# Digital activism: Passive participation and divergence of ideas in online social movements

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*Dedicated to Henry Robert James Bromberg*

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# Attestation of Authorship

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person (except where explicitly defined in the acknowledgements), nor material which to a substantial extent has been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning.
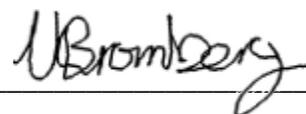
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# Abstract

This thesis seeks to explore how information technology is being used to engage people in social movements, which may both have a diverse support base and be spontaneous, to rally active supporters around a set of shared goals. New Information and Communication Technologies (NICTs) such as the Internet and social media have enabled an unprecedented level of connectedness that has hitherto remained unknown. This has changed the way that we view social interaction, no longer requiring that social connections be maintained through face-to-face communication. It has enabled us to invest in, and increase the number of our social connections more efficiently, through the use of indirect communication channels. However, this has also had implications for social movements whose mode of communication centres on the use of digital communication, and the requirement of strong social connections to mobilise people and resources into action.

This qualitative research looks at technologically-connected social movements though the lens of Castell's (2000) network society, Habermas (1992) public sphere, and modern social movement theory (McCarthy & Zald, 1977). Focusing on the *Occupy Auckland* social movement and its ancillaries as the unit of analysis, this thesis explores, through thematic analysis, the experiences of movement participants and supporters, through unstructured interviews. The themes that have emerged have enabled the construction of ten distinct propositions that frame the core findings of this research.

Namely, that technology is an effective tool for gathering support. However, there is a strong connection between the use of technology in a social movement and leadership within that movement. In the absence of leadership and technological savvy, the movement experiences inertia due to increasing participation which is only passive in nature, which challenges the movement to realise its goals. Without the influence of effective leadership skills and engagement from the general public, social media has, in isolation, limited ability to affect social and political change. This challenges future movements which choose to organise themselves online to have strong a leadership presence online and to develop strategies within the movement to engage would-be passive participants into social action.

# 1 Introduction

A cursory glance at any month in media today is revealing some striking trends in the popular spread of social activism. From the Tahrir Square revolution in Egypt in January 2011 and the 2011 Libyan civil war to recent 'Occupy' protests the world-over, activism has been brought to the front of the attention of journalists and the public. Backed by technologically savvy activists, technologies such as the Internet and social networks have become key media to gather support from social groups and the wider community (AFP, 2011; Kazmi, 2011). Either using technology or in person, the aim of these forms of global sit-ins and 'occupations' is to cause disruption and gain public attention for activists' points of view on issues. The acts of social activism discussed in this thesis, referred to henceforth as social movements, is defined by McCarthy and Zald (1977) as, "a set of opinions and beliefs in a population which represents preferences for changing some elements of the social structure and/or reward distribution of society" (pp. 1217-1218). . The object is to gain public attention for activists' points of view on issues. Such action closely resembles the form of protest known most commonly as *civil disobedience*, that is to say, "public, non-violent, conscientious yet political act[s] contrary to law... with the aim of bringing about a change in law or policies of government" (Rawls, 1999, p. 319).

The etymological origin of the term 'civil disobedience' can be traced back to Thoreau's (1849) essay on the topic. However, although social movements predate civil disobedience, the first recorded large-scale social movement to utilise this tactic was not until the 1919 Egyptian revolution where citizens protested against the British claim of sovereignty over them (Zunes, Kurtz, & Asher, 1999). Arguably the most famous person to receive attribution for the rise of civil disobedience is Mohandas K. Ghandi for his role in

the Indian fight for independence from Britain. In the latter nineteenth century and on, there have been two major trends in social movement causation, the fight for the flattening of social caste, and that for individual civil rights. Perhaps the most notable and well-known example of class wars in the previous century occurred in Russia, with the Bolsheviks' overthrowing of the ruling Romanov Dynasty and the eventual rise of the Soviet Union. Led by the Marxism-inspired socialist, Vladimir Lenin, the working class of Russia created the Red October uprising that saw the removal and ultimate execution of the royal family, in an effort to redistribute wealth and become a communist state (Sherman, 1994). The social movement itself (the uprising of workers and insurrection of government buildings) that took place in Saint Petersburg (then Petrograd) was marred by violence and heavy casualties on both sides (Acton, Cherniaev, & Rosenberg, 1997).

The role of social movements in society has changed to adapt to the changing needs of society. So too has the method of resource mobilisation with the rise of modern technology (Calabrese, 2004; Garrett, 2006), espoused by New Information and Communication Technologies (NICTs), including the computer and the Internet. Whilst during the middle ages, conspirators might have used secret letters to coordinate plots, modern technology is being used to rally large-scale support for causes and is proving to be a useful resource to movements (Stein, 2009). This phenomenon is perhaps most aptly described as "the rhetoric of the technological sublime" (Carey, 2005, p. 443), or the inspirational power of those who have technology. This technology enables the widespread dissemination of protest information (Stein, 2009). It successfully mobilises large support bases, such as the case with the Middle Eastern movements were this has been potent enough to overturn governments. In more recently history, namely the late nineties and beyond, a new form of social movement has become prevalent with the rise of NICTs.

These have transcended the physical realm of protest and activism to encompass the virtual as well, making it possible to take political stands within the digital domain itself. As examples are the recent *Occupy* movements, which this thesis focuses on, and the global *Anonymous* group which has used the Internet as the battleground for their political and social wars. The question here is, how did this happen?

The rise of NICTs has allowed the proliferation of a more devious form of activism, dubbed 'hacktivism', which is the perpetration of computer intrusion as a means of pursuing social change (Muhammad, 2001) by hacker groups such as *Anonymous*. This has caught the attention of governments and the media in recent years. The very factors that have made groups such as *Anonymous* difficult for authorities permanently to impede (Perna, 2011), namely, the reported lack of a formal leadership structure and the geographic diversity of its members, have also prevented the group from adopting a unified objective (Arthur, 2011). Without the required leadership to organise such a social movement, this has led to a number of break-off groups, which have been at odds with the original collective purpose (Arthur, 2011). A similar problem has manifested itself within more recent protests, and has been a mainstream criticism of the *Occupy* movement. The form of direct democracy reported by the movement has prevented the emergence of collective goals and prevented representative negotiation with government officials (Strauss, 2011).

Nevertheless, protests can now be mobilised online, and this technology is transcending all national boundaries (Golding, 2000), as witnessed by the global movements occurring in solidarity with *Occupy Wall Street*. The gap between the digital and real worlds may be closing, and the use of technology for promoting social issues, by both activists and politicians, is not least of all a factor. The Internet has helped the compression of space and time, enabling instant communication with anyone, anywhere in

the world (Golding, 2000). However, Barringhorst (2008) argues that despite this allowing of the facilitation of political participation and distributed power, the Internet has kept hidden the emergence of would-be representatives of social issues within social movements. This issue in combination with the need for a balance of organised leadership and individual agency (Morris, 2000) provides a real challenge for social movements utilising NICTs.

Yet, in the light of the aforementioned global developments in activism and protest, and the media attention that this topic has received, little literature exists which investigates the use of technology in diverse social movements. Technologies like the Internet and Social Media have enabled people to communicate with each other instantly over distance, giving life to recent protests. However its relationship with social participation is not fully known or understood (Garrett, 2006), nor how this affects the forming of shared goals, suggesting the need for further research. Questions remain surrounding NICTs potential benefits or costs to mobilising social actors in support of social movements. Also, in reducing the barriers to participation, this has reduced or negated the meaning which was previously gained from the effort of physical contribution has been negated. The widespread adoption of technology for gaining momentum in social movements has heralded the advent of so-called 'slacktivists' and 'clicktivists' (portmanteaus of slacker or clicker and activist, respectively). That is, individuals who would elect to involve themselves in movements through arbitrary gestures of support (such as signing a petition), which, without action causes a measurable impact, but may not bring about measurable social change.

## 1.1 Research Problem

The issue of weak participation and subsequent difficulties of creating shared goals leads to my proposed research problem:

*Understanding the role of technology in the process of mobilising active support around a set of shared goals in social movements.*

In this thesis, I shall start by analysing contemporary trends in social movements through the extant literature in chapter two. The theoretical framework of this research will centre on three conceptual elements that provide the foundations to understand the problem: 1) the network society, 2) the public sphere, and 3) social movement theory. After the literature review, I discuss the specific context of my research focus, the *Occupy* protests. The methodology for answering my research problem will be outlined in full in the fourth chapter, where the context for my unit of analysis and the participants for the study are introduced. Further to this, the findings of my research shall be presented in chapter five as an outcome of the analysis of data gathered from participant interviews and direct observations of local protests. In chapter six my findings shall be compared and contrasted with those of previous researchers, discussing the core emergent themes from my research and those found from other movements. Finally, in the conclusion, I discuss the implications of the findings on the extant literature and any areas for future or more detailed research.

# 2 Literature Review

In the latter part of the twentieth century, "a technological revolution, centred around information technologies, began to reshape, at accelerated pace, the material basis of society" (Castells, 2000, p. 1). In this chapter, I discuss the arrival of a new form of social movement, and how these are different from previous forms of social movement. To frame the environment of their materialisation, the history of the public sphere and its disbursement and decentralisation are reviewed, and how this, with the invention of NICTS has enabled the emergence of a Network Society. Finally, I compare these movements to existing literature on social movement theory, how this has impacted on our individual and cultural identities, and the forming of social movements to realise these identifies.

## 2.1 The Network Society

What Castells (2000) describes as a new coming together of the economy, state and society, which has created a globally interdependent network of people and systems, is what he terms *the network society*. These systems, as well as its technology have become almost indiscernible from the people who interact with it, as the technology has become an integral part of us, and us of it (Hassan, 2008), as we enter the generation of ubiquitous computing (Weiser & Brown, 1996). However, even so, technology is not a determinate for the course of society, and similarly, society does not absolutely command the evolution of technology, though both are inexorably linked (Castells, 2000). That being said, as with all symbiotic relationships, at least indirectly, both can be a factor in the rise or fall of the other; for example, the state can curb the update and development of technology, and in turn this can create a digital divide that has serious consequences for social development (Castells, 2000). Nevertheless, we are now primarily guided ontologically by logic,

facilitated in part by the technology, in forming our understanding of how the world functions (Hassan, 2008).

In fact, if technology is indeed shrinking space and accelerating time (or at least as we perceive it) (Golding, 2000), then we ultimately enter a state where "we begin to see the present only when it is already disappearing" (Laing, 1967). Technology creates an immutable impact on the way that we, as individuals, function within a society that demands we keep up with its continually accelerating pace (Hassan, 2008). We are compelled, not only by economic factors, but also for the sake of our social participation to be part of the connected network, and to remain connected to it at all times (Hassan, 2008). Ironically, this state of constant connectedness, whilst opening up a multitude of avenues for social interaction, also facilitates feelings of isolation and loneliness, as a result of connection overload, that would otherwise not be the case in the absence of a network society (Castells, 2000).

However, such dramatic changes are not unique to the network society; a similar societal upheaval was witnessed with the industrial revolution (Castells, 2000), reminiscent of the punctuated equilibrium paradigm (Gersick, 1991), that is to say, long periods of social stability broken up by sudden revolutionary change. Indeed, the technological revolution of the late twentieth century bears strong resemblance to previous revolutions, as the technology is akin to introduction of new power sources, both of which "[transform] our material culture" (Castells, 2000, p. 28), in other words, our relationship between our cultural identity and our material possessions. However, the fundamental difference between this and previous revolutions is not in the direct impact of production of new technology, but rather the mode of production. Unlike any time before, it is in fact human cognition that is the primary source of the generated commodity, information, rather than

just being indirectly involved, and the key to its success is the generation of innovative thinking and the knowledge it produces (Castells, 2000).

The focus on production remains not only on the creation of the new technology, but also its distribution (Castells, 2000), and the application of our evolving knowledge to make reproduction of the technology possible (Bell, 1972). The creation of NICTs was merely a natural progression in the evolutionary journey of technology, but what was not predicted was the unprecedented rate at which the technology distributed across the globe (Castells, 2000). Such distribution, and ultimate penetration of the technology into society has come at an exponentially faster rate than any previous new technologies (Castells, 2000). Though perhaps more relevant, unlike the industrial revolution which spread through invasive colonisation, the network society has not come at the expense of individual culture (Castells, 2000). Furthermore, this distribution of new technologies is being accelerated by mass-convergence of technologies and media, where in some cases these are becoming indistinguishable from one another (Golding, 2000). This has allowed media such as basic text, images, sound bites and videos to be embedded within the same content, and to be made readily available from a plethora of different access points (Castells, 2000), including mobile devices, anywhere in the world with access to the Internet. This has been particularly keenly felt by organisations which may strive to reduce their expenditure on quickly depreciating technological assets, where these same services can be outsourced, in an effort to become 'weightless' (Rifkin, 2000) and therefore more flexible to change.

Individuals have also benefited from being able to participate socially in an expressive form through online social media (Borrero & Yousafzai, 2012). However, as individuals become more intertwined into social participation through the Internet and other

technologies, our once private lives are becoming more public. This in turn is providing an increasing measure of uncertainty over our own identities.

Such uncertainty has had far-reaching consequences not only for the economy, but has seen the rise of social movements that go beyond the class disputes of the previous centuries. These include civil rights, environmentalism, gender and diversity, which mass-communication has allowed (Castells, 2000). Arguably these have come about as our political systems stray ever further away from public accountability (Castells, 2000). However, these social movements are often disjointed from one another, each focussing on a single issue, and isolated from the bigger picture, often centring on traditional primary identities (such as ethnicity and religion) to attract followers (Castells, 2000). "In a world of global flows of wealth, power, and images, the search for identity, collective or individual, ascribed or constructed, becomes the fundamental source of social meaning" (Castells, 2000, p. 3).

In the network society (though not necessarily in isolation), a struggle exists between the collective identity of the network, and the personal identity of the self, which has become particularly pertinent in a society where people find meaning in who they perceive themselves to be rather than what they do (Castells, 2000). First and foremost, it seems necessary to define what is meant by the term 'identity', given that it may exist in a number of forms. Locke (1959) asserts that our identity is consistent through our transition of space and time from a state of *tabula rasa* ('blank page', or knowing nothing) at birth. Conversely, what Erikson (1968) termed the 'identity' does not persist over time and is actually influenced by our social interactions, and so becomes what he calls the 'social self'. However, the three primary types of identity referred to in this thesis, as described by Laraña, Johnston and Gusfield (1994), are individual identity, or our personal traits,

collective identity, or the straits we share with a collective group, and public identity which encompasses the effects of external influences on how we perceive ourselves.

Authors have suggested that ICTs allow users to change their identities at will, describing them as "malleable" and a matter of choice and not requirement (Golding, 2000). Turkle (1996) suggests that the Internet has even changed human thought and identity. However, whilst identity may be more flexible, it is largely restricted by state boundaries and local politics, the influence of popular culture, large corporations and media spectacle have a significant effect on our behaviour (Golding, 2000). In either case, if technologies are indeed an extension of man (McLuhan, 1964), and if the Internet has extended our mind, it must also carry our identity, at least in part, with it. For better or worse, this has enabled the commoditisation of identity, where we may buy and sell different façades online, and enables us to wear the 'mask' of our choice for online social interaction (Hassan, 2008). This may be problematic as such commoditisation suggests that identity is merely a series of quantitative indicators and statistics, which can be represented within binary code, which challenge our ability to transfer our identities to the digital space (Poster, 2007).

Castells (2000) argues that a new collective identity, and therefore also a new culture in itself is emerging, which he terms the "culture of real virtuality" (p. 358), that is, the convergence of the real world into the virtual where the virtual plays as important a role as the physical. However, this idea of mass culture through technology predates NICTs and the Internet, as previously television audiences, homogenised by their shared experiences, could be considered in themselves a mass culture (Castells, 2000). Like identity, this has led to the commoditisation of such culture, as the result of the mass media, giving advertisers the ability to show their wares to larger audiences in places that might

previously have been considered sacred (see brand names on football shirts; Hassan, 2008). So too, public assets are becoming privatised, and the once sheltered institutes of learning, such as universities and community colleges, are being moved into a competitive environment with private institutes, and indeed other non-government organisations (NGOs), where revenues and marketing become a primary focus (Hassan, 2008). Such privatisation is a primary grievance for *Occupy Auckland*, which is studied in this research.

