

**MOBILE PHONE USE FOR EMPOWERMENT IN THE CONTEXT OF  
SOCIAL EXCLUSION: AN ETHNOGRAPHIC STUDY OF URBAN REFUGEES  
IN SOUTH AFRICA.**



BY

**KASKY BACISHOGA BISIMWA (BSMKAS001)**

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Supervisors: Prof. Kevin Johnston and Prof. Irwin Brown

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## **DECLARATION**

I hereby declare that the thesis

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is my own work, and all sources have been acknowledged through referencing.

SIGNED: 

Signed by candidate
---------------------

Kasky Bacishoga Bisimwa

March 2017

## **DEDICATION**

To my amazing daughters Lola and Nina; my son Olame,

and my virtuous wife Odile.

I love you

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Proverbs 9:10 says, “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom...”. Truly, all other types of learning are worthless unless built upon a knowledge of the LORD JESUS CHRIST Himself. Above all, I give praise to the LORD JESUS CHRIST, my all in all, who made it possible.

I would also like to express my gratitude to my supervisors Prof. Kevin Johnston and Prof. Irwin Brown for their guidance and invaluable support that helped me throughout the journey to complete this thesis.

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I express my special gratitude to all the research respondents, refugees in South Africa, who trusted me and generously devoted their time to participate in this research.

Finally, I owe special thanks to my family and friends in Cape Town, DR Congo, and Rwanda. I am so grateful for your prayers, love, and support. May God bless you all.

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## ABSTRACT

**Problem Statement:** Calls have been made to find ways to address the problem of urban refugees who are now acknowledged as a universal, continuing, and recurring phenomenon. There is a dominant optimism about the contribution of mobile phones to the empowerment of refugees in the host countries. However, there is a dearth of knowledge on exactly how mobile phones contribute to empowerment, and also the use of mobile phones by urban refugees in developing countries has received only minimal attention.

**The purpose of the research:** The main objective of this research was to empirically investigate whether the use of mobile phones by urban refugees in South Africa generates or fails to generate capabilities for empowerment. The specific aim was to critically explore the factors which shape the use of mobile phones by urban refugees in South Africa and their capabilities for empowerment.

**Design / methodology / approach:** This research adopted a critical orientation to knowledge, used critical ethnographic methods and drew on a theoretical lens developed from the integration of Sen's Capability Approach and Bourdieu's Theory of Practice. The data were collected through observations and in-depth interviews with 22 urban refugees in South Africa. Documents and website corroborating evidence have provided secondary data. Data were analysed using thematic analysis.

**Findings:** The findings suggest that mobile phone use affords valuable capabilities for empowerment in three main ways. First, the capabilities to negotiate ways to participate in the information society by: participating in economic and financial activities, improving access to services and to sources of information. Second, the capabilities to effectively engage with wider networks by: developing and maintaining relationships, being socially and culturally connected, and communicating effectively. Third, the capabilities to manage one's own situation and solve problems by: multi-tasking easily, and a guarantee of transparency and security. However, the generation of these capabilities is contingent on power relations in the social field – between social structures and individual's agency. In South Africa, the capabilities of empowerment that urban refugees can generate through mobile phone use are either enhanced or hindered by interrelated factors, namely the affordances of mobile phones, socio-environmental factors, and personal factors. The availability of capital is very crucial for personal factors, to which they confer more, or less, power to influence the power relations.

**Originality/contribution:** This research contributes to the theory in the field of Information Systems by proposing a dynamic framework with precise constructs for theorising and explaining the mechanisms and social practices that shape mobile phone use and the capabilities for empowerment. This research suggests that to research mobile phone use for empowerment in the context of social exclusion and inequality in developing countries, researchers need to look beyond social agents'

immediate behaviours to take into consideration the broader context of social exclusion, by focusing on conversion factors, human diversity, and capabilities. This research has exposed the explicitly or implicitly hidden interests, important beliefs, assumptions and social practices that facilitate or constrain capabilities for empowerment. It contributes to the empowerment of the ethnographic researcher who is himself an urban refugee in South Africa, but also to the empowerment of urban refugees in South Africa and perhaps of other individuals in a similar situation. That is because empowerment starts with the enlightenment and the realisation of one's own true interest and situation. The findings can also contribute to the policy-setting process of government or organisations seeking to assist urban refugees, by facilitating the formulation of their intervention strategies.

**Keywords:** Mobile phone, Refugee, South Africa, Social exclusion, Empowerment, Capability Approach, Bourdieu's Theory of Practice, Structures, Agency, Capabilities.

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## **LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS**

ATM	Automatic Teller Machine
CA	Capability Approach
DHA	Department of Home Affairs
DR Congo	Democratic Republic of Congo
GPS	Global Positioning System
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
ICT4D	Information and Communication Technologies for Development
ID	Identity Document
IS	Information Systems
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
SMS	Short Message Service
TOP	Theory of Practice
UCT	University of Cape Town

# 1. INTRODUCTION

## 1.1. Introduction

Information and communication technology (ICT) has increasingly become an important part of current development agendas, in which it has been viewed as a key component in the effort to develop the information society, alleviate socioeconomic exclusion and poverty, and enhance the empowerment of disadvantaged groups in developing countries (Andersson, Grönlund, & Wicander, 2012; Avgerou, 2010). This research aims to critically explore the factors which shape the use of mobile phones by urban refugees in South Africa and their capabilities for empowerment. As forced migrants, refugees have repeatedly been identified by the United Nations as belonging to a category of marginalised and vulnerable groups that need to be empowered (Correa-Velez, Spaaij & Upham, 2012; Papademetriou & Fratzke, 2016; UNHCR, 2015a). In research, empowerment is referred to as the “expansion in people’s ability to make strategic life choices in a context where this ability was previously denied to them” (Kabeer, 1999, p. 437). This chapter presents the overview of this PhD research. It discusses the motivation, the research objective, the research questions, and the research approach.

## 1.2. Research Motivation

The motivation for this research arises from the particular historical moment in which it is situated. On the one hand, the urban refugee phenomenon has become a global concern, particularly since the declaration of the European refugee crisis which began in 2015 when a rising number of refugees, coming from the Middle East and North Africa, made the journey to countries in the European Union (EU) travelling across the Mediterranean Sea or through Southeast Europe (Papademetriou & Fratzke, 2016). The current refugee crisis is referred to by the European Commission as the world’s largest global humanitarian crisis since World War II (ECHO, 2015). While the contemporary refugee crisis became widely represented and experienced by the EU in 2015, South Africa has experienced an enormous increase in refugees since the end of the apartheid era (Gordon, 2016a). And since then, in South Africa refugees have been experiencing social exclusion and social inequality (CoRMSA, 2013; Crush, Chikanda, & Tawodzera, 2016; Gordon, 2016a; Kobia & Cranfield, 2009).

On the other hand, the potential of mobile phones as catalysts of development is recognised worldwide (Chabossou, Stork, Stork, & Zahonogo, 2009; GSMA, 2015; Kim, 2016). The literature in Information and Communication Technologies for Development (ICT4D) shows a fast growing interest in the mobile phone as a new technology with much promise for development (Donner, Gitau, & Marsden, 2011; Hatakka, Thapa, & Sæbø, 2016; Sreekumar, 2011). Mobile phones are believed to facilitate global flows of information ( Billieux et al., 2015; Van Biljon & Kotzé, 2008; Whittal, 2011) crucial to

the creation of local livelihoods and the development of strategies for improving life circumstances. The increasing pervasiveness of ICTs in everyday life has given rise to an emerging debate on the use of technological innovation to alleviate the plight of refugees (Betts, Bloom, Kaplan, & Omata, 2014). It is argued that mobile phones enable empowerment, enhance the autonomy of individuals to set up their own connections and to have more choice and greater control over their lives (Chew, Ilavarasan, & Levy, 2015; Kim, 2016; Smith, Spence, & Rashid, 2011; Svensson, & Larsson, 2015). Yet, as Oksman (2010) argues, even though mobile phones are designed to do particular things, they often perform in ‘Janus-faced’ ways that give rise to multiple and paradoxical implications. Such dialectic nature of mobile phones gives reasons to believe that its widespread use as an integral resource of everyday life has opened up a range of possibilities and leads to new practices and complex consequences (Kim, 2016; Svensson, & Larsson, 2015). Refugees use mobile phones in their daily lives, yet little is known about their use and its impact on their lives (Bacishoga, Hooper, & Johnston, 2016; James, 2016). Hence, a critical understanding of the use of mobile phones by urban refugees in South Africa and their capabilities for empowerment is crucial.

### **1.3. Persistence and Relevance of the Research**

This research is relevant not only to the specific context for which it is carried out (the use of mobile phones by urban refugees in South Africa in the context of social exclusion and inequality) but also to the ICT4D research communities and international institutions worldwide.

First of all, the refugee phenomenon has increasingly become an important national and international issue due to the intensification of violence and natural disasters that have affected parts of the world on a large scale. For example, the European crisis caused by the massive arrival of refugees has gained attention with daily media coverage worldwide (Holmes & Castañeda, 2016). The issues of refugees have received well-deserved attention in a bid to address them (Leung, 2011; Zetter & Deikun, 2010). However, only minimal attention has been paid to an investigation into the impact of mobile phones on the experience of urban refugees (Leung, 2011). To date, the broader refugee studies literature has been dominated by discussions of the systems of administration of rural or camp refugees (Gordon, 2015; Leung, 2011). So far, available studies of technology use in the efforts for alleviating the plight of refugees have been focused mainly on refugees resettled in developed countries (Leung, 2011), or on the use of technological innovation in improving organisational responses for refugees installed in camps (Betts et al., 2014). Hence, little is known about the use of mobile phones by urban refugees in developing countries and the impact on their lives. There is a particular dearth of knowledge about the factors that shape urban refugees’ use of mobile phones and the implications for their empowerment.

Secondly, in the ICT4D literature, there have been abundant references to empowerment, often with assertions that in general, ICT has the potential to empower (Andersson et al., 2012; Avgerou, 2010).

However, such widespread assertions are based on claims rather than evidence (Betts et al., 2014; Carmody, 2012; Kim, 2016). Despite the intense interest among research communities and international institutions in regards to ICT4D, and the remarkable theoretical capabilities of ICT4D to study technology innovation in relation to socio-economic context, there is still scant knowledge about how mobile phone use facilitates and brings about empowerment (Hoan, Chib & Mahalingham, 2016). ICT4D research remains weak in forming convincing arguments about IT-enabled socio-economic development (Avgerou, 2010). The literature has rather focused on personal factors influencing ICT adoption or on organisational factors influencing its implementation (Donner et al., 2011) and has thus failed to holistically address the issue. For example, research in the area of mobile technology for development has been dominated by an economic understanding of development (Svensson & Larsson, 2015). Also, very limited systematic evidence of developmental impacts of mobile phones in the developing countries is provided (Rashid & Elder, 2009). Until now, there is a dearth of research which focuses on conditions or contextual factors that might shape mobile phones' use (Han, 2012). Little has been done in exploring the factors that shape the extent to which capabilities can be generated from ICT utilisation (Qureshi, 2011; Zheng & Stahl, 2012). Gilbert (2010) argues that there has been little research that has looked at people's empowerment or disempowerment related to ICTs, in relation to their own context of ICT use. As such, the extent to which mobile phone usage can affect urban refugees' empowerment remains under-researched.

Gigler (2011) advises that research should adequately investigate the different factors affecting the extent to which ICT's utilisation can or cannot result in positive changes in people's lives and enhance the well-being of communities. Andrade and Doolin (2016) call for in-depth research to understand why a person chooses to use ICT in a particular way. Therefore, it is crucial to critically explore the factors which shape the use of mobile phones by urban refugees in South Africa and their capabilities for empowerment. That constitutes the aim of this research. Capabilities refer to the genuine opportunities an individual enjoys or the freedom that individuals have to enjoy valuable beings and doings (Oosterlaken, 2012). According to Gigler (2011), it is essential to also consider people's capabilities when assessing the impact of ICTs in their lives, rather than only evaluating the potential of ICT's use.

#### **1.4. Research Objectives and Question**

This research is informed by an underlying assumption that ICT does not necessarily result in development for all but it is subject to the power dynamics of Information Systems (IS) innovation action (Avgerou, 2010). In addition, in this research social structures are assumed as formed to serve a strategic purpose; typically, to empower or disempower. The term structure is defined as "sets of mutually sustaining schemas and resources that empower or constrain social action and tend to be

reproduced by that social action” (Sewell, 1992, p. 19) and is used to refer to aspects of an individual’s environment such as the socioeconomic status, social class and religion (Chew et al., 2015).

Therefore, the objectives of this research are set out as follows:

1. To empirically investigate whether the use of mobile phones by urban refugees in South Africa generates (or fails to generate) capabilities for empowerment.
2. To critically investigate which capabilities urban refugees generate through the use of mobile phones and the circumstances under which they are generated.
3. To critically investigate which factors or conditions enable or hinder urban refugees from generating capabilities through mobile phone use.

With such objectives, this research will provide an understanding of whether the use of mobile phones enhances capabilities for the empowerment of urban refugees in South Africa. To achieve its objectives, the following research question needed to be answered:

*How does mobile phone use enable capabilities, and what factors shape mobile phone use and capabilities for the empowerment of urban refugees in South Africa?*

To fully investigate this main research question it has been broken down into the following secondary research questions:

1. *What factors shape mobile phone use by urban refugees in South Africa?*
2. *How does mobile phone use enable the capabilities for the empowerment of urban refugees in South Africa?*

It is important to acknowledge that mobile phone technological properties as crafted by designers and developers may be examined to identify the typical activities commonly associated with the use of the technology. However, that is not the aim of this research as shown in the above research questions. In this research, the focus is on how urban refugees actually use their mobile phones and the factors which shape their use, and the capabilities for empowerment.

## **1.5. Research Approach**

This research is theoretically based on the integration of Sen’s Capability Approach (CA) (Sen, 1980, 1984, 1993, 1999) and Bourdieu’s Theory of Practice (TOP) (Bourdieu, 1977, 1990a, 1993) to explain empowerment through the use of mobile phones. In so doing, this research is based on and contributes to the literature on ICT4D with a focus on the use of mobile phones by urban refugees in South Africa. In the domain of ICT4D, a wide range of conceptual frameworks have been applied to research the relationship between ICTs and empowerment. For assessing the main fundamentals of empowerment the CA has been recognised as an important theoretical framework (Gigler, 2011). Walsham (2010) suggests using Sen’s CA as a possible theoretical lens when assessing how ICTs can contribute to improving individual well-being. Avgerou (2010) emphasises that the CA has influenced the development discourse, and Gigler (2004) describes CA as an important theoretical framework for capturing the main fundamentals of empowerment.

However, as Oosterlaken (2012) points out, many of the applications of CA so far have been concerned with project evaluation. He urges that investigations should also be conducted on how the expansions of human capabilities come about. In addition, Hill (2003, p. 117) argues that “until the analytical frameworks being developed as extensions of the CA address the issue of social power, the analysis of well-being will be incomplete, and decisions made to enhance human capabilities will systematically fall short”. For this reason, Bowman (2010) calls for broader frameworks that enable an understanding of the social and cultural constraints on choice and the processes that shape the persistence of disadvantage and poverty. Consequently, this thesis employs a theoretical framework based on the integration of Sen’s CA and Bourdieu’s TOP, to provide more insights in achieving its aim. Bourdieu’s TOP enables the analysis of how power persists. Bourdieu points to the role of the power of symbolic systems and their domination over the construction of reality in understanding social situations (Bowman, 2010). Bourdieu focuses on the constraining and enabling features of social structures on human action. The concepts of Bourdieu’s TOP are used to make sense of the relationship between “objective social structures (institutions, discourses, fields, and ideologies) and everyday practices, i.e. what people do and why they do it” (Donnelly, 2010, p. 82). Alsop, Bertelsen, and Holland (2006) argue that empowerment is influenced by two interrelated factors: opportunity structure and agency. Agency is defined as an actor’s or group’s ability to make purposeful choices (Samman & Santos, 2009). Consequently, the analysis of the interplay between structural conditions and agency become crucial since it allows an understanding of factors that shape empowerment.

Therefore, it can be assumed that the integration of Sen’s CA and Bourdieu’s TOP will be crucial in analysing the connections between the conceptual notions of empowerment — opportunity structure and agency — to explain empowerment through the use of mobile phones. To fulfil the aims of this PhD research, an empirical investigation will be conducted to understand the interplay of structural context, agency, and power in shaping the use of mobile phone by urban refugees in South Africa and the capabilities for empowerment.

This study adopts a critical research philosophical perspective which is concerned with “social issues such as freedom, power, social control, and values with respect to the development, use, and impact of information technology” (Myers & Klein, 2011, p. 17). Critical research is well-accepted and has a great impact in the IS discipline (Lin, Kuo & Myers 2015; Ngwenyama & Lee, 1997). Such choice of a critical paradigm is consequent to the objectives and the context of this research. The principal approach to knowledge reproduction within the critical paradigm is a qualitative inquiry (Hirschheim & Klein, 2003; Myers, 2009). As such, an ethnographic qualitative approach is followed in this research, as it provides an effective strategy for in-depth investigation of actions, behaviours, and perceptions of human actors, an understanding of phenomena from their point of view and the context (social and institutional) within which these perceptions were formed and actions took place (Kaplan & Maxwell,

1994; Ngwenyama & Klein, 1994). Data will be gathered using semi-structured interviews, direct observations, field notes and group discussion with urban refugees.

## **1.6. Nomological Net**

A nomological net is a general and integrating mechanism of research programmes which helps the researcher to understand key research issues and the key literature that represent and contribute to the research area (Benbasat & Zmud, 2003). This research is concerned with the issues surrounding the use of mobile phones for empowerment. Empowerment is an oft-stated agenda item of development (Alsop et al., 2006; Heeks, 2008). In Sen's CA framework, development is understood as the expansion of opportunities (named capabilities in Sen's approach), together with the expansion of agency (Sen, 1985, 1999). Samman and Santos (2009) explain that agency is the ability to make choices, and the realisation or effectiveness of these choices is empowerment.

The perspective of this research can best be understood using Avgerou's (2010) discourses on ICT4D as depicted in Figure 1 which has been modified for the purpose of this research. Avgerou (2010) presents ICT4D discourses as following two influences occurring along two continuums: the ICT-enabled development (Vertical Axis in Figure 1) and the ICT innovation process (Horizontal Axis in Figure 1). On the continuum of ICT-enabled development, two perspectives are identified: the progressive and the disruptive transformation perspectives. Whereas in the progressive transformation perspective ICT is considered as enabling transformations in multiple domains of human activities (Avgerou, 2010), the disruptive transformative perspective posits that ICT-enabled development is a contested endeavour and thus has varying effects on different populations. These effects are influenced by factors such as politics, power struggles and conflicts of interest (Avgerou, 2010). The effectiveness of ICTs in enabling development is, therefore, questionable.

On the continuum of the ICT innovation process, two perspectives are identified namely, innovation by transfer and diffusion, and the social embeddedness innovation. In the innovation by transfer and diffusion perspective, ICT is considered as a tool designed to work in any context where it only needs to be marginally customised to fit in (Avgerou, 2010). The socially embeddedness innovation perspective is concerned with ICT adaptation from within the social context of the developing country. The focus of the social embeddedness perspective is on how innovation emerges and is situated within the local context and also how it is impacted and shaped by individuals' capabilities within society (Avgerou, 2010). This perspective places great emphasis on the importance of the ICT system to reflect the norms and culture of the local context.

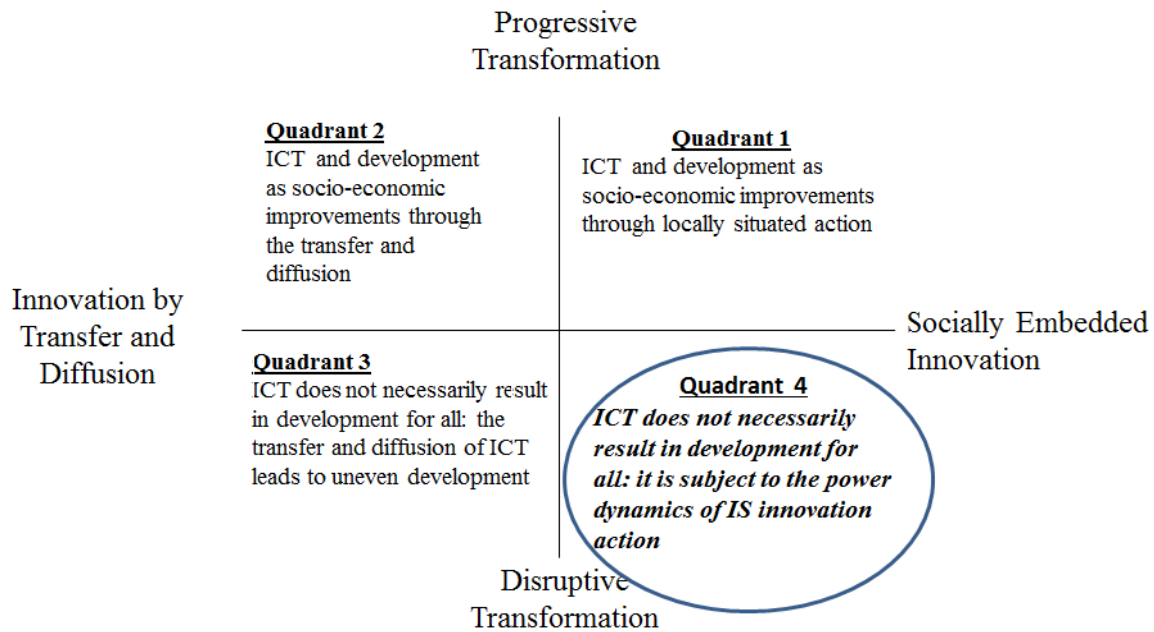


Figure 1: Current discourses on ICT4D. Adapted from Avgerou (2010).

**Quadrant 1** assumes that ICTs can contribute to improved socio-economic conditions and development, but only in a manner that is useful and relevant locally and decided by local people (Avgerou, 2010).

**Quadrant 2** posits that by adopting ICTs developed and transferred from advanced economies, developing countries should catch up with these and reap the same perceived benefits of ICT (Carmody, 2012; GSMA, 2015). In IS research this approach is criticised as being techno-centric because it is based on reports of intended benefits rather than actual evidence (Wade, 2002). It is also criticised because of the assumption that developing countries need to “catch up”, with what are sometimes destructive practices for the environment and society.

**In quadrant 3**, ICT is viewed as a force of socio-economic change, but not necessarily in an equal fashion across and within developing countries, hence reinforcing existing injustices and inequalities (Heeks, 2008).

**Quadrant 4** suggests that sometimes there are only a selected few benefits from the usage of ICTs (Avgerou, 2010). As such, ICTs only serve to promote the interests of some, as carried over by policies and existing inequalities (Avgerou, 2010). This perspective is adopted by IS researchers to critique existing ICT4D projects. Similarly, the same perspective has been adopted in this research, in which the area of interest is about the use of mobile phones for empowerment in the context of social exclusion and inequality. With such a perspective, this research can be situated in quadrant 4 of Avgerou's (2010) ICT4D discourses which, for such reason, constitute the nomological net of this PhD research. This PhD research draws on the contextual approach to ICTs by emphasising the importance of the local structural context, which it considers crucial in understanding the use and impact of mobile phones for empowerment. The core components in this nomological net situate the phenomena of interest of this

PhD research within the broad ICT4D discourse. It is in respect of this nomological net that the key research objectives were defined in this thesis as presented earlier in Section 1.4.

## 1.7. Background and Context

The urban refugee phenomenon has become a growing concern, with more than half of the world's 15 million refugees residing in urban areas (Gordon, 2016a). There is no reason to believe that these numbers will decrease in coming years, while the reasons for refugees' flight are still prevailing (Phillips, 2011). An urban refugee is "an individual living in an urban area outside of his/her country of origin who meets the criteria put forth in the Refugee Convention or OAU Convention, even if the person has not been recognised by a host government" (Bailey, 2004, p. 7). The article 1 (2) of the 1951 United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) Refugee Convention stipulates that a refugee is someone who is persecuted or fears persecution because of particular characteristics of identity or membership in targeted social or political groups, and is unable or, because of fear, unwilling to seek protection within his or her country. However, even though a person can be a refugee according to the convention, he or she may not claim the rights assigned to this status unless officially recognised by the host country. Such a person is considered an asylum seeker until then, and he or she is usually endowed with only limited rights. In this thesis, asylum seekers as well as recognised refugees are referred to as refugees since in South Africa the two terms are used interchangeably by service providers.

Refugees choose to settle in urban centres because it is where particular conditions they desire are more readily available such as income-generating opportunities, education, adequate medical care, favourable climatic conditions, and transportation (Kobia & Cranfield, 2009; UNHCR, 2010). Despite greater opportunities offered by urban settings, urban refugees face many challenges, rendering the majority of them vulnerable (Kobia & Cranfield, 2009; UNHCR, 2009). In host countries, urban refugees face numerous challenges which shape their experiences, such as their opportunities, vulnerabilities, strategies, and livelihoods in the urban settings (UNHCR, 2009; UNHCR, 2010). Reports show that social exclusion and social inequality are the most important challenges experienced by urban refugees in South Africa (Kobia & Cranfield, 2009). Refugees are often discriminated against, refused services, and excluded from formal and informal markets, as well as from financial services in South Africa (Landau & Segatti, 2009; Masenya, 2017). The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees has urged that ways should be found to best address the challenges of urban refugees (UNHCR, 2009).

This research is a modest endeavour to critically explore the factors which shape the use of mobile phones by urban refugees and their capabilities for empowerment in South Africa, a Southern African country with a high mobile phone penetration rate and persistent social inequalities (Han, 2012). The post-apartheid era has resulted in South Africa becoming one of the largest recipients of asylum seekers

in the world, and it continues to be one of the major destinations for asylum seekers, as well as for migrants seeking economic and social opportunities (UNHCR, 2015b). Reports show that urban refugees in South Africa are marginalised, socially excluded and subjects of inequality (Crush et al., 2016; Landau & Segatti, 2009). Refugees in South Africa are restricted, if not systematically excluded, from employment and income generating opportunities (CoRMSA, 2013). Incidents of xenophobic violence continue to be an ongoing concern and refugees continue to lose their lives and/or livelihoods (Crush et al., 2016; Gordon, 2016b) although many of these incidents do not receive coverage in the mainstream media (Masenya, 2017). The researcher has himself been a refugee in South Africa since 2006. It is in this context that the researcher decided to carry out empirical research.

## **1.8. Positioning Self in the Research**

My connection with the context of this research requires special consideration. I have been an urban refugee in South Africa for about ten years, and have experience with the use of mobile phones. I perceived my experience to be an important resource that allows making close connection with refugees – the potential research respondents, and understanding their mobile phone use experiences over time. I felt that I have developed strong opinions concerning the use of mobile phones by urban refugees in the context of social exclusion and inequality which is the context of this thesis. As with Johnston (2011, p. 13), “I believe that there is no absolute truth or single reality, no perfect answer to most questions; we should be continually questioning and discussing truth and reality. Different people experience a similar incident differently”. In this section, I present a self-narrative by giving, in a form of autobiography, a perspective on my own experience of being an urban refugee and how my experience is linked to the motivation of this thesis. I believe that the self-narrative will allow the readers to be informed about what could possibly inform the assumptions made, and the logic I followed in this research.

Briefly, this is how I become an urban refugee in South Africa. It all started in 1996 when Laurent-Désiré Kabila and his Alliance of Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Congo-Zaire (ADFLC) began the first war during which I lost both my father and mother. I and my brothers and sisters took refuge in Bukavu which is the main city of South Kivu province. As such, I became a war displaced person in my own country before becoming a refugee out of the country. In Bukavu, I went back to school and completed my matric and went to university. Upon the completion of my honours degree in Informatics at ISP/Bukavu (Institut Supérieur Pédagogique de Bukavu) in 2005, I decided to leave the country as my life was threatened. On 23 July 2006, I and four friends of mine left the country by truck to Burundi where we spent three days before going to Tanzania. After spending eleven days of hardship in Tanzania we decided to go to Malawi where we heard that the refugees’ situation was better. Arriving in Lilongwe Malawi, we were directed to Dzaleka refugee camp. However, the Malawi government officials in

charge of Dzaleka refugee camps told us that they were no longer receiving newcomers, but still, we remained there, accommodated by other refugees. In Dzaleka, we used to communicate, using mobile phones, with refugees in South Africa who advised that it was better to go to South Africa. After three months in Dzaleka I took a truck to Mozambique, leaving behind my friends, and after four days' journey, I finally reached Durban in South Africa on 25 August 2006. In Durban, I reported to the Department of Home Affairs (DHA) reception centre but the office was closed for it was after working hours. Together with other newcomers, I slept in a queue outside the DHA building so that I might be assisted the following day. The following morning, I was issued with an asylum seeker temporary permit but received nothing else. However, I learned from other refugees that there was a church where temporary shelters were provided, and that is where I went to start my new life.

Upon my arrival in South Africa, my assumptions were that greater democracy and development would imply greater freedom for urban refugees. However, being a newcomer with no source of income or any kind of assistance, far from my family and friends, my life became bitter as I was struggling financially as well as emotionally. I was feeling useless and uncomfortable. I could not remain in such a situation for long. I started searching for information concerning job opportunities, where to get assistance in case of emergencies. I realised that urban refugees' communities in South Africa rely on networks of individuals of common characteristics such as being refugees, coming from the same country and sharing a common language. Similarly, I later found myself pushed into a network of Congolese refugees, within which I felt protected and supported. These informal networks of urban refugees helped me to 'get by' as they played a crucial role in addressing my immediate material and emotional needs. The setting up of those informal networks was facilitated by the use of mobile phones. Mobile phones were used to share or seek information with/from others, facilitating the spread of information within the informal network, since most of the refugees work twelve hours a day or even more to get enough income to survive in cities, rendering a face to face conversation very rare. With the help of the networks, I faced no difficulty in getting information about available opportunities such as a room for rent/share, how to send money to my siblings back in Congo, or locating a job such as security, car guard, taxi driver, and waitron.

However, being a well-educated person with an Honours degree, my mind was confused by the failures that I was experiencing in locating better opportunities. In addition, I felt revolted by experiencing the way discriminatory practices such as social exclusion and xenophobia, and marginalisation were hindering the abilities of urban refugees to act on their ascribed rights and opportunities in South Africa.

In the year 2009, while I was self-employed as a photographer and home video maker, I started my Masters study in IS at the University of Cape Town (UCT). My academic interests that I have pursued over the years were significantly shaped by my personal experience. In fact, prior to my enrolment for my Masters study, as an urban refugee in South Africa, I worked as a security guard, a parking attendant,

a construction worker, a teller, and a small business sole trader. Based on my understanding of informatics and the experience of being a war displaced person in my own country prior to becoming a refugee in South Africa, I decided to focus my thesis on refugees' experience. As such, I conducted a study entitled "Can Mobile Phones Enhance Refugees' Integration? A South African Perspective" the findings of which show that mobile phone usage plays an important role in the social integration process of refugees (Johnston & Bacishoga, 2013). What I learned when conducting my Masters research improved my understanding of the experience of urban refugees in South Africa. It also raised questions which I believe to be relevant and persistent in the IS field of research. I was thus motivated to go further since I believed I had an interesting perspective to bring to the IS area of study. My personal and educational background offer a unique vantage point to gain solid knowledge regarding issues and initiatives of urban refugees in South Africa *vis a vis* the use of mobile phones.

I believe that my personal experience of being an urban refugee in South Africa is an important resource, allowing me to make close connections with the respondents to research and understand their experiences with mobile phone use. I also believe that I have the benefits of being able to incorporate the lessons learned from myself being one of the urban refugees in South Africa, lessons which are tacit, embedded and in many ways incorporated in my own values and thinking. In many ways, I identify myself amongst urban refugees in South Africa with whom we share the same values. As such, I believe that mutual engagement with respondents is powerful enough to lead me to uncover conflicts, tensions, and ways of resistance to dominant discourse in an explicit way.

In addition, being the sole researcher, I acknowledge that my background, my personal experiences and assumptions, and the wider socio-cultural context of my life may influence my interpretations and constructions, as warns Davies (2008). In this regard, Madison (2012, p. 9) suggests that ethnographers must make their ideological stance clear and contextualise their position by making it "accessible, transparent and vulnerable to judgment and evaluation". I hope to minimise my biases by stating them openly by constant reflection. As such, rather than trying to conduct this thesis as some form of dispassionate and detached analysis, reflexivity is actively applied throughout since it provides a high degree of transparency/audibility to guard against the accusation of value-judgements. Reflexivity makes explicit the researcher's role in the design, collection, and interpretation of data (Schultze, & Avital, 2011). Thus, the endeavour in this research should be viewed as minimising the possible imposition of my own experiences on the process of generating and analysing data. More explanations about the use of reflexivity in this thesis are provided later in Chapter Four.

## **1.9. Intended Contributions of the research**

This research significantly benefits from the ethnographic position of the researcher to provide grounded explanation and a better understanding of complex phenomena such as the factors which

shape the use of mobile phones by urban refugees and the capabilities for their empowerment. The findings will contribute at two levels:

Firstly, to the theory in the field of IS by:

1. Better theorising the mechanisms and social practices that shape mobile phone use and the capabilities for empowerment in the context of social exclusion and inequality in the developing countries.
2. Expanding the scope of contemporary understanding of the dialectic nature of mobile phone use by providing a better explanation of the relationships between factors that shape its use.
3. Contributing to the debates on the use of mobile phones for empowerment in the ICT4D discourse.

Secondly, to practice by drawing implications for the use of mobile phones in the context of developing countries. This will be done through a provision of critical understanding of the factors which shape the use of mobile phones and the capabilities for empowerment of refugees living in urban areas. The study will inform the IS research community about the capabilities that can be generated through mobile phone use and the factors that may enhance or constrain urban refugees from translating their mobile phone usage into capabilities for empowerment. The findings will serve to inform organisations seeking to assist urban refugees about the factors to take into consideration when crafting their intervention strategies.

## **1.10. Outline of the Thesis**

This thesis is organised into eight chapters:

*Chapter one – Introduction:* provides the background of the thesis, its motivation and importance, the description of its context, and the research problem.

*Chapter two – Literature review:* provides an overview of current literature related to this study on urban refugees' use of mobile phones.

*Chapter three – Theoretical framework:* outlines the theoretical framework adopted for this research and lays out the key questions for interrogation.

*Chapter four – Philosophical perspectives and methodological approaches:* presents and situates the philosophical stance adopted by this thesis within the IS research paradigms, as well as the research methods and strategy.

*Chapter five – Presentation of ethnographic findings:* presents collected data for analysis.

*Chapter six – Data analysis:* analysis of data.

*Chapter seven – Discussion of findings:* presents the empirical findings from the analysis of data and reflects on the results and discusses their theoretical, policy, and practical implications.

*Chapter eight – Research conclusions:* summarises the research findings, draws conclusions, outlines the contributions, explores the potential limitations and makes suggestions for future works.

## **2. RESEARCH BACKGROUND AND LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1. Introduction**

The purpose of this PhD research is to critically explore the factors which shape the use of mobile phones by urban refugees in South Africa and their capabilities for empowerment. Mobile phone use for empowerment is the phenomenon of interest from which this micro level research – situated in the context of a developing country – is based. This chapter presents some research background to the context of this research, and a literature review to develop a comprehensive understanding and critical assessment of the current state of knowledge relating to the research’s phenomenon of interest.

Therefore, this chapter is organised as follows: First, the global refugees’ crises are reviewed. Then the context of urban refugees in South Africa is presented. After that, the review of mobile phones in developing countries is presented, followed by an overview of mobile phones in South Africa. The chapter continues with the review of refugees and mobile phones, empowerment and development, and mobile phones and empowerment. This chapter ends with the presentation of gaps identified in the literature.

### **2.2. The Global Refugees Crises**

The existence of refugees is as old as recorded history. Worldwide, war, violence, and persecution have always forced people to leave their home countries to seek refuge elsewhere, typically not of their choosing. Recently, however, refugees and internally displaced persons worldwide hit record numbers of over 65.3 million, for the first time since the Second World War (UNHCR, 2015a). The UNHCR (2015a), in its report entitled *Global Trends*, noted that with the global population of 7.35 billion, the total of 65.3 million displaced persons means that almost one percent of the global population are refugees. Andrade and Doolin (2016) warn that the phenomenon of refugees is an ethical issue of formidable proportions that cannot simply be ignored by the international community. The sudden increase in the number of refugees is mostly due to the unrest throughout the Middle East and particularly Syria and Iraq, although other regions such as parts of Africa and the Balkans are also major sources of refugees. Even though the European refugee crisis has gained worldwide attention with media coverage, what is happening in the EU is just one of the examples of the scale of the refugee movement that the world is witnessing nowadays (Holmes & Castañeda, 2016). A typical example in Sub-Saharan Africa is given by South Africa, a country which, for the past two decades, has increasingly become a host society for many refugees from across the continent and beyond (UNHCR, 2015b).

It is important to note the distinction between “refugee” and “migrant”, two words that are intermittently distinguished and conflated in popular, political, and media discourse. The term “migrant” should not

be used when referring to “refugee” because the former implies a voluntary decision and the latter is applied to people fleeing danger. According to the UN Convention on the Rights of Migrants, the term migrant should be understood as “covering all cases where the decision to migrate is taken freely by the individual concerned, for reason of personal convenience and without the intervention of an external compelling factor” (UNESCO, n.d.). The connotation used for a migrant differs from that of a refugee. According to the Article 1A (2) of the 1951 Geneva Convention, a refugee “is any person who, owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his/her nationality and is unable, or owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself/herself of the protection of that country” (UNESCO, n.d.). In the broadest sense of the term, refugees are migrants even though they continue to be a distinct category of people. However, compared to other migrants, refugees are mostly in need of international protection and have the right to seek and enjoy asylum in the hosting society (UNHCR, 2015c). Forced migration is often associated with emotional, psychological and physical hardship (UNHCR, 2015a; Zetter & Deikun, 2010). Mostly, refugees have poor health and lower levels of personal well-being than other migrants (Walker, Koh, Wollersheim, & Liamputtong, 2015). Most of the time urban refugees have lost all their assets, do not enjoy any property rights, may have communication challenges and may not possess the required knowledge and skills to survive in the host country - frequently they lack supportive social networks (Campbell, 2006; Papademetriou & Fratzke, 2016).

After being granted asylum, refugees are usually expected to rapidly participate in the host society, particularly in terms of being financially independent. In their study of the relationship of social integration and psychological impairment in traumatised refugees, Schick, et al. (2016) find refugees in Switzerland to be remarkably poorly integrated, particularly in terms of labour market participation despite comparably high education and long duration of residency. Whittal (2011) finds that persistent lack of integration worsens income inequality, raises government debt, and misses an opportunity to alleviate demographic pressures on social insurance systems. To foster social integration of refugees, it is important to better understand and address their specific needs (Crush et al., 2016; Papademetriou & Fratzke, 2016; Schick, et al., 2016).

The experiences of refugees in urban settings are complex and varied, with multiple consequences to both refugees and the host communities (Jacobsen & Fratzke, 2016). Literature in refugee studies shows that in host countries, urban refugees in search of viable livelihoods carve out space under adverse conditions through creative engagement and mobilisation of social networks (Jacobsen & Fratzke, 2016). However, it has been found that despite greater opportunities offered by urban settings, urban refugees face many barriers rendering the majority of them vulnerable (Kobia & Cranfield, 2009; UNHCR, 2009).

The experiences of urban refugees, comprising their opportunities, vulnerabilities, strategies, and livelihoods in the urban settings, are shaped by diverse and complex challenges. Social exclusion has been highlighted among the important challenges experienced by urban refugees (Correa-Velez et al., 2012; Kobia et al., 2009). Social exclusion is defined as a wide range of phenomena and processes which “work to deprive people of access to opportunities and means, material or otherwise, to achieve well-being and security in terms that are important to them” (Peace, 2001, p. 34). Refugees are faced with particular challenges throughout their exile lives (Sharma, 2016). Frequently, urban refugees are subjected to discrimination and are unable to access critical social services such as water, healthcare, education and housing (Correa-Velez et al., 2012; Gordon, 2016b; Papademetriou & Fratzke, 2016). They can thus be disempowered with resulting consequences such as social isolation, experiences of discrimination and negative impact on their well-being (Andrade & Doolin, 2016; Johnston & Bacishoga, 2013).

As most of the crises that cause refugee displacements persist for many years, it is fair to assume that most of the refugees will settle in the host countries or at least stay for many years. Data from 1978 – 2014 shows that fewer than one in 40 refugee crises are resolved within three years (Crawford et al., 2015). Most of refugees are likely to remain indefinitely in the host countries (Papademetriou & Fratzke, 2016). Calls have been made to find ways to best address the needs of urban refugees (Crawford et al., 2015; Papademetriou & Fratzke, 2016; UNHCR, 2010). The influx of refugees into a country leads to new socio-economic challenges and a need for the development of strategies to address these challenges. It should not be forgotten that refugees not only desire to escape war and violence but also want to build a better future. Therefore, as Crawford et al., (2015) argue, understanding the likelihood of protracted refugee stays from the outset should influence the shape of national and international intervention.

## **2.3. Urban refugees in South Africa**

### **2.3.1. Refugee frameworks in South Africa**

South Africa has a long history of internal rural to urban migration and labour migration from Southern African countries like Lesotho and Mozambique. However, the post-apartheid era has attracted and continues to attract ever increasing new waves of migrants and asylum-seekers from throughout the continent and beyond (Gordon, 2016b). Some of these asylum-seekers are escaping conflicts, insecurity and persecution in their home countries and others are looking for better economic and social opportunities. A great majority of refugees stems from African countries such as Zimbabwe, Somalia, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Nigeria, Rwanda, Malawi, Angola or Burundi. According to the UNHCR report (2015b), there were over 1,096,063 pending asylum applications in South Africa in 2015. There is no unanimity concerning the size of the refugee population in South Africa. However,

with 62,159 new asylum applications registered in the year 2015 alone (Parliamentary Monitoring Group, 2016), there is no doubt that this country remains one of the leading recipients of asylum seekers worldwide. This trend has become more pronounced due, on one hand, to the striking disparity in living standards and economic development between South Africa and most African countries (Parliamentary Monitoring Group, 2016). Other reasons are that the majority of African countries are experiencing ethno-religious conflicts and socio-political and economic instability (Gordon, 2016b) in addition to the effects of climate change.

South Africa has firmly committed itself to human rights and has entrenched these rights into national legal systems. The country is renowned for its protection of a broad range of economic, social, and cultural rights. A sophisticated jurisprudence on these rights is included in the country's Bill of Rights in the Constitution (Crush & Tawodzera, 2014). All the rights in the Bill of Rights have *universal* application thereby benefiting *everyone* except where they are specifically excluded. In fact, to ensure that people in South Africa should never again suffer prejudice on the grounds of their race, religion, class, or background, the Constitution's preamble explicitly promises that "South Africa belongs to all who live in it" (Handmaker, De la Hunt & Klaaren, 2008, p. 29) including refugees and asylum seekers. In addition, following its first democratic elections in 1994, South Africa, in line with its constitutional commitments to human rights and dignity, acceded to and ratified several treaties relating to refugee protection. These include the 1951 Refugee Convention and its 1967 UN Refugee Protocol, the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights, as well as the 1969 African Refugee Convention. Hence by ratifying these conventions, South Africa has assumed the mandate of protecting refugees whereas the functions of monitoring the international protection of refugees is assumed by the UNHCR. The country has a liberal asylum legislation that incorporates all basic principles of refugee protection including freedom of movement, right to education and work, access to basic social and medical services, access to administrative justice, legal protection and non-discrimination. These rights are indispensable and constitute the basic rights and standards that, if implemented, should facilitate the survival of urban refugees in the host country (Tati, 2008).

Unlike other African countries, the South African refugee legislation is characterised by a non-camp policy and most refugees live in urban settings (Crush, Chikanda, & Skinner, 2015; UNHCR, 2009). In order to legalise their stay in the country and thus protect their rights, the DHA is responsible for refugee policies' implementation as well as issuing to them appropriate permits and documentation. According to the South African Refugee Act, on the application, asylum seekers are to be issued with a 'Section 22' permit that, in almost all instances, gives the applicant the right to work, to access basic social services, and the freedom of movement within the country (Crush et al., 2016; Gordon, 2016b). A decision on the application is to be issued within six months when they are either to be provided a refugee status or asked to leave the country or apply for another immigration status. However, the poor

quality of status determination decisions by the under-resourced Refugee Appeal Board of the DHA has resulted in a backlog of asylum claims of over 100,000 by 2011 (CoRMSA, 2012). Only a few applicants receive decisions on their application within the expected six months and many wait for years (sometimes more than ten years). For refugees, obtaining necessary documentation, such as the asylum seekers' permit or refugee status, is a primary step in accessing services which they are entitled to by law. Refugees are required to regularly renew their documentation and are therefore mainly concentrated in the major urban areas where the Refugee Reception Offices (RROs) are erected. However, for renewing their documents, most of the time refugees face problems in accessing the reception offices for a variety of reasons, including long queues, inability to lodge appeals, bureaucratic irregularities, and corruption. Sometimes they spend the night in the queue outside refugee reception offices trying to gain entry. Others are obliged to regularly travel from the cities they reside into cities where their refugees' documentation was first issued to them (Crush & Tawodzera, 2014).

