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Mobile phone technology: offering an updated approach to understanding the operations of a social movement utilising the TAC as a case study.

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SCHROB033

A dissertation submitted in *partial fulfilment* of the requirements for the award of the degree of Master of Social Sciences in Political Studies

Faculty of the Humanities

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COMPULSORY DECLARATION

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Abstract

Social movements are facing new challenges and strategies for organisation as they enter the 21st Century. There are a growing number of cases where social movements have used mobile phone technology as a means for organising and recruiting. Subsequent studies relating to this have largely been conducted in developed countries. However, the context and implementation of such technology differs greatly for developing countries.

Social movement theory has constantly been updated, with prominent social movement theorist Charles Tilly at the forefront. Tilly notes that social movements are changing and there is a need to reassess the theoretical framework that helps to explain how they operate. The framework developed by McAdam McCarthy and Zald, which categorises the operations of a social movement as the political opportunities, mobilising structures, and framing processes can be used to address this.

This dissertation subsequently looks at the impact that mobile phone technology has for the political opportunities, mobilising structures and framing processes of a typical social movement in a developing country. The South African social movement, Treatment Action Campaign (TAC), acts as a key case study for this area of research. The important technological assistance provided by the NGO, Cell-Life provides evidence into how this technology is able to change the operations of a social movement. Applying the theory to case study method this dissertation argues that there is a need to update the theoretical framework developed by McAdam et al, to

include mobile phone technology as a variable that affects these areas of operation for a social movement.

Through quantitative and qualitative evidence provided in the form of a survey and interview with key members of the TAC and Cell-Life, this dissertation shows that whilst still limited in its current implementation, mobile phone technology offers numerous opportunities for the TAC to improve their political opportunities, mobilising structures and framing processes. Subsequently the TAC acts as a key case study for explaining mobile phone technology's greater impact for social movements throughout developing countries.

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Table of Contents

Abstract	2
<u>Table of Contents.....</u>	4
Chapter 1: Introduction.....	6
1.1 Choice of Topic.....	6
1.2 Problem Statement	7
1.3 Research Questions.....	10
1.4 Outline	10
1.5 Methodology.....	11
1.6 Limitations.....	14
Chapter 2: Literature Review.....	16
2.1 Introduction	16
2.2 North-South Divide and Technological Determinism.....	16
2.3 Innovation and Entrepreneurship	18
2.4 Assessing the Impact	21
2.5 Conclusion	23
Chapter 3: Social Movement Theory	25
3.1 Background.....	25
3.2 Theoretical Framework.....	27
3.2.1 Political Opportunity.....	28
3.2.2 Mobilising Structures.....	31
3.2.3 Framing Processes	33
3.3 Conclusion	34
Chapter 4: Treatment Action Campaign and Cell-Life.....	36
4.1 Introduction	36
4.2 Treatment Action Campaign	36
4.2.1 History	36
4.2.2 Structure and strategy of the TAC.....	38
4.2.3 Political Opportunity, Mobilising Structures and Framing Processes.....	39
4.2.4 Problematising the TAC as a ‘Social Movement’	42
4.2.5 TAC and Mobile Phone Technology.....	44
4.3 Cell-Life	45

4.3.1 History	45
4.3.2 Strategy and Implementation	46
4.3.3 Cell-Life Research Findings.....	50
4.4 Theoretical Framework.....	51
4.4.1 Political Opportunities.....	51
4.4.2 Mobilising Structures.....	54
4.4.3 Framing Processes	56
4.5 Conclusion	58
Chapter 5: Effect of Mobile Phone Technology on the Treatment Action Campaign	61
5.1 Introduction	61
5.2 Returning to the research questions	61
5.3 Theoretical Framework:	62
5.3.1 Political Opportunities.....	62
5.3.2 Mobilising Structures.....	63
5.3.3 Framing Processes	65
5.4 Conclusion	66
Chapter 6: Conclusion.....	69
6.1 Further Research	71
Bibliography	72

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Choice of Topic

This dissertation aims to look at how social movements utilise mobile phone technology in their operations, determining this technology's impact. Through the social movement framework developed by McAdam, McCarthy and Zald (1996), the research will assess the effects of mobile phones on movement's political opportunities, mobilising structures and framing processes. Ultimately the research aims to update this framework to include mobile phone technology as a variable that contributes towards these areas of a social movement.

Previous studies (Wasserman, 2006; Loudon, 2010) have analysed the use of Information Communication Technology's (ICT) by social movements and subsequently these are used as an entry point for this dissertation's more specific focus into mobile phone technology. A case study of the prominent South African social movement organisation, the Treatment Action Campaign (TAC) which campaigns for the rights of people living with HIV/AIDS in South Africa will be used to describe the processes put in place with regards to mobile technology in its campaigns. The main focus of the case study will be an investigation of the NGO Cell-Life specifically the 'HIV Prevention' programme. Cell-Life is a unique organisation in terms of its operations. Cell-Life offers mobile phone technology platforms for social movements such as the TAC. The current work done by this organisation is therefore key to the research conducted in this dissertation. The subsequent objective will be to highlight how mobile technology may be utilised within an African context to assist to further the goals of social movements and increase political participation.

Whilst findings are expected to show that mobile phones do not form a replacement for more traditional forms of political participation that may include face-to-face interaction, the technology serves an important role in the operations of social movements. The case study of the TAC and Cell-Life will show how mobile phones serve as a means to further the goals of the TAC, especially with regards to its information and communications activity.

1.2 Problem Statement

The role of mobile phone technology represents a growing area of research with respect to its implications for the operations of social movements (Wasserman, 2010; Loudon, 2009). However the exact role that this technology serves and to what extent it offers opportunities for improved political opportunity, mobilising structures and framing processes within a social movement still remains to be determined. Research, using a specific South African case study, will assist in furthering understanding of how this technology may be used by movements within an African context.

Social Movement scholar Charles Tilly (2004) argues that with the changing form of media, the level of symmetry differs. Thus in other words whilst more traditional forms such as print media, radio and television offer little feedback from recipients, telephones and the Internet in contrast offer far greater levels of symmetry between the ‘senders and receivers’ of social movements. However, an important point that Tilly makes is that ‘technological determinism’ should be avoided. The innovation of new communications media does not single-handedly change the character of social movements. Nonetheless, as communication develops its significance for social movements cannot be ignored. Tilly cites an example of a social movement in Manila, which mobilised followers through the use of mobile phone text messaging. Within an hour of initiating, tens of thousands arrived to protest for the removal of president, Ferdinand Marcos. Thus, having considered this example, Tilly poses the question, “Would the twenty-first century finally bring social movements to the long-dreaded culmination of People Power across the world?”¹

The advent of new technologies such as mobile telephone communication and the Internet has had the effect of creating “smart mobs”. Technology analyst Howard Rheingold (2003), citing the case of the Philippines, coins the phrase to describe people who are able to coordinate actions without even knowing each other. Tilly argues that significant changes are indeed occurring in the twenty-first century but raises four noteworthy points of objection. Firstly to avoid technological determinism,

¹ Tilly, C., 2004. *Social Movements, 1768-2004*, Paradigm Publishers: London p.2

as many new features in social movements may result from alterations in social and political contexts rather than through technological innovation. The second ‘warning’ is that, similar to nineteenth and twentieth century communications, new forms of communication innovation still operate in a two-sided way. In other words, from one side it may lower the costs of coordination among activists already connected with one another. On the other hand however, it may exclude even more definitively those who lack access to new communication means, thus further entrenching communication inequality. The third point being, social movements still relies on local, regional and national forms of organisation that have prevailed for over a century. Finally, it is important to avoid the argument that globalisation has completely dominated the social movement scene. The third point raised by Tilly applies directly to the case study of the TAC in terms of how it currently communicates with the majority of its members.

The challenge when investigating the impact of mobile phones is as Ekine (2010: x) notes, the misleading statistics concerning mobile phone use in Africa, which may not necessarily provide insight into how mobile phones are actually used. As such, discourses on mobile phones may make an interpretative leap from statistical information to speculation about the impact of mobile phones on democracy and development. Wasserman subsequently describes this as a jump from “access to effect”, which ignores usage of phones in everyday life. This may lead to either an over-optimistic expectation regarding the potential impact of mobile phones or a moral panic about their detrimental influence.

Another issue relates to where the focus on mobile phones lies, with respect to whether they should be viewed as tools rather than on the people using them. In the situation where the main focus is mobile phone technology, and its effect on society that may be quantitatively measured and related to access rates, Wasserman (2010) warns, “the danger of technological determinism lurks”. In response to this Manji (2008) argues that instead of looking at mobile phones social effects, focus should be given to the shift in power relations into which they are introduced. Thus instead of focusing on the direct effects that mobile phone technology is having on societies in Africa, whether this may be in a positive or negative light, a focus should rather be made on turning attention to the ways in which such technologies may be

“contextualised and domesticated by African users” (Wasserman, 2010). Ling (2004) comments how new technologies such as the mobile phone provide opportunities and challenges to democratic life in Africa. However, what is important to note is that these technologies are essentially adopted by people in varied African contexts, which may differ greatly from contexts in the developed world. Thus Ling (2004: 23) calls for a “picture of mobile phones in Africa that are rich, textured and varied.”

Subsequently in creating a dichotomy of approaches to the study of mobile phone technology one can separate current approaches as follows. The technology-centred model is concerned with what happens to people when mobile phones are used to transmit information to them and the context-centred model, which is rather concerned with what happens to the technology when it is appropriated and adapted by people (Wasserman, 2010).

A solution to this problem of locating an appropriate approach to understanding the significance of mobile phone technology may lie within the domestication approach as outlined by Ling (2004). This approach focuses on the “the adoption, adaption and integration of technology in everyday life as an on-going process of negotiation” (2004: 26). What remains a challenge is to subsequently link how the domestication of mobile phones within a specific micro context to a more broader explanation for how this technology is shaping the way in which democratic processes and the intended actions of social movements takes place. Wasserman (2010) comments on this noting that possibly trying to find a connection between popular media platforms, everyday life and political participation, “relies on a too rigid a separation of the political and the seemingly mundane, between domestic participation and popular culture, between civic and social identities.” Instead, in trying to understand the manner in which mobile phones operate as Goggin (2006) suggests, we must understand that such technology is interesting when considering its social and cultural context due to the fact that it breaks down the very boundaries between the private and the public (2006:4).

This point made by Goggin has interesting implications for the way we understand mobile phone technology and subsequently the way we investigate its impact on social movements. Deuze, Blank and Spears (2009) go as far as stating that Africans

are increasingly moving from existing with media, to existing within the media thanks to mobile phones. Goggin (2006) goes as far as to state that mobile phones transcend being merely technological tools that may be studied separately from broader social and political processes but rather “cultural technologies that play an indispensable role in the everyday lives of consumers” (2006:2). This dissertation seeks to confirm this point raised by Goggin.

1.3 Research Questions

The research questions that this dissertation subsequently address is whether the innovation of mobile phone technology offers an updated approach to understanding the political opportunities, mobilising structures and framing processes of a social movement? Through investigation of a South African social movement, the Treatment Action Campaign and its relationship with partner NGO Cell-Life, how does mobile phone technology contribute to the political opportunities, mobilising structures and framing processes of this social movement?

1.4 Outline

This dissertation is separated into six sections. The current section serves as an introduction to the dissertation. This section introduces the research questions, the choice of topic, problems that are faced in addressing this area of research and finally the expected contribution that the research is going to make to the field of social movement theory. Section two forms the literature analysis. This section reviews the literature on the role mobile phones play for social movements. This section explains the established views surrounding the significance that mobile phone technology holds for social movements. Section three establishes the theoretical framework that will be applied to the case study. This section introduces social movement theory as explained by prominent theorist Charles Tilly. The framework created by McAdam, McCarthy and Zald to explain how social movements operate is also introduced. The framework creates three categories namely political opportunities, mobilising structures and framing processes, which can be used to assess how social movements operate and subsequently the contribution made by mobile phone technology. Section four is the case study. This section looks at the Treatment Action Campaign and

establishes the context in which the movement was formed and provides a backdrop to its partnership with NGO, Cell-Life. This section continues by examining Cell-Life through the findings of research conducted into the role mobile phones have for social movements. Using information provided by a survey conducted by Cell-Life, as well as an interview with the managing director of the organisation, Peter Benjamin, this section looks at how mobile phones assist the social movement under the categories established by the theoretical framework. Section five looks at the TAC and mobile phone technology. Using the findings and referring back to the research questions this section shows how mobile phone technology offers a new approach to the way we understand the traditional means for understanding how the TAC operates. The sixth and final section is the conclusion. This section discusses the contribution of the research findings and suggests future areas for research.

1.5 Methodology

The main method of this dissertation will be the application of case study to theory. George and Bennet (2005) elaborate on the theory-case study method, explaining the contribution that this method offers for theory development. The authors note that case studies can test deductive theories and suggest new variables that need to be incorporated². In the case of this dissertation it is hoped that the case study of the TAC, and its use of mobile phone technology, will lead to incorporating a new variable into social movement theory.

George and Bennet continue that case studies may contribute to the refinement of contingent generalisations on the conditions under which causal paths occur, thus leading to more comprehensive theory. This will apply to the way that we view the contribution made by mobile phone technology for social movements. The 'causal paths' being the framework identified by McAdam, namely political opportunity, mobilising structures and framing processes. Commenting on theory development and generalising across types, the authors note that generally the specification of a new concept, variable, or theory regarding a causal mechanism that affects one case, probably affects more than one case, and possibly even all instances of a

² George, A., Bennet, A., 2005. *Case Study and Theory Development in the Social Sciences*, Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs: Harvard. p.111

phenomenon³. Continuing they note, “when a deviant case leads to the specification of a new theory, the researcher may be able to generalise about how the newly identified mechanism may play out in different contexts”⁴. This is significant for this dissertation in terms of how we understand mobile phone technology’s contribution to the broader context of social movements throughout Africa.