With the rise of NICTs, this has become most prevalent with the codification of social concepts and meaning (Castells, 2000), and indeed culture itself (Hassan, 2008). Almost paradoxically, this codification of society through technology has produced a double-edged sword. Although a wider number of individuals who might not otherwise have been able to are now engaging in forms of social participation, the psychological outcomes of feeling isolated is increasing (Castells, 2000). This has created tension between some diverse cultural identities. Of course, assertion of individual and collective identity does not preclude being able to engage with and work alongside other identities and social groups, but in the absence of strong communication channels or if the extant channels break down completely, different identities inevitably perceive each other as threats (Castells, 2000). This becomes exponentially more complicated between identities at different stages of technological update. If one considers that the Internet's users are also its content producers, it stands to reason that the earliest adopters will have the greatest cultural influence over the network (Castells, 2000).

Though it is not all dystopian in vision, as a number of movements, or countercultures have arisen to challenge the commoditisation of culture and identity (Hassan, 2008). The open source software and 'copyleft' communities are examples of such movements, where users are encouraged to engage, create and share ideas, making them

publicly available to those outside of the open source movement. Such supportive behaviour is not so uncommon between connected individuals, even those who are weakly connected, which has allowed social movements to find cohesion in the network society (Hassan, 2008). In any case, the codification of social meaning long predates technology, as we have always used symbols to represent aspects of reality through *symbolic interactionism* (Castells, 2000). However, as a result of the technological shift to limitless connections, as well as being commoditised, our public and private lives are becoming ever more inseparable and indistinguishable (Hassan, 2008). This has in turn, improved efficiency in productivity at the cost of our perceptive acuity for social engagement, as we struggle to keep up with the increasing pace of our environment (Hassan, 2008). Consequently, this has challenged societies' abilities to maintain functioning democratic systems with this pace of change (Hassan, 2008). This may have, in part, contributed to the erosion of the public sphere.

## 2.2 The Public Sphere

Habermas (1992) first introduced the idea of the bourgeois public sphere. The term "public" denotes the idea that something is open and available for all to access, whereas "private" refers to something that is exclusive to those for whom it pertains. The terms public and private sphere are, by Habermas' own admission, not necessarily the most accurate names, given the multitude of possible meanings. Nonetheless, sociology has yet to find more adequate replacements. For example, although an organisation, such as a school, may be deemed to be public by virtue of how it is owned and operated, it may not necessarily be open to the general public themselves. The term "public" refers to those who carry the public opinion, and therefore act as the critical judge to the state (Habermas,

1992). Therefore, the public sphere is the specific domain in which the public meet to discuss issues of importance and relevance, and integral to a functioning civil society. Hauser (1998) calls it "a discursive space in which individuals and groups congregate to discuss matters of mutual interest and, where possible, to reach a common judgement" (p. 86).

The originals of the public sphere date back to Ancient Greece, where the bourgeois members of society, that is, those wealthy men who owned land, were admitted into an agora, or public space, to discuss and deliberate matters of public importance (Habermas, 1992). Naturally, this was to the exclusion of the lower social class, women, children, persons of other ethnicities and slaves. During the Renaissance, the public sphere evolved with the rise of feudalism to become an integral part of merchant Europe, stemming from the need for widespread information dissemination across the continent. At this time, too, the realisation of the importance of individual liberties was becoming significant, giving way to the notion that the public sphere consisted of "private people [coming] together as a public" (Habermas, 1992, p. 4). This remained the case until the end of the Middle Ages, where the sphere became open to those who were learnéd enough to engage in political discourse, though this was still limited to those sufficiently affluent to afford education (Habermas, 1992). This later became the foundation of the British sovereign parliament system, with the sphere being made up of representatives of the people (Habermas, 1992).

A feature to note about the political sphere is its separation from state, and that while the bourgeois had influence within their own locus of control (through power over land, manufacturing and employment), they did not constitute the ruling class of the state (Habermas, 1992). Wherever there was expression of opinion, be it through the arts or otherwise, this constituted an extension of the public sphere, encompassing libraries,

theatres and museums as institutions of the public sphere. However, with its evolution, the public sphere was in fact collapsing. "While its scope is expanding impressively, its function has become progressively insignificant" (Habermas, 1992, p. 4). Although the state and society (in particular, the public sphere) were once viewed as separate from each other, the transformation of the traditional bourgeois into agents for the new democratic state, brought about the reintegration of the two. This is challenging the sphere's ability to critically reflect on its role in the new society, as members of the sphere have become agents of the state (Habermas, 1992). This fundamental shift has come at the hands of consumerism and the commercialising of the public sphere through the popular media (Habermas, 1992).

In recent times, the public sphere has shifted to the arena of democracy, allowing a greater number of people to participate in decision-making processes. "Democratic governance rests on the capacity of, and opportunity for citizens to engage in enlightened debate" (Hauser, 1998, p. 83) which necessitates a public sphere. Hauser (1998) argues that democracy is inevitably an inefficient way of governing. However, it has the distinct advantage of being driven by informed judgement. On the other hand, he believes that as the volume of information available to the public increases, and as too does the number of diverse interests and cultures, democracy becomes increasingly harder to sustain. Fraser (1990), on the other hand, believes that decision-making does not belong to the public sphere, which she calls the "weak public". If the public were responsible for decision-making, they would effectively become the state and lose the ability for objective and critical discourse of the state. In either case, she argues that the traditionally held ideal of the open-access bourgeois public sphere is self-defeating, as stratification in society naturally lends itself to restricting political access to subordinate groups. However, it was

only a matter of time before the socioeconomic barriers to entry into the public sphere were eroded, and its inner circle was open to lords and plebeians alike. Nonetheless, the promise of equality within the sphere itself presupposed that each participant shared the ideology of equal rights (Fraser, 1990). Potential inequalities are particularly prominent between those with gender and ethnicity differences, as is claimed by the feminist and civil rights discourses. Habermas's (1992) theory of public discourse described only a single public sphere, which according to Fraser (1990), assumes a homogenised culture and value system in a social totality, which in practice was not the case (Warner, 2002). Fraser (1990) suggests that "full parity of participation in public debate and deliberation is not within the reach of possibility" (p. 66) for a single public sphere. Therefore, the need for multiple public spheres, or *counter-publics*, arises to meet the challenge of mutual inclusion and participation within political debate.

These counterpublics, "parallel discursive arenas where members of the subordinated social groups... formulate oppositional interpretation of their identities, interests, and needs" (Fraser, 1990, p. 67) form the basis for political discourse in civil society. Only the participants in any given public sphere may dictate the content and direction of debate (Fraser, 1990). However, in order for a public to consider itself democratic, it must provide opportunities for subordinate groups to make known what they consider to be important topics of discussion. However, this still has significant advantages in a society that is absent of stratification (Fraser, 1990). Therefore, it is important that multiple spheres must exist, that are self-organised, self-sustaining, and bring together strangers from one or more demographic (or otherwise) relationships (Warner, 2002). However, when a discourse becomes so strong that it eschews other marginal opinions, it ends in a situation of "deliberative inertia" (Smith, 2011), where "the public sphere does

not function as it should, new social and political problems... will remain at the margins of the democratic process" (Smith, 2011, p. 152). This creates the environment of political unrest that is sufficient to prompt the rise of social movements within the public sphere.

A certain amount of inertia may be healthy for the formation of stable social policy (Markovits, 2005). However, the aim of social movements and civil disobedience within the public sphere is to bring issues and debates from the edge of the sphere into its political centre and to try and restore balance to the egalitarian ideals of the sphere (Smith, 2011). Now also, with the penetration of NICTs, the medium and locus of the public sphere has evolved as well. "The public sphere in the political realm evolved from the public sphere in the world of letters; through the vehicle of public opinion it put the state in touch with the needs of society" (Habermas, 1992, pp. 30-31), a trend which has continued into the network society, with NICTs replacing letter-writing. That is to say that the use of long-distance communication, from telephony and telegraphy to the Internet, for connecting people with each other and the state en mass has become the norm. However, with technology and society intertwined by their interdependency on one another (Castells, 2000), and the espousing and organising (Barglow, 1994) of individuality from both, the increase in individualism and subsequent decrease in collectivism has created inherent uncertainties for the future of the state and the public sphere (Castells, 2000) as a platform for political discussion and social movements.

## 2.3 Social Movements

Any given society at any given point will always have enough discontented citizens to support the rise of a social movement, providing that they are both well organised and have the necessary resource support (McCarthy & Zald, 1977). McCarthy and Zald

(McCarthy & Zald, 1977) also contend that this discontent may be pervaded and manifested by opportunistic individuals or organisations. However, a sudden event or grievance is not always required to trigger collective action (Snyder & Tilly, 1972), but rather develops out of the responses by politicians to the grievances (McCarthy & Zald, 1977). Turner and Killian (1972) assert that, in addition, such collective action is only possible if the participants share an ideological justification, that is, the reasons for acting, in this case, a shared discontent. Interestingly, social movements most often occur during the apex period of a societal long cycle, that is, "phases of between forty and sixty years duration during which the modern world system has developed up to the present day" (Huber, 1989, p. 365).

Furthermore, during times of settled and "normalised" politics, a state of equilibrium exists where social participants are most likely to accept that status quo and not challenge government (Beissinger, 1996). Gradually people adjust their beliefs to exist within the boundaries of new social paradigms, and social movements occur when people overstep these boundaries. Knowledge of such adjusted beliefs cascades through the process of diffusion over established social and technological networks (Koopmans, 2004; D. J. Myers, 2000), such as the new media, to reach larger audiences. Unfamiliarity with similar causes, and as such "weak-ties" – connections between people which are implied by the probability that mutual associations predict connectedness – to the social movement, are most likely to influence diffusion as the movement often introduces a novel spectacle to the recipient (Granovetter, 1973). Such weak-ties have been found particularly in new social movements that lever online social networking tools for communication (Fraser, 1990). Nevertheless, in order for individuals to participate in a social movement, they must see a potential personal benefit through the realisation of political opportunities (Morris, 2000).

The mid-twentieth century gave rise to a new form of research into such social mobilisations, known as the Social Movement Theory. Social Movement Theory enables sociologists and social scientists to model the structures and processes of a social movement, and also to understand the actors involved in its success or failure. This has led to the categorisation of Social Movement Organisations (SMO), Social Movement Industries (SMI) and the Social Movement Sector (SMS) (McCarthy & Zald, 1977). SMOs are the core organisational units that make up social movements by aligning their values with the desired outcome of the movement. For the sake of clarity, it is important to note that a single movement may comprise a number of SMOs, and similarly, any given SMO may support any number of movements.

Although not all participants belong to such organisations, the SMOs nevertheless supply resources, be it human, financial, or otherwise to the movement to help it meet its goals. However, many organisations have their own distinct and defining cultures that they bring to a social movement, which makes them more than a simple resource, and can help the cohesion or disparity of participants in the movement (Clemens & Minkoff, 2007). As such, it is not uncommon for organisations to be either the source or target of a social movement. At least to an extent, this is true for more recent movements challenging unequal distribution of wealth and government austerity measures, most notably the *Occupy Wall Street* protest that sought to disrupt the operations of the Wall Street financial stock exchange.

Continuing the organisational analogy, a Social Movement Industry (SMI) is all of the SMOs associated with a single movement, which should be considered separate to the social movement itself, as it may be made up of other resources external to the SMOs (McCarthy & Zald, 1977). Resource mobilisation theory dictates that no given social

movement is ever fully mobilised; that is, if the SMI represents a collection of organisations with resources and human actors, these are never fully utilised to their maximum ability. In other words, not all their resources are focused solely on the movement. Finally, a Social Movement Sector (SMS) is the collective term for all SMIs in the given society, and the total external resources available to social movements. Furthermore, social movements must place focus on acquiring and utilising resources in order to be successful. One such theory, Resource Mobilisation, "the organizing of collective action and initiatives aimed at producing specific outcomes" (Stein, 2009, p. 753) is used in the analysis of social movement behaviours.

Resource mobilisation "examines the variety of resources that must be mobilized, the linkages of social movements to other groups, the dependence of movements upon external support for success, and the tactics used by authorities to control or incorporate movements" (McCarthy & Zald, 1977, p. 1213). Previous models have ignored the importance of outsiders to social movements impacting on its internal operations (McCarthy & Zald, 1977), and also the importance of cultural identity to the participants (McAdam, 1994). Morris (2000) takes this a step further to suggest that the core successes or failures of a particular movement, as defined by whether the movement is able to achieve its goals, are highly reliant on 'powerful external actors'. In any case, the greatest challenge for resource mobilisation is to engage individuals, with all of the personal costs involved, in seeking a collective outcome, and therefore a collective benefit (Olson, 1965).

Arguably one of the most used and misunderstood expressions in contemporary social behaviour theory is the term 'new social movement' (NSM), which has been erroneously used to refer to all manner of recent active social engagements, regardless of their inherent diversities (Laraña et al., 1994). There are, however, some key distinctions

that separate what is termed 'old' and 'new' social movements. Laraña et al. (1994) set out a list of traits that most (but not necessarily all) NSMs have that differentiate them from older social movements.

First, whilst previous movements tended to focus on class conflicts (the 'haves' and the 'have nots'), NSMs have a wider social context, including other demographic factors (such as ethnicity, gender and sexuality) and social constructs (such as environmentalism). Second, the differentiation between the individual and the movement becomes blurred as movements focus on individual action rather than collective action. Third, they often shape from the emergence of new or previously subjugated or eschewed forms of identity, such as sexual and gender diversity. Fourth, they tend not to be totally unifying unlike the Marxist paradigm, as they centre on more individualistic social issues. Fifth, they more often than not centre on aspects of person's life, such as poverty, health, education and sexuality. Sixth, civil disobedience is a typical mode of protest. Seventh, they maintain a high level of autonomy from the traditional and mainstream political parties. Eighth, there are often segmented into individual movements and act independently of any central group. Finally, the collective search for identity (both for the individual and the group) has become a critical factor in the formation and ultimate success of the movement.

With the rise of the network society and the introduction of NICTs, the repertoire of options for communicating social messages and agendas has increased dramatically, supporting social movements to connect with more people (Van Laer & Van Aelst, 2010). However, this creates a challenge for any would-be social movement leader to maintain these numerous connections, whilst still engaging those connected in meaningful ways.

Although previous literature maintains that social movements emerge with the occurrence of social breakdowns, and are therefore unorganised and unstructured, Morris (2000) argues a measure of strong leadership must be present to achieve successful outcomes. "Leaders are critical to social movements: they inspire commitment, mobilize resources, create and recognize opportunities, devise strategies, frame demands, and influence outcomes" (Morris & Staggenborg, 2007, p. 171). One example of leadership activities include the engagement of people and physical and monetary resources to achieve a wide support-base and develop strategies for the movement (McCarthy & Zald, 1977). However, McCarthy and Zald (McCarthy & Zald, 1977) also warn that existing social movement leadership models in literature have created the problem of reducing the value of those involved to simple followers, rather than active and contributing participants. This is why leaders, whilst maintaining the structure of the movement, must also facilitate human agency - the liberty for individuals to make free choice (Barker, 2005) – in order for the social movement to achieve long-term support (Morris, 2000). The leader must therefore be primarily a mobiliser of resources and an articulator of movement values (Gusfield, 1966). Whatever the case, strong leadership is required to move beyond the initial stage of meaning construction within the social movement (Morris & Staggenborg, 2007).

The problem remains though, particularly in social movements, of how leaders become such and gain authority legitimately. Although the topic of leadership legitimacy has been discussed widely in literature during the last century, the concepts of political leadership are appropriate to social movements (Morris & Staggenborg, 2007). The legitimisation of such political leadership is complete follower trust, to the extent that they are willing to give up the power of their individual agency to the leader (Michels, 1962). However, the problem remains, as with such forms of leadership in other areas of society,

that it relies heavily on the personal interests of the leader themselves, as well as their desire to retain positions of power. Although the oft-bureaucratic structure of supporting organisations (who are by definition a form of SMO) is useful for sustaining the movement's momentum, they often exacerbate any issues with leadership corruption (Michels, 1962).