### **2.3.2. Socio-economic context of refugees in South Africa**

The rights and obligations of refugees in South Africa are clearly stipulated in the country's constitution, the Bill of Rights, as well as included in the Refugee Act. For example, Article 27 (g) of the Refugees Act (130 of 1998) clearly stipulates that refugees in South Africa are to be given the same rights of access as everyone else in the country. As Handmaker et al. (2008) argue, at least in theory, refugees are given the same rights as any South African; hence, they can work and study and are expected to integrate into the country. In fact, concerning employment, the Refugee Act allows refugees the right to seek employment in both public and private establishments in South Africa. In respect to the right to education, the South African Bill of Rights stipulates that access to basic education is a human right for everybody, irrespective of their nationality. As such, the South African School's Act (1996) made schooling compulsory for children aged 7 to 15 years. In addition, the article 27 (g) of the South Africa Act 130 of 1998 states that "a refugee is entitled to the same basic health services and basic primary education which the inhabitant of the Republic receives from time to time" (Landau & Segatti, 2009). However, the right to education is only enjoyed by refugees who are capable of doing so at their own expense. Since most of the refugees are poor and vulnerable, access to education becomes just a dream. In health services, the South African constitution, section 27 (1), guarantees everybody the right to health care services, including reproductive health. This means that refugees in South Africa should receive the same medical assistance as their South African counterparts. In fact, the South African legislation recognises the right of the poor, vulnerable and marginalised groups to access public health care and section 27 (3) of the constitution stipulates clearly that no one regardless of nationality or residency status may be refused emergency medical treatment.

### **2.3.3. Attitudes towards Refugees in South Africa**

Reports from different research show that in South Africa, refugees have always been subjects of social exclusion and inequality (Crush & Tawodzera, 2014; Landau & Segatti, 2009). Very often the legitimacy of their permits remains unrecognised by some public institutions and employers, preventing them from benefiting fully from these rights (Gordon, 2016b; Handmaker, et al, 2008; Landau & Duponchel, 2011). Throughout their stay in South Africa, refugees do not receive any kind of institutional assistance or financial support from the government (Cejas, 2007). Often, they are systematically excluded from employment and income generating opportunities (CoRMSA, 2012; Gordon, 2015). Landau and Segatti (2009) find that refugees in South Africa often do not access state-instituted social security mechanisms given prevailing anti-immigrant attitudes. Refugees have been made ‘scapegoats’ for all kinds of social ills in South Africa (Masenya, 2017). They are considered as a threat to the economic and social rights of South Africans (Crush & Ramachandran, 2015), blamed for the domestic unemployment, heightened crime, and even for the HIV/AIDS spread (Gordon, 2015). Refugees are discriminated against, marginalised and often excluded from formal and informal markets (Kobia & Cranfield, 2009) which further exacerbates the vulnerability of refugees. Researchers such as Crush and Tawodzera (2013), and Landau and Duponchel (2011) claim that hostility towards refugees makes South Africa one of the most migrant-unfriendly countries in the world. Crush et al. (2016) refer to South Africa as a hostile land to refugees, with a majority of South African citizens identifying African nationals, including refugees, as a group they least wanted to come and live in South Africa. An illustration is the events of May 2008 when the country was rocked by violent xenophobic attacks on the lives and property of Africans from other parts of the continent. The violence spread nationwide and resulted in the deaths of more than 60 people and the displacement of over 100,000 others (Crush & Tawodzera, 2013; UNHCR, 2009). This large-scale attack marked the latest development in a long series of smaller-scale violent incidents victimising refugees (Crush & Ramachandran, 2015). Since then, incidents of xenophobic violence continue to be an ongoing concern and refugees continue to lose their lives and/or livelihoods although many of these incidents do not receive coverage in the mainstream media, thus creating the impression that such incidents do not constitute a problem any longer. According to CoRMSA (2013), since May 2008 there has been at least one attack on groups of refugees in the country almost every month. Gordon (2016b) urges that anti-immigrant sentiment is not only limited to manifestations of violent acts like xenophobic attacks but goes further beyond that.

### **2.4. Empowerment and Development**

The concept of empowerment has been adopted and studied in many fields, ranging from economics and political science to psychology and health care. The term empowerment itself suggests that it is fundamentally about gaining or increase in power, control or real ability to affect change. The roots of thinking on empowerment lie in feminist theory and are focused on

an equal ability to participate in the political process or an equal capability to exercise power (Chew et al., 2015; Ibrahim & Alkire, 2007; Hill, 2003). The term empowerment has been ascribed a multitude of different definitions and denotes different goals and conceptualisations in various fields. For Cornish (2006), empowerment is the process of gaining a concrete, new capability to perform some specific action. Mason and Smith (2003) define empowerment as “the extent to which some categories of people are able to control their own destinies, even when their interests are opposed by those of the other people with whom they interact” (p. 1). Alsop et al. (2006) further define empowerment as “the process of enhancing an individual’s or group’s capacity to make effective choices, that is, to make choices and then to transform those choices into desired actions and outcomes” (p. 10). The main features in the definitions of empowerment are its characteristics such as being a process, increasing power, and improving position (Alsop, et al., 2006; Kabeer, 1999). The final result of the process should be that individuals gain more control over their own lives. For the purposes of this thesis, Kabeer’s (1999, p. 437) definition is adopted, for which empowerment is the “expansion in people’s ability to make strategic life choices in a context where this ability was previously denied to them”. The justification of choosing Kabeer’s (1999) definition is that it denotes the condition of exclusion, disempowerment or a relatively powerless group of individuals, which is the context of urban refugees in South Africa (Kobia & Cranfield, 2009).

Empowerment is conceived as the expansion of agency and is often regarded as instrumentally important for achieving positive development outcomes (Chew et al., 2015). In their study of sociotechnical consumption, Yuksel, Milne and Miller (2016) find that empowerment of consumers results from products, services, and practices that expand their freedom of and control over the choice and actions to shape their experiences of consumption. Such findings confirm Kabeer’s (1999) claim that the ability to exercise choice incorporates three inter-related dimensions, namely the resources as pre-conditions, agency as the process, and achievement as the outcomes. Increasingly agency refers to enhancing individuals’ freedoms to act and achieve what they consider valuable – that is, the agent’s ability to envisage and purposively choose options (Sen, 1992). Samman and Santos (2009) add that empowerment is a dynamic process, the nature of which is on-going with inputs and outputs, incorporating the presence of internal and external constraints or opportunities. Constraints to empowerment lead to disempowerment, the binary opposite of empowerment, which indicates a state or a sense of oppression, powerlessness, exclusion, marginalisation or disadvantage (Luttrell et al., 2009). Such state of disempowerment is caused by the way in which power relations shape

opportunities, choices, and well-being (Luttrell et al., 2009). As such, achieving empowerment is intimately linked to “addressing the causes of disempowerment and tackling disadvantage caused by the way in which power relations shape agency, opportunities, and well-being” (Luttrell et al., 2009, p. 6).

Central to the understanding of empowerment is that it is a process that expands an individual’s choices and control over his/her own life (Alsop & Heinsohn, 2005; Kim, 2016). Sen emphasises the empowerment of individuals to be active agents of change in their own terms (1999). From the CA perspective, empowerment is a capability, and can also be a functioning which is an achievement of a capability. As a capability, it represents the “expansion in people’s ability to make strategic life choices in a context where this ability was previously denied to them” (Kabeer, 1999, p. 437). It then becomes a functioning once the individual has grasped the opportunity for empowerment. Empowerment is often regarded as instrumentally important for achieving positive development outcomes. Alsop, et al. (2006) argue that empowerment is influenced by two interrelated factors: opportunity structure and agency. As such, increasing the agency of deprived individuals renders them able and motivated to be effective agents of their own development (Sen, 1999).

## **2.5. Mobile Phones in Developing Countries**

With the rapid advancement and the popularity of mobile technology, it is no wonder that the mobile phone is one of the most rapidly growing newer technologies in the world. In recent years, numerous mobile technology-based development projects have appeared worldwide. Many researchers have been directing the focus on mobile phones in the developing countries, where the adoption of traditional ICTs faced many implementation challenges (Billieux et al., 2015; GSMA, 2015). In many developing countries, fixed line phones and broadband internet are underdeveloped and depend upon expensive infrastructure (Carmody, 2012; GSMA, 2015). Mobile phones work using the radio spectrum and in places which lack electrical grid, a base-station can be powered using generators (Qiang, Yamamichi, Hausman, Altman, & Unit, 2011; Rashid & Elder, 2009). To date, mobile technology is the predominant infrastructure in emerging markets and is available to a larger proportion of the population than many other basic services (GSMA, 2015).

In the developing world, many of the countries have skipped fixed-line infrastructure to directly leapfrog into mobile technology (Rashid & Elder, 2009). Early research conducted on mobile phone use has emphasised its positive outcomes. It has been reported that mobile phones are multi-functional, portable, easier to use, and relatively more affordable than other technological tools (Etzo & Collender,

2010). In the last decade, mobile phones have been rapidly adopted by millions even in the developing countries, overcoming wealth barriers in achieving an 89% penetration rate (Etzo & Collender, 2010; Pew Research Center, 2015). An illustration of the mobile phone's rapid penetration in Africa is the report by Pew Research Center (2015) that examined mobile phones and smartphone use in seven sub-Saharan African countries and the United States of America, as shown in Figure 2

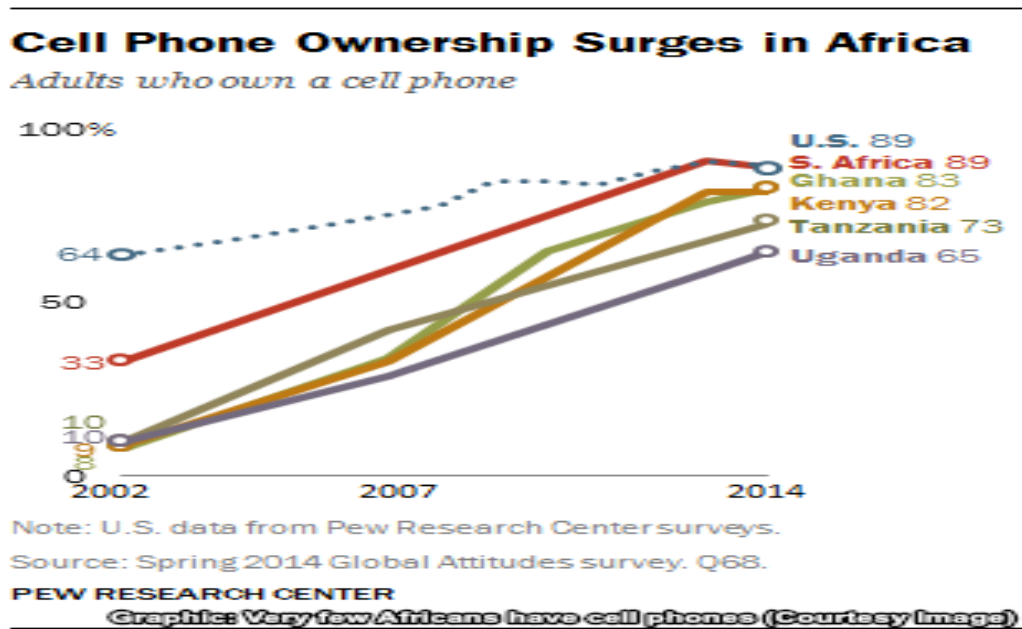


Figure 2 Mobile Phone Penetration. Source: Pew Research Center (2015)

Figure 2 shows that mobile phone penetration has grown very rapidly in Africa. According to Pew Research Center (2015), in African countries like Ghana, Kenya, Tanzania, and Uganda, roughly ten percent owned a mobile phone in 2002. But since then, the ownership of mobile phone has increased tremendously and today, in South Africa and Nigeria, mobile phones are as common as they are in the United States (Pew Research Center, 2015).

Following the rapid mobile phone penetration in developing countries, there has also been an increase in the extent of studies on mobile phone usage (Etzo & Collender, 2010; Gomez, Baron & Fiore-Silfvast, 2012). Existing literature shows that research on mobile phones has been conducted from a variety of perspectives, and often in relative isolation from each other in terms of objectives (focus), approach (theory and methodology), context, and so forth. Donner (2008) categorises the studies of mobile phones in developing countries as focusing on determinants of adoption, on the interrelationships between mobiles and users, on the impacts of use, and on economic development (Sreekumar, 2011).

In terms of research focus, studies on mobile phones usage appear to have closely followed a chronological trend which can best be understood using the value chain which incorporates studies of

indicators of mobile phones readiness, to those of availability and uptake, and recently to the impact of mobile phones (Duncombe, 2011). The interest of researchers in these domains has changed over time. Initially, research on mobile phones was interested in exploring the *readiness* which is the systematic prerequisites (Heeks, 2010) in terms of skills, awareness, policy, and infrastructure (Heeks, 2010). Most of these studies were conceptualised at the community or national level. From the readiness level, researchers' focus gradually shifted to the assessment of the *availability* of mobile phones in terms of the supply of the devices and applications (Heeks, 2010). This stage was quickly followed by that of the assessment of mobile phones *uptake* which is about the processes by which access to a mobile phone is turned into actual usage (Heeks, 2010). It examines the demand and actual usage of mobile phones for different purposes (Heeks, 2010). The later stage of research focus appears to be on the assessment of the *impact* of mobile phones which is about the micro-level behavioural changes associated with the technology use and also about the benefits and costs of mobile phone use, and the contribution of mobile phones to the development goals (Heeks, 2010). To date, much of the recent research on mobile phone use in South Africa can be situated in this trend of impact assessment, as the focus has been directed to the positive outcomes and challenges of mobile phone use. This thesis can be situated in this group of research concerned with the assessment of the impact of mobile phone use (for one of the objectives includes the investigation of the capabilities that urban refugees generate through the use of mobile phones), but also in the group of those concerned with the uptake (in terms of urban refugees' capability to actually use mobile phones for their empowerment).

### **2.5.1. Benefits and opportunities of mobile phone use**

In terms of benefits associated with mobile phones, research has emphasised the positive outcomes. The argument is for example that mobile phones and their networks enhance capability sets of users and expand possibilities for connectedness between people by increasing access to timely and relevant information (Billieux et al., 2015; Smith et al., 2011). The well-known development economist Jeffrey Sachs argued that “mobile phones have emerged as the single most transformative technology for development” (quoted in Etzo & Collender, 2010, p. 661). Smith et al. (2011) emphasise that mobile phones constitute the “basis for one of the greatest expansions of human capabilities in known history, and in a remarkably short timeframe” (p. 77). The utilisation of mobile phones is growing at a rapid rate, not just for allowing people to communicate without being constrained by physical proximity or spacial immobility (Etzo & Collender, 2010) but also for incremental benefits – improving what people already do, transformational benefits – offering something new, and production-related benefits – selling mobile phones and related services (Jagun & Heeks, 2007).

The use of mobile phones has increasingly become ubiquitous and an integral part of everyday life. The literature shows that a growing number of studies have underlined the efficacy of mobile phone use in providing value-added services in different sectors. Smith et al. (2011) categorise the benefits of mobile

phones into three related dimensions. First, mobile phones enable or strengthen *social networks*, for example in the rural and poor context when mobile phones are used for survival and security purposes. Second, *economic networks*, for example by enabling or strengthening the connection between financial institutions and citizens, expanding boundaries of markets and improving supply chains. Lastly, *governance networks*, for example by increasing citizens' access to government services, enabling political mobilisation, election monitoring, early warning systems, crisis management, etc (e.g. Duncombe, 2011; Whittal, 2011). Other value-added services that prior studies found to be enabled by mobile phone usage include the applications such as mobile payment systems (Harry, Sewchurran, & Brown, 2014; Majchrzak, Markus & Wareham, 2016), the health sector (e.g. James, 2016; Newman, Browne-Yung, Raghavendra, Wood & Grace, 2016; Qiang et al., 2011), in learning (Chen & Yan, 2016), mobile internet and mobile shipping (Aricat, 2015), and mobile gaming (Hoehle & Venkatesh, 2015). It is evident that mobile services offer a way for the public agencies and private sectors to reach communities that previously received little attention (Qiang et al., 2011).

### **2.5.2. Challenges and missed opportunities of mobile phone use**

In terms of challenges and missed opportunities associated with mobile phones, it has been argued that different challenges restrict many from benefiting from the full potential and functionality of mobile phone use (Carmody, 2012; Etzo & Collender, 2010; Kim, 2016). The challenges mentioned include: government restrictions, lack of adequate policies and regulations, costs and usability problems (Etzo & Collender, 2010; Qiang et al., 2011), the dysfunctional use of the mobile phone (Billieux et al., 2015; Oksman, 2010), low level of literacy (Whittal, 2011), and security concerns (Lin & Lu, 2015). The government's influence encompasses all other spheres since it holds power to set policies, regulations, and strategies that can affect mobile phone use (Etzo & Collender, 2010; Qiang et al., 2011). An illustration is that, during contested elections or uprising, the government implements Internet blackouts or shuts down the mobile phone network to make it difficult for opposition groups to coordinate their activities. Many stakeholders influence the many drivers through which mobile phones can positively be used. In m-health for example: from the health system (health care workers, patients, medical supply chains), finance (banks, insurance companies, individual users), and technology (software developers, mobile operators, handset makers) can influence the way m-health improves health (Qiang et al., 2011). In his study about the perceptions of mobile phones in college classrooms, Campbell (2006) finds mobile phone usage during class as a potential source for distraction and cheating.

The literature review shows that research concerning mobile phones use in developing countries has undergone rapid growth in recent years. The mobile phone landscape in South Africa is now discussed.

## **2.6. Mobile phones in South Africa**

### **2.6.1. The Technology Environment**

The introduction and growth of mobile phone services in South Africa have been spectacularly successful. South Africa has a vibrant mobile phone market that is expected to increase substantially (Han, 2012). Based on mobile connections, that is the number of active SIMs in the market, the mobile phone market penetration rate in South Africa is well above 130 percent, one of the highest rates in the world (RIA, 2013). The increase in the number of mobile phone users is believed to be driven by separate subscriptions for voice and mobile broadband services (Hawthorne, 2016). Compared to the uptake of conventional desktops and laptops, it is clear that in South Africa mobile phones dominate the market and have become a ubiquitous tool, a convenient, versatile and affordable alternative in the hands of many people. Reports highlight that in South Africa, the ownership and use of mobile phones continue to grow as access to fixed-line phones continues to decline (Gillwald, Moyo & Stork, 2012; RIA, 2013).

South Africa has the most developed telecommunications network in Africa consisting of a network that is 99.9% digital and includes the latest wireless and satellite communication (Infodev, 2012). International bandwidth is no longer the major constraint on the usage of data services in South Africa since 2009, with Seacom coming into the market followed by EASSy in 2010 and WACS in 2011, putting an end to the monopoly held by the SAT3 undersea cable. Driven by an explosive growth in mobile telephony, telecommunication is one of the fastest growing sectors of South Africa's economy. In South Africa, wireless mobile broadband is the cheapest and most predominant form of broadband access unlike other more mature markets where it is the fixed-line broadband which dominates and is cheaper. The country has five mobile operators, namely Vodacom, MTN, Cell-C, Telkom SA (Heita, 8ta), and the virtual network operator Virgin Mobile, as well as hundreds of internet service providers.

### **2.6.2. Mobile phone usage and ownership**

In South Africa, there is an intensified use of mobile phones to access social media such as Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, and Instagram. According to the South Africa Landscape Report 2013 (Figure 3), approximately 87% of Facebook users and 85% of Twitter users are accessing these tools on their phones (Deloitte, 2013). In fact, wireless internet is the main type of broadband connectivity in South Africa with 70.8% of internet users browsing the internet via a mobile phone handset. Purchased airtime may be converted for data usage; similarly, data services may be used for voice calls through voice over IP (VoIP). Also, users are finding innovative ways to bypass expensive SMS rates of mobile phone network providers by using free instant-messaging services such as WhatsApp, Facebook zero and others (RIA, 2013). According to research commissioned by Infodev (2012) about the use of mobile phones among 'base of pyramid' users, South African urban users of mobile phones are knowledgeable

about available applications and use social media and instant messaging, which they use for communication or other needs.

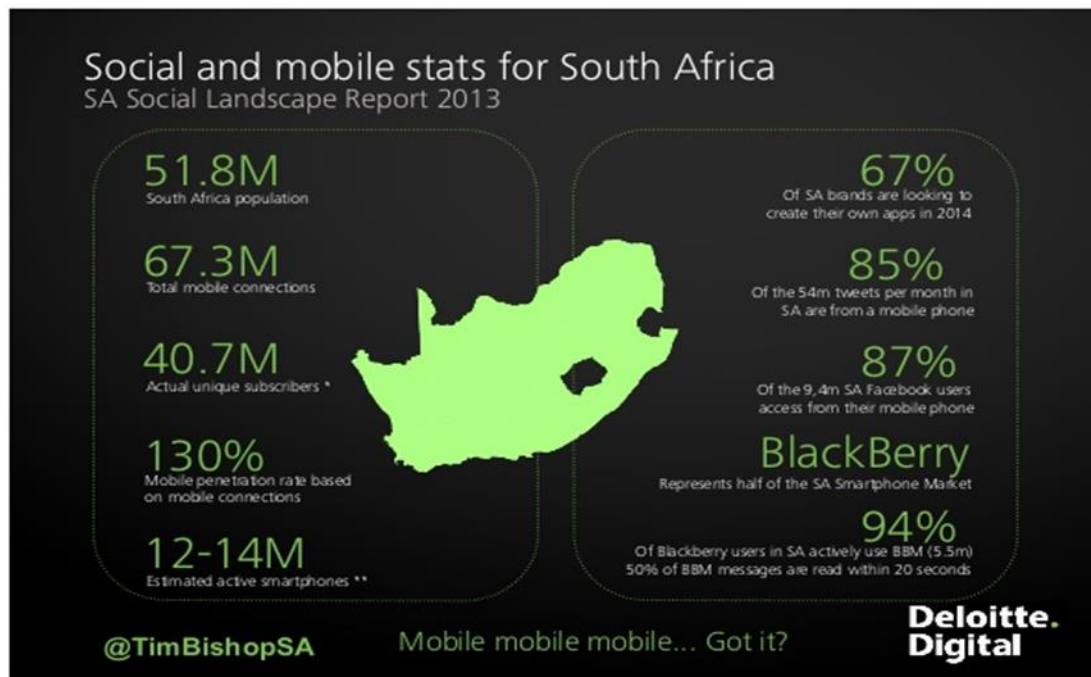


Figure 3: Digital in South Africa 2016. Source: Deloitte

In South Africa, mobile phones pose a much greater opportunity for communication than fixed line or even internet cafés do (Hawthorne, 2016). Thus, during the course of years, mobile service providers have developed relatively innovative ways of encouraging subscription. The increased growth of mobile phone use in South Africa has been credited particularly with the increased affordability and to the immense popularity of prepaid services introduced in the late-1990s (Han, 2012; Hawthorne, 2016). In fact, subscribers may access the mobile network either through a monthly contract (post-paid) or a prepaid (pay-as-you-go) connection. Post-paid customers are those who enter into a long-term billing arrangement (usually for a period of 1 to 3 years) with a mobile network operator. The network agrees to provide mobile access and services through the month. At the end of the month, the customer receives the bill to pay within the given time frame. In order to qualify for a post-paid subscription, system customers are required to have a good credit history and a regular income (Bacishiga et al., 2015; Hawthorne, 2016). Depending on the service provider, there can be many differences between terms and conditions for post-paid. Post-paid is usually offered in different packages: the more expensive the package, the more minutes or data are allowed to be used monthly. As part of the contract, customers are provided with cell phones, and usually, they have a bigger and better selection of phones to choose from.

In contrast, prepaid customers purchase their own cell phones, they make payment in advance before using the service, they are charged in real time for all usage, and they can thus use the mobile phone network until they run out of airtime. Prepaid customers purchase bundles of airtime as needed. Recent research shows that for the majority of the South African population the prepaid airtime bundles are a popular choice (Infodev, 2012; RIA, 2013). Network providers are required to provide the same supported network to both the prepaid and postpaid customers.

In South Africa, mobile phones are the dominant technology for voice and data communication among the disadvantaged populations and for informal businesses (Han, 2012). With regard to the use of mobile phones basic services such as voice calling and SMS services, in South Africa there are now few differences between mobile phone users in urban and rural areas, or between those at the top of the pyramid and those at the base of the pyramid (RIA, 2013). In fact, Kobia and Cranfield (2009) emphasise that compared to other ICTs, mobile phones offer the poor with a relatively accessible and affordable option and are increasingly accessible to remote populations and lower-income groups in the developing world.

### **2.6.3. Mobile Payment landscape in South Africa**

The high penetration rate of mobile phones in South Africa provides the opportunity for financial institutions to partner with other organisations to provide comfortable and convenient financial services to those who have been excluded from the formal financial system. Since the inception of mobile financial services, mobile phone users have had a reliable medium to send and receive money nationwide. Many financial institutions have adopted m-payment or mobile phone banking as one of the key response mechanisms to provide convenient and secure access to financial services to the unbanked and underserved individuals. Mobile phone banking users can send and receive money immediately on their mobile phones. Progress made in South Africa in regard to mobile payment services include:

The First National Bank (FNB) eWallet allows FNB customers to send money instantly to anyone with a valid South African mobile phone number. The recipient does not need to hold a bank account but only a valid South African mobile phone number. A valid mobile phone number requires a mobile phone SIM card registered by the Regulation of Interception of Communications and Provision of Communication-Related Information Act (RICA) (Donovan & Martin, 2014).

The ABSA CashSend works the same way as with the FNB eWallet. The recipient, with a valid South African mobile phone number, can withdraw money from most ABSA ATMs using a reference number and access code he/she has received via SMS. The instant money transfer by Standard Bank and Spar also works in a similar way. Registered Standard Bank Internet banking users can access the service

and send money to anyone with a valid South African mobile phone number nationwide. The other similar systems were the M-Pesa by Nedbank and Vodacom which was discontinued on 30 June 2016.

Another mobile payment services in South Africa is provided by the partnership between Capitec with retailers such as Shoprite Checkers, and Pick n Pay. The service can be accessed nationwide at the branches of retailers. Both the sender and the recipient of money are requested to possess their South African ID book or card for being able to transfer or receive money.

#### **2.6.4. Issues and strategies**

In South Africa where mobile phones have become a ubiquitous feature and daily companion for many people, the reductions in the cost of services and the availability of smarter devices at lower cost have stimulated the continued uptake and increased use of mobile phones (RIA, 2013). Thus, in initiatives that make use of mobile phones technology, the policy and regulation environment for the mobile phone industry is an important consideration. In fact, the South African National Broadband Policy aims to address the availability, accessibility, and affordability of broadband, the building of an information society and promoting the uptake and usage of broadband (Parliamentary Monitoring Group, 2016). However, RIA (2013) have found that, in spite of such dynamic growth that continues to be demonstrated by the South African ICT sector, particularly the mobile services sector, the growth has not met the national objective of affordable access to the full range of communication services. When compared to both African and global standards, the prices of mobile phone communications services and all other communications services remain high in South Africa (RIA, 2013). The report of the RIA Pricing Transparency Index shows that despite South Africa's Prepaid Mobile ranking improving from 30<sup>th</sup> in 2012 to 22<sup>nd</sup> in 2013 (out of 46 African Countries indexed), "the cheapest mobile prepaid product in South Africa is still nearly 7.5 times more expensive than the African countries' cheapest similar product, and still three times more expensive than the cheapest product available from a dominant operator in Africa" (Gillwald et al., 2012, p. iv).

Therefore, the South African government has adopted the Electronic Communications Act, 2005 (Act No. 36 of 2005), the national broadband policy, namely "*South Africa Connect*" which is the government's strategy and plan about creating opportunities and ensuring inclusion. Financial inclusion is the prominent priority in the policy. For the implementation of such policy, mobile phones are inescapably critical, since in South Africa they have become ubiquitous features and daily companions for many people (Han, 2012). In particular, much hope rests on the use of mobile phones to extend access to financial services for the poor (De Koker, & Jentzsch, 2013). Also, in 2009, the South African government amended the Regulation of Interception of Communication Act (RICA) by introducing identification and verification measures for mobile phone users. RICA provides for the lawful interception of communications for crime combating purpose. In terms of RICA, mobile phones service

providers may not activate a SIM card before the user is identified and verified. RICA makes it compulsory for all cellphone users in South Africa, both contract and pre-paid (PayAsYouGo), to make their SIM card RICA-compliant. Security is one of the government's ostensible motivations for RICA (Donovan & Martin, 2014). It is believed that SIM regulations will reduce the opportunities for malevolent actors to use mobile devices anonymously to undertake unlawful or socially harmful activities such as drug trafficking, kidnapping, and terrorism (Donovan & Martin, 2014). However, there is fear that the identity verification could likely be a problematic requirement for some and may unintentionally exclude many people from services delivered through mobile phones (De Koker, & Jentsch, 2013).

Therefore, in South Africa, where mobile phones have become the most easily accessible and convenient way of offering services to customers (Han, 2012), an understanding of the factors which shape the use of mobile phones by urban refugees and the impacts on their empowerment is crucial and is the aim of this research.

## **2.7. Refugees, mobile phone use, and Empowerment**

In recent years, the issues of urban refugees have attracted a number of academics as well as humanitarian actors (Aricat, 2015; Kobia & Cranfield, 2009). The literature review shows that efforts to promote self-reliance and livelihood amongst refugees through models of assistance that focused on care and maintenance – that the livelihoods of refugees depend on external interventions – have not been successful (e.g. Loescher, & Milner, 2011). Efforts have been shifted towards a more holistic response to the challenges and opportunities available to refugees. A plethora of interesting research has been done regarding refugees' concerns, giving place to the development of a more complex understanding of the kinds of environments that encourage self-reliance and sustainable livelihoods among refugees (Crawford et al., 2015). Therefore, in the last two decades, there have been abundant references to empowerment in ICT4D literature, often with assertions that in general, ICT has the potential to empower (Kim, 2016; Rashid & Elder, 2009; Svensson, & Larsson, 2015; Zambrano & Seward, 2012). As such, Zambrano and Seward (2012) suggest that there is indeed potential in the use of mobile technologies to support and enhance development outcomes. However, most of the existing research focuses on legal, political and human right perspectives, and also on specific health, training and education needs of refugees.

Minimal attention has been paid to the use of ICTs, particularly mobile phones by refugees in developing countries (Bacishoga et al., 2016). Of the few existing studies that look at ICTs use by refugees, the majority seem to focus on immigrants' use of ICTs in camp settings (e.g. Aricat, 2015; Hunter, 2015; Maitland, 2015), and on the range of technologies used by refugees living in resettlement areas in developed countries (e.g. Andrade, & Doolin, 2016; Leung & Li, 2015; Walker et al., 2015).

Little research has been dedicated to mobile phone use by refugees living in cities in developing countries. Once again, however, the focus has been on particular mobile services or on specific outcomes. The example is the research by Tomita et al. (2015) about the use of SMS to assess depressive symptoms among refugees in South Africa. Another example is the pilot research by Danielson (2013) exploring the communication channels between refugees and service providers in Cairo. To date, little is known about the use of mobile phones by refugees in the developing countries' context, particularly about the factors affecting the use of mobile by phone urban refugees in South Africa and the impacts on their empowerment. It is argued that to achieve improved understanding, researchers need to turn their focus to the appreciation of refugees' own efforts to improve their lives, and the support they may need to sustain these initiatives (Crawford et al., 2015; Magda et al., 2015).

Therefore, Donner (2008) claims that there is an underlying hope that mobiles phones can contribute to the livelihoods and well-being of those in resource-constrained settings. Many scholars have noted the empowering effects of ICTs for refugees. In their analysis of ICT projects supported by the International Development Research Centre (IDRC), Rashid and Elder (2009) conclude that most of the analysed studies confirm the potential of mobile phones as a tool for economic empowerment. In his research on whether ICTs can empower migrants to return to their countries of origin, Hunter (2015) reports that ICTs have empowering and uniting effects for both the migrants and their family and friends in their home countries. However, despite such enthusiasm, there is little research on what influences empowerment. In addition, the lack of attention to underlying structural causes of disempowerment has led to criticism (Luttrell et al., 2009). Furthermore, most ICT4D research on empowerment focuses on a macro or meso-level, with a country or an organisation as the unit of analysis (Gomez et al., 2012). Therefore, this PhD research will fill this gap since it sought to critically explore the factors which shape the use of mobile phones by urban refugees in South Africa and their capabilities for empowerment.

## **2.8. Summary of the chapter and Identified Gaps**

The literature review shows that considerable efforts have been made in researching mobile phone usage and impacts in developing countries. The evidence generated provides interesting insights into the dominant themes, analysis and evaluation conducted to date. For example, statements such as “mobile phone use contributes to development” are easy to detect. However, the literature review presented in this chapter has exposed some evidence of gaps which need to be addressed.

The literature shows that most previous IS research on mobile phones has adopted interpretivist and positivist approaches and have focused on the regional or national level and on the immediate organisational context (Lin et al., 2015). Theories employed in most of the existing research regarding the use of mobile phones have largely abstracted from a social context. Inherent, if not always explicit, calls for more rigorous micro-level research have been echoed repeatedly. Donner (2008) and Han

(2012) voice concern that, despite greater maturity in researching mobile phone impact in the developing world, a strong perspective has been placed on macro-level economic growth. Avgerou (2010) points out that an understanding of how the socio-economic context enables or constrains meanings and actions of ICT innovation on the contribution to life improvements of individuals in developing countries remain inadequate. The literature review highlights that a deeper understanding of factors that enable and constrain empowerment through mobile phone use is still relatively scarce. More systematic theorising efforts are still needed, particularly at the micro level of individual users of mobile phones.

It is clear that in the literature of mobile phones and empowerment, there is a dearth of knowledge on exactly how mobile phones contribute to empowerment (Hatakka et al., 2016). This dearth of knowledge is echoed by Zheng and Stahl's (2012) call for a critical investigation of capabilities enhanced by technology and the conditions or factors that enable/restrict such capabilities. The need expressed by Zheng and Stahl's (2012) call is still ongoing, as recently Andrade and Doolin (2016) emphasise that further research is needed to investigate why a person chooses to use ICT in particular ways. Most studies on the impact of mobile phone usage on empowerment have been of a pilot nature, with a techno-centric focus (Han, 2012), paying less attention to conditions or contextual factors that might shape mobile phone usage and the resulting empowerment.

In addition, the literature shows that the use of mobile phones by urban refugees in developing countries has received only minimal attention (Leung, 2011). The broader literature on refugee studies is still dominated by discussions of the systems of administration of camp refugees and on the ICTs use by refugees resettled in developed countries.

This research fills the identified gaps in the literature as its purpose is to critically explore the factors which shape the use of mobile phones by urban refugees in South Africa and their capabilities for empowerment. It builds upon previous studies and takes stock of existing experience and evidence. The next chapter addresses the theoretical approaches.

## 3. THEORETICAL RESEARCH FRAMEWORK

### 3.1. Introduction

Philosophers of science argue that a theory is important as it provides the framework to make sense of complex phenomena and a basis for considering how what is unknown might be organised (Silverman, 2005). Theory acts as a lens through which we focus and magnify certain things while filtering out other things presumed to be irrelevant (Truex, Holmström & Keil, 2006). A theory assists us in knowing “what to consider and what to leave out of our observations” as well “what to look for, ask about, and leave out in the process of data collection” and in doing fieldwork (Schensul, Schensul & LeCompte, 1999, p. 12, 13). Truex et al. (2006) urge researchers to be able to formulate a reasonable justification of their choice of selecting a particular theory or theories versus alternatives.

In her examination of the structural nature of theory in IS research Gregor (2006) distinguishes five interrelated types of theory which all together show that theory affects what we see and what we do not see. Therefore, the theory should be selected in consideration to how well it is suited to provide a better theoretical understanding and explanation of the object of study. A theory may enhance our understanding of the world or may be used as a basis for future intervention or action (Gregor, 2006).

The development and use of theories are generally acknowledged as important aspects of the pursuit of scientific knowledge in IS research (Gregor, 2006; Truex et al., 2006; Weber 2012). Such an intellectual activity is not all that straightforward, given the socially constructed and value-laden nature of theories. It is advised that, when selecting a theory, researchers should consider among other things the fit between the theory and the phenomenon of interest (Truex et al., 2006). In other words, it is crucial to determine which theory is appropriate for the problem under study (Gregor, 2006). In this PhD thesis, methods and conceptual frameworks are used to explore the context, experience, and practices relating to the object of the research – factors that shape urban refugees’ use of mobile phones and empowerment in the context of social exclusion and inequality. It is necessary to remember that despite the unambiguous advantages of mobile phone use – transforming lives and generating new socio-economic opportunities (Etzo & Collender, 2010), it may also be associated with negative outcomes – missed opportunities (Billieux et al., 2015; Etzo & Collender, 2010; Oksman, 2010). Walsham, Robey, and Sahay (2007) advise that the use of ICTs, let alone mobile phones in developing countries, needs to take place in the context of local culture and should be designed to operate in a culturally-sensitive manner. Such context led this thesis to employ a theoretical framework based on the integration of Sen’s CA and Bourdieu’s TOP. Sen’s CA and Bourdieu’s TOP are important but underdeveloped areas of theoretical discourse in IS, as discussed next.

## 3.2. Capability Approach

The CA was first articulated in the 1980's by Amartya Sen (Sen, 1980, 1984) to whom it remains most closely associated. Sen developed the CA in the context of organising and evaluating ways to empower people in developing countries to improve their freedom, well-being, and independence (Alkire, 2008; Robeyns, 2005). It is a framework for the assessment and evaluation of social arrangements, the standard of living, inequality, poverty, justice, quality of life or well-being (Kleine, 2010; Robeyns, 2005). Robeyns (2005) emphasises that the CA is also suited to evaluate and assess the design of policies and proposals about social change in society. The CA stands as a critique of the more prevalent utilitarian approach to evaluation by emphasising capabilities as the basis for evaluation instead (Zheng & Walsham, 2008).

Compared to the utilitarian approach which focuses on commodities, the CA offers a more appropriate and alternative focus. According to Deneulin (2006) and Zheng and Stahl (2011), the CA is built upon three cornerstones: (1) it emphasizes “the expansion of freedom both as primary ends and as the principle means of development” (Sen, 1999, pg. xii); (2) it highlights the centrality of ‘individual agency’ in addressing human deprivation; and (3) it stresses participation. As such, CA is people-centered, arguing that the focal point of policy should be on human beings and their quality of life. The CA posits that equality of life is not about the resource, the possession of commodities, but about what the resources enable people to do and to be what they value (Sen, 1999), that is individuals’ capabilities, reflecting the genuine opportunities that people enjoy (Zimmermann, 2006).

Since the last decade, the CA has gained powerful popularity as a predominant framework for analysing and discussing matters of justice and equality, development, and well-being (Oosterlaken, 2012). The CA is increasingly being applied by scholars from diverse disciplines such as philosophy of technology and computer science, economics, development studies, science and technology studies. The CA has not only influenced scholarly works, but it has also influenced both policy and practice. Thus, CA has become an influential paradigm for policy debate in human development where it inspired the creation of the United Nations’ Human Development Index (Hamel, 2010) and has also been applied in other different ways, such as in the assessment and/or evaluation of small-scale development projects (Oosterlaken, 2012).

The purpose of this PhD thesis is to critically explore the factors which shape the use of mobile phones by urban refugees in South Africa and their capabilities for empowerment. The conceptual basis of this PhD thesis is provided by the perspective of social exclusion and social inequality which are the most important challenges experienced by urban refugees (Correa-Velez et al., 2012; Kobia et al., 2009). According to Sen (1992, 2000), social exclusion reinforces social inequality and can be perceived as a part of capability deprivation and can also lead to other capabilities failures, thereby limiting

individuals' living opportunities. This can include the deprivation of the capabilities of using mobile phones for purposes such as participating in e-commerce or an online competition. For example, Zheng and Walsham (2008) argue that people should look at poverty, not only as lowness of income but also as the deprivation of capabilities.

The choice of CA as the theoretical lens for this research is context-motivated. The CA has an ethical approach to social arrangements different from most theories. While traditional ethical theories are mostly action-agent oriented (Oosterlaken, 2012), the CA gives important consideration to the interpersonal variations among human beings in that it explicitly distinguishes different spaces of equality (Zheng & Stahl, 2011). In this regards, CA acknowledges that equality in one space which is intended to lead a valuable life, e.g. owning a mobile phone, does not necessarily mean equality in life opportunities to achieve it, e.g. doing online banking. This occurs when agents' aspirations soar above their objective chances. It is argued that the uses and consequences of mobile phones are often ambiguous and contradictory (Billieux et al., 2015; Etzo & Collender, 2010). It is such ambiguity which complicates the ethical analyses in terms of solely individual actions, agents, intentions, reasons and obligations (Johnstone, 2007). Therefore, CA is important due to its value-based approach as it gives central importance to agency and valuable human capabilities.

### 3.2.1. Core Concepts of CA

Sen's CA focuses directly on the quality of life that people are actually able to achieve (Zimmermann, 2006). Sen (1993) argues that quality of life can be analysed in terms of core concepts of functionings, capability, and agency. These three concepts are interrelated but offer distinct meanings.

The first concept, *functionings*, represents the various doings or beings of an individual (Sen, 1999). They are constitutive of well-being, the actual achievements and, as such should be distinguished from the resources used to achieve them.

The second concept, *Capabilities*, reflects the genuine opportunities an individual enjoys or the freedom that individuals have to enjoy valuable beings and doings (Oosterlaken & van den Hoven, 2011). As such, capabilities are a person or group's freedom to achieve or promote valuable and achievable functionings (Sen, 2000; Zheng & Stahl, 2010). Sen elucidates these two concepts as follows: "A functioning is an achievement, whereas a capability is the ability to achieve. Functionings are, in a sense, more directly related to living conditions, since they are different aspects of living conditions (Zimmermann, 2006). Capabilities, in contrast, are notions of freedom, in the positive sense: what real opportunities you have regarding the life you may lead" (Sen, 1987, p. 36). These capabilities are what allow a person or group of persons to perform certain functionings to "lead the kind of life they value

– and have reason to value” (Sen, 1999, p. 18). People become excluded when they are denied access to resources that would enable them to acquire capabilities.

The third concept, *agency*, is defined as the freedom to set and pursue one’s own goals and interests (Sen, 1985). For Sen (1999, 2000) an agent is someone who acts and brings about change, and whose achievements can be judged in terms of her own values and objectives. Agency focuses on the ability to personally choose the functionings one values. Hays (1994) differentiates two concepts of agency, firstly the *structurally reproductive agency*, that which entails choices that either reinforce the status quo or replicate prevailing social patterns to result in empirically observable reproduction. Secondly, the *structurally transformative agency*, which modifies structural conditions by altering social patterns in “non-trivial” consequences (1994, p. 64). It is the latter, structurally transformative agency, which is linked to Sen’s CA because it emphasises the structural impact resulting from an array of agential enactments which implies the empowerment of individuals or groups, to be active agents of change in their own terms. Sen (1999) argues that “greater freedom enhances the ability of people to help themselves and to influence the world” (p. 152).

### **3.2.2. CA and ICT4D**

In recent years there is a growing interest from scholars and practitioners to applying CA to deliberations about technology. For example, Thomas and Parayil (2008) use the CA to investigate the link between the digital divide and the larger social and economic divides in India. Andrade and Doolin (2016) in their study on ICT and the social inclusion of refugees, use CA to explore what people are able to do and achieve with ICTs. Oosterlaken (2012) claims that CA stands as a powerful conceptual framework to fruitfully reflect on the matters of ICT4D. Gigler (2008) emphasises that the CA is to be preferred over conventional approaches that overemphasise the significance of technology itself for social development. It is believed that the increase in applying CA in ICT4D may be explained by the popularity of ICT which is believed to have a critical role to play in people’s lives and in their development (Oosterlaken, 2012). A common thread in most of the studies that have applied the CA to ICT4D is the focus given to the capabilities that users benefit from technology. In addition, many of these studies, but not all, are focused on developing countries (Gigler, 2008; Ibrahim et al., 2012). However, as Oosterlaken (2012) points out, so far many of the applications of CA have been concerned with project evaluation.