Cited in George and Bennet, Eckstein comments on ‘generalising across cases’ noting that “crucial cases” provide definitive evidence for a theory. However, the difficulty remains in defining a “crucial case”. This is defined, by Eckstein, as “one that must closely fit a theory if one is to have confidence in the theory’s validity, or conversely, must not fit equally well with any rule contrary to that proposed.”⁵ This dissertation will note how the case study of the TAC closely fits within social movement theory. However, Eckstein continues that crucial case studies rarely occur in the social world. George and Bennet counter stating, case study researchers must identify cases that are ‘most-likely’ or ‘least-likely’, the important thing being to determine its status. In terms of this dissertation, the TAC is proposed as being a ‘most-likely’ case for fitting within McAdam’s framework. Through the process of identifying the case as ‘most-likely’, George and Bennet note that it will help to “identify which variables in a case may favour alternative theories, and helps the researcher to address systematically whether alternative theories make the same or different predictions on processes and outcomes in a given case.”⁶ Thus, in terms of this dissertation, the case of the TAC will be used to identify how the variable of mobile phone technology may offer an alternative theory in terms of contributing towards the framework established by McAdam.

The domestication model offers a useful approach to identifying the significance of mobile phone use by society. It avoids assigning a deterministic role to either technology or society, rather viewing the two as interacting on a daily basis. Thus, through viewing this interaction one can establish how mobile phones are “imagined, appropriated, objectified, incorporated and converted by their users” (Ling, 2004: 28).

³ Ibid. p.114

⁴ Ibid. p.115

⁵ Ibid. p.120

⁶ Ibid. p.121

This is important from the point of view that it avoids the overarching claims often associated with technologically determinist models. The problem that this model may face as Wasserman (2010) notes is, in conducting such a micro-level analysis of a society, the greater relationships between technology and the social and cultural identity that may be formed in such interaction with mobile phones from an African perspective may be missed. However, Wasserman offers the following counter:

“The Challenge to understand the significance of mobile telephones for African democracies, including alternative/activist politics and processes of development and social change, is to explore how these broader discourse are related to everyday practices.” (Wasserman, 2010)

Through the process of drawing such links, it is possible to establish the significance that mobile phones have on the day-to-day operations of social movements, instead of trying to understand the somewhat intangible impact that such technology may have for broader processes such as political participation. Subsequently, this approach will be implemented when assessing case study material regarding the operations of the TAC and how it has used mobile phone technology.

The first major source used is a study conducted by members of partner NGO to the TAC, Cell-Life. The report conducted by Dr Donald Skinner for the ‘Research on Health and Society’ Faculty of Health Sciences of Stellenbosch University will be used. This source is useful as it was conducted amongst five TAC branches around Cape Town. The main aims of the study were to identify current levels of usage of cell phones, knowledge of cell phone technology and attitudes toward cell phone usage. The study utilises a combination of qualitative interviews and a survey conducted amongst TAC staff and members⁷. The importance of this source is that it fits in with the domestication model mentioned previously. Through the use of this report, which offers insight into mobile phone use amongst ordinary society, this source helps to draw conclusions regarding mobile phone technology’s impact. This source offers insight into what Wasserman describes as relating, “broader discourse to... everyday practices.”

⁷ Skinner, D. 2009. *Evaluation for Cell Phone for Life for Cell-Life Baseline Report*, Research on Health and Society. Available: <http://www.comminit.com/hiv-aids/node/321138> [online: 23 August 2011p.3

The second major source used was an interview with head of NGO Cell-Life, Peter Benjamin. Peter Benjamin is responsible for running the organisation responsible for assisting the TAC in terms of all its mobile phone operations including managing its membership database. He stands as one of the most knowledgeable individuals in terms of the area of mobile phone technology's many uses for social movements. As well as being a member of the TAC, Benjamin has unique insight into the operations of the TAC and how mobile phone technology offers improved opportunities for this social movement. As such, the interview consisted of questions relating to the nature of the partnership between Cell-Life and the TAC, the TAC's current and future mobile phone usage and what mobile phone technology offers the TAC in terms of its operations.

In order to understand how social movements utilise mobile phone technology it is important to conceptualise this technology. Rheingold (2003) offers a useful typology with respect to 'new media technologies' and their use by social movements. Rheingold (2003) notes that new media technologies are able to "shift the locus of the public sphere from a small number of powerful media owners to entire populations." Within this typology mobile phones can be positioned. Rheingold notes that 'new media technologies' bring about interactive, "many-to-many" communication that provides opportunities as well as problems for activists in three main areas. These areas include:

1. Dissemination of alternative news
2. Creating virtual public spheres
3. Organising collective political action

This typology offers a broad means for understanding the areas in which ICTs and more specifically mobile phones are used by social movements.

1.6 Limitations

The limitations facing this research are with regards to application of this micro-analysis to a broader context. However, as mentioned previously, in offering a micro-lens in which to view this relationship it is possible to establish the significance that mobile phones have on the day-to-day operations of social movements. Another

major limitation with respect to the case study of the TAC was with regards to current implementation of mobile phone technology. At the time of research, the TAC were still largely using mobile phone technology informally and were in the process of implementing strategies and structures created by NGO partner Cell-Life. Due to this being a relatively new area of research there is a limited amount of source material available.

A final limitation is with regards to understanding the TAC as a social movement and subsequently using social movement theory⁸. In an evaluation of the organisation, Boule and Avafia (2005) note that since 2004, the TAC can no longer be described as solely an advocacy organisation but as a service delivery organisation as well⁹. The TAC subsequently combines the functions of both a social movement as well as an NGO in providing a service to its members. The implication of this is that any investigation into the TAC post-2004 will have limitations in using social movement theory. Whilst social movement theory is more applicable to the social movement pre-2004, it may still be used to a limited extent to understand the operations of the movement and for the purposes of this thesis, how mobile phone technology affects those operations.

⁸ See pg.42

⁹ Boule, J. & Avafia, T. 2005. Treatment Action Campaign (TAC) Evaluation. [Online]. Available: www.tac.org.za. [accessed: 14 August 2011]

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

This section reviews the literature on mobile phone technology's role within social movements. It will show how this research area is broadly defined in the literature by two perspectives. The first is the 'north-south divide' and the argument of technological determinism. These perspectives argue that firstly an asymmetry exists between the global north and south in terms of access to technology and that secondly too much weight must not be placed on existing technology as a means for replacing more traditional means of communication and organisation. The second area of literature discussed in this review, looks at domestication and local adaption and entrepreneurship. This focuses more on how technology is being used as a force for change and the impact that it can have for local communities who adapt the technology to their local context. Ultimately this literature review aims to locate this dissertations research question within the existing literature.

2.2 North-South Divide and Technological Determinism

The north-south divide broadly explains the existing disparity that exists between the technologically advanced north, comprising the developed nations and the less advanced developing world of the south. The role of ICTs and specifically mobile phone technology for social movements differs greatly depending on the location of the study. Whilst numerous studies have been conducted with respect to this field abroad, the global north, (Garrett, 2006; Van de Donk, 2004) the contribution of ICTs and mobile phone technology within an African context still remains widely debated (Hahn & Kibora, 2008).

In a keynote address presented at a workshop entitled, 'Mobile phones: the new talking drums of everyday Africa?'¹⁰ Professor Herman Wasserman (2010) notes how

¹⁰ Wasserman. H., 2010. *Mobile phones, popular media and everyday African democracy: transmissions and transgressions*, <http://mobileafricarevisited.files.wordpress.com/2011/02/3a-herman-wasserman-keynote-mobile-phones.pdf> [accessed: 23 May 2011]

consensus has not yet been reached regarding the extent to which mobile phones may facilitate social change. Factors range from the political economy of access to the means in which such technology is utilised by its users in terms of creative adoptions, adaptations and domestication of the technology. Wasserman notes that as such, research into this phenomenon is very much divided between optimists and pessimists regarding its potential.

Much of the literature surrounding mobile phone technology warns of technological determinism. Some argue that such technology may serve to further entrench inequality within society (Etzo & Collender, 2010; Manji, 2008). Thus it could be argued that the penetration of mobile phone technology should not be assumed to be an indicator of high usage or as having a positive effect on the social lives of Africans. Commenting further on this point, Wasserman discusses the utopian claims regarding the potential of mobile phones and ICT in Africa. ICTs were seen as bringing forth a new era for African Democracy. This argument was based on what has been described as ‘technological determinist’ assumptions that the introduction of new technologies will bring about social change and further democratic participation within social movements¹¹. However, providing the major counter-argument to technological determinism, the spread of ICT throughout Africa proved most dissimilar to the situation in the “media-saturated” North, subsequently leading to the current questions facing the study of this area. These questions and the issues which face ICT use as bringing about revolutionary social change, are with regards to “access, inequality, power and quality of information”, as noted by Wasserman¹².

Thus, what emerges from the literature is a need to better understand the context in which mobile phone technology emerges within Africa in terms of its effects for social movements. Issues of high running costs still act as a limiting factor to the capabilities of mobile phones. Thus critics fairly argue that, while mobile phones may be more inclusive than other ICT platforms, such technology may still limit its users

¹¹ Wasserman. H., 2007. Is a New Worldwide Web Possible? An Explorative Comparison of the use of ICTs by two South African Social Movements in *African Studies Review*, vol. 50, no. 1. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20065344>[accessed: 20 May 2011]

¹² Ibid. p. 110

to more passive usage. This is seen in the example of the practice of ‘beeping’ or more locally ‘please call me’ text messages – as a means to communicate. Etzo and Collender (2010), cited in Wasserman, emphasise this point noting, “mobile phones are not social neutral tools, but can entrench or exacerbate unequal gendered or classed power relations”¹³. Wasserman agrees, adding to this point that figures which indicate a high penetration of mobile phones into the market should not automatically be assumed to be an indicator of “high usage”, nor should it lead to claims regarding its positive effect on the social lives of Africans¹⁴. Firoze Manji, Director of African NGO Fahamu, agrees with this sentiment commenting on use of mobile phones as tools. Fahamu focuses on “using emerging technology in support of human rights and social justice”. Manji notes, “It is easy to be romantic about the tools, their potential, and capabilities. The point is to be strategic, and recognise that tools only complement, and do not substitute for, human interaction.”¹⁵

The main argument seen throughout the literature regarding technological determinism is that it is important to note that the situation in the developing south is very different from the north. As such, this section of literature would argue that when considering the effects that mobile phone technology may have for social movements, it is important to not place too much weight on the use of the technology for bringing about a change in the operations of social movements, avoiding claims of technological determinism. The operations of Cell-Life and its focus on harnessing mobile phone networks, described in this dissertation, aims to counter technological determinist claims that may be weighed against the benefits that mobile phone technology may have for the TAC.

2.3 Innovation and Entrepreneurship

The other area of the literature focuses on how mobile phone technology is being creatively adopted and adapted to fit within local contexts of social movements. Hahn and Kibora (2008) describe the introduction of mobile phones to Africa as shaping the

¹³ Etzo and Collender in Wasserman. 2010. p.660

¹⁴ Wasserman. 2007

¹⁵ Manji in Ekine, S. (ed.) 2010. *SMS Uprising: Mobile Activism in Africa*. Oxford: Pambazuka Press. p.67

communication landscape far more rapidly than in Europe¹⁶. As such, they would fall into the category of those who view mobile phone technology as providing a significant impact on social movements and assisting in bringing about social change. The use of mobile phones as tools in political mobilisation and activism has significantly grown in recent years. Notable cases of successful activism conducted through cell phone mobilisation were seen in the Philippines with the toppling of President Joseph Estrada's administration, which came to be commonly known as the People Power II revolution¹⁷. With such events occurring, interest into the effectiveness of this tool have risen recently, with researchers questioning how mobile phones have and can be used in other ways and other places, and to what effect¹⁸?

There is no denying that the introduction of mobile phones in Africa has transformed people's ability to communicate with one another. Whereas developed countries may have had previous networks of communication through landlines, the mobile phone has provided communication where there was previously none¹⁹. In terms of mobile phones however, Wasserman believes that optimism regarding the benefits of this platform are somewhat more justified. He notes that mobiles have been shown to be a far more accessible medium than other ICT platforms such as computers and fixed-line telecommunication²⁰.

Whilst criticisms over mobile phone usage are valid, Etzo and Collender argue that through such limitations, Africa acts as a "crucible for mobile phone innovation and entrepreneurship"²¹. In terms of this, the authors argue that users create interesting and creative means for overcoming limiting financial obstacles. Thus, as mentioned through the use of 'beeping' or 'please call me' texts, users develop codes or protocols, which enables them to interpret these messages²². Ekine (2010) further emphasises this noting, figures regarding subscriber rates for mobile phones in Africa

¹⁶ Hahn, H. P. & Kibora, L. 2008. 'The domestication of the mobile phone: oral society and new ICT in Burkina Faso', *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, vol. 46, no. 1, pp. 87-109

¹⁷ Asuncion-Reed, R. in SMS Uprising. p.56

¹⁸ Ibid. p.57

¹⁹ Ekine. 2010. x

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Etzo & Collender. 2010. p.665

²² Ibid. p.666

does not even fully reflect its true impact, with many people sharing handsets. Continuing, Ekine notes, “Technology in itself does not lead to social change. For change to take place technology needs to be appropriated and rooted in local knowledge. People decide why and how a particular technology will be used and, depending on the political and socio-economic environment in which they live, adapt it accordingly.”²³ Wasserman, citing an example by Smith (2010), discusses how street vendors in Uganda offer mobile phone access on a ‘per-call basis’, even going as far as to allow customers to charge their phones using a car battery. This highlights how African users are able to adapt mobile phone technology ethnographically, which subsequently has implications for its use by social movements. The recent use of ‘please call me’ text messaging as a means to create campaign awareness conducted by Cell-Life is an important example of how mobile phone technology is being locally adapted²⁴.