On the other hand, such organisations could help to foster democratic power structures, rather than a bureaucratic oligarchy (Barker, Johnson, & Lavalette, 2001). Nevertheless, historically leaders have traditionally been from the middle or upper classes and highly educated (Morris & Staggenborg, 2007). This is often because such individuals have the financial resources and flexible social contracts (the rights and responsibilities of the individual to the state) to enable them to contribute to the movement. "Educated individuals often acquire leadership positions because they are best suited to design and preside over social movement tasks" (Morris & Staggenborg, 2007, p. 175). However, in contrast, individuals from the lower classes may provide a unique point of view from their own experiences, giving them an advantage in leadership positions, providing they are still substantively educated (Morris & Staggenborg, 2007). In either case, SMOs that are subject to a wider range of leaders and styles are often more informed, more flexible and viewed as more professional, with greatly increased strategic capacity over those with limited leadership diversity (Ganz, 2000). Such diversity has been helped by the relative distribution of power that has been brought with the ubiquitous penetration of NICTs and the Internet.

## 2.4 Internet Technology, Power Distribution and Decentralisation in Social Movements

Bertola (2010) argues that even the very architecture of the Internet, through end-to-end communication, decentralisation of processing power to the 'edge' computers, and separation of transport protocols and applications, has enabled it to become a tool for widespread political participation and innovation. This has been furthered by the artificial compression of time and space; that is, the removal of barriers such as geographical distance between participant and leaders, and the time delay of communication (Golding, 2000). It has additionally resolved space limitations of single meeting halls (Coleman, 1999). Further to this, the deregulation of the Internet has resulted in more rapid society development through innovations, and indeed "the evolution of the Internet [itself] is determined by the sum of the individual actions at the edges" (Bertola, 2010, p. 331).

This frames one of the arguments in support of a form of Internet neutrality. Wu (2003) has advocated the complete removal of discriminatory bias against any particular content or citation on the Internet by ISPs and watchdogs. In such a paradigm, any given user at any given time and place would have complete, unrestricted and equal access to any given content and services. Whilst this has clear advantages for free market competition, the social and political implications of free speech on the Internet are as apparent (Bertola, 2010). For example, open access leaves the political process open to hijacking by political extremists and outliers, and the devaluation of online participation as a mere "gimmick" (Coleman, 1999). But even then, not all people have the opportunity to access and contribute to such resources. Such limitations to access may include the cost of acquiring and maintaining the hardware and software required to access the Internet (Golding, 2000), a lack of information literacy (Coleman, 1999; Golding, 2000), or political apathy

(Coleman, 1999). The distribution of power is in any case limited to representation of a greater number of people rather than implementation of a system of direct democracy, the latter of which he contends would be a threat to political stability (Coleman, 1999). Bertola (2010), agrees with this distinction in principle: "if by 'power' we mean the ability to make laws, nothing has changed; but if by 'power' we mean the ability to do what you want notwithstanding the rules imposed upon you by society, then the Internet has brought power into the hands of billions" (p. 327).

Implications of this for social movements include the following: Technologies such as the Internet are being used to influence the masses to join social movements (Carey, 2005), for example, the use of Blackberry smart-phones for organising the Tahrir Square protest. However, the distribution of power to the masses has created the unintended effect of drowning the voice of the individual into the metaphoric crowd, and potentially overlooking the contributions of the valuable few capable of leading and mobilising movements (Baringhorst, 2008). Indeed, even in a power-distributed social movement, formal structures and leadership are required to avoid devolution of the movement into anarchy, and to prevent undesirable informal networks of leaders without accountability to the movement developing (Freeman, 1972; Morris & Staggenborg, 2007). Leaders are also required to act as representatives and spokespeople, and to frame movements (Benford & Snow, 2000) to the mass media. Otherwise the media will identify, 'elect' and portray their own leaders of the movement (Gitlin, 1980).

In such an event, with the lack of representative leadership, movements may struggle to express their frames to the public (Morris & Staggenborg, 2007). Although a particular frame may be able adequately to achieve one aim for the movement, it could also potentially conflict with the completion of another (McCarthy & Zald, 1977), particularly

in an environment of diverse views. Additionally, some supporters of the social movement may not explicitly support any or all of its underlying values, such as those constituent organisations who follow conscience rather than absolute belief (McCarthy & Zald, 1977). Given this, the engagement of participants relies on the challenge of frame-alignment; that is, bringing together the interests of the social movement and its individual supporters into shared schemata (Benford & Snow, 2000; Snow, Rochford, Worden, & Benford, 1986). However, this frame alignment may be being neglected in more recent movements.

## 2.5 Summary

In this literature review, I have discussed the current understanding of social movements and their connectedness with supporters through the mobilisation of resources in the new network society. The extant literature suggests a trend towards increasing connectedness of individuals over the Internet, which is reshaping the way we view and interact with society. This has implications for social movements that wish to compete for the attention of potential supporters in the digital space, which has to some extent replaced parts of physical social engagement. This has, in turn, created new challenges for social movements that rely on the Internet for resource mobilisation, but still require the physical participation of supporters. The purpose of this research, as discussed previously, is to understand how movements, which operate significantly online, are using this technology to both actively engage supporters and to create goals and visions that can be shared and communicated. A contemporary example (at the time of writing) of such movements is *Occupy Wall Street*, as discussed with brevity earlier, which forms the context for my research.

# 3 Research Context

For the purpose of this thesis, I have conducted research on *Occupy Auckland*, a movement set up in solidarity with the original *Occupy Wall Street* in the United States of America. Although the exact purpose of the *Occupy* movement was never fully explored by its participants, it came about in retaliation to the US Government's decision to financially bail out failing banks and corporations, and the austerity measures that followed. The online activist group, *Adbusters*, had through social media channels, communicated ideas for the original movement in July 2011. The intention of the protesters was to create a human blockade that would prevent financial workers from being able to enter the *Wall Street Stock Exchange* building in New York City. However, due to public dissemination of protest information over various online media channels, the local authorities (police) were already stationed to meet the estimated 1,000 protesters before they arrived on the morning of September 17, 2011. Although this received little attention in the mainstream media, a number of participants continued to promote the movement over Facebook and Twitter; and over the next few days had acquired a number of supporters worldwide. Some of those who had been turned away from Wall Street by police instead turned to using the local Zuccotti Park to set up an encampment. This would ultimately become the central base for the movement. Other people were consequently attracted to come and join the occupation, and by the third week, they had an estimated 15,000 people actively participating in the Wall Street occupation. In the coming weeks of the protest, demonstrators in other cities around the US and other countries set up similar occupations in solidarity with the original *Occupy Wall Street* movement, and by the end of week four, there were protests in 95 cities across 82 different countries.

## 3.1 "We are the 99%"

Although the ultimate collapse of the Soviet Union arguably restored Marxism to its pre-Leninism ideals, it has provided a formidable challenge to the strength of left-wing economic politics (Castells, 2000) which typically favoured economic socialism over capitalism. Similarly in the United States, in response to the 1929 stock market (Wall Street) crash and subsequent decade of economic depression (the Great Depression), a number of large-scale protests and social movements arose to challenge the government to make the necessary reforms to float the economy (Hamby, 2004). However, despite this, right-wing economics has favoured an economy with capitalistic leanings rather than the reverse. Hence we are seeing a complete restructure over the course of the twentieth century with the rise of globalisation and multinational corporations, decentralisation and deregulation, and a decrease in the influence of labour movements (Castells, 2000).

The emergence of the *Occupy* movement was influenced by the rise of capitalism in such a way that the movement's supporters believed it was favouring those at the top end of the economic wealth scale. Although, the exact trigger for the movement's emergence may never be completely understood, discontent exists surrounding governments' responses to the economic recession that started in late 2007. Although the movement was widely criticised for not formulating a set of goals to achieve, its primary base of supporters had been self-identified as "the 99%". The term had arisen from a financial report that outlined the disproportionate accumulation of wealth within the top 1% of income earners in the United States. This lead to the *Occupy Wall Street* movement's slogan, "We are the 99%" to encourage other lower income earners to join the movement". An example of political poster used by the movement in its later stages is shown in Figure 3-1.
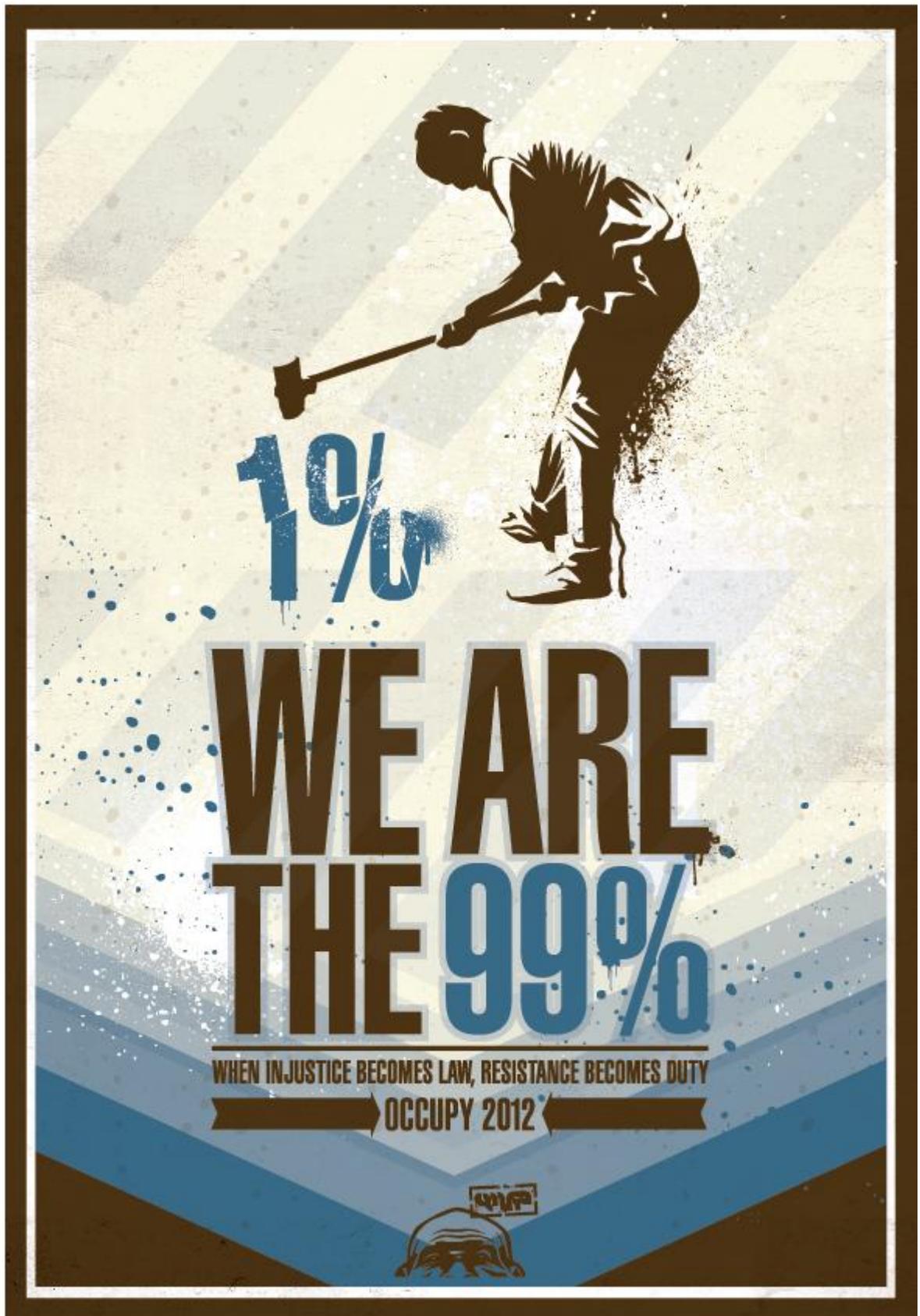
**Figure 3-1: Occupy Wall Street protest sign**
(From We are the 99%, by R Conti, 2012. Retrieved from website: http://occupydesign.org/gallery/designs/we-are-99)

## 3.2 Use of Technology and Social Media

One of the aspects that characterises new social movements is the high penetration of NICTs within its participant population. The operation of such movements inevitably requires a higher level of technical savvy than those previously if they wish to operate in cyberspace, naturally drawing in people who have experience in the digital world, or those who may even be considered "digital natives". This is true for *Occupy* movements too, and over the course of my research, I have encountered a number of different technologies being employed by protesters. These are summarised below.

In New Zealand, out of the major social networks, Facebook has certainly been used most prolifically by *Occupy Auckland*. A number of pages were set up on the site, which linked to and shared resources with each other, and the wider *Occupy* network. The administrators of these pages (members of the *Occupy Auckland* media team) would coordinate the creation and dissemination of important event information over Facebook and the other networks. This appears to have been quite successful in gaining support and momentum for the protest online, however it was not necessarily reflected in physical turnout; as explored in my findings. The pages were also used as a setting where online-only protesters could express opinions about the progress of the movement, make suggestions to the General Assembly, and debate topics of issue. Outside of New Zealand, and particularly in the United States, Twitter was a popular method of communication between protesters, as well as to and from the central movement. Twitter messages, or 'tweets', are limited to only 140 characters, requiring the sender to be succinct in their communication, and making it more effective quickly to communicate issues of importance. Twitter also uses 'hashtags' to enable users to link their tweets to particular

trending topics, which enabled the movement to keep track of the viral spread of its message.

A number of the larger protest locations set up their own websites for supplying information on events and progress from their social media site. Some of the smaller movements instead elected to set up blogs on free sites like Blogger.com and Tumblr.com. The movement websites (such as OccupyWallSt.org and OccupyLondon.org.uk) were all centrally federated through the core *Occupy* protest movement, which involved a direct line of communication between the media teams at each of the occupations worldwide. The advantage of this was that each site could quickly work together to disseminate news across the network, to a larger audience than any of the individual movements could reach. The *Occupy Auckland* protest also provided the option for people to subscribe to updates through an email distribution list, and a number of the fliers from the central *Occupy Wall Street* were made available in print form at meetings. Although used less frequently for mass communication than the other media, the central group of protesters, particularly project teams, kept in regular contact via text messaging. Some of the motions proposed to the Auckland General Assembly had been collaborated on by a number of protesters around the region (and even further afield) through the use of online Wiki pages and document sharing services.

However, arguably the innovative and important form of technology utilised by the movement came in the form of video live streaming. Live streaming involves the use of web2.0-enabled sites to relay a live video feed being captured from a remote location. The fundamental difference between this service and a standard video streaming site, like YouTube, is that it is designed to relay video as it is captured only, rather than in an archival fashion. The advantage of this, particularly for people who are interested in an

event (such as an Occupy protest) but are unable physically to attend, is that they are able to watch the event or meeting as it unfolds. Viewers are also able to make their own comments and contributions to the live stream by having discussion in the chat relay that is provided alongside the stream. In the case of the Occupy movement, protesters and stream viewers were encouraged to act as 'witnesses' to the protest and to contribute to spreading the word by reporting what they experience through their own social networks. This is discussed in greater depth in my findings.

## 3.3 The "General Assembly"

Outside of the use of social media for dissemination of information within the movement, the *Occupy* protests held regular public meetings to discuss strategies and issues. These were referred to by protesters as the "General Assembly" (GA), and were open to any members of the movement, the general public and even those in opposition. The primary mode for decision-making at GA meetings was by consensus, which was designed to allow every participant to have an equal voice, and to ensure that minority groups were properly represented by giving them priority. As several thousand participants attended many of the meetings, the movement developed a method for communication within large crowds, as shown in Figure 3-2. Any attendee could agree with or oppose any motions made by the group, and it would be the responsibility of the motion's supporters to make amendments that would resolve any disputes. In the event that an attendee chose to 'block' the motion entirely, it was withdrawn, evaluated and redrafted by a mediation team before being put before another GA. However, as it was found that opponents at the movement attended some of the later meetings, some occupations opted to revoke the need for unanimous consensus, in favour of absolute majority decisions.

# OCCUPY TOGETHER
## HAND SIGNALS

## SPEAKING



**WANT TO TALK**  **DIRECT RESPONSE**  **CLARIFY**  **POINT OF ORDER**

## FEELING



**AGREE**  **DONT AGREE**  **OPPOSE**  **BLOCK**

**Figure 3-2: Hand gestures used at General Assemblies**
(From Occupy Hand Signals, by R de Haas, 2011. http://occupydesign.org/gallery/designs/occupy-hand-signals)

One of the stated objectives of the movement's structure was to remain completely leaderless, and that all decision-making should occur through the aforementioned democratic consensus. This included not appointing people to roles in any official capacity, most especially as spokespeople for the organisation. The justification for this was that it allowed the movement to operate without, what was perceived by members as a corporate structure to the organisation of protests. In practice, however, without structures, internal disputes became commonplace where a participant would take initiative and another would resist, or in a situation where shared resources were limited. This necessitated the establishment of an arbitration team that would allow these disputes to be resolved in an open and transparent manner. This, like the other internal teams, was made up of volunteers who would be regularly rotated. Even so, the difficulty of including and supporting participants from diverse backgrounds whilst still directing resources into promoting the goals of the movement became an almost insurmountable challenge.