### **3.2.3. Critiques of the CA**

While the CA has much to offer, its application for studying IS phenomena has been subject to certain critiques. Some conceptual issues are worth mentioning here:

First, the CA fails to address structural inequalities as it gives less attention to utility or resources, and focuses more on capturing other aspects of life such as wellbeing and freedom (Bowman, 2010). For example, Sen argues that inequalities relate to a lack of opportunities, freedoms, and choice (Zheng & Walsham, 2008). This is an important argument, but it presents a danger of being used to divert attention from the need for greater income equality (Bowman, 2010).

Second, CA provides no explicit theorization of technology (Johnstone, 2007; Kleine, 2010; Oosterlaken, 2012; Zheng & Stahl, 2012). Consequently, most ICT research that has adopted the CA framework has an implicit assumption of technologies as a neutral means which can be readily drawn upon to serve the purpose of human development (Oosterlaken, 2012).

Third, although CA recognises the impact of social institutions on individual capabilities, that is, the restricted agency (Hill, 2003; Sen, 1985), no further discussion of possible constraints on human agency is provided (Oosterlaken, 2012; Zheng & Stahl, 2011). Hill (2003) emphasises that Sen's CA does not analyse the role of institutionalised or symbolic power in causing or perpetuating inequalities in individual opportunities to achieve or become empowered.

Therefore, several articles have focused on explicitly providing steps towards operationalization of CA in relation to ICT4D. For example, both Johnstone (2007) and Zheng (2009) extensively discuss the advantages and challenges of applying the CA to ICT. Zheng and Stahl (2012), drawing on CA and critical social theory in IS, provide a theoretical perspective for evaluating social implications of technology. Kleine (2010, 2011) builds on Sen's CA, and the work of Alsop and Heinson (2005) as well as the Sustainable Livelihood Framework (Department of International Development, 1999) to develop "the choice framework" as an alternative way of operationalizing the CA and visualizing the elements of a systemic conceptualization of the development process. Several other authors draw on CA to develop frameworks for evaluating ICT4D projects (e.g. De', 2006; Hatakka et al., 2016; Madon, 2004). However, as Heeks (2010) warns, the main practical call is still for more theory-based evidence about ICTs' impact on development. More empirical works are needed in response to challenges faced by policy makers and practitioners (Oosterlaken, 2012).

It is suggested that to address the weaknesses of the CA, researchers should extend it with other theories (Robeyns, 2006; Zheng & Stahl, 2012). Hill (2003, pg. 117) points out that, "*Until the analytical frameworks being developed as extensions of the capability approach address the issue of social power, the analysis of well-being will be incomplete, and decisions made to enhance human capabilities will systematically fall short*". In fact, Sen intended his approach to be combined with other theoretical approaches (Sen, 1992). Alkire (2008) suggests that a framework that deals with capabilities of individuals should recognise that individuals as agents are socially embedded and connected to social structures in their environment, and consequently should analyse the role that institutions, collective

actions, and other social structures play in creating the capabilities of an individual. Therefore, none of the existing frameworks, as with CA if applied as such, suits well to the framing of this research which aims to critically explore the factors that shape the use of mobile phones by urban refugees in South Africa and their capabilities for empowerment. For example, Kleine's (2010, 2011) Choice Framework lacks the details in how the conversion takes place from material properties to capabilities (Hatakka et al., 2016).

Therefore, it became imperative for the purpose of this PhD to enhance the explanatory power of Sen's CA. This was done by drawing upon Bourdieu's TOP (Bourdieu, 1977, 1990a, 1993), hoping that its concepts of capital, habitus, symbolic power and social arrangements would make sense of the relationship between social structures and individuals' agency in everyday practices. In so doing, this research will significantly contribute to the body of knowledge. The choice of applying Bourdieu over other most visible critical theorists in the IS literature such as Foucault and Habermas is dictated by the context of this research as the following discussion shows.

Foucault focuses on discursive practices from the perspective of the history of epistemology and theory of knowledge (Macey, 2000). Some of his important concepts include archaeology and genealogy of knowledge, discourse, and the panopticon (Myers & Klein, 2011). His research approach involves detailed historical studies of institutions with the purpose of revealing the interdependence of knowledge and power in discursive social practices. In fact, Foucault described himself as a "specialist in the history of systems of thought" (Macey, 2000, p. 133). The espoused values of Foucault are that he believes in the emancipation of individuals although he is explicitly skeptical of the viability of the enlightenment ideal (Myers & Klein, 2011).

Habermas focuses on the communicative action as the basis of modern societies (Klein & Huynh, 2004) with a particular emphasis on forms of behaviour that are in fact socially conditioned, the power of symbolic systems and their domination over the construction of reality, and the hidden mechanisms of reproduction of social and cultural practices (Macey, 2000). Some of Habermas' important concepts include the communicative action and strategic action, cognitive interests, lifeworld and systems (Myers & Klein, 2011; Ngwenyama & Lee, 1997). His research approach consists of applying concepts from the history of social philosophy to rational reconstruction of self-formative processes, resulting in cognitive interest theory (Myers & Klein, 2011). Habermas's theory is one of compromise, he assumes an ideal state wherein parties share a common goal that is the basis for communication action (Kvasny & Truex, 2000). Such approach made the use of Habermas somewhat limiting in the context of this thesis, which posits that social structures are formed to serve a strategic purpose; typically to empower or disempower.

Bourdieu's theory is one of conflict. He focuses on the constraining and enabling features of structures on human action (Kvasny & Truex, 2000). With the ethnographic field study as a research approach, Bourdieu's espoused values are explicitly consistent with the enlightenment ideal (Myers & Klein, 2011). As such, Bourdieu's critical theory approach appears as being the most relevant in the context of this research. Although it may be possible to apply key concepts from other critical theorists to this research, Bourdieu's TOP appears to be the most appropriate to its context. An overview of Bourdieu's critical theory is presented in the section that follows.

### 3.3. Bourdieu's TOP

Adopting Bourdieu's TOP will strengthen and enrich CA by enriching the concept of technology and by addressing the issue of social power and providing a critical account of human agency. Bourdieu's TOP holistically reconciles the double reality of the social world by addressing the dichotomy between social structure and individual's agency. Before immersing in Bourdieu's TOP, I start with a brief presentation of his biography (taken from Calhoun, 2002a) for a better understanding of how his theory resonates with the transitions he went through in his life.

Pierre Bourdieu (1930–2002) was born to a working-class family in a small village in southern France. Despite his modest background, Bourdieu was educated in France's most prestigious universities, as encouraged by his father. However, growing up in a disadvantaged milieu, with a different linguistic background, Bourdieu never felt part of the intellectual elite of the time.

At university in Paris, Bourdieu studied philosophy. Later in 1958 when he was sent to Algeria, which at that time was a French colony, Bourdieu took a teaching position. From there he switched to the discipline of anthropology, which at the time was emerging. During that time, he undertook ethnographic fieldwork among the Kabyle, Algeria's largest indigenous group. Based on his fieldwork, Bourdieu published his first book, *The Algerians*, which was an immediate success. Later, Bourdieu would also use this fieldwork to write *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, one of his first and most influential theoretical statements. Again, from anthropology, Bourdieu switched to sociology, in which he established a new version of social theory.

Bourdieu was a prolific academic writer. He was also a leading public intellectual in France, speaking out and organising protests against what he saw as the unfair and exploitive aspects of neoliberal economic policy and globalisation. By the time of his death in 2002, Bourdieu was known as one of France's greatest scholars and one of the most influential social theorists in the world. His transitions across different settings have demonstrated a process of seeking acceptance, prestige, and empowerment.

In his works, Bourdieu focuses on the constraining and enabling features of social structures on human action (Calhoun, 2002a; Kvasny & Truex, 2000). He points to the forms of behaviours that are in fact socially conditioned; the hidden mechanisms of reproduction of social and cultural practices; and the power of symbolic systems and their domination over the construction of reality (Macey, 2000; Kvasny & Truex, 2000). Hence, Bourdieu reconciles the dualisms in the structure-agency debate, the macro vs micro, structuralism vs constructivism (Burke, Joseph, Pasick, & Barker, 2009). To do this, Bourdieu combines three concepts (field, capital, and habitus) in the TOP aimed at understanding behaviour (Practice).

The pertinence of Bourdieu in this research is about how his TOP helps in the understanding and exploration of factors which shape mobile phone use by urban refugees in South Africa and the implications for their empowerment. In this research, *practice* is understood to be what the research participants use their mobile phones for and how they use their mobile phones.

### **3.3.1. Core Concepts of Bourdieu's TOP**

Bourdieu's concepts of field, capital, and habitus constitute the central focus of his TOP introduced in the late 1970s. Although these three concepts are useful in their own right, they are not to be understood in isolation, but as interdependent (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). This is because it is impossible to envision the actors without the context within to act, as it is to describe a social situation without the actions of the actors. In what follows, a discussion of Bourdieu's concept of the field is presented, followed by that of capital and then that of habitus.

#### **3.3.1.1. The field**

In order to grasp the interactions that determine the human daily life (i.e. negotiations, discussions, conflicts, etc.), it is important to first understand the context within which these are produced. The context consists of the circumstances and place – the social space. Interactions have to be considered in their specific social situations, which Bourdieu (2000, p. 20) calls "*fields*". For Bourdieu, a field is a structured social space that operates by objective social rules (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992; Jenkins, 2002). Gaventa (2003, p. 6) emphasises that fields are the "various social and institutional arenas in which people express and reproduce their dispositions, and where they compete for the distribution of different kinds of capital". Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992) explain that agents within the field confront each other, manoeuvre and struggle according to their positions in the field in the pursuit of desirable resources. People compete because the field is simultaneously a space of conflict and a space of competition. For agents to compete in the field, they have to be able to demonstrate appropriate strategies and practices. To achieve that, they have to internalise the rules of the field that enable them to anticipate future tendencies and opportunities (Bourdieu, 1983).

The competition happens in the fields because it is both the field of forces whose necessity is imposed on individuals who engage in it and at the same time, the field of struggles within which individuals confront each other according to their position in the structure of the field (Bourdieu, 1977). Positions that agents occupy within a particular field are regulated by power relations (Wacquant, 2014). Such positions reflect and reinforce various status distinctions such as work activities, social group affiliation, and so on. Depending on their positions within the field, social agents are able to mobilise actual and potential capital, and also to command access to the power available in the field (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). In other words, the position an individual occupies in the field creates self-evident rules that determine the potential limits of his social mobility within that particular social field. Of specific pertinence in this thesis, South Africa's social space is conceived of as a set of social fields, the empirical everyday world, the South African social world within which urban refugees and institutions are integrated and interact with each other in accordance with each field's specific rules. Different social fields include the public and private institutions, markets, religious organisations, sports, and housing, hospitals, schoolings, transportations, public and private officials, employment, and business.

According to Bourdieu (1993, p. 73), "in order for a field to function, there have to be stakes and people prepared to play the game, endowed with the habitus that implies knowledge and recognition of the immanent laws of the field". The stakes consist of the maximisation of capital symbolically and materially. For agents to play and win in the field, they have to internalise social arrangements which are the rule of the game, demonstrate appropriate practices and strategies (Bourdieu, 1983). Social arrangements, therefore, capture the form of rules active in society. The laws or rules and conditions of the game are not formalised but tacit in nature (Wacquant, 2014). They are prescribed by social positions and they operate on the interpretations of social agents, depending on their preferences, social positions, and values. However, there is no global rule that applies to all fields (Bourdieu, 1990a). As such, the internalisation of the field-specific rules enables the agents to play and win by anticipating future tendencies and opportunities (Bourdieu, 1983). Thus, it is essential for agents to have 'a feel for the game' which is "the practical mastery of the logic or the imminent necessity of the game – a mastery acquired by experience of the game, and one which works outside conscious control and discourse..." (Bourdieu, 1990a, p. 61). Bourdieu explains that each field defines its cards or currencies for the game whose relative value can advantage social actors in playing or winning the game (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). These cards are in forms of capital and take time to accumulate. However, different forms of capital are accorded different values depending on the field in which an individual is operating – legitimisation. Also, some capital are effective and valid only in a given field but not in others. Their values can change according to the rules of the game (Bourdieu, 1986). In the field, there are different forms of capital: social, economic, cultural and symbolic capital as discussed in the section that follows. These different combinations or packages of capital constitute the capital portfolio or 'pile of tokens' that can be utilised differently by individuals conferring them more or less power to influence the rules

of the game (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 99). As such, each player comes to the game with his own habitus and access to capital based on his position in the field. Bourdieu describes the interactions that occur within the fields as ‘struggle’ since actors (individually or collectively) strategically operate to maximise their positions and to improve or to build new capital, as discussed next.

### 3.3.1.2. *Capital*

As discussed in the previous section, each field values particular sorts of resources that agents can mobilise in order to enter and gain positions within social fields. Bourdieu named these resources *capital* which he defined as “accumulated labour (in its materialized or its incorporated, embodied form) [...], it is a force inscribed in objective or subjective structures, but it is also the principle underlying the imminent regularities of the social world” (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 241). For Bourdieu, capital is not limited only to the notion of economic or material assets but extends to comprise capital that may be social, cultural or symbolic (Bourdieu, 1977, 1990a, 1993).

*Economic capital* refers to basic economic and material resources. It is in the form of money and material assets such as property, income, financial stocks (Abel & Frohlich, 2012). Economic capital is a decisive factor in social advantage and disadvantage.

*Social capital* is understood as “... [the] aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of mutual acquaintance and recognition – or to membership in a group – which provides each of its members with the backing of the collectively-owned capital” (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 248f). Social capital represents an agent’s entirety of social relations. It requires effort for its creation and maintains. It is, for example, a practical way to understand the effect of the physical isolation that individuals experience.

*Cultural capital* is defined as people’s symbolic and informational resources for action (Bourdieu, 1986). According to Abel and Frohlich (2012, p. 238), “cultural capital in the form of knowledge is a precondition for most individual action and, as such, is a key component in people’s capacity for agency”. It provides the means for a non-economic form of domination and hierarchy, as classes distinguish themselves through taste (Gaventa, 2003). As such, cultural capital plays a central role in societal power relations (Bourdieu, 1986).

*Symbolic capital* is referred to as a form of tacit power that an agent possesses and functions as an authoritative embodiment of cultural value (Bourdieu, 1993). It is not an independent type of capital within itself, rather, it consists in the acknowledgement of capital by the entirety of the peer competitors in a specific field (Bourdieu, 1977). Symbolic capital relates to honour and recognition. Each of the other forms of capital has the possibility of being converted into symbolic capital. The significance of

symbolic capital is that it confers authority and credibility to the agent and is considered as a valued maker of status in the *field* (Jenkins, 2002).

According to Bourdieu (1984), the ways in which these forms of capital interact contributes to the reproduction of social inequalities and power distribution in society. Individuals actively use their capital to make effective choices and translate these choices into desired actions and outcomes: to empower themselves. As such, these different forms of capital play an important role in producing and reproducing inequality and discriminatory social practices, but also in the empowerment of individuals. Therefore, it takes all these different forms of capital to fully explain the reproduction of social inequality or empowerment, since they are interrelated and inextricably linked (Abel & Frohlich, 2012; Bourdieu, 1986) in such a way that capital: (1) are dependent and conditional on each other (e.g. cultural capital such as certain values and behavioural skills are expected for the acquisition of social capital such as to participate in specific social networks); (2) can be converted one into another (e.g. converting economic capital, in the form of money, into cultural capital, in the form of education); (3) can be accumulated (e.g. investing money in a certain business activity in order to make more money); and (4) can also be transmitted (e.g. through family socialization, knowledge and values can be transmitted to children). In this sense, individuals may be deemed more or less advantaged, dependent on their abilities to convert a capital into other forms of capital (Bourdieu, 1986).

In order to obtain the right to enter a social field, agents need to be endowed with specific capital that they can put at stake. It is also an agent's capital structure that determines his position in the field. The accumulation of *capital* is both the process within, and the product of, the *field* (Thompson, 2008). For this to happen, there occurs a competitive 'game' in the *field* within which various actors compete to improve or maintain their position. As such, agents' relative positions in the field are determined by the volume and structure of their capital portfolio (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). An agent's 'capital portfolios', allows him to "wield power, or influence in the *field*" (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 98). Agents' differences in capital possession and position within the field determine differing levels of power within the field. Thus, the concept of capital is important as it defines what gives some individuals power and status over others within a given field. However, the possession of capital cannot solely explain agents' behaviour within the field. The chance to acquire and apply those different forms of capital are predetermined and structured by an agent's habitus (Abel & Frohlich, 2012) as discussed next.

### **3.3.1.3. *Habitus***

Bourdieu (1990a) defined habitus as "... system of durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures, that is, as principles which generate and organize practices and representations that can be objectively adapted to their outcomes without

presupposing a conscious aiming at ends or an express mastery of the operations necessary in order to attain them” (p. 53). Habitus is *durable* because of its “affinity” which is the inclination to create ways of doing, perceiving, working, and appreciating that sit comfortably with the habitus (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 22). It is *transposable* because these dispositions, perceptions, and practices tend to persist even when individuals find themselves in fields, different to the original ones in which their habitus was structured (Thompson, 2008). It is *structured* in that past and present circumstances are brought together not randomly but in an ordered way (Bourdieu, 1990a). It is *structuring* because it helps shape the present and future practices (Bourdieu, 1990a).

Habitus can also be viewed as a set of deeply founded dispositions and beliefs rooted in the daily practices of individuals and groups which arise from personal experience and history (Kvasny & Truex, 2000). Habitus is related to the cultural and familial roots from which a person grows and continues to be structured by life experiences (Bourdieu, 1996). In this way, habitus is acquired through repetition like a habit, as a result of long-term occupation of a position within the social world. Habitus is created and reproduced unconsciously, “without any deliberation pursuit of coherence... without any conscious concentration” (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 170). Bourdieu (1986) explained that the condition of existence influences the formation of the habitus which is manifested in an individual’s perceptions, dispositions, feelings, thoughts, appreciations, inclinations, tastes, practices, and works.

Understood as structured by layers of transposable dispositions, habitus affects the way an individual perceives and appreciates all experiences (Bourdieu, 1990b). There are certain ways in which habitus manifests in people. For example, Bourdieu (1977) argues that individuals who come from the same “material conditions of life” (p. 63) and who have been exposed to the same “pedagogic action” (p. 64) are likely to have a similar set of dispositions and interest which incline them to “recognise and pursue the same goods” (p. 64). Krauss (2013) emphasises that individuals who occupy a similar position in social structure are likely to have the same habitus, and in this way, each of them will be able to reproduce the rules of the system, but not necessarily cite or recite the rules from memory (Krauss, 2013). These illustrations show that habitus is created through a social process resulting in patterns that are enduring and transferable from one context to another, but that also shift in relation to specific contexts and over time (Burke et al., 2009). Habitus can be recognised in an individual acting, feelings, thoughts, and ways of being (Maton, 2008). By implication, in this research, habitus is related to urban refugees’ perceptions, dispositions, feelings, thoughts, appreciations, inclinations, and actions.

However, habitus is not permanent or fixed. It varies depending on the nature of one’s position. It can be changed under unexpected situations or over a long historical period (Bourdieu, 1990a; Navarro, 2006). As such, environment and context are a key influence on habitus. This does not mean that individuals are passive receivers of practices in the fields without sufficient examination of how these practices are being determined. The structure does not ultimately determine behaviour, but also, habitus

is not totally deterministic. Individuals are reasonable beings who are capable of applying sound, practical (or common) sense which allows them to act based on the developed structures or existing circumstances in the field (Bourdieu, 1990a). Bourdieu (1990a) argues that individuals could escape their disadvantaging habitus by seeing chances and taking them. Bourdieu made such a claim in reference to his own experience as coming from a less privileged family, yet still he was able to be successful at the highest levels of the French education system. He argued that “not only can habitus be practically transformed ... by the effect of social trajectory leading to conditions of living different from initial ones, it can also be controlled through the awakening of consciousness and socioanalysis” (Bourdieu, 1990a, p. 116). Bourdieu (1990a) explains that habitus is an on-going social construction that can be transformed by alignment to external forces in new fields. It does not determine practice, but instead, it produces practice through invention and interaction with the field (Bourdieu, 1990b).

Habitus produces and it is produced by the social world (Bourdieu, 1984; Wacquant, 2014). It is an embodied *feel of the game*, a set of the rules by which individuals interpret the social world from a particular, and therefore always partial, perspective within it (Bourdieu, 1990a, p. 66). Habitus is the strategy-generating principle that enables individuals to cope with unforeseen and ever-changing situations (Bourdieu, 1977). Just as there is individual habitus, fields have a collective habitus which is the relations, interactions, and experiences that have happened to them which create habitus (Bourdieu, 1984; Wacquant, 2014). The class habitus that stems from social group position on the social field leads to what Bourdieu (1977) referred to as *doxa*, which is the unconscious beliefs, the state when the social construction is perceived as the natural order and therefore accepted. What is taken for granted on a field sets social boundaries and limits individuals’ social behaviour. When individuals in a field come to believe collectively in what game is worthwhile investing and what constitute the rules of the game, there happens “*collusio* in the *illusio*” (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 7). *Collusio* in the *illusio* means that when all individuals tacitly recognise “the value of the stakes of the game and the practical mastery of its rules”, the habitus ensures that they act in accordance with the field-specific rules (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 117)

### **3.3.2. The interplay of Structure and Agency in Bourdieu’s view**

Having presented the major concepts of Bourdieu’s TOP, now the discussion moves on to Bourdieu’s efforts to overcome the structure-agency dualities. The reconciliation between structure and agency or macro and micro, which is referred to as the structuralist constructivism or constructivist structuralism (Bourdieu, 1989, p. 14), constitutes Bourdieu’s major contribution.

As discussed in the previous section, ‘habitus’ is a central concept in Bourdieu’s TOP, and it conveys the essence of his view of structure and agency. Bourdieu (1977) stresses that it is in the habitus that the dialectic relationship between structure and agency is manifested. Habitus is understood as “dispositions that are both shaped by past events and structures, and that shape current practices and

structures and also, importantly, that condition our very perceptions of these” (Bourdieu 1984, p. 170). As such, habitus is viewed as a structure structured by the agent’s experiences of the social life, but simultaneously, habitus structures the social life in which the agent lives. This implies that involvement in a field shapes the habitus; in turn, the habitus shapes the perceptions and actions leading to a reproduction of the rules of the field (Crossley, 2001). By acting in conformity with the structure, the structure is confirmed and reproduced. However, an agent’s actions are to be considered neither as purely impulsive nor as purely rationalised, rather it is a combination of structure and agent’s consciousness (Bourdieu, 2000). Habitus is neither simply determined by structures nor a result of free will, instead it is created by a kind of interplay between the two over time. Habitus generates actions and strategies, largely unconsciously, following agents’ readings of consequential reactions of these actions and strategies. Collective strategies are therefore shared ways in which groups of individuals from similar backgrounds tend to act (Burke et al., 2009). Abel and Frohlich (2012) argue that it is through collective strategies that habitus links structures and agency.

Individuals have a certain degree of agency in their choice of strategies and practice. However, as argue Abel and Frohlich (2012, p. 239) “agency requires capital and that the unequal distribution of capital is first and foremost a matter of social structure”. As such, the interaction of capital and their transformation into empowerment points towards a decisive function of agency. Individuals use their capital to retain or increase their relative position on the social field. Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992, p. 108f) comment that individuals are “bearers of capital and, depending on their trajectory and on the position they occupy on the field (...), they have the propensity to orient themselves actively either toward the preservation of the distribution of capital or toward the subversion of this distribution”. Therefore, “one should not say that a historical event determined a behaviour but that it had this determining effect because a habitus capable of being affected by that event conferred that power upon it” (Bourdieu, 2000, p. 149).

Social structures use *symbolic violence*, also referred to as *symbolic power*, to impose on the individual with less capital a sense of one’s place or position in the field. Symbolic power is defined by a “determinate relationship between those who exercise this power and those who undergo it – that is to say, in the very structure of the field in which belief is produced and reproduced” (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 117). Thus, symbolic power contributes to the inter-generational reproduction of inegalitarian social arrangements. Kvasny and Truex (2000) and Navarro (2006) emphasise that social arrangements constitute the main way through which the interplay of agency and structures symbolically create power and legitimise it constantly. This happens when dominated individuals accept limits imposed on them in the game (Bourdieu, 2000).

In the TOP, social practice is viewed as the product of a combination of individual determination and determining structures. Bourdieu (1984, p. 101) uses the following equation to express the interplay

between habitus, capital, and field: [(Habitus) (Capital) + Field] = Practice. Hence, social practices are the result of structured associations and power relations in social fields. Also, social dispositions, norms and patterns of behaviour and the habitus are results of social practice. For Bourdieu, '*practice*' is understood to be the result of social structures, which are the socialized norms or tendencies, in a particular social arena '*the field*' where certain rules apply and also of an individual's background, circumstances, dispositions '*habitus*', and the material and symbolic assets '*capital*'. Hence in Bourdieu's TOP, the field brings into focus the structure (macro), and the habitus' focus is on the agency (micro). The interplay of agency and structures symbolically creates power and legitimises it constantly (Navarro, 2006). The habitus assures the collective belief in the rules of the game (*illusio*) and that individuals act in accordance with their respective positions on the field (*doxa*), which depends on the individuals' relative amount and structure of capital (Bourdieu, 1977).

### 3.4. Conclusion on Integrating TOP with CA

Bourdieu's TOP views social practices as a product of dialectic relationships between structure and agency. Hence Bourdieu's TOP ties together three core concepts, namely the fields, capital, and habitus in such a way that agents' habitus (dispositions) reflect not only their lived experiences but also depend on changing capital endowments (capital portfolio) and fields' boundaries and specific rules. Social actions or practices emerge between the objective structures external to the agent as the field and the internalised structures of the habitus.

Bourdieu's TOP is important in this PhD research in understanding urban refugees' use of mobile phones. The interplay of the relational concepts of Bourdieu's TOP allows the researcher to explore the antecedent factors that give rise to practices. In this PhD research, the practice of interest is the use of mobile phones by urban refugees in South Africa. Understanding urban refugees' empowerment in relation to the use of mobile phones implies understanding the factors that shape the usage in terms of structure and agency. The concept of habitus is important in so far as it explains how an individual or group's perceptions and actions contribute to the re-iteration of different social advantages or disadvantages over time. Bourdieu's TOP is useful in stressing the choice limiting aspects in the links between, on the one hand, structure in term of unequal access to resources (capital and services), and on the other hand, agency in term of habitus and strategies (Cockerham, 2005). The merit of Bourdieu's TOP is that it acknowledges the importance of structure in shaping and often determining human social behaviour. Bourdieu's TOP allows making sense of the relationship between "objective social structures (institutions, discourse, fields, ideologies) and everyday practices (what people do and why they do it)" (Webb, Schirato & Danaher, 2002, p. 1).

However, Bourdieu's TOP tends to focus much on the explanation of social inequality through social reproductive processes and structurally reproductive agency, but less on explaining the forms of agency

that can contribute to social change (Abel & Frohlich, 2012). Kvasny and Truex (2000, p. 281) posit that “Bourdieu gives more credence to the limiting or enabling aspects of social structures”. Clearly, the concept of habitus focuses on the role of agency in the reproductive part of social action and “has less to offer to our understanding of the dynamics of actual changes in the range of options to act for one’s own benefit” (Abel & Frohlich, 2012, p. 239). Bourdieu’s TOP provides an insufficient explanation of how opportunity structures may change over time.

Therefore, the need to integrate Bourdieu’s TOP with Sen’s CA which allows exploration of structurally transformative agency matters. CA emphasises the individual’s ability to choose from a set of alternative functionings as a freedom *sui generis* (Sen, 1999). Capabilities, understood as a person’s or group’s freedom to achieve or promote valuable and achievable functionings (Zheng & Stahl, 2010), can also be viewed as means for the structurally transformative agency. For example, when an improved range of capabilities such as the use of mobile phones by urban refugees allows them to make strategic life choices and achieve opportunities which were previously denied to them. With the CA, exclusion and inequality do not apply to the availability or distribution of structurally based resources (capital) alone, but to the capabilities as well. The integration of CA with Bourdieu’s TOP appears crucial for a holistic theorization of the use of mobile phones for empowerment in the context of social exclusion and inequality, which is the context of urban refugees in South Africa.

### **3.5. Re-conceptualizing the use of Mobile phones for Empowerment in terms of Sen’s CA and Bourdieu’s TOP**

#### **3.5.1. Theoretical concepts based on the integration of Sen’s CA and Bourdieu’s TOP**

Drawing on the integration of Sen’s CA and Bourdieu’s TOP, a dynamic framework is proposed and schematized in Figure 4. This framework, illustrated in the form of a diagram, visualises the inferred relationships between conversion factors, mobile phone use, capabilities, and empowerment. It shows that conversion factors – social structures, the personal factors (habitus and agency), and different forms of capital are interrelated and shape the use of mobile phones, capabilities, and empowerment. The framework shows also that the use of mobile phones influences the convergence of resources (capital) into capabilities and the outcomes of empowerment.

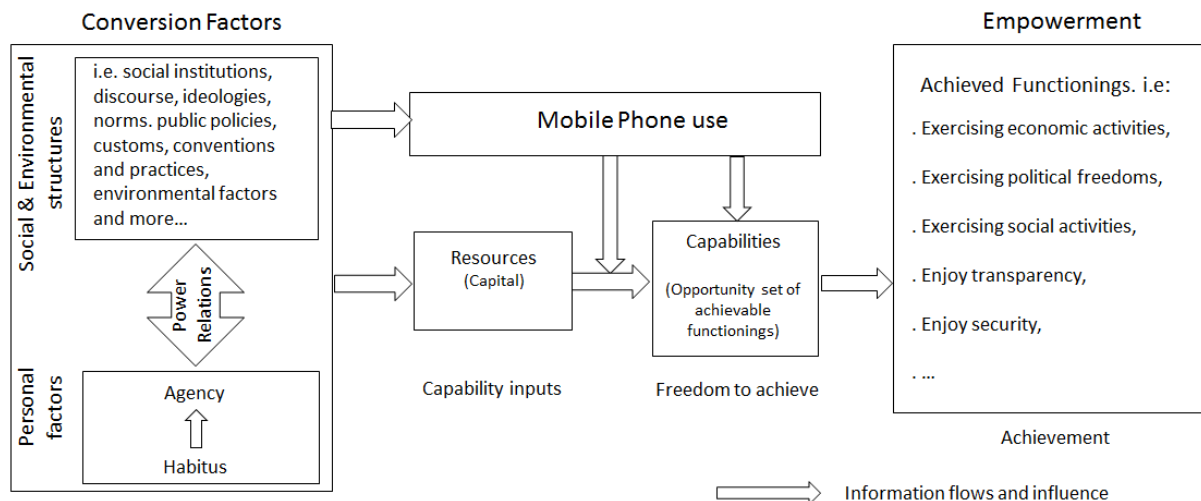


Figure 4: A theoretical framework for theorising mobile phone use for empowerment. Source: Author's own elaboration based on the integration of Sen's CA and Bourdieu's TOP.

Based on Sen's CA and Bourdieu's TOP, it is evident that when assessing the factors which shape the use of mobile phones and the capabilities for empowerment from the perspective of social exclusion and inequality, the researcher should be mindful of the following constructs, which constitute the elements of the theoretical framework of this research:

**The conversion factors** are considered as consisting of a mix of the social and environmental structures and the personal factors that influence an individual's action which, in this thesis, is mobile phones use. The social and environmental structures consist of what in the CA is referred to as social context and environmental factors such as geographical location, infrastructure, and climate (Robeyns, 2005). The social structures include also the economic structures, political structures, social factors such as social norms, public policies, customs, social networks, conventions, and practices (as in Bourdieu's TOP) (Bourdieu, 1977, 1996). The personal factors consist of the personal characteristics such as personal history and psychology, mental and physical conditions, literacy, age, gender, metabolism, skills (Sen, 1985, 1992, 1999), and the individual's agency and habitus (Bourdieu, 1977, 1990). The conversion factors influence people's capabilities and the choices (Robeyns, 2005; Zheng, 2009).

**Agency** refers to the capacity of an individual to choose behaviours or actions (Bonvin, 2016). Speaking of agency, Sen (1999) insists that the agent should have the ability to choose behaviour or the pursuit and realisation of goals that he/she values and has reason to value. However, Bourdieu's TOP reflects the understanding that no behaviour occurs in isolation from immediate and broad context, social structures (Burke et al., 2009). Hence, rather than treating agency and structure as distinctively apart, agency and structure mutually constitute one another (Bourdieu, 1990a).

To explain the interrelations of individual agency and social structures, Bourdieu uses his concept of **habitus**, the "structuring structures" (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 72) and shows that agents are not completely

structurally constrained by predetermined social experiences of habitus, rather, personal factors and structures are interrelated and influencing each other. These interactions are based on *power relations* in social fields (Bourdieu, 1990a). Power relations result from the historical processes and can be seen as institutionalised embodiments of individual actions and thoughts (Levina & Orlikowski, 2009).

**Capital** constitutes a central source of power within a field (Bourdieu, 1977, 1984, 1990a). Capital is viewed as a resource in both CA and Bourdieu's TOP. Referred to as commodities in CA, Sen recognises that their characteristics, access, and use generate capabilities for an individual. Although Sen's view of capital points to the idea of economic perspective, Bourdieu's conceptualization of capital embraces much more than this. Bourdieu (1986) explains that the different forms of capital (i.e. economic, social, cultural or symbolic) are interrelated and inextricably linked and that it takes all of them to fully explain the reproduction of social inequality. Bourdieu's conceptualization of capital allows an assessment of key components of power relations and social inequality directly relevant to agency. Hence, Bourdieu's conceptualization of capital enriches the understanding of resources that may be converted into capabilities (Hart, 2012).

*Capabilities*, conceived by Sen (1999) as the genuine opportunities an individual enjoys. Bourdieu's conception of capital is an acknowledgement that within fields, people have unequal opportunities to act or to instigate change (Bourdieu, 1989). As such, the effective opportunities individuals have, to undertake the actions and activities within which they desire to engage, are crucial for their empowerment.

*Mobile phones*, with properties that include the storage and processing of information, knowledge generation and transfer, synchronous and asynchronous communication across space and time, networked connectivity and multimedia content, provide to the users the means which can be converted into the capabilities to achieve (Zheng, 2009). Through ease of communication, mobile phones may enable and enhance users' agency and capabilities for empowerment. Based on the integration of Sen's CA and Bourdieu's TOP, it is plausible to conjecture that when assessing mobile phones' use for empowerment, the idea of enablers or barriers does not apply only to the availability of the device but also to the capabilities. Rather than directing the focus on the mobile phone itself, what matters is the capabilities engendered by its use. Hence, central to this framework is the capabilities and the value creation associated with the use of mobile phones when mobile phone use enable the expansion in people's ability to make strategic life choices in a context where they were previously denied them.

*Empowerment* is understood as the expansion in people's ability to make strategic life choices in a context where they were previously denied them (Kabeer, 1999). Empowerment is the outcomes of the process, the achieved functionings (Madon, 2004; Robeyns, 2006). Understood as achievement, empowerment is not something to measure, but something to be qualitatively specified in terms of a

concrete domain of action (Kabeer, 1999). Empowerment is directly observable in practices, such as participating in information society via mobile banking (Andrade & Doolin, 2016). Sen (1992) suggests that it is those aspects of life that we have reason to value which should be regarded as functionings. In *Development as Freedom* (1999), Sen presents five instrumental freedoms (economic facilities; political freedoms; social opportunities; transparency and protective security) that he claims contribute to the general capability for an individual to live more freely. These constitute what Kabeer (1999) refers to as the possibilities for transformation on the ground, which would signal empowerment. In this thesis, the five types of instrumental freedoms were operationalised as follow to represent actual functionings which are considered as direct indicators of empowerment:

1. Exercising economic activities: have to do with individuals utilising their economic resources and entitlements available to them.
2. Exercising political freedoms: have to do with political entitlements associated with democracies and include individuals' choosing their representatives and participating in setting the agenda for political discussions.
3. Exercising social activities: in terms of individuals enjoying social facilities such as healthcare, education, social infrastructure, participating in social activities.
4. Enjoy transparency: have to do with the basic trust that individuals enjoy in their day-to-day activities, with an assurance of disclosure and lucidity.
5. Enjoying security: individuals enjoying institutional measures that protect them from deprivation.

Authors such as Alsop et al. (2006) and Dé (2006) suggest that Sen's five types of instrumental freedoms that follow may be considered as proxies of empowerment. Ibrahim-Dasuki et al. (2012) argue that the extent to which Sen's five types of instrumental freedoms are secured is indicative of the level of an individual or social group empowerment. Considering Sen's five types of instrumental freedoms as indicators of empowerment was also adopted by other researchers such as Alsop et al (2006), De' (2006), Gigler (2011), and Britz, Hoffmann, Ponelis, Zimmer and Lor (2013).

### **3.5.2. Exploring Mobile phone use for Empowerment in the light of the integrated Bourdieu's TOP and Sen's CA Framework**

Having discussed the integration of Bourdieu's TOP and Sen's CA, this section will serve to and demonstrate the pertinence of the proposed framework to the research case under study.

This framework stresses that to assess the empowerment of an individual or a group of individuals in relation to mobile phone use, it is not sufficient to know whether they have or do not have access to mobile phones. Rather, what is needed is to investigate whether they are in a position to convert relevant and appropriate uses of mobile phones into capabilities for empowerment by inquiring more about the social and environmental structures and personal factors. As Zheng and Stahl (2012) put it, the digital

divide is not between the have and have not, but between the can and cannot. By allowing a deep inquiry about the individuals and the circumstances they live in, this framework informs the researcher about the available opportunities and constraints (both internal and external to them), and the way these shape and are shaped by mobile phone use and the resulting empowerment.

This framework improves IS understanding of the process of empowerment through the use of mobile phones by theorising the agency-structure dynamics drawing on the integration of Bourdieu's TOP with Sen's CA. This is a holistic framework because it allows, on one hand, an understanding of how conversion factors (internal and external structures) hamper or enable individuals to use their mobile phones to perform or achieve desired actions; and on the other hand, an understanding of the capabilities that individuals generate through the use of mobile phones. As such, the theorization of the interplay between structures and agency based on the integration of Bourdieu's TOP and Sen's CA is a comprehensive dynamic framework. Its vantage point is that it is concerned with people's effective opportunities of using mobile phones by taking into consideration their contextual situation and their daily experiences of mobile phone use.

Based on the integration of Sen's CA and Bourdieu's TOP, it becomes evident that understanding the use of the mobile phone for empowerment can best be achieved through a thorough investigation of the interdependent relationship between structural conditions, individuals' agency, capital, and capabilities. Even though such interdependent relationships are not always explicit or do not always constitute the object of research, it can be evidenced in scholars' works. For example, Orlikowski (2000) comments that individuals' practice change as they experience change in power, technology, circumstances, time, awareness and motivation. Robeyns (2006, p. 26) acknowledges that "in several instances the enlargement of people's capability sets will require practices of empowerment"; and Carlone et al. (2015) affirm that social structures are themselves the result of immediate or not immediate collective agency/actions. Andrade and Doolin (2016) argue that human actors inhabit specific temporal, relational and historical conditions which enable and constrain their actions. Gigler (2004, p. 5) suggests that "the ability of an individual to realise his desired and valued functionings depends very much on his capabilities and entitlements or assets". Luttrell et al. (2009, p. 6) emphasise that "power relations shape agency and opportunities". Williams (2003) argues that the balance between agency, context, and structure is itself highly determined by structural forces. The framework presented in this thesis is informed by, but also differs from, the works of earlier authors (e.g. Andrade & Doolin, 2016; Johnstone, 2007; Kleine, 2010; Zheng & Stahl, 2011; Oosterlaken, 2009) who have sought, from different angles, to show how ICTs can be linked to Sen's CA.

The underlying intention behind this framework has been to critically explore the factors which shape the use of mobile phones by urban refugees in South Africa and their capabilities for empowerment. The framework itself can be seen as applicable to development processes more generically. This

framework is intended as a heuristic tool for conceptualising the multiple and complex constituting factors that shape the use of ICTs in general and mobile phones particularly. It allows conceptualising how in a specific context, such factors are constituted, related and ultimately how they affect individuals' opportunities for generating capabilities through mobile phone use and, consequently, their empowerment, by asking nuanced empirical research questions such as: *How does mobile phone usage enhance empowerment? What conditions enable/hinder the effective use of mobile phones? How does mobile phone usage interact with these conditions?*

Possible relationships between conversion factors and the indicators of empowerment are presented in Table 1 which follows. The interview guidelines (Appendix A) that were used to guide the process of data collection of this research was formulated based on Table 1. The term "indicators of empowerment" is used because such indicators serve only as a guide for interviews, which has to be conceived in such a way that it allows the interviewees to define themselves the criteria that they deem important (Sen, 2014; Kabber, 1999). Sen (1999) advises that "the assessment of capabilities has to proceed primarily on the basis of observing a person's actual functionings... the valuation of actual functionings is one way of assessing how a person values the options she has" (p. 131). Similarly, Uphoff (2005) notes that an approach to assessing and analysing empowerment has to capture dynamic processes and relational changes that are less predictable, less tangible, and more contextual. Similarly, Gomez and Pather (2012) argue that, for a more complete and holistic perspective of ICT impact, attention should be on intangible and unquantifiable aspects that are facilitated indirectly through the use or the presence of ICTs.

Table 1: Possible relationships between conversion factors and the indicators of empowerment

		<b>Direct Indicators of Empowerment</b>				
		<b>Economic activities</b>	<b>Political freedoms</b>	<b>Social opportunities</b>	<b>Transparency guarantees</b>	<b>Protective security</b>
<b>ICTs use (mobile phones)</b>		How does the use of mobile phones enhance the capabilities (give more opportunities) for exercising economic activities?	How does the use of mobile phones enhance the capabilities (give the opportunities) for exercising political freedom?	How does the use of mobile phones enhance the capabilities (give the opportunities) for exercising social activities?	How does mobile phone use improve transparency guarantees and informational freedom?	How does the use of mobile phones protect from further deprivation?
<b>Conversion factors</b>	<b>Social structures (E.g. Economic relations, social norms, public policies, customs, social arrangements &amp; conventions).</b>	Whether social factors have enabled/hindered MP use for exercising economic activities.	Whether social factors have enabled/hindered MP use for exercising political freedom.	Whether social factors have enabled/hindered MP use for exercising social activities.	Whether social factors have enabled/hindered MP use for guaranteeing transparency.	Whether social factors have enabled/hindered MP use for protection from further deprivation.
	<b>Environmental structures (E.g. Geographical location, ICT infrastructure, climate, institutions).</b>	Whether environmental factors have enabled/hindered MP use for exercising economic activities.	Whether environmental factors have enabled/hindered MP use for exercising political freedom.	Whether environmental factors have enabled/hindered MP use for exercising social activities.	Whether environmental factors have enabled/hindered MP use for guaranteeing transparency.	Whether environmental factors have enabled/hindered MP use for protection from further deprivation.
	<b>Personal factors (E.g. Personal history &amp; disposition, mental &amp; physical conditions, literacy, age, gender, ethnicity, skills).</b>	Whether personal factors have enabled/hindered MP use for exercising economic activities.	Whether personal factors have enabled/hindered MP use for exercising political freedom.	Whether personal factors have enabled/hindered MP use for exercising social activities.	Whether personal factors have enabled/hindered MP use for guaranteeing transparency.	Whether personal factors have enabled/hindered MP use for protection from further deprivation.
<b>Capital (E.g. Social networks, certain values and behavioural skills, money, education).</b>		Whether MP use has enabled/hindered the conversion of capital into capabilities for exercising economic activities.	Whether MP use has enabled/hindered the conversion of capital into capabilities for exercising political freedom.	Whether MP use has enabled/hindered the conversion of capital into capabilities for exercising social activities.	Whether MP use has enabled/hindered the conversion of capital into capabilities for guaranteeing transparency.	Whether MP use has enabled/hindered the conversion of capital into capabilities for protection from further deprivation.

In this thesis, the indicators of empowerment constitute the outcomes of the interdependent relationship between conversion factors (structural conditions, individuals' agency, and capital), mobile phone use, and capabilities. Therefore, for analyzing how empowerment comes about, this thesis suggests that a critical analysis would work backward from the outcomes, which are the achieved functionings, into the systemic relationships between structural conditions, individuals' agency, thus analyzing the empowerment process, which in this context would be, the factors that shape mobile phone use and the capabilities for empowerment. Alsop et al. (2006) suggest that the assessment of empowerment can be applied to identify measurements that capture important dimensions of changes in power, and be complemented by more interpretive and explanatory forms of qualitative research. However, the critical theory goes beyond interpretive research (Myers & Klein, 2011; Ngwenyama & Lee, 1997) and recognises that social goals and their achievements are significantly shaped by the exercise of social power (Hill, 2003). This thesis reiterates Zheng and Stahl's (2012) recommendation to adopt a critical paradigm to enrich this proposed framework. Both this framework and the critical research paradigm point to the importance of historical backgrounds in understanding social situations, and underline the importance of social structures in enabling or denying empowerment. Adopting a critical research paradigm will allow a critical assessment of social arrangements in relation to the use of mobile phones for urban refugees' empowerment.