Having noted the intrinsic role that mobile phones occupy within African society, their more specific role within local politics can be considered. Heller (2009) notes how social inequalities are deeply entrenched within certain areas of the developing world, such as South Africa, and as such citizens have trouble engaging with the state, notably on the level of local government²⁵. Wasserman describes the role of mobile phones and their significance for local politics, especially with how they may contribute to the practices of citizenship. This includes considering the mobile phones role beyond the ‘rational’ aspects of its transmission of political information. Wasserman emphasises a need to consider how mobile phones allow citizens to transgress the rules of ‘good citizenship’ and political practice²⁶. Thus instead of understanding how mobile phones can be used to assist with service delivery and dissemination of information regarding local politics, it can instead allow users to pursue “strategic non-participation”.

²³ Ekine. 2010. X

²⁴ See Chapter 4: Treatment Action Campaign and Cell-Life

²⁵ Heller, P. 2009. Democratic Deepening in India and South Africa. *Journal of Asian and African Studies* 44 (1) pp.123-149.

²⁶ Wasserman. 2010

This type of participation includes using mobile phones for mobilisation of street protests or activism. Kellner (2002), cited in Wasserman, comments on this noting how it has “opened new terrains of political struggle for voices and groups excluded from the mainstream media and thus increases potential for intervention by oppositional groups.”²⁷ This interactivity and ability to participate outside of the traditional forms of political protest has effectively created what Wasserman describes as “alternative public spheres”²⁸. Rheingold (2003) describes this under a set of functions, which he describes as “bringing about interactive many-to-many communication that provides opportunities for activists”. The three areas in which this occurs is through: the dissemination of alternative news; creation of virtual public spheres and the organising of collective political action²⁹. Through these broad categories, the different means in which ICTs and mobile phones are used by social movements is illustrated.

2.4 Assessing the Impact

Having broadly defined the arguments outlined by the literature, the question of how to address this topic within the research questions of this dissertation is required. Wasserman argues that examples of creative adoption and adaptation should be the focus when attempting to answer questions regarding the potential of mobile phones in creating political participation in Africa³⁰. He argues that a merely statistical analysis that looks at figures regarding uptake and use of mobile phones in Africa would not successfully provide insight into how mobile phones are actually used. Sokari Ekine further emphasises this argument noting that figures don’t reveal certain pieces of information such as number of handsets per person or conversely how many people share one handset³¹. Thus what occurs in discourse regarding mobile phones is an interpretive leap from “access figures to speculation about the impact of mobile phones on democracy and development”³². This leap subsequently leads to either the

²⁷ Kellner in Wasserman. 2007. p.182

²⁸ Wasserman. 2007. p.112

²⁹ Rheingold. 2003.

³⁰ Wasserman. 2010

³¹ Ekine. 2010 x

³² Wasserman. 2010

utopian view of the potential impact of mobile phones or alternatively their detrimental impact.

The issue that is faced within the literature and subsequently this dissertation is how to assess mobile phone technology's impact. Wasserman notes that if mobile phones are viewed as tools rather than on the people using them, strong conclusions regarding their impact are inevitable. He notes that in such an instance, where phones are studied as technologies in themselves and their effects on society, the "danger of technological determinism" is present³³. This approach is not uncommon within Africa and Wasserman relates this to the outdated 'communications for development' approach. This approach views technology as a modernising force to be introduced into African settings, rather than turning attention to the ways in which technologies are being contextualised and domesticated by African users³⁴.

Having identified this problem, a solution regarding the most appropriate means to study this area is required. Wasserman notes that whilst mobile phones, as a relatively new technology to Africa, do offer new opportunities and challenges to democratic life in Africa, these technologies are ultimately adopted by people in a varied and heterogeneous context, far removed from contexts of the developed world. Thus what emerges is a need to pursue an approach which offers, as Wasserman describes, "rich, textured, immersive perspectives; not sweeping rhetorical claims about revolutions or counter-revolutions."³⁵ Ekine follows on from this stating that its people at a grassroots level who decide how they can use technology to foster social change and collective action³⁶. Adding to this sentiment, Nyamnjoh notes that Africans and their societies are shaping the technology and thus the idea of appropriation of technology should be the focus. Nymanjoh notes, "society and technology are interdependent and are evolving in a dialectic process of cultural and social appropriation."³⁷ Through this process the technologies acquire different meanings and are used as means of

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ekine. 2010. xi

³⁷ Nyamnjoh, F.B. 1999. Africa and the information superhighway: The need for mitigated euphoria. *Ecquid Novi* 20(1). p.12

social change and development, in the process being changed and leading to the emergence of a mobile phone culture³⁸.

It is this concept of mobile phone culture, which provides the most suitable means for understanding the impact of mobile phones. Ling identifies this and prescribes the “domestication approach”, as ‘the most suitable framework within which to think of the role of mobile phones in everyday democratic politics in Africa.’³⁹ Wasserman takes note of this approach stating that mobile phones are interesting in terms of their social and cultural context. They are able to break down and redraw the lines between the private and the public. This basically means that increasingly mobile phones move beyond being external to people’s lives but rather integrated into them⁴⁰. It is this idea, which Nyamnjoh (2009) describes as transgressing “pre-existing boundaries and limitations.”⁴¹ Thus mobile phones represent, as Wasserman describes, “cultural technologies” that we need to subsequently investigate with respect to how they fit in with the greater cultural settings⁴².

2.5 Conclusion

The literature surrounding mobile phone technology and its use by social movements can be divided into two categories, namely technological determinism and creative adoption and adaptation. This literature review has subsequently attempted to locate the research question within this literature and provide a suitable context from which the research for this dissertation may be conducted. Having reviewed the literature it is evident that there is a danger of over-emphasising the importance of mobile phone technology’s role within social movements. Thus, when considering this dissertation’s research question, the case study that will be used to test social movement theory will need to take into consideration suggestions made by the literature to avoid falling in to the trap of technological determinism. The literature argues that studies in this research area should not rely on merely statistical evidence but rather use local

³⁸ Ibid. p.13

³⁹ Ling, R. 2004. *The Mobile Connection: The Cell Phone’s Impact on Society*. San Francisco: Morgan Kaufman p.26

⁴⁰ Wasserman. 2010

⁴¹ Nyamnjoh. 1999

⁴² Wasserman. 2010

immersive perspectives. As such, this dissertation shall root its research within qualitative as well as quantitative data in order to avoid this problem, as Wasserman warns, “where mobile phones are viewed as tools rather than on the people using them, strong conclusions regarding their impact are inevitable.”⁴³ Thus, a strong focus is made on the users of mobile phone technology in this dissertation.

University of Cape Town

⁴³ Wasserman. 2010.

Chapter 3: Social Movement Theory

This section introduces social movement theory and the theoretical framework that may be used to investigate the use of mobile phone technology by social movements. This section will begin by broadly discussing social movement theory, as outlined by theorist Charles Tilly. The theoretical framework developed by McAdam, McCarthy and Zald will be explained in order to further test its relevance against the case study of the Treatment Action Campaign, and this movement's use of mobile phone technology.

3.1 Background

The term 'social movement' was first introduced as a concept in 1959, referring to scholarly discussions of popular political striving by German sociologist Lorenz von Stein⁴⁴. Initially the term was introduced to describe the idea of a "continuous, unitary process by which the working class gained self-consciousness and power"⁴⁵. However social movements have come to represent a far broader and more complex set of systems over the course of the previous century.

Prominent social movement theorist, Charles Tilly, notes that social movements emerge from a synthesis of three key elements. The first of these is a sustained and organised public effort to make a collective claim on a targeted authority, otherwise described as a 'campaign'. The second is a combination of the following: creation of special-purpose associations and coalitions, public meetings, solemn processions, vigils, rallies, demonstrations, statements to and in the public media and pamphleteering. Finally, the third element is the participants' concerted representation of WUNC (worthiness, unity, numbers and commitment on the part of themselves or the constituency)⁴⁶. Tilly comments, the term often becomes all-inclusive, describing many different forms of popular collective action, and as such no one in particular

⁴⁴ Tilly, C., 2004. *Social Movements, 1768-2004*, Paradigm Publishers: London pp.5

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

owns the term “social movement”⁴⁷. However, he continues, that throughout the latter eighteenth and later nineteenth centuries the pursuit of public politics began to take greater shape amongst Western countries, consolidating itself into a “durable ensemble of elements” that came to broadly represent the concept of the social movement⁴⁸.

The 1960’s and beyond represented a proliferation of the social movement, becoming a permanent component of western democracies⁴⁹. A difficulty presented to social movement scholars during this period was the subsequent competing theoretical models of interpretation. The Marxist and structural-functionalist models both offered explanations for the mechanisms behind structural tensions leading to collective action. In Europe, a general dissatisfaction with Marxism led to the development of ‘new social movements’ perspective⁵⁰. Despite conflicts within the theoretical frameworks, scholars from different countries have increasingly begun emphasising the importance of certain broad sets of factors to analyse the emergence and development of social movements/revolutions⁵¹. The form, personnel, and claims of social movements vary and evolve historically is another argument asserted by Tilly. He argues that, “changes in political environments, incremental changes within the social movement sphere, and transfers among movements interact to produce substantial change and variation in the character of social movements.”⁵² Finally Tilly argues that social movements, as an invented institution, could disappear or mutate into quite a different form of politics. He notes that with the spread of globalisation the nature of social movements is inherently different and thus may change greatly in the future⁵³.

⁴⁷ Ibid. p.7

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Porta, D., Diani, M., 1999. *Social Movements: An Introduction*, Blackwell Publishers: Oxford pp.1

⁵⁰ Ibid. p.2

⁵¹ McAdam, D., McCarthy, J., Zald, M., 1996., *Comparative Perspectives on Social Movements: Political Opportunities, Mobilising Structures, and Cultural Framings*, Cambridge University Press: Cambridge pp.2

⁵² Tilly. 2004. p.12

⁵³ Ibid.

3.2 Theoretical Framework

McAdam, McCarthy and Zald construct a framework that can be used as a means to assess how a social movement operates. As mentioned, since the 1960s there has been a proliferation of scholarly writing on social movements and revolutions. Thus McAdam, McCarthy and Zald proposed a “synthetic, comparative perspective on social movements that transcends the limits of any single theoretical approach to the topic”⁵⁴. The framework is divided into three areas. The first is the structure of political opportunities and constraints confronting the movement; second refers to forms of organisation available to insurgents and lastly collective processes of interpretation, attribution and social construction that mediate between opportunity and action⁵⁵. Thus these three broad categories for analysing social movements are conventionally shortened as political opportunities, mobilising structures and framing processes⁵⁶.

Having established the means for broadly analysing social movements, scholars share a concern for at least four aspects of social movements⁵⁷. The first of these is informal interaction networks; movements may often be conceived of as the grouping of informal interaction networks between a number of individuals, groups and organisations. As such networks contribute both to creating the preconditions for mobilisation as well as creating the preconditions necessary for the ‘elaboration of specific world view and lifestyles’⁵⁸. The second point is a sense of shared beliefs and solidarity. In order for something to be considered a social movement, there needs to be present a shared set of beliefs and sense of belonging. Thirdly, there needs to be a collective action focusing on conflict. Social movement actors are required to engage in political as well as or otherwise cultural conflicts that are aimed at the promotion or opposition of social change at a systemic or non-systemic level. Finally the use of protest is a key aspect to social movements. Social movement scholars maintain that often the fundamental difference between movements and other forms of social and

⁵⁴ McAdam. 1996. p.2

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Porta & Diani. 1999. p.14

⁵⁸ Ibid.

political actors is to be found in the contrast between conventional styles of political participation and public protest⁵⁹.

3.2.1 Political Opportunity

This factor is based on the interaction of social movements with institutionalised politics. Early social movement scholars attempted to explain social movements based on changes that were occurring in the institutional structure or the informal power relations of the national political system. As theory in this area developed, work attempted to explain “cross-national differences in the structure, extent and success of comparable movements on the basis of difference in the political characteristics of the nation states in which they are embedded”⁶⁰. This is where ‘political opportunity’ emerged, based on the premise that social movements and revolutions are shaped by a broader set of political constraints and opportunities unique to the national context in which they are embedded. Hence, this is the main focus of the “political process approach” which views political opportunity as being a major contributor towards collective action⁶¹.

Tilly builds on this, looking at how political opportunity is changing for social movements. He argues that with the changing form of media, the level of symmetry differs. More traditional forms such as print media, radio and television offer little feedback from recipients, whilst telephones and the Internet in contrast offer far greater levels of symmetry between the ‘senders and receivers’ of social movements⁶². However, an important point that Tilly makes is that ‘technological determinism’ should be avoided. The innovation of new communications media does not single-handedly change the character of social movements or provide greater means for political opportunity⁶³. Nonetheless, as communication enters into the twenty-first century it’s significance for social movements cannot be ignored. Tilly cites an example of a social movement in Manila, which mobilised followers through

⁵⁹ Ibid. p. 15

⁶⁰ McAdam. 1996. p.3

⁶¹ Ibid. p.7

⁶² Snow, D., Benford, R., 1992. *Frontiers in Social Movement Theory* ed. Morris A., & Mueller, C., Yale University Press: London. pp. 151

⁶³ Ibid.

the use of mobile phone text messaging. Within an hour of initiating, tens of thousands arrived to protest for the removal of then president, Ferdinand Marcos⁶⁴. Thus, having considered this example, Tilly poses the question, “Would the twenty-first century finally bring social movements to the long-dreaded culmination of People Power across the world?”

The advent of new technologies such as mobile telephone communication and the Internet has had the effect of creating “smart mobs”. Technology analyst Howard Rheingold, citing the case of the Philippines, coins the phrase to describe people who are able to coordinate actions without even knowing each other⁶⁵. Tilly argues that significant changes are indeed occurring in the twenty-first century but raises four noteworthy points of objection. Firstly to avoid technological determinism, as many new features in social movements may result from alterations in social and political contexts rather than through technological innovation. The second ‘warning’ is that, similar to nineteenth and twentieth century communications, new forms of communication innovation still operate in a two-sided way. In other words, from one side it may lower the costs of coordination among activists already connected with one another. On the other hand however, it may exclude even more definitively those who lack access to new communication means, thus further entrenching communication inequality. The third point being, social movements still rely on local, regional and national forms of organisation that have prevailed for over a century. Finally, it is important to avoid the argument that globalisation has completely dominated the social movement scene⁶⁶.