## 3.4 Occupy Auckland

One of the protests I attended in late April 2012 at Auckland's Aotea Square, *Aotearoa is not for sale*, was a hikoi (protest march) that started in the Far North and was gradually making its way to the capital, Wellington, over a two-week period. Fronted by the *Occupy Movement*, the Green Party and Mana Party of New Zealand, the hikoi was to speak out against government austerity measures, including the sale of public assets to private investors, on and offshore. Although the incumbent National Party government had made asset sales a priority during their election campaign, protesters believed that the general lack of public support for the sales meant that the government had no mandate to carry through with them. In perhaps one of the most important moments in the formation of

this movement, in a high-profile legal proceeding earlier in 2012, a New Zealand High Court rejected the government's plan to sell a major farm to a Chinese-based company. This had helped bring the asset sales debate back into the public eye. The Auckland-based event, which had sister movements in Nelson, Wellington and Christchurch, had received little publicity from the mainstream media, but had gathered support through online social networks (such as Facebook and Twitter), Internet live-streams of the event and word of mouth.

The sound of the protest was audible throughout the Auckland Central Business District; a man could be heard over a public address system, chanting followed by a roar of solidarity from the crowd. Police cars lined the side of the road, and an officer was directing traffic as the final protest marchers made their way into the square. In the square itself, Mana Party leader, Hone Harawira, was addressing a crowd of about 2,000 supporters. A number of supporting groups were also present, including Unite Union, Socialist Aotearoa, as well as some independent media reporters. I spoke to a nearby police Sergeant who told me at the peak of the march, there were over 10,000 participants as they walked up Queen Street. Over 30 officers were present at the event, though he explained that most of them were from the Maori Liaison team. He spoke highly of the protesters; although there were a number of 'splinter groups' who had only turned up to get public attention. On the whole, he was pleased to report that the affair had remained consistently civil. This was typical of New Zealand activism, he told me, and that even though people may be discontent with some of government's decisions, he believed that there is much less aggression towards authority than one would find overseas. Perhaps as a testament to this, as he was noting that there had not been any deliberate damage of property during the

demonstrations, a passing protester smiled at the officer and thanked him "for keeping us safe today".

## 3.5 Summary

In this chapter, I have contextualised my research around *Occupy Auckland* as a unit of analysis. The nature of the *Occupy* movement was to mobilise supporters, through online social media, into protest against those whom they perceived to be in the top percentile of economic wealth ('the 1 %'). Although the movement had originated in New York as a protest against government austerity measures and bailouts of banks and large corporations, similar movement were quickly established in solidarity. One such movement was set up in Auckland, in a similar fashion, to protest the government's response to the worldwide economic conditions. As with the other movements, *Occupy Auckland* employed social media and other Internet technologies to engage sympathisers into discourse online in the hopes of generating further momentum for the movement, and hopefully gather people to the physical protests. This thesis seeks to explore this aspect of the *Occupy Auckland* movement, that is to say, the process of using the online technologies within the movement itself for creating that momentum into shared physical action. In the next chapter, I discuss the methodologies used for conducting this research.

# 4 Methodology

Having framed the theoretical and specific context for this thesis, in this chapter, I describe the methodology that I used to conduct the research. Firstly, my personal philosophical position, through the lens of my ontological, epistemological and axiological assumptions, is discussed. This helps to frame my choice in data collection techniques, discussed secondly, including the identification process for participants, a description of each participant's background and the ethical considerations for this research. Finally, I describe and justify my use for thematic analysis in this research and how it has helped to identify its emergent themes.

## 4.1 Philosophical Position

Perhaps it is too simplistic an approach to entirely separate the paradigms of *Interpretivism* (Bryman & Bell, 2011; Grant & Giddings, 2002; M. D. Myers, 2010), or *Constructivism* (Guba & Lincoln, 1994), and *Critical Theory* (Bryman & Bell, 2011; Grant & Giddings, 2002; Guba & Lincoln, 1994; M. D. Myers, 2010). Nevertheless, I believe that going forward, Interpretivism represents the paradigm that best suits my views on research, and I am indeed most comfortable with using. We may view our own philosophical paradigms through three key concepts: ontology, epistemology and axiology, which I shall discuss individually.

### 4.1.1 Ontology

My ontological assumption is that social constructs (even by their very definitions) are not abstracted from the people that belong to and interact with them. In fact, I believe that these constructs are in a constantly nonsolid state that is forever altered by each new

interaction. Similarly, the ontology of the interpretive paradigm may be described as the belief that reality as we see and experience it is created by social 'actors' interacting with each other and the social environment (Bryman & Bell, 2011). For example, by interacting with other people (actors), we not only change our own reality, but their reality as well. Bryman and Bell (2011) call this belief *Constructionism*, citing that concepts such as organisation and culture are constructs of this social interaction – created and changed by those that inhabit them – and are not pre-existing structures. I would further this by saying that changes to these constructs do not necessarily require the direct interaction of a social actor, and comparison with other similar constructs can trigger change (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Myers (2010) posits that shared meaning of a concept is not assumed in differing contexts, such as culture. Perhaps similarly then, one culture or organisation may not have entirely the same meaning to every actor that interacts with it, and despite the best efforts of say, a scientist or manager, a unified understanding may not be possible. Therefore, I accept and must encourage these differences throughout my research.

### 4.1.2 Epistemology

Attached directly to my ontological belief, and in line with an interpretive position, my epistemological assumptions are that human knowledge is without absolutes or certainties, and that it is subject to the discretions of individual judgement (Bryman & Bell, 2011). Therefore, people should be treated as subjective, rather than objects of natural science. Furthermore, I err on the side of a *hermeneutical* approach (Bryman & Bell, 2011; Guba & Lincoln, 1994); trying to understand through interpretation the aforementioned actor interactions rather than trying to explain them; a method that Grant and Giddings (2002) describe simply as having to "listen and interpret...the data 'given' by the participant" (p. 17). This requires a researcher to take a participatory approach to the

research method, such as *Verstehen* in German philosophy (which is based on hermeneutics), and see from the subjects' perspectives (Bryman & Bell, 2011). I believe that this level of empathy and involvement, as described in the approach of *phenomenology* (Bryman & Bell, 2011; Grant & Giddings, 2002), is the key to researching and understanding *oftentimes-deep-seated* individual and social behaviour. This enables the researcher to overcome any preconceived ideas about the overall topic or subject being interviewed, which is important to understanding the participant's behaviour, and stay as close to the experience as possible (Grant & Giddings, 2002). Therefore, being able to speak the 'language' (both literal and metaphorical) of the participant is essential to interpret their meaning (M. D. Myers, 2010). As such, interpretive research is usually considered to be *inductive* (Bryman & Bell, 2011) in nature, that is, the resulting theory, inseparable from the interpreted data (M. D. Myers, 2010), is generated from the research itself. Therefore, one would ask a research question rather than make a hypothesis (Bryman & Bell, 2011). I believe that this approach has significant benefit, especially in open-ended social research, where keeping an open mind, and analysing all available data could yield far richer results.

### 4.1.3 Axiology

My axiological assumptions; that is, those based on value judgements, are not necessarily as easy to classify as belonging to a distinct paradigm as my ontological and epistemological beliefs. Like an interpretivist, I concede that the values held by both the researcher and participant impacts on, and play a role in, the determination and interpretation of findings (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). On the other hand, I feel that in many situations, these values may require mitigation on the part of the researcher, so as not to cloud our judgement, and ability to remain objective to our own preconceptions. In other

words, to ensure that we can remain empathetic towards those we study. Furthermore, Grant and Giddings (2002) emphasise the importance of highlighting one's own views towards the research, which could also alleviate this issue.

## 4.2 Data Collection

A qualitative approach through my observation of and participation as a supporter in the General Assemblies and street protests run by *Occupy Auckland*, unstructured interviews with activists, and a review of publically available information (mainstream media reports, blogs covering the movement, social media pages of the movement, and its official website) has been used for collecting data for this research. Participants were identified through their involvement in current protests that have used technology to disseminate information and gather supporters, such as at the *Occupy New Zealand* protest. This particular protest, which as previously discussed, links to other *Occupy* movements worldwide, provided rich data and enables generalisations to other social movements. The extensively available public information, such as the mainstream media, also helped to inform the research. Additionally, an analysis of a number of news media reports, websites and blogs, dedicated to the coverage of the *Occupy* protests, were undertaken and included.

### 4.2.1 Collection of Secondary Data

Prior to starting collection of primary data from interviews with participants, between the months of October 2011 and July 2012, news media and non-traditional sources that covered the *Occupy* movement and the events after its conclusion were reviewed. My approach for identifying secondary sources was to use a snowballing technique, whereby I subscribed to the *Occupy Wall Street* and *Occupy Auckland* Facebook pages, and to the news feeds on their respective websites. These movements' media teams

regularly updated both the websites and Facebook pages, with usually one or more new articles posted every day during the occupation period. These usually contained links to external blogs and news sites, as well as comments in the associated fora, which enabled me to identify secondary data sources relevant to the worldwide *Occupy* movement. Examples of the data sources included opinion articles on the New Zealand Herald and Stuff.co.nz websites, blogs run by individual movement supporters (such as my participant, Suzie), detractors and observers, Internet fora on sites such as Reddit and Tumblr, as well as the discussions on Facebook itself. The latter in particular, which contained discussion both for and against the movement, provided a rich source of data which helped me both to frame my interview questions and to supplement the details of the discussions with the research participants. In any event, these secondary data sources were also used in the development of concepts alongside the interviews, as discussed next.

### 4.2.2 Identification of Participants

As previously noted, the participants were individuals connected with the *Occupy Auckland* who use technology to help support the movement. The criteria for selecting participants were that they had to be involved in a current or recent social movement (as a protest) and use technology to help promote it. They also needed to be located in New Zealand. The participants with the most involvement with technology and the social movement, such as those who were involved in *Occupy* social media team, were selected to be interviewed. Mentally handicapped persons and those under 20 who were unable to give consent on their own behalf, were excluded from this research. This ensured that all participants were able to give full, voluntary and independent consent to their being interviewed. Contact with potential participants was made through meetings at *Occupy*

*Auckland* (and other Auckland-based protests), where I had the opportunity to approach supporters and discuss this research.

The protesters that agreed to participate in the research were asked to attend one or more (formal or informal) interviews that typically lasted between one and two hours each. Prior to and during this research, I had attended 12 of the protest assemblies at Aotea Square between October 2011 and July 2012 where a number of people had indicated their interest in participating in this study, including several politicians who are enthusiastic users of technology. Given the high-profile nature of the movement and its supporters, even though the public *Occupy* protests concluded before the start of this research, I was still able to identify research participants. As the methodology uses a combination of interviews, participation and review of the popular and independent media, in-depth analysis with only three participants was appropriate as theoretical sufficiency was reached. Given the diverse nature of the movement, and the differing opinions it generated, interviewing a number of participants (each of which both formally and informally) enabled more diverse responses than I had found with just a single individual. After the first interview, I found that I well understood the context of the movement, the people involved and the technologies employed. However, I had yet to capture the core issues for the movement and its participants. I therefore recruited and interviewed participants until theoretical sufficiency was realised; that is, until the coding had produced categories that both developed and interrelated in a meaningful way. Reflection on preliminary analysis of the data with participants, that is, checking that I had correctly captured their views, helped with this development of concepts and categories.

### 4.2.3 Participants

Over the course of my data collection, three activists, with varying degrees of involvement with the *Occupy* movement, were interviewed. These three participants provided the theoretical sufficiency I needed to produce my findings. They were identified based on a snowball approach, and selected for their involvement with activism and the *Occupy* movement in New Zealand, as well as their knowledge and use of technologies to support this movement. I interviewed my participants between March and July 2012, for an average of two interviews each, and these lasted around one hour per interview. All three participants gave permission for their real names to be included in this research; however, only their first names have been included.

### *4.2.3.1 Suzie*

Suzie, a young mother with her own IT business had been involved with the protest since the early days of establishing a movement in solidarity with *Occupy Wall Street*. She had spent most of the movement camping at Aotea Square (from its first general meeting in October 2011 until they were evicted the following January) with other protesters, and had been largely involved with the social media operations of the occupation, as has her own blog. She was interviewed as part of a group of protesters at a protest march several months after the eviction of the *Occupy* movement. As a tribute to the occupation, she had taken me to the very place they had been camping out the main protests. At that time, around a dozen police officers lined the edge of the park, to ensure that protesters did not try to set up camp again. My participant identified herself as Suzie "Occupy Earth", as she was known through social media channels, and smiled at the irony of holding an interview when surrounded by police. I suggested that we move to a more private location, to which she responded, "We are an open and transparent movement". She told me that because of this,

even after their eviction from Aotea Square, Albert Park, and other locations, the *Occupy* movement still "goes strong" with regular meetings three times a week. I interviewed Suzie once for around two hours.

### 4.2.3.2 Aaron

Aaron, a long-time supporter of left-wing activism, is a transgendered single parent of one, was invited to be involved in the early stages of the local movement. I had met Aaron through previous student movements protesting the then-proposed legislative changes to the membership structure of student associations, and we had both shared a common interest in student politics and equity movements. He initially indicated his interest in my research, particularly because of the focus on technology, at the first general assembly meeting of *Occupy Auckland*, which I had attended. At the time, he was the Queer Rights Officer for a national student body, the national organisation that represents the rights and interests of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgendered (LGBT) students. This role required extensive engagement through online social media, for which Aaron had developed an interest and expertise. I had one formal interview with Aaron, lasting around one hour, a number of informal interviews ranging from five minutes to two hours, as well as an exchange of informal email communications.

### 4.2.3.3 Sue

Sue, a former politician and political activist has been involved in social movements and street protests since 1967, when she was still attending high school. She explained that her involvement with activism is a lifelong commitment, which has been "protracted and deep in many different movements". Her primary involvement in protests had been 16 years spent working with and supporting people who were unemployed or government beneficiaries with the *Auckland Unemployed Workers Rights Centre*. This has subsequently

become a number of other organisations that still exist today. More recently, she was involved with *Auckland Action Against Poverty* (AAAP), which had linkages to the *Occupy* movement. Sue helped to set up the original *Occupy Auckland* movement demonstration, but does not consider herself to be among the core group of *Occupy* protesters. Nonetheless she had made significant contribution through social media. I had one formal interview with Sue, lasting around one hour, a number of informal interviews ranging from five minutes to thirty minutes, as well as an exchange of informal email communications

## 4.3 Thematic Analysis

According to Braun and Clarke (2006), thematic analysis "is a method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within...your data set in (rich) detail" (p. 79). That is, it allows us more easily to collate large volumes of qualitative data into distinct and manageable themes, using a method of coding to reduce the data to be analysed (Tuckett, 2005). The thematic analysis usually follows an inductive approach to theory, similar to the epistemological beliefs of the interpretive paradigm (Bryman & Bell, 2011) . Braun and Clarke (2006) also argue that although thematic analysis is often poorly defined, and considered to be a part of other analyses (such as grounded theory), it is a useful tool for deep interpretation of the research topic. Tuckett (2005) also notes the usefulness of thematic analysis as the review progresses, enabling the continual development and refinement of themes that can be used to inform further analysis until a theoretical sufficiency (a point at which further analysis would not yield more useful themes; Bryman & Bell, 2011) is realised. However, this does also highlight the importance of using thematic analysis for this research, considering the open-ended nature of unstructured interviews (Bryman & Bell, 2011). It enables themes to 'emerge' from the data, rather than

from a selective bias by the researcher (Braun & Clarke, 2006). These emerging themes can be identified out of large data sources (Tuckett, 2005), which may be found in any qualitative research (Bryman & Bell, 2011), without necessarily requiring the production of full grounded theory (Braun & Clarke, 2006), which would not necessarily be possible in this thesis, considering time constraints. Bryman and Bell (2011) identify a type of analysis as 'discourse analysis'. This is the analysis of symbolism in media and "how we say things" (p. 525). Braun and Clarke (2006) also suggest that the thematic analysis proves useful when although the data are socially driven, no discourse analysis has been conducted, as would be apparent with transcribed surveys. That being said, the use of a coding technique (associated with thematic analysis) may inadvertently lead to the decontextualisation of the codes from the meaning of what was actually said, and that what was said can become a 'fragmented' version of the original connected flow of the participants' comments (Bryman & Bell, 2011). This is a crucial point to consider in conducting any research. However, it may be avoided by continuously reviewing the original recordings of the interviews to redraw contexts from the questions and the manner in which there where answered. Tuckett (2005) suggests that this can be mitigated by keeping in mind some key questions when analysing the data, such as, "Who is saying it and who is it about?" and "What are the consequences of the meaning (social context)?" (p. 84). Given the relatively little literature covering the use of NICT for the process of frame building shared goals, my approach is inductive, and the data gathered used to inform new theoretical perspectives. Anderson, Standen and Noon's (2003) research method models a seven-stage approach to a thematic analysis, adapted for use on the survey data as follows:

1.      Review survey data collected;

2.      Code data based on key words identified from the responses;

3.      After 20 concepts coded, create general categories from the codes;

4.      Continue analysing responses, informed by the emerging topics;

5.      Create a set of general categories from the full dataset;

6.      Produce some central themes from the identified categories;

7.      Once sufficiency is achieved, review and discuss the findings.

Note the use of coded responses in stage three; the original authors suggested 10 survey interviews to be an appropriate milestone. However, as I was conducting informal interviews, I found concepts that had emerged from my research might have been a more appropriate gauge for this number. I did not have sufficient variety to create categories after the first 10 concepts, as suggested by Anderson et al. (2003); however, this was possible after the first 20 concepts. This staged-approach formed the basis of the analysis of the data, using spreadsheets to create a simple computer-aided coding application. Theoretical sufficiency was deemed to be realised once the coding had produced categories that were both developed and interrelated in a meaningful way. Reflection on preliminary analysis of the data with participants also helped with this development of concepts and categories. I recorded and transcribed all interviews.