### **3.6. Summary of the chapter**

In this chapter, it is argued that the integration of Bourdieu's TOP and Sen's CA can serve the purpose of the research question posed in Chapter One and therefore helps in achieving the objectives of this research.

In this research, the interest is particularly in a critical exploration of the factors which shape the use of mobile phones by urban refugees in South Africa and their capabilities for empowerment. Put in theoretical context, South Africa is a social field, subdivided into sub-fields such as the economic, social, political sphere where certain rules apply. Each individual urban refugee is an agent in the field and is endowed with a certain amount of capital, struggles for empowering themselves in improving their own position relating to socio-economic and political participation, guaranteed transparency and protective security.

In line with the integrated Bourdieu's TOP and Sen's CA framework, it is presumed that urban refugees' practices including their use of mobile phones are shaped by the conversion factors. The conversion factors are constituted with the context under which urban refugees operate – the combination of personal factors (habitus, agency), which shape and are shaped by social and environmental structures (fields' specific rules and conditions). The conversion factors impact on urban refugees' capability inputs (resources), their use of mobile phones and on their capabilities for empowerment.

In accordance with the field-specific rules of the game and the socio-environmental structures, urban refugees use their mobile phones to interact in a network of positions, realise individual strategies and try to improve or maintain their relative positions. Urban refugees have to invest capital in order to succeed in the particular field. However, the value of capital is determined or ascribed by rules of the game within the field. As such, urban refugees need not only to be endowed with the appropriate capital portfolio but also to play in accordance with the rules of the game that have been internalised in their habitus through social arrangement. Therefore, habitus has to correspond to the rules of the game in South Africa in order to ensure conformity with practice.

The framework is based on the integration of Bourdieu's TOP and Sen's CA proposed in this research and allows an analysis of the interplay between structural conditions and agency (macro and micro) to provide an understanding of factors that shape urban refugees' use of mobile phones and the resulting capabilities for empowerment. Emphasising on conversion factors, capital, and capabilities, this framework allows us to empirically explore the way urban refugees use mobile phones and to find out why and how they generate (or fail to generate) capabilities for their empowerment. Also, this framework provides an insight into the capabilities generated by mobile phone use and the circumstances under which such capabilities occur. Therefore, this framework enables a critical exploration of the factors or conditions which shape the use of mobile phones by urban refugees in South Africa, and their capabilities for empowerment

It is important to recap that authors including Zheng and Stahl (2012), Alkire (2008), Robeyns (2006) and Hill (2003) suggested extending Sen's CA with other theories to address the weaknesses. In doing so by integrating Sen's CA with Bourdieu's TOP, this research strengthens and enriches the explanatory power of both theories in relation to ICTs' use and empowerment. In addition to extending Sen's CA with other theories, Zheng and Stahl (2012) recommend also drawing from critical theory. It is generally known that CA shares some significant commonalities with critical theory: they both constitute "schools of thought that are meant to make a difference – to improve individual and social lives, both are normative theories rooted in ethics and develop streams of ideas to support freedom, empowerment and emancipation" (Zheng & Stahl, 2012, p. 58). As such, to significantly contribute to the body of knowledge by illuminating some aspects of the phenomenon under study, this PhD research has adopted a critical perspective as its philosophical foundation. The next chapter presents in-depth discussions of the reasons for adopting the critical perspective philosophy.

## **4. PHILOSOPHICAL PERSPECTIVES AND METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH**

### **4.1. Introduction**

In the IS research community, there has been a great debate on the suitability of different research paradigms or approaches for examining IS phenomena (Hirschheim & Klein, 2003). It is suggested that the research objectives, as well as the researcher's knowledge of interest, should guide or command the choice of research design (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). The research paradigm is defined as “a general organising framework for theory and research that includes basic assumptions, key issues, models of quality research, and methods for seeking answers” (Neuman, 2006, p. 81). It is an important stage during which the researcher makes decisions concerning the philosophical assumptions, the research method, data collection and treatment, and the approach for writing up and presenting results (Myers, 2009).

A critical research paradigm has been adopted for this thesis. Therefore, in this chapter the motive for the adopted paradigm is presented by providing details concerning how the design connects to the paradigm or perspective being used; how the methodology allows the researcher to address the issues of praxis and change; what/who was the subject of study; what strategies of enquiry were used; and what methods and research tools for collecting and analysing empirical data were utilised (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). All of these were done acknowledging that the choice of methods and the ways they are used to conduct research cannot be separated from the theory informing the research and the problems being investigated. This chapter is structured as follows: First, the overview of the research paradigms is presented. This is followed by the presentation of the philosophical perspective of critical research. Then the research approach is discussed, followed by the presentation of the types of research methodology. After that, the research strategy is discussed, followed by the ethnographic reflections on the research process. The last point discusses the mode of data analysis.

### **4.2. Overview of research paradigms**

Any research, whether qualitative or quantitative, is guided by epistemologies which constitute the underlying philosophical assumptions about valid knowledge and its acquisition (Myers, 2009). Epistemology involves the criteria which need to be met to construct and evaluate knowledge through the examination of conditions, nature, possibility, and limits of human knowledge (Danermark, Ekstrom, Jakobsen, & Karlsson, 2002). Cecez-Kecmanovic (2005) reminds us that different ways of researching the world are shaped by different ways of viewing it. In the IS field of research, there exist different dominant sets of philosophical assumptions constituting the researchers' basic belief systems

or paradigms which are effective in helping researchers to approach the phenomena of their interest. A paradigm is the most fundamental set of assumptions that allows members of a professional research community that adopted it to share similar perceptions and engage in common practices (Hirschheim and Klein, 2003).

In order to provide its stance *vis-à-vis* the overall philosophical perspectives, this thesis followed Chua's (1986) three paradigms classification. Based on the underlying research epistemology, Chua suggests three paradigms for qualitative research, namely the positivist, interpretive, and critical (Chua, 1986). This three-fold classification has been widely accepted within the IS research community (Myers & Klein, 2011). It was adopted by researchers such as Myers (2009) in his discussion of the use of qualitative research in all the business disciplines including IS. Orlikowski and Baroudi (1991) aimed to categorise published IS research according to the epistemologies, and many more authors (e.g. Klein & Myers, 1999; Myers & Klein, 2011; Ngwenyama & Lee, 1997) refer to these.

This thesis holds a critical perspective. The reason for such choice is presented and discussed step by step in this chapter. This thesis also drew on Chua's classification of assumptions which constitute the three sets of beliefs that collectively delineate the way researchers see the world and conduct research (Chua, 1986). Those are the beliefs about physical and social reality, the beliefs about knowledge, and the beliefs about the relationship between theory and practice.

1. *Beliefs about Physical and Social Reality.* These concern the assumptions about the object of the research or the essence of phenomena under study (Orlikowski & Baroudi, 1991) from which all empirical theories are rooted (Chua, 1986) and include: the *ontological assumptions* (whether reality is objective or subjective), the *human rationality* (the intentionality ascribed to human action), and the *social relations* (people interaction in society, groups, and organisations).

In this regard, positivist researchers assume that social and physical reality is objective and exists independently of individuals' cognition (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2015). Interpretive researchers with their relativist ontology believe that social reality (the world) is not given but produced and reinforced by human interaction and action (Pozzebon, Mackrell & Nielsen, 2014). However, assumptions of critical researchers, which is the stance of this thesis, are that social reality is *historically* constituted; produced and reproduced by humans (Myers & Klein, 2011). The social world is also assumed as possessing objective properties tending to alienate humans from their potential (Stahl, 2011). As such, the researcher's belief is that of *totality*, a dialectical understanding of elements and the totality which is understood to be shaped by contextual and historical conditions (Myers & Klein, 2011). Therefore, the concepts of the theoretical framework adopted in this thesis as presented in Chapter Three including field, capital, habitus, and capabilities constitute useful hermeneutic devices, which taken together enable the researcher to move beyond conceptualizations of the social world and the individual as being

in binary opposition. Social relations are not orderly but unstable, undergoing changes constantly. The fundamental antagonism inherent in social forms conceptualises the social instability (Benson, 1977) which leads to inequalities and conflicts.

2. *Beliefs about Knowledge.* These are sub-divided into two related sets that are: *the epistemology* which is about the criteria for valid knowledge acquisition and evaluation, and the *methodology* that deals with which research methods, approaches, and techniques are considered appropriate for generating valid empirical evidence (Guba & Lincoln, 2005).

With regard to this argument, positivists typically work deductively to search unilateral, causal relationships that constitute principles or universal laws. The positivists' scientific explanation account is known as hypothetico-deductive. Positivists are epistemologically mostly concerned with the empirical testability of theories, explanation, control, and prediction (Creswell, 2009; Gibbons, 1987).

However, interpretivists construct explanation or interpretation accounting for the way that in particular settings subjective meanings are created and sustained (Putnam & Pacanowsky, 1983). Epistemologically, interpretivists believe that to understand social processes requires getting inside the world of those generating them (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2015; Myers & Klein, 2011).

Meanwhile, critical researchers' epistemological belief is that knowledge is grounded in historical and social practices (Chua, 1986; Myers & Klein, 2011). As such, in this critical research, the belief is that it is historically only that a phenomenon can be understood (Myers & Klein, 2011; Orlikowski & Baroudi, 1991), through an analysis of "what it has been, what it is becoming and what it is not" (Chua, 1986, p. 621). Such belief explains the reliance on historical analyses (the narrative analysis) which has been adopted for this thesis, as discussed later. Thus, ethnography or a long-term study was the research method chosen for this thesis. The researcher believes that the interpretation of the social world is not enough. In addition, an understanding and critique of the material conditions of domination are crucial. Thus, a critical analysis of the self-understanding of participants is adopted (Chughtai & Myers, 2016; Orlikowski & Baroudi, 1991).

3. *Beliefs about Relationship between Theory and Practice.* This reflects the intentions and values that the researcher brings to his work. That is the purpose of knowledge in the empirical world of practice (Orlikowski & Baroudi, 1991).

In positivists' research, the beliefs about the relationship between theory and practice are primarily technical (Gibbons, 1987). Positivists take for granted the value-neutrality of their stance (Creswell, 2009). This is not the case for interpretive research in which the researcher is always implicated in the phenomena under investigation by trying to retell actors' stories. In critical research, however, researchers see their role as helping in eliminating the bases of domination and alienation, to initiate

change in the social relations and practices by “bringing to consciousness the restrictive conditions of the status quo” (Orlikowski & Baroudi, 1991, p. 21).

In light of the above arguments regarding the philosophical stances as adopted by different researchers whether positivist, interpretive, or critical, it is shown that those three sets of beliefs delineate the way of seeing and researching the world (Chua, 1986). However, it is important to note that while the paradigm helps to generate understanding, each still has its own strengths and weaknesses (Orlikowski & Baroudi, 1991), as discussed next.

**Positivist research** assumes that reality is objective and can be described by measurable properties which are unconnected to the researcher (Myers, 2009). Such research is premised on the assumed existence of fixed relationships within phenomena (Orlikowski & Baroudi, 1991). Positivist research relies on “evidence of formal propositions, quantifiable measurable of variables, hypothesis testing and the drawing on inferences about a phenomenon from the sample of a stated population” (Orlikowski and Baroudi, 1991, p. 5). Thus the positivist stream of research has sought to enforce standards of quality in empirical research by institutionalising certain criteria of rigour, validity, and replicability. However, the positivist research philosophy has been subject to criticism (Chua, 1986; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Orlikowski & Baroudi, 1991), among which two are mentioned here. Firstly, the quest for universal laws leads to neglect of historical and contextual conditions as potentially influencing human actions or triggering events (Orlikowski & Baroudi, 1991). Secondly, its techniques of encouraging deterministic explanations of phenomena that is, in the quest for causal relations, the focus is on the validity and control of the research procedures. Thus the researcher adopts a predefined and circumscribed stance towards the phenomenon under study. The limitation of such techniques is that it “is not conducive to the discovery and understanding of non-deterministic or reciprocal relationships” (Orlikowski and Baroudi, 1991, pp. 12-13).

**Interpretive research** examines the social meanings and rules through which social practices are made possible and thus reveals the underlying connections among parts of social reality (Gibbons, 1987, p. 7). Interpretivists assume that social reality is socially constructed by humans in their mutual interactions (Orlikowski & Baroudi, 1991) and that knowledge of reality is achieved through social constructions, and relativistic shared understanding of phenomena (Myers, 2009). Interpretive approaches “aim to produce fine-grained explorations of the way in which a particular social reality has been constructed” (Pozzebon, 2004, p. 278). For this to be achieved, the researchers attempt to understand phenomena through accessing the meanings from the participants’ perspective and intentions (Myers, 2009; Orlikowski & Baroudi, 1991). Interpretive research enables one to capture dynamic, complex social phenomena that depend on time and context (Klein & Myers, 1999; Orlikowski & Baroudi, 1991). However, a number of commentators have discussed the limitations of interpretive research philosophy (Burrell & Morgan, 1979; Gibbons, 1987; Orlikowski & Baroudi,

1991; Pozzebon et al., 2014). The critics of the interpretive perspective pinpoint its omission to explain the unintended consequences of action, while these represent important forces in shaping social reality (Gibbons, 1987). It also ignores contradictions within social systems and does not address structural conflicts within society (Pozzebon et al., 2014). Interpretivists often disregard external conditions from which certain experiences and meanings rise (Gibbons, 1987). The explanation of historical change is also neglected by an interpretive perspective (Fay, 1987; Myers & Klein, 2011).

**Critical research** aims to “focus more explicitly on the dynamics of power, knowledge, and ideology that surround social practices” (Pozzebon, 2004, p. 278). As such, the researcher attempts to analyse and understand the status quo of the situation (Myers & Klein, 2011). The researcher assumes that “social reality is historically constituted and that it is produced and reproduced by people” (Myers, 2009, p. 42). The main task is to critically evaluate and change the social reality being investigated (Myers & Klein, 2011; Orlikowski & Baroudi, 1991) and thus bring to light the restrictive and alienating conditions of the status quo. In other words, the critical researcher wants to know “what is wrong with the world rather than what is right” (Walsham, 1995, p. 79), and thereby enhance the opportunities for human potential realisation (Hirschheim & Klein, 2003; Pozzebon et al., 2014).

Therefore, each researcher explicitly adopts the research paradigm that he judges appropriate for the study he is conducting. And by doing so he can become more aware of the underlying assumptions and beliefs he brings to bear in his research. In this respect, the philosophical perspective of critical research is adopted for this thesis. The critical paradigm is well accepted and has a great impact on the IS discipline (Chughtai & Myers, 2016; Lin et al., 2015). Building on a foundation that has already gained recognition among IS scholars (e.g. Cecez-Kecmanovic, 2011; Mingers, 2001; Myers & Klein, 2011; Orlikowski & Baroudi, 1991; Pozzebon et al., 2014; Zheng and Stahl, 2012) strengthens the credibility of this research for the audience. The motivations for adopting a critical research paradigm are discussed next.

### **4.3. The Philosophical Perspective of a Critical Research Paradigm**

As briefly presented in the previous section of this chapter, critical research is a paradigm or worldview that consists of beliefs about physical and social reality (ontology, social relations, and human rationality), knowledge (epistemology and methodology), and the relationship between theory and practice (Stahl, 2008). The central idea in critical research is that all social phenomena are historically created and conditioned. The objective of critical research is the improvement of human condition, the emancipation (Ngwenyama, 1991; Orlikowski & Baroudi, 1991). Cecez-Kecmanovic (2011) emphasises that critical researchers “(co)create knowledge with transformative and emancipatory intent by revealing how IS serve particular interests, by developing a situated understanding of positions and experiences of people affected by the systems, and by linking such understanding with broader

conditions, power relations, and social structures” (p. 3). To achieve such objectives, critical theorists’ mission is to unmask the essence of capitalist societies and encourage social change through a revolution of consciousness. In addition, critical research extends to a critique to unearth limitations of existing inequitable and unjust social conditions and social processes, and find alternatives which can more adequately address human needs (Mingers, 2001; Ngwenyama & Lee, 1997).

Critical research is based on the perception that social conditions, often restricting emancipation and limiting people’s potential, are created and recreated by humans. Thus, the ability of people to consciously act to change their economic and social circumstances is constrained by various forms of domination such as social, cultural and political (Cecez-Kecmanovic, 2011; Zheng & Stahl, 2012). The task of critical researchers is believed to be the social critique, which is to engage in improving social reality by bringing restrictive and alienating social conditions to light (Cecez-Kecmanovic, 2011; Klein & Myers, 1999), informing and inspiring transformative social practices for the development of people in society (Cecez-Kecmanovic, 2011, Chua, 1986). Thus, critical research is emancipatory and aims to be explanatory, practical and ethical at the same time (Cecez-Kecmanovic, 2011; Zheng & Stahl, 2012). Critical researchers focus on conflicts, oppositions, and contradictions in society, seek to be emancipatory by helping to eliminate the causes of domination and alienation and thereby enhance opportunities for realisation of human needs and potentials (Hirschhheim & Klein, 2003). Realising that one or a group of persons are actually being oppressed is the first step of opposing oppression. By developing a sound understanding and explanation of the status quo in a social situation (Myers, 2009), critical researchers bring to light the alienating social condition.

#### **4.3.1. Why a Critical Paradigm for this thesis?**

A critical research paradigm has been adopted as the philosophical foundation for this thesis as it is well suited to its objectives. This research sets out to critically explore the factors which shape the use of mobile phones by urban refugees in South Africa and their capabilities for empowerment. Such objective goes in parallel with critical theorists’ aim which is to unveil the cause of unwarranted alienation and domination, and thereby enhance the opportunities for realising human potential (Klein & Myers, 1999; Ngwenyama, 1991; Ngwenyama & Lee, 1997). As such, the object of this thesis takes into consideration a problematic situation or phenomenon which is informed by critical theoretic concerns. In addition, as explained in Chapter Three, by adopting the proposed framework which is based on the integration of Bourdieu’s TOP and Sen’s CA, the researcher is mindful not only of refugee individuals and their personal factors, but also the existing social structures such as the social practices, local meanings, institutional contexts, and the socio-technical factors. The critical research paradigm suits this thesis well because it offers a broad overview and potential for understanding of the subjects within their social, cultural and historical context. Further, the use of mobile phones by urban refugees is a social practice. As Bourdieu (1990b) argues, social practices and perceptions result from the

relations between habitus and the specific context within which individuals act. As such, in this particular situation where the research context involves issues of social structures, individual agency, practice, and power; a critical paradigm is particularly amenable to such a mix of issues (Ngwenyama, 1991). Myers and Klein (2011) emphasise that critical research in IS is concerned with “social issues such as freedom, power, social control, and values with respect to the development, use, and impact of information technology” (p. 17).

Therefore, critical research proves to be useful for this research and suits its aim of critically exploring the factors which shape the use of mobile phones by urban refugees in South Africa and their capabilities for empowerment. The critical research paradigm appears to be crucial since it allows for uncovering of limitations caused by social structures (Burke at al., 2009; Myers, 2009), and therefore enhancing urban refugees’ empowerment through changing consciousness and counteracting detrimental human and social consequences. In fact, critically-oriented research aims to make public those forces that pose obstacles for individuals to participate in making decisions about their lives (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2003). Hirschheim, Klein and Lyytinen, (1995, p. 83) emphasise that “emancipation proceeds by revealing the sources and causes of the distorting influences which hide alternative ways of life from us”. As such, using the theoretical framework discussed in Chapter Three which is based on the integration of Bourdieu’s TOP and Sen’s CA, critical research helps to explore the potential and the opposite effects of mobile phone use on urban refugees’ empowerment. This research questions the taken-for-granted assumptions about mobile phones as instruments for empowerment, and critiques the unquestioning pursuit of mobile phone’ use across contexts. Furthermore, Zheng and Stahl (2012) recommend drawing from critical theory to strengthen and enrich Sen’s CA in relation to ICTs and human development.

#### **4.3.2. Critical Research paradigm and methodology**

For examining methodological questions in critical research, Alvesson and Deetz (2000) proposed three important elements, namely *insight*, *critique*, and *transformation redefinition*. The first element, *insight*, refers to a practical knowing that is achieved through hermeneutic, interpretive, or archaeological understanding of real people and situations (Alvesson & Deetz, 2000; Myers & Klein, 2011). The second element, *critique*, implies deeper investigation beyond the observable, revealing hidden interests in seemingly objective knowledge production and workings of power. The third element, *transformative redefinition*, is concerned with the necessity to envisage alternatives and stimulate change (Cecez-Kecmanovic, 2011. p.446). Building on these three elements, Myers and Klein (2011) suggested six principles for conducting critical research. These six principles guided this research and are therefore briefly described as follows.

1. *The principle of using core concepts from critical social theories*: This principle suggests that critical researchers should start with a priori theoretical concepts derived from one or more critical theorists (Myers & Klein, 2011). This thesis is in accordance with this first principle because it applies a theoretical framework which is based on the integration of Bourdieu's TOP and Sen's CA. As with Bourdieu, Sen's CA itself has its roots from critical social theorists as its roots go back at least to "Adam Smith and Karl Marx, and indeed to Aristotle" (Sen, 1989, p. 43). As largely discussed in Chapter Three, the selection of the theory was guided by the concepts judged to be of most relevance to the social situation being studied, such as empowerment, social exclusion, social inequality, power, and values with respect to the use of mobile phones.

2. *The principle of taking a value position*. This principle "recognizes the importance of taking value position for motivating and grounding a critical research project" (Myers & Klein, 2011, p. 26) as usually do critical researchers when they explicitly take a value position in regard, for example, to human rights, freedom, empowerment, equality, justice, fairness, and elimination of alienation (Cecez-Kecmanovic, 2011). This thesis complies with this second principle. The value position in this thesis is explicitly shown in its aim which is to critically explore the factors which shape the use of mobile phones by urban refugees in South Africa and their capabilities for empowerment. The researcher explicitly shows his rejection of value-neutral judgments by openly showing his interests in empowerment, or rather related notions of emancipation and elimination of marginalisation practices. In addition, the researcher's passion for equality and justice is shown by his interest in conducting research with a conceptual basis provided by the perspective of social exclusion and inequality. For Bourdieu, the public exposure of embedded interests can help undermine apparent legitimacy and open up the possibility for altering existing social arrangements (Kvasny & Truex, 2000). Therefore, an understanding of the factors that enable/hinder urban refugees from generating capabilities through mobile phone use and the impact on their empowerment would be a path to enlightening them to seeing their situation and interest. It is assumed that urban refugees in South Africa, considered as disadvantaged (Landau & Duponchel, 2011), can be able to recognise or realise and pursue the values that they are denied by current practices. It is important to note, however, that although critical research may begin with a value orientation, it does not mean that the research process could be subjective. Rather, it means that values would influence the choice of topic but not the research process, which has to remain objective all the time (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007).

3. *The principle of revealing and challenging prevailing beliefs and social practices* directs attention to "habits, customs, and conventions that are typically passed on by venerable tradition and sacrosanct sources of authority" (Myers & Klein, 2011, p. 27). This principle suggests that critical researchers should identify important beliefs and social practices and challenge them with potentially conflicting arguments and evidence (Myers & Klein, 2011). Once again, the theoretical lens of this thesis provides

an advantage for complying with this principle. Bourdieu's TOP, with its concepts of capital, habitus, field, and symbolic power, and Sen's CA core concepts of capabilities, functionings, and agency provide an insight into the relationship between social structures and urban refugees' agency in relation to their use of mobile phones. With the adopted framework, primary attention has been given to the role that social structures including economic power, labour market, political systems, social networks and other social structures play in shaping urban refugees' use of mobile phones and their empowerment. Attention is also directed to refugees' own personal factors in terms of agency, personal factors (such as personal history and disposition, mental and physical conditions, literacy, age, gender, metabolism, and skills). In addition, the critical nature of this thesis sets it to understanding and explaining existing power relations inscribed in cultural meanings. In fact, critical research is premised on the understanding that cultural institutions can produce a false consciousness, in which ideologies and systemic distortions become taken-for-granted realities (Alvesson & Deetz, 2000).

4. *The principle of individual emancipation* "reflects a fundamental idea about freeing individuals from repressive social and ideological conditions, realisation of human needs and potential, critical self-reflection and self-transformation" (Cecez-Kecmanovic, 2011. p.446). In this perspective, one of the research contributions set for this thesis consists of providing a better explanation of the relationships between social structures and agency in the context of mobile phones' use and urban refugee empowerment. According to Gordon, Holland and Lahelma (2001), understanding human agency is a path to emancipation. Cecez-Kecmanovic (2010) urges that "critical researchers have the important task of identifying possibilities of change and assisting the dominated, powerless and exploited to have a voice and emancipate themselves"(p.7). Bourdieu (1977) emphasises that critical social science seeks to change social conditions through emancipatory experiences that encourage reflexive agency. This principle is adhered to in this research because its findings explicitly expose both the empowering and disempowering use of mobile phones by urban refugees.

In addition, by identifying the factors that enable or hinder their empowerment with mobile phones, this thesis is set to contribute to the emancipation of urban refugees in South Africa. For example, the factors that hinder urban refugees' use of mobile phones and their capabilities for empowerment are to be viewed as restrictive and alienating social conditions that need to be brought to light. Critical ethnography is adopted to facilitate this research reach its intended goals, for critical ethnography aims to produce the emancipation of people through enlightenment and other means such as seeing their true interests and situation (Hammersley, 1992). Therefore, urban refugees should be able to see, recognise and pursue their empowerment interests. In fact, in its attempt to empower people from different forms of oppression and domination, critical social science purposely goes beyond understanding and explaining social phenomena to challenging the status quo and privileged power positions, along with exposing the forces of domination and resistance, within social sites and institutions.

5. *The principle of improvements in society* suggests that improvements in society are possible. This thesis posits that urban refugees can use their mobile phones to change their conditions – that is to empower themselves. However, their capabilities to achieve such desired functionings, which are the empowerment, may be shaped by their structural conditions and context. The goal of the critical theorist researcher is not only to reveal the current forms of domination but also to suggest how it might be overcome (Myers & Klein, 2011). Although it is assumed that “the direction of improvement has to be determined by those affected, by internal self-governing processes” (Cecez-Kecmanovic, 2011, p. 447), critical researchers can formulate (some) recommendations on how improvement in society can be possible, even though to very differing degrees (e.g. Kvasny & Keil, 2006). This principle has been taken into consideration in this thesis. Among other intended contributions of this thesis, its findings will serve to inform and allow formulating some recommendations to stakeholders, especially policy makers and organisations seeking to assist urban refugees about the factors to take into consideration when crafting their intervention strategies. Thus the outcome theory will provide knowledge that empowers, motivates, enlightens, and provides capacity or tools to those that struggle against social exclusion and inequality. In fact, the validity test for a critical theory lies in practice (Ngwenyama, 1991).

6. *The principle of improvements in social theories* consists of two parts: The “explicit procedures of evidence giving and the acceptance of the idea of fallibility, ... and self-correction through criticism and debate” (Cecez-Kecmanovic, 2011. p.447); and subjecting “our theoretical apparatus to change, partly in response to new historical discoveries or empirical data on current social changes, and partially in response to new theoretical reasoning and debate” (Cecez-Kecmanovic, 2011. p.447). Chapter Three presents a discussion of the merits and critiques of Sen’s CA and Bourdieu’s TOP. Both theories are integrated into a holistic framework used for the purpose of this research.

In summary, this research entails an in-depth understanding of local context, the conditions of social life, the experience of urban refugees’ mobile phone use, as well as an investigation of factors that might enable or hinder them from converting technology, in this case, mobile phone use, into capabilities. It is such a focus that led this study to adopt the philosophical perspective of critical research which seeks to examine social situations for achieving a sound understanding and explanation of the status quo.

However, it is acknowledged that by adopting a critical perspective, the responsibility of the researcher in a social situation does not end there, but must extend with a critical investigation of prevailing ideologies and conditions of social life to unveil the social unconscious which constitutes barriers to human empowerment. Social unconscious consists of those unacknowledged interests that agents follow as they participate in a hierarchical social order (Bourdieu, 1984). Critical research critiques and unearths limitations of existing inequitable and unjust social conditions and social process; essentially

questioning common-sense assumptions about society and the ideologies promoted by dominating institutions (Myers & Klein, 2011; Ngwenyama & Lee, 1997).

#### **4.4. Research Approach**

The primary objective of scientific research is to generate knowledge about the empirical world by building theories. In IS, a theory seeks to describe, explain, explore, prescribe or predict some conditions or behaviours about design, implementation, management, use or impact of IT artifacts on organisations or society (Gregor, 2006). This research contributes to the theory and practice of mobile phone use for human empowerment. It, therefore, has two theoretical orientations, namely the exploratory and explanatory, as it aims to explore and provide a grounded explanation of factors that impact on the use of mobile phones by urban refugees in South Africa. At the same time, it provides a better understanding of how these factors impact on their empowerment. As such, a three-fold approach has been adopted in order to provide a creative approach to making sense of the context under study. This involves, as explained later in this chapter: (1) a reflexive confessional narrative presented in the form of an autobiography, where the researcher tells his own experience of being an urban refugee and how it is linked to the motivation of the research; (2) data collection and fieldwork consisting of observations and ongoing interaction and in-depth interviews with the research respondents selected through a purposeful sampling; and (3) documents and website corroborating evidence. This approach helps to establish credibility and trustworthiness through overlap and triangulation since it provides a basis for cross-checking findings drawn from different sources. As such, this adopted approach demonstrates consistency and rigour.

#### **4.5. Types of research methodology**

The methodological approach is about the strategy of inquiry or ways of generating knowledge and how researchers go about obtaining it. It moves from the underlying philosophical assumptions to the design and data collection (Guba & Lincoln 1994; Myers, 2009). It, therefore, influences the way in which data are collected. There exist various ways of classifying research methods. The most common distinction, however, is between quantitative and qualitative research methods (Myers, 2009). Therefore, particular research contexts can determine the research method to be considered. For the purpose of this thesis, the qualitative research methodology was selected, for its structure allows for an open-ended approach suitable for exploring participants' unique experiences. The reason for this choice can be explained through the description of the characteristics of both the quantitative and the qualitative research methodologies, presented in Table 2 that follows.

Table 2: Qualitative vs Quantitative research methods

	<b>Qualitative</b>	<b>Quantitative</b>
<b>Philosophy &amp; research design</b>	Phenomenology. Flexible, emerging	Positivism. Structured, predetermined
<b>Goal &amp; Focus</b>	Meaning-oriented. Used with the purpose of understanding and interpret social interactions. The focus is on quality (features)	Look at results as stemming from causal relationships. Used to test hypotheses by analysing cause and effect to make predictions. Focus on quantity (how much, numbers)
<b>Method, data collection &amp; sample</b>	Ethnography/Action research. In a natural environment to study behaviour. Use interviews, observation, to collect data (words, images, objects) from a smaller and purposefully selected group.	Experiments/Correlation. Under controlled conditions, isolate causal effects to study behaviour. Use questionnaire, scales, tests, inventories to collect data (numbers, statistics) from a larger and randomly selected group.
<b>Analysis &amp; Role of researcher</b>	Inductive. By the researcher to identify patterns, features, and themes. Human behaviour is viewed as being dynamic, social, situational and personal. The researcher is immersed	Deductive. By statistical methods to identify statistical relationships. Human behaviour is viewed as being regular and predictable. The researcher is detached
<b>Generalisation</b>	Unique case selection. Results or findings are specialised or particular and less generalizable.	Results or findings can be generalizable and applied to other or larger populations within known limits of error

Source: Author's own elaboration

The description presented in Table 2 shows that some empirical methods are more or less appropriate in terms of their use to answer particular research questions posed by a critical IS researcher. The choice of methods and the ways they are used go hand in hand with the theory informing the research, as well as the problems under investigation (Cecez-Kecmanovic, 2001; Stahl, 2011). One of the strengths of quantitative methods is the ability to make predictions and to measure things (Tewksbury, 2009). They are excellent for investigating questions in which selected features are treated “as independent, objective, and discrete entities, and as unchanging over the course of the study” (Kaplan and Maxwell, 1994, p. 31). However, studying social sciences in a natural environment involves several uncontrolled variables, and issues that are not easily partitioned into discrete entities, whose incorrect measurement may result in misleading outcomes (Myers & Newman, 2007). In such contexts, a qualitative research method is more suitable due to its flexible, evolving and emergent characteristics. A qualitative approach is characterised by initiatives whereby researchers interpret or make sense of human experiences within settings. Qualitative research methods are crucial in “understanding the meaning and context of the phenomena studied, and the particular events and processes that make up these phenomena over time, in real-life, natural settings” (Kaplan and Maxwell, 1994, p. 31). Qualitative research can be done with either a positivist, interpretive or critical perspective when Chua's (1986) classification of research epistemologies is taken into consideration. The weaknesses of qualitative research include that usually, fewer people are studied, and the difficulty in aggregating data and making systematic comparisons (Myers & Newman, 2007).

Therefore, in consideration of the ontological and epistemological assumptions of this thesis (Guba & Lincoln, 1994), as well as its context and purpose (Cecez-Kecmanovic, 2001), the methodological stance appropriate is clearly the *qualitative*. This thesis seeks to critically investigate urban refugees' use of mobile phones. As such, it requires an in-depth investigation of actions, behaviour, and perceptions of human actors, an understanding of phenomena from their point of view and the context (social and institutional) within which these perceptions were formed and actions took place. Richer and broader descriptions of lived experiences are possible through qualitative methods as they provide an opportunity to explore concepts from participants' distinct perspectives. It is clear that the choice of the qualitative method over quantitative method is motivated by the context, the purpose, and the problems being investigated of the research which can largely be lost when textual data are quantified and aggregated (Kaplan and Maxwell, 1994). In fact, the goals of qualitative research are not to measure something but rather to fully understand the meanings of phenomena under study in their context and also to provide thick accounts of such phenomena (Myers & Newman, 2007). That is the goal of this thesis, which is concerned with the provision of a rich description for the understanding and explanation of complex phenomena such as the relationships, patterns, and configurations among the factors based on the perspectives of people being studied, in their setting and in the context of that setting. Participants of this thesis yielded qualitative data about habitus, behaviours, lived experiences or practices, feelings, and emotions.

Note that the qualitative method is concerned with the understanding of social phenomena or particular situations by investigating the behaviour and views or perspectives of peoples concerned with the study and the context within which they act (Kaplan and Maxwell, 1994). In that respect, subjectivity and a socially constructed reality are common in such research (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). Therefore, an appropriate research strategy is crucial, as explained in the following section.

#### **4.6. Research strategy**

A research strategy is a strategy of inquiry which moves from the underlying philosophical assumptions to research design and data collection (Myers, 1999). As explicitly expressed in the previous section, this thesis uses qualitative methods. In the field of IS, researchers have the possibilities of choosing from a wide range of qualitative methods that have been tested and accepted as appropriate to investigate and answer the research question/s. Four qualitative research methods have been outlined as being particularly significant in IS, namely action research, case study, ethnography, and grounded theory (Chughtai & Myers, 2016; Myers, 1997).

For researchers to decide which method to adopt they must acknowledge that their choice will influence the way in which data will be collected. As such, they need to be aware of the potential benefits and pitfalls of methods which they select and know the circumstances in which they might be appropriated.

Each research method implies different skills, assumptions and research practices (Myers, 1997). In this respect, ethnography has been adopted as the research method for this thesis. This choice has been determined based on the objectives formulated for this thesis, the research questions, the philosophical assumptions and the approach.

This qualitative research implies that people's behaviour should be understood as making sense in the context within which it occurs, where that context includes how they see themselves and their environment. In fact, an ethnographic approach is not as much concerned with objectivity and a single version of the truth as much as it is concerned with how people make sense of their own worlds (Schultze, 2000; Yin, 2002). Choosing ethnography does not mean that other methods outlined were not useful. Although ethnography was the appropriate means of inquiry for this thesis, the characteristics of other methods such as case study and grounded theory were borrowed to enhance the approach adopted. The reasons for choosing ethnography are discussed next.

#### 4.6.1. Ethnography

Ethnographic research has its roots in the discipline of cultural anthropology and sociology. It is the art and science of investigating a social group of people, communities or organisations for describing their culture or cultural scene, which includes the behaviours, traditions, beliefs, values, attitudes, norms, language, dress, artifacts, daily lives and routines that create a describable pattern in their lives (LeCompte & Schensul, 1999). According to Hammersley and Atkinson (2007), ethnography is a qualitative research method where the researcher is involved by "participating, overtly or covertly, in people's daily lives for an extended period of time, watching what happens, listening to what is said, asking questions – in fact, collecting whatever data are available to throw light on the issues that are the focus of the research" (p. 1). Ethnography is, as Fielding (1994) argues:

*"a stance which emphasised seeing things from the perspective of those studied before stepping back to make a more detached assessment. .... mindful of the Native American adage that one should 'never criticise a man until you have walked a mile in his moccasins'" (Fielding, 1994, p. 156).*

Therefore, the characteristics of ethnography consist of spending a significant amount of time in the field, immersion in the research context, and placing the phenomena in the appropriate social and cultural context. This method, now widely employed in the IS field (Krauss & Turpin, 2013; Majchrzak et al., 2016; Oreglia & Srinivasan, 2016) is viewed as one of the important means of studying social and organisational contexts of IS (Chughtai & Myers, 2016). Therefore, this thesis is a longitudinal study as its data will be collected on more than one occasion over a period of time and it will analyse social change over time (Levin, 2006). In fact, to investigate practice, this thesis uses Bourdieu's concept of habitus by documenting respondents' retrospective information such as their pre-migration experiences, their journey and early life in their host country.

The reason for this thesis adopting ethnography research is to improve the understanding of human thought and action through interpretation of human action in context (Myers, 1997). In so doing, the researcher should be able to become conversant with the norms of the people living within the studied context to the point that the behaviours of the people make sense (Chughtai & Myers, 2016; Schultze, 2000). As Bourdieu (1993) argues, one cannot gain insight into an individual's social existence unless one becomes absorbed in its reality. The way this is done is by pulling together "numerous observations of actual behaviour, coupled with insights and explanations to form some comprehensive blueprint, archetype 'code' or set of implicit 'rules' or 'standards' for behaviour" (Wolcott, 1990, p. 55). Bourdieu (1990a) advises that in order to get a sense of practiced habitus of the people, the researcher has to situate himself in the social situation and real social activities. In fact, ethnography emphasises exploring the nature of social phenomena and offers the benefit of providing an in-depth understanding of people and their situation (Genzuk, 2003; Myers, 1999). Myers (1999, p. 5-6) emphasises that ethnography is the most "in-depth" or "intensive" research method possible.

Ethnography differs from other qualitative research methods such as case studies in that the latter is outward looking, aiming to delineate the nature of phenomena through a detailed investigation of individual cases and their contexts (White, Drew & Hay, 2009). Conversely, ethnography is inward-looking, aiming to uncover the tacit knowledge of culture or a group of participants (White et al., 2009). Ethnography requires very detailed observational evidence gained by spending a significant amount of time in the field (Yin, 2002). In studying events in their natural setting, the ethnographer makes use of pluralistic methods of inquiry such as interviews, participant observation, documents analysis, and informal social contact with participants (Ngwenyama & Lee, 1997). Participant observation is one of the distinguishing features of ethnography (Myers, 1999) in which the researcher is offered the advantage of being both an observer and a participant in his/her pursuit of cultural description and interpretation (Yin, 2002).

While many ethnographers start from scratch, not knowing anything about the people they study, the experience of being an urban refugee for more than eight years forms the basis of the ethnography adopted in this thesis, as explained in Chapter One and later in this chapter. I started off this research with significant knowledge of the experiences of urban refugees in South Africa. Such experiences were strengthened with the participant observations and insights gained through interviews with fellow urban refugees who participated in the research. However, I was conscious to avoid bringing a priori assumptions to this research, as explained later in this chapter. Ethnography suited this research well as the researcher was immersed in a familiar research setting with the advantage of researching social events in the context in which they occurred. In addition, adopting the ethnography as method of inquiry for this thesis offered the vantage point of seeing reality the same way the people being studied see it, and therefore being able to decipher meaning, interpret and describe social phenomena. In doing so, the

issue of cultural entrapment was addressed since an ethnographic approach would provide an insider view of what happens in the research sites with regards to the cultural aspects of human interactions.

There exist many types or different schools of ethnography. These include the holistic, the semiotic, and the critical ethnography schools of thought (Myers, 1999). In the holistic ethnography school, the assumption is that the researcher should go native and live like the local people being observed (Myers, 2009). In this respect, empathy and identification with local people are needed. In the semiotic ethnography school of thought, it is argued that it is possible for the researcher to search out and analyse another culture without having to empathise with the subjects (Myers, 2009). The critical ethnography school of thought sees the research as an emergent process that involves a dialogue between researchers and the people under study (Creswell, 1998; Myers, 1999). Critical ethnography implies that common sense assumptions should not be taken at face value, but rather questioned in order to gain access to deeper meaning (Hammersley, 1992; Thomas, 1993). Critical researchers study the oppressed or socially marginal groups and use their work to aid emancipatory goals or to negate the repressive influences that lead to unnecessary social domination of all groups (Creswell, 1998; Thomas, 1993).

Nevertheless, despite all those differences, there remains an underlying point of agreement between all the ethnographic schools: the ethnographic researcher is required to spend a significant amount of time in the field; exploration of a particular social setting where the researcher would have first-hand experience, predominantly on the basis of observation and participation. This research identifies with the critical ethnography school of thought which, informed by critical theory, questions common-sense assumptions looking at issues of power relations as well as the dilemmas, routines, frustrations, relationships, and risks that are part of everyday life (Grills, 1998). The motive for this choice is provided next.

#### **4.6.1.1. Why Critical Ethnography?**

Critical ethnography is an applied form of ethnography that is in search of knowledge to inform change (Creswell, 1998). It implies an “appropriation and reconstruction of conventional ethnography so as to transform it into a project concerned with bringing about human emancipation” (Hammersley, 1992, p. 96). Critical ethnography is informed by the critical paradigm and critical theory which promote the idea that the world and reality are socially constructed and influenced by the socio-cultural and political context (LeCompte & Schensul, 1999). Kincheloe and McLaren (2003) argued that critical ethnography is concerned with how social issues including power, ability, culture, ethnicity, and gender form a socio-political system.

According to Myers (1997), critical ethnography is the implementation of a critical paradigm in ethnography. As discussed in the previous section, critical ethnography does not stand in opposition to

conventional ethnography. Rather it goes beyond that by advocating that common sense assumptions about reality need to be questioned in line with a critical epistemology (Myers, 1997). Marcus (1998) argues that, by merely focusing on a “thick description” that mainly consists of relying on participants’ own interpretations of culture as well as the detailed descriptions of their actions and practices in their real lives, conventional ethnography neglects possible constraints operating on people being studied. Conventional ethnography does not necessarily take into account the issues of relations of power (Hammersley, 1992). In their critique of the conventional ethnographic approaches, critical ethnographers raise questions of “Knowledge for what?” (Lynd, 1939/1970), ‘Whose side are we on?’, (Becker, 1967), ‘Why can’t social scientists be partisans?’ (Gouldner, 1968), and ‘Why should we be content to understand the world instead of trying to change it? (Marx, 1846/1974, p. 123).’ (Cited in Thomas, 1993, p. 2-3). Consequently, critical ethnographers not only attempt to describe people’s perspective and behaviour, but also to explain them as well as to propose a transformative social change (Hammersley, 1992).

The choice of a critical ethnography method for this thesis is consequent to the paradigmatic orientation adopted, the critical philosophical perspective, which posits that inquiry into social activity should focus on understanding the meaning of activity from within the social context and lifeworld of actors (Mingers, 2001; Ngwenyama & Lee, 1997). This thesis is based on the critical ontology in which reality is considered subjective and socially constructed. Given that the theoretical perspective of this PhD research is informed by critical theory philosophy, the critical ethnography method was deemed to be the most appropriate kind of ethnography to use. Critical ethnography will enable the researcher to rely on first-hand experience and observations made possible by getting close, for an extended period of time, to where the action is taking place – mobile phone use by urban refugees. Also, critical ethnography will help reveal and challenge prevailing beliefs and social practices (Myers & Klein, 2011).

