Zimbabwe Television

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# CHAPTER ONE

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.0 Overview

This chapter covers the background of the study, the statement of the problem, research objectives, research questions, the justification of the study as well as the scope and limitations of the study. The chapter explores political activism and democracy in Zimbabwe through the digital space and also giving a global point of view in how political activism has influenced other countries.

### 1.1 Background of the study

The growth and advancement of new communication technologies in the most recent decade or more have primarily changed the perception, technique and procedure of starting and organising social developments and mass protests. Before the development of new technology activism was communicated through the passing out fliers, petitioning and talking to people to organise (Madison, 2017). Communication in this period was much slower as information took time to spread. However, this does not dismiss the forms of communication used as according to Brian Martin (2007) activism in the era of new technology still involves door-to-door canvassing, alternative radio, public meetings, rallies, or fasting. These traditional actions are still relevant and are used in conjunction with new communication technologies.

Activism is dated back to 1954 were it was used to end slavery, protect workers from manipulation, advocating equality for women and challenging regimes (Shradie, 2019). Martin Luther is one of the well-known activists who had the I have a dream speech and led the Selma to Montgomery march in the United States of America. In the United States of America activism is noted a human right as citizens have the right to disagree with given policies or governance. These activisms are widely spread in America for example #Blacklivesmatter, #LGBT rights movements, anti-abortion rights movements among many others. These movements mark the discontent among citizens towards a particular issue at hand. Gerbaudo (2012) argues that for change to occur there needs to be some kind of activism. Paolo Gerbaudo (2012) further alludes that activism infuses the idea and practice of unrest with a perpetual discomforting development that shields new progressive types of association from the threats of stratification and its abusive symptoms. Scholars of democracy started to study the concept of political activism in the 1960s according to Campbell (1960) and

Almond and Verba (1963). Almond and Verba point out that political culture and political participation are at the base of a healthy democracy. Their argument is that for there to be democracy there needs to be participation. These two scholars talk of political engagement and or public involvement in decision making represent the cornerstones on which democracy takes root and structures its consolidation. Hence this research borders on the line of political engagement through #ThisFlag movement in hope for a healthy democracy.

Other popular political demonstrations are Democratic Republic of Congo demonstrations in 2015, the Mediterranean Indignados, movements in Turkey and Brazil, and Occupy Wall Street. The Arab Spring of 2011 was the most significant political movement in Africa as it marked the first time in Africa were people widely used Facebook and Twitter as a form of communication for activism and democracy. This movement was momentous through the hashtags it formed in challenging the dictatorship of their African governments. The continued growth of disgruntlement with the ruling government of Tunisia and Egypt led to its citizens demonstrating seeking for democracy. The governments in these countries were largely autocratic for example in Egypt the citizens were seeking removal of Mubarak from office (Barnsby, 2012). Thompson (2011) states that in Egypt government officials were about to be removed due to mass protests coordinated and announced through Facebook pages and Twitter feeds. The use of Facebook and Twitter in this movement and mass street protests resulted in a regime change that significantly impacted the history of African dictatorial presidents.

Muthongo (2015) argues that political activism is the utilisation of vigorous and coercive online ideas and campaigns to create awareness about political issues. Martin further expresses that political activism is one of the causes realising development and recreation within the system. Thus, the focus of this research with Martin (2007) and Muthongo's (2015) arguments, the use of social media can create awareness about political issues bringing about development and restoration in this case within Zimbabwe. Norris (2009) and Muthongo (2015) are of the view that through political activism citizens participate either online or offline.

Zimbabwe is characterised as a dictatorial or single party state rule, with poor governance, poverty, poor infrastructure, high inflation and high rates of unemployment (Freedom House, 2017). These challenges have subsequently affected the access and utilisation of media and civic engagement. President Robert Gabriel Mugabe ruled Zimbabwe for 37 years, and his rulership was considered

dictatorial and immersed with mass killings and the highest inflation in the world (Muronzi, 2019). Mwangi (2016) asserts that a key aspect that denies people their right to make proper decisions and express themselves is lack of access to appropriate information. Mukasa (2003) and Moyo (2011) mention that Zimbabwe has repressive media laws that have been used to stifle freedom of expression and opinion. With Mwangi's (2016) viewpoint, Mukasa (2003) and Moyo (2011) illustrate that Zimbabweans lack access to relevant information due to the government that denies the right to freedom of expression. Traditional media in Zimbabwe according to Freedom House (2016) is more of a party state media, as it only reports positive news to do with the ruling party and negative news about the oppositional party. The traditional media is not balanced and gives no space to citizens to air out their views. Therefore, there is marginalisation of citizen voices in the mainstream media, hence citizens have resorted to the use of alternative media that is social media (Moyo, 2007). In spite of stifling freedoms of expression, political grievances and actions for democracy in Zimbabwe has been shifted to the online space as Khondker (2011) asserts that social media especially Facebook and Twitter have become important tools for activism in countries such as Zimbabwe that lack of freedom. Due to repressive governments in Africa the introduction of the internet which has become a virtual public sphere (Papacharissi, 2002) where activism has taken place largely on the social media. Willem (2013) argues that the internet are technologies of freedom as they go past state restrictions on media freedom. According to Papacharissi (2002) and Willem (2013) gate keeping methods are now irrelevant with regard to the internet as anyone with a camera phone and access to the internet is able to say what they want and when they want without limitations (Barnsby, 2012).

Building on the background on Zimbabwe economic, political and social hardships, the #ThisFlag movement is of interest as it addresses the key issues of political activism and democracy of Zimbabwe through online spaces. The #ThisFlag movement was started by Pastor Evan Mawarire of His Generation Church on Facebook. The movement begun with its first viral video on the 19<sup>th</sup> of April, he shared his emotions on how Zimbabwe economy was dwindling down giving no hope to its people.

Zimbabwe has only one state television broadcaster that is, Zimbabwe Television. For the last 38 years under President Robert Gabriel Mugabe, Zimbabwe has been operating as a dictatorial nation

without space or a forum for ordinary citizens to make matters known or have a dialogue with political actors. This gives an insight on the argument by the Freedom House that press freedom is restricted in Zimbabwe. For instance, the coup of November 2017 the military took over the television broadcast. Audiences had no choice but to listen to the military official and the ruling party jingles that were played all day (Daily News, 2018). Moreover, the traditional media that is The Herald and The Sunday Mail these are both state owned they only publish news that is in favour of the ruling party anything negative or about the opposition party is not published. In view of the traditional media in Zimbabwe the #ThisFlag movement is of great interest as it surpasses the traditional media by giving Zimbabwean citizens a forum to freely express themselves and be heard to attain democracy. In some cases, journalists who would decide to ignore these restrictions could be found dead or missing (Freedom House, 2017). Itai Dzamara a profound journalist after writing to the President asking him to resign, up to date Itai Dzamara is not known of his whereabouts after that incident (Chipato, 2018). This makes it clearer as to the purpose of this research as it seeks to shed more light on media freedom in Zimbabwe, to do an appraisal on the #ThisFlag movement through social media.

Kamau (2011) argues that democracy is the ability in a state to have equal rights to all normal adults, freedom of speech and opportunity for political participation. When all these attributes are available Kamau states that democracy is evident in that state. In Zimbabwe freedom of speech is inhibited by media laws for instance, Access to Information Protection and Privacy Act (AIPPA) it requires journalists and the media to register and it automatically gives the information minister powers to decide which publications can operate legally and who's able to work as a journalist (MISA Zimbabwe n.d). With such laws in place it becomes of interest to research on political activism and democracy.

## **1.2 Statement of the problem**

The background has illustrated that, in as much as the Zimbabwean Constitution of 2013 provides freedom of expression, freedom of speech, the draconian media laws are not aligned with the constitution itself. Due to this, political activism was unheard of in Zimbabwe as people would talk about political matters behind closed doors in fear of disappearing or being killed (Sachikonye, 2017). Political freedom was a myth hence, the #ThisFlag movement gives us an entry point as it defies and creates a dissent movement against the ruling government. The socio-economic status

of Zimbabwe has seen the rising of the #ThisFlag movement creating political awareness and bringing in the ideology of freedom which the researcher is interested in. The argument is that online spaces provide citizens with communication tools that expunge the imbalances of information creation and dissemination consequently giving a voice to the voiceless.

The argument is that in order for a state to have democracy there has to be some sort of activism (Loader, 2011). Cammaerts (2012) states that activists are harnessing the power of alternative media because, as argued by McLeod and Helrtog (1999) cited by Mutsvairo (2016), traditional media report negatively in their reporting of political protest movements, potentially destroying the activists' mobilisation efforts. According to these three scholar's traditional media by ignoring citizen voices especially those from counter hegemonic movements have accidentally allowed activism to thrive. These three scholars point out an interesting point which enables the researcher to examine the effectiveness of online spaces in political activism and democracy. To understand political activism in Africa requires a firm commitment to contextualising the concept within a broad and diverse framework that underpins the continents cultural, economic, geographical and historical background (Mutsvairo 2016). It is with this background that the researcher sought to research on the #ThisFlag movement use of online spaces as it provided a first time in Zimbabwe where the online space was harnessed for a political movement.

### **1.3 Objectives**

The objectives of the study were to:

1. Appraise the #ThisFlag movement on the use of online spaces in Zimbabwe between April 2016 and August 2018
2. Assess people's reactions generated by videos on Facebook during the #ThisFlag movement in Zimbabwe between April 2016 and August 2018
3. Identify how hashtags were used in delivering a message from the #ThisFlag movement in Zimbabwe between April 2016 and August 2018
4. Examine the effectiveness of online activism for democracy in Zimbabwe

### **1.4 Research Questions**

1. How were online spaces used by the #ThisFlag movement between April 2016 and August 2018?

2. What were the people's reactions to videos generated by Facebook during the flag movements between April 2016 and August 2018?
3. How were the hashtags used in delivering a message for the #ThisFlag movement in Zimbabwe between April 2016 and August 2018?
4. How effective is online activism for democracy in Zimbabwe?

### **1.5 Rationale and Justification**

The study seeks to offer a more nuanced appraisal and understanding of the #ThisFlag movement through online spaces mainly Facebook in providing an arena for political activism and democracy. This research through prevailing literature on social media will mainly focus on Facebook as a platform where citizens exercise freedom of expression past state restrictions. Ntuli (2013) and Ruhanya (2013) express confidence that social media platforms can play vital roles in democratising Zimbabwe. Thus, the research will compliment researches on social media in political activism and democracy in Zimbabwe by focusing particularly on the #ThisFlag movement using the popular digital platforms used by the activists that is, Facebook which can be argued to have reshaped the public opinion. Brian Raftopoulos (2013) is of the view that endeavours to mobilise and employ citizens have to be rethought, reorganised and in some cases the old methods of doing things must be innovatively discarded. Hence the research will assess the validity of Raftopoulos statement in examining the role of social media as a mobilising tool in social movements and the creation of appropriation of social media technologies by citizens to reclaim their political voices and spaces.

### **1.6 Significance of the study**

In Zimbabwe political activism was unheard of, due to fear of being killed, disappearing or arrested. Thus, the significance of this study was to give an appraisal of the #ThisFlag use of online spaces. Through the use of online spaces, the study illustrates the importance of online activism for freedom of expression. The #ThisFlag is of significance as it gave an entry point to political activism and democracy through social media. The #ThisFlag movement being the first of its kind in using videos and the social media platform for citizen participation establishes the importance of the study in providing a space for the marginalised to speak out.



## **1.7 Scope and Limitations**

This research focuses on issues to do with political activism and democracy. A number of studies have been carried out in this area however, this research is limited to Zimbabwe focusing mainly on the #ThisFlag movement started by Pastor Evan Mawarire. This area is of interest as Zimbabwe is regarded as one of the countries in Africa with an autocratic system, poor governance, high levels of unemployment and poverty. Therefore, by limiting the research to Zimbabwe one can assess paying particular attention to the system and contextualising it. The research is limited to specifically one social media network that is Facebook. The first viral video was posted on Facebook thus making the platform of more interest as compared to the other social media networks. The #ThisFlag movement had several accounts thus is limited to one flag movement account that is Pastor Evan Mawarire's Facebook account. This account is where all the videos, comments and hashtags are generated from. The research focuses only on the period of April 2016 to August 2018.

## **1.8 Operational Definitions**

**Democracy** - rule of the people by the people

**Hashtag** - a key word or phrase preceded by the symbol # used within a message to identify a keyword or topic of interest

**Online spaces** - the internet and social media platforms

**Participant** - those that take part in the online discussions through comments

**Political Activism** - the ways that citizens participate, the process that lead them to do so and the consequences of these actions

**Reactions** - views, likes, comments and shares on Facebook by participants on videos selected

**#ThisFlag movement** - political protest movement in Zimbabwe using the national flag as its prop

# **CHAPTER TWO**

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.0 Overview**

This chapter reviewed various current and recent literature on political activism and democracy. The chapter zeros in on literature that discusses the use and power of online spaces for activism and democracy. The chapter assessed the aspects of democracy paying close attention to Zimbabwe exhibiting the consensus that online platforms enable citizen participation in ways previously inadmissible. The chapter also discusses the theoretical framework that informs and guides the research. It is through these frameworks that findings are interpreted and analysed.

### **2.1 Introduction**

Political activism and democracy are aspects that have been widely studied in Africa and across other borders. The most common being the Arab Spring were there was an uprising that began on social media. In Egypt the #Jan25 were the was a media frenzy the youth protesting on the legal and political issues including police brutality, state of emergency laws, emergency laws, lack of free and fair elections and freedom of speech. Corruption and socio-economic challenges were also part of the movement (It News Africa, 2017). Thus, by looking at this one can see that political activism is a popular aspect in Africa hence why the research is of interest.

The #ThisFlag movement was started by Pastor Evan Mawarire from His Generation church. He began with his first accidental viral video on the 19<sup>th</sup> April 2016. The video gained more than 100 thousand views in the first week. This video was what kicked off the movement as it mobilised different Zimbabweans from all over the world who concurred with the pastor to start voicing out their opinions. The video was a solo video of Pastor Evan with a Zimbabwean flag around his neck in his office expressing his personal grievances on how he was unable sustain and to take care of his family due to economic hardships (Mawarire, 2016). He used to flag to explain the missing promises that had been made to Zimbabweans hence calling for the need to grab the flag and call out for their promises.

This chapter, therefore, will look at various scholars and their views on political activism and democracy, as well the use of social media in political activism. These scholars include Mutsvairo,

Morozov, Castells, Chuma, Gerbaudo, Downing, Papacharissi, Dahlgren to mention a few. These scholars give the base line arguments on the use of online spaces for activism as well as looking on the democracy on Africa democracies through the use of technology.

## **2.2 The Role of Social Media in Activism and Democracy**

Mustvairo (2016) states that mobile communication is progressively playing a leading role in the mobilisation of social and political protests. Mutsvairo (2016) concurs with Gerbaudo (2012) that activists, mobile monitors, citizen journalists and digital story tellers based in Sub-Saharan Africa are joining the dispute, astutely by-passing hegemonic mass media gatekeepers by navigating through the online sphere to collective political and social involvement across the continent. It is through the growth and development of communication technologies that political protests are becoming more and more vibrant as they by-pass media restrictions. Looking at Zimbabwe as mentioned previously, Zimbabwe has media laws that restrict media freedom, however, according to Gerbaudo and Mutsvairo social media has provided an arena for freedom of speech as it by-passes hegemonic mass media gatekeepers. Hence one can argue that the #ThisFlag movement through online spaces provided a sphere for citizen involvement on political matters. Tufekci (2017) argues that contrary to what Gerbaudo and Mutsvairo agree on, he states that the availability of online spaces does not necessarily mean freedom has been given. To this scholar in as much as there are no restrictions on the online sphere, autocratic governments still have power on how information is communicated. For instance, there are countries like China, Saudi Arabia, Ethiopia that restrict online freedom as some sites are blocked by the government hence information is not distributed effectively (Clark, 2017).

Mutsvairo (2016) states that social media has created a space for discussion and knowledge sharing which reaches a wide target group in a short time, possibly within seconds. With the likes of Facebook live streaming, this allows information to be delivered within seconds reaching a wide target group. Activists have made use of Facebook live streaming as a way to deliver information. For instance, during the Sudan march, it was live streamed as a way to illustrate the current events as they are happening and are recorded for the target audience. Live streaming allows citizens who are not there in person to participate through reactions and comments virtually as if they are there in person. Facebook livestreaming is a tool that most activists have utilised to mobilise and show people the current events, which increases the possibilities for individuals to gain political attention

(Bennett, 2016). Hong Kong demonstrations, Women's March rallies in The United States, Yellow vests demonstrations are examples of livestreaming demonstrations. Paying attention to the activism under research, Pastor Evan uses livestreaming, as some of the videos will be analysed on the target audience reached, as well as the significance of the livestreaming of the demonstrations. The argument is that livestreaming affordances allow freedom of expression to the previously marginalised groups of society and allow them to be "there" (virtually) even if they are not there.