# 5 Findings

As described in Chapter 4, a thematic analysis technique has been used to identify and code the outcomes of this research. The background research into the *Occupy* protest, as well as my observations at a number of demonstrations has offered rich material to interpret and to support the establishment of emergent themes, as discussed in the next chapter. I have identified 75 distinct concepts, which have been codified in the following four categories: technology, leadership, organising, and communication. These four categories represent a logical grouping of the concepts, and the types of ideas, issues and information they represent.

## 5.1 Technology

The first concept that I identified from my data was discussed by Suzie who told me that *social media is a new form of 'word of mouth'*, in that we have partially replaced traditional conversations, or word-of-mouth, with discussion online, which can be seen by a wider audience and *increase political awareness*. She suggested that "direct viewers become 'witnesses' who are encouraged to post on Twitter, and blog what's happening at the protest live to their followers. This means that the actual number of 'watchers' is higher". This audience is further expanded through the use of *witnessing and sharing through social media*; that is to say, those who attend protest events are asked to share their experience through social media as the events progress. This has enabled social movements more easily to facilitate debate (*technology helps people to discuss issues*) and participation on a wider scale (*technology facilitates global participation*) for a smaller cost than with traditional communications (*technology has made activism faster, easier and cheaper*). In particular, "working internationally, [physical] contact is difficult, if not impossible, but

you can go a lot further now with international collaborations and relationships because of the online possibilities". The technology *has opened up the world to people* who would not necessarily be able to engage socially otherwise; in particular, those with physical disabilities. This underlines the ease of involvement through the Internet.

Localised events are easier to organise too, as social media can be used quickly to pass on information about events (*technology successful at gathering people together at a particular place and time*). On the other hand, because of the low commitment from agreeing to attend something through social media, the number of people who actually attended events was lower than the number who indicated they would (*non-attendance from social media users*). This created a measure of resentment from physical protesters who did not believe that online supporters where actually contributing to the movement. That is to say that "some people on site felt that the people online weren't true Occupiers because they weren't physically involved" (*online contributors not included by occupiers*), and in some cases the online supporters would not contribute to online fora either (*non-contribution in online forums*). They were seen to be only passive recipients to the activities (*users of technology were only passive recipients*). In some case, though, people were dissuaded from participating online by so-called *rogue administration* of the discussion forums in which "administrators would delete posts if they thought they were too contentious" and inhibiting discussion. This came about in an absence of strong guidelines for the use and administration of the media channels, which caused some confusion around its use (*the use of technology was confusing and disorganised*).

Nevertheless, the *Occupy* movement also made use of other non-traditional media sources to convey stories about the various events (*used own media sources to tell the story*), because according to Suzie, "the mainstream media cannot be trusted, and if the

truth is to get out, it has to come from the societal grass roots". (This distrust in the media was held because, at least initially, the mainstream outlets both in New Zealand and worldwide, had declined to run news stories on the events.) However, the movement's own communication channels were not without problems, and in particular, the live-stream was identified as unprofessional by Aaron, as he perceived some of the interviewers to be inexperienced or biased (*live-stream used by unprofessional interviewers*). He noted that the videos themselves "seemed to be of everything" rather than focused on core activities. There was also a measure of resistance to using the technology, in particular the live stream, and as Aaron put it, "the masses haven't yet got to grips with live stream" (*resistance to technology*). It was also problematic that the social media discussion that played out often represented the internal workings of the movement, as influenced by both individuals and groups (*group and individual influence over the technology both factors*), which too was disorganised (*the social media reflected the inner workings of the movement*) and the mainstream media exploited this.

Technology can be used to generate change (*technology is a tool for generating change*), and is particularly effective at espousing the cultural identity of its users (*technology is a channel for cultural identity*) where "different political and cultural identities [influence how technology is used]". However, according to Sue, we are over-depending on the technology (*overdependence on technology*) as a means to create change. She argues that it is only a tool (*technology is just a tool*) and not in itself an answer to social change (*technology is not a single answer to issues*). Technology in isolation does not nourish a social movement, and physical contact between protesters is essential for movement growth (*technology does not provide social nourishment*). "The idea [itself] that you can be an online activist is a raging debate...there is the danger that people clicking [the

'like' button] online [on Facebook] is enough" (*online activism is a disputed concept*), and the "the nature of social media [is that] it doesn't necessarily go anywhere" and lead to social change (*social media has no power to take action*). In order to create the nourishment needed to grow the movement and generate change from a movement that levers technology to communicate, strong leadership is necessary to engage those online supporters (*technology requires strong leadership*).

To summarise, these concepts form the first category (see Table 5-1 for the full list of concepts) in my findings: technology, which describes the usage of technology within the movement, and in some cases, the overall applications which those technologies have within social action. For example, the concepts: *technology helps people to discuss issues*, *technology facilitates global participation*, and *technology has made activism faster, easier and cheaper*, identify the benefits that technology provides for wider social interaction. This is particularly prevalent for individuals separated by great geographical distances. Similarly, the concepts: *technology is a channel for cultural identity*, *technology is a tool for generating change*, *used own media sources to tell the story*, and *opened up the world to people*, suggest that technology enables different cultures and values to pervade and disseminate across wider social groups. On the other hand, a number of concepts reveal some of the challenges that technologies present to social movements and other engagements. This is highlighted, most particularly, in situations where technology is overused, or used incorrectly, such as when there is an attempt to replace needed face-to-face contact, entirely. In addition, one of the most alluded to issues was passive participation; that is, limiting one's engagement with social movements to arbitrary actions within certain social media. This presents a further challenge to movements that rely on the mass mobilisation of people as resources.

**Table 5-1: Concepts within the Technology category**

| | Concept | Quotes from interview data |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | social media is a new form of 'word of mouth' | "the resistance movements during World War II used Morse code as a new form of word of mouth. Today we use social media sites like Facebook and Twitter." |
| 2 | witnessing and sharing through social media | "direct viewers become 'witnesses' who are encouraged to post on twitter and blog what's happening at the protest live to their followers, meaning that the actual number of 'watchers' is higher" |
| 3 | technology helps people to discuss issues | "anyone could contribute to the debates online, or make comment online" |
| 4 | technology facilitates global participation | "working internationally, [physical] contact is difficult, if not impossible, but you can go a lot further now with international collaborations and relationships because of the online possibilities" |
| 5 | technology successful at gathering people together at a particular place and time | "I think [the technology] was successful in terms of gathering people at particular places and times" |
| 6 | technology is a channel for cultural identity | "social media helps create [social groups] for [Maori]... you see different political and cultural identities [influence how technology is used]" |
| 7 | technology has made activism faster, easier and cheaper | "the whole nature of political work and organisation is so much easier, faster and cheaper now [because of technology]... and coming out of the dark ages" |
| 8 | technology is a tool for generating change | "[technology has] hugely enriched our capacity to work together to change the world" |
| 9 | used own media sources to tell the story | "we've had our own cameraman on most of our actions, so we can put up film...on YouTube and linked in to Facebook right away, so that we can tell our own story about our own actions." |
| 10 | ease of involvement through the Internet | "although it definitely isn't the only cause, I believe that [technology] has increased the ease of people being able to contribute to protests" |
| 11 | opened up the world to people | "social media and the Internet have deepened social capital and extended it... for people who have had no means of contact, it has opened the world to them" |
| 12 | resistance to technology | "the masses haven't yet got to grips with live stream" |
| 13 | live-stream used by unprofessional interviewers | "most of [the live-streaming] was 'bad' and unprofessional; it seemed to be of everything" |
| 14 | users of technology were only passive recipients | "back in the day, people would spend more time organising. If they wanted to create an event, and invite people, they would go door-to-door to get people involved...People will click on a button on Facebook to show their support for a movement, and not do anything else, except click on that button...we had a fair amount of people who just clicked on buttons" |
| 15 | online contributors not included by occupiers | "one of the problems we discovered with the Facebook groups was people that were involved online thought they were a true member of the movement. However, some people on site felt that the people online weren't true Occupiers because they weren't physically involved" |
| 16 | non-attendance from social media users | "in fact that means nothing unless you are willing...[protest and] to take action, ticking like online means nothing" |
| 17 | overdependence on technology | "the tendency to just sit at your computer instead of getting out into the world, or to read or to think, but to just 'blab out' at a superficial level" "we are becoming too dependent on technology" |

| 18 | technology is just a tool | "it's just a tool... it's not a god in itself to be worshiped, as some people seem to do" |
|----|---------------------------|----|
| 19 | technology is not a single answer to issues | "it's not something that will free us, or lead us into utopia... it's not going to take us anywhere. It's the people and how we use it is what gives it any value" |
| 20 | technology does not provide social nourishment | "in terms of growing or nourishing the group...physical contact is critical" |
| 21 | online activism is a disputed concept | "the idea that you can be an online activist is a raging debate...there is the danger that people clicking 'like' online is enough" |
| 22 | non-contribution in online forums | "[another movement] has tried to pull itself together online, but it just wasn't working...people just wouldn't contribute to [the online wiki]" |
| 23 | social media has no power to take action | "what's the point of [an online] debate if it's never turned into anything? Which is the nature of social media, of course – it doesn't necessarily go anywhere" |
| 24 | rogue administration | "people would get banned and then other people would make them admins again... admins would delete posts if they thought they were too contentious" |
| 25 | the social media reflected the inner workings of the movement | "the media reported on the internal disputes because they were being conducted online" |
| 26 | the use of technology was confusing and disorganised. | "there was a lot of confusion. Some people were involved temporarily and then they moved away, so there was disagreement over who had access to the website, who had access to the Facebook pages, who had control" |
| 27 | technology requires strong leadership | "if the technology had been managed better, it could have helped enormously...I don't think the technology has the problem, but it was the way the movement was managed" |
| 28 | increased political awareness | "technology makes people feel as if they can get involved more easily...you can Google [problems] and find out who in your area is doing something about them and join them...It has increased people's political awareness" |
| 29 | group and individual influence over the technology both factors | "the use of social media not only reflects organisations, but the individuals within an organisation..." |

## 5.2 Leadership

It was found when analysing how the movement is using the technology, and whether or not it supported participation within the movement, that leadership is important to support such uses or technology. According to both Aaron and Sue, *leadership is necessary for facilitating shared goals* within any given social movement, and as summarised by Sue, a movement without a leadership structure, be it formal or informal, "just doesn't work". "Going out together, and whatever else you are doing is critical to build camaraderie and get to know each other". As alluded to in the previous section, *physical contact is required for a successful movement*, and in order to engage supporters

into physical action from purely digital stimulus requires empowerment (*empowerment necessary to make passive activists engage physically*) which can only be provided by visible and recognisable leadership (*visible and well known leaders creates empowerment*). Although having people with experience is important to a movement (*lifelong commitment to activism*), it also thrives off the diversity of people who are younger and with less experience of political action (*age diversity important for success of activism*). According to Sue, "it has been useful that [Auckland Action Against Poverty] has a mix of older activists... and young activists from places like Occupy... and we've joined together to learn from each other".

Similarly, having diversity in the leaders' backgrounds and styles is important when the participants are diverse, although Suzie does not believe it is possible to represent groups as diverse as those in *Occupy* (*representation of diversity impossible*). She observes, "A single leader to represent 99% of people? We come from all sorts of walks of life and ethnic and religious backgrounds... to have a single leader or even leaders would be impossible." This was one of the factors for the movement choosing to be expressly leaderless, which Aaron describes as being inadvertently anarchistic (*anti-leadership / anarchy*) and lead to the rise of unofficial and unrecognised leaders (*spontaneous / unofficial leadership*) who were neither legitimate (*no leadership legitimacy*) nor accountable (*no leadership accountability*). The people who emerged as leaders tended to be those who were most vocal during meetings (*loudest voices seen as the leaders*), and those people "are seen as the leadership or spokespeople" in the eyes of the public. This led to jealousy from other protesters (*peer jealousy*). Public recognition of illegitimate leadership in the media "created a sense of jealousy because people didn't like others to be

promoted as leaders or spokespeople. It was as though they were speaking on behalf of the movement, because [they] were all meant to...have equal voices".

As such, there were issues with respect between protesters (*lack of respect*) as people competed for power (*internal power struggles*) and to realise their own ambitions and goals (*personal ambitions / goals*), including a number of "pet projects" that would compete with each other for the limited shared resources (*disputes over shared resources*). Aaron observed that, "often if you said that there was a problem, you were ignored or argued with". He told me that this lead to the movement devolving into task-orientation (*task-orientation without leadership*) only, such as the General Assemblies which "very quickly descended into issues with general housekeeping...and disputes between people", without any view to setting and achieving goals (*lack of proposed solutions to target problems*). This made it *challenging to instantiate ideas* and "with so many goals that people brought up, it was very hard to solidify into a few key goals and what we wanted to do". Being unable to create these goals contributed to the movement not establishing, or realising, the directions or endgames of what it wanted to achieve.

Sue suggested that this was because, like physical contact, *leadership is vital for movement growth*, which was absent in the Occupy movement. She further posited that *leadership groups are a good alternative* for the movement if they are unwilling to have one or a small number of leaders. One "could have a group of ten, and have ten leaders in it; every single person leading, but leading a different piece of the work" and "leadership does not have to be from a bombastic, arrogant, charismatic man or woman". In point of fact, according to Sue, *leadership need only be "taking on a job"*, telling me that "the key thing is accountability and people taking on roles, and all that leadership is, is taking on a job".

In conclusion, the second category (see Table 5-2 for the full list of concepts) that has been identified is leadership. This describes those concepts that look at the (under)utilisation of leadership (that is, how concepts of leadership and decision-making were applied by the protesters) and leadership styles within the movement, and the subsequent issues and opportunities this presented. The commonly presented theme in the interviews was the apparent leaderless nature of the *Occupy* movement that was conceived with the hope to create a consensus (later an absolute majority) decision system. It was identified that, contrary to the values of the *Occupy* movement, leadership is necessary to drive a social movement, particularly when there is a focus on resource mobilisation via the Internet instead of face-to-face contact or through the mainstream media. This may have therefore proven problematic for *Occupy*, as the below concepts highlight. Nevertheless, these issues have also enabled valuable insights to emerge into where and why leadership is needed within social movements. This is particularly true within the frame of how shared goals are formed, where in order to produce actual innovation and take initiative towards this, a strong (though by no means dictatorial) leadership presence is required.