Arguing from the perspective of how innovations in technological communication and digital media have affected social movements, subsequently improving political opportunities, Lance Bennet offers several points. He notes that innovations assists to make loosely structured networks, as opposed to previously denser social movement networks, which has subsequently become crucial to coordination amongst activists. Another important note is that it reduces the influence of ideology on personal

⁶⁴ Ibid. p.95

⁶⁵ Rheingold, H. 2003. *Smart Mobs: The Next Social Revolution*. New York: Persus Press. p. xii

⁶⁶ Tilly. 2004. p.98

involvement in social movements and diminishes the importance of bounded, durable and resource rich local and national organisations as bases for social movement activism. Furthermore, it increases the strategic advantages of resource-poor organisations within social movements⁶⁷. However, the implications for this as Bennet concludes, is that it in turn makes social movements increasingly vulnerable to problems of coordination, control and commitment⁶⁸.

Improved communication has several social implications. Tilly notes how even prior to the advent of the Internet, a move from “all-encompassing, socially controlling communities” to “individualised fragmented personal communities” has occurred. This move has largely been facilitated through such advents as the telephone, improved transportation and more recently the internet which has allowed for social ties to be maintained without there being a physical proximity. Tilly makes two observations from this. Firstly that with each new form of communication that facilitates a specific set of social relations, it equally excludes others who may not have access to the relevant communication medium. The second observation is that communications media differs dramatically in its degree of symmetry and asymmetry, with digital communication redressing this balance to a certain extent⁶⁹.

Tilly poses several questions regarding the implications for improved communication technology. He begins questioning whether social movement practices are changing more rapidly and extensively than they did with the advent of earlier communication and transport technologies, and as such are new sorts of relationships among activists consequently emerging? Thus for Tilly the observation of the nature of social movements is now more relevant than ever before⁷⁰. Tilly concludes that perhaps what is occurring is a split within social movements. In the first category we see older styles of action and organisation that sustain “continuous political involvement at

⁶⁷ Bennet, L., 2003. “Communicating Global Activism.” *Information, Communication & Society* p.143

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Tilly, C. 2003. *Social Movements Enter the 21st Century*, Columbia University. p. 13

⁷⁰ Ibid. p. 17

points of decision-making power” and on the other “temporary displays of connection across continents, largely mediated by specialised organisations and entrepreneurs.”⁷¹

3.2.2 Mobilising Structures

This factor can be defined as, “informal and formal collective vehicles through which people mobilise and engage in collective action”⁷². Most scholars focusing on this area look at ‘meso-level’ groups, organisations and informal networks that make up the building blocks of social movements. McAdam McCarthy and Zald focus specifically on resource mobilisation, which looks at the “formal organisational manifestations of the processes.”⁷³ Tilly argues more for a focus on informal, grassroots mobilising structures. Tilly believes the key to social movements is a dependence on political entrepreneurs for scale, durability and effectiveness. Tilly notes that the social movement combination of campaigns, WUNC displays and coordination all result from prior planning, coalition building, and muting of local differences⁷⁴.

Porta and Diani explore mobilising structures, outlining three types of movement networks. They note that movement networks allow groups and organisations, which individually may be weak and isolated to play a significant political role. The first type of network is those that link various movement organisations either in times of mobilisation or through less permanent consultation mechanisms⁷⁵. The second is those that connect the same organisations by means of activists they have in common with one another. The third and final network is those that enable activists to be recruited, often based on preceding forms of participation⁷⁶. Thus having outlined these three networks Porta and Diani continue stating, “people involved in movements have demonstrated extremely high levels of integration in social networks

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² McAdam. 1996. p.3

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Porta & Diani. 1999. p.112

⁷⁶ Ibid.

of various types.”⁷⁷ This is an important point to note as it plays a significant role in the way we understand social movements.

However, some scholars contest the significance of movement networks. It is argued that the fact that participants are integrated in a form of social network that may be linked to their private lives or public activities does not bear any significance with regards to social movements, as it is always possible to identify social networks capable of providing the opportunities needed to involve individuals in protest. As such, the role and significance of networks in fostering participation should not be over-estimated in leading to collective action⁷⁸. Some critics are even noted as stating that social networks are incapable of explaining collective action. Porta and Diani subsequently conclude that to console these opinions it is important to stress differences between various types of social networks and to ask what contribution each one can give to explain the various types of collective action⁷⁹. Continuing they note, when the cost of participation is particularly high, it is the strength of relationships, which link potential activists to each other and those already committed, that is key in determining who shall mobilise. If there is any relationship between social networks and the intensity of personal transformation, networks will play a greater role when the transformation is at a level that requires a certain cost that thus requires support⁸⁰. In other words, Porta and Diani argue that at a certain level social networks, whilst not the only feature responsible for collective action, remain a key part of assisting in contributing to mobilisation through the offering of support. Adding to this McAdam and Paulsen reinforce the importance of, “a strong subjective identification with a particular identity, reinforced by organisational or individual ties that is especially likely to encourage participation.”⁸¹

⁷⁷ Ibid. p.113

⁷⁸ Ibid. p.115

⁷⁹ Ibid. p.116

⁸⁰ Ibid. p.117

⁸¹ McAdam, D., Paulsen, R. 1993, Specifying the Relationship between Social Ties and Activism in *American Journal of Sociology*, pp. 659

3.2.3 Framing Processes

McAdam, McCarthy and Zald place emphasis on the shared meanings and definitions that guide social movements. They subsequently propose the definition outlined by fellow scholar Snow, which describes framing processes as “the conscious strategic efforts by groups of people to fashion shared understandings of the world and themselves that legitimate and motivate collective action.”⁸²

Tilly argues that framing processes are responsible for shaping and defining social movements. He argues that social movements combine three types of claims: program, identity and standing. Subsequently, program claims represent support for or opposition to actual or proposed actions made by the object of the claim such as a government. Identity claims relate naturally to the combined assertion from the mobilised group engaged in social movement. Standing claims assert ties or similarities to existing political actors or groups, sometimes representing the standing of other groups that are the subject of protest for a social movement⁸³.

The concept of framing processes is essential to our understanding of social movements. Zald notes that a focus on the strategic framing of ‘injustice and grievances’ along with their subsequent causes and motivations for collective action is important. In so doing, this highlights, as Zald describes, “the central importance of ideas and cultural elements in understanding the mobilisation of participation in social movements and the framing of political opportunity.”⁸⁴ The cultural impact of framing on social movements and subsequently its use as a strategic device has become key for scholars in analysing social movements⁸⁵. Social movements subsequently exist within a larger societal context, as such movements draw on the cultural stock of how to protest and organise⁸⁶. In order to do so, organisations rely on skills and technology of communication, which may include anything from publishing newsletters to recruiting members. Zald comments on this, noting that ‘cultural stocks

⁸² McAdam. 1996. p.6

⁸³ Tilly. 2004. p.12

⁸⁴ McAdam et al. 1996. p.261

⁸⁵ Ibid. p.266

⁸⁶ Ibid. p.267

are not static' and as a result over time necessary elements required for social movements either gain prominence or become unnecessary⁸⁷. Another important point to note is that social movements may draw on different cultural stocks depending on position within a social structure. In other words social groups will subsequently draw on the frames compatible with the skills, orientations and styles of their specific group⁸⁸. Thus an example of this would be that a social group made up of homeless women would not have the ability to draw on the same lobbying skills as say a group of university educated lawyers.

Snow and Benford comment on framing, "the framing process and the concepts of collective action frames and master frames provide a basis for understanding the process through which collective action is inspired and legitimated."⁸⁹ These authors make a number of propositions to argue for the importance of framing processes in contributing towards social movements. Their first proposition is that in order for protest to occur there needs to be the construction of an 'innovative master frame'. They define master frames as performing similar functions as movement-specific collective action frames but on a much larger scale. Thus, master frames may apply to a number of movement organisations⁹⁰. They continue stating that the failure of mass mobilisation when structural conditions are accounted for may be attributed to the absence of a master frame⁹¹. It becomes clear from their propositions that the presence of a master frame is key to the formation and operations of social movements⁹².

3.3 Conclusion

This section has outlined political opportunity, mobilising structures and framing processes of the social movement. As Tilly notes, the nature of social movements is changing and the spread of mobile phone technology contributes to this changing landscape. This framework is key to this dissertation, which aims to determine to

⁸⁷ See further on this by Tilly

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Snow, D., Benford, R., 1992. pp. 151

⁹⁰ Ibid. p.140

⁹¹ Ibid. p.144

⁹² See Snow and Benford pg 142-151 for full list of propositions

what extent and how it should be adjusted to include this technology as a variable that may affect these areas of a social movement's operations.

University of Cape Town

Chapter 4: Treatment Action Campaign and Cell-Life

4.1 Introduction

This section introduces the case study of the Treatment Action Campaign and its partner NGO Cell-Life. It will look at this social movement from its inception in 1998 until 2004, looking at the conditions that helped form the social movement and how it has changed during the course of its existence. Thus providing a context for the work conducted by Cell-Life and from which the research for this dissertation is subsequently conducted. This section will continue, providing the research findings into how the Treatment Action Campaign utilises mobile phone technology and how this subsequently affects the social movement's political opportunities, mobilising structures and framing processes. This will be done through a review of a survey conducted by Cell-Life as well as an interview with managing director of the NGO and member of the TAC, Peter Benjamin.

4.2 Treatment Action Campaign

4.2.1 History

The HIV/AIDS epidemic facing South Africa was heightened in 1998, when the first major battle was fought over the provision of the established antiretroviral drug, AZT. AZT helps in the prevention of mother-to-child transmission (PMTCT) and in 1998, South African advocates and researchers made a call to have the drug brought into the country and distributed to pregnant mothers⁹³. The Health Ministry's previous establishment of mother-to-child-transmission (PMTCT) pilot sites using the antiretroviral drug AZT was suspended as the health minister saw the program as unaffordable. The then health minister, Dlamini-Zuma justified the government's position stating that the government would prefer to focus on prevention rather than treatment. This controversial decision was followed by the founding of the Treatment Action Campaign on the 10 December 1998, which aimed to "campaign for the

⁹³ *History of HIV/AIDS in South Africa* <http://www.avert.org/history-aids-south-africa.htm> [accessed: 4 August 2011]

equitable access to affordable treatment for all people with HIV/AIDS”⁹⁴. As cited in a literature review by Mackintosh (2009), the TAC was created to use all the legal means necessary to challenge the obstacles that limited access to treatment for HIV/AIDS through the creation of “grassroots and racially representative AIDS activism.”⁹⁵

The TAC would subsequently come to represent the focal point in the tension between civil society and government around ARV provision and the increasingly political HIV/AIDS situation in the country⁹⁶. Initially, Zachie Achmat, who represented the international face of the organisation, believed that whilst the withdrawal of PMTCT sites was a concern, the ANC administration and the TAC would support each other in decreasing the price of drugs such as AZT and thus work towards making the treatment more affordable in the country⁹⁷. However, over the next several years the government would entrench a controversial position towards HIV/AIDS treatment in the country. Dr Manto Tshabalala-Msimang subsequently replaced Dlamini-Zuma as health minister and together with president of the time, Thabo Mbeki, argued against the effectiveness of AZT. The arguments and policies made against providing AZT and Nevirapine grew into a broader questioning of all antiretroviral drugs, including those that were being used as treatment. This ‘wider branch of thinking’ came to be known as denialism, which essentially argued that HIV did not cause AIDS but rather resulted from socio-economic factors, or lifestyle choices⁹⁸.

Mbeki’s ‘denialist’ position towards HIV/AIDS was marked by his questioning of orthodox AIDS science ultimately leading to his withdrawal from the public debate over the science of the disease⁹⁹. This subsequently helped to increase the

⁹⁴ TAC Constitution on its website: <http://www.tac.org.za/community/about> [accessed 17 August 2011]

⁹⁵ Mackintosh, D. 2009. *The Politicisation of HIV/AIDS in South Africa: Responses of the Treatment Action Campaign and South African Government, 1994 – 2004*. Centre for Social Science Research Working Paper No. 244, UCT pp. 15

⁹⁶ Ibid. p.16

⁹⁷ Achmat cited in Mackintosh 2009. p.16

⁹⁸ *History of HIV/AIDS in South Africa* <http://www.avert.org/history-aids-south-africa.htm> [accessed: 4 August 2011]

⁹⁹ Ibid.

politicisation of HIV/AIDS in South Africa, thereby entrenching the positions of civil society and the government, making co-operation increasingly difficult.

The TAC, along with several other NGOs filed a case against the government in 2001 on the grounds that it was a constitutional obligation to create free PMTCT programs at all public hospitals and recommend the use of the cost effective ARV, Nevirapine. The case was eventually taken to the Constitutional Court, where the TAC was successful in the ruling¹⁰⁰. The victory, which helped grant access to ARVs for people infected with HIV/AIDS, helped to secure the TAC's significance both internationally and locally. In a paper entitled, "A Moral to the Tale: The Treatment Action Campaign and the Politics of HIV/AIDS", Friedman and Mottiar (2004) discuss the TAC since this success and pose several question regarding the movement. Is the TAC a model for other social movements? Are its methods effective and if so does the TAC offer an approach that enables the poor to claim the rights promised by democratic citizenship?¹⁰¹

4.2.2 Structure and strategy of the TAC

In order to address these questions, a better understanding of the TAC, its objectives and operations are required. The TAC campaigns for affordable treatment for people living with HIV/AIDS. Along with this, the movement's goals are to 'prevent and eliminate new HIV infections' and improve the affordability and quality of health-care access for all'¹⁰². The organisation adopts a multi-strategy approach to campaigning, with methods ranging from civil disobedience and street demonstrations through to actions in court. Its strategic approach being achieved through:

- Securing comprehensive treatment and prevention services in selected focus districts as a model for other districts
- To inform and support national advocacy efforts through its branches, providing a platform for people to mobilise and organise around HIV and

¹⁰⁰ Ibid. p.18

¹⁰¹ Friedman, S., Mottiar, S. 2004. *A Moral to the Tale: The Treatment Action Campaign and the Politics of HIV/AIDS*. Centre for Policy Studies pp.1

¹⁰² Ibid. p.2

related health rights¹⁰³.