Wallack (1999) cited by Rentschler (2007) states that some network coordinators propose that an expansion in media activism over the previous decade is because of the developing disappointment of politically dynamic associations who need reliable and great standard news inclusion of their exercises, that is if they receive any at all. With such lack of coverage Bennett (2016) states that social media has become a growing platform where young adults and a growing population in non-western countries like to express their views and voice out their opinions which the mainstream media feels reluctant to portray. Bekkers (2011) concurs with Rentschler (2007) as he states that social media has offered a rapid involvement from the young adults in voicing out their own views and disgruntlements that may be in support or disagreement with government policies or other political or social issues. DeLisle et al (2016) concurs with Bekkers as she states that the generations of today are about rights, they know their rights and hence have the power to voice out their opinion to be heard. Thus, to them social media has become a platform to freely express themselves without looking over their shoulder.

Morozov (2009) counter argues that open internet access does not translate into political activism. He states that access to internet access does not necessarily provide the guarantee to democracy. According to Morozov the internet provides resources of mobilisation, spreading information, freedom of speech, however this does not translate into democracy. He argues that the internet is simply but an avenue and not where democracy is won. Mutsvairo (2016) agrees with Morozov (2009) in that the internet is a resource for activists although reaching a broader audience is not always a guarantee of democratic success. He states that in Africa there is a predominant belief that everyone with internet access is possibly an activist. According to him this belief is fundamentally flawed. Mutsvairo and Morozov state that having the ability to view, like and post a video related to political matters against the ruling government does not necessarily mean one is

an activist. To these scholars a whole lot more can be achieved past the use of the internet. Papacharissi (2002) argues that greater access to information, enabled by online media, does not directly lead to increases in political participation, or greater civic engagement, or trust in political process. Her argument is that having access to the virtual sphere or social media does not translate into citizen participation. One might have access to these platforms but that does not necessarily mean that citizen participation therefore increases as some might still have their reservations in speaking publicly.

The events of 2011 in what came to be known as the Arab Spring gave motion for cyber-optimistic ideas that led some scholars to claim that a 'Twitter Revolution' was possible. Howard et al (2011) submit that social media played a significant role in the Arab Spring. This has led to debates over the role of Facebook and Twitter in social movements with the ability to shift the balances of power in society in which this research seeks to clarify focusing on Zimbabwe. Some researchers, hail Facebook and Twitter for being efficient mobilisation tools central to revolutions. Scholars refer to protests that occur on social media especially Twitter and Facebook as Hashtag activism (Goswami, 2018). The concept of tagging social media groups, ideas or topic was started by Chris Messina in 2007 (Mbambazi and Mbambazi, 2018). In 2007 he began the hashtag activism with the #SandiegoFire. This became a trending tweet as others began to use it. Goswami (2018) states that the hashtag is an act of building up public support via social media for a cause. It has been emerging as a data log in advocating for a cause, linking the social media users to participate and voice for a campaign across platforms through a concisely designed message. Hence when the Pastor Evan Mawarire posted his video with the hashtag #thisflag, #flagmovement, it automatically became viral as it mobilised people to advocate for the same cause.

Shirky (2011) argues that digital platforms give citizens tools to organise themselves against authoritarian states. It is essential in the context of this research to identify broad patterns which show the agency of key participants on the flag movement in what can be understood as counter-power. Diamond and Plattner (2012) submit that greater citizen participation on digital media platforms creates stronger oppositional forces and eventually leads to regime change and democratisation of society. Digital platforms are, therefore, seen as tools for political change. The submission is that, through digital media, citizens can challenge elite control on mass

communication through production and dissemination of information. In this research the flag movement is evidently a social movement that seeks to challenge elite control in Zimbabwe.

Scholars consider social media platforms as sources for 'counter-power', (Castells 2007). Ndlela (2010) notes that for Twitter and Facebook platforms to be considered as alternative sources of information, they must represent the Gramscian notion of the counter-hegemonic. This is sometimes referred to as counter-power. In this case the social actor of the flag movement is Pastor Evan Mawarire who formed the social movement under research. Studies illustrate that for the politically and socially marginalised, the online space has become a secure platform to challenge state hegemony (Bhowa 2018). The Independent (2017) goes on to concur with Castells by stating that social movements by actively campaigning to expose those with political power through the online space is what has changed and expanded the idea of the public sphere and the public forum. In some cases, the emergence of online activism is an indirect response to civil society defiance and lack of media development (Howard and Hussain 2013; Breurer et al, 2014). Howard and Hussain, Breurer et al argument are in agreement with McLeod and Helrtog (1999) and Castells (2006) as they had stated that activists are simply using the power of alternative media because traditional media take a negative stance or simply ignore in the coverage of social movements, potentially destroying the activists' mobilisation efforts. Since traditional media in this case we look at The Herald which is a state press, and Zimbabwe Broadcasting Corporation (state media) these take a negative stance and sometimes do not cover social movements thus, destroying the activist's efforts to mobilise and advocate for democracy. However, Cammerts (2012) from McLeod and Helrtog (1999) argument he tends to disagree in that he feels that mass media by ignoring ordinary citizen voices, especially those from counter-hegemonic movements, traditional media structures have unwittingly allowed online activism to flourish leading to what Yang (2016) has called the 'discursive protest on social media united through a hashtag word, phrase or sentence. For example, our very own case study #ThisFlag movement. Further Zittel and Fuchs (2007) highlights that several governments in Africa will not be bothered by what people are saying online as long as they are still in control of conventional media outlets such as television and press because they know not everyone is able to understand social media especially for political purposes. However, Fuchs (2014) concurs with Van De Donk (2014) with this view as he states that not everyone understands social media or seeks to be part of political activism, some

have no idea about the activism taking place or rather are simply not interested. Moreover, the government are known they have the military and police should activists attempt to take the government head-on (Van De Donk et al, 2014). This argument illustrates that African governments will do anything in their power to suppress any political activism by using the police or military prowess. In the case of the flag movement there are issues of the leader Evan Mawarire being imprisoned, Promise Mkwanaenzi of #tjamuka, Itai Dzamara disappearing because of challenging the government.

Berg (2017) argues that through citizens participation on social media platforms leaves trails which might be used to track them by interested parties, that is, commercial, state or private. These are the audiences who also participate in the flag movement by either commenting, retweeting or posting videos and pictures in accordance with the movement. Independent Opinion (2017) states that discussions on the online space can no longer be dismissed as past-time for arm-chair critics because opinions are being shaped by these social mediums that is, Twitter, Facebook, YouTube among others. Political participation on the Internet includes one's ability to find political information on the digital space. Banaij and Buckingham (2010) reveal that people used the Internet with the intention of obtaining political information that cannot be found in traditional media. In like manner, Robertson et al, (2010) conclude that citizens use the online space in order to gather information about political organisations, as well as to communicate with them and express their opinion.

Bargh, McKenna and Fitzsimmons (2002), cited in Davies and Noveck (2006), state that participants are able to express their real selves online than in person. They concur with Stomer - Galley (2003) cited in Davies and Noveck (2006) who state that more people feel secure to discuss political issues over the online space than in person because it is more relaxed and less dangerous. Participation however through the online space is not limited by geographical borders and time restrictions (Coleman and Blumer, 2009). Papacharissi however warns, the democratising potential of new technologies often rests on the individual's inclination to be politically active and on the political foundation that is in place (Papacharissi, 2004). Hence for her and Davies (2006) et al it is up to the user to feel the need to be politically active and comfortable.

Ntuli (2013) and Ruhanya (2013) express optimism that online platforms can play essential roles in democratising Zimbabwe. According to these scholars, their argument is that in countries where freedom of expression is prohibited, this has been by-passed by social media channels as people in the comfort of their homes or wherever they are under a pseudo name can comment, start up a discussion on political matters without being traced their location. According to Willem “technologies of freedom” namely Facebook, WhatsApp and Twitter have enabled citizens to become part of political discussions against the previously marginalised form of traditional media.

In addition to Willem’s view of technologies of freedom, Chibuwe (2012) stated that the online space provides the public with the prospect to create dialogue, to be heard, not only to hear. It gives voice to the previously marginalised; they get the opportunity to be heard and to create dialogue with many people who may be not be in the same time and space but virtually bound. According to these scholars the online spaces have enabled the creation of a dialogue between citizens on political matters. It has created the ability to talk back and be heard on political, social and economic matters. It has brought about the tool of instant communication and not having to wait to send in a comment but the space for dialogues to take place. Wang and Bates (2008) cited by Chibuwe and Ureke (2016) bring out the democratic nature of the online sphere as it equalises people as content is available to all and communication is on all levels.

Howard and Hussain (2011) argue that participation on the online space helped in bringing together people’s grievances in Tunisia and Egypt into a common national agenda. The argument, therefore, is that participation on online spaces create political awareness that is necessary to inspire political change. The submission is that online platforms provide necessary framework and tool for organising protests. The online spaces are, therefore, understood, as platforms for counter-power. The flag movement (social movement) is thus seen as a forum on social media to counter-power, showing citizen agitation(s) towards social and political change. The online space is viewed as promising solutions to the crisis of democracy (Loader and Mercea, 2011; Chiyadzwa, 2012).

Chibuwe and Ureke (2016) state that the online space has the ability for one to remain anonymous. Chibuwe and Ureke are of the view that the emergence of the internet has liberated the public sphere due to its anonymous nature of its communication. The two scholars concur with Dean (2003) who points out that the introduction of the online space has revived the public sphere. This



online sphere, especially the establishment of social media, was thought to enable free and equal discussions among citizens which would in turn enhance participatory democracy (Loader and Mercea, 2011). Such evaluation of the online space led many participants to believe that the online space makes a better public sphere than traditional media (Gerhards and Schafer, 2009). However, Dean (2003) argues that, all connections are intervened; there is no unadulterated, quick, completely present, completely straightforward experience. There is no reality undiluted by intervention (McQuail, 2010). Intervention of online space content by conventional individuals or citizen journalists is affected by their convictions, standards and qualities among other things. In online communication by ordinary citizens, such legal constraints may be bypassed by assuming a pseudo name. According to Chibwe and Ureke this anonymity factor using pseudo names in Zimbabwe has increased the online participation of citizens, as their identities are hidden, thus they are able to comment freely without the fear of being traced. The ability of online platforms to post messages instantaneously while in anonymity not only undermine social hierarchies and improve levels of sharing ideas but also lowers concerns about expressing an individual's candid opinions especially when they are likely to be ostracised (Guvakva, 2016). However, even though online anonymity has the ability to encourage marginalised views to be heard, it may also reduce the salience of social norms (Postmes et al., 1998) cited in (Baek et al., 2011). Therefore, basing on Baek et al., (2011)'s position, online deliberations may produce negative emotions, prevent and understanding. Some scholars are of the view that the online spaces encourage passivity. The online space promotes passivity that is made stronger by predetermined interactivity, Brook (1999). He further argues that the internet might have the potential for developing democracy, but the culture linked with information technology promotes passive intake.

### **2.3 Activism for Democracy in Zimbabwe**

The want or need for democracy in Zimbabwe according to Mandaza (2013), Moore (2014) and Sachikonye (2017) has led to the wide-spread protests like the #ThisFlag movement, that demanded that Mugabe who had ruled for 37 years without any economic and political progress to show for it, should relinquish power. It was due to the country's grave economic ills attributed to mis managed governance and to corruption while authoritarianism is viewed as the root of oppression.

Sachikonye (2017) states that the contemporary protest movement represents a qualitatively higher level of social and political activism compared to earlier phases. Previously according to Mandaza (2016) much of the activism was limited to civil society organisations such as unions and human rights and women's rights groups led by professionals, their methods of mobilising did not enable them to reach out to wider communities. Sachikonye (2017) notes that operating in the 1990s and 2000s these groups limited their work to documentation of repressive conditions, electoral irregularities and socio-economic ills. Hence, the new opportunities created since 2015 are based on Sachikonye's three developments. Firstly, he notes the growing awareness and, realisation that authoritarianism and, incompetence and, corruption of the incumbent regime will not be addressed solely through activities of opposition parties and electoral processes. The beginning of movements like the #ThisFlag under study. He points out that the Zimbabwean crisis has deepened to reach a "tipping point" where citizens are beginning to overcome fear and reverence of authorities, along with their "docility", to reclaim their public spaces in order to assert their rights and air their grievances. Thus, the #ThisFlag movement is seen as an online movement with activists beginning to overcome fear and reverence of authorities by claiming their public spaces online.

Secondly Sachikonye notes that, protest groups draw on the improved 2013 Constitution of Zimbabwe to assert their rights to march and demonstrate. The demonstrations provide an arena for them to articulate their causes and interact with other citizens, while the common use of information technologies ensures wide coverage of their concerns.

Third and final point he states that, the variety of issues for mobilisation and protests go beyond the traditional agenda for trade unions, professional groups and political parties. The local needs such as the need for public spaces for vending, service delivery, personal safety, transport services and local governance, these are resonant issues that have drawn thousands to the streets and squares. This represents a golden opportunity for the protest movements such as the #ThisFlag under study in conjunction with parties to link local needs to national development and governance issues and to motivate their members to agitate for transition and transformation at the national level.

Sachikonye (2017) states key six obstacles to democracy in Zimbabwe. The obstacles state that, democracy has been hindered due to; strong dictatorship constrained by the use of military and police force; the lack of an unseeable past in Zimbabwe's history in order to give a comprehensive

political settlement; low levels of democratic practices, experiences and values; narrow focus on the succession leadership of ZANU-PF; limited focus on regime change rather than other reforms proposed by opposition and civil society organisations among other key factors. According to Sachikonye (2017) if these obstacles are overcome that of inclusive settlements, overseeing the past and having explicit agreements among mutually opposed forces then democracy can be achieved for Zimbabwe. Successful democratic transitions require explicit agreements for instance the Sudan massacre where agreements were made between the people and the military. The scholar further notes that the new constitution of Zimbabwe is a notable attempt for an explicit agreement, however its reluctance of the ruling party to implement its provisions unreservedly remains a major block.

Bracking (2013) states that it is better for Zimbabweans to forget about democracy as ZANU-PF will control the state for the imminent future. Ibbo Mandaza (2013) concurs with Bracking (2013) as he says that we might as well give up the freewill of the people and the right to make choices to those who do not care for them. According to these two scholars', democracy has been slow or rather unattainable in Zimbabwe due to the ruling party ZANU-PF. David Moore (2014) he argues that democracy is being slow to be born, hence it has taken time to be achieved. For Moore (2014) there is still hope for democracy thus the aspect of activism.

Gerbaudo (2012) goes on to state that activism imparts the concept and practice of uprising with a continuous discomforting movement that helps to protect new innovative forms of organisation from its repressive side effects. Gerbaudo argues that for change to occur (democracy) some sort of activism needs to take place. Building on this argument, the flag movement falls under the scope of activism as it is a movement seeking revolutionary reforms. Kamau (2011) states that democracy itself, it is recognising that the rule and running of a government rests with the people. As stated previously by Gerbaudo (2012) for such democracy alluded by Kamau (2011) activism has to take place. Hence democracy and activism are inseparable. However, some scholars argue that activism does not always result in democracy, although democracy can be a result of activism.

Moore (2014) points out that it is indeed not easy to build a democratic [nation] with a dead weight of the past marginalisation. These are the references to the liberation struggle where the generation that fought the liberation war find it difficult to call for democracy as they remain loyal to the

ruling party ZANU PF that fought for them. Their loyalty is what causes failure of activists as they resort to guerrilla tactics they are used to. Those that fought the liberation war are argued to be pleased with the militant rule and dictatorship of the country. Thus, the differences in mindsets—those that fought and saw the war and those that are younger and want change (democracy). Roftpoulous (2013) argues that a simple election could not remove the military-economic elite. Hence according to Gerbaudo (2012), Roftpoulous (2013) and Moore (2014), in as much as democracy calls for elections, so long as there are different mindsets, the militant rule will not be removed.

Building on Roftpolus (2013) view, Kamau (2011) goes on to state that the kind of democracy practiced in third world countries should not necessarily be equated to democratic governance found in the developed countries. His argument is based on Kabwegere (2000) who states that regular elections are one of the provisions for democracy, whereas these elections have neither reinforced democratic values in the third world countries. For example, in the 2008, 2013 and 2018 Presidential elections of Zimbabwe all have been argued to have been rigged, despite the opposition party MDC-A failing to produce factual evidence on the none-free elections.