**Table 5-2: Concepts within the Leadership category**

|  | Concept | Quotes from interview data |
|---|---|---|
| 30 | leadership necessary for facilitating shared goals | "the inherent contradictions and problems with...an ongoing action that was leaderless...[meant that] it had no clear goals...it just doesn't work" |
| 31 | physical contact required for a successful movement | "going out together, and whatever else you are doing is so critical to build camaraderie and get to know each other" |
| 32 | visible and well known leaders creates empowerment | "for me, if you are going to grow political organisations on the left or social movements, you need people who are visible leaders that other people accept as leaders." |
| 33 | empowerment necessary to make passive activists engage physically | "by working with the people...keeping key posts interesting...trying to keep people interesting [will help get online people involved]" |
| 34 | lifelong commitment to activism | "I've been in community development and community activism for so long" |
| 35 | age diversity important for success of activism | "it has been useful that [AAAP] has a mix of older activists...young activists from places like Occupy...and we've joined together to learn from each other" |
| 36 | spontaneous / unofficial leadership | "people look towards others for leadership, whether they are more experienced or more vocal, more knowledgeable, have more |

| | | skills …more people look to those people for leadership, so even if no one is assigned as a leader, they happen spontaneously whether or not someone has given them that title" |
|---|---|---|
| 37 | leadership vital for movement growth | "can help to guide and shape, and encourage and nurture groups, rather than just letting it happen" |
| 38 | leadership groups a good alternative | "you could have a group of ten, and have ten leaders in it; every single person leading, but leading a different piece of the work" |
| 39 | leadership need only be "taking on a job" | "but the key thing is accountability and people taking on roles, and all that leadership is, is taking on a job" |
| 40 | no leadership legitimacy | "having nobody assigned to the position of leadership was that certain people would gravitate to that position and I was concerned that [those people] probably weren't best suited to being leaders" |
| 41 | no leadership accountability | "[young activists have] welcomed the opportunity to learn how to work inside [AAAP, which] is organised and where leadership…accountable…not some pretence that it's not needed or doesn't exist" |
| 42 | task-orientation without leadership | "[the General Assemblies] very quickly descended into issues with general housekeeping…and disputes between people" |
| 43 | loudest voices seen as the leaders | "the loudest voices come through and are seen as the leadership or spokespeople" |
| 44 | representation of diversity impossible | "a single leader to represent 99% of people? We come from all sorts of walks of life and ethnic and religious backgrounds… to have a single leader or even leaders would be impossible." |
| 45 | peer jealousy | "it created a sense of jealousy because people didn't like others to be promoted as leaders or spokespeople, as if they were speaking on behalf of the movement, because we were all meant to…have equal voices" |
| 46 | lack of respect | "often if you said that there was a problem, you were ignored or argued with" |
| 47 | disputes over shared resources | "except when it came to shared resources, like marquees and space... there were disputes" |
| 48 | personal ambitions / goals | "it seemed like every individual person had their own idea as to what the main goals of the movement should be...everyone wanted their pet project" |
| 49 | internal power struggles | "that if you were someone who became a leader, whether by your own doing, or by other people looking up to you, people could then use that as a reason to shut you down" |
| 50 | anti-leadership / anarchy | "at times, it got close to the point of being anarchy" |
| 51 | challenging to instantiate ideas | "with so many goals that people brought up, it was very hard to solidify into a few key goals and what we wanted to do" |
| 52 | lack of proposed solutions to target problems | "because we were unable to come up with those goals and solutions, [the Council] used that as a reason to move us on" |

## 5.3 Organisation

Organisation is the third category identified and it describes those structural and organisational aspects of the *Occupy* movement that were not framed in the Chapter 3. Firstly, as noted by all three of my participants, physical engagement with the *Occupy* protest in particular *required considerable time commitment* to attend the daily General

Assembly meetings and either to camp at the occupation site or to support those who were. This created an additional burden for the movement, which was struggling with the difficulty of engaging people into real-world action, as it also had to convince supporters to take significant time out of their private and professional lives to support it. For this reason, there was *low diversity amongst physical activists*, as people with professional or family responsibilities, vulnerable groups, and people with physical disabilities had found it difficult to spend a number of days or weeks camping outdoors. Aaron observed,

> *"Which activists can actually take the time out of their lives to go and camp in a square or park for an indefinite period?... There are a lot of people who would not be able to participate, and if you weren't part of the core of Occupy, then it was like you had no right to have a voice in it. So it became restrictive, naturally enough to those who are able to camp out."*

Furthermore, as the movement progressed, the food and shelter being provided to the occupiers at *Occupy Auckland* attracted other people from the local area, and in particular, became a *bastion for homeless and mentally unwell people*. This raised *safety concerns* between supporters of the movement, local government agencies, the popular media and the public. Aaron, whose background is in women's rights and protection was asked to provide assistance to mitigate the risks created by undesirable behaviour towards women. However, as there were *no set guidelines* for how to act or respond to issues, it was challenging for him to set up a group to work through these concerns. He noted that "because it was a leaderless movement...there was no one in authority to set the guidelines for what you could do, or how to behave".

Sue noted that many *groups were fragmented* by this, and their members *were atomised* from one another where they should have been working towards a common goal. She claimed that "there is just a plethora of different groups and individuals that are atomised, and almost refuse to come together in any coherent way", concluding that the *"tyranny of structurelessness"* created a "very disparate collection of people, with no particular coherence" (*disparate / incoherence in movement*). Aaron suggested that the reason the *movement had caused its own disintegration* was because authorities were able to exploit the weaknesses of the movement through its lack of focus and goals (*backlash from authorities to exploit weaknesses*). On the other hand, Sue argued, "it takes a lot more than the "1%" to keep our current structures in place... [their views cut] across any structural, systemic analysis of our economy and society" (*public complacency / apathy was underestimated*), and this led to the movement being unsustainable. They both agree, however, that the *movement did not achieve its goals* or reach the potential it had. According to Sue, "*Occupy* started off with the best of intentions...it didn't work... as someone who was keen on it from the beginning, it certainly didn't succeed at what I hoped it might be".

Arguably, this category (see Table 5-3 for the complete list of concepts) could perhaps equally have been labelled 'Outcomes'. However, as this thesis focuses on the processes and systems involved in social movements, rather than their success or failure, the current nomenclature is more appropriate. Nevertheless, these concepts represent a retrospective view of how the movement was structured and organised, and as such, identifies a number of key areas of improvement. First, further to the aforementioned issue with digital engagement being too easy, and a subsequent lack of commitment to physical engagement, it was observed by the participants that physical participation in a movement

that extended over a period of weeks and months was perhaps too difficult. For example, those people who had jobs, be it a professional career, or home-based responsibilities and care, those people with physical difficulties, and those with particular needs or concerns were unable to participate, and more crucially, feel included in the movement. Second, the apparent lack of structure, neither generated through leadership nor democratic consensus, resulted in a fragmenting of people, ideas and groups from each other, to such an extent that the any proposed goals of the movement were not realised. Finally, this lack of structure, in combination with mounting pressure from the local authorities made the long-term continuance of the movement insurmountable, and it ultimately disbanded. Although one of the participants I interviewed predicted an imminent resurgence, this has not hitherto occurred.

**Table 5-3: Concepts within the Structure category**

|    | Concept | Quotes from interview data |
|----|---------|----------------------------|
| 53 | requires considerable time commitment | "which activists can actually take the time out of their lives to go and camp in a square or park for an indefinite period?" |
| 54 | bastion for homeless and mentally unwell people | "the second problem that I saw was the coming together of homeless people, often with mental illness, or recovering from mental illness and addiction issues, coming together with the political activists in a very uneasy relationship" |
| 55 | safety concerns (women) | "there were primarily concerns about the safety of people involved in the occupation…especially the safety of women" |
| 56 | low diversity amongst physical activists | "there are a lot of people who would not be able to participate, and if you weren't part of the core of Occupy, then it was like you had no right to have a voice in it. So it became restrictive, naturally enough to those who are able to camp out" |
| 57 | public complacency / apathy was underestimated | "it takes a lot more than the "1%" to keep our current structures in place... [their views cut] across any structural, systemic analysis of our economy and society" |
| 58 | no set guidelines | "because it was a leaderless movement...there was no one in authority to set the guidelines for what you could do, or how to behave" |
| 59 | people fragmented | "the whole thing is so fragmented by its very nature in that its decision-making process was [affected]" |
| 60 | disparate / incoherence in movement | "what you had in the end was this very disparate collection of people, with no particular coherence" |
| 61 | atomised groups | "where there is just a plethora of different groups and individuals that are atomised, and almost refuse to come together in any coherent way" |
| 62 | "tyranny of structurelessness" | "you may have read the article, *The tyranny of structurelessness*? I use that a lot when working with people to try and explain [the |

| | | problem with leaderlessness]" |
|---|---|---|
| 63 | movement did not achieve its goals | "Occupy started off with the best of intentions...it didn't work... as someone who was keen on it from the beginning, it certainly didn't succeed at what I hoped it might be" |
| 64 | movement had caused its own disintegration | "I think it was effective at disintegrating itself [through leaderlessness]" |
| 65 | backlash from authorities to exploit weaknesses | "I believe that the reason the authorities were able to destroy the movement they way that they did, was because of the divisions that arose in the competition for leadership within a leaderless movement" |

## 5.4 Communication

The final of the four categories is communication, which groups together concepts that identify communication aspects of the movement, both in the physical and online spaces. The *Occupy* movement faced significant challenges in its effort to communicate to supporters and the general public in order to increase its support base. First, *poor mainstream media coverage* of the movement meant that they had to rely on non-traditional communication channels, such as social media. According to Suzie, "within two weeks of the start of the Occupy protests, there were over 100,000 videos on YouTube, yet not a single report on the New Zealand Herald". Furthermore, a feeling of *public complacency* over government actions and *apathy* towards the movement, affected the ability for it to get its message across.

However, because of the lack of shared goals, as discussed previously, there were a number of *public misconceptions* surrounding exactly what its purpose was, such as "the public thinking it [was] all about poor people wanting to take the rich people's money, but [it was] actually the exact opposite". It was about rich having accumulated wealth through means which potentially disadvantaged poorer people. Indeed, this was also exacerbated by the media *"inventing"* spokespeople for the movement, as the protesters would not elect one themselves. This caused internal disputes surrounding the individual right to represent the movement, and as they were played out through social media, these *disagreements were*

*publicly visible* for the media to report on. Aaron observed, "the media...helped to exacerbate the problem when they started calling people 'spokespeople'... [and] reported on the internal disputes because they were being conducted online".

Communication issues challenged even the participation that did take place within the movement. Though my participants agreed that *protests bring people together*, the diverse nature of *Occupy* and its dual existence offline and online meant that issues of equality arose. First, *some people were not comfortable speaking at meetings* because "[people] don't necessarily want to get up in front of a big group of people...to voice [their views], and some people found it quite intimidating to speak [at General Assemblies]". This meant that some *voices got lost in the crowd* at both the General Assemblies and the online fora through the sheer volume of participants. Also, a gap existed between the movement supporters online and those who participated in the occupation proper. Sue in particular, felt that she did not have the right to speak at the protests as she was not actually camping with the core group (*feel unable to speak at meetings if not part of the core group*). Finally, although mitigating steps were taken to avoid it, these issues inadvertently *disadvantaged minority groups in discussions*, as they were more likely to not be part of the core group, and be significantly outnumbered in meetings. Aaron described "a speaking order where if you were a marginalised person (if you were a person of colour, or a woman, of if you hadn't spoken at all that evening, or rarely spoke), you were *supposed* to be bumped up the speaking order... that rarely actually happened".

The two themes that I have presented (see Table 5-4 for a complete list of concepts) from this category are, first, that the movement experienced challenges in its communication with the general public and the media, and therefore its ability to rally support. For example, the poor coverage in mainstream media, combined with the visible

disagreements between protesters led the general public to have misconceptions about what the movement actually stood for. The abovementioned issues, and a lack of a clear focus that could be communicated to the public and the authorities, likely compounded this. Secondly, both the online and physical spaces that the internal movement occupied were challenged with the issue of overcrowding. That is, in an environment designed to be open and give opportunity for all to speak and contribute, the sheer number of participants made this untenable. However, as discussed in the context section of this thesis, this issue was partially mitigated by reforming as an absolute majority system, rather than complete consensus, in order to keep the flow of decision-making, and the adoption of hand gestures to communicate views on a topic.

**Table 5-4: Concepts within the Communication category**

|  | Concept | Quotes from interview data |
|---|---|---|
| 66 | protests bring people together | "[protests] in itself can achieve something in the bringing together of people" |
| 67 | poor mainstream media coverage | "within two weeks of the start of the Occupy protests, there were over 100,000 videos on YouTube, yet not a single report on the New Zealand Herald" |
| 68 | public misconceptions | "the public thinking it is all about poor people wanting to take the rich people's money, but it's actually the exact opposite" |
| 69 | media "inventing" spokespeople | "the media...helped to exacerbate the problem when they started calling people 'spokespeople'" |
| 70 | disagreements publicly visible | "the media reported on the internal disputes because they were being conducted online" |
| 71 | some people not comfortable speaking at meetings | "[people] don't necessarily want to get up in front of a big group of people...to voice [their views], and some people found it quite intimidating to speak at [General Assemblies]" |
| 72 | voices lost in the crowd | "everyone was supposed to be equal, but that was far from the truth...it was promoted as 'your voice matters', but when you have people in their thousands talking at the same time, not everyone gets heard" |
| 73 | feel unable to speak at meetings if not part of the core group | "if I'm not part of this, I don't really have a right to speak, so I just walked away and carried on with my [life]" |
| 74 | public complacency / apathy | "complacency and apathy. We're willing to forgo having human rights because we've got a roof over our heads, food on the table and an iPod in our hands. Like the Roman saying 'bread and circuses; give them food, give them entertainment and they don't need their political rights" |
| 75 | disadvantaged minority groups in discussions | "there was a speaking order where if you were a marginalised person (if you were a person of colour, or a woman, et cetera), you were *supposed* to be bumped up the speaking order. That rarely actually happened" |

## 5.5 Categorisation

These 75 codes, shown as a complete set in Figure 5-1, are a result of interviews with three participants, participation in protests and reflection on the alternate media coverage of the movement, and represent a theoretical sufficiency for this research. Although these concepts are by no means an exhaustive list of issues and ideas that occur within social movements, or indeed necessarily even the *Occupy* movement, they are relevant to my research problem and provide a framework for analysis and the emergence of themes. In the next chapter, I shall discuss these findings further in comparison to the extant literature, and theorise on the outcomes from the emergent themes.

| Leadership | Technology | Organisation | Communication |
|---|---|---|---|
| • social media is a new form of 'word of mouth'<br>• witnessing and sharing through social media<br>• technology helps people to discuss issues<br>• technology facilitates global participation<br>• technology successful at gathering people together at a particular place and time<br>• technology is a channel for cultural identity<br>• technology has made activism faster, easier and cheaper<br>• technology is a tool for generating change<br>• used own media sources to tell the story<br>• ease of involvement through the Internet<br>• opened up the world to people<br>• resistance to technology<br>• live-stream used by unprofessional interviewers<br>• users of technology were only passive recipients<br>• online contributors not included by occupiers<br>• non-attendance from social media users<br>• overdependence on technology<br>• technology is just a tool<br>• technology is not a single answer to issues<br>• technology does not provide social nourishment<br>• online activism is a disputed concept<br>• non-contribution in online forums<br>• social media has no power to take action<br>• rogue administration<br>• the social media reflected the inner workings of the movement<br>• the use of technology was confusing and disorganised.<br>• technology requires strong leadership<br>• increased political awareness<br>• group and individual influence over the technology both factors | • leadership necessary for facilitating shared goals<br>• physical contact required for a successful movement<br>• visible and well known leaders creates empowerment<br>• empowerment necessary to make passive activists engage physically<br>• lifelong commitment to activism<br>• age diversity important for success of activism<br>• spontaneous / unofficial leadership<br>• leadership vital for movement growth<br>• leadership groups a good alternative<br>• leadership need only be "taking on a job"<br>• no leadership legitimacy<br>• no leadership accountability<br>• task-orientation without leadership<br>• loudest voices seen as the leaders<br>• representation of diversity impossible<br>• peer jealousy<br>• lack of respect<br>• disputes over shared resources<br>• personal ambitions / goals<br>• internal power struggles<br>• anti-leadership / anarchy<br>• challenging to instantiate ideas<br>• lack of proposed solutions to target problems | • requires considerable time commitment<br>• bastion for homeless and mentally unwell people<br>• safety concerns (women)<br>• low diversity amongst physical activists<br>• public complacency / apathy was underestimated<br>• no set guidelines<br>• people fragmented<br>• disparate / incoherence in movement<br>• atomised groups<br>• "tyranny of structurelessness"<br>• movement did not achieve its goals<br>• movement had caused its own disintegration<br>• backlash from authorities to exploit weaknesses | • protests bring people together<br>• poor mainstream media coverage<br>• public misconceptions<br>• media "inventing" spokespeople<br>• disagreements publicly visible<br>• some people not comfortable speaking at meetings<br>• voices lost in the crowd<br>• feel unable to speak at meetings if not part of the core group<br>• public complacency / apathy<br>• disadvantaged minority groups in discussions |

**Figure 5-1: Concepts into Categories**

# 6 Discussion

In this chapter, I shall further analyse the findings from my research, describe the themes that have emerged from the data, and discuss their implications for the literature. The final stage in the thematic analysis technique is the identification and observation of core ideas and theories that emerge from the individual concepts and group categories (Braun & Clarke, 2006). These themes represent the culmination and reconciliation of the data that have been collected, and therefore the collective ideas that the participants shared. However, as discussed in the methodology, there is an inherent challenge of viewing data as a fragmentation of codes and concepts, isolated from exactly what was said and with what emphasis (Bryman & Bell, 2011). Whilst searching for new meaning and theoretical generalisations, it is possible to allow the findings to become too abstracted from the data, which in turn puts the research in danger of misconceptions and inaccurate conclusions. Consequently steps to mitigate the effects of codifying data were taken, such as continuously re-reading the transcripts and listening to the recorded interviews, checking the codes against what was said, as well as checking them with the participants directly.