This thesis aims to critically explore the factors which shape the use of mobile phones by urban refugees in South Africa, and their capabilities for empowerment. As such, it implies understanding the broader social, economic, cultural, and political contexts of institutional and social structures, human agency and capabilities, as well as the discursive social actions or practices that are intertwined in many ways. In this respect, simply presenting how things are by investigating the routines of people’s lives through the practice of a “thick description” cannot help to demystify the complexity of the phenomena being studied in this thesis. To better illustrate the phenomena, an in-depth ethnography that goes beyond “thick description” is required. In fact, Marcus (1998) suggests that depth in ethnography should strongly emphasise “interpretations of cultural experience—ideas about subjectivity, personhood, and the emotions. It is a kind of depth that challenges sensibility; knowledge and the understanding of experience in a particular way of life become much more intimately entwined” (p. 246). Giving attention

to people's lives might change underlying social realities and power relations. This constitutes the fundamental aim of critical ethnography which consists of transforming social groups through critical dialogue and the demystification of cultural ideology (Quantz, 1992).

The choice of critical ethnography is the most appropriate design because it provides the lens for "theorising social structures constraints and human agency as well as the relationship between structure and agency in order to consider paths towards empowerment of the researched" (Gordon et al., 2001, p. 193). As discussed in Chapter Three, this research involves an intensive scrutiny of various aspects of social phenomena including social structures, agency, and capabilities. For the researcher to interpret people's roles and activities in their social context, critical ethnography is crucial as it facilitates description and analysis and opens to scrutiny otherwise "hidden agendas, power centres, and assumptions that inhibit, repress, and constrain" (Thomas, 1993, p. 2). In this thesis, using critical ethnography research methods led the researcher to question assumptions and beliefs that are taken for granted (Cecez-Kecmanovic, 2011). For example, in challenging assumptions and revealing the ideological qualities and hegemonic functions of mobile phone use, when mobile phone use is said to be empowering, and empowerment is assumed to be unquestionably straightforward.

The perspective of critical ethnography allows revealing how marginalised persons are situated in social and material relations, and how their disempowerment is manifested in cultural arrangements (Quantz, 1992). This thesis stresses the centrality of capabilities as the analytical concept that informs the research. It focuses on a particular community, the urban refugees in South Africa who constitute a segment of society as discussed in Chapter Two. The outcome of using ethnography for this research provides an opportunity for producing a coherent description of the social situation in the context of social, cultural, economic, and political reality, as experienced by urban refugees in South Africa.

#### ***4.6.1.2. The ethnographic research respondents***

I, the researcher and the research respondents are all refugees from the African Great Lakes region living in South Africa. The African Great Lakes region (the Democratic Republic of Congo (DR Congo), Rwanda, and Burundi) is located in the heart of the continent and named for the numerous fresh-water lakes (see Figure 9, in Appendix C). The recent history of the African Great Lakes region is fraught with persistent turbulent conflicts, instability, and destruction. The region has experienced genocide in Rwanda and its aftermath, the ongoing civil war in Burundi, and the armed rebellion in the DR Congo. Despite various international and national efforts at resolution, the conflicts persist with profound effects on the stability of the region and the human security of communities (Kamatsiko, 2017). This has resulted in millions being massacred with machetes and bullets, millions forcibly displaced, thousands of children forcefully recruited by rebels or national armies, tens of thousands raped (children, women, and men), starvation, and more (Kanyangara, 2016). Many of those who have

fled the region have sought refuge in neighbouring as well as faraway countries, including South Africa where they live in urban cities.

While it is acknowledged that the heterogeneity of research respondents' experience may yield more complex data, it does not mean that adopting an ethnographic approach will fail to convey in-depth richness of urban refugees' experiences. In addition, while it is acknowledged that by studying just one particular context and situation (only refugees living in South Africa) the ethnographic research presents the disadvantage of not having much breadth, it does not mean that adopting an ethnographic approach will fail to develop more general models from this single ethnographic research. In fact, this ethnographic thesis leads to in-depth knowledge of the subject matter and also, as Myers (1999) argues, it is possible to generalise from one ethnographic research to theory just as it is for one case study (Walsham, 1995; Yin, 2002). Myers argues that "the arguments made in favour of generalisation from case studies apply equally well to ethnographies" (1999, p. 7). Here, generalisation is understood as "explanations of particular phenomena derived from empirical interpretive research in specific IS settings, which may be valuable in the future in other organisations and contexts" (Walsham, 1995, p. 79). Indeed, despite each refugee respondent having a specific personal account whose details appear to be unique, as Stein (1986) argues, "specific refugees' situations should not be treated as unique, atypical, individual historical events but rather as part of the general subject; refugee behaviour, problems, and situations that recur in many contexts, times and regions" (p. 5). Therefore, from the rich and detailed accounts of the everyday experience of urban refugees based on respondents' narratives, I was able to conceptualise the key concepts or factors which were the focus of this inquiry. I was able to scientifically develop a perspective which sees certain consistencies in the respondents' experience and behaviour. In fact, as Stein (1986), argues, "There is a refugee experience and that this experience produces what we can call refugee behaviour" (p. 5). Geertz (1973) emphasises that "there are no routes to general knowledge save through a dense thicket of participants" (p. 22).

#### **4.6.2. Data sources**

For the purpose of this thesis, data collection was conducted through both primary and secondary sources in order to document as many rich sources of evidence as possible. A primary data source refers to unpublished data which are gathered by the researcher directly from the respondents, whereas a secondary data source is that constituted of previously published materials such as books, articles, etc. Primary data were gathered using semi-structured in-depth interviews, direct observations, field observations (notes), and group discussion with ethnographic informants. Such primary tools for data collection enabled the creation of thick descriptions (Geertz, 1973).

In-depth semi-structured ethnographic interviews were conducted as a means of investigating the research questions and as a key way of exploring informants' practices, experiences, and a variety of

opinions, beliefs, views, and interests. The interviews were conducted with a fairly open framework which allowed for focused conversational two-way communication. Thus, rather than viewing the interview as a process of merely eliciting information and listening, I engaged in discussion sometimes sharing my personal experience, thus making the interview process more interactive and fluid, encouraging respondents to share significant experiences since their arrival in South Africa as well as to reflect on their background before leaving their home countries. In-depth semi-structured interviews with ethnographic respondents yielded rich stories and meanings attached to key aspects of urban refugees' experiences. Interview guides were developed from the research framework which was guided by the research questions of this thesis. The theoretical framework was used both as the guide for carrying out fieldwork and also to provide ways of synthesising and communicating the results.

Participant observation was used to allow the researcher to engage in informal discussion with the research respondents and ask questions for clarification when needed. This method enabled generating questions about observed events even when they were not planned. Since the researcher intended to provide a 'thick' description of the experience of urban refugees' use of mobile phones, participant observation was crucial in getting extensive details of contextual factors through the observation of ongoing activities and description of the setting. The context for participant observations was created by the fact that the setting constituting the field for the research is Cape Town where I, the researcher and the research respondents live and socialise. Being immersed in the setting allows me to see, hear, and experience the reality as the research participants do (Marshall & Rossman, 1999). Although I was not sharing the same residence with the participants, the fact that we all live in the same town means that I was immersed in their activities and this allows me to develop familiarity with the rules, norms, and practices of the field. Such familiarity is crucial in this ethnographic research to grasp the experience of the research respondents. As Bourdieu argues: "... one cannot grasp the most profound logic of the social world unless one becomes immersed in the specificity of an empirical reality" (Bourdieu, 1993, p. 271).

In addition to the ethnography fieldwork, notes and participant observation become an important addition to the use of interviews and documentary materials. Field notes were taken in order to capture the context and record details of direct observation. For this to be achieved I set out to write detailed descriptions as soon as possible, the very same day they occurred, before I could forget part of it.

Secondary data sources included historical background documents such as publications and reports of NGOs dealing with urban refugees and the South African DHA. It includes also relevant documentation, pictures, and literature reviews of research about refugees in South Africa. From the analysis of secondary data emerged important information such as historical decisions, major events, and achievements. Photographs (such as those of refugees in a queue at DHA, money transfer agency, and advocacy offices) were sometimes used in interviews to prompt participants to reflect on and discuss

events, as well as the meanings of events. These were used to remind respondents and complement respondents' personal narratives which provided information, crucial in the understanding of the influence of contextual and structural conditions of human agency.

It is important to highlight that the research strategy for data collection evolved with the research. Although I have identified the methods to be used prior to fieldwork, I was flexible with the use of these methods and adapted them to the particular circumstances during each interview. This is because the process of data collection ended up by being influenced by emerging data as well as the development of relationships between the respondents and myself, which, for some, evolved into friendships. With each and every participant, I was constantly assessing each method and selecting the most suitable one, or a combination of a few (direct observations, interviews, and group discussion). Hence, the research was subject to endless revisions, and refinements but the essential features remained constant.

#### **4.6.3. Sampling Approaches**

To critically explore the factors which shape the use of mobile phones by urban refugees in South Africa and their capabilities for empowerment, this thesis focused on the urban refugees' experience of the use of mobile phones. As such, it was useful to talk to key respondents during the fieldwork to put urban refugees and their mobile phones' usage and experiences in context. Key respondents constituting the sample of the research can be a useful way to explore the way cultural ethos is reflected in particular aspects of everyday life (Marshall, 1996).

Choosing a study sample is an essential step of any research project because studying the whole population is rarely practical, efficient or ethical. A study sample enables the researcher to focus on particular behaviours in particular contexts rather than attempting to portray a whole cultural system (Sandelowski, 2000). The literature describes many variations of qualitative sampling approaches including convenience sampling, theoretical sampling, and purposeful or judgment sampling (Marshall, 1996). Convenience sampling involves the selection of the most accessible subjects. Theoretical sampling consists of building interpretative theories from the emerging data and selecting a new sample to be compared with ones that have already been studied, while purposeful sampling is about actively selecting the most productive sample to answer the research question.

Purposeful sampling was deemed the most appropriate approach since the experiences of urban refugees living in South Africa may be more or less intriguing due to their heterogeneity (and work experience, age and gender, educational level, marital status, and the duration or length of stay in South Africa). In purposeful sampling, the researcher actively attempts to select the most productive research respondents who can provide rich information on issues that are important for the research purpose (Marshall, 1996; Tuckett, 2005). This sampling technique involves strategically picking respondents to optimise the

range of potential information on the dimensions of interest (Patton, 1990). However, even though purposeful sampling was the main sampling approach for this thesis, a convenience sampling approach was also used whenever necessary. For example, by convenience I decided to include the wife of one respondent because she was always present during the interviews with her husband at their home, and was participating in the discussions by helping her husband recall certain events and sharing her own experiences.

In this regards, the interviewees were mostly chosen for their relevance to the conceptual question rather than their representativeness or convenience. Note that purposeful sampling may be advantageous when the researcher has a practical knowledge of the research field. This research has adopted ethnographic methods which involve the researcher spending a significant amount of time with the people under study. As such, having the knowledge of the field, the researcher has the opportunity to identify respondents with special experiences (critical case sample) or respondents with special expertise (key informant sample) and also take into consideration potential useful informants (snowball sample) recommended by other participants (Marshall, 1996. p. 523). Therefore, the first couple of months of fieldwork consisted of recruiting research participants. I personally contacted some participants and explained to them the purpose of the research and asked them to participate. Information was also given on the consent form (Appendix B). Other participants were recommended by the previous participants. The deliberate flexibility in the criteria for selecting participants was to avoid excluding potentially useful participants.

In qualitative research, determining an adequate sample size is a matter of the researcher's judgment and experience in evaluating the quality of data collected against its use, the research method and sampling strategy employed, as well as the intended research product (Sandelowski, 2000). In this thesis the composition of the sample was monitored during the data collection process. However, being an ethnographic research, this thesis focused on a small sample size providing an opportunity for deep analysis which would result in thick descriptions of the particular context under study (Geertz, 1973). One of the strengths of the qualitative approach is that it provides focus and depth even with a small sample. Therefore, rather than seeing a small sample size as a limitation, purposefully small size sampling provided a good opportunity to investigate this thesis' research questions in great detail. As such, for this thesis, the total number of respondents and the number of interviews per respondent reached a limit when a state of theoretical saturation was achieved (Baker, Edwards & Doidge, 2012). That is, when collected data was considered rich and interesting and that no new concepts were emerging from the analysis of additional interviews with the respondents. Note that data collection and data analysis were done simultaneously as explained later.

#### 4.6.4. Interviewing Process and Ethical Considerations

The interview process started with familiarising myself with the research respondents and data collection. None of the existing instruments (interview questionnaires) for assessing empowerment were found to be appropriate for the purpose of this thesis. So as not to lose focus during the interview process, I prepared an interview guideline based on the theoretical framework and the research questions. However, from the interviews with the first four respondents, I realised that the interview questionnaire that I prepared to guide me in fieldwork contained concepts and language that were too abstract and unfamiliar to the respondents. It was imperative to first operationalise these theoretical concepts by looking for alternative definitions that were familiar to respondents. Doing so led to the formulation of the codebook as explained later. It also led to some adjustments to the order and to improved formulation of the interview guidelines (Appendix A) which assisted me in knowing what to look for, ask about, and leave out in the process of data collection.

As the fieldwork continued, the interviews were conducted in non-disruptive environments. Respondents were approached at their workplaces, in their homes, outside public buildings, at NGOs working for refugees, at schools, works, and other refugee gatherings. In fact, having the opportunity to discuss within a safe setting encouraged participants to express their opinions, feelings, and ideas freely. Respondents were given the advantage of choosing the language of their preference to be used for conducting interviews as I am fluent in the common languages spoken by the targeted populations, namely French, Swahili, Kinyarwanda, Kirundi, and Lingala, in addition to English which is the *lingua franca* in urban South Africa. But it happened that most of the time in our conversations we were mixing either of those languages. Being fluent in all those languages maximised the pool of possible respondents. I did not experience any challenges recruiting respondents. The respondents were informed of their right to decide where and how they preferred to be interviewed; whether in private or in the presence of others, recorded or unrecorded. Every effort was made to ensure that respondents felt free to talk. In the effort to uphold research principles and to maintain respondents' rights and values, all information identifying the individual participants was treated in strict confidence in such a way that their identities were masked using pseudo names. As such, information disclosed was treated confidentially and a commitment was made not to reveal respondents' identities.

I, the sole researcher, conducted all the interviews. With the agreement of the interviewees, each interview lasted from 30 minutes to one hour. While some questions required a brief and precise answer, it was also desirable to let information emerge. As such, respondents were given the opportunity to express their thoughts on the topic of interest as freely as possible. In this respect, interview processes were conducted as regular conversations, discussions, sharing of ideas and views, a building of trust and rapport (Holstein & Gubrium, 2011). Such conversational interviews comprised a large component of the data set for this thesis.

As the researcher, I took every precaution necessary to stay within the bounds of the ethical requirements and regulations set out by the ethics in research committee of the Faculty of Commerce (to which the Department of IS belongs) at the UCT. As such, for each respondent, informed consent was obtained before the first interview, after having explained the aims and objectives of the research. They were informed that the data are being gathered only for scientific purposes and that their responses to the study are important. As such, participants were requested to respond with as much fairness, openness, honesty and precision as possible. Respondents were also reminded of their freedom to withdraw from the interview process with no adverse detriments. The interest of the respondents to participate was established through mutual understanding. With informed consent, it is not likely that the research results would be negatively influenced, as the study would be well understood by participants. According to Neuman (1994), informed consent is not doing harm or inflicting physical or psychological injury on respondents. Neuman (1994) suggests that the interviewer has an obligation to be ethical, whether or not the interviewees understand, are aware of, or concerned about ethics.

For each respondent, generally, at the beginning, the interview sessions were more formal and the time of meeting was scheduled. Accordingly, my planning for the interview process consisted of asking questions and recording of the responses with respondents' permission. Participants were comfortable with recording. In course of time, the interviewing aspect of the fieldwork became the cornerstone of building strong relationships of trust with the research participants. The relationship of researcher and research respondents developed into a friendship. The interview sessions became informal, unstructured and impromptu as they took the form of conversational and mutual discussions which enabled me and the participants to share and exchange our experiences, attitudes, feelings, thoughts which could have been missed using a more formal structure. When such instances arise, the interview questionnaire was used as a guide to avoid losing focus on the topic and to ensure that all relevant questions are asked while participants' responses mostly took the form of self-narrative of their own experiences. In such circumstances, if I was unable to record (as I did not always have my recorder with me), I took field notes of important information and observations as soon as possible. Field notes were also used to capture more details and fill the gaps of time where I was not recording. Remembering key elements in a conversation was not difficult for me, since being a refugee I am familiar with most of the experiences of participants. Thus unfamiliar experiences could not be forgotten since these became new experiences for me. I was avoiding taking notes while talking to the participants as I did not want to come across as someone paying more attention to the notebooks than to the actual conversation.

On many occasions, I and participants met socially for just hanging around, or for certain events. During such informal encounters, I sometimes get answers to questions regarding this study without having to make special data collection efforts. When such information relevant to my research emerged, I always

asked the concerned respondent whether he/she would allow including it in his/her responses and they often agreed.

In the earlier phase of the meeting, participants were encouraged to discuss their personal experience in general in terms of activities back in their home countries, the early arrival into South Africa, and their use of mobile phones in particular. Specifically, the conversation focused on the respondent's economic capital (funding and resources), social capital (social networks, interpersonal skills, and position), cultural capital (accumulated, specified skills and knowledge), habitus (interests and beliefs). In the later phase of meetings, the focus was on participants' experiences of mobile phones use in daily routines.

Recorded interviews were transcribed as soon as possible to ensure the accuracy of the transcription and to avoid losing necessary details for analysis. As Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992) point out, the work of the researcher consists of collecting, interpreting and writing up possible readings of the data and approaching the task with an objective, unbiased critical view. This process of listening to a voice recorder and transcribing occasionally prompted additional questions for subsequent sets of interviews since, in significant ways, the analysis affects the data and the data affects the analysis (Myers, 1999). To ensure precision of my understanding of the respondent's experiences and views, at the beginning of each new interview session, if I had queries on the previous interview, I asked the participants to comment. This led respondents to provide some clarifications, explanations, and to reflect on things discussed during the previous interviews. I did my best to ensure prolonged engagement with respondents, creating opportunities for multiple interviews since it was important for me to capture evolving events and experiences, and also to identify possible changes or improvements.

For concluding each interview, a general question was asked to interviewees such as 'is there anything that you feel I've missed?' or 'is there anything that you would like to add?' In response, some reflected on particular concerns and issues and others spoke about certain frustrations. But overall, respondents said that they were happy with me for the genuine interest I had in conducting research about the refugee community. At the end of each interview, I summarised the respondents' comments to allow them to make any possible amendments to my understanding of their story. Doing this ensures compliance with the ethical requirements and regulations. It serves also as a useful method for checking the meaning of comments.

#### **4.6.5. Reflexive-dialectic Orientation**

This thesis investigates the use of mobile phones as experienced by urban refugees in their day-to-day activities in South Africa. I, the researcher, am also an urban refugee in South Africa. Thus, I am not only trying to scientifically understand the social world (research context) but I am experiencing it too.

Thus, I find myself in the midst of conflicting identities of being the researcher and a member of the researched community. As Bryman (2001) points out, an ethnographer is part insider, since he or she is a participant in the social world that is the object of investigation, and part outsider, since the results of the fieldwork must be transmitted to professional (and other) audiences and thereby interpreted in the context of frameworks that bestow credibility on the fieldwork. Such a situation raises the issue of interpretation and representation, i.e. “what is the position of the researcher in relation to the object of the research?” (Barnard, 1990, p. 71).

As both Bourdieu (1990b) and Schultze (2000) argue, the ethnographer cannot deny being a key factor in whatever he/she investigates in the sense that his/her disposition and values affect both approach and outcome. The ethnographer acts as a translator, “ferrying information between the field and the academic community and thereby developing coherence between the data and theory. The analysis thus entails a juggling of induction, i.e., interpreting the data using situated and subjective knowledge, and deduction, i.e., applying objectified methods, frameworks, and theories to the data” (Schultze, 2000, p. 25). It is clear therefore that the ethnographer’s challenge is of staying on the margins of the studied group both socially and intellectually (Genzük, 2003) so as to be capable of describing the experience for outsiders while understanding it as an insider.

To address the above challenges, Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992) advise the researcher to be aware of his/her own intellectual position and disposition, which might distort what is observed from the social phenomena under investigation. As such, this thesis takes on a reflexive orientation (Bourdieu, 1977, 1990b, 1996; Cecez-Kecmanovic, 2011; Schultze, 2000) which requires an awareness of the researcher’s contribution to the construction of meanings throughout the research process. Stahl (2008) emphasises that critical researchers need to be willing to be critical about their own assumptions, beliefs, and ideologies. There is no unanimity on the definition of critical reflexivity. However, the unifying thread from it is “*the insight that the research process organised by subjects belongs – through the very act of knowing itself – to the objective complex that is supposed to be known*’ [Habermas, 1974, p. 12]. *This is a reference to the fact that the critical theorist is himself part of the social reality that he wishes to analyse, that his problems and his interests, as well as his concepts and judgments, issue from and belong to the very traditions and institutions under investigation. Critical theory is doubly reflective: it is self-conscious of its origins in the historical development of society, and it is self-conscious of its role in the further development of society*”. (McCarthy, 1978, p. 135).

In the domain of critical ethnography, reflexivity is considered as a useful strategy in helping researchers to examine their personal, cultural, social, and political aspects of positionality in relation to the contexts and participants being studied (Denzin, 1997; Reed-Danahay, 1997; Schultze, & Avital, 2011). Using reflexive practices in this thesis enables me as the researcher to be explicit in the exploration of the links between my own personal experiences and the ethnographic practices. Bourdieu

suggests that by adopting a reflexive orientation, the researcher needs to reflect on the sense-making relationship he/she has with the social phenomena. Thus, for a good degree of informed subjectivity necessary for fieldwork and analysis, I used a confessional narrative to show that I am part of the world that I am studying. A confessional narrative or confessional account of ethnography is “*an attempt to explicitly demystify fieldwork or participant-observation by showing how the technique is practiced in the field*” (Van Maanen, 1988, p. 73). Narratives are in the form of stories. They are useful to both respondents and researcher because they are a basic tool that individuals use to communicate and create understanding with other people and for themselves.

In a confessional narrative, the self-revealing text implies that the ethnographer makes use of personal pronouns to consistently highlight the point of view being represented, and also reveal personal details and biases (Schultze, 2000). Narrative offers a way of understanding experience and thus allows the audience to understand the empirical and the sense made of it (Schultze, 2000). Through a narrative, the teller’s self is revealed in perceived sequential and consequential events. It also presents the ethnographer’s experience of doing fieldwork by giving a self-critical or a self-reflexive account of the research process (Myers, 2009) as well as a reflection on one’s own relation to the knowing object (Bourdieu, 1990b). Consequently, in presenting and discussing the findings, fieldwork accounts were discussed using first person narrative to provide assurance and to establish with authority that I, the researcher, was there (Schultze, 2000).

A confessional narrative aligns best with a critical epistemology. In this thesis, the design of semi-structured interviews is used to elicit narratives, given the a priori theoretical framework proposed. As such, narratives empower respondents to lead their accounts. The confessional narrative is told as a story through which the researcher and the respondents provide clues about their respective habitus. The confessional narrative is also presented in the form of autobiography. Autobiography is “a form of self-narrative that places the self within a social context, it is both a method and a text, as in the case of ethnography” (Reed-Danahay, 1997, p. 9). It is a research method considered valuable particularly for individuals and groups whose perceptions and experiences have had little historical coverage such as minority groups (David, 2003). According to David (2003), autobiography is an important means in the studies where the use of reflexivity allows the questioning of ‘how we know what we know’. In this thesis, autobiography is used in the attempt to transcend the dichotomy between the wider social forces which shape and interact with the refugees lives (social structures) and the issue of individual agency (habitus) and the refugees’ responses and actions (use of mobile phones). In fact, knowledge is gained in different ways, including through experience and ways of understanding that experience.

Furthermore, in aiming to minimise the influence of the researcher’s prejudices in the process and on the findings of this thesis, Bourdieu’s (1990a, 1990b) guidelines for reflexive practice will be followed. Such guidelines include:

1. The researcher is critically aware of the *habitus* that he or she brings from his or her social background to the object of inquiry. Greater objectivity can be gained in research findings in as much as personal dispositions and interests are considered and controlled so as not to infiltrate the researchers' concepts, research process and methods.
2. The researcher is critically aware of the *field location* that he or she resides in, which can be a source of bias. The struggle for scholarly recognition and intellectual or theoretical ideals may result in the researcher's projecting a position of intellectual struggle on the objects of inquiry, and therefore undermining the objectivity of research findings.
3. The outsider and scholastic point of view require both a social and epistemological break with the realm of practice. Bourdieu (1990a, 1990b) argues that "there is a sort of incompatibility between our scholarly mode of thinking and this strange thing that practice is" (p. 382). The separation from social practices of research participants and imposition of the researcher's epistemological framework upon the object of inquiry has the power to undermine the objectivity of research findings. These are acts of epistemological sovereignty and *symbolic violence*. Bourdieu (1990b) emphasises that a reflexive view allows researchers to become conscious and critique the natural tendencies of separation from, and the imposition of, the epistemological framework upon the object of inquiry.

In respect to Bourdieu's guidelines for reflexive practice, I (the researcher) approach the field with openness, but also acknowledging prejudice (Klein & Myers, 1999). It is important to note however that acknowledging the prejudice does not mean that the researcher should allow himself to be boxed in by a conceptual lens or a firm research roadmap that might possibly distort his or her view of the field (Krauss & Turpin, 2013; Thomas, 1993). In critical ethnography, the research internal structure is explored and its scope clarified and defined only in the course or process of the research, as the researcher develops and discovers the research problem (Thomas, 1993).

In this thesis, the research problem and research question were formulated through the mixture of my (the researcher's) own experience of being an urban refugee, my experience from fieldwork during my Master's thesis data collection, and also the review of literature which confirmed the scarcity and need for research that provides deeper understanding of subject matter. However, the reality is that the research problem of this thesis as well as the research question evolved and became clear amid the process of research; that is during the fieldwork data collection, data analysis, and reflection (Myers, 2009, Thomas, 1993). Some of the literature reviews were conducted concomitantly with fieldwork since the former was in response to the lessons learned from the latter (Thomas, 1993). As such, even though this thesis used an interview questionnaire (Appendix A) to guide the process of data collection, social phenomena were approached mostly inductively and with openness in the way that, acknowledging prejudice, I was able to keep in mind the literature that could enable the interpretation of social phenomena and critical issues as these emerged from fieldwork (Thomas, 1993).

#### **4.7. The Ethnographic Reflexions on the Research Process: A confessional account**

To critically explore the factors which shape the use of mobile phones by urban refugees in South Africa and their capabilities for empowerment, is the focus of this thesis research. This involves understanding life experiences of urban refugees in South Africa. The assumption is that, neither the life of an individual nor the social world can be understood without understanding both. In this section, I, the researcher, present my own self-revealing in the form of a confessional account.

Since I, the researcher, am an urban refugee in South Africa as explained earlier in Chapter One, my personal experience has played a crucial role in the shaping of the academic interests that I have pursued over the years. Ethnographers are advised to adopt an ethnographic self-narrative approach by situating themselves in relation to the object of the research they are conducting (Bourdieu, 1992; Okely & Callaway, 1992; Schultze, 2000). Thus I adopted a self-narrative approach which is a reflective practice that involves the need for the researchers to be explicit in their exploration of the link between their own personal experiences and their ethnographic practices so as to have a better understanding of various social interactions that reveal questions of multiplicity of voice and authenticity, of identities, of cultural displacement, and the politics of representations of local people's knowledge (Okely & Callaway, 1992). This approach involves an analysis of the complexities of social interactions over time. The value of self-narrative is that it highlights the ethnographer's experiences in doing fieldwork by giving a self-revealing and self-reflexive account of the research (Krauss, 2013; Myers, 2013). In respect of critical ethnography, which is the research method adopted for this thesis, reflexivity is regarded as a useful strategy in helping researchers examine their social, political, cultural, and personal aspects of positionality in relation to the participants and contexts being investigated (Alsup, 2004). Therefore, in Chapter One, a self-narrative in a form of autobiography providing the perspective on my own experience and the link to the motivation of conducting this research was presented. In the following, I present my reflections upon the challenges I encountered during the process of data collection and analysis.

Being part of the social community being studied (urban refugees in South Africa), I entered the field for data collection with familiarity and a personal connection. Being a male, married since 2009, living with my wife and our three children, in the refugee community I am considered as being a wise, responsible and experienced person, in contrast to young and single persons who are considered as still having a lot to learn. Thus, I experienced no challenges in engaging in conversations with adult parents with whom there were no taboo subjects as we discussed family affairs and shared parenthood experiences. In most of the cases, the respondents, particularly male respondents, were considering me as a friend and thereby did not hesitate to make personal disclosures. Respondents perceived me first and foremost as a friend, a fellow refugee and not as a researcher. Indeed, during many of our

conversations, we shared stories about personal experience of being urban refugees in South Africa. Our stories included life in home countries, the reasons for leaving the country, the journey, the arrival, and life so far in South Africa, as characterised by multiple challenges and experience of social exclusion and inequality that we usually encounter. These stories helped in building solid relationships and trust. As such, our background served as a bridge in discussing feelings of otherness. I believed that the mutual engagement and the collaboration of self-narrative of our experiences of being urban refugees are influential and powerful, in that I could be able to motivate the research participants to elicit the meaningfulness of their life experiences. Thus, the strong relationships that emerged between me and the respondents had the potential to benefit the research process.

In order to gain a much deeper understanding of the experience of my respondents through storytelling, and to encourage them to share more, I related myself to some aspect of their experiences. In this respect, through self-disclosure and self-display of my own experience of being a refugee, I was trying to demonstrate my connections and commonalities with my respondents, with the hope of constructing an intimate and safe context of sharing through storytelling. My respondents clearly showed appreciation of my honest account of how life was challenging in South Africa. Still, I certainly did not claim to completely be aware of or understand the refugee experience. In accordance with Hammersley (1992), I later realised that the familiarity or ‘insider knowledge’ that I possessed, by being an urban refugee and the researcher at the same time, brings advantages, but which are tempered by countervailing disadvantages. This became evident as, at the early stage of data collection, I found myself struggling between two contrasting types of knowledge:

*First, the subjectivist knowledge*, that of an urban refugee who possesses the primary experience and unquestioning apprehension of the social world. For Bourdieu (1977; 1990b), a subjectivist knowledge is the practical mastery (beliefs, emotions, judgments, desires, thought) of the social world. In regards to this thesis, I am very close to the mobile phone use as experienced by urban refugees in South Africa. Since my arrival in South Africa, I engaged in interactions with urban refugees on a daily basis. My familiarity with the field led me to develop strong opinions regarding urban refugees’ experience. I was constantly confronted with my tendency of trying to find similarities in the experiences of respondents with my own experience, or with other refugees’ experiences that I was aware of. When I started the collection of data, I expected that respondents would consider that we have many similarities in terms of experience regarding the use of mobile phones as we are urban refugees. However, in the course of the research, there were several moments where I felt like an outsider and was viewed as such by the respondents. From time to time the research respondents, explicitly and implicitly, pointed out to me that I am not experiencing refugee life as they do. For example, even though all the participants are educated and have at least a secondary education level and some possess Honours and Masters’ degrees, because of my position of being a PhD student from the UCT, the most prestigious university in South

Africa and on the continent, I was frequently identified by several respondents as “different” with regards to general social conditions of refugees in South Africa. Thus, during our conversations my respondents frequently reminded me of this with words such as:

“...at least you have your Master degree and you are PhD student from UCT ... You can no longer be treated like us, simple refugees...” “...whoever know that you are a doctor [PhD] must treat you with respect...” “...if someone asks you the green ID just show your student card and power will change hands....”.

With such comments, they were explicitly showing that for them, my new ‘status’ had made me a stranger to their experiences. They were also considering that my new ‘status’ had offered me some privileges different from other refugees. At the beginning, I was feeling uncomfortable and vulnerable for being positioned as an outsider, ignorant of the experience of refugees. I had to constantly ask myself whether my assumptions and experiences were the same as those of the respondents. Thus I started questioning not only my assumptions but also those of my respondents. As Hammersley (2002, p. 218) warns, “...understanding often requires seeing a phenomenon in its wider context, and this may be particularly difficult for those closely involved in it”. Being aware of this I needed to bring a balance so as to overcome the danger of over-familiarity. As such, in pursuit of objectivity in this thesis, I used my ability to maintain a distance between my own opinions and the research process by carefully listening to respondents’ narratives, acknowledging the variety of views and experiences.

**Second, the objectivist knowledge**, that of an outside researcher who, as Bourdieu (1977) explains, “in his preoccupation with *interpreting* practices, is inclined to introduce into the object the principles of his relation to the object, as is attested by the special importance he assigns to communicative functions (p. 2)”. In fact, I have realised that as the researcher, in an ethnocentric manner, I was subconsciously considering myself as being in a more powerful position than the research participants who only possess the subjectivist viewpoint of the social world, the “native experience and the native representation of that experience” (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 2). I was considering my views as being superior and more meaningful than those of the research participants, who I was considering as only experiencing the social world but not objectively reflecting on it.

After realising that I was struggling with two contrasting types of knowledge, I also realised that it was important that I find a balance between them. Bourdieu (1977) advises that, for an adequate understanding of the social phenomena being studied, it is necessary that knowledge breaks occur. First, break with the subjectivist knowledge, and second break with the objectivist knowledge (Bourdieu, 1977, 1990b). These knowledge breaks happened through dialogue and reflexivity. By breaking with the native representation of my experience as an urban refugee and by questioning my presuppositions inherent to the position of a researcher, I was able to understand the limits of objectivist knowledge and

to pursue an inquiry into the social conditions. I thus gained a third mode of knowledge which, according to Bourdieu (1977) “explores the limits of all objective exploration and makes possible both an objectively intelligible practice and also an objectively enchanted experience of that practice” (p. 4). This enabled me, for example, to realise that it was because of being identified as ‘different’ that I learned the sense of self. The unexpected situation of being considered as an ‘outsider’ raised my sensitivity and self-consciousness that opened my eyes to the fact that I carry with me different identities. As such, at some stage, I started to realise that there are situations which are unique to particular respondents and that I did not have the same frame of reference for experiencing the urban refugees’ situation the way some respondents experience it. It is this self-consciousness that deepens my understanding of what I was hearing, seeing, and feeling at the time when I and the respondents engaged in the process of sense-making exchanges. I realised that I should be carefully listening to respondents’ narratives, and reporting data from the perspective of the meanings that the respondents attach to their social world (Bryman, 2001). In this regard, every time that respondents shared “something new” to my own experience, I made a summary of my understanding so as to eliminate my preconceived ideas, to make sure that I had made sense from the respondent’s experience the way he/she understands it. Thus, throughout the process of data collection and analysis, it became important to build opportunities to document my interpretations by clarifying respondents’ accounts by writing them down in *italics*, and to check my own interpretations of these through the support of literature. In the writing up of the findings, efforts have been made to include the respondents’ voices as much as possible using quotations from their narratives.

#### **4.8. Modes of data analysis**

Modes of data analysis are different approaches to gathering, analysing and interpreting data. In qualitative research, there are many different modes of data analysis such as grounded theory, hermeneutics, semiotics, thematic analysis, and approaches which focus on narrative and metaphor. The common thread in qualitative modes of analysis is that they are all concerned primarily with textual analysis (whether verbal or written) (Myers, 1999). In the IS field of research, qualitative data analysis has gained recognition. It involves abstracting from the research data the verbal, visual or oral themes and patterns that the researcher thinks are important to the topic (Oates, 2006). In this critical ethnographic research, data analysis was performed using thematic analysis, which is a qualitative method for data analysis consisting of identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data (Braun & Clark, 2006, p. 79). The choice of thematic analysis for this thesis is in respect to its power to report people’s experiences, perspectives, and meanings, whilst examining the ways in which events, realities, meanings, and experiences come about (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Many researchers have provided guidelines on how to use thematic analysis. This research broadly followed the guidelines and principles proposed by Braun and Clark (2006) as depicted in Table 3.

Table 3: Phases of thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 87)

Phase	Action	Description of the process
1	Familiarising yourself with your data:	Transcribing data (if necessary), reading and rereading the data, noting down initial ideas
2	Generating initial codes:	Coding interesting features of the data in a systematic fashion across the entire data set, collating data relevant to each code
3	Searching for themes:	Collating codes into potential themes, gathering all data relevant to each potential theme
4	Reviewing themes:	Checking in the themes work in relation to the coded extracts and the entire data set
5	Defining and naming themes:	Ongoing analysis to refine the specifics of each theme, and the overall story the analysis tells
6	Producing the report:	Selection of vivid, compelling extract examples, analysis of selected extracts, relating back of the analysis to the research question and literature

According to Braun and Clarke (2006), in thematic analysis, themes or patterns within data can be identified in two primary ways, namely in an inductive or ‘bottom up’ way, or in a theoretical or deductive or ‘top down’ way. Whilst there has been much debate regarding the advantages and disadvantages of using inductive or deductive approaches in qualitative research, it is argued that the interplay between existing theory and emerging theory is an important and useful paradigm in qualitative research (Braun & Clarke, 2006). As Davies (2008) argues, ethnographers may have themes or categories in their mind before entering the field of study, or they may draw themes and categories from a theoretical framework. Such mode of analysis data is referred to as ‘a theoretical thematic analysis’ (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Therefore, during data analysis, this research adopted a hybrid approach of qualitative methods of thematic analysis by incorporating both the deductive theory-driven approach and the data-driven inductive approach (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006). The intention was that constructs of the guiding theoretical framework (presented in Chapter Three) have to be eschewed in favour of contaminating the process of data collection as little as possible. Hence, themes were not only theory-driven but also data-driven.

A thematic deductive-inductive approach was adopted as an overall method of data analysis. Deductively the theoretical framework was used for exploring the research questions – key themes of the theoretical framework. In this respect, an interview questionnaire (Appendix A) was used to guide the process of data collection which consisted of respondents’ narratives. In this thesis, the concepts of the theory were considered as being the main themes and provided theoretical vocabulary to describe empirical practices or social actors’ behaviours. These could be modified or more themes added as inductively the researcher identified emergent themes. In this regard, themes generated from an inductive approach followed a process in which data coding were done “without trying to fit it into the

pre-existing coding frame or the researcher's analytics preconceptions" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 83). An inductive approach gave the researcher the ability to see alternative explanations and therefore alternative views of reality. Through the reading and re-reading of data, emergent themes or clusters of issues were identified. These were then, if necessary, refined and given meaning by associating them with the theoretical concepts from the adopted theoretical framework. In doing so, the theoretical framework was not enforced on to the social phenomena up front but was used in the groupings of the identified themes. The ontological subjective stance of this thesis considers that reality is socially constructed. The researcher sees knowledge as a social construction and the pursuit of meaning and understanding as subjective (Walsham, 1995). Social reality and people's subjective meanings are critically examined by eliciting and observing what is important and significant to them. The data analysis was conducted following the approach by Braun and Clarke (2006) which proceeds through six stages or steps as follows:

#### **First step: Familiarising myself with data.**

As soon as data were collected I proceeded with data transcription so as not to lose any detail. As such, each interview session was transcribed verbatim, taking into consideration contextual information and non-linguistic observations such as facial expressions, body language, setting descriptions, vernacular expressions, and emotions (McLellan et al., 2003). Therefore, the first phase of the data analysis process began with data transcription during which I familiarised myself with the data, by immersing myself in it through a meticulous reading and re-reading of the collected data in order to gain an overview of the main themes discussed with the respondents. This was done throughout the fieldwork and not only after leaving the field, since for this thesis, data collection, and data analysis were done simultaneously. During this first step, the profiles of respondents were organised into Table 7 as shown later.

It is important to note that in this research, data analysis drew on prior understanding of the theoretical framework which is closely aligned with the research questions and used to identify, organise, describe and analyse themes in some detail. As such, I entered the field to collect data with, in my mind, some themes and categories consisting of the key theoretical concepts from the adopted theoretical framework. These included for example 'habitus', 'capabilities', 'capital', which in fact led to the design of the interview guide. As I was transcribing the interview data as soon as the interviews were conducted, I also started coding from the first transcripts. However, applying these theoretical concepts during the interview processes and the initial analysis of data was challenging. The concepts and language were too abstract and unfamiliar to the respondents. Therefore, it was imperative to first operationalise these theoretical concepts, which lacked explanatory power and were often invisible in the empirical world. This was done by adopting empirical or operational definitions which provide indications of how to recognise or identify these theoretical concepts in the empirical situation. This was achieved by going back to the theoretical framework to look for alternative explanations which

help to make sense of the data. This process strengthened the analysis and increases the validity and reliability of the research (Calhoun, 2002b). The process of operationalization resulted in the development of the following codebook (Table 4).

Table 4: Codebook. The operationalization of theoretical concepts for data analyses

Key Concepts	Concepts Definitions (Theoretical language)	Concept Definitions in Empirical Situation (How to recognise it in data)	Example from Empirical Observations (data)
Habitus	A cognitive construct that arises from personal experience and history (Kvasny & Truex, 2000).	Respondents' attitudes, feelings, aspirations, expectations, Sensibility dispositions about mobile phone use. Familiarity, exposure, previous experience with, willingness to use mobile phones. Examples: Not/knowing what to do. Not/being used to, un/familiarity with, being un/comfortable with ...	<b>Gatera:</b> "...I'm comfortable with my mobile phone ... I'm used to it...I access the internet easily and do whatever I want ... it is just like a computer..." <b>Shaba:</b> "I do not know much about mobile money transfer and we cannot try it ... I think it must be risky for refugees... I only know that with a South African ID one can send or collect money through Shoprite...but refugees are not allowed..."
Field	A social arena under investigation. A setting in which agents or individuals are positioned, acting and located. Where struggles for power and capital (in terms of resources and position) take place.	A network, structure or set of relationships which may be intellectual, religious, educational, cultural, etc. The broader social arena within which agents identifies themselves. This including one's habitus matching the rules of the game at the workplace, in the social group, public policies, bureaucracy.	<b>Linda:</b> "...I do not have another choice that using my mobile phone because I cannot find no more public phones in this Cape Town...before they [public phones] were almost everywhere". <b>Nyaba:</b> "...do you know that the money market in Shoprite and Pick n Pay is only for those with green IDs?"
Economic Capital	A... It is in the form of money and material assets such as property, income, financial stocks (Abel & Frohlich, 2012)	Ability to use mobile phones to direct or indirect creates opportunities to acquire resources. Or the ability to directly or indirectly convert the use of mobile phone into economic resources. Spending economic resources (money) in activities that could not be possible without mobile phones.	<b>Seleo:</b> "...I make sure I personally call every single customer to give them the new address. I keep jealously my customers contact details on my phone and a book..." <b>Linda:</b> "... mobile phone...I think it allows me to reduce some expenses in communication and save on things like the internet, ... in transport fare and time ...".
Social Capital	The aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of mutual acquaintance and recognition — or to membership in a group — which provides each of its members with the backing of the collectively-owned capital (Bourdieu, 1986)	Un/ability to use mobile phones to, direct or indirect, access to relationships with others knowledgeable to get/provide support, information, guidance, social contacts. Enabled to do things, to feel or to be in some position (networks with friends, social group) because of not/use of mobile phones. Confidence/fear, trust/distrust, Feeling excluded, unwanted	<b>Binti:</b> "... you name it...thanks to mobile phone I keep in touch with my family and friends back home, my friends here in South Africa and all over the world...". <b>Gatera:</b> "...mobile phone breaks barriers to distance as it allows us to communicate with friends and relatives even when at work..."
Cultural Capital	people's symbolic and informational resources for action (Bourdieu, 1986)	Un/familiarity with the ways of doing things or style of communicating in particular situation. Exposure, knowledge, direct experiences with. Recognition, educational qualification, competencies, skills.	<b>Buya:</b> "... I do not want to appear like a foreigner in my own country when I go back...". <b>Fomutu:</b> "...take a picture with his phone and instantly send it to me via Facebook or WhatsApp ...I show my children where we came from ..."

<b>Symbolic Capital</b>	A tacit power that functions as an authoritative embodiment of cultural value (Bourdieu, 1993)	the resources available to an individual on the basis of honour, prestige or recognition, and serves as a value that one holds within a culture	<b>Kodani:</b> “... I realised that everybody is on WhatsApp and my friends wanted me to follow...” <b>Dezia</b> “...embarrassed with an outdated [feature] phone...”
<b>Agency</b>	The freedom to set and pursue one’s own goals and interests (Sen, 1985).	Agency is regarded as embedded in respondents’ expressions, meanings, and symbolic practices. These included the respondent’s power or the extent to which one can resist/oppose constraints of the field.	<b>Sango:</b> “I’ve used my cell phone to book an appointment with the UCT law clinic to get help to renew my refugees’ status...” <b>Kola:</b> “... I know that not having a bank account limits the benefits I could get from my phone but I have no choice...such thing always happens to refugees”
<b>Functionings</b>	What a person chooses to be or do from their capability set to live a life they value (achieved outcomes)	This theme related to how different contexts provide differential access to resources: Given/refused access to, Constraints and control, do’s and don’ts,	<b>Tezo:</b> “...when I am at home or at work I use my cell phone to keep updated with activities at school by communicating with colleagues...” <b>Kola:</b> “...but since I do not bank anymore there is no way I can use mobile phone’s wallet to send money... I could buy airtime just on my phone but now I have to walk to retail shop...”