According to Christiansen (2007) the social and hyperinflation, the constant swelling, disappointment of open administrations and disintegration of expectations for everyday comforts was getting agonisingly unmistakable in individuals' regular daily existences, prompting the more reason for public protests. However, Campbell (2003) argues that with the Zimbabwean leader that portrays their power in terms of masculinity as a sense of community leadership and authority, achieving democracy through activism will continuously be defeated. Sabelo Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2009) has since argued that Zimbabwe violence is not only a political culture, but that violence rests at the fundamental craft for the ZANU-PF regime. Thus, Moore (2014) agrees with Ndlovu-Gatsheni that due to political regime of Zimbabwe democracy might be dead for Zimbabweans.

According to Gatsheni-Ndlovu (2009) Zimbabwean nationalism has been damaged by this inheritance of dictator battle ready initiative and that the valorisation of violence has drove the nation into political and economic crisis as well as into an emergency of national identity. To

Ndlovu he states that it is due to lack of freedom of expression, lack of democracy and more of violence has led to an identity crisis of Zimbabweans.

Sachikonye (2017) builds on Gatsheni-Nldovu's argument that it is because of the lack of democracy that Zimbabweans started lobbying for constitutional reform and democratic change in the late 1990s. He is of the same view with Moore (2014) and Mandaza (2013) that the processes to democracy has been slow in movement. He argues that there is a sense that the country missed the "democratisation wave" that swept the African continent in the early to mid-1990s. Similarly, it can be argued that again Zimbabwe also missed the later wave that swept across North Africa in 2010-2014. These scholars argue that Zimbabwe continuously miss their opportunity to democracy and hence it has been incessantly slow.

Activists normally seek for regime change, however Sachikonye (2017) argues that regime change does not amount to a democratic transition. He says that regime change is simply leadership succession to the assumption of power by a new leader. Thus, according to Sachikonye's view the removal of former President Mugabe to President Mnangagwa was a regime change but not a democratic transition. He further states that the direction of evolutions is not pre-ordained or permanent; furthermore, it is irrevocable and potentially could result in another dictatorship.

Sachikonye (2017) is of the view that Africa has been observed that a democratic transition consists of two related processes, namely political liberation and democratisation. He states that liberation is where the constitution assures civil and political freedoms as well as limits on the use of power by the government and people restore personal and arbitrary rule as the basic structure of governance. He further alludes that democratisation is a process for giving rules in controlling electoral competition and specifying governmental powers and responsibilities. The argument is that although the two concepts are interlinked liberalisation is necessary for democratisation but may not automatically lead democracy. In other words, it can lead to flawed democratisation in which authoritarian officials with sufficient power against disjointed prodemocracy forces successfully influencing elections in their favour (Kpundeh 1992).

## **2.2 Theoretical Framework**

### **2.2.1 Public Sphere theory**

The Public Sphere concept was coined by Habermas (1989). The concept has since then received tremendous attention and numerous criticisms of the Public Sphere. The Public Sphere concept reinforces the idea of providing a space where citizens can gather to discuss public issues, without state interference or market influence. This concept is essential to this research in as far as it provides lens to understand social media as a platform for citizen political activism influencing the public opinion.

It is crucial to trace the origin and development of the Public sphere what has come to be known as the Virtual Public Sphere as Papacharissi (2002) revisited the notion. For Habermas (1974:49-50) the public sphere is: a forum within our social life where public opinion can be formed discussing matters of general interest without being subject to coercion. The Habermasian Public Sphere is, therefore, a forum where issues are discussed and argued with the end result being the expression of public opinion. Habermas idea of a public sphere focused on the engagement and idealised rational dialogue among people in locations other than the privacy of their homes, especially in cities (Tufekci 2017). This public sphere was facilitated by the rise of spaces like coffeehouses and salons where people who were not immediate family members mingled and discussed current affairs and issues that concerned everyone. For Habermas, the most important characteristic of the public sphere is its interaction of the public in logical vital discussions (1989). As such, at the core of the 'ideal' public sphere of the 18<sup>th</sup> Century laid in the act of private citizens participating in critical public debate. Such debate might lead to the formulation of public opinion. However, in this research it is not focused on debates as per say rather activism and democracy. The point of interest in the context of this study is the conceptualisation of political activism on social media either as rationale or not.

Building on Habermas's public sphere, people had to walk to the coffeehouses and salons in order to have these discussions. They had to part of a certain class to be allowed to participate. Now with the introduction of new technology that is, the online space, Habermas's idea of a public sphere is still relevant, however it had to be rethought with the use of the internet. Tufekci (2017) argues that as technology changes, and as they modify the societal constructions of visibility, access and

community, they also affect the forms of the public sphere which in turn affects the social norms and political structures.

Papacharissi (2002) states that the internet is celebrated as having the ability of reviving the public sphere. Papacharissi from the Habermasian concept she then coins the Virtual sphere. The emergence of online platforms where engagements surpass geopolitical and sociocultural boundaries; a platform, without central control, where individuals are free to express their opinions and thoughts prompted some scholars to argue that a new public sphere has emerged in the form of online media. Atton (2004) argues that online media resembles alternative media in advancing self-organisation, open participation, and a counterhegemonic potential. The openness of political participation were citizens freely discuss their grievances and stand together under the #ThisFlag movement is of interest to this study. In that note, making it crucial to examine the citizens openness to discuss political matters under the flag movement.

The Internet and online platforms have been seen as counter measures to the misfortunes of democracy and the challenges of authoritarianism. According to Dahlgren (2006), an active public sphere is understood as a collection of communicative spaces in society that allow for the flow of information, debates, ideas that are ideally in an unrestricted manner and also the creation of political will that is public opinion. These spaces, and now, more recently, the newer interactive media figure notably, also serve to enable communicative relations between citizens and the power holders of society. Dahlberg (2015) notes that the democratising capacity of the online spaces was necessary in altering authoritarian state into democracies by granting the inclusion of citizens. These citizens would as such force governments to be more liable to their citizens hence social movements through online platforms. This becomes of interest as this will answer the main question of the research, that is, doing an appraise of the flag movement through Facebook. As such, argument of the online space as a new public sphere reflects the ideals of both deliberative democracy and participatory democracy. This is a state in which citizens can discuss and debate politics with minimum state restrictions.

Unlike the traditional public sphere (in the form of mainstream media) dictated by top-down communication, the online public sphere is illustrated by multidirectional communication. Castells (2007, 2009) describes this fact as 'mass self-communication' which works courtesy of online

media platforms. That is, users of online media have the ability to spread information to a global audience more so on Facebook through the use of hashtags which can target audiences outside those who follow the user. For example, #flagmovement and #thisflag. The theoretical underpinnings of the virtual public sphere; are, therefore, crucial in unpacking the diversity of political voices on Facebook in Zimbabwe.

Mouffe (2005) states that the public spaces are the diversity of forums where political opinions and differences can be articulated and, debated and political identifications take place. For Mouffe a public sphere is not only one space, rather it is within multiple spaces where people can agree or disagree on their political views, expressing their own opinion without the fear of looking over one's shoulder. Papapchariss (2002) and Bennet (2003) state that the internet as a public sphere concentrates on its prospects for affording greater involvement and possibilities for resistance and organisation by opening new grounds for groups excluded from the mainstream media to gain prominence. In realisation of this sphere and its multiplicity traditional media has now converged their media to include these spaces. For instance, newspapers now have online papers, as well as Facebook handles and Twitter handles where people can discuss a particular article. Calhoun (2004) had stated that in the past new media technologies have been received as ground-breaking tools for a revival of the public sphere, the internet being no exception.

Dahlgren (2006) states that we have to understand the public sphere as comprising diverse spaces. He theorises the public sphere as containing of three dimensions, that is structures, representation, and interaction. The structural dimension has to do with the formal institutional features. This includes media organisations, their political economy and issues of their financing, as well as the legal structures specifying the freedoms of and restrictions on communication. The structural dimension thus directs our attention to such traditional democratic issues as freedom of access and speech. Dahlgren argues that a society where democratic inclinations are vulnerable will not give rise to healthy institutional structures for the public sphere, which in turn means that the figurative dimension will be inadequate. Regarding the online space the structural dimension is the way in which the communicative spaces appropriate for democracy are largely constructed. This has to do with such things as the way online-geography is organised in terms of legal, social, economic, cultural, technical, and even Web-architectural features. Such factors have an influence on the ways in which the Net is available (or not) for civic use. The representational dimension refers to



the production of the media, the mass media as well as “minimedia” that target particular small groups via, for example, newsletters or campaign promotion materials. Given the ever-increasing “massification” of communication on the online space representation becomes highly significant for online contexts of the public sphere as well. Publics, according to Habermas and Dewey (1954), exist as conversational interactional processes; atomised individuals, consuming media in their homes, do not comprise a public.

Dahlgren (2006) goes on to explain that interaction consists of two facets. First, it has to do with the citizens’ engagement with the media the communicative practices of making sense, clarifying, and using the output. The second aspect of interaction is that of between citizens themselves, which can include anything from two-person dialogue to large meetings. To point to the interaction among citizens whether or not it is validated as deliberation is to take a step into the social contexts of everyday life. The study thus, reflects these interactions as the people interact on the social spaces as to whether they can interpret the videos and making sense of the communication space. Dahlgren also notes that one should also recognise that, empirically, the classifications of representation and interaction on the Net often obscure into each other.

### **2.2.2 Relative Deprivation theory**

Robert Longley (2018) states that Relative Deprivation theory reflects on an actual or supposed lack of resources essential to sustain the quality of life, diet, activities and material possessions to which numerous socio-economic groups or individuals within those groups or individuals within those groups have grown accustomed or are considered to be the recognised norm within the group. In simple terms Relative Deprivation theory is the lack of resources that is, money, rights or social inequality. Lack of these resources often contributes to the rise of social change movements.

This theory in this research illustrates the reasoning behind the flag movement understudy. The flag movement is a political movement that began as a cry on the lack of socio-economic resources of Zimbabwe. Lack of unemployment due to corrupt tendencies and the dictatorial leadership of President Robert Mugabe (Mawarire 2016). Social theorists and political scientists define Relative Deprivation theory as a condition where people who feel they are being deprived of nearly anything considered vital in their society. For instance, money, rights, political voice among others. According to these theorist’s lack of these will result in joined social movements dedicated

to obtaining the things of which they feel deprived of. The flag movement by Mawarire can therefore be argued to have been about feeling deprived of socio-economic resources thus the movement.

The Relative Deprivation theory was coined by Stouffer to describe unexpected relationships that emerged from surveys of American soldiers in World War II. Runciman in 1966 broadened the theory by distinguishing between egoistic and fraternal group. This research, however, focuses on the fraternal group as the flag movement was a social group and not individual (egoistic) protest. Fraternal Deprivation is about a group where dissatisfaction arises from the status of an entire group as compared to a referent group. According to Dipanshi (n.d.) this discontent may reinforce a group's collective identity and common cause for social change. For example, the hashtags that then emanate from the flag movement to illustrate the identity of the movement and to show the solidarity of the people. Gurr (1970) states that when the current situation contravenes expectations created by past experiences, people are more likely to feel politically alienated and to participate in collective protests. In view of this argument the theory is of interest to the research as it gives an overview on the flag movement, illustrating theoretically the connection between activism and democracy.

Newton, Mann and Geary 1980 used Relative Deprivation theory to explain participation in collective protests. According to this theory, Relative Deprivation postulates a subjective state that shapes emotions, cognitions and behaviour. With this the theory will help the researcher in analysing the reactions on the Facebook videos of the flag movement. These reactions are what Newton et al (1980) are referring to as the subjective state that shapes emotions, cognitions and behaviour.

The theory Relative Deprivation assists the researcher in unpacking the #Thisflag movement itself. Giving a broader view and analysis on the how and why the political protest in order to give an appropriate appraisal of the research. Smith et al (2015) states that people will evaluate their current outcome negatively and feel resentful and angry if they can imagine (1) improved alternative outcomes, (2) more sincere measures that could produce better outcomes, and (3) the current situation seems implausible to improve in the near future. This is evidenced by the #ThisFlag movement as it drives on the frustrations of finding better alternative outcomes, more legitimate procedures that could produce better outcomes. These were all as a result of a rulership

under Mugabe for 36 years without change and the situation proving to be more difficult thus the need for better alternatives. When the current situation violates expectations created by past experiences, people are more prone to feel politically alienated and to participate in collective protests (Gurr, 1970). Gurr illustrates how the deprivation of certain needs and violation of certain expectations could lead to participation in collective protests. This theory illustrates the reasons and the motive behind citizens of Zimbabwe participating in the collective protests and demonstrations by the #ThisFlag movement. The need for jobs, a better health system, a better economy among other factors is what Gurr stated could lead to collective protests. He adds on that when people feel deprived, they are likely to feel politically isolated. Thus, the want for a none politically alienated movement which is under study the #ThisFlag

The theory notes that Relative Deprivation theory requires that people evaluate their situation to another possibility using principles about what “ought to be.” It is this emphasis on entitlement or “deservingness”. Thus, through the reactions and opinions the study takes into account the principles of deservingness. This is to do with what the participants say they deserve through the demonstrations and what they are entitled to. The theorists (Crosby, 1976; Folger, 1987; Martin, 1986a; Walker & Pettigrew, 1984) specify anger and resentment as essential affective consequences of Relative Deprivation. When people feel they have been unjustly deprived relative to a meaningful comparison, they are held to be resentful and angry and this affective response is anticipated to mediate particular reactions in a host of domains. The theorists argue that the manner in which the people react is what illustrates the source of deprivation.

At the core of Gurr's relative deprivation theory is the proposition that the protests that might result from this deprivation could lead to collective political violence. According to Gurr, relative deprivation refers to the alleged inconsistency between people's value expectations and their value capabilities. Value expectations are the goods and conditions of life that people want and feel they deserve. A job, adequate food on the table, a decent standard of living, freedom of expression, truth and justice are some examples of value expectations that people generally hold. Value capabilities, on the other hand, are the goods and conditions of life that people already have or believe they can obtain. Dissatisfaction, which is a motivating state, is the instant response to the experience of relative deprivation. The discontent experienced can range from mild displeasure to rage. Following the frustration-aggression hypothesis, discontent is often accompanied by anger

and the tendency towards aggression. Gurr postulates that the greater the inconsistency experienced between value expectations and value capabilities, and the greater the number of people who experience this inconsistency, that is, the greater the intensity and scope of relative deprivation and hence of discontent, the greater is the potential for collective violence. The potential for collective violence is transformed into the potential for collective political violence to the extent that the political system and its agents are blamed for the discontents. The study thus, postulate political violence that occurs during the #ThisFlag movement is due to the relative deprivation that occurs within the citizens leading to the protests and movements. Thus, the analysis of the videos and the participants reactions.

# **CHAPTER THREE**

## **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

### **3.0 Overview**

This chapter is going to outline the research design, approach, population, method and sampling techniques. Data analysis and presentation will be explained concurrently with a justification of the researcher's choices. For the research to be considered valid and reliable, these aspects will be discussed in the chapter. The ethical considerations observed during the study will be clearly shown.

### **3.1 Philosophical Paradigm**

Research paradigms inherently indicate a researcher's beliefs about the world they live in (Lather, 1986a). This research will be grounded and situated in the pragmatist philosophical research paradigm. A discussion of this nature, is, therefore, important in reflecting how this researcher approaches knowledge. This paradigm is of the opinion on how research approaches can be mixed effectively (Hoshmand 2003). Hoshmand further adds that the underside of pragmatist paradigm is that research approaches should be mixed in ways that offer the best chances for answering important research questions. Pragmatists are of the belief that each concept should be traced by its relevant practical consequences. When judging ideas, they should be based on empirical and practical consequences.

The interest for a pragmatist is to find out 'what works' and what facilitates solutions to problems (Patton, 1990; Creswell, 2003). Pragmatist suppose one should stop asking questions about the rules of nature and reality (ontology) and theory of knowledge (epistemology). For pragmatists, the research question or problem is the focal point (Creswell, 2003) where the central concern is 'what works' (Patton, 1990). According to Powell (2001) the pragmatist recommends reorienting the evaluation of theories around a third principle: the theory's ability to solve human problems. To a pragmatist, the obligation of science is not to find truth or reality, the presence of which are constantly in dispute, but to enable human problem-solving.

It is essential for this study on political activism and democracy to go beyond to determine the meaning of words, concepts, statements, ideas and beliefs. De Waal (2001) implies that we should consider what consequences, that might plausibly have practical bearings we conceive the object of our conception of the object. Thus, from this point of view pragmatism, this researcher will seek to understand political discussions as being shaped by individual preconceptions and perceptions of the world through empirical and practical consequences. As such, pragmatism allows this researcher to undertake an in-depth examination of the nature of political activism by ordinary citizens in Zimbabwe.