From the data, ten distinct theories from four different themes have emerged from the categories. Each one of these theories and themes, as will be discussed in this chapter, incorporate the multiple findings of the categories that were identified in the previous chapter. As such, a number of concepts contributed to the emergence of each of these themes. The themes, as shown in Figure 6-1, are Technological Skills, Passive Participation, Diverse Leadership and Unstructured Movements. Broadly speaking, Technological Skills is a combination of both technology and communication, and is representative of the skills required by social participants to successfully engage in online

social movements. Passive Participation, as emerged from technology, leadership and communication, is the issue with engaging social participants in meaningful social action. Diverse Leadership, whose components are leadership and communication, is something that is required to engage social participants from diverse demographic backgrounds. Finally, organisation and leadership yielded the description of Unstructured Movements and the impact that they have on movement organisation and outcomes. These themes and their underlying theories will be discussed more thoroughly in the following sections.
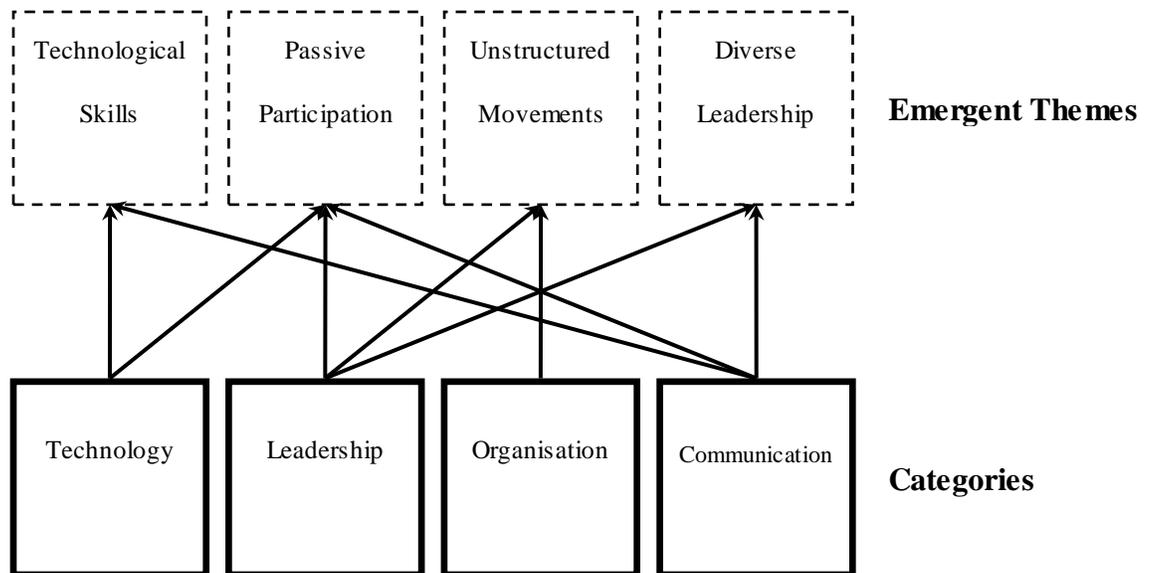


**Figure 6-1: Emergent Themes**

## 6.1 Technological Skills

A point argued by all of my participants consistently was the importance that the degree of knowledge an individual had themselves, or at least had access to through other people, determined how successful their interactions were with the movements online. Sue, in particular, remarked that although she was not necessarily trusting of the technology, she relied on the savvy of her fellow activists to ensure there was engagement on the online social channels. Aaron believed that a lot of the issues that *Occupy* had with gaining and

keeping supporters were attributable to a lack of understanding of how social media and its users function. Suzie believed that there is a challenge for some would-be supporters to access the digital resources (particularly the live-stream) in order to engage with the movement. This was why their 'witnessing' programme, which had observers post what was happening online, was so important. Indeed issues with digital access are not new, and have been around since the dawning of NICTs and the Internet. Digital and information literacy; that is, the ability to use technology to access information resources at will, has become as important to this generation as traditional literacy and numeracy (Clarke, Milner, Killer, & Dixon, 2008). With the increasing necessity for technological connectedness for social participation (Castells, 2000), this will be crucial for anyone in a network society.

However, such skills as well as core access to the technology are not by any means universal, which has given rise to the term, the 'digital divide'. The digital divide, which originated from the mid-1990s and the penetration of the Internet (Light, 2001), is not just an issue of inequality between countries and societies, but within them too. A technologically determinist stance has claimed that NICTs will break down barriers of inequality between groups by making technology and knowledge readily available. However, NICTs are in fact less readily available than previous technologies like telephony (Golding, 2000). Perhaps most importantly, even in our society of post-class disputes (Laraña et al., 1994) and open public sphere (Habermas, 1992), findings suggest that the digital divide is more impacted by socio-economic factors than the typically held idea of generational differences (Golding, 2000). Similar to the days of the bourgeoisie, the issues of access to knowledge, in this case in the digital sense, have resurged between the socioeconomic and educationally 'haves' and 'have-nots' (Papacharissi, 2002). Berdel (2004) argues that there are four main barriers to the access of digital knowledge: physical

access to computers, spoken language differences, educational deficiencies, and attitudes towards technology, and the latter two were found to affect the *Occupy* movement. As noted by Sue, and contrary to the findings of the literature review by Golding (2000), the latter attitudes towards technology were more often than not from a non-digitally native generation (DeMaria, 2008). Nevertheless, whatever the case may be, the issue of Internet access is being seen as ever more important to governments, with some going so far as to make it a fundamental human right (Berdel, 2004).

Such initiatives have helped to erode the effects of the digital divide, particularly in Western democracies (Dahlgren, 2005). However, functioning political debate, as argued by Habermasian theory (Habermas, 1992) requires equality for all citizens able to contribute. Of course, in a democracy such as found in Westernised societies, the right to vote and take political action is available to all citizens, even though not all citizens have access to digital resources (Berdel, 2004). Nonetheless these are becoming the frontier for political participation (Sanford, 2012). Organisational social movements, such as charities and social entrepreneurs have the two-pronged consideration of not only how to ensure their core groups are able to get access, but how to attract new supporters in a hugely competitive online market (Modarres, 2011). Naturally, this provides inextricable challenges for movements such as *Occupy*, whose ability to mobilise public support depends not only on this technology, but the people's ability to access it. This leads to my first proposition that not only is it important for the individual to be technologically literate in order to engage, but also to the movement so that they are able to engage others.

**Proposition #1: Social movements that use the Internet require the expertise of technologically savvy supporters.**

Social movements, if successful in gathering supporters, still have the onus of maintaining a high level of engagement with them. A number of technologies, some of which have been identified through the data collected, are becoming well placed to assist social movements in this regard. In particular, the Web 2.0 phenomenon, which is now commonplace in most groups that organise themselves online in any part, has aided movements to communicate with wider groups of people: and this to the extent that it is almost a social movement in itself (Birdsall, 2007). Web 2.0 has enabled social networking sites like Facebook to become an important tool for social movements to gain hold and to rally people to support offline through its use of organised events (Harlow, 2012). This has been particularly prevalent for the *Occupy* movements that were unable to rely on the traditional media sources (television news reports, newspapers and the like) to communicate their message. The Internet has certainly added to the repertoire of tools available to social movements (Hess, 2007; Van Laer & Van Aelst, 2010), which has in turn enabled them vastly to increase their locus of participation (Lerner, 2010). That too has its own associated problems. As found in this research, this vastly increased participation has created a notable risk of overcrowding in the digital space, leading to some voices and opinions getting lost. This is particularly problematic for minority views (Smith, 2011) and the social movement itself if potential leaders or problem solvers are eschewed (Baringhorst, 2008). As such, my second proposition identifies that although technology helps to make social participation available to a wider audience, those with minority views may get disregarded within the mass of information.

**Proposition #2: Technology can be used to increase the locus for participation but can also unintentionally eschew minority opinions and values.**

If not all people can be heard in the sheer numbers, this may further compound the problem of mobilising support by accidentally discouraging engagement in an arena already prone to passive participation.

## 6.2 Passive Participation

The second theme that has emerged from the interviews, observation and review of the movement media coverage is the challenge that *Occupy* and other movements is facing with non-action, or limited participation in social movements. For the purpose of this thesis, I define active participation as engaging in activities that have a direct and tangible effect on the movement, *viz* attending protest marches or leading discussion online. On the other hand, the opposite applies to passive participation which, to cite a common example from the data, includes clicking a button on a social networking site to indicate tacit or implicit support for an idea or statement. Resource mobilisation theory defines these categories as *constituents* (those who are mobilised and provide resources, be it time, money or otherwise) and *adherents* (those who believe in the movement's cause but are not directly material resources for the movement) (McCarthy & Zald, 1977). Although the movement's passive supporters to add arbitrary value to the movement by increasing its social media reach, they do not provide resources significant enough to be considered to be mobilised. Aaron highlighted that a considerable issue that the *Occupy* movement had to overcome was a significant number of "people who just clicked on buttons" as a means of participation.

This issue was particularly publicised throughout online communities as a response to the Kony 2012 campaign (Invisible Children Inc., 2012) which encouraged social media users to share a video about the Ugandan warlord, Joseph Kony, in an attempt to raise

awareness and fight for his arrest (J. Myers, 2012). The movement was criticised by some online activists who were concerned that it was encouraging 'clicktivism' (a portmanteau of click and activism), a form of passive participation (Bailyn, 2012). A number of Internet memes ("tunes, ideas, catch phrases, and their ilk... propagate[ing] themselves in a cultural meme pool and leap[ing] behaviourally from person to person"; Milicevic, 2001, p. 117) were created in response, such as the one shown in Figure 6-2, which features a variation of a quote by Boromir (Sean Bean) in the movie *The Lord of the Rings – Fellowship of the Rings* (Cheezburger Inc., 2009).
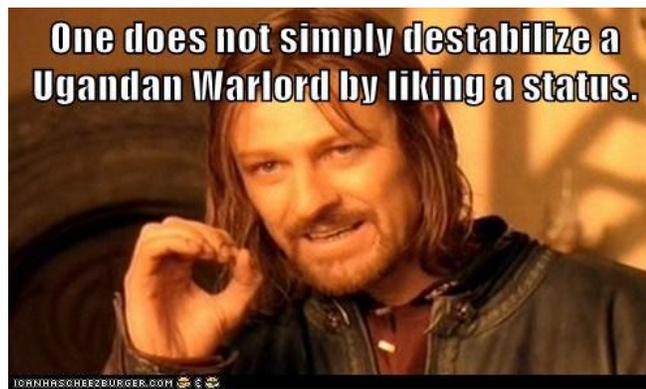
**Figure 6-2: Internet meme response to the Kony2012 campaign**
(From Cheezburger.com, by superjew6594, n.d. Retrieved from website: http://cheezburger.com/5948454400)

Again, passive participation is not something unique to social movements which operate online, and has been documented as a challenge that movements must surmount since the conception of resource mobilisation theory (see McCarthy & Zald, 1977). On the other hand, the participants found that the Internet, and in particular social networking sites, was useful for advertising movement events and engaging people in online debate. The Internet has indeed long been heralded as a powerful tool for mass-communication with potential supports and the ability to engage people at least on a passive level (Tatarchevskiy, 2011) in social change movements, leading to my third proposition.

**Proposition #3: The Internet is an effective method for disseminating protest information to gain passive support, but only at a superficial level.**

Although social networking sites were conceived with a particular commercial application in mind (Beer, 2008) for advertisers and sponsors, they have emerged as another platform for social engagement and participation. However, boyd and Ellison (2007; uncapitalised style chosen by author) warn that this creates a potential trap for social communities using social networking sites for engagement, under the allure of free access to services and information without consideration for its origins in capitalism. Even on the surface, the effects of this are evident with the rise and fall of different networks with the changing face of the online community and their needs (boyd & Ellison, 2007). If this is the case, have we invested our social connections in systems at the mercy of a capitalistic, fickle society and a destabilised economy? Albeit a dystopian proposition, it may have some merit. As I discussed in my literature review of online identity, we have commoditised the self (Hassan, 2008) for ease of flexibility (Golding, 2000). Given the commercial nature of the Internet and the ease of creating or forgoing connections (Castells, 2000), it may not be too far of a leap to conclude that we have also commoditised our social relations. Every interaction we have on social networking sites is used to build up a dossier of our lives in order to better tailor system preferences, and advertisements, to us (Raab & Bennet, 1998). Therefore, our social interactions, through forums and private messages are catalogued in an attempt to represent how we engage socially.

However, as found in this research, the Internet and social media has been a useful supplement for *viva voce* interaction, and invaluable to the communication that took place between the different solidarity movements. Indeed, as foreshadowed by Castells (Castells, 2000), the network society has come to fruition, enabling absolute connectedness,

regardless of the geographical distance individuals may be apart: so much so that it is having an unprecedented effect on the social capital (the potential value and benefits of one's social connections; see Putnam, 1995) of individuals or groups. Prior to the widespread availability of the Internet, Putnam (1995) argues that social capital was already in decline throughout Western societies, citing a developing lack of trust and neighbourliness . Although it may still be too early to plot a trend of the effect of the Internet on social capital, initial findings suggest (Mukherjee, 2006; Simms, 2004) that the Internet does increase social capital when used alongside traditional social connections, particularly by decreasing the cost of attaining social capital and strengthening existing ties (Pénard & Poussing, 2010). However, this increase in social capital has also come at the cost of the strength of each newly formed connection, with many formed online, particularly for youth, having only weak ties (Pénard & Poussing, 2010). Furthermore, the majority of online communication is between people located within close enough geographical proximity to engage on a physical level, and those who do use the internet to communicate over longer distances tend to use the Internet more than traditional channels for social contact (Barry, Anabel Quan, James, & Keith, 2001). This factor was identified by Sue, who asserted that on its own, the Internet "does not provide social nourishment", and as discussed by Castells (2000), this level of network connectedness can induce feelings of loneliness and isolation. Therefore, I make the following proposition.