This codebook was based on a preliminary scanning of the data. In this codebook, the left column identifies the code labels or key concepts and the second column provides the definition of what the key concepts concern. The information in both of these first columns is based on the research questions and theoretical concepts, whereas the third column provides a description of how to know when the themes occur, based on the findings from the data. This was done through an examination of in-vivo codes which, according to Strauss (1987), are the codes taken from or derived directly from the languages and terminologies used by interviewees themselves. The last column gives illustrative examples from the empirical data.

The codebook shows for example that elements of ‘habitus’ can empirically be identified in the data by focusing on respondents’ ways of thinking, doing, being, and feeling. Also by looking for expressions or languages that describe or show embodied dispositions that arise from family, social groups and education systems. These included ‘usual or habitual traits’, ‘being used to’, ‘being comfortable in’, ‘preference or aspiration’, ‘desires and tastes’.

Similarly, the codebook shows that elements of ‘social capital’ can empirically be identified in the data by looking for expressions or languages that describe or show the nature and impact of social networks. Illustrations included statements or expressions describing ‘belonging to refugee community’, ‘coming from the same country’, ‘common language’, ‘solidarity’, and ‘trust/lack of trust’.

### **Second step: Generating initial codes.**

For the identification of capabilities generated through the use of mobile phone by urban refugees, data were examined by looking at what the respondents reported they were actually able to achieve using mobile phones (their functionings). Simultaneously, data were approached by looking at the conditions, explicit or implicit, that enable or hinder urban refugees from being able to use mobile phones to

actually achieve what they value. While I was looking broadly across data with the purpose of familiarisation with it, sets of initial codes started to emerge from the data. These (initial codes) were grouped into potential themes during this second phase of the data analysis process. To achieve this, some of the tools of grounded theory were used (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), namely open coding and constant comparison. Interview data were broken down into data sets (represented by different font colours as shown in Table 5). As I was familiarising myself with the transcribed data, I was noting down at the side of each paragraph of the transcript the identified potential codes as shown in Table 5. This phase of familiarisation with data allowed for the classification of similar materials and to capture insights (Dey, 1993). It is important to highlight, however, that some of the paragraphs were classified under more than one code.

Table 5: Searching for codes

Transcript/data extract	Initial codes
<p><b>Q/</b> Do you think using your mobile phone enhances your capabilities (gives you more opportunities) of exercising economic activities? Explain how.</p> <p><b>Shaba:</b> Yes...before, I used to spend a lot of money and time when travelling to Joberg to buy goods ... but now we are making some savings since we arrange all over the phones I and my friend Mboka who is based in Joburg ... I send him money and through the phone, I instruct him about the goods that I need...he does the shopping and send me the goods through buses ... <b>Sometimes, when there is a misunderstanding about the items, we use pictures taken and share through our phones to make sure we are talking about the same thing.</b> We do not spend a lot because we use WhatsApp... the only problem is the bank charges when I sent him money through his bank account.  <b>I do not know much about mobile money transfer and we cannot try it ... I think it must be risky.</b>  <b>I only know that with a south African ID one can send or collect money through Shoprite, it is better that through Banks, but refugees are not allowed...</b></p> <p><b>Tezo:</b> I use my mobile phone just for communication but I can say that it also helps me to save time which is money....it is cheaper than public phones and it is in my hands...specially with this smartphone I save on using the internet for example when in need of 2<sup>nd</sup> hand articles I can check online...chatting on Facebook and WhatsApp...because of mobile phone I avoid engaging in unnecessary activities such as paying taxi fare for visiting someone who is not available ... <b>the problem is that not everybody, I mean amongst refugees, can afford a phone like this (smartphone) and we are not a citizen to get by contract ...</b> yes, you may buy 2<sup>nd</sup> hand but what guarantee with such a phone? You know, as refugees we mostly use trains for transport, and we are targets of thieves it easy to lose your expensive phone... <b>I know some people use mobile phone for banking but personally, I do not trust mobile phone to that level...what if your money is lost?</b></p> <p><b>Mika:</b> ...for me, I can say I'm not using mobile phones like for real economic purpose but I think it allows me to reduce some expenses in communication and save on things like the internet, instant messaging ... <b>but first, one have to afford to buy a smartphone...</b>I have realised that with mobile phone I end up spending more that I could in data bundles and airtimes... <b>I know one can make a huge saving by using mobile phone in activities like buying things online but conditions like a credit card is already an obstacle for refugees ...we do not have those...only lucky one (refugees) have debit cards (laugh) ...but I use my mobile phone to check gumtree and olx... sometimes I receive SMSs from shops like Pick n Pay about sales. if I'm interested I go for it... no need of IDs.</b></p> <p>I know mobile phone can be used to find a job but I think it is waste of time if you are a refugee because I know the first condition must be green ID... yes we (refugees) can</p>	<p>Initial codes</p> <p>Saving travel cost and time.  <b>an innovative way of using mobile phone</b>  Instant-messaging facilitates business, Affordable communication.  <b>Little awareness of mobile money transfers. Lack of trust.</b>  <b>Refugees excluded from money markets services offered by supermarkets in SA</b>  Saving in time, transport and communication  More saving when using high-end phones  <b>Not affordable for many refugees (High cost).</b>  <b>Not qualified for credits (policy)</b>  Issue of Security and guarantee for high-end mobile phone  <b>Negative perception about mobile Banking</b></p> <p>Saving in communication expenses.  <b>High-end phones not affordable.</b>  <b>Mobile phones Create extra costs.</b>  <b>Awareness of mobile phone uses for online shopping.</b>  <b>Refugees' obstacle to online shopping. Use of internet for market information.</b>  Awareness of mobile phone for jobs search. ID as an obstacle.</p>

use mobile phone to find jobs by requesting amongst friends for opportunities or recommendations...I do not think refugees can do internet banking and I do not know anyone who does it...

Mobile phones use for job search among the social group. Perception that refugee do not use internet banking

### **Third step: Searching for themes.**

The analysis process continued with a careful reading and re-reading of data. At this stage, the focus was on identifying themes and patterns that emerged as being important to the description of the phenomenon under study. The procedures involved categorizing and classifying data to prepare units for analysis – coding, in order to “make sense of the text data, divide it into text segments, label the segments with codes, examine codes for overlap and redundancy, and collapse these codes into broad themes” (Creswell, 2008, p. 251). A theme is described as “capturing something important about the data in relation to the research question and represents some type of patterned response or meaning within the data set” (Braun & Clark, 2006, p. 82).

### **Fourth step: Reviewing themes.**

I proceeded by going back to the transcripts for reviewing, checking whether the initial codes’ names were consistent with related data sets, and looking out for patterns to create themes. For some data sets, this activity resulted in the renaming of the codes before grouping them into themes. Additional themes that emerged were also prepared for discussion in order to hold meaning and reflect the sense of the analysis. For example, the emerging themes grouped under the category ‘affordances of mobile phones’ (Norman, 1988; Orlikowski, 2000) consist of ‘the ubiquity and usefulness of mobile phone, and the usability of mobile phones’ which includes the knowledge of the opportunities and services offered by certain features of mobile phones such as access to social media and instant communication. Emergent themes allowed for data expansion (making new connections between concepts), and reconceptualization (rethinking theoretical associations – the possibility for the transformation of the theoretical framework after the interpretation of data) (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996). The following Figure 5 presents an illustration of the way the activities throughout this fourth phase of data analysis using an open coding technique were conducted. Even though categories of themes were drawn from the theoretical framework, they were not used as hypotheses to test the existence of such categories but rather they played the role of initial categories used as resources or headings to arrange data.



Figure 5: Coding by themes and theoretical concepts

This excerpt from the respondent Kowe provides information on his habitual traits, influencing his desires and preferences. The phrases ‘...I always wanted to keep in touch with friends...’ demonstrated the respondent’s disposition and preference. This was coded ‘**necessity of mobile phone**’, a code which was considered as an operationalizing definition of the key concept of ‘habitus’. Kowe’s embodied disposition is a result of his experience, ‘... in this country, we have learned that friends are as important as your brothers and sister...’ This excerpt was also coded as respondents’ sense of ‘**developing and maintaining relationships**’ which reveals the habitual trait of solidarity and social networking that influence his desire and preference for the necessity of a mobile phone. The excerpt also shows that, although the respondent is aware that high-end mobile phones provide more opportunities, he regrets that such mobile phones are still out of reach of many among those he communicates with (an urban refugee community).

In addition, the above illustrating excerpt from respondent Kowe shows a social relationship as having a value that is worth investing in. The code was ‘**developing and maintaining relationship**’, which are the indicators of ‘social capital’. This piece of data also shows that the feeling of social isolation and loneliness comes in the absence of social capital, when there is a lack of solidarity and social networking: “...even if you would like to save by not spending, but how can you afford feeling isolated from your friends in this foreign country?” The excerpt shows also that social relationship creates

sympathy toward group members – “...my wish is that all my people (refugees) could be able to afford such mobile phones...”. This excerpt shows that mobile phone use provides the capabilities to effectively engage with wider networks. It also shows that the personal disposition and preference in term of habitus affect the use mobile phone.

Another example from the data sets which shows the capabilities to effectively engage with wider networks is from respondent Buya: “...most of the people that I communicate with through my phone are refugees, especially those from Burundi...I think it is because we speak the same language and there is trust between us... if I am in trouble, I believe another refugee will do something because he knows what being refugee means. We share same problems and are treated the same way by South Africans...”.

In this excerpt, solidarity and trust are demonstrated in the expression ‘*if I am in trouble, I believe another refugee will do something because he knows what being refugee means*’. This piece of data shows how the respondent felt strengthened, empowered, and trust in group solidarity or cohesion. The code is ‘**being socially and culturally connected**’ which is the outcome of social capital. However, this piece of data provides indications of the negative side of social capital which may be limiting in that it defines expectations by *trusting only those belonging to the social group*.

#### **Fifth step: Defining and naming themes.**

The analysis continued with the comparison of data with data, data with categories and category with category until a theoretical elaboration of that category began to emerge (Bryman, 2001). This phase of data analysis consisted of checking whether themes were internally coherent, consistent and distinctive. In this respect, constant comparisons analysis (data sets compared with other data sets) were performed so as to allow the researcher not to get lost in contextual details but: (1) to keep track of the original meanings inherent in data set, (2) to check for concordance and, (3) to check that no codes had been missed. As this was completed, some themes were combined while others were deleted due to repetition. Table 6 shows the results, which are discussed later in Chapter Six. Data comparison was not only concerning data from field notes or interviews but also data from theoretical concepts and any further insights gained from the reading of materials to allow for data triangulation.

Table 6. Categories and themes relating to mobile phone use and urban refugees' empowerment in South Africa

	CATEGORIES	THEMES	DESCRIPTIONS	
Factors that shape the use of mobile phones by urban refugees in South Africa	Affordances of mobile phones	Ubiquity and usefulness of mobile phones	The extent to which a mobile phone can be used to achieve specified goals. Possible activities that can be performed with mobile phones (money trans, mobile banking, possibility of managing data usage).	
		Usability of mobile phones	Strengths and limitations of mobile phones. Opportunities presented by the features (applications, reliable connectivity, ..) but also the inherent constraints (such as short sessions, small screen,..).	
	Personal Factors	The necessity of mobile phones.	Needs of staying in touch. Dependency or attachment to mobile phone and perception of freedom. User's ability, competence, skills and knowledge to use mobile phones effectively: un/awareness of properties (functionalities) of mobile phones, not/knowing the possibilities offered by mobile phones or how to use mobile phones to complete a specified task in a specified context	
		Un/availability of financial resources	Ability /Financial constraints to purchase mobile phones and using certain applications.	
		Frustration of being excluded	Frustration due to experiences or information about the situation. The perceived attitude, motive, intention of other toward refugees (they hate us, they cannot allow us to use that service).	
	Socio-environmental factors	Lack of confidence in Language	lack of or confidence in English affect the willingness of using mobile phones chats or SMSs for communication	
		Social influence	Influence of social networks (everyone is using it), norms, customs and certain values.	
		Policies and regulations	Policies and attitudes that exclude refugees from certain opportunities	
	The capabilities associated with mobile phones use by urban refugees in South Africa	Capabilities to negotiate ways to participate in information society	To participate in economic or financial activities	Improve access to markets. Finding and securing employment. Enable transaction and remittances.
			To improve access to services	Provides the sense of being included in the modern society. Improve access to services (health, water, electricity)
To improve access to information			Opportunities to access and commenting on information (government information, political and cultural issues,...)	
Capabilities to effectively engage with wider networks		To develop and Maintain social ties and relationships	Opportunity to network with others. The opportunity of being timeliness reachable. Being socially connected	
		To be socially and culturally connected	Improved information flows within the community.	
		To communicate effectively	Interactivity. Ensuring confidence and trust in activities. Certainty in textual communication. And spell check	
Capabilities to manage own situation and solve problem		To make multi-tasking easier	Opportunity to switch between activities. Manage activities on the go.	
		To guarantee transparency and security	Basic trust, Avoiding misunderstandings. Giving a sense of security and of inclusion in modern society.	

### Sixth step: Producing the report.

While the data sets were examined and coded, at the same time the interpretive analysis of data occurred, and arguments about the phenomenon being examined were made (Boyatzis, 1998). Data that are reported in this thesis constitute vivid and compelling excerpts that were selected based on similarities and differences. The report on findings is presented in detail in the next chapter. But before that, it is important to note the following.

The procedure of data analysis as applied in this thesis was not linear, step-by-step as presented. Instead, it was an iterative and reflexive process with no distinction between data collection and data analysis. The results of the analysis helped to guide the subsequent collection of data in such a way that the process was an iterative cycle of data gathering and analysis. The collection of data and the analysis phases were undertaken concurrently. In this regard, before undertaking any further analysis, data collected in the previous phases were re-read to ensure that developed themes represented the subjective viewpoint of respondents. Basically, while in quantitative research a clear distinction between data gathering and data analysis is commonly made, in qualitative research such distinction is often problematic (Myers, 1999).

In this ethnographic research, it was crucial that relevant narratives be included as most of the times these yield information that may not be available by other methods (Schultze, 2000). The narratives were assembled in some sense of the chronological order of events to provide an understanding of how the respondents made sense of their experiences. However, narratives were not wholly reported in the presentation of findings. Only parts that were relevant to the inquiry of this research were included. Criteria for selecting parts of narratives to be reported were based either on the grounds of being a marked case or typical, and included the following: How does the narrative exemplify aspects of urban refugees' experiences? What were the challenges and how were mobile phones used? What is the evaluation or what lesson does the story carry? What does the respondent's story say about mobile phones' use and empowerment?

Symbols and identifiers used in the transcribed extracts are as follows:

- [] Explanatory note
- ... Placed at the start or end of a piece of text denotes the continuation of a sentence
- ... Placed in the middle of a piece of text denotes that a section of text has been removed
- ! Exclamation
- ? Question
- Int: Interviewer

Narrators are identified by their names.

## **4.9. Summary of the chapter**

This chapter outlined the methodological approach of this research. Taking into account the objectives, the context, and the theoretical orientation of this study, a critical research philosophical perspective was adopted. Critical ethnographic methods were deemed most appropriate as the research strategy since they enabled the researcher, to rely on first-hand experience and observations. The data were collected through participant observations and in-

depth interviews with 22 urban refugees in South Africa. Documents and website corroborating evidence have provided secondary data and thematic analysis was used for data analysis.

## 5. PRESENTATION OF ETHNOGRAPHIC FINDINGS

### 5.1. Introduction

This chapter starts with a summary description of the context of the field site to provide the background for situating the research findings. Note that much of the context description was presented in Chapter Two because it was necessary to provide the readers with an upfront understanding of the context of this research to better appreciate the theoretical framework and the research paradigm adopted. In this ethnographic research, the context description is crucial because social practice is a phenomenon which cannot be understood out of the space and time context in which it is situated (Bourdieu, 1977). The descriptions presented in this chapter allow an understanding of the structural conditions concerning urban refugees' empowerment in South Africa. One of the central assumptions of this thesis is that *social structures are formed to serve a strategic purpose; typically, to empower or disempower*. The framework presented earlier reiterates Bourdieu's arguments that when exploring social phenomena, it is insufficient to only consider what is said or what is happening, but it is also necessary to examine the social space in which social events and behaviours are taking place (Bourdieu, 2005). It is trivial to investigate urban refugees' experiences of mobile phone use without considering the context in which they live – *the field*. Tedlock (2003) argues that ethnography is not individual and fixed, but social and processual. Although individuals remain the unit of evaluation, they are positioned within a wider sociocultural context.

Therefore, the first section of this chapter sets the scene by presenting the structural context of the subject matter in terms of field description. In this respect, an overview of urban refugees in South Africa in terms of historical, social, political and economic context is presented. The organisations which mission is to provide services to refugees are also presented. The second section presents the respondents' profiles and trajectory that will facilitate in highlighting the broad range of variables which work together in the process of habitus.

### 5.2. Contextual overview

#### 5.2.1. Geographic and Demographic Profile of South Africa

South Africa is located at the southern tip of the African continent, and has a total area of 1,219,090 square km, with a coastline of 2,798 km and land boundaries of a total of 4,862 km. The borders are with Botswana (1,840 km), Mozambique (491 km), Namibia (967 km), Swaziland (430 km), and Zimbabwe (225 km), and it completely surrounds Lesotho (909 km). With Pretoria being the

administrative capital, Cape Town the legislative capital, and Bloemfontein the judicial capital, South Africa is subdivided into nine administrative provinces as shown in Figure 6.

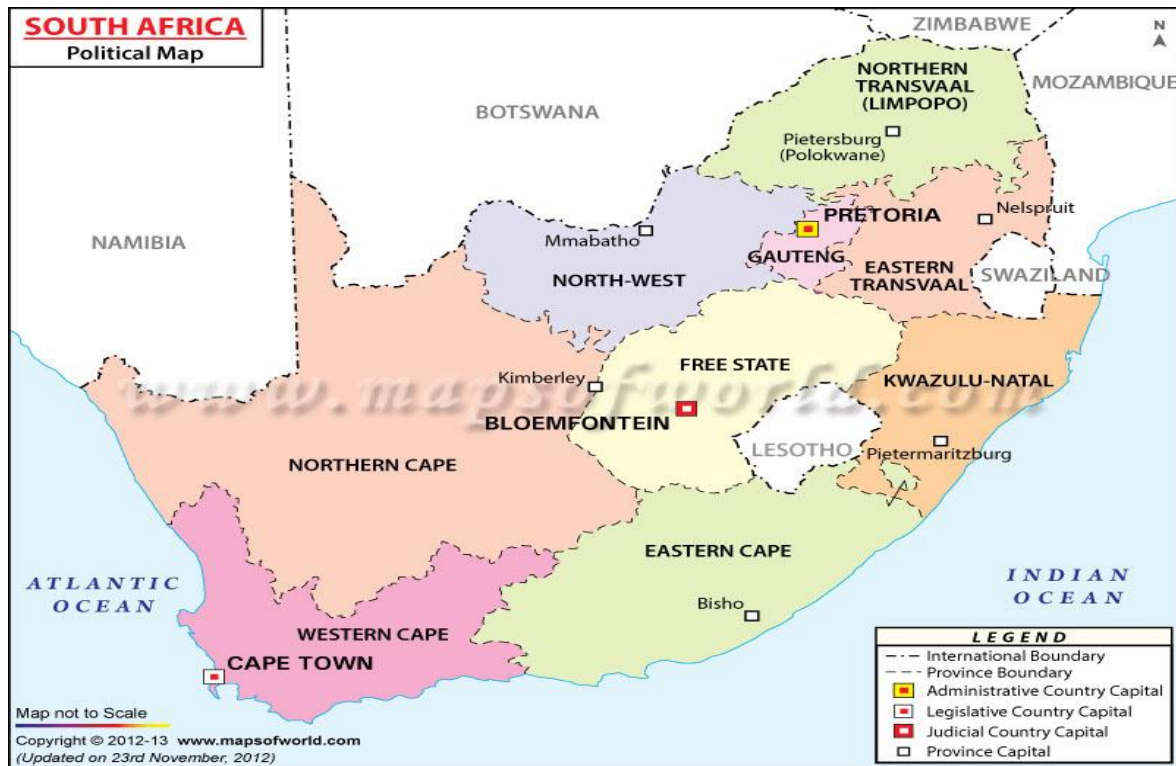


Figure 6: South Africa Political map showing the international boundary, provincial boundaries with their capitals and national capitals

South Africa’s population size has increased from 40.6 million in 1996 to approximately 54.96 million in 2015, representing a great diversity in ethnicity and customs (Statistics South Africa, 2016). With the median age of 26.8, South Africa has an intermediate population (Statistics South Africa, 2016) since a population is described as being young when it has a median of less than 20 and old from the median of 30 and above (Shryock & Siegel, 1976). The South African population is constituted of black South Africans: 80.2%, the coloured population: 8.8%, white population: 8.4%, and Indian/Asian population: 2.5%, and other 0.5% (Statistics South Africa, 2016).

### 5.2.2. Economic, Social and Politico-cultural context of South Africa

Following years of international isolation imposed on South Africa due to its racially motivated apartheid policies, the country was readmitted to the international community after successful free elections in April 1994. Today, the Republic of South Africa is a stable, constitutional democracy and a middle-income country considered as the major economic power of Africa. The country has the characteristics of both an advanced and a developing economy. It is the only country in the African continent represented in the G20 and a member of BRICS, the association of five major emerging

national economies, namely Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa. The country possesses abundant reserves of natural resources and modern infrastructure such as roads, harbours, airports, and railroads that support a relatively efficient distribution of goods. South Africa possesses relatively well-developed telecommunication networks and electricity grids. The country has access to modern technology, sophisticated institutions including universities and research entities, a strong private sector, and legal resources, in addition to the 15<sup>th</sup> largest stock exchange in the world (InfoDev, 2012; RIA, 2013). The economy is relatively industrialised, the prerequisites for tourism development are good, the financial system is highly developed, and the levels of urbanisation are high at over 65 percent and increasing (Statistics South Africa, 2016). Consequently, the level of South Africa's economic and social development makes it significantly different from other Sub-Saharan African countries.

However, 20 years after the first democratic election in 1994, and with a policy promoting black empowerment, South Africa is still one of the most unequal countries in the world, with half of its population living below the poverty line (InfoDev, 2012). Despite some improvements that have taken place in decreasing the inequalities gap in income and wealth distribution between whites and blacks, South Africa still faces numerous challenges. These include unemployment, with approximately one-quarter of the population being unemployed; higher levels of violence, murder and rape than in most other countries; corruption and poverty (Breen, Lynch, Nel & Matthews, 2016). In addition, the widespread HIV-AIDS epidemic in South Africa constitutes one of the biggest threats to the country's growth and development. The country is portrayed as economically divided, with the inequality between the minority rich, mostly whites, and the majority poor, many of which are blacks living on less than \$2 per day (Statistics South Africa, 2016). Many of South Africa's poor have access to some form of social grant. As such, the South African poor are somewhat different from those at the bottom of the pyramid in other African countries. The South African government is developing and promoting very ambitious programmes of providing access to housing, education, sanitary environment, water and electricity for more people (World Bank, 2014).

### **5.2.3. Organisations providing services to refugees in South Africa**

In South Africa, all refugees are urban refugees as there are no refugee camps. Refugees have to find their own means of survival including accommodation, some form of income or employment, and education for their dependents or themselves. As such, they are in a vulnerable situation and in many cases, they are exposed to many kinds of abuses in their daily lives, especially from abusive employers and unscrupulous service providers. In addition, despite the DHA's commitment to ensuring that its asylum system promotes human rights, administrative rationality and the rule of the law, considerable challenges remain. Therefore, in the effort to enhance refugees' protection and empowerment in South Africa, there exist many organisations that work in synergy to strengthening the partnerships between refugees and service providers. These comprise a number of local and international organisations

dealing with specific aspects of refugees' experiences including legal issues, psycho-social issues, shelter, skills training or others. They contribute by providing technical support and guidance to the government on policy formulation and refugee matters. In addition, these organisations provide protection and assistance to refugees by rendering to them legal and social assistance. Some of these organisations are presented next for illustrative purposes.

*The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees UNHCR-Cape Town Office:* The agency, in line with its statutory responsibility, is mandated to monitor the implementation of the refugee convention and promotes a durable solution for refugees. Its primary purpose is to safeguard the rights and wellbeing of refugees to ensure that everyone can exercise the right to seek asylum and find safe refuge in another State, with the option to return home voluntarily, integrate locally or resettle in a third country (UNHCR, 2016). In South Africa, the UNHCR's latest strategies include: making special efforts to pursue preventive action and advocacy, including awareness and conflict resolution programmes, as well as other community interventions aimed at promoting social cohesion (UNHCR, 2014). In this respect, UNHCR plans to advocate for the preservation of established asylum space, including the rights of refugees and asylum-seekers to work, study and access health and social services in the country; to provide for short-term material assistance to vulnerable refugees and asylum-seekers who cannot access other assistance for basic needs, such as shelter and food; and to facilitate resettlement for individuals with critical needs (UNHCR, 2014).

*The Scalabrini Centre of Cape Town* ([www.scalabrini.org.za](http://www.scalabrini.org.za)) is a non-profit organisation advocating for the equal treatment and social integration of refugees and migrants within South Africa, particularly in the Western Cape Province. Since 1994, Scalabrini Centre have been providing a holistic development programme that considers all basic needs and human rights of the migrants and local communities of Cape Town. Its programmes include welfare programmes, training and assistance with access to local services through referrals to schooling, bank accounts, health care, legal representation, qualification accreditation and social assistance.

*The Cape Town Refugees Centre (CTRC)* ([www.ctrc.co.za](http://www.ctrc.co.za)). CTRC is a South African non-government organisation whose mission is to engage refugees in improving their quality of life by enabling them to become self-reliant and self-sufficient through various empowerment opportunities, including capacity building, education, psychological and emotional support, networking, lobbying, advocacy and integration into local communities. CTRC, through its partnership with the UNHCR, the provincial and national level government departments and ministries, and as a member of several critical networks, it is an essential part of the support network for refugees.

*The Agency for Refugee Education, Skills Training & Advocacy (ARESTA)* ([www.aresta.org.za](http://www.aresta.org.za)) is a Cape Town based non-profit organisation whose mission is to contribute to the successful integration

of refugees through advocacy, training, skills development, education and research. ARESTA fulfils a practical empowerment role in the education of refugees, providing them with skills necessary for their self-reliance.

*People Against Suffering, Oppression and Poverty (PASSOP)* ([www.passop.co.za](http://www.passop.co.za)). PASSOP is a community based non-profit organisation and grassroots movement whose mission is to empower communities to stand up and express their beliefs, needs and fears, and access the rights they are entitled to.

*The Muslim Refugee Association of South Africa (MRASA)* (<http://www.mrasa.org.za>) is a non-profit organisation aimed at uplifting the standards of refugees, religiously, socially, morally and academically. In this regards, MRASA provides to both refugees and local communities English and Arabic language courses, provides life skills training in fields such as tailoring, welding, dress making and computer application skills. MRASA offers scholarships to students, employment advice and networking with local communities and business to supply a database of refugees looking for jobs. MRASA also provides HIV and Aids counselling and awareness programmes for refugees' rights and obligations.

*Amis BK* ([www.amisbk.org](http://www.amisbk.org)) is a non-profit organisation founded in 2007 by a group of refugees from DRC. Every refugee from DRC is welcome and considered as a member. During its monthly meetings, members share their experiences and discuss the overall social situation of Congolese refugees in South Africa. The conversations serve as a way of learning how to manage challenges and also as advice about good practices. Those in specific need are identified so that anyone with the ability and willingness to assist may know where to direct the assistance.

*The UCT Law Clinic* ([www.law.uct.ac.za](http://www.law.uct.ac.za)): The Refugee Rights Unit was founded in 1998 as a Project within the UCT Law Clinic, aimed at providing legal support services to the growing number of refugees and asylum seekers in South Africa. It has since evolved into a fully independent Unit, with different components. Apart from its teaching and researching objectives, the UCT's Refugee Law Clinic provides direct legal services to thousands of refugees and asylum seekers in the Western Cape each year, and it undertakes a significant amount of targeted advocacy and training of government officials, the judiciary, civil society partners and refugee communities.

*The Jesuit Refugees Services (JRS)* ([www.jrs.net](http://www.jrs.net)). JRS is a semi-autonomous organisation of the Jesuits that carries its mission of accompanying, serving and advocating on behalf of refugees and other forcibly displaced persons in over 51 countries. In South Africa, JRS's mission includes assisting refugees in areas of work or services, namely in the field of education, healthcare, livelihood activities, emergency assistance, and social services.

*The Legal Resources Centre* ([www.lrc.org.za](http://www.lrc.org.za)) is one of the human rights non-profit organisation in South Africa. Its mission is to use the law as an instrument of justice for the vulnerable and marginalised, including poor, homeless, and landless people and communities who suffer discrimination by reason of race, class, gender, disability or by reason of social, economic, and historical circumstances. Since its foundation in 1996, a significant proportion of the work of LRC has been in the sphere of refugee law. The LRC has played a pivotal role in developing a robust jurisprudence and protection of refugees in South Africa through strategic litigation, advocacy, education, and training. The LRC has four regional offices in Cape Town, Johannesburg, Durban, and Grahamstown.

*The Sonke Gender Justice* ([www.genderjustice.org.za](http://www.genderjustice.org.za)): It is a South African-based NGO that works across Africa to strengthen government, civil society, and citizen capacity to support men and boys in taking action to promote gender equality, prevent domestic and sexual violence, and reduce the spread and impact of HIV and AIDS. To achieve its mission, Sonke draws on a broad range of social change strategies that include: advocacy, activism and community mobilisation; community education and individual skills building; partnering with government to promote policy development and effective implementation. As such, Sonke uses different tools such as ambush theatre, murals, and soccer games to engage the community in dialogue about issues surrounding refugees in South Africa.

Clearly, in the general discourse about refugees in South Africa, there is a tendency of conceptualising refugees as dependents, passive victims who have things ‘done to them’. Such labels imposed upon urban refugees in South Africa circumscribe their agency and shape capital and social arrangements available to them. This ethnographical research illuminates the experience of urban refugees in negotiating social structures and their sense of agency as they use mobile phones to generate capabilities for empowerment.

### **5.3. Profiles and Trajectory of the research respondents**

In this chapter, all the respondents are introduced. As in the subsequent chapters, most of the data are in form of narratives in which respondents provide personal accounts of their daily life and their experiences relating to the use of mobile phones. This is because “how we understand ourselves often occurs through processes of representation and narrative” (Somers, 1994, p. 606). The respondents talked about their families, and their daily life prior to and after becoming refugees. The overall information provided in this chapter is useful to the understanding of respondents’ practice. This section is crucial in terms of gaining an understanding of how initial capital is developed and how internalised disposition is reflected in the practice and actions of urban refugees with regard to the use of mobile phones.

### **5.3.1. The profiles of the research respondents**

This thesis critically explores the factors which shape the use of mobile phones by urban refugees in South Africa and their capabilities for empowerment. For this purpose, I was interested in seeking respondents with demographic information which reflected and took account of the heterogeneity of the targeted refugee population in South Africa. As such, the range of selection criteria includes key elements such as age and gender, occupation, the length of stay in South Africa, marital status, and education background. In the end, 22 respondents were selected among urban refugees from the African Great Lakes region countries who had been living in South Africa for at least three years.

In December 2013, I started contacting urban refugees in Cape Town and informing them about my research by giving them a brief description of the purposes, goals, and methods of the research. Thus I explained to respondents that it is important in regards to the research to be meeting as many occasions as we can get the opportunity to do so. However, in the course of time, some of those who were involved in the research were moving to different areas and towns making it difficult to keep meeting for the purpose of the research. A few others were not able to keep their ongoing commitments to the research due to their job schedules. The profiles of the 22 respondents of this research are outlined in Table 7. All of them use mobile phones on a regular basis. To ensure the anonymity and confidentiality of the respondents, as was guaranteed to them, their names were changed by attributing to each of them a nickname.

Table 7: Profiles of Respondents.

No	Name	Gender & Age	Educational level	Marital status	County of Origin	Year of arrival in SA	Occupation
1	Seleo	Male (30-35)	Matric	Married	Rwanda	2004	Mechanic & Refurbished car reseller
2	Kowe	Male (35-40)	Masters	Married	DR Congo	2003	Delivery man
3	Sango	Male (40-45)	Tertiary Education	Married	DR Congo	2006	Security guard
4	Elena	Female (30-35)	matric	Married	DR Congo	2006	Stall trader
5	Buya	Male (30-35)	matric	Single	Burundi	2004	Taxi man
6	Shaba	Male (35-40)	Secondary Education	Married	DR Congo	2005	Bouncer & ambulant trader
7	Nyaba	Female (30-35)	Secondary Education	Married	DR Congo	2005	Hair dresser
8	Dezia	Male (30-35)	bachelor degree	Single Father	Burundi	2006	Security guard
9	Netia	Female (20-25)	Matric	Married	Burundi	2009	Tailor
10	Rwaki	Male (30-35)	Secondary Education	Married	Rwanda	2004	Handyman
11	Kola	Male (25-30)	Tertiary Education	Single	DR Congo	2006	Cameraman
12	Linda	Female (20-25)	Secondary Education	Single	Burundi	2006	Sex worker
13	Dina	Female (20-25)	Secondary Education	Single	Burundi	2008	Sex worker
14	Binti	Female (30-35)	Matric	Single Mother	DR Congo	2001	Teller and Gospel singer
15	Kodani	Male (30-35)	Tertiary Education	Married	DR Congo	2007	Handyman
16	Gatera	Male (25-30)	Matric	Married	Rwanda	2006	Businessman
17	Tezo	Male (30-35)	Tertiary Education	Single Father	Rwanda	2005	Security guard manager and Student
18	Rabina	Female (50-55)	Diploma	Single Mother	Rwanda	2000	Day labour
19	Fomutu	Male (40-45)	Matric	Married	DR Congo	2006	Pastor & artisan
20	Lolo	Female (20-25)	Matric	Single	Rwanda	2009	Student & waitress
21	Mika	Male (35-40)	Degree	Single	DR Congo	2002	Electrician
22	Nastia	Female (30-35)	Honour Degree	Married	Burundi	2010	Stall trader

The information provided in Table 7 indicates that all respondents are between 20 and 55 years of age, reflecting the age group of most of the refugees in South Africa. The 'year of arrival in South Africa' shows that respondents' length of stay in South Africa ranges between 3 years and 17 years. The length of stay is an important factor in the experience of urban refugees into the host country (Bacishoga & Johnston, 2013). The 'occupation' refers to the respondents' principal work or source of income during his/her participating in this research. It does not mean that it is the only occupation of the respondent since arriving in South Africa. In fact, urban refugees are nomadic in terms of work and accommodation. Note also that most of the respondents' work is casual labour in that they are informal workers and do not have a formal contract with their employer. For a few respondents such as Kodani, Rabina, Linda and Dina their works can be referred to as day labour in that they search for work on a day to day basis.

### 5.3.2. Personal trajectories of the respondents

This section provides a summary of each respondent's biographic trajectory from their home country until the period this research was conducted. MacKenzie and Forde (2009) warns that research that explores the experiences of immigrants will be incomplete if it neglects other aspects that shape their identities such as their history, social norms or their pre-migration experiences. In this thesis, it was crucial to document information concerning respondents' lives prior to leaving their home countries, not only for enabling the reconstruction of stories of what it means to become a refugee, but also for briefly capturing their backgrounds in the attempts at highlighting the diversity of their experiences and the broad range of variables which work together in the process of habitus. The operationalisation of habitus requires looking at respondents' underlying dispositions, taken-for-granted arguments, assumptions, and responses and uncovering any unreflexive tendencies.

During the first interview sessions, respondents were encouraged to talk about their backgrounds in terms of education, skills, work experience, and mobile phone use prior to leaving their home countries and also about their journey to and early experiences in South Africa. These experiences are now briefly presented in narrative form. The respondents' narratives are important, given that by telling their stories, individuals not only illustrate their versions of the action but also provide interpretations or evaluative commentaries on the subjects.

#### 5.3.2.1. Seleo, the car mechanic

Seleo, a young married father of a son, is a car mechanic and owns a car repair workshop. He also refurbishes and sells accident-damaged cars. I met with Seleo when I needed a trusted and affordable mechanic. Someone provided me with Seleo's mobile phone number. I contacted him, he gave me his address and since that day he became my mechanic and later agreed to participate in this research. For over a period of 2 years, I conducted interviews with Seleo in which he narrates about his informal work as car mechanic back in Rwanda, his journey to South Africa, the transition from car guard to a professional mechanic, owner of a car repair workshop and successful businessman. The narrative highlights not only Seleo's use of a mobile phone in running his business but also the challenges experienced by most refugees in South Africa. In addition, his narrative illustrates the way some refugees strategically use their mobile phone in trying to overcome the challenges.

Seleo explained that: *"...because of insecurity I decided to leave the country ... I was in phone contact with Paci [a friend living in South Africa] and he advised me to come to South Africa... on my way, I met with two Congolese and together we continued the journey ... throughout the way, Paci was guiding us... we were communicating by phone calls and SMSs..."*

Int: did you use the same SIM Card all the way until to South Africa? *Seleo: "No, I bought I SIM Card in Burundi because I spend there a week...I bought another one in Zimbabwe where we spent few days but before I left Zimbabwe I sold the phone for I needed money ... arriving in SA, three of us we accommodated by Paci as the two friends did not have where to go ..."*.

Int: how long did you take before you owned a mobile phone after arriving in SA?

*Seleo: "... you know, if you're already used to mobile phones, it is difficult to stay without one...it did not take long before I could buy a cheap second-hand phone...but before that sometimes I was using Paci' own and public phones..."*

Int: how did you and your friends move on then?

*Seleo: "...Paci helped us so much, he got one of my friends a security guard job before he could even know how to speak English. The other guy got a barber job... myself I got a car guard job... so most of my first relationships here are these Paci introduced to me ..."*.

### **5.3.2.2. Kowe, the Pizza delivery man.**

Kowe works as a pizza delivery man despite holding a Masters degree from one of the best South African universities, and an Honours degree from one of the best universities in Congo. At the time I was conducting this research, Kowe never obtained a job equivalent to his studies. Kowe was still planning to continue with his studies as he explains: *"I have tried all I could to get a job but at every occasion when I am almost there my refugee paper becomes a problem...I have applied for permanent residence long ago and I have finally got it...I'm planning to do my PhD...I hope this time I will get a job..."*.

I met Kowe when a friend of mine wanted to send some gifts to Congo as Kowe's father visited and was preparing to go back. For refugees in South Africa, having someone who is going back to the home country is an opportunity for sending gifts to the family. Before coming to South Africa Kowe experienced living separated from his relatives as he explains: *"... while I was doing my honour degrees, I was also lecturing at high school...I later moved to Rwanda where I got a teaching job...it was a difficult first-time experience living far from my home ... I was spending a lot of money on phone because I was missing my people"*.

The narratives briefly presented in this research highlight Kowe's educational background in his home country and his working experience prior to flying to South Africa, his early experience in South Africa and how he created an opportunity to continue with his studies. Kowe shares about his experience with

the use of mobile phone in life as single man, married and father, student and job seeker. He also shares about the role of mobile phones in his casual job and his struggle for survival.

### 5.3.2.3. **Sango, the Security guard and his wife Elena, stall trader**

Sango is a man whose family is of major importance in his life. He shares: “...*honestly, I’m what they call economic refugee... of course, it is because of the war that I lost my job, but my coming here was for looking for better life for my family...*”. In Congo, prior to his coming to South Africa with his wife Elena and their four children, Sango was working as a civil servant for years. Back in Congo, Sango’s wife Elena was a teacher at a primary school, but now in South Africa she is a stall trader. Elena runs a small business on a stall nearby a busy train station. Their four children are all studying. They live in a two-bedroom flat: one room is for the parents, and another room is occupied by the girls, while the boys sleep in the dining room. There are three mobile phones in the family, one for the father, one for the mother and the other is shared by the children but always in the hands of the elder sister.

I met Sango at DHA in a queue outside the building waiting to have his refugees’ asylum permit extended. He agreed to participate in this research then we exchanged mobile phone contact numbers and kept in touch. He was amazed to hear that I was doing my PhD and expressed his desire for education. Sango: “... *back in Congo [DR Congo] I was a civil servant, working as a clerk at ‘Division de l’Economie’ from 08:00 am to 03:00 pm ... after work I was driving a taxi until around midnight... since I arrive here, my desire was to study public administration but I never get that opportunity. Now I am a security working 6 am to 6 pm, I’m tired ... I hope my children will have the opportunity that I have missed ...*”.

It was during an interview with Sango at his home that his wife Elena, who was helping her husband to recall some past experiences and also sharing her own experience decided to participate in the research. Elena: “...*in Congo, as a primary school teacher, I always had a domestic servant and never worry domestic works...but now as I cannot afford one anymore, I have to multitask ... run my small business, at the same times I have to look after the children through a mobile phone because most of the time I’m not at home with them ...*”.

Int: how do you do that? Elena: “*I contact them to find out if they are back home from school...instruct them about household duties...it is not easy... I spend money but it worth it...*”. Sango: “*we bought them that mobile phone because we still have to look after them even if we spend the day far from them...*”.

The narrative presented in this research illustrates the family determination and disposition to fit in and become part of the South African community despite all kind of challenges. Some of the interviews were conducted in the group (both Sango and Elena) while others were separate depending on the availability of each one.

#### 5.3.2.4. Buya, the taxi man

At the time Buya was participating in this research, he had been a taxi man for five years. But before that, he worked as a trolley man at a supermarket, a waitron, and a mechanic assistant in a car workshop. He is a single man and shares a room with a friend. He explains that he is the second boy in a very poor family of five, whose father has died. “...it is difficult for me to save any money while my mother and siblings are in need...every time that I receive a phone call from home it is about ‘oh this one is sick, that one needs school fees’...it gives me too much stress...” (Buya).

Buya’s narrative highlights the role mobile phones play in providing a vital link to separate family and also in retaining customers. Buya’s story also shows the contrasting face of South Africans *vis a vis* urban refugees. By some, he is constantly regarded as an undesirable alien individual with no rights, while by others he is regarded as a courageous person who deserves to be encouraged.

“... since my arrival in South Africa up to now, mobile phone has played a very significant role ... life here in Cape Town is different from home. The town is big and everybody go to work ...mobile phone is important to stay in contact...”. Buya explained that when he left Burundi, mobile phones were not yet popular. People used to walk to one another to visit. But he adds that he thinks things must have changed there as well because “I see most of them are now on Facebook when I just search for the names ....”. Buya continues saying: “...personally, I do not know if someone can survive here without a phone... I know one’s phone can get lost or damaged but one will do the best to get another as soon as possible. Even a R100 phone just to be reachable ... all my friends live around in Cape Town, Joburg, Durban, even those in Burundi ... I have to keep in touch ... with my phone, if I need someone I just contact him ... if I do not have enough airtime to make voice calls I sent SMSs or send a callback, or flash him ... you can only know what is going on around if you communicate with people ... me I always use my phone when looking for information amongst my friends ...”

In urban South Africa, people tend to have a busy life due to work, studies and personal issues. As such, they turn to mobile phones which they use as alternatives to satisfy their needs of staying in touch and be reachable at any time, as they are portable.

#### 5.3.2.5. Shaba, the bouncer and ambulant trader & Nyaba, the hairdresser

Shaba and his wife Nyaba have been married since back in Congo and are parents of six among which four are from two-time twins birth. With such a huge familial responsibility, the couple works very hard to sustain their young family (children aged between and 14 and 6). Shaba explains that from Monday to Friday he runs his small business of selling seasonal items at different flea markets in Cape Town. Also, every weekend Shaba has a night shift work as a bouncer at a night club downtown. Not having a reliable job, insufficient salary and the familial responsibility explain why Shaba has to play more

than one card at a time to make ends meet. His wife, Nyaba, also works as a hairdresser five days per week.

Shaba had already experienced hardship while still in Congo. Prior to his coming to South Africa, Shaba explained his life was not easy: “...*I dropped schools because I married early...*”. Married to Shaba, Nyaba was running a small business of public phones and selling airtime as she commented: “...*my husband opened for me a small public phone...at that time too many people in Congo did not have mobile phones...my business was helping as I was also selling airtime and other phones accessories such as phones charger, phones pouches, earphones, and batteries...*”.