The TAC maintains visibility primarily through posters, pamphlets, meetings, street activism and letter writing¹⁰⁴. Another important aspect of the TAC is their programmes which provide services. The core programmes consist of: “Prevention and Treatment Literacy”, “Community Health Advocacy” and “Policy, Communications and Research”¹⁰⁵. The ‘treatment literacy’ campaign helps to advise people undergoing or administering treatment. Friedman and Mottiar note that such a program has both a political purpose as well as a ‘service’ dimensions. Whilst the literacy campaign includes consciousness-raising content, the project also shows that ARV programmes can be implemented effectively and that the TAC can establish effective treatment¹⁰⁶. The program acts as a campaigning tool and demonstration of the role the TAC can potentially play in the roll-out. Thus the TAC, in providing services, is contributing to the strength of its platform for campaigning.

4.2.3 Political Opportunity, Mobilising Structures and Framing Processes

The external political environment in which social movements operate is key to their political opportunities¹⁰⁷. In terms of social movement theory, political opportunity is created as a result of opening of access to power, shifts in ruling alignments, availability of influential allies and cleavages with elites. Thus changes within the state allow for actors to create new movements¹⁰⁸.

In understanding this, the context in which the TAC emerged can be better understood. In the context of post-apartheid South Africa there was both a change in the political environment as well as in social conditions. The process of democratisation provided opportunity by removing any threat of oppression from collective action and creating opportunity for influence such as use of the

¹⁰³ <http://www.tac.org.za/> [accessed: 17 August 2011]

¹⁰⁴ Friedman, Mottiar. 2004. p.2

¹⁰⁵ <http://www.tac.org.za/> [accessed: 17 August 2011]

¹⁰⁶ Friedman, Mottiar. 2004. p.2

¹⁰⁷ *ibid.* p.12

¹⁰⁸ Tarrow, Sidney. 1994. *Power in Movement*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. pp.18

constitutional court. According to Heywood, the fact that the TAC was not formed prior to 1994 is related more to political context than repression. He notes, “There could have been a TAC without the transition. But our space to operate and our role would have depended on ANC politics.”¹⁰⁹ Subsequently, the political opportunity structure of the TAC, had it been formed during apartheid, would have been centred on the anti-apartheid struggle. Predicated on the fact that issue-based activity was only pursued in the instance that it could contribute towards the struggle against the government. Thus, had the TAC been formed during apartheid it would have been expected to link its activities to the greater struggle against apartheid, instead of focusing on the single issue of HIV/AIDS¹¹⁰.

Another key issue, as noted by Friedman and Mottiar, is the government’s macro-economic policy, which has been criticised for worsening social conditions, and creating new rationales for collective action as evidenced in Mbeki’s denialism¹¹¹. Cited in Friedman and Mottiar, Heywood notes that there are strategic continuities with many of those with activist backgrounds doing “old things in a new environment”¹¹². Another feature of post-apartheid South Africa, which assists the TAC, is the formation of the constitutional court, as highlighted in the case where the court ordered the government to supply ARVs to citizens. Friedman notes, “the rights which make a court challenge possible now were not available before 1994.”¹¹³ Subsequently the TAC has grown in response to a number of opportunity structures that have presented themselves: the freedom to operate in a post-apartheid environment as well as the controversial denialist position adopted by Mbeki and subsequently the government with respect to HIV/AIDS being the two most prominent.

The structure of the TAC is a conventional membership organisation, although Friedman and Mottiar (2004) note, with “aspects of its internal structure [that] are

¹⁰⁹ Heywood in Friedman p.12

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ Friedman. 2004. p.12

¹¹² Heywood in Friedman. p.13

¹¹³ Ibid.

unconventional.”¹¹⁴ It’s website notes that the organisation has 16000 members, 267 branches and 72 full time staff members¹¹⁵. There is not a clear distinction between ‘members’, ‘supporters’, ‘volunteers’ or ‘activists’ and as cited in an interview in Friedman and Mottiar, an official from TAC notes, “volunteers and members are really the same thing”¹¹⁶. Thus it may be more accurate to describe people active in the TAC as ‘participants’ rather than drawing a distinction between members and supporters. Of the registered membership, the demographics are largely poor and black¹¹⁷. Cited in Friedman et al (2004), Achmat notes, ‘The demographics of TAC are 80% unemployed, 70% women, 70% in the 14-24 age group and 90% African’¹¹⁸.

In terms of framing processes, the TAC acts as a voice for its member who may not have the advantages available to ‘middle class activists’ and would thus be unable to participate in complicated debates in English¹¹⁹. This of course raises issues regarding people at grassroots level informing the leadership’s agenda. Friedman and Mottiar note on this point that many activists see TAC as a “fighter for the people with HIV and AIDS... an instrument to win treatment.”¹²⁰ Continuing further on they note that most importantly the TAC gives the most powerless of citizens a sense of their ability to become active citizens. Thus the TAC becomes a vehicle not only for activism but also as a means for grassroots initiatives to develop such as support groups for people dealing with HIV/AIDS.¹²¹ The TAC’s role subsequently extends to fighting the stigma of HIV/AIDS, giving people a “sense of efficacy” and providing “basic information on the virus and how to cope with it” which empowers its members to take control of this important aspect of their lives¹²². Furthermore, in terms of grassroots participation, through it workshops, campaigns and discussions of strategic options at branch levels, members are offered an opportunity to become active citizens as opposed to passive subjects. Cited in Friedman and Mottiar, TAC provincial organizer Xolani Kunene notes, “We were a top down organisation but

¹¹⁴ Ibid. p.3

¹¹⁵ <http://www.tac.org.za/> [accessed: 17 August 2011]

¹¹⁶ Berold in Friedman and Mottiar. p.3

¹¹⁷ Ibid. p.6

¹¹⁸ Achmat in Friedman and Mottiar. p.6

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ Ibid. p.7

¹²¹ Ibid. p.17

¹²² Ibid.

now our members are showing a potential to lead. Branch members used to just keep quiet in meetings, but are beginning to participate actively – it started small but then it grew.’¹²³

4.2.4 Problematising the TAC as a ‘Social Movement’

The question of whether the TAC can be defined as a social movement is contested due to the criticism weighed against the movement that it ‘seems to work within the corridors of power’. Basically, due to the movement’s reliance on its bureaucracy of full time personnel, it is criticised as distancing itself from other social movements¹²⁴. However Friedman notes, the difference lies in the fact that “unlike other movements, the TAC engages with the post-apartheid system and accepts that rights can be won within it.”¹²⁵ The TAC can be categorised as a civil society organisation, which relies on mobilisation.

The issue that is faced in subsequently defining TAC as a ‘new social movement’, is where such a definition requires ‘politically and/or socially directed collectives... focused on changing one or more elements of the social, political and economic system...’¹²⁶. However, as Friedman counters, the flaw in trying to define a social movement by its aims is evident when looking at the TAC. He continues that the TAC is a social movement as it seeks to change the distribution of resources in society and creates ‘new forms of organisation amongst civil society’¹²⁷. Thus, Heywood notes that if social movements can be understood as associations, which mobilise people, then the TAC clearly qualifies, as activists within the movement see it as a ‘campaigning organisation’¹²⁸.

Another issue faced in defining the TAC as a social movement is the emphasis on ‘new’. Friedman argues that if the use of ‘new’ social movements implies that ‘classic’ democratic forms of engagement with the state are unsuccessful at delivering gains for the poor then the TAC challenges this perception. The TAC is able to

¹²³ Kunene in Friedman, p.17

¹²⁴ Ibid. p.24

¹²⁵ Ibid. p.25

¹²⁶ Habib, Ballard and Valodia cited in Friedman. P.27

¹²⁷ Ibid.

¹²⁸ Heywood in Friedman. p.28

demonstrate that mobilising in the traditional way can result in real gains for the poor and thus a new approach is unnecessary. He notes, “the lesson of TAC’s experience, then, is that it remains possible to use the rights guaranteed and institutions created by liberal democracy to win advances for the poor and weak.”¹²⁹ Gibson, cited in Oshry (2007), further asserts this, stating how the TAC is ‘unambiguously a social movement because its roots are older and steeped in anti-apartheid movements’¹³⁰. Continuing he notes, whilst the conceptions of ‘new’ and ‘old’ may be divided in theory, the difference in practice has become blurred and hard to distinguish from each other. Adding to this point, McKinley and Naidoo explain that movements, which have emerged in the post-1994 environment, exhibit ‘new’ approaches to the socio-economic issues and political struggles facing our country but remain ‘old’ in many respects to their operations¹³¹.

An important point to note, in an evaluation of the organisation, Boule and Avafia (2005) note that since 2004, the TAC can no longer be described as solely and advocacy organisation but as a service delivery organisation as well¹³². The TAC subsequently combines the functions of both a social movement as well as an NGO in providing a service to its members. Added to this is the question of the TAC as a ‘single-issue organisation’. Neocosmos argues it’s difficult to categorise the TAC as this as its focus has become increasingly expansive over time¹³³. Oshry concluded that the diverse perspectives on the functions of the TAC reveal that the division between issue-based gains and broader social change is rather complex – a far more complicated division than merely movements fighting for social change and a single-issue organisation¹³⁴.

¹²⁹ Ibid.

¹³⁰ Gibson in Oshry, N., 2007. *Is the Treatment Action Campaign Effective? A literature Review*. CSSR Working Paper No, 207 pp.11

¹³¹ McKinley and Naidoo in Oshry. p.11

¹³² Boule, J. & Avafia, T. 2005. Treatment Action Campaign (TAC) Evaluation. [Online]. Available: www.tac.org.za. [accessed: 14 August 2011]

¹³³ Neocosmos in Oshry. p.13

¹³⁴ Oshry. p.14

4.2.5 TAC and Mobile Phone Technology

The Treatment Action Campaign has evolved over time. From its inception as primarily an ‘activism-driven’ organisation, its activities have come to represent a far wider scope. The TAC has subsequently translated their style and strategy of AIDS activism into legal, medical, humanitarian and political responses¹³⁵. Thus, having focused primarily on addressing the fight for ARV medication, with success being achieved in this area, the TAC found its operations shifting to address far more the daily conditions of the poor who make up the majority of its membership. This shift is in line with the TAC’s increasing engagement with the “politics of life”¹³⁶ that has accounted for the organisation’s involvement in the response to the 2008 violence against foreigners in South Africa¹³⁷. The biggest shift in the TAC operations has been in terms of assisting to promote HIV treatment and prevention. The opportunities for using mobile technology to support such operations are vast. This has been assisted by the partnership with the NGO, Cell-Life.

The TAC’s use of mobile phone technology remains limited in its scope, primarily used informally by its branches. Growth in this area of operations for the TAC is vast, and is possible through cooperation with NGO partner Cell-Life. Managing Director of Cell-Life, Peter Benjamin, believes that, amongst other things, the TAC could greatly increase its membership and role as an organisation if it can fully take advantage of cell phone technology¹³⁸. The major obstacle to the TAC adopting the technology fully is the political decision required by the TAC leadership to shift their traditional way of organising. The usage of cell phones in South Africa is overwhelming, with 35 million active users, which accounts for roughly 80% of all

¹³⁵ Robins, S. 2009. ‘Humanitarian aid beyond “bare survival”’: Social movement responses to xenophobic violence in South Africa’ in *American Ethnologist*, vol. 36, No. 4, pp. 637-650

¹³⁶ See Farmer 2003, Fassin 2007

¹³⁷ Ibid. p.638

¹³⁸ Benjamin, P. 2008. TAC Tools for Information & Communication (TACTIC): *Towards a broader-based TAC through the use of technology*. Cell-Life. pp.1

youths and adults in our country¹³⁹. This figure represents more than just a statistic; it represents an entirely new opportunity for mass communication and organisation.

4.3 Cell-Life

4.3.1 History

Cell-Life began as a research project at UCT, initially aimed at creating a cell phone system that linked nurses and home-based caregivers treating HIV patients in Gugulethu. Cell-Life has subsequently established itself as an NGO which aims:

“To provide technology-based solutions for the management of HIV and AIDS... to address health-related logistical challenges in developing countries, such as the provision and distribution of anti-retroviral treatments, continuous patient monitoring and evaluation, and collection and communication of relevant data. This is achieved through the use and development of innovative software supported by existing technologies such as mobile phones and the Internet, in a manner that is appropriate for a developing-country context.”¹⁴⁰

With the TACs success in fighting for the provision of anti-retroviral medication, the next major challenge was implementation of distribution. Cell-Life founder, Dr Ulrike Rivett noted “infrastructural limitations present a major challenge to the successful roll-out of South Africa's ARV programme.” Rivett noticed that even though the TAC had successfully won the case to put in place a national programme that would make Nevirapine available to state hospitals and clinics, treatment distribution was still going to be severely limited by infrastructural and physical limitations¹⁴¹.

Having attempted to create a new form of technology to address this problem, Professor Jon Tapsom of the Department of Electrical Engineering at UCT suggested use of existing technology to cut costs. Rivett notes, “Cell phones provided the perfect

¹³⁹ Ibid. p.2

¹⁴⁰ <http://www.cell-life.org/about-us> [online: 24 August 2011]

¹⁴¹ Rivett, U. <http://www.socialresponsiveness.uct.ac.za/> [online: 22 August 2011]

solution.”¹⁴² Subsequently Cell-Life came into existence combining technological expertise with social response.

The first project implemented was in Gugulethu in 2001. Therapeutic counsellors and home-based carers were given cell phones which allowed the carers to collect information on a patient’s status during visits and subsequently load this onto a central database that could be accessed by a patient’s doctor or nurse. This project also implemented an alert function, which gave home-based carers the ability to alert doctors or nurses via SMS when there was a medical emergency.