**Proposition #4: Social media supplement traditional social interaction but cannot absolutely replace face-to-face contact in a social movement.**

This presents a dilemma for new social movements burgeoning through the Internet and social media. How indeed can a movement, whose primary mode of communication and engagement with supporters is online, hope to create strong ties to create active

participation, in the face of technologies that do not directly support the creation of strong ties? A consistent theme that has emerged throughout this research is the incredible importance of leadership to social movements: that is, any social movement, and particularly those that operate in the digital space. Although all three participants had a different take on the mode and application of leadership, all three independently discussed it as being important. Suzie, who arguably had the closest relationship with the core running of the physical protest, is a strong believer in the leaderless nature that *Occupy* portrayed and that leadership was successfully decentralised to all of the protesters. Aaron, on the other hand, believed that this ideology created a lot of dissent and jealousy between those who were looked up to and those who believed in 'leaderlessness', which ultimately led to the collapse of the movement through pressure from authorities. Sue concluded also that the apparent lack of leadership contributed heavily to the end of the movement. However, she believed this was through a lack of strategic direction and the failure to set objectives. Leadership was thus identified as important for social movements, as they do provide such direction (Morris & Staggenborg, 2007) and mobilise previously inactive people into action (Gusfield, 1966). That is, to phrase in resource mobilisation terms, they must transform movement adherents into constituents in order to increase the number of resources at the disposal of the movement (McCarthy & Zald, 1977). I therefore propose:

**Proposition #5: Strong leadership is required to transform online passive supporters into active supporters.**

Although I have discussed leadership here briefly, in the context of mobilising supporters into action, its other facets with the movement (namely leadership style and the provision of structure) are discussed more thoroughly in the next two themes, Diverse Leadership and Unstructured Movements.

## 6.3 Diverse Leadership

The concepts of leadership and change and their relationship are well-researched ones (see Bass, 1990; Kotter, 2007; Stace & Dunphy, 1988 among others), which has enabled us to understand good practice for each, particularly in organisational settings. Though exactly how leadership is formed, or what definitive traits defines a good leader are still as yet not well understood (Conger & Kanungo, 1998). As discussed, the *Occupy* movement did not have a definitive leadership structure and was centred on the vision of being completely leaderless with a 'flat' structure. Suzie suggested that the decision to be leaderless, quite apart from trying to "escape the capitalistic structure of corporations", was formed on the inherent difficulty of one or a few people representing such a diverse group of people. Indeed, one of the most challenging obstacles for single or small groups of leaders is to successfully engage, and satisfy, groups of people who are culturally diverse (Grisham & Walker, 2008). Sue, on the other hand, whilst acknowledging this point, believes that "leadership does not have to be from a bombastic, arrogant, charismatic man or woman... You could have a group of ten, and have ten leaders in it; every single person leading, but leading a different piece of the work... it's not saying that it's about one leader dominating everything, but it is about acknowledging the role that a leader takes". That is, there is benefit from having a team of leaders at all levels of the organisation (or movement) in order to engage the widest group of people (Fitzsimmons & Kirby, 2012; Hill, 2010). Indeed this is perhaps particularly true in an environment of change (in the case of a social movement, it is the change agent), where individuals must be engaged on many levels, including cognitively and emotionally (Smollan, 2006).

This is true at a deep cognitive level where the leader and the followers must have similar cognitive styles in order to reduce resistance to change (Mullany, 2008), further

necessitating the need for more than one leader. This is true of all systems, and that in the face of threat, any system, organic or synthetic, must have more variety at its disposal (in this case diverse leaders) than its threats, such as agents of the state or counter-movements, has (Ashby, 1958). However, such variety need not come from 'official' channels, and as Sue pointed out, "leadership need only be doing a job". Informal leadership is also not a new concept, however, it is often overlooked by groups and organisations as being useful (Peters & O'Connor, 2001). In fact, informal (or emergent) leaders may be able to better support groups who are only newly formed than formal leaders (Pescosolido, 2001). Unlike traditional leaders, who are either appointed or elected to a position of authority, which is often discriminated by gender and other demographics (Appelbaum & Shapiro, 1993), informal leaders emerge from a group as individuals with influence (Downey, Parslow, & Smart, 2011) and often in response to negatively perceived authoritative leadership (Lewin, Lippitt, & White, 1939). As such, it is their aim to create loyalty within the group exclusively to ensure maximum support (Jasper, 2011).

Leaders emerging in this fashion do not require the recruitment or training process of formal leaders, as they have already achieved the respect and following of their peers (Peters & O'Connor, 2001). This may present a distinct advantage for social movements which do not have the resources at their disposal to engage formal leaders (although McCarthy & Zald, 1977 would argue that it is still necessary to engage social elites). Nevertheless, this research has found that not only is leadership itself essential to a social movement, but in the case where the support base is broad (as is the case online), the leaders must be equally diverse in backgrounds and styles.

**Proposition #6: Multiple diverse leadership styles are required to support culturally diverse social movements that operate online.**

Notwithstanding the need for leadership to mobilise people into action, in order to sustain a movement for any period of time, leadership is required to guide the process for participants to conceive of and agree on a set of shared goals (Morris & Staggenborg, 2007). This was found in the *Occupy Auckland* movement, with Sue suggesting that "the inherent contradictions and problems with... an ongoing action that was leaderless... [meant that] it had no clear goals... it just doesn't work". Whether or not this was the singular issue that led to the non-formation of goals remains to be seen; however, it remains an essential component nonetheless.

**Proposition #7: Strong leadership is necessary to facilitate the creation of shared goals in diverse social movements that operate online.**

Furthermore, I found that in order to gain public support for a movement, it is necessary to have clear goals to communicate, and identifiable leaders to communicate them. Both Suzie and Aaron identified an issue with the public's understanding of the protest, with Suzie noting that there was scarce mainstream media coverage and Aaron suggesting that there was a general belief that the grievance was "poor people wanting to take the rich people's money". However, it perhaps cannot be reasonably expected of a bystander to recognise the purpose and intentions of a movement if even within itself it lacks consensus on what the goals are. As discussed, it is the role of a leader to facilitate the creation of these goals (Morris & Staggenborg, 2007), but it is equally their responsibility to frame these goals for the public to understand (Benford & Snow, 2000). It was also found that the mainstream media were ascribing the title of 'spokesperson' to any supporter that it interviewed (Gitlin, 1980) if the spokespeople were not defined by the movement. Naturally, as these people where neither elected nor appointed by the movement to represent it, *and* the movement had been unsuccessful at creating shared goals, they were

prone to represent their own personal biases. According to Sue, the lack of specified job roles meant that the spokespeople, acting as leaders, where not personally accountable, often leading to an abuse of their position (Bateman, 2009). As noted by Aaron, the disputes that resulted were played out in public, which was heavily criticised by bystanders and the general public (Kelly & Kelly, 2011). On the other hand, such movements and SMOs which are reliant on diverse leadership (as discussed) to create goals, if used effectively, are seen to be more professional and effective than those with limited diversity (Ganz, 2000). This outlines the need for effective leadership to frame protests to the public.

**Proposition #8: Public opinion of social movements that use non-traditional media is shaped by the effectiveness of its leadership and the clarity of its goals.**

However, leadership in isolation does not predicate the successfulness of a protest coming together as a cohesive movement. Even a strong leader may not be effective in an environment of low structure and accountability, as I shall discuss in my final theme.

## 6.4 Unstructured Movements

Freeman (1972) discussed her experiences in the women's liberation movement, which had famously rejected and denied the concepts of leadership and organisational structure. She observes how such a stance, taken against the inequalities of the workforce, had stunted the progression of the movement by limiting it to the stages of mere informal discussion. Indeed in a system without formal structure, informal and unaccountable structures will emerge. This "tyranny of structurelessness", now a term in its own right, is a core theme of my findings, emerging directly from the interviews. When asked about the structure of the *Occupy* movement, Sue asked me if I had read Freeman's essay and drew a number of parallels between the two movements.

As already discussed, the *Occupy* movement also rejected leadership structures in an attempt to decentralise and distribute power out to all participants. This inexorably led to disputes for power, misbehaviour and public disagreements, as found by Aaron in his experiences of the movement. The idea of leaderlessness had become so ingrained in the movement itself, that obscure, and perhaps irrational, steps were taken to uphold it (Freeman, 1972). Such examples include the opening of the membership for each working group (such as the media team) to anyone who wanted to take part, without prejudice or suitability assessment. (This was particularly problematic for the media team who needed savvy people to engage online supporters, as previously discussed.) Furthermore, when disputes over shared resources arose, arbitration teams were assembled from volunteers, again with no selection criteria. As noted by Freeman (1972), "[if] the movement continues to deliberately not select who shall exercise power, it does not thereby abolish power...[all] it does is abdicate the right to demand that those who do exercise power and influence be responsible for it" (p. 6). That is, it fails to select the right leaders for the right roles that can be held accountable for their actions. A further example of this within the *Occupy Auckland* movement was a lack of guidance and structure for how the live-streaming of events should be conducted and captured. Aaron claimed that there were times when the cameramen would leave the stream running and take it with them as they collected items from their car. Although one might argue that there is an element of common sense (or lack thereof) in such situations, research has shown that in any given social situation, we need some degree of structure, be it self-imposed or otherwise (Neuberg & Newsom, 1993). It is nevertheless important for any social movement to strike a balance between its structure and the power of individual agency (Darlington, 2012) in order to provide guidance to act within the movement's frame whilst still allowing personal expression.

**Proposition #9: Structure is required in a social movement to provide a frame for participants, particularly those online, to operate within.**

As discussed, both effective leadership and clear structures are required to frame protests, gain public support, form shared goals and make social change. Indeed, the concept of technological determinism suggests that the Internet on its own is transformative of society and the way we organise ourselves (Golding, 2000). Whilst this may be true to an extent, it is perhaps still too early to predict how such connectedness will change society, as it still has a considerable path ahead of it before it reaches maturity in a connected paradigm. However, what I can surmise, both from this research and from other recent social movements, is that although the Internet is having a profound change on the way we connect socially, it is impossible to separate the technology from society (Castells, 2000). If this is the case, then technology and the Internet are not, on their own, an agent for change. As aptly put by Sue, without the aid of structure, leadership and physical interaction, "it [interaction on social media] doesn't necessarily go anywhere", that is, there were little or no identifiable social changes in response to the online movement. She went further to say, "it's just a tool... it's not a god in itself to be worshiped... it's not something that will free us, or lead us into utopia... it's not going to take us anywhere... it's the people and how we use it which gives it any value". As such, this leads me to my final proposition for this research, which I argue is the most fundamental in terms of answering my research problem and the implications for social movements.

**Proposition #10: Social media, in isolation, have limited ability to affect social and political change.**

# 7 Conclusion

The aim of this research was to understand how technologies, and in particular NICTs, are affecting the process that social movements undertake to mobilise their supporters around one or more shared goals. It can be said that the findings were mixed, if not enlightening, and highlights that the dichotomies of technological and social determinism are in fact too simplistic. Indeed, it is not possible to classify the social use of technology, such as social media, and social movements with significant online presence, as either bad or good, neither is it possible to commit as to whether it negatively or positively affected social movement. Suffice it to say that the rise of NICTs, the network society and subsequent social movements' online presence has presented a plethora of new opportunities for creating social change. Once social participants were limited to street protests with people from their local or regional area, or if they were lucky, they may fetch some attention in a news report. Now, the Internet has challenged these long-held boundaries of geographical distance and physical engagement, opening up social action to a world of billions of potential activists and agents of social change. Equally, however, it has presented new challenges for sociology and social movement theory. How does a social movement reconcile the potentially millions of individual voices and opinions? How to generate a semblance of order and direction whilst still allowing individual freedom of expression?

However, this research did not set out to answer those questions, but to merely focus on how social movements adapted to the technology's influence on social action. As such, my research problem was to understand the role of technology in the process of converging different ideas in spontaneously formed social movements. This thesis serves to

discuss this in full, and to provide an answer, at least in part, to this problem. I believe that my findings have accurately captured the views and experiences of the participants, my own observations, and the observations of the mainstream media. This has been done without sacrificing the ability to theoretically generalise with too low, or too high, a level of abstraction from the findings. In this chapter, I shall finally summarise the findings in this thesis, discuss the limitations of those findings and what implications they will have for future research.

## 7.1 Implications for Social Movements

The findings in the research had four emergent themes: Technological Skills, Passive Participation, Diverse Leadership, and Unstructured Movements. Through interviews with participants, review of the mainstream and non-traditional media, and my own participation in the protests, I observed that a high level of technological savvy was required in order to operate within the digital space. Not only were movement supporters required to be information literate in order to access the discussions happening on fora, social networks and through live streamed events, but people with advanced knowledge were necessary to oversee and moderate these activities. In the absence of such expertise, there were commonly issues with supporter engagement in discussions, ineffective communication, and in some cases, disputes over how online activities should be conducted. What was a particularly challenging issue for the movement was to mediate the environments which had considerable numbers of contributors, such as General Assemblies and online for a, to try and encompass as many individual views as possible. However, as was noted by the participants, in the event that this was not approached effectively, it was often the people from minority groups (with minority views) whose views were most

eschewed. It is likely that this had an impact on the movement's ability to mobilise these minority groups, as they may have felt marginalised, however unintentionally, which may have included potential leaders' of such groups being similarly overlooked.

These un-mobilised groups were often loosely connected to the movement through weak ties and only very passive participation. A prevalent example of such weak connections to the *Occupy* movement was through a new phenomenon called 'clicktivism', which allows backers to indicate support for individual events, announcements and ideas by clicking the 'like' button on Facebook or equivalent. The challenge with this form of passive support is that even if something has obtained a considerable number of clicks or 'likes' (and ultimate virality on the Net), that does not necessarily produce a real world change. This is, however, why the Internet and social media are useful for information dissemination, because they are able to connect people through weak ties to share ideas and grievances. Nevertheless, in order to create the quality of connections required for collective action, traditional forms of social contact, such as face-to-face meetings, are still required. Online interactions do indeed supplement traditional ones, and have been shown to be very useful to social movements for quickly creating a multitude of weak ties to increase social capital. Therefore, the challenge for any social movement aspiring to create social change through online action is to engage those would-be clicktivists into stronger ties with the movement, and mobilising them into physical action.

In order for a movement to engage its supporters, it requires effective leaders who are able to relate to those people who they are mobilising into action. This may be contentious for a movement like *Occupy* which means to unite a diverse range of people, rather than a particular demographic. Indeed, a factor for *Occupy*'s decision to be 'leaderless' was that no one person could represent such a diverse group. This research has

found that to be the case, which makes leadership teams with a high level of diversity necessary for diverse movements. Only once an effective leadership structure is established, is a movement able to focus on creating shared goals with the guidance and mediation of these leaders. Failure to establish effective leadership, in the case of *Occupy*, resulted in the eventual failure to create shared goals and frame the movement. In turn, this was problematic for conveying its message, as there was not a single united direction, leaving the process of public image to individual bias. In order to gain public support, a clear and well defined set of goals are required, and these should be framed by the leaders of the movement. Also, leaders must be able to quickly set guidelines and a simple structure for movement supporters to follow in order to support the sharing of goals and a united direction.

However, although technology has been a useful tool for connecting people who would otherwise be unable to connect with each other, it has not provided the absolute conduit to social change that technological determinism has predicted. Once the novelty of this new form of connectedness, provided by weak ties, has worn off, the social changes driven by movements based in the digital space are minimal. The double-edged sword of new technologies is becoming more apparent, as a dichotomy of increasing social connections by weakening individual ties emerges. The Internet is effective for distributing information about a cause, and may also serve to strengthen existing social ties between supporters. However, in additional to that in the digital space, collective action in the physical space is still presently necessary to create social change in the real world.

## 7.2 Limitations

Although this thesis aims to answer the research problem in a theoretically generalised way, it focuses solely on one social movement in one country. The *Occupy* movement was not unique to New Zealand, nor was it the only example of online social movements in recent history. The scope of this research was limited to New Zealand social movements and as such may not be reflective of all kinds of online social movements, or indeed those emerging in non-Western countries. As the recent movements in the Middle East, such as in Egypt and Libya have shown it is possible to create social movements which have significant outcomes through social media and mobilise them to create revolutionary change. While it may be possible to theorise as to why these movements have differences from those studied in this thesis, that is a matter for further research and does not fit within the scope of this research.

## 7.3 Further Research

The emergent themes from this research warrant further research in their wider contexts. Leadership of social movements with significant online presence is a particular challenge that needs further study to enable us to understand how this takes place and the impact that it has on the success or failure of a movement. This research has demonstrated the need for strong leadership, a well-researched topic in organisational theory, but whether or not this is transferable to the digital space remains unknown. The Internet has shifted the locus of participation as well as the mode of communication and engagement in social movements. Where they may have once been limited to physical street protests and town hall meetings, engagement is now taking place on digital highways and virtual town halls. In the absence of face-to-face contact, once understood to be absolutely necessary for social

cohesion, how a leader needs to engage people into social and political action in the digital space requires further investigation and research. Even if successful, how the digital action can be transformed into change in the real world remains unknown, and is a viable field for further research. These questions cannot yet be answered but may be crucial for our ongoing engagement in both the digital and physical spaces.

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