I met with Shaba when he started working as a bouncer at a night club where I was working as a photographer. After work, I and Shaba used to share taxicab fare to drop each one at his door since we were living in the same area. Mobile phones were helping a lot for making necessary arrangements such as locating one another, and finding the availability of our discounted taxi driver.

One day as I was conducting the second interview with Shaba about this research at his house, his wife, Nyaba was listening and agreed to participate. The couple’s narrative presented in this research is a summary from three separate interviews with Nyaba, five with Shaba and two group interviews with the couple. Their narratives illustrate the hardship of urban refugees’ life in South Africa and underline the importance and value of social capital and the role of mobile phones in refugee life.

#### **5.3.2.6. Dezia, the Security guard**

Dezia, his wife, and their two children live in a one-bedroom apartment in the backyard of their landlord in a secured area. The house has been a garage which has been converted into a dwelling place. He works as a security guard at a supermarket. His wife is jobless and stays at home taking care of the children. Dezia left his country, Burundi, in 2006, leaving behind his wife and a child with whom he managed to reunite in 2009. He said that back in Burundi, his life was not easy, as his father who was a high school teacher was struggling to provide for the family and ensuring that all the children could study. His mother was selling bread to help the family with extra revenue and Dezia was joining her in the evening as he was the first born of the family. As Dezia reports: “... *my struggle did not start today ... I can say that I have grown before the age due to the pressure of the responsibility that I was feeling ...*”

After completing his bachelor degree, Dezia decided to join the army as he could not find work. He did not authorise me to report in this thesis the reason why he left the country. He shared however that he left the country through Tanzania and moved south to Zimbabwe until he reached South Africa. The whole journey took him 6 months because he did not have travel documents.

I met Dezia once at the supermarket in my neighbourhood where he was working as security guard. I explained to him about my research and he agreed to participate. We exchanged contact numbers and since then we could have some chat every time I went for shopping. The narrative presented in the following has been constructed from six interviews undertaken over a period of two years and illustrates his use of mobile phones in maintaining his work and relationships with relatives. For Dezia, life in South Africa is far better than in Burundi, despite all the challenges that he and his family face.

#### **5.3.2.7. Netia, the tailor and Husband Rwaki, the handyman**

Rwaki narrates that when he left Rwanda he spent two years in Burundi before moving to South Africa. It is during that time that he met Netia who later became his wife. Rwaki explained that he never planned to come to South Africa but he was influenced by his friends living in South Africa with whom he used to interact on mobile phones. *“...they were calling me almost every day. That time we did not know things like Facebook to share photo and our phones did not have the internet ... they were sending me photos of themselves with the view of beautiful cities...”*. Rwaki stated that he could not return to Rwanda because he perceived his life could be in danger. He got the opportunity to come to South Africa when one of his friends living in South Africa put him in contact with a group of four other persons to travel with.

Netia narrates that, unlike in South Africa where she does not have enough time to even take care of her own children, back in Burundi her home country, she used to enjoy free time with her friends. In her 18s, her then fiancé, Rwaki, bought her a mobile phone and was supplying her with airtime regularly. After her matric, she started university studies but failed in her first year as she explains: *“...my mind was no more on my studies... I was thinking about coming to South Africa and get married. We were communicating with my Rwaki regularly ...but it was expensive... the mobile phone that I was using at that time did not have the internet ... we were using SMSs and voice callings”*.

The narratives presented here illustrate Netia’s emotional struggle due to being far from her loved ones and her strategies of using a mobile phone to maintain her social networks. Now she is a mother of a daughter but she spends most days at a factory missing her daughter whom she only fetches from a crèche after 4 pm. Netia wishes she could go back to Burundi but her husband is against the idea. Most of Rwaki’s narratives are about his daily life in South Africa.

#### **5.3.2.8. Kola, the photographer**

Kola is a photographer well known mostly amongst refugees from Congo. However, back in the Congo, Kola knew nothing about video making. He only got his 3<sup>rd</sup>-year university degree in commerce when he went to Angola due to the war in DRC. For two years he was a street vendor in Luanda before moving to South Africa where he is now married to a South African woman with whom he has three children.

Kola's narrative as presented in this research is a summary from four interviews undertaken in about 18 months. His narratives reveal the employment challenges faced by most urban refugees in getting and retaining employment, the benefits and limitation of mobile phone use in addressing the issues. For example, Kola gave the narrative account of the experience of one of his friends who relocated to Durban, where he went start a business "... he decided to relocate to Durban where he thought his business will improve... but every time he must come back here (Cape Town) to renew his Ngunda [term used by most of refugees from DR Congo to refer to the documents issued to them by the DHA] ... the first time they gave him three months, when he came back they gave one month, then for four successive months he has been receiving a month each time, it even happened that they even gave him one week...".

Kola comments that, unlike his friend, he adopted a different strategy to expand his business by capitalising on mobile phones for advertising. "...I designed business cards that I distribute here and there...I make phones calls to explain to people what I can do at a competitive price...it worked. Especially amongst the refugees because they want affordable everything...".

Such narrative highlights the challenges posed by social structure on individual agency. It also illustrates the experience of a respondent who managed to turn mobile phone use into an opportunity to achieve desired outcomes.

#### **5.3.2.9. Linda and Dina's way of surviving**

Linda (25 years old) and Dina (23 years old) are both sex workers who willingly agreed to participate in this research and share their experience with mobile phone use into their activities. I met these two young females during my weekend job. Linda shared that since she left her country, Burundi, mobile phone is the only means that she uses to communicate with relatives back home. As for Dina, she left Burundi with her parents and siblings due to wars and found refuge in a refugees' camp in Zimbabwe, where she was influenced by a friend to move to South Africa.

"...the three years that I spent in the camp was too much for me... we could hear stories that South Africa is better but my parents wanted to stay there... meanwhile, a Zimbabwean friend coming from South Africa was planning to go back. She was very busy on phone with people in South Africa...I came with her without letting my parents know... I only call my parents after I arrived. Two weeks later I noticed that she was a prostitute and she told me that I will be contributing for rent and food. I could not find a job and I need money to survive and help my family. For a whole month, I tried to resist but I did not find an alternative and...voila, here I am".

The narrative provided by these two females, as summarised in this research, emphasises the ubiquity of mobile phones and the multitasking role that these tools play in today's life. As with many respondents, during the interview with these two females it emerged that, apart from being a

communication tool, mobile phones have replaced many traditional devices such as diaries and phone books, alarm clocks, and cameras. Mobile phones offer the advantages of performing many other functions in respondents' lives.

#### 5.3.2.10. **Binti, the gospel artist musician**

Binti, an artist-musician of gospel songs, is a single mother living with her two boys. Binti has been recommended to me by her friend (Dezia's wife) who gave me her mobile phone contact number. It was when Dezia and I were discussing the economic impact of mobile phones that his wife received an SMS from Binti informing her about her upcoming gospel concert. Later when I called her Binti did not hesitate to participate in the research. Binti's narrative, as summarised in this research, describes her determined efforts to improve her life and regain esteem from the community. It highlights the struggle of single parent refugees in a country where no assistance is provided and the resulting anxiety. It also demonstrates the strategic approach of using mobile phones in empowering oneself and in trying to fill the gap created by being a single parent in a country far from home.

Binti explained that when she was young she started singing in the local choir in the Pentecost church. She evolved and became a famous singer in her local choir, winning many prizes from different gospel choir competitions. After completing her matric she travelled to marry her fiancé, a refugee in South Africa. There Binti joined the choir at a local church, where she became the choir leader. After five years of marriage she separated from her husband:

*"...life became difficult... before I was working only 3 days per week but I started working 6 days per week... no more time to spend with my children or visiting friends...mobile phone became my only link to the world...I come home tired and the children are already asleep. Morning, I leave before they wake up...I was missing my own children. When at work I use to phone them just to know how they are spending the day. Their health and my own start deteriorating [weeping]".* I stopped recording and started comforting her. After a while, she insisted she was fine and willing to continue the interview. She said that her past experiences helped her to make good decisions. With the help of her pastor, she stopped working as a teller and focused on her music career in which her mobile phone helps her a lot for advertising and for being contactable.

Binti narrates that she always wanted to release a music album but it was impossible without money. She tried to get a loan from different companies, but as a refugee she was disqualified. Binti explained that one day as she was chatting with friends on Facebook, an idea struck her *"...what if I use my mobile phone to raise funds by asking donations from the friends?"*. She continued saying *"...I put my mobile phone at work and as you know, I have managed to release my first Album...."*. Binti shared that the fundraising and promotion were facilitated mostly through mobile phones. The strategy that she used

to raise funds was impressive. She explained that she used the little money that she had saved and produced just one video song and posted it on her Facebook page, “...I described my project by providing the titles of songs that I need to produce, and I also insisted that I need donations to make the project possible. My mobile phone helped a lot for I was able to instantly chat with every particular friend I met live on Facebook and on WhatsApp. Since my mobile phone is every time at the reach of my hands I could instantly respond to everyone who likes or comment on my posts or to those who WhatsApp me... For example, when someone responds to my post, I instantly receive a signal and straightaway I engage in chat with the person... I was sending SMSs, and receiving calls and SMSs even from people that I do not know....” She revealed that the strategy resulted in receiving donations from friends and others from Cape Town, Johannesburg, and Durban, from Congo her home country and even overseas. However, she added that she had experienced a problem receiving donations from people outside South Africa because “as a refugee, I cannot receive money at the Western Union or MoneyGram...”. But that issue was partly resolved because one of her South African friends at the church, who is also my biggest sponsor, has helped her receive the money. “... of course, some people were reticent and asking why they should send me money to somebody else name?” The solution to that challenge came from her friend, a refugee who in the past experienced the same challenge. She explained that those who are banking with FNB and wanted to receive money from abroad, need to go to the bank branch and ask for the SWIFT code, and send it, together with the receiver bank details, to the sender.

According to the FNB website ([www.fnb.co.za/travel-products/send-and-receive-money](http://www.fnb.co.za/travel-products/send-and-receive-money)), SWIFT which stands for the Society for Worldwide Interbank Financial Telecommunication is an electronic communication method used by banks all over the world to correspond with each other in a secure and standardised way. SWIFT transfers are secure, standardised, relatively inexpensive and extremely quick. SWIFT does not facilitate funds transfer; rather, it sends payment orders, which must be settled by correspondent accounts that the institutions have with each other. Each financial institution, to exchange banking transactions, must have a banking relationship by either being a bank or affiliate itself with one (or more) so as to enjoy the particular business features. For those banking with FNB in South Africa, SWIFT is used to facilitate all types of international payments into and out of South Africa. Donations, gifts, payments for education, purchases, sending out investment allowance are all possible throughout this system.

#### **5.3.2.11. Kodani, the handyman**

Kodani, married and a father of two, has been living in South Africa since 2007. Kodani describes himself as a “*tout travaux*” since he works as a painter, electrician, plumber and construction worker. According to Kodani, back in Congo he never worked at any of these different jobs, as he was focused

on his medicine studies which he abandoned only during his second year of university: “...it is only when I arrived in this country (South Africa) that I realised that I should drop my dream of becoming a medical doctor...not knowing where to turn, I started enrolling for short courses to learn skills for self-reliance...”.

Int: where did you get the idea and motivation of doing short courses? Kodani: “when I arrived, the guy who welcomed me was doing working as a firefighter at the harbour...he did a formation of six months and was enjoying a good salary...he paid for me a short course of painter...”.

I met with Kodani at the Amis BK monthly meetings. For the purpose of this research, I conducted five interviews with him over 18 months. The narrative presented in the research shows the role that mobile phones play in the experience of urban refugees. It also illustrates the positive approach to life in South Africa that many urban refugees from Congo have when they compare it to their war-ravaged home country. Respondents’ narratives also highlight the experience of discrimination and exclusion that undermine the opportunities to generate capabilities from mobile phone use. For Kodani, life in South Africa presents many opportunities, particularly for those who have acquired knowledge relevant to the South African context. As with other respondents, Kodani’s narrative shows the importance of education in the formation and acquisition of other capital.

#### **5.3.2.12. Gatera, the businessman**

Gatera, a father of two, was a single man in 2005 when he left his country together with his senior brother due to the fear of being forcibly recruited to join a rebellion in the neighbouring country. Gatera explained that it is through mobile phone communication that John, a family relative residing in SA facilitated their journey by providing them with guidance and assistance at every step: “...we left home with a cell phone to keep in touch updating the parent about the journey but especially to keep in touch with John...John was like tracking us all along the journey. As the SIM card could not work out of Rwanda, in Burundi and Tanzania we always manage to find someone to whom we could give some money for us to use his cell phone to contact home and John. In Malawi, we bought a new SIM Card for we stayed a little bit longer...we spent a lot in mobile communication because at that time these social media did not exist yet...we only used SMSs and voice calls...”.

Gatera explained that when, in Malawi, they ran out of money John briefed them to find a Malawian citizen to whom he sent them money via the Western Union. In South Africa, John helped Gatera and his senior brother to find jobs in a shop. When participating in this research, Gatera owned a recording studio and taxi meter business. Gatera uses his mobile phone mainly for business and to keep in touch with friends and his wife.

### 5.3.2.13. Tezo, the delivery man

After obtaining a bachelor degree in informatics and business management from Kigali Independent University, in Rwanda, Tezo worked as treasurer of a trading company for two years until his journey to South Africa. I have interviewed Tezo five times over a two-year period. During this period, Tezo was working as a security guard manager and had enrolled at a college where he was pursuing his studies. Since his arrival in SA in 2005, Tezo had done different kinds of work and lived in different cities around SA, and in all these, the use of mobile phones had played a major role as he explains:

*“...cell phone had been a turning point in my life here in SA... in Joburg where I lived for two years, I did not have a stable job ... my cell phone was everything. I was an assistant to any person who needs a helping hand. ... one could call and offer me, for example, a one-week job, or a two ways job, or a one-day job, or even a job for few hours... sometimes I worked in construction, as a trader, security guard, or handyman ....I could also spend days without a job offer. But I never stop calling friends to ask for job opportunities. One day a friend who moved to Durban called me to Durban where he found me a kind of stable delivery job. I organised myself and got married .... three years later a friend living in Cape Town got me this job [manager of fast food restaurant] ... now I manage to work and study.... but if now my phone ring and it is a better opportunity, you know yourself [ laughing] ...”*

His narrative emphasises the enormous amount of preparative work, struggle, strategies and the length of time it can take for urban refugees to even start to think about resuming studies in the new country. This is because most of the time, refugees arrive in the new country without any material resource. In addition, as Cejas (2007) mentioned, in South Africa refugees do not receive any kind of institutional assistance or financial support from the government throughout their stay in South Africa. As with many respondents, Tezo’s narratives illustrate how mobile phones afford users with a point of contact, which is important to be quickly reachable.

### 5.3.2.14. Rabina the day labourer

Rabina is a widow, a mother of four whose younger son is more than twenty years old. With her husband and children, Rabina left her country in 2004 when a civil war erupted and they took refuge in Tanzania, where they stayed in a refugee camp for six years. With her family, Rabina moved to South Africa in 2000 where her husband passed away three years later. Rabina stated that she had never owned a mobile phone until she arrived in South Africa. *“...in the refugee camp in Tanzania, there were public phones. Some refugees had mobile phones but us we did not have. One of my friends has a mobile phone and it is her contact number that I was giving to people as my point of contact. To make calls, I was using the public phone but also I used to borrow my friend’s mobile phone and buy my own airtime to make calls and SMSs. When someone calls me she used to come running to give me the phone but if she is far she*

*tells the person to call later. When she comes to me and tell me that someone wanted to talk to me, I could flash the phone number for the person to call back. The problem was that I was not the only one relying on that friend's mobile phone...that phone was always busy and people to whom I gave that phone number to contact me used to complain about going into voice mails...."* Rabina contrasted her experience of that time to her current experience, when everyone has his own mobile phone. *"...now in my house, everyone has his own mobile phone with the internet..."*.

Rabina is a nurse by profession but in South Africa she does day to day labour, occasionally working as a caregiver for seniors, a maid, or stall trader. Her narrative highlights the role of mobile phone use in providing people with a way to stay informed about the relatives, and also the expectation that mobile phones can afford opportunities to users.

#### **5.3.2.15. Fomutu, the pastor**

Fomutu, a father of five, is an artisan and associate pastor. He moved to South Africa alone but four years later he was joined by his family. He stated that mobile phones helped him a lot with emotional and moral support when separated from his family. Fomutu added that during his family journey to South Africa, a mobile phone helped him to monitor them all the way. *"...it was the first time my wife travel. She was afraid but I explained to her that with mobile phone it will be easy because I will be with them every step. I could go waiting for them halfway but as a refugee, you know yourself [referring to the fact that most of the refugees in South Africa cannot leave the country because of the issue of travel documents]. With God's help, they arrived safely. But you see how mobile phone helped a lot..."*. Also, Fomutu shared that in his artisan job, the mobile phone is like his market. He does not have a shop but his customers order by phone. Fomutu also explained that his mobile phone facilitates coordinating his church activities.

#### **5.3.2.16. Lolo the waitress**

Lolo is a young female living with her parents, with whom she came to South Africa. Lolo arrived in South Africa with a Matric from her country where the official language is French. She enrolled in English classes for two years before going to college. On weekends she works as a waitress to contribute to her school fees. Lolo explained that she has been using mobile phones for over 10 years. *"...back in Congo, I was using mobile phone mainly for keeping in touch with my friends and my family members...I still use mobile phone for the same purpose but now I use it also for school and work purposes..."*. Respondent Lolo's narratives illustrate how an individual's needs and opportunities shift at different stages of life.

### 5.3.2.17. Mika the electrician

Mika is an electrician, a job that he has learned from a technical college in South Africa. Mika and his siblings left Congo and went to a refugee camp in Uganda where he only stayed for few months before moving to South Africa. As Mika explained, “...*I realised that it is very risky to stay in the refugee camp relying on UN aid alone...I was making phones calls asking for help from my friends....my former classmate who came to South Africa sent me money to join him...*”. Arriving in South Africa, Mika, facilitated by mobile phones, kept contact with his parents and siblings who he was supporting financially until the latter were resettled in the USA.

Mika is also the secretary of Amis BK which is an organisation regrouping refugees from East Congo for mutual assistance. His job description includes sending SMSs to all Amis BK members, informing them of the day, place, time and the subject of the upcoming monthly meeting. I, the researcher, am a member of Amis BK and I always receive SMSs from Mika relating to the activities of the group. The narrative relating to Mika as presented in this research illustrates his experience with mobile phone use in daily life with a particular regard to his work, his dispersed family and his role as a secretary of Amis BK.

### 5.3.2.18. Nastia the stall trader

Nastia left her home country because of ethnic violence and came to South Africa with her seven-year-old daughter, leaving her husband with their ten-year-old son. Nastia is working as a stall trader in the streets of Cape Town but she holds an Honours degree in Business and Management from a University in her home country. Nastia explained that using a mobile phone helps her in every domain of her life including “...parenting, socialising, running my small business, facing out my daily challenges, and of course my family in Burundi...”. As with many respondents, the narratives by respondent Nastia illustrate the several opportunities enabled by mobile phone usage, and the challenges experienced by respondents to use mobile phones to achieve some of the desired outcomes. As with Danielson (2013) and Leung (2011) the experiences of many of the respondents, including Nastia, show that mobile phone use has made possible safer transfers of information between dispersed family, including refugees.

## 5.4. Summary of the chapter

It is evident that for refugees in South Africa, settling in urban areas can help them do quite well, as they can use their skills, education and expertise to work and pursue opportunities that economic resources provide and get money to cover their needs (Campbell 2006; Kobia & Cranfield, 2009). However, the socio-economic environment in South Africa, characterised by high unemployment, economic inequality, and poor service delivery has strained relations between host populations and

refugees. Gordon (2016b) urges that anti-immigrant sentiment is not only limited to manifestations of violent acts like xenophobic attacks but goes further beyond that.

The respondents' autobiographies reveal not only their subjective perspective but also offer a temporal dimension to understanding identity formation and practices. The narratives reveal that respondents have varied backgrounds, but with some similarities. For example, most of the respondents decided to leave their home countries because life conditions had deteriorated to the extent that it became unbearable for them to remain there. On their arrival in South Africa, most of the respondents experienced language barriers which affected their formation of capital, mostly during the earlier stages. As Bourdieu (1990) puts it, language structures our understanding of the word and that it is the medium by which these understanding is communicated. Coming from a region where English is not an official language, none of the respondents arrived with proficient English skills. All the respondents noted that on their arrival they had little or no English language skills and that this remained an ongoing source of concern for many.

The information about respondents' background as presented in this section shows that, at the time of their flights, most of the respondents had finished their secondary education or were undergoing it. Others were engaged in tertiary education or had obtained their degrees, while some had started working already. However, most of the respondents still wished to resume their studies despite the time spent without studying. For most of them, leaving the home country coincided with the discontinuity of scholarly education, and forced change in working careers. As such, the impression gained from the respondents' narrative accounts was that for most of them, their employment activities in the host country did not reflect their respective education levels and/or former professional experiences. However, for a few of them there was continuity of education and working careers.

## **6. DATA ANALYSIS**

### **6.1. Introduction**

In this chapter, critical ethnography methods explained in Chapter Four are used to analyse empirical data through the lens of the theoretical framework presented in Chapter Three. This chapter is divided into two main sections which together help to analyse the collected data.

The analysis commences with the examination of the factors that shape the use of mobile phones by urban refugees in South Africa. In so doing, this section addresses the first aim of the research presented in this thesis by exploring the ways in which conversion factors enable or restrict the use of mobile phones for the empowerment of urban refugees in South Africa.

The subsequent section is concerned with the analysis of capabilities associated with mobile phone use by urban refugees in South Africa. In this section, the second aim of the research presented in this thesis is addressed, and shifts towards the unique contribution of the use of mobile phones by respondents to make strategic life choices in a context where they were previously denied them.

In the presentation of evidence of respondents' narratives, care has been taken to include key incidents and insights from data which are believed to be representative of most respondents' experiences, but also of those who differed in significant ways. The presentation of respondents is selective, only providing an illustrative example so as to present more in-depth accounts. It is important to remind readers that findings presented in this research should not be seen as exhaustively characterising how urban refugees in South Africa use mobile phones. The presented findings constitute the experiences that I have been told/identified/observed with the exposure I had to the research respondents prior and during the course of this research, and using particular data collection tools as explained in Chapter Four. For the purpose of this research, what is referred to as mobile phones include traditional phones and smartphones so as to reflect the current reality of the disparity of mobile phone devices owned by the respondents.

### **6.2. The factors that enable or hinder the use of mobile phones to enable capabilities for urban refugees in South Africa**

The findings of this research show that mobile phones are commonly used by urban refugees in South Africa. This section presents an examination of the factors or conditions that shape the use of mobile phones by urban refugees in South Africa in some meaningful ways, either by enabling them to generate, or hindering them from generating, capabilities for their empowerment. The analysis

presented in this section addresses the first aim of the research presented in this thesis by exploring the ways in which conversion factors enable or hinder the use of mobile phones for the empowerment of urban refugees in South Africa. Based on the analysis of the collected data, the factors affecting the use of mobile phones by urban refugees in South Africa were grouped into three categories, namely the affordances of mobile phones, the personal factors, and the socio-environmental factors (see Table 6). These three categories are considered to represent the conversion factors which structure the use of mobile phones by urban refugees as they interact within the social field, South Africa.

Even though presented separately, these conversion factors that shape the use of mobile phones are overlapping to some extent. It was impossible to explain one concept without mentioning the others. That overlapping was not surprising since the discussion of the theoretical foundation of this thesis shows that conversion factors are not to be understood in isolation but as interdependent.

The following sub-section commences with the analysis of the affordances of mobile phones. Then follows the analysis of the dispositional or personal factors, and the analysis of the situational or socio-environmental factors.

### **6.2.1. The Affordances of Mobile phones**

The data analysis of this research concurs with the literature showing that while the use of mobile phones impacts many aspects of the users' daily activities, their use is also influenced by different factors (Lin & Lu, 2015). This section presents the affordances of mobile phones that influence their use by urban refugees in South Africa. Affordance refers to "the perceived and actual properties of the *mobile phones*, primarily those fundamental properties that determine just how *mobile phones* could possibly be used" (Norman, 1988, p. 9) (italic mine). The affordances of mobile phones can be understood as what Orlikowski (2000) refers to as the mobile phone infrastructure, which includes the services provided, the available networks, the features and functionality of mobile phone devices. While engaging in a discussion about the reasons for using mobile phones and the services or activities performed with mobile phones, the themes that emerged from the data consisted of the ubiquity and usefulness of mobile phone, and the usability of mobile phones.

#### **6.2.1.1. Ubiquity and usefulness of Mobile phones**

At the time when interviews were conducted, fifteen respondents reported that the devices they were using were second-hand devices, bought from previous users. All the respondents, except three (Nyaba, Elena, and Dezia) possessed either smartphones (fourteen respondents) or feature mobile phones (five respondents), which are customised phones that provide Internet services such as Web browsing, instant messaging capabilities, and e-mail.

It was evident for all the respondents that a mobile phone is a must-have device because of its ubiquity. Many of the respondents mentioned that they believe it is difficult to separate themselves from their devices because of personal needs. For all the respondents, mobile phones were viewed as a necessity for communication reasons. The necessity of mobile phones for work was also reported by some respondents. The majority stated instances in which they had trouble achieving something because either they did not have their mobile phones at hand or did not get an immediate reply from the person contacted. “...*I always answer calls because the person who calls must have a good reason for calling...you never know; it can be a blessing like a job opportunity...also not answering calls is a sign of irresponsibility...*” (Tezo).

There was evidence of technological awareness among respondents whose most popular activities on mobile phones included making and receiving calls, sending and receiving text messages (SMSs) and photo messages, sending and receiving emails, accessing social media sites such as Facebook, WhatsApp, and imo, uploading and sharing photos and videos online. They also used their mobile phones to take photos and videos, listen to stored music, watch short videos and play games that were loaded on the mobile phone, store contact information, and get information (news, entertainment) from the Internet. Other reported activities included the use of maps or satellite navigation to locate places and destinations, and online banking. Lolo stated: “...*the advantage is that using a mobile phone is simple. Anyone can use it...one can easily and quickly find what he wants in a mobile phone...it has functions that allow one to do many things...a part of communication and other things, I use my mobile phone for entertainment when I am bored*”. All the respondents showed their preference for voice call conversation over all other forms of mobile phone communication.

Mobile phone usability and connectivity which allows interaction were also mentioned amongst the reasons for its use. Respondents highlighted their need and desire for instant communication and interaction and argued that in today’s world it is the mobile phone that offers the best opportunity to achieve such purposes. Elena shared: “...*people move around with their mobile phone on them. Whenever you need an information from someone just make a call and you will get answered immediately...*”. Seleo added “...*imagine what could happen during our journey to this country if we did not have instant communication...a letter or email to Paci [the person who have been guiding them throughout their journey] could never save us at the border...*”.

Mobile phone communications included: interaction with family and friends regarding social and financial issues; interaction for business or work purposes; interaction for education, divertissement or church purposes, interactions for safety and advocacy purposes. The majority of respondents indicated that their use of mobile phones was mostly dominated by social interactions with family and relatives who also are mostly fellow refugees living in South Africa, but also the family members and friends back in their home country.

### 6.2.1.2. Usability of mobile phones

In relation to mobile phones, usability can be identified to consist of effectiveness, efficiency, and user satisfaction of the use of mobile phones (Harrison, Flood & Duce, 2013). In this research, usability is viewed as encompassing the technological features or the characteristics of the mobile phone in terms of its strengths and limitations. It emerged that certain features of mobile phones present particular opportunities to the users such as the applications, the reliable connectivity, and the portability of mobile phones. However, other mobile phone features such as short sessions, and small display screen were seen as inherent constraints. The data showed that overall the opportunities and constraints inherent in mobile phones affected respondents' satisfaction with their devices, but their personal needs left them with no choice other than to use their mobile phones.

#### 6.2.1.2.1. Benefits or Advantages of mobile phones

All the respondents confirmed that they use their mobile phones on a daily basis. For many respondents, a mobile phone is a ubiquitous tool that they do not detach from them and check at all times and do not feel comfortable without it. Some respondents explained that the mobile phone is the first thing they remember when going out. Respondents commonly mentioned that what they like the most about their mobile phone was efficiency. Mobile phones offer convenience due to the faster and ease way of contact, as users are able to keep in touch with others irrespective of time and location. Respondent Gatera explained: *"...what I like the most about mobile phone is that I can talk to others at any time. It fits well in my pocket so I can go with it anywhere...I access the internet and read emails and chat with others whenever I like. I can also take pictures, videos and entertain myself when I wish..."*

Other reported benefits associated with the use of the mobile phone relates to its features, the possibilities that it offers. The argument was that mobile phones have many features that allow users to achieve goals with effectiveness. Data shows that the characteristics of mobile phones, including connectivity and mobility enabled respondents to perform multiple functions such as taking and sending pictures to more people at once, videos and voice recording; listening to the radio and recorded music; watching videos, downloading apps and playing games; checking the maps for location or getting directions; checking the weather, time, and calendar; using the built-in calculator; keeping track of appointments and setting reminders; taking notes; making task or to-do lists; receiving notifications and reading the bible. Therefore, mobile phones provide respondents with convenient and faster ways of sending and accessing information, and facilitating communication for business, work, studies, and leisure. Respondents mentioned also that mobile phones enable them to manage time. They also keep their mobile phones as a lifeline to help in times of special need, as stated Binti: *"... mobile phone is so important for me to the point that even when I'm broke I must do my best to get some airtime to [pause]*

*you never know...emergency can happen...". An illustration of the benefits of mobile phone use is presented through the following group interview with respondents Linda and Dina:*

Linda: *"... I also use my phones as a reminder for my rendezvous. I just set up an alarm clock so that I cannot forget..."*.

Dina: *"I always keep the contact details of my customers.... when I need money, I take my mobile phone and call...sometimes I make random calls...I'm sure I cannot contact five persons without having at least one who will come to me even when he did not plan so..."*.

Linda: *"...I use my mobile phone to keep in contact with my friends...I have saved to contact details of some taxi men because I always need them..."*.

Int: what if your phone is lost?

Dina: *"...I always lose my phones. But without a mobile phone, this job can be very difficult. Due to the experience of losing my phones most of the times, I have decided to always keep the important contact number in a small book..."*

Linda: *"...Yea, having a mobile phone is important in our job, not only for being readily contactable but also for security reasons"*.

Int: how is a mobile phone important for security reasons?

Linda: *"in our job, we must memorise the contact numbers of close friends and also the police 10111. We have been told that before going out with someone you do not trust, you must call at least three of your friends and ask them to be checking out with you like every 30 minutes. If you do not respond after 3 calls, they must do something...like contacting the police"*.

Dina: *"we also contact the police if someone wants to abuse us or do not want to pay..."*.

Int: do the police always respond to your calls?

Dina: *"yes they always respond but most of the time they arrive late when you do not need them anymore... but it is worth it because when a man sees you calling the police, he runs and leave you or pay you your money..."*.

Linda: *"our job is not safe but having a mobile phone make you feel safe somehow"*.

Dina: *"for me, it's important to have a mobile phone with me. When I do not have my mobile phone, I feel like I'm incomplete... one weekend my phone was damaged and I could not get it fixed until the next Tuesday. I'm telling you, I was feeling like held in the quarantine..."*

The respondents' narratives suggest that mobile phones have become ubiquitous to modern life. The findings show that depending on the technological features of a mobile phone, the user can perform the enabled activities with accuracy and completeness. These findings concur with the literature showing that mobile phones could be used for efficiency, for connectivity, and for play (Hoehle & Venkatesh, 2015). As with Smith et al. (2011), the findings suggest that mobile phone use can play an important role in empowering users to gain economic and social participation in their social milieu.

#### 6.2.1.2.2. The Disadvantages of Mobile Phones

While respondents were speaking of the advantages they enjoy using mobile phones they were also mentioning some drawbacks related to their use. Amongst other concerns regarding the use of mobile phones that were mentioned by the respondents were the costs associated with the use of mobile phones, such as the cost of purchasing the device, airtime cost, Internet bandwidth cost, repair cost, loss of handset. Gatera lamented: “...for course I spend money on mobile phone but when compared to the benefit, I think it worth to have one”.

Most of the respondents were very sensitive to the expenses associated with the use of mobile phones and mentioned that they always try to carefully manage costs of using mobile phones. As such, they adopted different strategies such as minimising voice calls and also keeping outgoing calls as short as possible. Phone messaging, call back and flashing (generating missed calls) are used to minimise the costs but mostly they prefer voice calls as revealed in the following excerpts:

Shaba: “In South Africa, the cost of mobile phone communication is too expensive compared to Congo and worse compare to western countries...I use voice calls when I have to do so but I must make sure not to talk for long. Otherwise, I use SMS...I also send call back message depending on whom I want to contact...”

Respondent Nastia shared that for her, voice calling remains the best because it gives the impression “like you are actually communicating face to face”. She added that the problem with voice calling is that it is “very expensive, especially when calling outside of the country or if your correspondent is on a different network”. She concluded that she does not have the choice but to use SMSs and social media chats to save the communication cost.

Respondents also use flashing as a mean of communicating free of charge. Flashing is used mostly amongst close relatives as explains Kodani: “I do not have to make voice calls all the time. To save to cost I also use call back message and flashing. For example, I can call my wife to tell her that I am on my way. When I arrive I only need to flash her as to tell her to come open I am at the door”.

All respondents mentioned the use of flashing on mobile phones when trying to get a return call, or to deliver a prearranged message, or as a sign of greeting relatives. The findings show a high level of consciousness about the use of airtime but also the use of mobile phone data. Respondents describe how carefully they try to limit their spending on airtime and data. However, most respondents were not able to estimate their actual expenditure on airtime and data. Only a few were able to keep track of their average spending. The findings clearly show that the affordability of use in terms of airtime and data is still compromising the ability and quality of mobile phone communication. The cost of mobile phone communication in terms of airtime (high rate charge per minute of communication) and data usage

becomes even more of a limiting factor in international communication between South Africa and the rest of the continent.

The excerpt by respondent Kodani illustrates how using voice calls or SMSs to connect with people in DR Congo his home country is still relatively expensive, while the alternatives which are Facebook, WhatsApp or imo are believed to be affordable, but are not as convenient as the first option (voice calls or SMSs). Kodani explained that he mostly uses SMS services even though it is not as efficient as voice calls. He argues that SMS is cheaper and *“any mobile phone user gets be reached through SMS anytime...SMS is not like WhatsApp which I can say it is free when using WiFi or when cellular data are activated but not everyone is reachable through it...”*. Kadani argues that some people do not have WhatsApp on their mobile phones and even those who do have it may have deactivated their cellular data to avoid spending. *“...and again, as you know, calling home [DR Congo] is very expensive compared to other countries. I do not know why for example the USA is far from Cape Town compare to DRC but a phone call to the USA cost me less than a Rand per minute while it cost more than R5 calling to DRC. That is why I have decided to only use SMS when communicating with people back home. I only call if it really worth it. Otherwise, I use WhatsApp or Facebook to communicate with people back home when we unexpectedly meet online...”*

Respondents shared that they usually buy a minimum amount of airtime or data that can be used fully within the airtime/data expiry window. According to the Vodacom SA spokesman, Mr Richard Boorman (iTWeb, Feb 21, 2014), prepaid minutes and data are redeemed as soon as they are loaded on to phones, and are valid until to the end of the following month.

Concerning data usage plans, most of the respondents showed their preference for BIS (BlackBerry Internet Service) which guaranteed unlimited access to the internet for a whole month. Also, the sharing of data for the internet, as explained Nyaba, appears as an alternative way of saving, especially amongst those living together such as couples:

*“My phone does not have the internet and even if it could, we could not be buying internet data for both my phone and my husband own. Personally, I do not use the internet that much and the unused data expire after a month. What a waste! If I need to access the internet I use my husband’s phone, easy!”*.

Further, apart from the cost associated with the use of mobile phones, other limitations mentioned concern the small screen size and the keypad size of mobile phones. Even though it is their small size that makes mobile phones so portable and convenient, respondent Elena commented that accessing the Internet on a laptop or desktop computer is still more convenient than on mobile phones. Respondent Rabina complained that mobile phone devices contain very limited screen size, limiting the amount of content that can be displayed. Also, data entry or input methods available for mobile phone devices are

limited and/or different from those for laptop and desktop computers, and so a certain level of proficiency is required. Respondent Kola comments: “...*I do not enjoy that much accessing internet on a mobile phone because I struggle to see and perform all the options like on a laptop...*”

Further concerns regarding the use of mobile phones that were mentioned by the respondents related to usability challenges. These included the limited processing capability such as the downloading speed, and limited power affecting the type of application suitable for mobile phones. Also, in comparison to laptop/desktop computers, mobile phones display lower quality images resulting from reduced image resolution. And again, the performance of the mobile phone can sometimes be affected by slow and variable connectivity, as the cellular networks coverage is not equally good or universal, especially when the user is changing locations. Furthermore, poor reception, poor battery life, and the risk of losing the device were among things respondents listed against mobile phones.

Rwaki shared that he used to rely too much on his mobile phone. All the phone contact numbers and events and appointment schedule were saved in the phone and he never bothered to save them somewhere else. But everything changed since the day he missed the job opportunity, because “*my battery ran out and I only realised it when was outside the building trying to call them to give me the door number... I was completely down... there is nothing that I could do because I did not have any number memorised*”.

Rwaki’s experience was echoed by many other respondents who commented that they keep almost all information in their mobile phones. They admitted that it causes much trouble when a mobile phone was lost, forgotten or the battery ran out and the owner did not have a backup like an agenda for important contacts and information. Kola: “... *if your battery ran out or got stolen. There nothing you can do until you recharge or get another phone and start afresh*”. The majority of respondents admitted that they do not keep information anywhere else but in the mobile phone and try to be careful not to have battery issues, lose or forget their mobile phones. Four respondents mentioned that they have memorised what they consider to be the most important contact numbers. Only a few respondents shared that they keep important information such as phone numbers in an agenda or piece of paper. Respondent Mika mentioned that he kept a mobile phone SIM Card safely in his wallet. “*the SIM Card is no longer activated on network but I use it as my repertoire and always update it with new contact numbers*”.

On his side, respondent Kowe commented that, because he is aware that mobile phones are always targeted by thieves and therefore can be lost at any time, he has an old damaged phone kept at his house in which all the mobile phone contacts are saved as a backup.

Further disadvantages of mobile phone use that the respondents mentioned include the time wasting and distraction due to the devotion to the mobile phone, and also the annoyance because of being

constantly reachable. Respondent Lolo shared that it sometimes happens to her that when she is busy doing something like an assignment or in the middle of a conversation, the phone rings. *“attend to the phone or not, I’m already distracted, the concentration is gone and maybe it makes me forgot what I was about to do”*.

Respondent Linda admitted that she spends too much time on a mobile phone. She added that because of being obsessed with her smartphone she even sleeps with it next to her bed so that she would not miss anything. Linda recognised that it is a bad habit but never succeeded in dissociating herself from it. Similarly, respondent Tezo lamented that, *“what I hate the most from mobile phone is that anyone with you contact number can actually contact you...yes you may ignore but for how long will you give excuses saying things like I missed your calls, I did not see your SMS, and so forth?... you do not have excuses, he saw you live online, he heard the call going through when calling you...”*

Rabina reported that she believes people have gone too far being extremely attached to their mobile phones: *“because of being too much connected on social media on mobile phone nowadays people do not socialise anymore...just seat in a taxi or a train for about an hour you will see how everyone is busy on his phone...none is talking to the fellow passengers...”*. Similarly, Rwaki complains: *“...I do not like when I am busy talking to somebody and notice the person busy checking on cell phone...Netia [his wife] has that bad habit. I always advised you [talking to his wife Netia] to stop checking on your phone when you are busy talking to people, even the children...”*.

Netia admitted that she has gone too far, being extremely attached to mobile phones: *“...the problem is that I always feel like checking my chats every minute...even when talking to somebody...and the night when sleeping...”*.

These findings show that constant connectivity enabled by mobile phones makes it somewhat difficult for respondents to dissociate themselves from business or work activities, and give relatives their uninterrupted attention. These findings constitute evidence that somehow mobile phones have broken far apart those who are close but brought close those who are far apart. Respondents’ narratives show instances of mobile phone addiction, especially to the social media. Mostly regarded as a time saver, these findings show instances when mobile phones become time wasters because of users being devoted to devices. It is a sort of mental temptation, making it somewhat harder to focus on a single task without being distracted by the mobile phone. It is evident that people have become obsessed with mobile phone capabilities such as the social media’s instant interactions and information. Most users spend a considerable amount of time on mobile phones, responding to friends and constantly checking for new updates. These findings concur with those of Hall and Pennington (2015), who showed that greater connectivity provided by mobile phones comes with the possibility of dependency and anxiety.

## **6.2.2. The Personal Factors that shape the use of Mobile phones by Urban Refugees in South Africa.**

In this research, personal factors were also found among the factors which shape urban refugees' use of mobile phones. Here personal factors are regarded as the individual characteristics involving all relevant attributes of the individual, as well as prior experiences relevant to the subject matter. Using Bourdieu's and Sen's theoretical language as given in the theoretical framework in Chapter Three, the personal factors make up the habitus and personal factors such as personal history and disposition, mental and physical conditions, literacy, age, gender, metabolism, skills, but also the circumstances and life course so far.

Both male and female urban refugees were active users of mobile phones and there were no issues or difference in mobile phone use that could be attributed to gender. Also, this research did not find any particular use of mobile phones that could be attributed to the respondents' age difference. The habitus of respondents, however, appeared to be crucial for urban refugees' experience of mobile phone use.

Habitus is developed through individuals' embodied social backgrounds, professions, experiences, personal circumstances and access to capital (Bourdieu, 1996; Kvasny & Truex, 2000). In the empirical situation, these corresponded to the research respondents' internal attributions which were recognised through their attitudes, feelings, aspirations, expectations, sensibility, dispositions about mobile phone use, familiarity, exposure, previous experience with and willingness to use mobile phones (see Table 4). Based on the thematic analysis, the themes that were grouped under the category 'personal factors' included the necessity of a mobile phone and awareness of its features, the availability of or lack of financial resources, the frustration of being excluded, and the lack of confidence in the English language (see Table 6).

### ***6.2.2.1. The necessity of a Mobile Phone and awareness of its features.***

In many ways, mobile phones have become a near-ubiquitous tool for information seeking and communication. Research in mobile phone use has demonstrated the importance of user's goals (Rogers, Sharp & Preece, 2011). All respondents reported that they needed their mobile phones. Even though many of the respondents could not give a specific reason for needing their mobile phones, it emerged from their narratives that mobile phone use has become a necessity in their daily life routines, because of the phone's values and properties which can satisfy their personal needs.

Respondent's personal needs that motivated the use of a mobile phone included the needs of social interaction, needs of identification or recognition, needs of information and entertainment, safety or security related needs, and job-related needs. Hence, respondents' appreciation of mobile phones' utility

and usefulness to satisfy or fulfil the personal needs led them to use the device. Some examples of personal needs that led to the use of mobile phones were evidenced in respondents' comments such as:

*"...I must have my mobile phone with me anytime because things can happen...I may need someone urgently or they need me. No one knows what will be the next need which will require mobile phone to be used..."* (Sango), *"...I always need to be able to communicate with others at any time anywhere ... that is what mobile phone does..."* (Rabina), *"...my phone is important for it enables me to be connected to the world ..."* (Binti), *"...as human, we need to be able to reach out to one another whenever we feel that desire. cell phone makes it possible ..."* (Fomutu), *"...I need mobile phone to communicate with my husband, my children, and my workmates, ..."* (Nastia).

These comments of respondents using mobile phones for many purposes show that mobile phones are indispensable. As with Aricat (2015), the findings reflect that respondents' increased desire for satisfying their own needs had influenced the use of mobile phones. Respondents' familiarity and personal experiences of satisfaction with mobile phone use appear to have an influence on their motivation to own and use a mobile phone, but also led to a dependency on it. At certain points, respondents showed an impression that one cannot cope without having a mobile phone. For example, respondent Netia comments that she always wants and enjoys having a mobile phone, for it procures her direct access to people she needs to interact with. Similarly, respondent Mika stated that he needs a mobile phone because it is enjoyable and provides to him *"a feeling of freedom to do things anytime...communicate, access internet, information, and more"*.

It emerged that at certain instances respondents perceived a certain level of comfort, pleasure, and satisfaction through the use of mobile phones. Respondents' familiarity and personal experience with mobile phones appear to have resulted in positive attitudes towards their use. Respondents perceive and expect that mobile phones can afford them many outcomes or possibilities for action. They discuss the ease with which they incorporate mobile phone use into their everyday lives for different purposes such as service/product search online and price comparison.