Since this first project Cell-Life has researched and developed a number of systems to support and manage HIV/AIDS treatment using a number of cell phone systems. In 2009, the Desmond Tutu HIV Foundation requested assistance in the management of ARV dispensing. The Intelligent Dispensing of ARVs (iDART) system was developed by Cell-Life, which was subsequently set up in 20 clinics, dispensing drugs to over 45, 000 patients. Along with this, Cell-Life continued to work with data capture, launching the Cellphone for HIV project in 2007. This project explores, “the range of applications for information, communication and interactive services to support the HIV sector.”

4.3.2 Strategy and Implementation

Figures cited in a study conducted by de Tolly and Alexander (2009) show, South Africa has approximately 36 million active cell phone users, thus making a rough average of 80% of all youth and adults with access to a cell phone¹⁴³. According to de Tolly, for millions of people living with HIV and others affected by the epidemic, there is an unmet need for information regarding the disease, and for communication with support structures¹⁴⁴. As a result of this Cell-Life has begun exploring a number of cell phone services to assess the viability for content delivery.

¹⁴² *ibid.*

¹⁴³ de Tolly, K., Alexander, H. 2009. *Innovative Use of Cellphone Technology for HIV/AIDS behavior change communications: 3 pilot projects*. Cape Town pp.1

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

Subsequently the 'Cell Phone for Life' project was implemented, which involves the direct use of cell phones to provide information to those people who are infected and affected by HIV/AIDS. The existing technology has numerous platforms on which it can operate such as social networking, unilateral and bilateral information exchange as well as service location and tracking. The use of SMS technology will allow for 'pushing' or unidirectional information sharing and chat platforms such as MXIT for query driven information. In order to adopt this project Cell-Life partnered with a number of organisations, including the TAC, in order to extend the service to its members¹⁴⁵.

According to de Tolly, studies have indicated that reminding people to take their medication can increase adherence, and subsequently people with better health literacy are more likely to adhere to their medication¹⁴⁶. As a result Cell-Life piloted a project that sent out daily SMS reminders to members of 'adherence clubs' run by the TAC and the Department of Health. Cell-Life opted for the use of SMSs due to their familiarity with cell phone users in South Africa, and would subsequently remove the technology as being a barrier to use. Along with this, it would be possible to make this service free to its users and finally possible to time SMSs relatively precisely – something that is critical to ARV efficacy¹⁴⁷.

The issue of confidentiality was raised by Cell-Life, as people often share cell phones and may have a concern around revealing their HIV status. However, de Tolly notes that of the 126 people who were offered the service initially, only 19 opted out¹⁴⁸. Another concern was that of language of the service. Subsequently the SMS was made available in English and Xhosa. A challenge that presented itself was the limitation of 160 characters of an SMS. Whilst English contains accepted SMS abbreviations, there were no standard abbreviations for Xhosa especially with regards to medical conditions, sexual practices and issues related to HIV¹⁴⁹. In order to

¹⁴⁵ Skinner, D. 2009. *Evaluation for Cell Phone for Life for Cell-Life Baseline Report*, Research on Health and Society. Available: <http://www.comminit.com/hiv-aids/node/321138> [online: 23 August 2011]

¹⁴⁶ de Tolly & Alexander, p.2

¹⁴⁷ Ibid. p.2

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid. p.3

overcome this obstacle, the translated SMS used some English words and acronyms such as ARV. Through trial and error, a list of Xhosa abbreviations was considered acceptable for use in the project.

MXit was another mobile phone application utilised by the project. MXit is a Java application installed on phones which allows for GPRS or 3G-based instant messaging. Data is far cheaper to send through this medium and is popular amongst South African youth, making it a useful information outlet for the project¹⁵⁰

In an interview conducted with Peter Benjamin, he outlined the areas in which Cell-Life is currently assisting the TAC in terms of organisation. Cell-Life runs the TAC's membership database – a computerised central database, comprised of the TAC's six districts. Through the creation of a central point of information, Cell-Life has established the groundwork for implementing future mobile phone operations within the TAC¹⁵¹. In terms of mobile phone technology specifically, Cell-Life assists with cell phone data collection for the organisation. This is an important facet of the TACs operations as they currently receive funding from a number of international organisations, with specific interest in the TACs operations with respect to educating people about health in the townships. Subsequently, the TAC needs to report regularly on this in order to fulfil the obligations to the donors. Thus Cell-Life provides the TAC with a data collection system, which allows People's Health Activists (PHA) working in the communities to send daily reports through an SMS on what they have done that day. The SMS is recorded in a computer and subsequently logged into the database, thus making the process far easier for internal records as well as for providing information to donors¹⁵².

Benjamin continues that the primary area in which mobile phones are used within the TAC is in terms of their informal use. He notes, "The branch secretary's job is to send out informal SMSs to let members know when meetings and events are happening... Cell-Life has subsequently provided bulk SMS systems to assist."¹⁵³ However,

¹⁵⁰ Ibid. p.6

¹⁵¹ Benjamin. Interview 01/09/2011

¹⁵² Ibid.

¹⁵³ Ibid.

Khayelitsha is the only district to use the system regularly, whereas the national branch occasionally utilises it, much less than it could do, believes Benjamin.

Cell-Life has also begun to assist the TAC with their membership system. Up until 2009 TAC membership was free. As a result this meant that establishing an accurate estimate of number of members of the TAC was difficult and any claim on membership was not auditable. Subsequently at the 2010 TAC national conference the constitution was changed and a fee of R10 to become a member was implemented. This fee would act as a commitment device to joining the movement. The problem that the TAC subsequently experienced was that of collecting all 10 000 individual R10 membership fees. The process of getting the money to the national office for record keeping is a convoluted process. The money would be paid by a member to the branch secretary, who would then send that to the district office, this would then need to be taken by the provincial representative and deposited into the national bank account and a record of the member's payment would then be made. Benjamin notes, "Even if everyone wanted to be honest – it would be a logistical nightmare."¹⁵⁴

Cell-Life thus set up an SMS membership system, which has been implemented by the TAC. The interested member sends an SMS, which gets recorded on the central database. The individual then receives a reply SMS which offers them the option to become a member by replying to a number that debits R10 from their airtime. The money is deducted, the payment is recorded in the database immediately on the date of payment and the individual receives a reply SMS with their membership number. Thus the process is made far easier as there is not only a proof of payment but also an accurate date of payment, which makes membership renewal easier to monitor. The system has been tested with success and currently between two and three thousand people have begun using the system, with Benjamin noting, "It's the first time in the TAC's history that they created an auditable scale of membership."¹⁵⁵

¹⁵⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

4.3.3 Cell-Life Research Findings

In order to determine how effective Cellphones for Life has been, a study considering its effects may be evaluated. A baseline report conducted by Dr Donald Skinner for the 'Research on Health and Society' Faculty of Health Sciences of Stellenbosch University will be used. Subsequently this study was conducted to, "evaluate how the new pilot service is perceived by the organisations running the service, those receiving the messages and those close to the recipients who may be affected."¹⁵⁶

The study would go about achieving this aim through the following objectives:

- To identify current levels of usage of cell phones, knowledge of cell phone technology and attitudes to the use of cell phones to obtain information
- To identify what the dominant information needs are among the organisational members¹⁵⁷.

Research was conducted in five TAC branches around Cape Town, with special attention given to ensuring a variation in race across the areas. The five areas under consideration were: Khayelitsha (Victoria Mxenge), Mitchell's Plain (Heinzpark), Klipfontein (Philippi), Tygerberg (Delft) and West Coast (Atlantis). A combination of qualitative interviews and a survey conducted amongst TAC staff and members of the organisation were utilised for the methodology¹⁵⁸.

The study also contains a quantitative analysis, which offers some interesting insight into behaviour and thoughts regarding mobile phone use and potential use for the TAC. The age of the respondents to the survey ranged from 18 to 54 and 70% female, representing a reflection of the demographics of general supporters of the TAC¹⁵⁹.

¹⁵⁶ Skinner. 2009. p.2

¹⁵⁷ Ibid.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid. p.3

¹⁵⁹ Ibid. p.17

4.4 Theoretical Framework

Part of the study was to look at how members and staff viewed the current operations of the TAC, noting issues in the organisation that may either hinder or facilitate its ability to effectively use mobile phones in the Cell Phone for Life project and the social movement in general.

4.4.1 Political Opportunities

A number of ways for improving the political opportunities of the TAC were raised through use of mobile phone technology. The TAC currently claim up to 20 000 members, spread over 220 branches, mostly located in townships, throughout South Africa. Whilst this figure remains an estimate, Benjamin believes a more accurate figure to be around 10 000¹⁶⁰. The implication regarding the number of branches in the country relative to the population is that an enormous percentage of the country's population lives in areas outside of proximity to a TAC branch. To contextualise this, during the national elections 14 000 polling stations are set up to allow for everyone in the country to have access to a site to participate¹⁶¹. Thus, roughly speaking, with TAC branches set up in most of the large townships of the country about one third of the population are within walking distance of a branch¹⁶². This subsequently excludes a large percentage of the population from joining the TAC, as a condition of membership is regular attendance of meetings. This acts as a serious barrier to entry for many due to a number of reasons, which may often include ill health, transport problems, childcare, work commitments or disability. Thus, currently most people in the country cannot join a TAC branch, even if they wanted to, and thus cannot become a member.

Considering this problem facing the TAC the mobile phone holds the key to addressing improving the political opportunities of its members. Benjamin notes, "In

¹⁶⁰ Benjamin. Interview. 01/09/2011

¹⁶¹ Benjamin. 2008. p.2

¹⁶² Ibid.

the last 20 years, people have worked out how, through an ICT revolution, you can create other forms of organisation – an information economy.”¹⁶³ In terms of membership, the TAC currently has a membership close to 10 000. The structure of the organisation does not allow for membership to reach much beyond this number. As the most credible organisation in the country, active in the sector of HIV/AIDS awareness and prevention, the TAC should be represented by a number far greater than its current size. With currently around five and a half million people infected with AIDS in South Africa and an even greater amount ‘affected’, the TAC should be in at least the hundreds of thousands, if not millions, believes Benjamin¹⁶⁴.

With no branches in the Northern Cape and very little in the Free State and Mpumalanga there are subsequently 6 out of 52 districts represented in the country. This is where the need for mobile phone membership arises. Without having to establish more branches, a separate category of membership could be created in order to include a far wider national membership representative of the organisation¹⁶⁵. The membership via cell phone would allow for a far greater amount of members, who could actively participate without physically attending meetings.

In terms of recruitment, the use of mobile phones is key. Having established the cell phone membership system currently in the TAC, the means for attracting new members exists, but needs to be expanded. Benjamin cites a recent example of cell phone advertising, which proves a good example in highlighting this medium of communication.

“The National Strategic Plan (NSP) is coming to an end this year and the new NSP is being written. For the last 6 months there has been an effort to get people involved, trying to get input, stakeholder involvement and greater participatory involvement. SANAC approached Cell-Life to establish electronic means to submit to the NSP, through email and SMS. It hadn’t been used that much. The TAC has been making an effort to spread info about it through workshops. But, basically very few engaged with the process, with roughly 3000 people contributing. The TAC approached Cell-Life to

¹⁶³ Benjamin. Interview.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid.

try and improve awareness of the NSP through electronic means. Subsequently we sent out emails, and started using cell phones. We then sent out an SMS asking people if they wanted to add their views to the NSP. That subsequently increased the amount of people to 17 000. ¹⁶⁶

This was the first indication that harnessing mobile phone technology could result in a far greater spread of participation. Benjamin continues stating how utilising advertising space through ‘please call me’ messages truly highlights the impact mobile phone technology has for furthering the goals of the TAC.

“Cell phone companies sell ad-space on their ‘please call me’ messages. There are about 75 million ‘please call me’s’ sent everyday in SA. On Monday 29th August, one million were sent out which mentioned the NSP and provided the information for people to contribute to the process. The following day - it ‘exploded’. It jumped up to roughly 75 000, and is now up to 90 000. So that meant that at least 60 000 people showed that they wanted to be involved and that there was a ‘real’ response.” ¹⁶⁷

In terms of information dispersal, two-way communication was noted in the survey as being important. This form of communication would be considered important for sending in reports and statistics to national and provincial offices, as well as requesting assistance with regards to information or advice for members facing a difficult situation, or in obtaining help in the event of an emergency. Respondents saw the use of the MXit service as being a useful tool for the principal organisers of the TAC. Thus MXit subsequently allows for ‘virtual meetings’ and as Skinner notes, “facilitate the ongoing organisation of campaign activities” ¹⁶⁸. Another idea proposed for Cell Phone for Life technology, included fundraising for the TAC. Some ideas noted by respondents included facilitating pledge lines in order to raise funds.

The survey helped to identify what respondents saw as potential advantages to the Cell Phone for Life campaign. A primary advantage identified by respondents was that Cell Phone for Life would save them time and money. As opposed to individual

¹⁶⁶ Benjamin. Interview. 01/09/2011

¹⁶⁷ Ibid.

¹⁶⁸ Skinner. 2009. p.17

visits or phone calls to each member of the TAC, one mass message could achieve the same effect. Subsequently it would improve organisational development and membership discipline, as members would know exactly where and when to come to meetings and activities. Skinner notes that the key advantage is “improving communication between branches and central offices.”¹⁶⁹

In terms of potential problems and limitations, respondents identified several points. The primary concern was the cost to members to maintain the system. Related to this concern was access to phones as well as access to phones with the required technology to perform all the functions of the Cell Phone for Life campaign. A few respondents felt concerned about the confidentiality of information included in SMSs, such as revealing a person’s HIV status¹⁷⁰.

In terms of qualitative information, an interesting figure of note was that over 65% of respondents owned a cell phone and thus was eligible to receive information from Cell Phone for Life¹⁷¹. The survey also outlines barriers to cell phone use, with the majority of respondents noting that the ‘cost of maintaining a cell phone’ remains the biggest issue¹⁷². However, practically all respondents answered positively with regards to ‘feeling comfortable using cell phones’, with a rather small amount being comfortable with the less basic mobile functions such as MXit. Skinner subsequently notes the need for input on how to use all the functions of a cell phone¹⁷³.