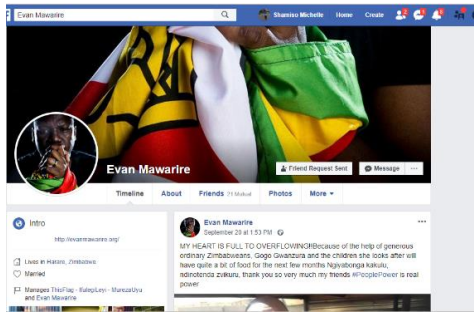
### **3.2 Research Design**

The study used a convergent parallel mixed methods research design. According to Bryman (2012: 45) a research design relates to the measures that are employed when appraising social research. Creswell (2014) defines research designs as types of analysis of qualitative, quantitative or mixed methods nature each of which type provides specific guidance for research. A convergent parallel design necessitates that the researcher concurrently conducts the quantitative and qualitative fundamentals in the same phase of the research procedure, weighs the methods equally, analyses the two workings independently, and infers the results together (Creswell & Pablo-Clark, 2011). This approach according to de Waal (2001) provides logic and pragmatic alternatives. Convergent parallel mixed method enabled the researcher to get the views numerically as well as the opinions of the #ThisFlag movement on Facebook. This design examined the aspect of political activism and democracy through Facebook by giving information both qualitative and quantitative to be analysed. Thus, the researcher using mixed methods gives a logic appraisal with practical alternatives of political activism and democracy.

### **3.3 Research Site**

This research will be carried out on the Facebook account Evan Mawarire. This Facebook account is managed by the founder of the #ThisFlag movement. This is where the videos and posts of the flag movement are found. The research site will also be in Harare, the capital city of Zimbabwe,

as this is where the interviewees reside and most activism took place.



*(Screen shot of Evan Mawarire's Facebook account)*



*(Screen shot of the city of Harare)*

### **3.4 Research Approach**

This research employs a mixed method research approach. This enables the researcher to create and interpret meanings both qualitatively and quantitatively on activism and democracy in Zimbabwe. A qualitative approach attempts to gain a contextual understanding of a social phenomenon that is of activism and democracy, in its natural setting (Creswell 2009). Quantitative research equips the researcher with emphasis on why things are the way they are (Bryman 2012). Thus, the study through using the mixed research approach answered the research questions by describing how things are as well as why they are the way they are. Through using a mixed method (Bryman 2012). This approach according to de Waal (2001) provides rationality and practical alternatives. Thus, the researcher by using mixed method gives a logic appraisal with practical alternatives of political activism and democracy.

### **3.5 Research Method**

The study used content analysis as its research method. Content analysis is a mixed method as it allows for the generation of both qualitative and quantitative data. This research method allows the researcher to examine the patterns in communication. Thus, from the data gathered through key informant interviews and archival research, the study utilized content analysis to generate the key themes and phrases. This was done through open coding. Through content analysis the study also generated the quantitative data.

### **3.6 Population, Sampling procedure and Data collection**

#### **3.6.1 Study Population**

The study population are videos which are 138 in total from April 2016- August 2018.

#### **3.6.2 Sample size**

The research used 10 videos downloaded from Facebook. The 10 videos contain the main key issues to the research starting from the first viral video of the #ThisFlag movement to the peak of the movement that is the 1<sup>st</sup> of August election results. The researcher interviewed 3 key participants of the flag movement, that is Pastor Evan Mawarire (founder and activist), Jacob Mafume (MDC-A secretary for elections) and Bernard Manyenyeni (former city of Harare Mayor). These key participants are active participants on Facebook and largely involved in the #ThisFlag movement events. *(See Appendix I for video titles)*

#### **3.6.3 Sampling procedures**

This study used a non-probability for of sampling that is, purposive sampling. It is sometimes referred to as judgement sampling (Brynam, 2012). The goal in using purposive sampling is to sample participants in a deliberate way so that the sampled are appropriate to the research questions that are being prepared. Foley (2018) goes on to state that purposive sampling is non-probability sampling in which investigators rely on their own assessment when choosing members of the population to partake in their study. Thus, from Brynam and Foley's view point the researcher relied on their own judgement in choosing the relevant videos, comments and interviewees as these are relevant to the research. The videos were selected purposively according to the themes of activism that is, mobilisation, freedom, defiance, action, hope and unity. The 10 videos also illustrate the beginning of the movement up to the perceived democratic moment of Zimbabwe. The power of purposive sampling lies in selecting information rich cases for in-depth analysis related to the central issues being studied. Purposive sampling allowed the researched to select information only relevant to the study.

#### **3.6 Data needs, types and sources**

Mugenda & Mugenda (2003) describes primary data as first-hand information collected, compiled and published for some purpose. Thus, primary source of data was gathered through online archival research from Facebook. The flag movement began on Facebook with a video posted by Pastor Evan Mawarire in April 2016. The researcher gathered data about the people's reactions



towards the movement through their comments through the Facebook account of Evan Mawarire. The Facebook account has two corresponding pages that is Evan Mawarire and ThisFlag- Ifulegi Leyi- Mureza Uyu. The researcher gathered primary data from interviewing key participants of the Flag movement providing adequate and first-hand information to the research at hand. Secondary data was collected through news articles and literature related to the research.

### **3.7 Data collection methods**

For a research to attain its detailed objectives, there is need for appropriate, sufficient and relevant methods to gather data. Gilbert (2011) highlights that the Internet may be identified as a source for gathering data. The researcher used archival research, and interviews as methods for gathering data.

#### **3.7.1 Archival Research**

Corti (2004) states that archival research encompasses the location, evaluation and systematic analysis and evaluation of sources found in archives. White (2005) adds that archival research is undertaken through interpreting the already existing archives of data and more often, it is data gathered and collected from documents stored in archives. McBurney and White (2009) describe archival research as a research done using data that the researcher had no part in gathering. This method was sufficient in this research since Facebook's affordances allow for the storage and retrieval of videos and comments from any Facebook account. Archival research is of importance to the research as the videos and comments were readily available from the Facebook account. From the period April 19, 2016 to August 1<sup>st</sup>, 2018 the researcher thus, downloaded the videos and comments from Evan Mawarire's Facebook account to her laptop. The 10 videos downloaded were purposively selected according to themes of activism and democracy derived from Chapter 2, that is mobilisation, freedom of expression, hope and anger. Hence by focusing on these themes the researcher downloaded the videos and also purposively selected the comments relating to the same themes. The researcher collected the #ThisFlag movement hashtags from the comments understudy during the period April 2016- August 2018. Hashtags such as #ThisFlag and #Bondnote make it easier for this researcher to collect data from the Facebook account understudy. The 10 videos selected are summarised below;

**a) #ThisFlag video**

The #ThisFlag video was posted on the 19<sup>th</sup> of April 2016, a day after Zimbabwe independence. This video began the movement which was termed #ThisFlag movement. In this video Evan Mawarire, the founder of the movement sits on his desk with the Zimbabwe national flag in his hand. He talks about the economic crises that Zimbabweans have been faced with, and their inability to speak freely about political and social issues. This video is 4 minutes long and gained 187 000 views.

**b) Mbuya vaHector (Hector's Grandmother) video**

This is a 2 minutes testimonial video of Hector's grandmother. It was posted on the 17<sup>th</sup> of May 2016. In this video Hector's grandmother, a 62-year-old, gives her testimony on how she lost all her savings and pension funds during the period 2007-2008. She blames this on corrupt tendencies by the government. Hector's grandmother states that Zimbabweans want to freely express themselves, but people are afraid due to the killings that happened in 2007-2008. She makes references to past incidents that are inhibiting citizens freedom. Hector's grandmother praises the #ThisFlag movement for giving people a hope and a space for freedom of speech and freedom of expression.

**c) Citizens debate video**

In this video Evan Mawarire (the founder), addresses Dr Mangudya, the Reserve Bank of Zimbabwe governor. It is a 4-minute video posted on the 16<sup>th</sup> of June 2016. Evan Mawarire gives a speech on the refusal of Bond notes by the citizens. The Bond notes are an alternative currency to the cash crises that Zimbabwe was facing. However, in Mawarire's speech he states that the citizens do not want these Bond notes as they will result in high inflation and the growth of a black market.

**d) Zimbabwe Shutdown video**

This video Evan Mawarire calls for citizens to shutdown Zimbabwe. He calls for citizens of all age groups, gender and race to not go to work or school and stay at home. This video was posted on the 5<sup>th</sup> of July 2016 calling for a shutdown on the 6<sup>th</sup> of July 2016. In a 3-minute video he appeals to civil servants, vendors, parents and every Zimbabwean to not go to work.

He states that by staying at home the government should be able to see that citizens have had enough of the political and economic crisis in the country.

**e) Tomorrow we will march video**

Evan Mawarire uses Facebook livestream for this video. In 37 minutes, he addresses the reasons why citizens should march on the 18<sup>th</sup> of November 2017. He states that the army and war veterans had approved the march, thus making it safe for everyone. He also states that it will be a moment to create history as they would be marching towards the state house in calling for the resignation of President Robert Mugabe.

**f) Robert Mugabe has resigned video**

In this video Mawarire makes use of livestreaming again. In this video Mawarire expresses his overjoy in Robert Mugabe's resignation on the 21<sup>st</sup> of November 2017. In 4 minutes, he states the hope for a better future in Zimbabwe now that Mugabe has resigned. He informs the citizens that indeed Robert Mugabe had finally resigned, that the #ThisFlag movement had finally paid off in removing the President.

**g) We must not be silent video**

In this video Evan Mawarire calls citizens to march from the Africa Unity Square to the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission offices (ZEC). He calls for a protest march on the 11<sup>th</sup> of July 2018 through a 2-minute video. Mawarire states that citizens should not be silent but march to the ZEC offices in demanding for electoral reforms.

**h) Free and Fair elections video**

This is a livestream of the free and fair elections march. The video illustrates citizens who had gone to march for free and fair elections on the 11<sup>th</sup> of July 2018. In this video Mawarire shows the number of participants who had shown up for the demonstration in calling for electoral reforms and transparency. The video contains citizens marching in the CBD, singing and chanting for free and fair elections.

### **i) They shot and killed freedom today video**

In this video, Mawarire states how freedom had been shot. This video was posted on the 1<sup>st</sup> of August 2018 when 6 Zimbabweans were shot by the army and 14 injured. These shootings came after alleged MDC-A supporters started protesting against the Presidential elections results before they were announced. Mawarire expresses his anger towards the government as he questions “why we marched” in the first place.

### **j) Destiny has seized us video**

Mawarire gives a speech at the Geneva Human Rights summit on the 8<sup>th</sup> of August 2018. In this video Mawarire explains the journey of the movement from when it began to the present August events. Mawarire expresses the issues of freedom of expression and freedom of speech being hindered in Zimbabwe. He talks of activism for democracy and a hope for a better Zimbabwe.

## **3.7.2 Key Informant Interviews**

The researcher used unstructured in-depth interviews for the key participants of the #ThisFlag movement and recorded them on her mobile phone. The key participants were Pastor Evan Mawarire, Bernard Manyenyeni and Jacob Mafume. The value of interviewing was not only because it builds a holistic snapshot, analyses words, reports detailed views of informants; but also, because it enabled interviewees to converse in their own voice and convey their own views and feelings (Berg, 2007). By interviewing the key participants, it enabled the researcher to have a detailed report expressed by the interviewee’s own thoughts and opinion on political activism and democracy in Zimbabwe. (*see appendix 2 for key informant*). Pastor Evan Mawarire was a key informant as he is the sole founder, the one who started the movement and the owner of the Facebook account being used. Bernard Manyenyeni is the former Mayor of Harare where most demonstrations took place and also an active user of Facebook in the #ThisFlag movement. Lastly Jacob Mafume a member of the MDC-A and the electorate chairperson is also a key informant interviewed in informing on the #ThisFlag movement.

## **3.8 Data collection tools**

This study relied on qualitative and quantitative research techniques. Both primary and secondary data collection tools were used. Data was collected from the three key informants using an

unstructured interview guide. Data was also collected through archival research that is, downloading the selected videos and reactions from Facebook. Coding was also utilized for generating key themes and phrases from the interviews, videos and reactions.

### **3.9 Data analysis and presentation**

The study employed content analysis and semiotic analysis. Content analysis is an approach to analyse the documents and texts (Eysenbach 2016). It seeks to measure content in terms of determined classifications in a systematic and replicable manner (Bryman 2012). Berg 2013 states that Content analysis is a type of secondary data analysis used to analyse text, including interviews, transcripts, newspapers, books, manuscripts and web sites to determine the frequency of specific words or ideas. Berg and Latin (2008) cited in Lune and Berg (2013) define content analysis as a meticulous detailed organised examination and analysis of a body of information in an effort to identify themes, prejudices and meanings.

Semiotic analysis on the other hand is a broad theoretical hypothesis of symbols and signs that accords particularly with their meaning in both synthetically created and natural words (Saussure 1966 cited by Berger 2004). It includes semantics, syntactic, and pragmatics. It can be a study of symbols and behaviour of using symbols, mainly in language. For Gripsrud (2006) semiotics is the study of the way in which people converse through signs and images, sounds and gestures, and how signs are used and what they imply with special respect to purpose and origin. From this perspective, Semiotic Analysis was essential for this research in that the videos and comments under analysis contain images, sounds and gestures. Bathes (1977) points out that the connotations we attribute to images are not a “natural” consequence of what we observe, that is images are not obvious and unanimous in how we understand what we see. Thus, through semiotic analysis the researcher was able to deconstruct the meaning behind certain images, sounds or gestures illustrated in the research.

Through the aspect of coding with the use of content analysis in conjunction with semiotic analysis, the researcher will analyse the following:

#### **3.9.1 The transcribed video speeches**

These are the speeches given from the videos. The researcher transcribes the speeches into text format so as to allow content analysis. Once the speeches have been transcribed, the researcher

will categorise the statements according to relevant themes picked out from the coding, that is statements that relate to *hope, anger, freedom and mobilisation*. Any statements relating to these four key areas will be analysed in order to give a comprehensive answer to the given objectives. (See appendix 3 for coding sheet).

From the videos the researcher takes note of the gestures that the speaker makes. That is pointing to the screen, shaking of the flag, the songs, placards and voice tones. Anger will be signified by *pointing to the screen, shaking of the flag vigorously, harsh voice tone*. Hope will be signified by *tears, songs, holding of the flag, soft voice tone*.

Placards in the videos are also analysed through content analysis and semiotic analysis. Content analysis allows for the analysis of the text in constructing and breaking down the meaning related to the given themes. Semiotics allowed the researcher to note the emotion appeal used in the inferred text.

### **3.9.2 The reactions**

The second research objective is to assess the reactions generated by the videos from the #ThisFlag. These are the comments, likes and shares from the videos downloaded. By assessing the reactions, the researcher selected the relevant comments guided by the coding sheet. Content analysis therefore enables the study to break down the comments and analyse each comment and statements in order to get concrete evidence in the participants public opinion. The number of likes, shares and comments are given in graphs and table format. This is to numerically give evidence versus the qualitative analysis.

The comments selected contain emojis. These are ideograms and smileys used in electronic messages. These ideograms are subject to semiotic analysis as they provide a comment with more meaning. For instance, an emoji clapping hands illustrates agreement or participation in the proposed topic of the video.

### **3.9.3 The hashtags**

The third objective is to identify how hashtags were used in delivering a message. These are generated from the video titles and the comments from the videos. In doing a content analysis of the reactions, the hashtags are identified giving key words and summaries to the selected comments and videos. This also allowed the study to pay critical attention to the patterns of language used in

communication exchange as suggested by Berelson (1952). The hashtags are symbolised by a # symbol followed by a word or phrase, for example #ThisFlag.

### **3.9.4 Interviews**

Responses from the interviews are scrutinised under content analysis. These responses are however, merged in answering the research questions. The responses are also selected according to the coding themes of hope, anger, freedom and mobilisation. These are the recurring variables in both videos, reactions and interviews. Thus, responses relating to the selected themes are picked out for analysis for a decisive conclusion.

Overall conclusion is drawn from the fourth objective in examining the effectiveness of online spaces for activism and democracy. This is through content analysis and semiotic analysis. The two are used to give valid and reliable answers as per analysis. By analysing the gestures, emotions, songs, placards, national flag from semiotics, it gives a vivid imagery on the act of activism and democracy.

### **3.9.5 Coding**

Open coding was used to classify the data for easier and more structured analysis. Open coding technique involves a process of breaking down, exploring, assessing, conceptualising and categorising data (Leedy,1993), and enables the researcher to organise and classify data so that patterns can be discovered, and conclusions drawn. The plan was to code the data into concepts and patterns so as to give significance to the data collected from the respondents, comments and transcribed videos. The study looked for specific words during the interview, the comments and videos on the uses of online spaces, the hashtags generated. For example, the presence of the symbol # illustrates a hashtag. After Coding, the researcher began to build on the themes and patterns to gain deeper understanding of the data's meaning.

#### **The following themes were coded accordingly**

Hope - "hope", "future", "our Zimbabwe"

Anger - "angry", "upset", "frustrations", "enough", "steal"

Freedom - "space", "voice", "speak up", "silence"

Mobilisation - "let's go", "lets unite", "stay away" "march"

### **3.9 Data Presentation**

The study confined the communication and display of data through a thematic format. The results include descriptive statistics collected from the data, that is the number of comments per video, views, shares and likes. Braun and Clarke (2012) submit that themes depict something crucial about the data in relation to the research question, and it presents some level of patterned reaction or significance within the data set. These themes were derived from coding under content analysis. As such, Thematic format brings insight into collected data. This heightens the researcher's attention to detail. Gilbert (2011) asserts that thematic presentations explain that the themes used reflect what has been examined and not enforced by the researcher.

### **3.10 Validity and Reliability**

Validity refers to the relevance of the tools, procedures, and data. According to Bryman (2012) validity are the concerns of whether an indicator that is formulated to determine a concept really measures that notion. Denzin and Lincoln (2005) cited by Bhowa (2018) states that research focuses on how results can be reliable over time (reliability) and whether the research precisely measures that which it intends to measure (validity). As such this research through using a mixed methods approach ensures that information is reliable, through its historical and contextual nature (Horsburgh 2003), as well as valid through descriptive statistical data collected. Rosenthal and Rosnow (2007) point out that validity is evidenced through openness with which data is collected and analysis procedures are presented. The research uses content analysis and semiotic analysis which allows for transparency as information is presented the way it is. Yin (2009) submits that reliability is of the extent to which the researcher's results can be replicated and generalised to the extent that the same result can be accomplished by another researcher elsewhere. Through the use of mixed methods, the researcher ensures results for this study are context specific but can however, be replicated.

### **3.11 Ethical Considerations**

Silverman (2000) highlights that researchers should be aware that while undertaking research, they are in actual fact entering the personal spaces of their participants. As such, this raises several ethical issues that should be addressed during, and after the research has been conducted. Hammersley and Atkinson (1995:264) discuss ethical issues under five headings which are: informed consent, misuse, harm, privacy and outcomes for future research. Having considered these ethical issues, firstly the proposal was approved and allowed to continue to for Field Work



(*see appendix IV*). As stated by Atkinson et al (1995) the study ensured that the respondents from the Facebook comments are kept anonymous. This is to keep the respondent's privacy and ensuring they are not exploited due to their opinions. The study sought not to plagiarise other people's work without giving credit to the authors, as this is an academic offence. The researcher maintained an open and truth approach in order to be clear and concise without editing or hiding any significant information. The researcher sought to avoid any instances of bias by being objective throughout the research as bias may make the research inadequate. The researcher obtained a Certificate of Originality (*see appendix V*) and Certificate of Corrections (*see appendix VI*) which all confirmed that the interests of the respondents were taken care of.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### DATA PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

#### 4.1 Overview

This chapter utilises all the information that has been discussed in all previous chapters. The chapter deals with data presentation, analysis and interpretation of data gathered from key informants, videos and comments of the study. Data presentation and analysis was guided by the research objectives that are; to give an appraisal on the use of online spaces by the #ThisFlag movement, access the reactions generated by the videos, identify how hashtags were used in delivering the movement messages and lastly to examine the effectiveness of online activism for democracy. The data was presented in thematic format, including responses from key informants, comments and videos. From the coded themes of *hope, anger, mobilisation and freedom of expression* data was categorised accordingly. Quantitative data was incorporated through tables and bar graphs for descriptive data.

#### 4.2 The use of online spaces by the #ThisFlag movement

##### 4.2.1 Freedom of expression

The study sought to give an appraisal on the use of online spaces by the #ThisFlag movement. The #ThisFlag movement started with its first video posted on Facebook on the 19<sup>th</sup> of April 2016. This was a day after Zimbabwe's national Independence Day. Mawarire went on to use the Facebook platform to what he terms the "accidental movement", as he did not expect the outcome and neither did, he think to start a movement. However, this video among several others that followed the movement has since used the online space. From the in-depth interview, Mawarire firstly states that;

*"#ThisFlag movement uses Facebook as the fulcrum of all messages as it has given space for people like me to rant out my emotions, gather people of the same idea (mobilisation) and provide an arena for people to speak up because we had been silenced for too long". (Mawarire, September 5, 2019)*

According to Mawarire the #ThisFlag movement provided a space through the online platform for people to freely express themselves as they "*had been silenced for too long*". Zimbabwe as mentioned in Chapter 2 had been under the rule of President Mugabe for 37 years, and for Mawarire his dictatorship had "*silenced us*". He goes on to state that;

*“we had been taught to police ourselves, we had a common phrase unodisappear, meaning you will disappear for speaking publicly about political issues”. (Mawarire, September 5, 2019)*

Due to the dictatorship and inability to speak Mawarire states that the #ThisFlag movement came into play. It is meant for people to use the online platform, to freely express themselves and have political discussions.

- **Mataké Byron Lee** Just beautiful. Thank you Pastor. 3 words freedom freedom freedom.
- **Benjamin Marembo** What a powerful and passionate speech. Pastor Evan Mawarire you have given us a voice that builds the little man to speak to power. God bless you.
- **Lily Funk** Thank you. One great voice in a million. To speak we shall, for we cannot be quiet anymore, we need to speak and they need to listen.

Above are some of the comments that illustrate participants using the platform to freely express themselves. Using words such as “freedom”, “speak to power”, “one great voice”, these comments signify freedom of expression through the online space with participants speaking to power. All 10 videos refer to freedom. Thus, in other words all of the #ThisFlag movement effort is towards freedom. Freedom of speech, freedom of expression and freedom of association are the three key elements referred to by the #ThisFlag movement. In the second video titled Mbuya vaHector (Hector’s Grandmother), she states that;

*You know kuti vanhu havakwanise kutaura zvavanenge vada kutaura (people cannot speak freely on issues they want to talk about), because we are not free, ndochokwadi chiripo (that’s the truth). 2007-2008 vanhu vakafa (people died)- tinoty kutaura (we are afraid to speak). So, it is through this platform we are now able to air our views. (transcribed from video 2)*

Hector’s grandmother is a testimonial video, in which she expresses the will to speak but due to the lack of freedom and past experiences (2007-2008) she is afraid to come out in the open to speak. However, she then acknowledges the presence of the #ThisFlag in giving citizens a platform to air their views through the online space. Thus, from Hector’s grandmother point of view the #ThisFlag used the online space to assist citizens in realizing their power to speak freely.

The third video, that is the citizens debate with RBZ governor, Dr Mangudya freedom of expression is noted at a public gathering. The citizens debate is forum were for the first-time citizens were involved in decision making. Mawarire gives a speech in which he states;

*“Government today the citizens of Zimbabwe (raising the flag) gather to convey their sentiments concerning the impending launch of the bond notes by the Reserve bank*

*of Zimbabwe. Government today you will hear genuine concerns from genuine citizens because it is we who will be affected the most and what we generally feel is not a well thought out solution we are about to go with these bond notes to a place we are too familiar with and are quite literally not happy to go back.”(transcribed video 3)*

The #ThisFlag movement through its use of the online space, allowed for citizens to give their concerns towards the bond notes that were to be launched. Mawarire confirms that it was through the online space, Facebook, Twitter and WhatsApp that people expressed their disgruntlement towards the bond notes and sought to make it known to the government.

Moreover, for freedom expression, Mafume in an interview state that;

*“the use of online spaces by the #ThisFlag movement showed the ability to go past state restrictions, there is no gate-keeping and it took the government long enough to realise the power of the online platform”. (Mafume, September 3, 2019)*

According to Mafume, due to the online space ability to go past state restrictions without gatekeeping has enabled the movement to flourish. This is because anyone regardless of party affiliation, gender or age has access to the space, thus allowing every individual to be part of the discussions, which translates to freedom of expression. Without the aspect of gate-keeping information is not withheld. Mawarire states that; “the online platform saw the exposure of several government officials as private documents were being released, something that AIPPA, would inhibit its access”.

However, according to Manyenyeni, former mayor of Harare, he states that

*“the flag movement was simply a reflection of an individual with a calling and a message of sharing it. It did not necessarily create freedom of expression for the recipients of the message. It gave the convenience of affordable one-way communication”. (Manyenyeni, August 29, 2019)*

From Manyenyeni’s point of view in as much as the #ThisFlag movement sought to use the online space for freedom of expression, it did not accomplish it. This is because according to him citizens are still afraid to comment publicly or to show up in streets for demonstration. His argument was that these videos posted by the Pastor were one way and did not take feedback, hence one cannot fully say that the movement gave a space for freedom of expression. Manyenyeni’s point of view is illustrated by Gerbaudo’s (2012) who states that the availability of the internet space does not necessarily translate into freedom of expression as there are still barriers to this expression for

example accessibility, fear and the government's restrictions. Thus, to Manyenyeni due to lack of feedback and people who are still afraid one cannot conclude that the #ThisFlag movement used the online space for freedom. Rather it sought to use it for freedom but might not have accomplished it according to Manyenyeni.

#### **4.2.2 Mobilisation**

The #ThisFlag movement used the online space for mobilisation purposes. Five of the 10 videos have a recurring theme of mobilisation. Thus, these videos focus on bringing people together. Mawarire himself states that: *“the movement was meant to gather people of the same idea, share and bring together people regardless of race, gender and age”*. (Mawarire, September 5, 2019)

The #ThisFlag movement sought to mobilise people to 1: speak up, 2: march, 3: stay away, 4: stand together. According to Mawarire these were the key objectives. He states that the #ThisFlag movement was not an everyday kind of movement, it is a movement in which it is used when necessary and mobilisation being the key factor.

The first mobilisation strategy is evidenced in the Zimbabwe Shutdown video. This was a shutdown on Wednesday the 6<sup>th</sup> of July 2016. This was the first time Zimbabwe was brought to a standstill (Bearak 2016). Mawarire in the video states that;

*“Fellow citizens Wednesday the 6<sup>th</sup> of July 2016 we are shutting Zimbabwe down. Wednesday 6 July 2016...we are closing, we are done, as citizens we are staying away from work because government has not listened to us...Citizens I want to invite you to do something to save our country...there shall be no violence, no marching, no protesting in town or in the roads...We are staying at home every worker...all children, school children are not going to school, high school students don't go, this is your nation we are fighting for...teachers don't go, civil servants you have not been paid, don't go to work, combie drivers do not carry anyone...”* (transcribed from video)

This was concurred by the participants who stated that;

**Hatlani Swamsava Switahela** The shutdown must not dismissed coz its a long time we are struggling .....there is no basic services that are provided in our Community so it is a action to. Show government ...lets do this

**Angela Bandera** Yeah, the country needs to be closed for renovations!! I'm in, once the renovations start to build our country again. This is the final push

**Simon Pheveni** complete shutdown mugabe down im in for this

The above comments agree with Mawarire in shutting down Zimbabwe. The participants see the shut down as a form of “renovating the country”, “showing the government” and seeing “mugabe down”. The participants show their willingness to be part of the shutdown as they use phrases like “I’m in”, “let’s do this”.

The #ThisFlag activist calls for children, every worker, teachers, civil servants and every citizen to not go to work on the 6<sup>th</sup> of July 2016. By calling for everyone and stating children and high school students, he illustrates the involvement and mobilisation of everyone despite of the age.

Mafume comments that:

*“this movement (#ThisFlag) saw the involvement of millennials who were once disinterested in political affairs. But due to the mobilisation strategies and its appearance on social media saw the inclusivity of the younger generation”.*  
(Mafume, September 3, 2019)

The movement uses the online platform to mobilise people through sharing of the videos. He states that; *“Spread this message to everyone, video inoyi tumira munhuwese uvaudze kuti vanhu vawirirana, (send this video to everyone and tell them we have agreed)”*

Thus, through the share button on Facebook, it allows for anyone to share the video on their timeline, inbox or other social media platforms. Mawarire calls for this sharing and spreading of the message in order to make everyone aware of the event. For this video the number of shares on Facebook reach up to 3 500 shares. However, this is only 2.2% of the total reactions made on the Facebook platform.

Manyenyeni adds that; more shares were done on “WhatsApp as compared to Facebook”. His argument is that more people have access to the WhatsApp platform as compared to Facebook, thus the video is downloaded and shared to groups on WhatsApp.

This mobilisation strategy according to Mafume was a success. This was because the shutdown of July 6<sup>th</sup> was a peaceful protest with people in their homes but making a loud statement with “empty streets”. However, the state media stated that “business was as usual on July 6<sup>th</sup>, 2016” (The Herald 2016).

Another form of mobilisation used by Mawarire on the online platform was calling for people to march. Unlike the previous protest, in this video titled We must not be silent, he calls for physical

appearances. By using words such as “we are marching” signifies the people’s involvement, “we will be meeting”, these are mobilisation strategies he mentions so as to make each individual watching feel part of the movement.

*“...on the 11<sup>th</sup> of July mangwana (tomorrow) Wednesday 11 July we are marching to the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission (ZEC), we are marching there to register our displeasure at the way they have been handling the process and preparing for elections...we will be meeting in town at 10am at Africa unity square. Let’s go there and deliver our message saying we are not happy with the preparation; we will not be robbed and just keep quiet. Some are saying it’s not necessary...its necessary, let’s go 10am, history in the making resetting how citizens participate”. (transcribed from video)*

By stating that “history in the making resetting how citizens participate”, this statement alludes to the mobilisation strategy that Mawarire uses in trying to make history through the #ThisFlag movement. By resetting how citizens participate, Mafume states that;

“Mawarire achieved this as one did not have to be affiliated to a particular party to be involved in his movements, he mobilised everyone to make sure they were able to say, “I was there”,”

#### **4.2.3 Emotions**

The #ThisFlag movement used the online space to express emotions. The two emotions brought out in the videos are hope and anger. Mawarire, in an interview he states that;

*“I was angry, I was upset and I thought who do I tell, who do I vent out my frustrations to, and for my generation, Facebook and Twitter and the online platform is the place to do it as you crowdsource your community and friends to have a discussion”. (Mawarire, September 5,2019)*

Hence Mawarire used the online space to vent out his frustrations. In the video titled They shot and killed freedom today Mawarire expresses his anger by pointing to the screen and raising his voice shouting, making use of rhetoric questions, “Why did we march?”, “If you are just going to kill us then why did we march”. In this video Mawarire expresses his anger towards the government as there had been six people shot dead and 14 injured by the soldiers who used live rounds of ammunition (EUOM, 2018).

Out of the 10 videos, 9 drive the theme of hope and 6 are driven by anger. The first viral video titled #ThisFlag, he brings out hope when he states that;

*“The green represents the power to push through soil, push past limitations and flourish and grow- that is me, this flag! (shaking the flag) The yellow...is for the*

*minerals above it, me you are the minerals, we are the value of this land. The red...its passionate blood, the will to survive, resolve to carry on, the want to push through to see dreams come to pass. This Flag! The black is the night sky that which we emerge from and we shine...This Flag! (playing slow music in the background)”*  
(transcribed from video)

By giving his own meaning towards the flag, he gives a sense of hope. For instance when he says “the black is the night shy that which we emerge from and we shine”, this is a statement of hope as it gives hope to the audience that one day they will emerge and shine from the hardships they have been going through.

The national flag is a symbol used throughout the video. The national flag represents the identity of the country. By using the national flag and giving it his own meaning, Mawarire seeks to make citizens identify with the flag and embrace it to “*restore its lost glory*”. According to Mawarire the flag had lost its meaning and therefore it was up to the citizens to restore it. Thus, when Mawarire shakes the flag and raises it he is shaking the nation to rise up and defend its glory.

When Mawarire says “This Flag!” in this text he smiles and raises his voice as an expression of joy. The tone of his voice rising and speaking fast raises momentum in the audience who are listening. The music in the background evokes emotions as it is played slow and soft with his voice speaking over the music. Thus, Mawarire uses the national flag to first make audiences identify with the message. He uses it to draw the attention of the audiences. The flag, music and tone of Mawarire’s voice in the video thus evokes emotions of hope in the participants to be part of the movement.

Manyenyeni from the interview states that:

*“Mawarire’s ability to express his emotions through the online space is what got him noticed and had more people interested in viewing and taking part in the discussions. These were discussions being done for the first time, and using the online space got the people talking and expressing what they felt about the government”.* (Manyenyeni, August 29, 2019)

Hence from Manyenyeni’s point of view the #ThisFlag movement used the online space to express emotions. For Manyenyeni this is what got him noticed, by being emotional he appeals to the people who concurred or understood him. Mafume agrees with Manyenyeni as he states that: “*Mawarire found a space he could let out his emotions that concurred with the rest of the citizens. He used it to bring out hope, [and] anger from within...*”. (Mafume, September 3, 2019)



This is evidenced by the second video, a testimonial by Mbuya vaHector a 62-year-old. She states that: *I'm happy nezvaitwa nemwana uyu tatambura (with what the Pastor has started as we are struggling) he has given us hope.*” (video transcribed speech).