4.4.2 Mobilising Structures

A major issue identified within the TAC is that of communication. A number of respondents to the survey noted they were unable to contact their members to remind them about meetings or call them for campaigns or events organised at the last minute. Many of the respondents note having to utilise ‘loudhailers and walking through the streets calling people’ in order to communicate. Another concern was that

¹⁶⁹ Ibid. p.12

¹⁷⁰ Ibid. p.13

¹⁷¹ see table 5.

¹⁷² See table 7

¹⁷³ *ibid.* p.20

the more rural branches felt more distant from the core of the organisation and were thus unable to attend organisational meetings in Cape Town, leading to feelings of exclusion¹⁷⁴.

Additionally, those who are members of the TAC do not receive direct communication from the national office. The TAC is structured in a similar vein to the anti-apartheid forms of organisation known as the 'cell-system' where information is passed from top level down, through the various levels of hierarchy until it reaches the bottom, and vice versa for communication from the bottom up¹⁷⁵. Thus the TAC is structured to provide information and services to its branches, but if a member doesn't have access to a branch they remain 'out of the loop'. The national office has never sent information directly to the thousands of members, and until Cell-Life assisted, there was no central list of members with contact details¹⁷⁶. Benjamin notes, "Members should be active in the branch, but this is not always the case."

The need for direct communication with members is thus key to improving participation, which also becomes possible through mobile phones. Benjamin notes how the central TAC is able to communicate directly with its members through SMS or even engage in two-way conversation through GPRS/MXIT. The system could subsequently be used to provide regular TAC notifications, which could include news, and local activities in the member's areas. Improved direct communication creates a greater sense of inclusion within the organisation and subsequently encourages more people to join the TAC and further increase membership. The primary role of the Cell Phone for Life is seen as information dispersal at multiple levels varying from simple to detailed response to campaigns, programmes and new information. An additional advantage identified of the Cell Phone for Life messaging service is that they remain on the phone and may be consulted at any stage. The major advantage being that this acts as a means for expediting the process of calling people for meetings or campaign activities, where before traditional means included going to houses individually¹⁷⁷. A respondent in the survey was quoted as noting:

¹⁷⁴ Ibid. p.9

¹⁷⁵ Benjamin. Interview. 01/09/2011

¹⁷⁶ Benjamin. 2008. p.2

¹⁷⁷ Skinner. 2009. p.11

“... if we have something, like a march, and then we don't need to SMS every individual person. We can contact Cell-Life and then they will contact our members... and that will save us money, and that's the main thing.”

In terms of Cell Phone for Life's organisational potential, generally respondents felt that it is “likely to increase as the awareness of the technology increases.” A common answer amongst all respondents was the principal function of the project was to communicate more efficiently with all members and potential members about meetings and other campaign activities.¹⁷⁸ The second major area of focus was with regards to communicating with the central office and subsequently maintaining general communication between the core offices and the community branches. Skinner adds to this, “any changes in the organisation or structure could also be communicated through Cell Phone for Life.”¹⁷⁹

Interesting statistics regarding the TAC's operations at the time of the survey as well as how mobile phones can better be utilised by the organisation were also identified. The current access to information supplied by the TAC regarding meetings, services and other noteworthy activities was noted by respondents as being ‘word of mouth’, often unreliable and cell phone calls which become expensive on a long term basis¹⁸⁰. Thus, as Skinner notes, Cell Phone for Life has room for ‘considerable input’. 64% of respondents answered stating that they are already using SMSs to obtain information, however not with respect to the TAC specifically.

4.4.3 Framing Processes

Skinner notes that in terms of core principles within the TAC, there was a clear identification. This was namely, “fighting for the right to treatment in the form of ARVs for people with AIDS.”¹⁸¹ In terms of any issues that may have been raised, members noted concern over knowledge of the TAC in the communities and possible

¹⁷⁸ Ibid.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid. p.14

¹⁸⁰ Ibid. p.18

¹⁸¹ Ibid. p.6

stigmatising of its members who were seen to be HIV positive. Thus, prominent feedback from the survey was a need for education in the communities and recruiting new members. Cell Phone for Life was seen as a primary mechanism required to achieving these goals¹⁸².

The survey went on to question the respondents on how they perceived the technology and Cell Phone for Life's impact. Skinner notes that awareness of the Cell Phone for Life technology and Cell-Life was generally poor. Awareness was most present amongst branch leaders or district organisers, who subsequently had the most contact with national and provincial offices. Skinner continues that there is, "a gap in knowledge and awareness that has to be overcome if the Cell Phone for Life is to be used effectively."¹⁸³

Another area in which Cell Phone for Life has use is in providing HIV information. Respondents to the survey felt that access to information regarding HIV would increase as members got "more in touch with the technology."¹⁸⁴ In terms of the specific services requested, the first of these was reminders to take ARV medication, which would require coordinating with the clinic dispensing the drugs. Another area in which information access would be useful is in terms of location finders to be used to assist staff in locating services and resources such as clinics, TAC offices and medical assistance. Skinner notes that, "support and regular contact around specific events and legal cases were raised as important."¹⁸⁵ Thus, providing information with regards to activist activity such as informing members when attempting to mobilise. The final area in which information access could be supplied through the project is for volunteers to have access to a reference source of experts and specific information on HIV and general health issues. Thus, medical assistance could be provided rapidly, as opposed to patients having to wait until the next meeting or having to visit a clinic¹⁸⁶. When asked what type of information they would want to receive on their cell phones, respondents answered with a high response to 'requesting basic information on

¹⁸² Ibid.

¹⁸³ Ibid. p.10

¹⁸⁴ Ibid. p.16

¹⁸⁵ Ibid.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid.

HIV¹⁸⁷.

Mobile phone technology also has implications for transforming internal democracy. A greater spread of opinions could be gathered prior to meetings, with members being sent the agenda via SMS. Members interested in specific items of the agenda could request more information regarding this via SMS. Subsequently, members who may not be able to physically attend the meeting can still provide input via SMS or MXIT, thus improving participation. On specific key issues a yes/no poll could be sent out via SMS and a far wider reflection of sentiment regarding issues could be established amongst the organisation and thus improve its framing processes¹⁸⁸.

4.5 Conclusion

The results of this survey have a number of interesting implications for the current use of mobile phone technology. Skinner concludes that, “Cell Phone for Life constitutes a new and exciting approach to information dispersal that is instant and can be widely dispersed directly”. Mobile phone technology combined with the cooperation of the TAC, which already maintains a background in community mobilisation, holds a strong basis for the future of the project¹⁸⁹.

In terms of the focus of the project and the areas in which mobile phone technology could be the most effective, Skinner concludes from the results of the survey that there’s a need to focus on organisational information, especially considering the current communication issues that arise between the central TAC office and the district branches¹⁹⁰. Thus, mobile phones offer improved communication channels for mobilising structures. Apart from organisation information, framing processes related to information regarding HIV and general health issues are considered important areas for the Cell Phone for Life campaign to address. A key finding of the qualitative results of the survey was “the capacity of the technology to provide a reference point

¹⁸⁷ see table 3.

¹⁸⁸ Benjamin. 2008. p.3

¹⁸⁹ Ibid. p.23

¹⁹⁰ Ibid.

if members are faced with questions that they cannot answer.”¹⁹¹ This subsequently improves the framing processes of the TAC, especially in terms of destigmatising HIV/AIDS amongst rural communities.

Another revealing area of the survey is with regard to the structure and operations of the TAC in terms of improving political opportunities. Under the TAC’s current structure and operations, a number of challenges are faced with respect to implementing the mobile phone technology provided by the Cell Phone for Life campaign. The survey noted these issues with respect to the splits between the national and provincial offices as well as poor communication often regarding the focus and function of the TAC¹⁹². This may historically be attributed to the nature of the organisation and how it came into being as a campaign driven movement, that drew in a number of supporters and followers who subsequently had to become assimilated into the bureaucratic structure of a social movement.

Another issue is the different areas of work done by the TAC. Due to the campaign structure of the organisation, campaign activities take preference over the other functions of the organisation. This concern extends to the implementation of the Cell Phone for Life campaign as focus could be shifted away from this project at critical moments of the implementation of this technology. Linked with this issue is the lack of systems and databases in existence¹⁹³. The survey revealed a lack of a single electronic database of member’s details. Thus serious effort is required in establishing such a database of information, and once this is established training of TAC staff to maintain and update the databases will be required. The final issue that was raised by the surveys was with respect to the cost of operations. Respondents noted that the Cell Phone for Life campaign would potentially create considerable cost saving for the TAC in terms of time and phone calls. That being said, the cost of providing the service, in terms of SMSs, especially considering the high number and frequency, remains a key issue. Skinner notes, “The cost of these will need to be covered in the long term”¹⁹⁴.

¹⁹¹ Ibid.

¹⁹² Ibid. p.24

¹⁹³ Ibid. p.24

¹⁹⁴ Ibid. p.25

This recent example of the NSP exemplifies the role mobile phone technology holds for use by social movements such as the TAC for improving their political opportunities, mobilising structures and framing processes. Benjamin notes regarding this, “for the first time in three years the TAC leadership has realised the full impact of this technology.”¹⁹⁵ Thus the question that remains is what needs to change in order for the TAC to fully embrace mobile phone technology into their organisation?

Benjamin believes that it comes down to whether the TAC wants to change its culture. Having grown organically as an activist-driven social movement, modelled on similar anti-apartheid cell structures, it has “become comfortable in its ways”¹⁹⁶. Thus adopting mobile phone technology would involve doing something they’re not used to. However as exemplified in this recent example, and emphasised by Benjamin, there is no reason why, with the assistance of mobile phone membership, the TAC should be capable of having an auditable membership of one million, thus substantially changing the nature of the movement. Benjamin continues that subsequently it comes down to a political decision over a technical one, made by the elected TAC leadership.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁹⁶ Benjamin. 2008. p.4

Chapter 5: Effect of Mobile Phone Technology on the Treatment Action Campaign

5.1 Introduction

This section seeks to tie together the arguments of this dissertation and prove the validity of the thesis statement. Thus this section addresses the effect mobile phone technology has had on the social movement, the TAC in terms of the theoretical framework developed by McAdam, McCarthy and Zald. Ultimately this section seeks to answer the research question, does mobile phone technology provide an updated understanding for the political opportunities, mobilising structures and framing processes of a social movement.

5.2 Returning to the research questions

The TAC acts as a useful case study for understanding the role that mobile phone technology holds for social movements. In order to fully understand this role and the impact of the technology it is necessary to interpret the findings through the lens of social movement theory. Whilst the TAC post-2004 has adopted less of a social movement position, the framework suggested by Charles Tilly and later built on by McAdam, McCarthy and Zald can still serve as a somewhat useful means for understanding how social movements operate.

Tilly saw social movements as a synthesis of three key elements. The first is a “sustained and organised public effort to make a collective claim on a targeted authority, otherwise described as a campaign”. The second, “a combination of the creation of special-purpose associations and coalitions, public meetings, solemn processions, vigils, rallies, demonstrations, statements to and in the public media and pamphleteering”. The third and final being, “the participants’ concerted representation of WUNC (worthiness, unity, numbers and commitment on the part of themselves or the constituency)”¹⁹⁷. Adding to this framework, McAdam, McCarthy and Zald see

¹⁹⁷ Tilly, C., 2004. *Social Movements, 1768-2004*, Paradigm Publishers: London pp.4

these elements as being: “the structure of political opportunities and constraints confronting the movement; forms of organisation available to insurgents and collective processes of interpretation, attribution and social construction that mediate between opportunity and action”¹⁹⁸. Subsequently, the three elements in which we can analyse the role of mobile phones for the TAC can be broadly categorised as political opportunities, mobilising structures and framing processes.

5.3 Theoretical Framework:

5.3.1 Political Opportunities

Broader societal factors affecting the relationship between a social movement and its environment are understood through political opportunity. In terms of mobile phone technology, Tilly argues that it is important to avoid arguments of ‘technological determinism’. This essentially means that innovations in new communication media does not “single-handedly change the character of social movements”¹⁹⁹. However, Tilly notes that as communication enters the twenty-first century, its significance for social movements cannot be ignored.

Bennet argues that technological innovation such as the mobile phone have had an impact for social movements. He notes how innovations assist to make “loosely structured networks, as opposed to previously denser social movement networks... crucial to coordination amongst activists... increasing the strategic advantages of resource-poor organisations within social movements”²⁰⁰. In terms of the TAC, the mobile phone membership system implemented by Cell Life offers potential for such ‘loosely structured networks’ as described by Bennet. Benjamin notes how mobile phones can be used for recruiting of new members and creating a more widespread network of supporters, beyond the scope of those who are within geographical vicinity of branches²⁰¹. Thus, through mobile phones, the TAC is able to better

¹⁹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹⁹ Tilly. 2004. p.97

²⁰⁰ Bennet, L., 2003. “Communicating Global Activism.” *Information, Communication & Society* p.143

²⁰¹ Benjamin. 2004. p.2

harness the support present in the country that would otherwise previously have been unable to participate due to limitations such as location relative to branches.

Bennet continues however, that whilst it may broaden networks, it also makes social movements “increasingly vulnerable to problems of coordination, control and commitment”²⁰². Benjamin accepts this, noting that the traditional membership is still required for the organisation, and instead of replacing this, a separate category should be created for ‘membership via cell phone’²⁰³. This idea is emphasised by Tilly who argues for the importance of such innovation in reducing the “influence of ideology on personal involvement in social movements, diminishing the importance of bounded, durable and resource rich local and national organisations as bases for social movement activism”²⁰⁴.

Further claims by Tilly regarding political opportunity is with regards to the form, personnel, and claims of social movements. He notes how these vary and evolve during the course of a movement’s history and subsequently “produce substantial change and variation in the character of social movements.”²⁰⁵ Subsequently, in terms of the TAC, the activities of the movement have shifted in recent years. Boule and Avafia (2005) note that since 2004, the TAC can no longer be described as solely an advocacy organisation but as a service delivery organisation as well²⁰⁶. Thus, the role of mobile phones becomes increasingly prominent for the TAC as seen in the services offered by the Cell Phone for Life campaign.