Her statement illustrates hope as she expresses joy in the #ThisFlag movement. According to her something can now be achieved to remove people from struggling. She is one of the examples that Mawarire uses for the #ThisFlag movement. She is used as a testimonial when she says that;

*“I'm 62- if I tell you kuti handina kana saving (I don't have savings), saving yangu yakaiswa kuzero (my savings depreciated) in the account, 2007-2008 you know what happened.*

By using facts and someone who is past the retirement age, only shows the need for hope in which the #ThisFlag movement sought to provide.

The songs used in the Free and Fair elections video depict hope and anger. The song that states, *“Hatidi zvekubirwa order nemasasikamu”* which means that we don't like crazy people who steal from us. These songs are sung with vuvuzela's, people shouting, raising placards, clapping and marching. The shouting of the words *“Hatidi zvekubirwa order nemasasikamu”* illustrates the anger within the people as they use derogatory terms in referring to higher offices. The stealing is in reference to ZEC and the ruling party ZANU-PF in rigging past elections.

Mafume states that: *“people were angry, elections have been stolen several times, so yes we were angry, and we did not want that to happen again”.* (Mafume, September 3, 2019)

The people sing with vuvuzelas making noise and chants in the streets is a way to increase momentum of the people at the same time directing their messages towards the ZEC authorities. Thus, the songs refer to *“masasikamu”* which means crazy people, in this case refers to ZEC.

The other song states that, *“zvakuda kutanga”* meaning it's about to start. This song is a song of joy and excitement with the hope of the demonstration achieving its goal to be heard for free and fair elections *“Zvakuda kutanga”* (it's about to start) refers to change about to begin. A change in which people are hoping for free and fair elections and a new government that gives them freedom.

The video shows people marching in red regalia. The red regalia is for MDC-A. This illustrates that the march was dominated by MDC-A supporters. Thus, in as much as it was a video recorded

by the #ThisFlag one could have easily dismissed the march to have been for MDC-A. Mawarire however states that:

*“the march was called for by MDC-A but you have to understand we want the same thing, we want free and fair elections, so whether you are a MDC-A supporter or not if you wanted free and fair elections you had to be there”*. (Mawarire, September 5, 2019)

Thus, this can be regarded as ironic as supporter sing “zvakuda kutanga” (it’s about to start), with people wearing red, the hope referred to in this scenario is for MDC-A to win elections. Free and fair elections, however with MDC-A winning.

### 4.3 Quantitative and qualitative analysis of reactions generated by the videos

The second objective was to assess people’s reactions generated by videos on Facebook. The reactions are the likes, comments and shares of the videos. These reactions will be analysed through each video as follows:

#### 4.3.1 ThisFlag video

This video was about Evan Mawarire expressing his frustrations towards the shattered dreams of the national flag. This is the first video that began the #ThisFlag movement. The video exceeded the founder’s expectations as he did not expect the following reactions captured in Table 4.1. Table 4.1 illustrates the number of views, likes and shares generated by the video.

**Table 4.1 Statistics of #ThisFlag video**

Views	187 000	97.8%
Likes	1 200	0.628%
Comments	287	0.15%
Shares	2 700	1.14%
<b>Total</b>	<b>191 187</b>	<b>100%</b>

*(Source: Evan Mawarire Facebook, 19 April 2016)*

The above statistics illustrate that 98% viewed, 0.6% liked, 0.15% commented and 1% shared the video. From the quantitative data, the video illustrates that majority only viewed the video and only few liked, commented and shared. This shows that majority of the participants were largely passive. However, the large viewership illustrates the interest in what the movement had begun.

The number of comments which are insignificantly low is justified by the former mayor, Manyenyeni who states that;

“Zimbabweans are afraid to speak, we all are. So no one is just going to dive in without certainty of what is going on and the big question was ‘who is this guy?’”. (Manyenyeni, August 29, 2019)

This is also supported by the participants who state that:

- **Ronald Nyandoro** How do we speak when they do not let us, tinotywa (we are afraid)

The above participant and the mayor’s comment illustrate the citizenry fear thus, the insignificant number of comments.

#### 4.3.2 Mbuya vaHector (Hector’s Grandmother) video

This video is a testimonial by Hector’s grandmother who states why citizens do not speak and the economic hardships she has faced. In his video she gives a testimony on how she lost her savings and challenges Zimbabweans to use the online space through the #ThisFlag to speak up. Table 4.2 below illustrates the reactions generated by the testimonial video.

**Table 4.2 Statistics of Mbuya vaHector video**

Views	61 000	95%
Likes	2 100	3.2%
Comments	392	0.61%
Shares	763	1.2%
<b>Total</b>	<b>64 255</b>	<b>100%</b>

(Source: Evan Mawarire Facebook, 17 May 2016)

The video generated 95% viewership similar to the previous video. It generated 3.2%, 0.6% and 1.2% likes, comments and shares respectively. Viewership is still large compared to other reactions. Majority of the participants are still passive as illustrated by the less than 1% number of comments.

From the quantitative data, it clearly indicates, a slight increase in the number of likes for this video. Participants have increased interest due to Hector’s Grandmother’s testimony. This interest is illustrated through the comments, in which participants give their own testimonies concurring with Hector’s Grandmother. This is illustrated through the comments;

- **Anna Merci** I know first hand many seniors who lost pensions savings and insurance policies. #Enoughisenough
- **Sylvia Chenzira Hove** I dnt believe in banking at all. I lost it all when Century Bank was closed and it was around December for that matter... that feeling is like death. I was running my own little business from home. Never got anything back and I know there are thousands...[See More](#)

In the above comments the participants concur and give their own testimonies on the loss of savings and pensions.

### 4.3.3 Citizens debate video

In this video Mawarire(founder) and other #ThisFlag activists address the RBZ governor Dr. Mangudya on the impending launch of the Bond notes (*See chapter 3 for video summary*). The citizens debate was the first-time citizens were allowed to speak publicly and give suggestions to the economic crisis of the country. Below Table 4.3 illustrates the reactions generated by the video.

**Table 4.3 Statistics of the Citizens debate video**

Views	3 400	60%
Likes	1 500	27.%
Comments	253	5.%
Shares	456	8.13%
<b>Total</b>	<b>5 609</b>	<b>100%</b>

(Source: Evan Mawarire Facebook; 16 June 2016)

The above table illustrates a low viewership as compared to the previous videos. The video generates only 60% viewership, 27% likes, 5% comments and 8% shares. The number of views are low as compared to the previous videos. However from the quantitative data, the number of likes, comments and shares have increased in comparison to the previous videos. There is more engagement from the participants in this video.

This is supported by qualitative data from the comments, as participants state that;

- **Brian Dube** We shall keep saying hatisikumada mabond note (we do not want them) they will affect us not you, so we repeat we don't want them and its time you listened to us the citizens
- **John Chipaka** We say no to the bond note!!! This will only bring a black market and turn us back to 2008. No bond note plse

The above comments illustrate the participants engagement in the video discussion as they refuse the impending launch of the bond notes. Engagement is illustrated through participants getting involved in the public discussion as stated by Almond and Vebra who argue that for democracy to be attained citizens need to be involved in political and public discussions.

### 4.3.4 Zimbabwe Shutdown video

The Zimbabwe shutdown video was where Mawarire called citizens to stay at home and not go to work. He used this video as a mobilisation tool in calling for citizens to shutdown Zimbabwe by not going to work. Table 4.4below illustrates the number of reactions generated by the video.

**Table 4.4 Statistics of the Zimbabwe Shutdown video**

Views	152 000	95%
Likes	3 000	1.9%
Comments	734	0.46%
Shares	3 500	2.2%
<b>Total</b>	<b>159 234</b>	<b>100%</b>

*(Source: Evan Mawarire Facebook; 5 July 2016)*

The video generated a larger viewership of 95%. Similar to other videos, almost all participants largely view the videos with very little or insignificant number of likes, comments and shares. The video generates 1.9%, 0.5% and 2.2%, likes, comments and shares respectively. However, of more significance is the number of shares that have increased above 1%. As noted, the Shutdown video was a mobilisation video, thus from the quantitative data it is evident that participants shared the video resulting in an increase of shares.

The number of comments are few. From qualitative data analysis this is justified by participants who state that;

**Tafadzwa Titi Mawere** but r th ppl goin to listen..... n will evry1 agree????????????????????????????????

**Tatendasean Chipudhla** The catch is tht u may want to stay away but u dont know wat ur boss will say!

These participants are skeptical about the shutdown. They illustrate that citizens might want to comment, like and share but due to uncertainty of “what your boss will say” or “if everyone will agree” becomes the challenge.

#### **4.3.5 Tomorrow we will march video**

Tomorrow we will march video is another mobilisation video in which Mawarire calls for citizens to march together. This was a march calling for the removal and resignation of President Robert Mugabe. Mawarire called it a “historic moment”, a day to change Zimbabwe’s history as they sought to remove the President through a protest march. The table 4.5 below shows the reactions generated by the video.

**Table 4.5 Statistics of Tomorrow we will march video**

Views	121 000	91%
Likes	4 300	3.2%
Comments	4 931	3.7%
Shares	2 564	2%
<b>Total</b>	<b>132795</b>	<b>100%</b>

*(Source: Evan Mawarire Facebook, 17 November 2018)*

Almost all participants viewed the video with 91% viewership. The video generates 3% likes, 4% comments and 2% shares. The number of likes, comments and shares are above 1% but below 5%. In other words the number of reactions excluding the views are average. This is because the participants were being called to march for the removal of the President which caused skepticism and uncertainty to the citizens safety for the march. This is supported by the participants who comment that;

- **Shedia Mai Fafy Madhau** how do we know we will safe, how do we know this is not a planned ZANU-PF move
- **Riza Dee** To make history we want, but how do we know the army is on our side, what if we are caught up in a chaos and arrested for protesting

These comments illustrate the citizens fear in participating in the march. However, other comments go on to mobilise other people.

#### **4.3.6 Robert Mugabe has resigned video**

This video serves as an informative tool, as Mawarire informs viewers and participants on the resignation of President Mugabe. President Robert Gabriel Mugabe had recently resigned from office on the 21<sup>st</sup> of November 2018. Mawarire therefore, expresses his joy and relief in the president finally resigning from office. The table 4.6 below shows the quantitative data of the video.

**Table 4.6 Statistics of Robert Gabriel Mugabe has resigned video**

Views	208 000	93%
Likes	8 600	4%
Shares	2 839	1.3%
Comments	4 882	2.2%
<b>Total</b>	<b>224 321</b>	<b>100%</b>

(Source: Evan Mawarire Facebook, 21 November 2018)

This video generated 93% viewership. It also attained 4% likes, 1% shares and 2% comments. The number of views are higher than all other reactions. Almost all participants viewed the video with minimal likes, shares and comments. The video was largely informative hence the number of views being higher than other reactions. With 208 thousand views the video reached the largest viewership out of the 10 videos. This is because President Mugabe’s resignation had been anticipated after the coup on 14<sup>th</sup> to the 21<sup>st</sup> of November 2018.

Only a few participants comment on this video illustrating their joy and hope towards the resignation of the president. This is evidenced by the participants who state that;

- **Thandie Sithole** · 1:25 Whay day to be alive Pastor. We thank you for your sacrifice, for the amazing role you played to achieve this. God bless and bless our beautiful Zimbabwe!!!
- **David Pearson** · 2:51 You brought a voice back to the people and gave them their confidence to stand together as one amazing news !!!
- **Angela Davidson** · 0:55 YOU DID IT!!! Mugabe has fallen !!’ Remembering Itayi Dzamara at this moment in history - the man who started the movement!

These participants however few express optimisms in the information given by the founder of the flag movement.

#### **4.3.7 We must not be silent video**

We must not be silent video is another mobilisation video. The video calls for citizens to not be silent and march for electoral reforms from the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission. Citizens are called to march on the 11<sup>th</sup> of July 2018. Table 4.7 below illustrates the quantitative data for views, likes, comments and shares generated by the video.

**Table 4.7 Statistics of We must not be silent video**

Views	3 200	78%
Likes	428	10%
Comments	140	3.4%
Shares	340	8.3%
<b>Total</b>	<b>4 108</b>	<b>100%</b>

(Source: Evan Mawarire Facebook, 10 July 2018)

This video generated 78%, 10%, 3% and 8%, views, likes, comments and shares respectively. The number of views is higher than all other reactions. This illustrates that most of the participants largely view as compared to all other reactions. However, the likes and shares illustrate an even distribution as they both have increased. Increase in likes and shares illustrate an interest as well as mobilisation through sharing of the video. More participants share the video in order to mobilize people for the protest march. Through sharing more participants are made aware of the protest march.

The number of comments are however, few as compared to other reactions. However, these have slightly increased illustrating the involvement of participants in the online discussions.

#### **4.3.8 Free and Fair elections video**

This video is a march recorded live on Facebook, with citizens marching toward the ZEC offices. The citizens call for free and fair elections from the ZEC office which oversees the process of elections. The Table 4.8 below illustrates the quantitative data of the video.

**Table 4.8 Statistics of Free and Fair elections video**

Views	2 500	55%
Likes	862	19%
Shares	218	5%
Comments	995	22%
<b>Total</b>	<b>4 575</b>	<b>100%</b>

(Source: Evan Mawarire Facebook, 11 July 2018)

The video generates 55% views, 19% likes, 5% shares and 22% comments. The number of views is arguably low considering that most of the participants were at the march being recorded. The video illustrates thousands of Zimbabweans marching together, thus the average number of views



of the video. The comments however have marginally increased. The number of shares are rather low as compared to other reactions and the number of likes are slightly average.

Participants in this video are more vocal as compared to other videos. They participate in the free and fair elections dialogue. This is illustrated by participants who state that

*“Ah the crowds tell a different story”, “it’s dangerous to have a lot of people with lots of time on their hands”, “Let’s hope there will be really free and legal elections with no corruption and cheating”.*

These phrases illustrate how at this point during the march people were hoping for a change from the previous elections. The participants are more engaged in the online discussion of free and fair elections.

#### **4.3.9 They shot and killed freedom today video**

This video is about the people that were shot and killed on the 1<sup>st</sup> of August 2018. Six people were shot and 14 injured due to protests that had begun in refuting the presidential election results that had not yet been announced. The results were to be announced on the 1<sup>st</sup> of August and from the statistics ZANU-PF the ruling party illustrated majority votes. In the video Mawarire expresses his grievances and displeasure towards the government for killing unarmed civilians. The table 4.9 illustrates the number of reactions generated by the video.

**Table 4.9 Statistics of They shot and killed freedom today video**

Views	115 000	97%
Likes	1 400	1.2%
Shares	1 800	1.5%
Comments	442	0.4%
<b>Total</b>	<b>118 642</b>	<b>100%</b>

*(Source: Evan Mawarire Facebook, August 1, 2016)*

The video generated 97% views. Almost all participants only viewed the video. The video generated 1.2% likes, 1.5% shares and 0.4% comments. The number of comments are insignificantly low as they are below 1%. This can be justified by the title and the message from the video, that freedom had been shot and killed. Through the shooting and killing of unarmed civilians instantly killed the freedom of participants, hence a large viewership with low comments.

This is supported by Mwarire who states that indeed “*the citizens had been silenced once again*”. Thus, the number of comments, shares and likes decreased due to the instilled citizenry fear again.

#### 4.3.10 Destiny has seized us video

In this video Mwarire addresses people at the United Nations Human Rights Geneva Summit. In this video he addresses the key issues of the #ThisFlag and its journey since 2016. The Table 4.10 below illustrates the quantitative data generated from the video.

**Table 4.10 Statistics of Destiny has seized us video**

Views	30 000	97%
Likes	426	1.4%
Shares	330	1.1%
Comments	60	0.2%
<b>Total</b>	<b>30 816</b>	<b>100%</b>

(Source: *Evan Mwarire Facebook, 8 August 2018*)

The video generated a high viewership of 97%. This viewership was high as Mwarire addressed a large international audience at the United Nations Geneva Summit. This was a global platform and hence attracted more viewers from across the globe. The number of likes 1%, shares 1% and comments 0.2% are very low. The comments are more insignificantly low as they are less than 1%.

The number of comments are arguably low as the few participants state that “Mwarire was only representing himself”. According to this comment the participant felt that Mwarire in explaining the journey of the #ThisFlag movement was talking about himself and not the country hence only a few were interested in commenting, sharing or liking issues to do with himself. Hence, this video generates more passive participants as they largely view the video and keep their thoughts or opinions to themselves.

From the above tables and bar graphs, they illustrate that viewership of videos was extremely higher than other reactions, that is the likes, shares and comments. The tables illustrate that participants were more comfortable viewing the video as compared to liking, sharing or commenting.