5.3.2 Mobilising Structures

The mobilising structure perspective can be used to understand how mobile phones assist in providing forms of organisation for the TAC and subsequently social movements in general. Porta and Diani (1999), outline movement networks as

²⁰² Bennet. 2003. p.143

²⁰³ Benjamin. Interview. 01/09/2011

²⁰⁴ Tilly. 2004. p.97

²⁰⁵ Ibid.

²⁰⁶ Boule, J. & Avafia, T. 2005. Treatment Action Campaign (TAC) Evaluation. [Online]. Available: www.tac.org.za. [accessed: 14 August 2011]

allowing individuals within a social movement who “individually may be weak and isolated to play a significant political role.”²⁰⁷

Diani describes such a network as one that links various movement organisations either in times of mobilisation or through less permanent consultation mechanisms²⁰⁸. Thus the relationship between the TAC and partner NGO Cell Life, is a good example of this type of network link. As mentioned previously Cell Life provides the technology required to implement mobile phone related services on which the TAC operates. Thus, a working relationship between the movements is created whereby the TAC provides a database of members and Cell Life offers the technology required to support the network. A prime example of this relationship in action is in terms of the ‘Cell Phone for Life’ campaign. As mentioned previously, this campaign involves the direct use of cell phones to provide information and support to those infected and affected by HIV/AIDS. Thus, whilst Cell Life provides the technical resources required to implement this service, the TAC offers its members²⁰⁹.

The criticism against movement networks must also be noted. It is argued that participants integrated in a network, such as those created by Cell Life, does not provide the opportunities required to involve individuals in protest. As such, the role and significance of networks in fostering participation should not be over-estimated in leading to collective action. Porta and Diani counter this, noting that whilst such networks may not be the sole means for mobilising, they remain a key part in offering support to a social movement. Adding to this McAdam notes that it offers a “strong subjective identification with a particular identity, reinforced by organisational or individual ties that are especially likely to encourage participation.”²¹⁰

In terms of the TAC, findings from the study conducted by De Tolly observed that rural branches felt more distant from the core of the organisation and were thus

²⁰⁷ Porta & Diani. 1999. p.112

²⁰⁸ Ibid.

²⁰⁹ Skinner, D. 2009. *Evaluation for Cell Phone for Life for Cell Life Baseline Report*, Research on Health and Society. Available: <http://www.comminit.com/hiv-aids/node/321138> [accessed: 23 August 2011]

²¹⁰ McAdam, D., Paulsen, R. 1993, Specifying the Relationship between Social Ties and Activism in *American Journal of Sociology*, pp. 659

unable to attend organisational meetings in Cape Town, leading to feelings of exclusion²¹¹. This is where the introduction of mobile phones assists to remove such sentiment. Respondents to the survey conducted by Skinner noted that MXit could be useful for allowing virtual meetings to assist in facilitating organisation of campaign activities²¹². Cell Life's Peter Benjamin further emphasised this, explaining how the TAC could have far greater direct communication with its members through SMS, or as Skinner notes, even two-way conversation through MXit. The implications of this include the TAC providing more regular notifications, which could include news, and local activities to its members. Subsequently this would create a greater sense of inclusion, thus adding to the mobilisation structure of the movement. Finally Benjamin notes how mobile phones may be used for fundraising. Respondents of Skinner's survey, suggested facilitating pledge lines as a means to raise funds as an idea for use by mobile phones, echoed this sentiment²¹³.

5.3.3 Framing Processes

McAdam et al note that the strategic framing of 'injustice and grievances' along with their subsequent causes and motivations for collective action is important. This assists to highlight, "the central importance of ideas and cultural elements in understanding the mobilisation of participation in social movements and the framing of political opportunity."²¹⁴ In terms of the TAC, the need for improved framing processes is required as noted in the survey conducted where prominent feedback called for a need for education in the communities and recruiting of new members²¹⁵. Subsequently, 'Cell Phone for Life' acts as a mechanism for achieving these goals as its primary role is stated as "information dispersal at multiple levels varying from simple to detailed response to campaigns, programmes and new information"²¹⁶.

²¹¹ de Tolly, K., Alexander, H. 2009. *Innovative Use of Cellphone Technology for HIV/AIDS behavior change communications: 3 pilot projects*. Cape Town pp.1

²¹² Ibid.

²¹³ Skinner. 2009.

²¹⁴ McAdam et al. 1996. p.261

²¹⁵ Skinner. 2009

²¹⁶ Ibid.

The cultural impact of framing on social movements and subsequently its use as a strategic device is key for analysing how social movements operate²¹⁷. Movements exist within a larger societal context and as such draw on the cultural stock of how to protest and organise. This relies on “skills and technology of communication, which may include anything from publishing newsletters to recruiting members”²¹⁸. The TAC draws on a cultural stock informed by traditional ‘anti-apartheid’ cell systems. Thus the movement is structured in such a way that information and services are provided to the branches, which subsequently pass these on to their members. The implication of this is that the national office never sends information directly to its members. Benjamin notes that, whilst the TAC might still be stuck in its traditional means of organising, within the last 20 years people have begun to discover other forms of organisation by means of an information economy²¹⁹. Through assistance with Cell Life, the TAC has been given the ability to communicate directly with all its members, thus completely changing its framing processes and the method upon which the movement organises.

Another area in which mobile phones may assist with framing is in terms of the TAC’s reporting. A condition of receiving funds from donors requires the TAC to report on its activities. As noted by Benjamin, Cell Life provides the TAC with a data collection system, which allows for daily reports to be sent via SMS to a central database. Through this process, a better internal record of the movement’s activities is recorded and donors are provided with sufficient information regarding the TAC’s activities²²⁰.

5.4 Conclusion

Having outlined the impact that mobile phone technology has had and holds for the TAC in terms of political opportunity, mobilising structures and framing processes, one can assess this technology’s greater impact for social movements.

²¹⁷ McAdam et al. 1996, p.266

²¹⁸ Ibid.

²¹⁹ Benjamin. Interview. 01/09/2011

²²⁰ Ibid.

Tilly notes that improved communication is weighted with several social implications. He notes how such innovations lead to a move from “all-encompassing, socially controlling communities” to “individualised fragmented personal communities” which is present in the direction being taken by the TAC. What Tilly notes is that, “with each new form of communication that facilitates a specific set of social relations, it equally excludes others who may not have access to the relevant communication medium.”²²¹ This is an important point to note with reference specifically to mobile phones and their impact for social movements. As emphasised by Benjamin, mobile phones are incredibly widespread, making them more inclusive than other traditional forms of organising. However, that being said, certain functions of mobile phone communication, such as MXit may exclude some from participation. The primary concern however, as echoed in the survey conducted by Skinner is the prohibitive costs associated with maintaining a two-way conversation through SMS. Thus, it is important to note the existing barriers to use of mobile phone technology.

However, the second observation made by Tilly is that, “communications media differs dramatically in its degree of symmetry and asymmetry, with digital communication redressing this balance to a certain extent.”²²² Considering the TAC, the findings have shown that mobile phones offer a far more widespread access to information regarding the TAC’s campaigns and activities. As Skinner concludes from the results of the survey conducted, “Cell Phone for Life constitutes a new and exciting approach to information dispersal that is instant and can be widely dispersed directly”²²³. Benjamin concurs with this, relating mobile phone use in terms of a more widespread membership base, “Through mobile phone membership, the TAC could have an auditable number of members that claiming over one million members. It would completely change the nature of the movement”²²⁴.

Thus, it is clear from this analysis that mobile phone technology holds a key position to the future of the TAC and social movement’s political opportunities, mobilising

²²¹ Tilly, C. 2003. *Social Movements Enter the 21st Century*, Columbia University. p. 13

²²² Ibid.

²²³ Skinner.

²²⁴ Benjamin. Interview. 01/09/2011

structures and framing processes as a whole. In terms of the TAC specifically, limitations to the findings have been that currently its use is limited to a more informal approach with regards to political opportunities and mobilising structures. In terms of framing processes, the Cell Phone for Life campaign has assisted the social movement already in framing its objectives and educating people about HIV/AIDS in communities. However, this is beginning to change. Tilly concludes that as communication enters the 21st Century, a split is becoming evident amongst social movements. This split sees two categories emerge. The first being, “older styles of action and organisation that sustain continuous political involvement at points of decision-making power”; the second: “temporary displays of connection across continents, largely mediated by specialised organisations and entrepreneurs.”²²⁵ If we relate this to the TAC, the move from the first to the second category becomes apparent. As Benjamin concludes, “it’s about whether the TAC wants to change its culture. It’s become comfortable, it has to become about doing something they’re not used to.”²²⁶

²²⁵ Tilly.2009. p.23

²²⁶ Benjamin. Interview. 01/09/2011

Chapter 6: Conclusion

This dissertation has attempted to update social movement theory and the theoretical framework created by McAdam, McCarthy and Zald. The aim of the research question was to assess whether the innovation of mobile phone technology offers an updated approach to understanding the political opportunities, mobilising structures and framing processes of a social movement. This dissertation subsequently applied the theory to case study method using the Treatment Action Campaign and Cell-Life to investigate this question. Walsham, discussing generalisations based on interpretive case studies, notes four ways in which case study research may make a contribution. These are namely: concept development, drawing of implications, theory generation, and contribution of deep insight²²⁷. It is hoped that this dissertation has helped contribute towards these four areas, specifically in terms of creating a more updated framework for understanding the role of mobile phone technology as a medium for assisting social movements.

Wasserman argues that the challenge in understanding the significance mobile phones have for 'politics and processes of development and social change' is to explore how such broad discourse are related to everyday practice²²⁸. Thus in using the case study of the Treatment Action Campaign, this dissertation has attempted to draw a broader conclusion with respect to the role mobile phone technology has for social movements.

The 'technological determinism' argument contends against placing too great an emphasis on the role of technology in bringing about social change. Thus, in terms of mobile phone technology and specifically its role in the operations of the TAC this argument must be considered. Wassermann notes that such inequality relates to "access, power and quality of information"²²⁹. In terms of the TAC, whilst this dissertation has shown that a major limiting factor to mobile phone use is associated running costs, as highlighted in the survey conducted by Skinner, this is merely a

²²⁷Darke, P, Shanks, G & Broadbent, M (1998). Successfully completing case study research: combining rigour, relevance and pragmatism. *Info Systems J*, vol. 8, p. 273 – 289

²²⁸ Wasserman. 2010

²²⁹ Ibid.

minor obstacle to this technology. Skinner ultimately concludes that mobile phone use by the TAC, in partnership with Cell Life, “constitutes a new and exciting approach to information dispersal that is instant and can be widely dispersed directly.”²³⁰ Thus, rather than ‘entrenching inequality’ in terms of access to information, mobile phones act as a medium for a more widespread dispersal of information and in the case of the TAC, as noted by Benjamin (2011), a more direct means for communication between the main branch and all of the TAC’s members²³¹.

In terms of mobile phones greater impact on the developing world, and throughout Africa, the case study of the TAC helps to illustrate this impact. Wasserman observes that whilst mobile phones, as relatively new technology to Africa, are currently offering new opportunities and challenges to democratic life on the continent, it is important to remember that ultimately these technologies are being adopted by people in a varied and heterogeneous context, that is far removed from the context of the developed world²³². Thus, as Wasserman concludes, a true assessment of this technology’s impact within an African context requires an approach, which offers, as he describes, “Rich, textured, immersive perspectives...not sweeping rhetorical claims about revolutions or counter-revolutions.”²³³ Subsequently, the case study of the TAC assists in this regard. The findings conducted from survey analysis and interview with Peter Benjamin of Cell Life, offer an ‘immersive perspective’ on the current role that mobile phones offer for the TAC. Thus, through this, this dissertation has followed Wasserman’s suggestion as a means to further gain understanding regarding this technology’s impact in a wider African context.

Nyamnjoh notes that Africans are shaping this technology, appropriating it in local contexts, and ultimately “evolving in a dialectical process of cultural and social appropriation.”²³⁴ In other words, such technology has the power to redraw the lines between ‘the private and the public’, which has the implication that increasingly mobile phones move beyond being external to people’s lives but rather integrated into

²³⁰ Skinner. 2009. p.23

²³¹ Benjamin. Interview. 01/09/2011

²³² Wasserman. 2010

²³³ Ibid.

²³⁴ Nyamnjoh. 2009. p.12

them²³⁵. It's this interactivity and ability to participate from outside of 'traditional forms of political process', that Wasserman and Rheingold describe as "alternative public spheres"²³⁶. In the case study, this is emphasised by the recent example of the 'please call me' campaign. Through advertising about contributing suggestions for the renewal of the NSP, Cell Life was able to extend its reach, receiving a far wider response than any previous attempts²³⁷.

This case study contributes towards an updated approach to understanding the political opportunities, mobilising structures and framing processes of a social movement. Whilst the TAC, with assistance from Cell-Life, is still in the process of fully implementing this technology within the organisation, this dissertation has shown that current levels of mobile phone use within the social movement and the structures that have been established have implications for furthering its political opportunities, mobilising structures and framing processes in the future.

6.1 Further Research

The very nature of technology is that it's constantly innovating. As such, there is a need to update research regarding mobile phones impact for social movements regularly. In terms of the role of mobile phone technology for the TAC and the major limitation facing this thesis, an obstacle to the TAC adopting the technology fully was the political decision required by the TAC leadership to shift their traditional way of organising²³⁸. However, as noted by Benjamin, a shift is occurring. With the recent success of NSP 'please call me' campaign, the TAC leadership is finally beginning to fully appreciate mobile phone technology's impact for the TAC, if harnessed fully. Investigating the TACs increased use of mobile phones for membership recruiting and organising would be worthy of future research.

²³⁵ Ibid. p.13

²³⁶ Wasserman. 2007 p.112

²³⁷ Benjamin. Interview. 01/09/2011

²³⁸ Ibid.

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