During the interview Pastor Evan comments that during the interview he noticed four different types of people. Firstly, there are those that only view the videos. He states during the first videos, one person once said to him: “*she was afraid to view the videos, for fear of who might be watching her or trace her for watching the videos*”. (Mawarire, September 5, 2019)

Secondly, there are those who view and like. These are bold to be seen that they have reacted to the video. However, there are those that go a step further, the third set of people who view, like and comment. These go a step further to air out their opinions, either in agreement or they disagree with the Pastor. Lastly there are those who view, react, comment and then share it on their timeline, in groups or download the video to share on other platforms. According to Mawarire these are the bold people who have gone past the stages of fear as mentioned by the lady who feared who might be watching her while she views the videos.

#### **4.4 Qualitative analysis of reactions in thematic format**

The researcher employed the use of themes and coding to derive the findings and conclusions. The researcher found out that in 10 of the videos viewed, participants who commented were rather few as illustrated in the tables above.

##### **4.4.1 Hope**

From the comments generated by the videos, hope is a key variable that recurs. Hope is a key factor that people see through the #ThisFlag movement. Mafume states that,

*“Mawarire as a pastor knows how to deliver the message of hope, he gave hope to people because he came as an individual who is not affiliated to any political party but wanted change for the country”.* (Mafume, September 3, 2019)

According to Mafume, this was because Mawarire was a pastor and his message of hope easily came about. Due to his non affiliation to a particular party according to Mafume is what gave the people hope. From the first video the comments illustrate hope when people say;

- **Simbarashe Chibwe Simbarashe** That is how I feel everyday Pastor Evan Mawarire , a heavy heart for the current situation and a hope for the future. Our Zimbabwe.
- **Chenai Mukumba** Pastor E, that's what I loved about this video. The anger and frustration was so evident but the message of hope still rung true, the belief that inspite of all this - we are still here, that was the truth of the video.
- **Russel Timbe** It's this very resolve you have just posted and a selfless stance both spiritually and in our everyday life that will change our country. You have given the everyday Zimbabwean hope and a wake up slap, a call to action you have alarmed. My heart echoes your sentiments and I take heed to the "Call to action"
  - We are not done with it yet x

The phrases “*hope for the future*”, “*our Zimbabwe*”, “*the message of hope*”, “*you have given every Zimbabwean hope*”, these illustrate hope. From watching the video, the participants find hope in getting a better Zimbabwe if they stand up. Hope is on the parameters to speak up and stand together.

- **Shadreck Gandagobvu Chiware** This is a first i think.Never in the history of Zimbabwe have citizens engaged a public officer in an organised and peaceful manner like this.Let alone just engaging.Opposition parties(so called alternative gvts) hv never done this.protesting does not relay thoughts to the administration.its gets you arrested.Welldone Evan and crew.I see hope
- **Trey Ndlovu** This would be a start for a better Zimbabwe and hope for a future. I just can't believe that people are beginning to speak freely.
- **Emmanuel Kapofu** That's the way to go pastor - engagement, honesty transparently. Well done Evan you give us hope.
- **Tendai Kambeu** #thisflag #tjamuka these guys have been ignorant to people plight for a while we can not be taken for granted our children need a better future
- **Hilton Mendelsohn** #ZimbabweStrong #ThisFlag
- **Joy Bhila Kwaramba** Yes look forward to hearing the rest .This is amazing now we can all use our skills ,abilities and intelligence to make a change in Zimbabwe #thisflag #zimbabweunite 🙌
- **Ketai Magama** That's what we call representing the masses.Well done Comrade.Hope the powers that be will swallow their pride and shove their bond notes

In the Citizens debate video, the above comments illustrate hope for the future. Participants look beyond in hoping for a better future as it is characterised by political engagement. Almond and Verba (1963) stated that democracy is evidenced by political engagement or public involvement in decision making. Thus, participants through political engagement with the RBZ governor, were hopeful for a better Zimbabwe in which they are involved in the decision making.

Out of the 10 videos 9 illustrated hope from the participants. That is 90% of the comment's participants were hoping for a better future for Zimbabwe. The #ThisFlag movement gave the participants hope.

#### 4.4.2 Anger

Anger is another key variable that is depicted in the comments. Similar to Mawarire using anger to drive his message, the participants respond with anger as well.

Phrases like, “*enough*”, “*steal*”, “*corrupt people*”. These phrases in the videos illustrate anger towards the government. The phrases portray anger in their corrupt tendencies, the stealing and rigging of elections. The participants express anger towards the economic hardships caused by the government.

- **Elizabeth Tarnia Fulton** We are tired of this government!!!!!! they steal from us and get away with it. Its time for change
- **Sara Mitchell** we have had enough, enough is enough!!! It is time Zimbabweans
- **Muku Bethel** · 8:15 Yes it matters Pastor E. If they are going to steal, we refuse. Enough is enough!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

Out of the 10 videos, 6 videos are targeted towards anger and some of the comments illustrate anger issues towards against Pastor Evan Mawarire himself.

Those against Pastor Evan express anger through calling him negative names such as “*you are a thief*” “*you are a coward*”, “*you are a sell-out*”. These comments are illustrated in the “We must not be silent” video, in which Mawarire was mobilising people for a march. By calling him;

- **Comfort Senekai** Mapastor matsotsi aya..hatiuye ikoko(pastors are thieves we wont come)
- **Morest Norest Mapfumo** Ibva zimbavha (*thief*) Pastor pastor chii ipapa u want us to help ur own agenda getaway foolish pastor
- 
- **Nichodimus Maziofa** Mawarire is the most ignorant person the world has ever seen.To hell with you ,you are going too far.Go do it alone .You studied the bible not the Laws of Zimbabwe.
- **Riza Dee** You are a sellout, mbavha gororo nyarara (a big thief be quiet)
- **Rachel Masere** Shut up Evan you are a big fun of demonstrations.

This illustrated the anger towards the Pastor as they viewed him as a “foolish pastor”. Some of the participants due to their anger towards the Pastor, and the perceptions of him being a sell-out and a thief, they would not participate in the movements.

The comments towards the government and the video messages from Pastor Evan carry the same nuances. The participants reflect that they agree with the pastor in that they have had “enough” from the government.

#### 4.4.3 Freedom of expression

Freedom of expression is noted in the comments. The participants begin to speak up and acknowledge the #ThisFlag for giving them a voice, as well as forming political discussions with others.

These were words like “*voice*”, “*freedom*”, “*speak up*”. These phrases and words illustrate how participants had begun to speak. Freedom of expression is a constitutional right, however until the #ThisFlag movement participants began to exercise it fully.

**Carol Hobbs NeeKing** Thank you Pastor E for giving us all a voice

**David Pearson** You brought a voice back to the people and gave them their confidence to stand together as one amazing news !!!

**Tafadzwa Kenneth Mukoyi** its time to make our voices heard Zimbabwe

**Clemence Wonder Mphepo** wow thats sad, amazing and heartfelt. We our voices to speak the truth in passion and honesty and truth.

These are some of the examples of the participant who acknowledge having their voice back. Thus, the previously marginalised had a new platform to speak out. The ability to comment on the videos according to Manyenyeni was a sign of freedom of expression itself. This is because one's identity is revealed when you comment unless under a pseudo name.

Thus all 10 videos had connotations of freedom of expression. They all contained the phrases of freedom. Secondly from Manyenyeni's point of view that simply commenting was an exercise to freedom of expression, all videos had comments thus freedom of expression.

#### 4.4.4 Mobilisation

The key phrases found in mobilisation are "Let's go", "munhu wese muroad" (everyone in the road), "we will go", "I will be there" "unite". These are the key words and phrases found in the comments. The phrases illustrate that the people would be part of the movements. They were willing to go to the streets for the protests. The word "unite", was a mobilisation variable as it sought to involve everyone, for Zimbabweans to march together, thus unite, meaning to come together.

**Ntando Mlilo** Let's go munhu wose murodi

- **Lord-Tendai Blessing-the VII** we wil go in the streets .iwe nehu cio hwako .u wl c us marching together as citizens...
- **Irene Shana Madare** Let's go. Aluta
- **Tafie Natso Chidodo** Now talking..this is what i know u for...lets unite👏👏👏👏👏
  - **Obey Chipetekure** · 5:20 Let's not make it easy for them and for the sake of our future generations may we stand United.
  - **Junior Mutasa** · 3:04 UNITED WE STAND
  - **Ernest Simon Machingambi** Ahoy Evan. I support your motive. Your motive is what everyone should share. Lets share this video, Lets make our voices heard.
  - **Rory Comins** · Well we will go I will be there👏👏
  -

The emojis used in the comments illustrate involvement. Emojis are ideograms and smileys used in electronic messages. For instance, in these comments there is the use of hand raising up emoji. This is there to signify participation of the participant. By raising a hand, they signify involvement and the willingness to participate in the movement. The clapping hands emoji in a this signifies the participants illustrating that they are grateful for the pastors call for a protest.

#### **4.5 The hashtags used by the #ThisFlag movement**

The research objective was to identify how hashtags were used to deliver the #ThisFlag movement messages. Firstly, it is important to note that the movement itself is named after a hashtag. Hashtags give prominence to issues on the social media. They provide the words or phrases relating to the topic at hand. Mawarire stated that;

*“by naming the movement #ThisFlag, firstly the movement is about the flag, it’s about us Zimbabweans and what identifies us better than our national flag, so it was named #ThisFlag because the first video I spoke about the flag and the movement is about restoring the lost glory of the flag”. (Mawarire, September 5, 2019)*

Thus, the first hashtag of the movement #ThisFlag was meant for Zimbabweans to identify with the flag and be part of a movement in restoring its dignity. In other words, according to Mawarire, the national flag and its meaning had lost their values and it was up to the citizens to restore it.

#Standyourground a defiant move on the online space for the movement as they stated to audiences to stand their ground. This hashtag was a calling to people to stop being silent and begin to speak up. As mentioned earlier majority of the Zimbabwean citizens were silent when it came to political issues, this hashtag was calling for the opposite. The #standyourground was calling for people to move away from being silent and stand their ground in regard to political affairs. It was a hashtag in also alerting people in that a movement had begun.

The #Enoughisenough and #Hatichadahatichatya (we don’t want we are no longer afraid) are other hashtags generated from the movement. This term, Enough is enough, according to Sachikonye (2017) is often heard among members of new protest movements referring to the conditions of repression and deprivation. The hashtag also symbolises how people are tired and want a change. By stating phrases like “we are tired”, “we are emotional beings”, “this brings tears to my eyes”, all these phrases signify that the citizens have had enough thus resulting in rebellion by not keeping in silence and speaking up gaining their political space. By stating enough is enough also signified a form of action was about to happen. This #enoughisenough was followed up with a protest

movement in the streets with people declaring that they have had enough of the economic and political situations of Zimbabwe.

The hashtag #shutdown was there to summarise the event. #Shutdown referring to no work, no school, people to stay at home as a sign of defiance. By the shutdown Mawarire and Zimbabweans sought to also show the importance of people as he stated that, *“the government is refusing to listen to us so it’s time to act”*. Thus, through close of business and empty streets during the week was defiant move of stating #enoughisenough and #shutdown. This hashtag on social media resulted in an internet blackout. The internet was shut down due to the spreading of defiant messages in calling for a shutdown and people not going to work (Bearak, 2016).

The #Freshstart symbolised a new beginning for Zimbabwe. As one had commented it was a new independence for Zimbabwe. The #Freshstart was a summary in calling out Zimbabweans to be part of the new beginning of Zimbabwe, without President Mugabe for the first time. It also signified a first time were Zimbabweans regardless of race and party affiliation were marching for one similar thing, that is a new beginning. A fresh start was significant as it brought Zimbabweans together including those living in the diaspora.

The #Free&Fairelections is a summary of the protest movement. The movement was directed to ZEC to be transparent and bring about fair elections. By declaring #free&fairelections illustrates how before there is the perception that elections were not free. Elections had assumed to have been rigged since 2008 (Campbell and Lewis 2008).

The movement used 7 hashtags to deliver their messages. The hashtags were a summary of the particular event or movement in the video. These hashtags were used for alerting purposes for instance by stating #Standyourground, this was a call to citizens action. The hashtags were used to also state the demands of the movement. By stating #Freshstart, signifying a new beginning, #Free&fairelections, it was a demand to ZEC to be transparent and be fair, #Shutdown an appeal to the citizens to remain at home for the protest. These hashtags delivered the movement messages by summarising, demanding and alerting the citizens in what they sought to achieve.



#### 4.6 The effectiveness of online activism for democracy

The last objective was to examine the effectiveness of activism for democracy in Zimbabwe. From the findings the researcher noted that the online activism by the #ThisFlag movement was the first of its kind in Zimbabwe.

The movement was effective in bringing about Zimbabweans together from across the globe. By using the online space, the diaspora community were largely involved in the day to day happenings of the movement. For instance, in the livestream video Tomorrow we will march, Zimbabweans in Australia, Canada, Egypt, South Africa among many other countries were part of the livestream march virtually. Thus, one can argue to say that the movement saw the inclusion of Zimbabweans across the borders. Hence one did not have to be there physically or only be in Zimbabwe to be part of the movement.

- **Simba Ustore** · 21:21 Marches being organised in New York and Washington DC
- **Joy Mai Ayisha** · 5:29 Bulawayo has 40 buses going, I think details of were to get them will be given later.
- **Vicky Forbes** · 1:43 We will make ourselves noticed in Perth
- **Ashes Ashes** · 26:15 PLEASE FB LIVE THE ACTION FOR US ABROAD
- **Tafadzwa Taffrock Mucheri** · 24:03 Trafalgar Square inoita 🖐️  see you there
- **Ian Moses** · 33:56 Zimbabweans in Canada  support this March, wish we could be there
- **Agnes Tekenende** · 18:08 Egypt where are we meeting

Above are some of the comments from Zimbabweans living in the diaspora. The diaspora community through the online activism by the #ThisFlag gave them a space to mobilise their own people for the same march in their cities.

According to Mafume online activism is “*effective as it brought the inclusion of the younger generation, the millennials*”. According to him their inclusion was important as they are the majority of Zimbabweans, their participation adds to the numbers appealing for change.

Online activism allowed for audiences to participate in discussions and form dialogues with individuals and the activists. Mawarire states that: “*the #ThisFlag created a space for citizens to have discussions and debates, which was largely important for the citizens debate forum*”

Mawarire refers to the Citizens debate with RBZ governor. He states that it was through the online activism that the debate was informed by the citizens. Citizens through the online space gave their

viewpoints on the launch of the bond note which is what the #ThisFlag activists then presented at the debate. Thus, the online activism gave the citizens ability to participate in decision making of political and economic affairs.

Online activism according to Manyenyeni to some extent moved citizens away from the aspect of fear. Zimbabweans are afraid to speak publicly about political affairs, however to a certain extent online activism changed that perception. Manyenyeni states that “it gave citizens the power to stay how they feel and what they feel needs to be done”

Online activism according to Mawarire proved that activism does not necessarily have to be a physical protest. As evidenced by the #Shutdown, this was a protest with people at their homes, no work and no school and no public transport. Instead of “tweets to the streets” like the Arab spring it was the other way around with empty streets.

Mafume comments that:

*“online for activism was or is effective because note how the government is threatened by it. Previously they used to dismiss the power of the online space but now they risk shutting down the internet because of a movement online”. (Mafume, September 3, 2019)*

Thus, according to Mafume due to the government lack of power on the online space, due to no gatekeeping and the uncensored nature of the online space, online activism can be deemed to be effective. Mawarire notes that “social media is a place where people can safely gather without being in direct harm’s way”. Therefore, Mawarire concurs with Mafume’s point of view as he states that online activism is effective due to its ability to keep one away from any harm, that is violence accompanied by protests in the streets.

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

#### **5.1 Overview**

This Chapter draws a summary from the findings presented. It also gives the conclusions and recommendations of the study.

#### **5.2 Introduction**

The objectives of the study were 1: to do an appraisal of the #ThisFlag movement on the use of online spaces 2: To assess the reactions generated by the videos on Facebook during the movement between April 2016- August 2018, 3: To identify how the hashtags were used in delivering a message from the #ThisFlag, and lastly 4: To examine the effectiveness of online activism for democracy in Zimbabwe.

The #ThisFlag movement began at a time where most Zimbabweans had lost hope in democracy. Zimbabwe had been under the rule of President Robert Mugabe for 37 years. Under his rule there was no freedom of expression, freedom of association, the ability to challenge the government and the right to protest. All these laws were inhibited due to fear of political violence. Thus, the movement gave an entry point to the realisation and power of social media as it used Facebook, Twitter and WhatsApp as their main tools for passing a message. Facebook became a key source of information for #ThisFlag movement as the founder Evan Mawarire would post videos on this platform that would then be shared on all other platforms. It became a platform for dialogue with the citizens on political matters as well as creating a forum for people to speak out.

#### **5.3 Summary of findings**

The study sought to mainly give an appraisal of the #ThisFlag movement on the use of online spaces. In the research finding the researcher noted that the #ThisFlag movement used the online space for freedom of expression, mobilisation and a platform to express emotions. From freedom of expression the study found out that all 10 videos targeted issues for freedom of expression. The #ThisFlag movement main aim was to give and make participants realise their rights to freedom of expression through the online platform.

The study found out that the #ThisFlag movement used the online space for mobilisation strategies. Five videos targeted mobilisation aspects, in either calling Zimbabweans to stay at home or to

participate in a demonstration. The most successful of the 5 videos was the Zimbabwe Shut down, in which the study found out that majority of Zimbabweans stayed at home for the protest movement.

The researcher found out that #ThisFlag movement used the online space to express emotions. The activists use of anger and hope appealed to the participants as they resonated with the message. 9 videos were about hope, and 6 videos used anger to drive their message. The use of emotions gained up to 97% viewership in the first video. Hence use of emotions gained more views from the audiences.

The second objective was to do an assessment of people's reactions generated by the videos. The researcher found out that they carried themes of hope, anger, freedom of expression and mobilisation. These four themes are similar to the messages by the activists. From the message of hope, the participants hoped for a better future in Zimbabwe with close to 90% of the reactions targeting a futuristic hope for Zimbabwe. Use of the emotions hope and anger appealed to the participants as they responded with the same emotions. This illustrated that the participants felt connected to the message and the videos.

The study found out that in as much as all 10 videos carried the message of freedom of expression, the reactions generated provided the least margin on freedom of expression. The researcher found out that most participants only viewed the videos and did not comment, like or share the videos. Participation was thus, largely passive. With comments ranging from 0.15%, likes 0.62% and shares 1.14%, these reactions are very low compared to the number of views of about 97%. Hence the researcher noted that only a few participants used the online space for freedom of expression.

The third objective sought to identify the hashtags used in delivering a message for the #ThisFlag movement. The study found out that the movement itself was named with a hashtag, #ThisFlag. By naming the movement #ThisFlag the researcher found out that it resonated with the participants as it called for national identity. The movement used metaphors(#ThisFlag), called people to action (#Standyourground), called for civic duty (#Free&Fairelections) and appealed to inner conscience (#Freshstart). The study found 7 key hashtags that were used in delivering the messages. These are, #ThisFlag, #Enoughisenough, #Shutdown, #Hatichada, #Standyourground, #Freshstart and #Free&Fairelections. The hashtags summarised the key events in a few words or phrase. The

hashtags were used as a way of alerting the participants on the protest movement or march for example #shutdown.

The fourth objective was to examine the effectiveness of online activism for democracy in Zimbabwe. The findings pointed out that activism is an important tool in achieving democracy. The online activism by the #ThisFlag was effective as began a new movement in Zimbabwe through the online space. It gave citizens the power to speak up and act. Online activism was effective as it mobilised most Zimbabweans, local and across the borders. The researcher found out that the movement included participation from the diaspora community which are Zimbabweans living abroad. The research also noted the inclusion of every race, gender and age group was represented on the online platform. It brought about inclusivity by breaking all social structures and classes.

However, the research also found out that in as much as the movement brought inclusion of the minority, it excluded a certain group of people without access to smartphones and the internet. Zimbabweans without a smartphone or access to the internet were alienated from the movement as it was largely an online movement and in order to see and participate in the movement one had to have access to these two.

#### **5.4 Conclusions**

Through the analysis of the findings the study showed that political activism and democracy are still being practiced in Zimbabwe. The #ThisFlag movement being the leading example in activism seeking democracy through the means of social media. The movement has flourished through the use of the online space with Facebook at its pivotal point. It saw the inclusion of previously marginalised voices as well as the new generation of the millennials. The millennials inclusion in the #ThisFlag movement through the online sphere was largely important as they are argued to be the next generation and need to be included in the political, economic and social affairs of the country. The #ThisFlag movement through Facebook and other platforms brought the news to them hence, making them inclusive in the dialogue as to what needs to be done as according in bringing in new ideas to the platform. The previously marginalised voices were given a space through the online spaces to engage with activists as well as the government officials. It created a space where people previously feared to let their views be made known in the public arena be known

through the digital space. The #ThisFlag movement gave hope to the Zimbabwean citizen is demonstrating in the streets as a way to get the government to listen and hear them.

The #ThisFlag movement proved that for activism to occur people do not always necessarily have to be in the streets to demonstrate. The online space is a counter-hegemonic sphere as the online posts speak volumes of messages and they get the attention of the government through a means that is not restricted or were one might be accused of not acting within their rights. It also proved that through online videos successful mobilisation and sharing of messages can occur. This was evidenced by the 2016 shutdown. The message was sent through Facebook and later spread to other platforms informing people to stay home which they did as a form of protest. It is against this background that it becomes prudent to conclude that, Facebook's potential for creating an ideal public sphere which promotes democracy was discovered through the #ThisFlag movement as it paved way for freedom of expression in the comfort of one's home at any given time. Physical presence for activism in the #ThisFlag movement was not quite a necessity as one's voice through the online space was what was needed. It is through the online sphere that Zimbabwean citizens went past the aspect of fear and no longer policed themselves when talking about political matters. However, it still remains a question, whether political activism through Facebook and other online spaces is enough? This is due to how, even after four years of campaigning the #ThisFlag movement, the activists have encountered several arrests including Evan Mawarire himself. During the period of interview, he was facing a charge of subverting the government for January 2019 shutdown. Other activists are being abducted if found challenging the government. One would then argue to say that activism in Zimbabwe through the online sphere has given the power to citizens, but they are still in chains as democracy is yet to be accomplished. The evidence of counter-power alone cannot help in qualifying the platform as a public sphere. Therefore, following Papacharissi (2002) and drawing from the findings of the previous chapter, this researcher concludes that democracy remains a question.

From the findings the researcher concluded that using emotional appeal through the online space gets citizens actively involved. As Mawarire poured out his frustrations through the videos he posted, crying and directing his messages to the people. This made him achieve his agenda, as he mobilized citizens into the streets or made them stay at home. The ideology of him being a Pastor

is a contributing factor, as citizens saw him as a man of God and not affiliated to any political party.

The other conclusion drawn from the findings is that in November 2017, Zimbabwe missed its democratic wave again, as the transition of power led to only a regime change and not democracy. It raises the argument that activism does not necessarily lead to democracy; democracy is only hoped for through activism. In Zimbabwe it is but still a hope as #ThisFlag movement continues to prevail and call for actions. Jameson (1986) argued that democracy will be achieved but only through hard political work.

The study also noted that the #ThisFlag reliance on social media for activism and democracy might not be the sole solution. Social media is a powerful tool for communication; however, the government has proved to be in control as they continue to shut down the internet when they feel threatened. For example, the first shutdown under President Mugabe social media sites were closed on the day, under President Mnangagwa in 2019 the internet was shut down for close to a week. Thus, in conclusion the online spaces could have power to expose and call out the government on their acts but with autocratic governments, democracy will be far from being reached. The reliance on the online space moreover excludes those that do not have access to a smartphone or data bundles. In other words, the movement was simply for those with a smartphone as this is where you would see the videos and share. Therefore, in as much as one might conclude that #ThisFlag brought about the inclusion by giving a voice to the voiceless, it is important to note those who do not have access to these platforms they are still excluded.

Violence is an aspect noted during political activism. The study takes note of the violence that occurs from the #ThisFlag movement. However, through data findings Mawarire refuses having had been part of any violence during the movements, that they were all peaceful protests done. The August 1<sup>st</sup>, 2018 shooting prove otherwise as the military is deployed to stop the violent protests that had begun. It is also important to note that the military was the one deployed at this time, showing that in as much as citizens and the government had agreed on peace in order to attain democracy, this was again far from being realised as people were killed on this day. It is with this finding that the researcher concludes that political violence will continuously be used with dictatorial governments.

The study in relation to the relative deprivation theory pointed out, the principles of entitlement and deservingness. The #ThisFlag movement gave instances of where the participants stated they deserved to speak up and stand up against the ruling government. The findings illustrated how they also mentioned they deserved free and fair elections. These are all entitled rights according to the Zimbabwe Constitution of 2013. Thus, the argument being valid in that the citizens were feeling deprived of their entitlements thus the need to have demonstrations.

The study revealed that Zimbabwean online presence is still affected by anecdotes of fear. This is evidenced by the number of views versus comments, likes and shares. The number of views were largely higher than the people who felt brave enough to comment, like or share. Thus, in as much as the #ThisFlag movement opened the space to freedom of expression the figures prove otherwise, as most of the participants are rather passive participants.

In illuminating this study Lowenthal (2015) states that the first steps toward transition often took place quietly, even invisibly: in the political opposition, within the authoritarian regime itself, in civil society or in multiple places. Thus, given diverse circumstances and trajectories from authoritarian rule toward democracy it is safe to conclude that “there can be no one size fits all standard or a simple guide for the best practices for such transition” (Lowenthal 2015).

## **5.5 Recommendations**

The recommendations are tied to the four objectives of this study and are derived from the literature review, the analysis of data collected, and the findings results. Thus, the researcher makes the following 6 recommendations;

The first objective was to do an appraisal of the #ThisFlag movement use of online spaces

1. The online space was used for freedom of expression, mobilisation and a platform to express emotions. However, from the qualitative analysis participants largely participated through viewership only. This is evidenced by the 97% views with only 0.15% comments in one of the videos. Therefore, the researcher recommends that the #ThisFlag activists encourage participants to air out their views in order to create a public opinion on political issues.
2. In addition, 5 out of 10 of the videos were about mobilisation. From the findings it is evident that physical demonstrations are not the only form of demonstrations. The



shutdown Zimbabwe success is evidence that demonstrations can take place peacefully with participants at home. Therefore, the researcher recommends the use of the Zimbabwe shutdown strategy for peaceful demonstrations.

3. The online space is a powerful tool as evidenced by the number of views gained from the videos. In as much as the online space are “technologies of freedom”, complete reliance on them in third world countries will only reach a certain number of people due to technological limitations. The researcher recommends that in countries like Zimbabwe the internet should be made a social need in order to get more people involved on the online platform

The second objective was to access the reactions generated by the videos

4. The study showed that majority of the participants viewed the videos and only a few liked, shared and commented on the videos. From the analysis Mawarire justified this by stating that “we were dealing with citizenry fear, people were afraid to speak”. The researcher recommends that in order for citizens to move past fear of publicly speaking about political matters, there needs to be educational awareness on citizens’ rights. Citizens need to be educated on their human rights which include freedom of speech.

The third objective was to identify how hashtags were used in delivering a message by the #Thisflag

5. The use of hashtags was used to pass political messages through the use of metaphors, call to action, call for civic duty and appeal to participants inner conscience, for example #ThisFlag a metaphor that signified nationalism. Therefore, the researcher recommends that activists use metaphors as these are used to appeal to the participants consciousness.

The fourth objective was to examine the effectiveness of online activism for democracy

6. The #ThisFlag was a success story as it became global in nature. It appealed to participants from across the borders of Zimbabwe for example participants from New York and Washington DC,

**Simba Ustore** · 21:21 Marches being organised in New York and Washington DC

Above is one of the participants from New York. Therefore, the researcher recommends that activists should harness the power of online spaces as it included participants from the diaspora, thus making inclusion of everyone who is Zimbabwean.

### **5.6 Suggestions for further research**

In undertaking this research, this researcher recognised that the study on political activism and democracy use of online spaces is a broad topic. It is, therefore, prudent to make further research recommendations, which would cover knowledge gaps where the scope of this research has left out. There is need for further study on other movements in Zimbabwe seeking for a democratic change, as well as going past the online sphere in discovering the political discourses. Such a research would account for political economy of Zimbabwe and hear the voice of the citizens through focus groups in their idea or need for democracy to be achieved. The researcher also recommends a study that focuses on the pre and post-election political activism on the online media bringing about issues of citizen participation and inclusion.

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## APPENDICES

### Appendix I: Video titles and link

Video 1: #ThisFlag first video

<https://www.facebook.com/evan.mawarire/videos/10153553623267043/>

Video 2: This flag was raised high by a 62-year-old woman Mbuya (Grandmother) VaHector

<https://www.facebook.com/evan.mawarire/videos/10153606464642043/>

Video 3: Citizens debate with RBZ governor #Bondnote

<https://www.facebook.com/evan.mawarire/videos/10153669322922043/>

Video 4: Zimbabwe shutdown on Wednesday 6 July

<https://www.facebook.com/evan.mawarire/videos/10153708818247043/?t=5>

Video 5: We must not be silent #HandeiTese (Lets go)

<https://www.facebook.com/evan.mawarire/videos/10155597702347043/>

Video 6: Tomorrow Zimbabweans we will march #Freshstart

<https://www.facebook.com/evan.mawarire/videos/10155051518497043/>

Video 7: Free and Fair Elections

<https://www.facebook.com/evan.mawarire/videos/10155599546487043/>

Video 8: President Robert Mugabe has resigned

<https://www.facebook.com/evan.mawarire/videos/10155062346642043/>

Video 9: They shot and killed freedom today

<https://www.facebook.com/evan.mawarire/videos/10155645027627043/>

Video 10: Destiny has seized us

<https://www.facebook.com/evan.mawarire/videos/10155335518042043/>

## **Appendix II: Key Informants unstructured interview guide**

### **Interview guide for key informants (Evan Mawarire)**

1. Can you briefly tell me about yourself?
2. Why did you start the movement and why is it named #ThisFlag?
3. Why the use of social media i.e. Facebook and Twitter?
4. What did the movement seek to achieve through the online space?
5. What were people's reactions towards the videos?
6. Who are the target audience and are these people reached via social media (if not how are others being reached)?
7. What was the use of hashtags?
8. Is Facebook/ social media an effective communication tool for activism and democracy?
9. Would you say the movement gave way to freedom of expression through social media?
10. To what extent would you say social media has played a key role in the movement and how?
11. There was a period in 2017 you went quiet and several accusations came your way stating you are a sell-out, a coward etc, then you campaigned as a councillor for Mount Pleasant and didn't win, my question is after all this Is the movement still relevant from when it began and now?
12. Do Facebook reactions (likes, shares and comments) result in the same people appearing for demonstrations? Why?
13. The Arab Spring is well known for having used social media as a tool for activism and succeeded, what do you think is lacking in Zimbabwe?
14. There are some who say they are tired of marching now and nothing is changing, what do you think needs to be done and for how long, as the movement has been going on for 4 years now?
15. Is activism the answer to democracy in Zimbabwe, how so, if not what is?
16. What is the significance of the flag you carry around?
17. Besides the videos and the street demonstrations what would you say is being practically done for democracy to be achieved?
18. For democracy to be achieved what do you recommend should be done?

## **Appendix II: Key Informants Interview guide**

### **Key informants (Jacob Mafume and Bernard Manyenyeni)**


1. Can you tell us briefly about yourself and how you got involved in politics?
2. How did you get to know about the flag movement?
3. How did the flag movement use the online space?
4. What are your views and sentiments towards this movement?
5. As a member of the opposition party do you think the movement is it relevant or is it still relevant from when it began and now?
6. Do you consider the online space as an effective communication tool for activism in Zimbabwe? Why?
7. Would you say that the #ThisFlag movement opened a space to freedom of expression through social media? Why?
8. As a Facebook/ social media user do the Facebook reactions (likes, shares and comments), what were people's reactions towards the movement?
9. What do you think has been the advantages and disadvantages of using Facebook/ social media for activism in Zimbabwe?
10. The Arab Spring and recently Sudan is well known for having used social media as a tool for activism and succeeded, what do you think is lacking in Zimbabwe?
11. To what extent would you say social media has played a key role in the past demonstrations?
12. For democracy to be attained in Zimbabwe what would recommend being done?

### Appendix III: Study themes and coding sheet

- Hope
- Anger
- Mobilisation
- Freedom

<b>Video</b>	<b>Hope</b>	<b>Anger</b>	<b>Mobilisation</b>	<b>Freedom</b>	<b>Hashtags</b>
Video 1	✓		✓	✓	✓
Video 2	✓	✓		✓	✓
Video 3	✓			✓	✓
Video 4	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Video 5	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Video 6	✓		✓	✓	✓
Video 7	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Video 8	✓			✓	
Video 9		✓		✓	
Video 10	✓	✓		✓	

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Title: Political activism and democracy: the use of Facebook by the flag movements in Zimbabwe between April 2016-Aug 2018

<u>Dr Michael Mwangi</u> SUPERVISOR	<u>M Mwangi</u> SIGNATURE	<u>12-06-2019</u> DATE
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