*"...in my business, a best quality smartphone is very important...for example, if a customer calls me, I just need to know the exact address then I check the map on my phone to find my way. When buying second-hand stuff, I first check the prices on websites like OLX or Gumtree to decide how much to pay...also, sometimes customers ask me to send them pictures and descriptions of my articles so that they can make right decision..."* (Kowe)

*"...there are always new things doable with mobile phone. Things like to use mobile phone to transfer airtime to a friend or to get airtime advance were not possible before...I do not know everything one can do but I learn...they advertise on TV, on the Internet, with SMSs..."* (Kodani).

*“...I’m comfortable with my mobile phone ... I’m used to it...I access the internet easily and do whatever I want ... read the news, find information about shops... it is just like a computer...”* (Gatera)

As in many of the narratives, it emerges that respondents’ perceptions that mobile phones can enable many possibilities result from their awareness of features of their devices. The data showed that respondents have the knowledge and skills necessary to use mobile phones and are aware of most of their basic/common uses. The findings show that choices of behaviour are dependent also on the awareness of the range of options that are possible – capabilities. Therefore, capabilities become embodied as a set of dispositions – habitus. As such, awareness becomes an important factor which affects the use of mobile phones for empowerment.

Some of the respondents, however, appear to be lacking the knowledge and skills necessary to efficiently use features of a mobile phone, especially the Internet. For example, respondent Seleo was not aware that it is possible to access Google maps on his ‘iPhone 4S’ smartphone. Similarly, respondent Netia was not aware that she could check her bank account balance, or purchase an Internet data bundle on her Samsung Galaxy S4 or access online news.

The findings show that respondents with rudimentary skills of mobile phones usage experience discomfort and distrust with advanced phones. Both respondents Seleo and Netia were unaware of some of the potential of their mobile phones, which inhibited the efficient use of the devices. Until I showed them how to use their mobile phone for their related needs, Seleo used to spend his airtime calling for direction. Netia used to spend time walking to the nearest ATM to check her account balance, to the store to buy data bundles, and struggled to get news from her home country. These findings are supported by literature such as Newman et al. (2016) and others who cited lack of skills to use and/or unawareness of potential resources among the barriers to effectively use and benefit from ICTs.

#### **6.2.2.2. Affordability in terms of income**

It has been found that mobile phone usage is significantly constrained by a lack of affordability (Duncan, 2013). The data suggest that the availability of, or lack of financial means, shapes the use of mobile phones by urban refugees in South Africa. Money is needed for purchasing and also being able to use a mobile phone on a regular basis.

The affordability and availability of second-hand devices were mentioned, for example: *“buying a used smartphone hand to hand is affordable...than buying a brand new from the stores”* as Tezo argued, before emphasising that *“you can get a second-hand phone anytime. All you need is to be careful enough not buying a piece of scrap... there is no guarantee afterwards”*.

Nyaba, one of the three respondents whose mobile phones were neither smartphones nor feature phones said that she always uses her husband's smartphone when she needs to browse the Internet. On their side, Dezia and Elena showed interest in having smartphones, but do not have enough money to purchase one. Also, Elena thinks that smartphone means “*spending more money on things like data and applications...*”. As with Nyaba, both Dezia and Elena explained that most of the time when they need to use the internet they walk to the internet cafés but occasionally they use their friends' mobile phones. They all noted that when borrowing mobile phones from friends to access the internet, the owners sometimes ask for money to cover the cost of internet data.

*“...occasionally I use my friend's phone to access Facebook and read my emails...I give him some money for the data that I use. But normally when I need to use the internet, especially to read the news I go to the cybercafé... here the news channel does not show what is happening in Congo ...one needs to go online to read for himself ...sometime I need to view videos...I cannot use somebody else's phone for that...unless the video is downloaded to be watched offline”* (Dezia).

The findings show that affordability in terms of cost of handsets, and prices of services affect refugees' use of mobile phones. The prices of a mobile phone handset vary depending on the nature of its technical features, applications and services offered, as respondent Kola argued:

*“...we all know that mobile phones differ, and the most expensive is the best. I would like to have one of those high-quality phones ... but I'm ok with this one [showing his affordable Huawei smartphone]. It is cheap but I still can do everything like access internet, take pictures and record video...”*

In a similar way, respondent Lolo comments: *“...with my mobile phone I can do most of the things a normal phone can do like to communicate, take pictures and access internet. But still, it is not like what someone with those expensive smartphones can do. They take quality pictures and videos. With such smartphones, you do not need a cameraman to your event. With good music sound like a real radio, and real games. They have big screens and their Internet looks as real as on a laptop, very clear. They do not need laptops at all ... look at this my own, it can cause eye problems because nothing is clear [laughing]...”*

As with Donner (2011), the findings show that affordability can inhibit meaningful use of mobile phones among low-income users. The findings also show respondents' awareness of feature differences between basic and high-end mobile phones. However, the price of high-end mobile phones is beyond the affordability of most of the refugees in South Africa. Also, high-end mobile phones are usually available to those with a post-paid or monthly contract. The conditions of a post-paid contract subscription system disqualify most of the refugees in South Africa, for it requires customers to have a good credit history and a regular income (Bacishoga et al., 2016).

The majority of respondents felt that handsets and services such as airtime, data, and repair costs were too expensive, as explained respondent Dezia: “...truly mobile phones are useful and a must have for every person in the today society. But the price of the use is unnecessarily too expensive. I wish I could communicate with my people very often but I rarely do. my relatives blame me saying I have forgotten them but I did not. I just cannot afford it...”. Similarly, Rabina shared that she had made friends with some of her former neighbours and they used to visit regularly, but since she moved to a new suburb their relationships grew cold because they cannot afford the expensive mobile phone communication: “in the earlier weeks when I moved to this place we were communicating regularly on the phone...and I realised that I was spending a lot on that...today we communicate like one in three months...”. Lolo: “I do not buy airtime regularly because it is expensive ... my phone has the internet but I cannot afford to buy data. I only access the internet on my phone when I am at school because there is free WiFi...”.

All the respondents believed that mobile phone interaction through social media is more affordable than through voice calls and SMSs, despite the former remaining unreliable because not everyone possesses a mobile phone with internet capability. In addition, sometimes some people switch off their cellular data so as to save costs and the battery life. But also, as respondent Linda insisted, “...I do not have another choice that using my mobile phone because I cannot find no more public phones in this Cape Town...before they [public phones] were almost everywhere”.

It is evident that many of the respondents were sensitive to the expenses and costs related to the use of mobile phones because of their restricted income. Many have become more aware of how to minimise the costs by using their mobile phone with care, spending on airtime and internet data bundles only when it is necessary. As with respondent Lolo, respondent Tezo reports that he only spends enough on internet data bundles to be used in 30 days because they after they will expire.

Only a few respondents commented that mobile phones provide them with satisfactory services in a cost effective manner. Gatera commented: “...best quality mobile phone are expensive but once you have it you enjoy. With my phone I take best quality pictures and videos ... communication tariff is expensive but I think data bundle are affordable...I regularly communicate with my friends and family on social media using cellular data....”. Fomutu believes that mobile phone communication is affordable because almost every person has a mobile phone and “I personally cannot justify not calling someone because of not affording airtime...of course, mobile phone conversations should be short like one to three minutes”.

### **6.2.2.3. Frustration of being excluded**

Frustration, which is a feeling of being upset or annoyed as a result of being unable to change or achieve something is one of the ways in which habitus can be manifested (Bourdieu, 1984). The frustrations of

being excluded from many aspects of life, including from some activities in which mobile phones would be of use, were evident in respondents' narratives. Whereas in many instances the data showed respondents' positive expectations regarding the use of mobile phones, there was also evidence of experience-based assumptions that included negative aspects and expectations. It appears that these negative aspects and expectations regarding the use of mobile phones resulted from the frustration caused by their social exclusion experiences. For example, respondent Dezia complains:

*"... I know that mobile phone can facilitate many things. But, it is not everything you see on TV adverts or you hear or see people doing that you can do also ... things like online booking, online banking, and more online [laughing]. we could also benefit from such things with our mobile phones ... I do not waste my time because I know they would not allow refugees..."*

Int: why do you say that? Have you tried, and it did not work or you were refused services?

Dezia: *"...no, I never try but I am sure such things will require green ID! .... if to get a SIM Card was a big deal, what about doing things that involve money just with a phone? They will not allow that to refugees. They do not trust us..."*

Social exclusion has been highlighted among the important challenges experienced by urban refugees in South Africa (Kobia et al., 2009). The frustration which the experiences of social exclusion place on urban refugees in South Africa appear to have provided the basis for their auto-exclusion in certain areas of activities in which they could use their mobile phone. As with respondent Dezia, many respondents showed scepticism about refugees' use of mobile phones for engaging in certain activities from which they could be excluded.

*"...do you know that the money market in Shoprite and Pick n Pay is only for those with green IDs?"* (Nyaba).

Similarly, respondent Kola mentions that it is difficult for refugees to enjoy the benefits that mobile phones could give them. He explains that in the past few years he had a bank account link which he was able to manage using his mobile phone. On his mobile phone he used to *"do things like buying airtime for myself or somebody else, buy electricity and send money on e-wallet..."* until one morning when he received an SMS requesting him to take his original Identification Document (ID) and proof of address to the nearest bank branch, for they needed to verify his details. Otherwise, his bank account would be suspended. Kola continues saying: *".... I did exactly what they requested but still they later put a hold on my bank accounts saying that they are busy verifying with Home Affairs..."*. The bank account was reactivated six months later, but only after the intervention of the LRC [Legal Resources Centre]. However, after this Kola withdrew all his money and decided never to use the bank again. *"... I know*

*that not having a bank account limits the benefits I could get from my phone but I have no choice...such thing always happens to refugees”*

In South Africa, many refugees do not possess a bank account (Crush, Chikanda, & Skinner, 2015) and as this research shows, many of those who have had bank accounts have lost trust because their funds have been frozen when they have to renew their documentation. After providing the renewed documentation to the bank, it takes weeks before the bank verifies them with the DHA, and then unfreezes the bank account.

Respondent Shaba claims that he does not know much about mobile money transfer and he cannot try doing it because *“I think it must be risky for refugees... I only know that with a South African ID one can send or collect money through Shoprite and it is better than through Banks, but refugees are not allowed...”*

Respondent Shaba’s reticence towards mobile money transfer systems can be explained by his lack of trust in the system, but also the fear of losing his money as he thinks mobile money transfer systems *“must be too risky for refugees”*. As with respondent Shaba, many of the respondents affirmed being aware of mobile banking, but expressed their lack of trust in the system *“...I think using mobile phones to make payment is risky. What can you do if you make mistakes? Remember, we are refugees...”* (Netia). They simply perceive that refugees are not welcome for mobile banking: *“...I do not think refugees can do banking on mobile phone and I do not know anyone who does it...”* (Nyaba).

The excerpt shows that security reasons and lack of trust are not the sole justification for not using mobile phone banking, but also the frustration caused by the experience of exclusion. This narrative reveals that frustration hinders some urban refugees from engaging in certain activities, including mobile phone banking. The outcomes of urban refugees’ early or past experiences constitute both an indicator of social exclusion in the past and a predisposition factor for disempowerment later on in life. Such findings illustrate the way in which social exclusion can be conceived as transforming into disempowerment.

*“...Yes, I know that it is possible for one to use MP for searching jobs and even apply for jobs by calling your relatives and tell them that you need a job ... but when it comes to the jobs that companies advertise online, I cannot waste my time trying because I know we [refugees] cannot successfully compete with locals [SA] who apply for such jobs... unless it is a private person looking specifically for refugees...”* (Rabina)

The narratives show that prior encounters, events, and interactions result in the formation of expectations. Hence, due to the frustration of being excluded, many respondents believe that certain opportunities enabled by the use of mobile phones are only for non-refugees. The findings show that

the roots of such frustration lie in the past experience of being excluded, having witnessed, or even hearing rumours of a refugee being excluded from certain activities or services. Such frustration can contribute – through habitus – to a re-iteration of social patterns of self-exclusion. Hence, self-exclusion tends to limit their opportunities to use mobile phones to extend their horizons. The excerpts show an example of respondents’ self-exclusion from using mobile phones for activities in which they believe they are excluded. In so doing, it is evident that the individuals might miss the opportunities that are at hand with use of a mobile phone.

#### **6.2.2.4. Lack of confidence in the English language**

It is argued that language and communication are without doubt two of the most important factors in the learning process (Ouane & Glanz, 2010). The narratives also show that language, which is the primary means of communication, may turn into an impediment for engaging in a conversation through mobile phones or face-to-face, or in establishing relationships with others. Language issues and lack of trust appear to be among the reasons some respondents hesitate to venture into relationships outside their own communities. Especially the respondents with little ability to improve quickly their English language skills, which is the main medium of communication in urban South Africa, or another South African national language, depending on circumstances.

The lack of confidence in the English language appears to impede the use of mobile phones for engaging in a conversation with individuals other than those from the same country, as exemplified by these respondents’ narratives:

Nyaba: “...The *English language is also a problem. Personally, I cannot call let’s say the customer service of Vodacom seeking the advice of what to do when I’m experiencing an issue with the service...the language option provided to customers consist of English and other South African language. They did not include French or Swahili...*”.

Elena: “...*I never needed an interpreter when I go to the hospital because I explain myself ... sometimes using gestures and you know...but one day after being attended to at the clinic they gave me a phone number to contact them if there is need ... when I happened, I call the number but we could not understand each other...I gave the phone to my South African neighbour but again I was struggling to explain to him what to report to the person over the phone...they later decided that I must go physically to the hospital...face to face at the hospital we communicated very well and did not need an interpreter...*”.

Seleo: “...*you know, whenever I got the opportunity I always give my contact number to people to contact me whenever they need a car mechanic ... But because I do not know English very well,*

*sometimes I struggle to communicate when a customer calls ... among my mechanics there is a Zimbabwean who helps me to talk to customers when I cannot explain everything well... ”.*

Binti shared that after she finally released the whole album her life has improved: “...*When my album was ready I needed to promote the sell.... on Facebook, phone calls, SMSs ... Not knowing English well became a problem. Some people were calling. I cannot hear everything they say ... we communicate by SMSs or chats it ok but voice calls in long English...*”

Language is not only a means of communication. It also has power for individual experiences as a means for negotiating pathways within set structures. Hence, because of unfamiliar language or lack of confidence in the local languages (i.e. English or other South African national languages) many of the respondents could not benefit from the convenience that mobile phones afford. The findings show that in the case of lack of language proficiency, many respondents prefer face-to-face communication or at least written communication in the form of SMSs and chats, rather than voice calls.

### **6.2.3. The Socio-environmental factors that shape the use of Mobile Phones by Urban Refugees in South Africa**

This section covers the analysed socio-environmental factors that influence the use of mobile phones by urban refugees in South Africa. Referring to Bourdieu’s and Sen’s theoretical language presented in Chapter Three, the situational factors make up the social structures and the socio-environmental factors respectively. From the thematic analysis, the themes that were grouped under the category ‘socio-environmental factors’ included social influences, policies and regulations, the stereotype about refugees and the challenges of documentation, and the geographical location.

#### **6.2.3.1. Social influences**

Social influences, also referred to as subjective norms, are understood as a person’s perception of the social pressures placed on him/her to engage in a certain behaviour (Hsu & Lu, 2004). Many studies such as Rogers (1995), and Venkatesh et al. (2003) suggest that social influences play a key role in individual behavioural intention to use an information technology device. Similarly, the analysis of data collected shows that social phenomena influence respondents’ use of mobile phones. It emerged that for all the respondents, owning a mobile phone is viewed as an accountability, an obligation to be available to friends and relatives. In every single respondent’s narratives, there was clear evidence of direct or indirect social influences on their use of mobile phones, including relatives’ and friends’ opinions and experiences, word-of-mouth, tendencies, trends, norms, practices, public discourse, and media.

Evidence of social influences on the use of mobile phones was identified in the data in many instances through respondents' comments such as "...everybody is using mobile phones social media...", "...embarrassed with an outdated [feature] phone...", "...got invitation from a friend to join imo...", "...I realised that everybody is on Facebook...", "...advertises of free communication using WhatsApp...", "...I want a better and cheaper way of communication...", "...nowadays mobile phone is needed to keep in touch..." and others. Such comments show that social influence is not only the motivation for using mobile phones in a particular way or in engaging in a certain activity but also one of the reasons for the frequency and mode of communication on mobile phones.

Respondent Kodani shared that he always learns from others, and the use of mobile phones is not an exception. "...When this WhatsApp thing was new I did not care because I had SMSs which were getting cheaper...then I realised that everybody is on WhatsApp and my friends wanted me to follow...today I enjoy it more than SMSs..."

"... I wanted it so bad [talking about a smartphone] because everybody is asking me my Facebook address, or WhatsApp... today people can call or SMS you only if it is urgent. For keeping in touch like to maintain your relationships you have to join social media. Otherwise, you will be like forgotten..." (Dina).

In these excerpts, respondents consciously and unconsciously accepted the influence of peers. They perceive and use their mobile phones in certain ways in exchange for acknowledgement or recognition in a social group. This finding, in accordance with the literature, shows that attitudes or actions influenced by peers are a form of identification and compliance process (Lin et al., 2015).

Commenting in the same way, respondent Tezo shared that he considers the mobile phone as his access gate into the world of technology. He explained that because most of the people he knows use mobile phones, it has become an imperative to him to do the same. "...without mobile phone you feel like leaving into your own world ... but I need to keep contact with others ...nowadays, technology is present in almost every aspect of life ... for me as an individual, mobile phone is the key to being involved in the modernity..." To prove his point, Tezo argued that in some important retail shops customers are required to register by providing their mobile phone contact number in order to be issued with a "smart shopper card" so that they can be able to obtain discounts or "points" when they make a purchase. In other shops, a smart shopper-type-card is not an obligation, but without it "you will not benefit from some savings and promotional sales... one must have a mobile phone to qualify..."

The influence of the "significant others" was further evidenced in respondents' narratives such as Sango's following comment:

*“...the popularity of mobile phones made me realise how important it is to always have one. Like everybody, I must have a mobile phone because it has become the important way of communication...today everybody uses WhatsApp and Facebook. I am also doing the same thing with my mobile phone. Yes, I have to do like others...”*

Kowe emphasises saying: *“... everybody is using mobile phones, why not me? For many reasons mobile phones are very useful but also easy to use ... of course the technology of mobile phone changes every day but, as many people, I learn a lot from TV adverts and Internet about the new potential a mobile phone... things like making airtime transfer, convert airtime into data bundle for Internet, get airtime advance when I am unable to buy. And other things like using my phone as voice recorder...”*

*“...I have been using mobile phone for long now. I know there are too many possibilities that can be achieved with it...there are a lot of services accessible on mobile phone depending on network services. I know about these services because I receive SMSs mostly when I load airtime or data bundles ...”*

It is evident that in addition to the influence of peers, respondents’ attitudes and actions in regards to the use of mobile phone are also affected by external influences. Such external influences occurred when respondents perceived that the information they receive enhances their knowledge of using mobile phones. In these excerpts, the explicit statements or promises about the services that network service providers make increase users’ awareness, which in turn motivates their use. Hence respondents’ use of mobile phones and their expectations of them, reflect what they are in the habit of doing. This finding is consistent with the literature (Cammaerts, 2015), showing that external influence can be seen as a form of internalisation process, which is disseminated through information such as mass media reports, expert opinions and other non-personal information.

#### **6.2.3.2. Policies and regulations**

The reports on the socio-economic context of, and the attitudes towards urban refugees in South Africa as presented in Chapter Two (2.3.2 and 2.3.3) show that they have poor labour market chances. Many refugees have no choice but to become self-employed. The findings show that respondents are aware that the use of mobile phones can be important for activities such as communication with customers or finding bargains online. However, many are struggling to fully capitalise on the benefits that mobile phones could offer in various activities because of policies and regulations that directly or indirectly affect the use of their mobile phones.

Data shows that refugees in South Africa do not qualify for buying a mobile phone on a contract basis. As Bacishoga et al. (2016) and Hawthorne (2016) report, in order to qualify for a contract subscription system, customers in South Africa are required to have a good credit history and a regular income. For example, on the website [www.Smart-phone.co.za](http://www.Smart-phone.co.za), the requirements for applying for a Vodacom mobile

phone contract are given as: a copy of a South African bar-coded ID or valid passport or valid driver's licence, proof of income (i.e. payslip or 3 months bank statements), and proof of bank details. As such, urban refugees in South Africa can only purchase mobile phones on a prepaid basis. Even on prepaid, however, purchasing a brand new mobile phone is not that straightforward for refugees, due to certain issues such as the provision of proof of address and refugees' documents checking process. Netia explained:

*“One day I saw an advert on TV about a certain smartphone on promotion in Game stores. But when I went there I was told that I have to provide a South African ID to buy that phone”.*

As with Netia, I the researcher, have also not been permitted to purchase a mobile phone which was on sale on a prepaid basis in one of the biggest retail shops. The manager explained that the rules had changed, and to prove his point he pointed out the poster shown in Figure 7.



Figure 7: poster found in one retail store in Cape Town. (Photo taken by the author)

Consequently, most of the respondents own used mobile phones bought from private individuals or small shops providing no guarantee, as explains respondents Tezo:

*“...it is not that I never wish to have a new smartphone or that I cannot afford it...look! I do not have any guarantee with this second-hand phones I am using. it can also be a stolen phone and put me in trouble...but I have no choice. I need a good phone and they are not allowing us to buy one...”.*

Only one respondent (Binti) reported personally buying a brand new smartphone directly from a mobile phones store. However, it was not that easy, as she explained: *“...I think it was just my lucky day... the teller requested my ID, I gave her my A4 refugee status... she took it to the manager... the manager came himself and sold me the phone...”.*

Several instances of respondents' comments reflect the influences of the field's policies and regulations on their use of mobile phones. Seleo explains:

*“with my phone, I constantly look for used cars and accidentally damaged cars for sale but also to advertise the cars on check gumtree [online classified website] ...the problem is that I am unable to make or receive online payment... you know sometimes I am interested in buying something but as I go to make deposits to the bank another person just buys it...”*

Shaba: *“...first of all, how can you use your phone to buy something online while the policies of the country have disqualified you for having a credit card, ID, and even a physical address?”*

Respondents also raised the challenges of not having bank accounts to benefit from the capability that mobile phones offer to manage money and make transactions online. Nyaba: *“...I know one can do some transitions or manage his bank account through a mobile phone... I do not have a bank account...”*

Six respondents who did not have bank accounts confirmed that they have tried to open them at different banks, but they have been told that banks are no longer allowed to open bank accounts for refugees. Two respondents suspended using bank accounts because it was risky. Mobile phone banking facilitates customers using their mobile phones or tablet to conduct instantaneously financial transactions such as sending and receiving money (Majchrzak et al., 2016). However, the findings show that many refugees in South Africa still rely on unsafe and time-consuming methods of sending and receiving money.

Respondent Kola complains: *“...with my mobile phone I did not have to walk around with cash in my pocket. But since I do not bank anymore there is no way I can use mobile phone's eWallet to send money... before I could buy airtime just on my phone but now I have to walk to retail shop...”*

Findings suggest that the use of mobile financial services is not uniform within South Africa. As reported in Chapter Two, in South Africa, to benefit from mobile financial services the money sender must be a registered customer of the Bank whose services he wants to use, such as FNB for eWallet, ABSA for CashSend, and Standard Bank for instant money transfer. On the other side, the money receiver is required to have a valid South African mobile phone number, that is a mobile phone whose SIM card is RICA-compliant. To use the mobile payment services offered by retailers such as Shoprite Checkers, and Pick n Pay in partnership with Capitec, both the sender and receiver of money need to be in possession of a South African ID book/card. These requirements are likely to exclude most of the urban refugees in South Africa from benefiting from mobile payments, which are believed to provide a means to facilitate monetary payments and transfers for those excluded from formal financial systems (Donovan & Martin, 2014).

The literature shows that the legitimacy of documentation provided to refugees in South Africa remains unrecognised by most employers (Gordon, 2016b; Landau & Kabwe-Segatti, 2009). The findings of this research reiterate such claims and suggest that urban refugees in South Africa are struggling to turn their basic rights into entitlements. The data show instances when many respondents missed opportunities they could have gained using their mobile phone. For example, respondent Nastia complained that she missed an opportunity in which she could save more than R1000 on a flight ticket just because she was not able to book on time using her mobile phone. This happened because the banking services enabled on her mobile phone are limited. Nastia explained that on her mobile phone she was browsing the Internet to check how much a flight ticket was from Cape Town to Durban, to where she was about to travel, “...on Jetcost flights comparison [ Jetcost is a metasearch website, allowing customers to search and compare prices on flights, hotels, and car rentals] I found a bargain, a R880 flight while other flights were above R1500... I called Yannick [Nastia’s landlord, a South African citizen] to book for me because, as you know, us refugees we do not have a credit card and we are not qualified to PayPal... Yannick was busy and the evening when he came the price had gone up...”

Similarly, respondent Tezo comments that he accesses the Internet on his mobile phone to search for items that he needs, but he does not have any means to pay online. Hence he always makes an arrangement with his supervisor who uses her credit card and Tezo reimburses her with cash.

Such excerpts exemplify the experience of urban refugees in South Africa. Being completely or partly excluded from certain services jeopardises their capabilities to effectively use their mobile phone for related services, but also hinders the achievement of related outcomes.

Nyaba: “I do not bother buying an expensive phone because I always got it taken away by skelm [South African word that means criminal] ...I have written down in an agenda the phone contact number of all my contacts because I do not want to keep losing them anytime my phone is stolen...if you how bad I feel when my phone got stolen ... friends who would like to contact me will be upset and I struggle to get another SIM card...I would like to keep the same contact number but I cannot do the SIM swipe because the SIM cards that I use are those we buy already registered with RICA...”.

Nyaba: “...many of my customers contact me by phone for booking. I lost many of them when my phone was stolen...I could not do SIM swipe because the lost SIM card was not registered in my name... because I cannot register with RICA, I buy registered SIM from South African in the street for R100...”

Netia: *In this country, when you hear “your ID please!” straight away you know that you are excluded, even if it is about doing a common thing like purchasing a mobile phone SIM Card.*

Alex emphasises: “Yes, at a certain time it became difficult to even buy a SIM Card because of RICA issues until they start selling SIM Card which is already registered with RICA, [pause] I do not know by who”.

In South Africa, as within the majority of African countries, regulations require mobile phone users to provide personal identification details in order to purchase and/or use a SIM card. For security reasons, the Regulation of Interception of Communications and Provision of Communication-Related Information Act (RICA) makes it compulsory for everyone in South Africa to register their mobile phone number (Donovan & Martin, 2014). The narratives of respondents show that the requirements for RICA compliance present them with real access difficulties. Despite the motivations for the implementation of RICA, the unintended discriminatory aspects of SIM registration present a hindrance to the use of mobile phones by urban refugees in South Africa.

The imposition of mandatory RICA registration took place in mid-2011. However, pre-registered SIM cards have been readily available for US\$2 or US\$3 in major cities. Individuals may register up to 100 SIM cards, so peers often register for each other, especially in the case of illegal immigrants who would otherwise be cut off from mobile communication (Donovan & Martin, 2014). Donovan and Martin (2014) comment that a key challenge to the RICA legislation in South Africa is the lack of reliable IDs.

The findings suggest that urban refugees consciously and unconsciously draw on alternative strategies, including the use of mobile phones, as a means of expanding their abilities to make strategic life choices in this context where these were and are still denied to them. The findings show that some of the respondents are aware of and interested in opportunities that they believe the use of mobile phones would facilitate, such as m-commerce and m-banking, but they find themselves unable to capitalise on these due to certain policies and norms which exclude them.

### **6.2.3.3. *Stereotype about Refugees and the challenges of documentation***

The literature shows that in South Africa, there is a widespread anti-immigrant sentiment which cuts across virtually every socioeconomic and demographic group (Gordon, 2016b). There is a negative stereotype about black African refugees, who are perceived as a burden to the host communities and a security threat and liability to the country’s development. Such public perceptions shape and determine the social discourses and policy responses to urban refugees, which in turn shape and construct the experiences of urban refugees in South Africa.

Buya: “...unless you send an SMS, but with a voice call people will notice that you are a black African foreigner... sometimes in a vocal communication over the phone I got asked from where I am. Then I will be like I am calling from the city centre, then the person will be like ‘no, from which country are you? From your voice, I can tell you are not South Africa’ ...”.

Kola; “...contacting UNHCR in Cape Town is waste of time and airtime. I do not know whether the UNHCR in Cape Town is a fiction or a reality ... whatever you do to contact them is unsuccessful... sometimes I was thinking that it is only me but I have found out that it is the same for everybody ... it is not that the phone number I have is wrong... I got it from their website ... every time I call, the line is either busy or they tell me that I have called on a wrong day, or that they are full booked and ask me to call again after two weeks...after months of trying and trying, I gave up. It is one day when discussing with a friend that she told me I better contact the UCT Law Clinic and gave me the contact number. I only call them once and they gave me an appointment. Three days later I went there and was received ...”.

These statements show that many of the respondents’ expectations for protection, tolerance and opportunities in South Africa have been dashed by intolerance, violence and xenophobic practices in the country. In subtle ways, it emerges that outsider stereotyping reinforces refugees’ frustration, thus exacerbating exclusion from engaging in some mobile phone-enabled activities. This finding supports the contention of Crush and Ramachandran (2015, p. 26) that, “South Africa provides a particularly important case study of how attitudes and behaviours materially affect the business climate for migrant entrepreneurs”. Doing as such ensures that relations of domination and subordination are reproduced.

However, these narratives show that some urban refugees are not considering themselves as passive victims but rather as creative contributors to the economy, managing to take care of themselves. The use of mobile phones helps them to alleviate some of their challenges.

Netia: “...It happens one day that at the police station I could not get my refugees status certified. I did not know what to do and the certified copy was needed at work. I and my husband started contacting our friends requesting for advice. Mobile phones helped us because two days later, my husband’s friend call and give the contact number of CRC [organisation dealing with refugees’ issues]. At CRC they gave an appointment to come after one week...we could not wait as I could lose my job...my husband kept on calling and sending SMSs...later that night one of our friends called and said he had the same problem a few weeks ago but got sorted out from a police station far from city centre... I did the same and finally got my asylum seeker permit certified at a police station 80km away from town...”

Buya: “...we were looking for a room to rent. The only way to get it is by calling friends and send them SMSs to remind them to keep asking wherever they can ... we were also searching on gumtree (Gumtree.com is an online classifieds and community website) but you know what? anytime that there was an accommodation that we found interesting on gumtree, if we call the owner, the answers were kind of: ‘sorry! Already taken, or leave your number I will call you later ...’, just because he noticed that we are foreigners. And if the accommodation is managed by an agency, refugees are already eliminated because of the requirements like “copy of your South African ID or Passport if not an South

*African citizen, proof of income, proof of current residential address, bank statements, current schedule tax return if self-employed” ... imagine! ... to get this accommodation we have been helped by a South African woman from our church ... we gave her the phone number of the owner of the two-bedroom house advertised on gumtree ... she just called and the answer was like ‘you can come to view the house this afternoon’ ... this is the very same house they told us one hour ago that it was already taken! ... that’s how we moved to this house”.*

The excerpts suggest that the social structure can provide a very limited range of options to certain individuals. Consequently, the discriminated individuals are unable to effectively use their mobile phones, and benefit from the information society. Respondents’ narratives report the difficulties that they experience in achieving their desired outcomes, aspirations or needs. As exemplified in these narratives, the perceived negative experiences result in invoking coping behaviours by turning to friends mostly through the use of mobile phones. In doing so, the mobile phone plays an important role as it is used as a way of coping with the perceived social discrimination that urban refugees encounter.

### **6.3. The capabilities associated with mobile phone use by urban refugees in South Africa**

This section presents the analysis of the capabilities generated by the use of mobile phones by urban refugees in South Africa for their empowerment. In doing so, the findings of this section address the secondary research question of this thesis, formulated as follows: *How does mobile phone use enable the capabilities for the empowerment of urban refugees in South Africa?*

Inferring from the collected data, capabilities for empowerment generated by the use of mobile phones were identified. They were grouped into three categories, namely the capabilities to negotiate ways to participate in the information society, the capabilities to effectively engage with wider networks, and the capabilities to manage one’s own situation and solve the problem (Table 6). The capabilities have been identified by examining the aspect of life such as specific activities or actions that the respondents reported (or have been observed as) being what they were actually able to realise or achieve using mobile phones. The activities or actions that the respondents realise using mobile phones constitute the achieved functionings and indicate empowerment.

As with the factors that shape the mobile phone use by urban refugees in South Africa presented in the previous section of this chapter, the capabilities generated by their use of mobile phones are unlikely to fall into neat, separate categories. Therefore, some overlap will be noticed in the analysis, but each category offers a different focus.

### 6.3.1. The capabilities to negotiate ways to participate in the information society

The collected data clearly show that urban refugees, in their struggle to negotiate livelihoods in South Africa, their host country, have adopted some coping strategies. They use the mobile phones for participating in economic activities, for improving access to services, and to various information. Data shows that to effectively achieve such coping strategies, the use of mobile phones plays a crucial role. For the purpose of analysis, these coping strategies have been grouped under the following category named ‘the capabilities to negotiate ways to participate in the information society’.

#### 6.3.1.1. Capability to participate in economic or financial activities

The data show instances of when, by using their mobile phones, respondents do realise some economic gains. Even though mobile phone use for social interactions was dominant, interactions for business and/or work related activities were also mentioned. Respondents used mobile phones in activities such as obtaining market information, improving entrepreneurial skills in terms of generating or reducing expenses, increasing access to economic resources (finding and retaining customers) or accumulating funds and managing money. Some evidence is provided in the following excerpts:

Kodani narrates how mobile phone use enables him to make correct decisions and thus save time, money and even energy: “...I can say that my mobile phone helps me in my activities since in my work as a plumber, electrician and painter, if someone needs me he can just call me. I have distributed my business cards, with my contact number on it, to potential customers: restaurants, hotels, nightclub managers, the church members, and others ...I’m telling you I never stay without work. I always receive calls even from people that I do not know. When I ask, how you got my number, the person reply, I got your contact number from a friend to whom you did a good work. As you know, we refugees always do great jobs for affordable price. Sometimes I have more works and call my other friends to help. When my friends have more works they also contact me to help and we share the money. Mobile phone allows me to avoid wasting time and money. For example, when a client calls me, we first discuss over the phones before I can decide whether to physically go to the site. Because sometimes, I receive calls for jobs but we do not agree about the pay and I already spent on transport fare... imagine.”.

Kola: “... Telling the truth, mobile phone has revolutionised my photography business... before I used to give business cards to my potential customers ... which cost money anyway... today they only ask for my contact number...it seems like nobody is willing to fill his wallet with business cards anymore”.

As with Kola, respondent Gatera commented that he uses his mobile phone to retain customers, and respondent Kowe to emphasise that: “...in my pizza delivery job, I use my mobile phone to contact

*customers and, as a GPS to locate them...believe me, without mobile phone, pizza delivery job can be a nightmare... ”.*

Binti: *“...I am in charge of choirs in our church and, as a gospel singer....my phone helps me a lot for I have to be available whenever I am needed...I perform every Sunday but the pastor can call me anytime during the week ... In exchange, the church pays my rent and I receive some extra money for food and others small needs. So I must be reachable any time through mobile phone....”*

Two respondents, namely Gatera and Seleo, indicated using their mobile phones more for business than for social activities. Gatera and Seleo affirmed that this trend only happened after their businesses grew bigger. Seleo indicated that the majority of his phone conversations were with his customers and his employees, most of whom are his fellow refugees. The same can be echoed within Gatera’ comments: *“...I can say that I use my phone more in business than for socialising because most of my friends are my business partners...”*. Two other respondents, Tezo and Buya, could not easily decide, but think the frequency of their use of mobile phones for business and social interactions is much the same.

Seleo: *“...my mobile phone helps me a lot in my business... my customers always contact me on mobile phones when they want my services. Even when I move my workshop to a new place they find me because of mobile phone... I always move because with my refugee paper I disqualified rent a business place... to rent a business place I have to use a South African who does it on my beneath...moving places make me lose a lot of money, time, and some customers. Sometimes I spend months before I can find a new place. When this happens, my customers can still contact on mobile phone and if possible I go to repair the car at their own place...”*

Int: I remember one day I contacted you about servicing my car and you suggested to come to do it at my place.

Seleo: *“...yea, but the majority disagree. But when I find a new place, I make sure I personally call every single customer to give them the new address. I keep jealously my customers contact details on my phone and a book. You know the strategy I use (laughs)! I just call the person saying things like “hey how are you? Please visit our new workshop. It has improved”. things like that. Sometimes I send them SMSs but I cannot rely on SMSs because I’m not sure if the person will read it. I know voice calls are expensive but it is business, I have to spend so that I can gain”.*

Such excerpts show how the use of mobile phones by urban refugees impacts positively on their economic capital by allowing the user to save some costs which otherwise could occur. The excerpts also show that mobile phones can be used to save time. For mobile phone users, another way of making financial saving consists of reducing expenses. Respondents do this in different ways, including making mobile phone contact to ensure if it is necessary to go to a place before spending on transport fare,

mobile phone beeping when the conveyed message is presumed to be known or when it is assumed that the person receiving the beep has all interest in calling the person who initiated the beep.

*“...using mobile phone helps me economically because I do business over the phone...before, I used to spend a lot of money and time when travelling to Jo'burg [Johannesburg] to buy goods ... but now we [together with his partner] arrange everything over the phone I and my friend who is based in Joburg ... I send him money and through the phone I instruct him about the goods that I need...he does the shopping and send me the goods by buses ... Sometimes, when there is a misunderstanding about the items, we use pictures taken and share through our phones to make sure we are talking about the same thing... we do not spend a lot because we use WhatsApp...”* (Shaba).

Although respondent Shaba seems to be confident in using mobile phones in running his business, as the narrative continues he shared that he never uses the mobile money transfer systems because of lack of trust in the systems. Only eight respondents reported that they use mobile banking, but mostly at a limited level such as balance checking, transaction notification, and FNB eWallet for money transfer within South Africa. Rwaki: *“With my phone, I do not need to walk down to the Bank to send money to someone in South Africa...because I have an FNB bank account, I use eWallet send money...I do not walk around with my bank card. If I need money, I just use my phone to send eWallet to myself and withdraw the money at ATM...”*.

Only a few respondents use mobile phones for online shopping, despite being aware and interested, but most of these are very limited to activities such as buying airtime or Internet data bundles, water and electricity, as noted respondent Mika: *“... I know one can make a huge saving by using mobile phone in activities like buying things online but conditions like a credit card is already an obstacle for refugees ...we do not have those...only lucky ones (refugees) possess debit cards (laugh) ...”*.

Many respondents did not have much to comment on, apart from costs and time-saving. For example, respondent Linda commented: *“...I'm not using mobile phone like for real economic purpose but I think it allows me to reduce some expenses in communication and save on things like the Internet, ... in transport fare and time to go around while one can enquire on mobile phone ...”*.

While respondent Linda's comment reflects the position of most of the respondents, some of them like respondent Sango believe that using a mobile phone creates extra costs and even unnecessary ones, but there is no other choice than *“keep using data bundles to access the internet to keep in touch with friends through Facebook and WhatsApp”*.

The findings show that most of the respondents believe mobile phone usage procures some economic benefits, even though to a very limited extent. It is evident, however, that for greater potential of mobile phones to be realised, users need access not only to affordable devices with Internet capabilities but

also to mobile broadband networks and affordable services. Elena explains: “...now I do not have enough money to buy a better phone with WhatsApp to benefit from free calls and chats with my friends...and you know, every phone call or SMS is money being spent”.

Respondent Shaba explained that it took him six months of saving to be able to buy a used smartphone. But he later realised that keeping the smartphone generates more spending, for he must buy data which expires after a month. Shaba: “...being on social media costs money and you have to use all your data otherwise it expires after a month...the guy I bought this phone from got it on a contract basis and used to receive data on discounted price. But for me, I have to buy expensive data...”.

Therefore, as the data show, many respondents use their mobile phones for economical or financial gain. Respondents’ narratives show that mobile phones provide the users with a point of contact, which enables them to be economically active. Businesses require constant communication, and respondents who use mobile phones for business purposes are benefitting more than those who do not. Yet, for most respondents, the economic or financial gains resulting from the use of mobile phones are limited to the basic advantages of mobile phone use such as saving time and costs.

#### **6.3.1.2. Capability to Improve access to Services**

Real-time communication enabled by mobile phones can be important in delivering services in an effective way. Many of the respondents affirmed using mobile phones to access services such as: mobile banking, an app on the mobile phone to order taxis, for information services, and to access online services. Respondents spoke of accessing bank account information and making transactions such as checking deposits, checking balances, and buying airtime and internet data bundles from their mobile phones.

Rwaki: “...on my phone I get the weather update, I check my bank account status, and sometimes I even check prices and availability of items in the shops before I can actually go there...”.

Nastia: “...business owners request peoples’ their phone contact numbers and to get a loyalty card you must provide them with your phone contact numbers ... it is not bad because sometimes it happens that I receive SMSs about the items that are on promotions and the discount offered...”

Respondents also spoke about the information services that are delivered to users, such as information about local weather, information about local discount offers and promotions. Regarding online services, respondents showed that using mobile phones to access or request services is much easier and convenient than filling out forms and standing in queues.

Tezo: “...when possible, I prefer using my mobile phone to buy something than going to the stores ... I use my phone to purchase electricity, airtime, data bundles, water, even to renew my car license...”

Gatera emphasised saying: “...using mobile phone to pay for a traffic fine is comfortable than doing it at the municipality where you will need to stand in a queue and maybe fill a form”.

Kowe explained that when using mobile phones to access services, he prefers using voice calls to interact with the service provider rather than just following automated instructions. He added, however, that “most of the online services do not offer such possibility of choosing options. And when there is, it takes long to get the call answered”. Kowe explained that the reasons for his preference are that with a voice call he can better express his concern to a person, or an expert who may advise him straight away.

“...unlike filling out a form or following prompts on the cell phone requesting you to choose your answers, a voice call is like a direct conversation, I express myself and quickly get advice from the human, probably an expert...”

The findings show that respondents use mobile phones to access the most viable electronic channel, not only to public but also to private services. However, while the majority of respondents mentioned that using mobile phones had improved access to services, this was not that straightforward, but relative. Some respondents claimed that they personally (or knew of fellow refugees who) did not receive reliable service when calling for assistance from public service providers, including the health care personnel, and the police. They insisted that the delay in response or lack of response occurred because their foreign accents were recognised over the mobile phone.

It emerged that no matter how convenient a mobile phone application is, or how streamlined a website is, human to human conversation remains the best. The need for human to human conversation is more prevalent in a situation which needs complex decisions. For respondents, mobile phones are capable of providing convenient services that can be accessed in real time and without time limitations.

### **6.3.1.3. Capability to Improve access to information**

The use of mobile phones has proven to be important for it enables a quick retrieval of information (Smith, Spence, & Rashid, 2011). The data suggested that all of the respondents have used mobile phones more than once to request information that was needed right away, because the absence of such information was undesirable. Most of their sources of information were from fellow refugees. The information requested consisted of job opportunities, accommodation, how to do or get certain things, and other items.

Netia: *“...when I am a difficult situation and need advice or information about how to solve this or that problem my mobile phone helps a lot...I just make calls to friends that I think can help...”*

Seleo: *“...when I urgently need something I phone a friend for help. You know sometimes it happens that I struggle to fix something on my customers’ car. I cannot waste time looking in books or searching on the internet how to do it. It only takes a phone call and someone tells me how to do it. We all do that always...”*

Respondents’ narratives also show that when they encounter any challenges they use their mobile phones to seek advice or emotional support, mostly from their peers in their own community, but also from the host community. They also use their mobile phones to share their experiences and knowledge and give advice to others in similar situations. These narratives show that habitus can be transformed, allowing agents to challenge dominant structures of a field (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992).

It is evident that mobile phones are used to get information in the form of recommendations and advice from friends. These excerpts show that when in need of urgent information, respondents prefer to save time by using their mobile phone to contact friends they believe can help, instead of independently searching for information from other sources. Another source of information, apart from relatives and friends, consists of accessing search engines, informational websites, and social media, and using Google maps to get directions to different places. They also turn to friends among the South African community, usually from church members or work colleagues, as shown in Buya’s narrative:

*“...when I need something like information about job, or I want to know how to do or get something I use my mobile phone to ask friend or search on the internet ... I also search on gumtree ...”*

Tezo claims that he likes this country because with a mobile phone it is possible to get in contact with almost all of the business and municipalities’ services. *“when I need information about electricity and water bills I just take my mobile phone and request explanation directly from them...they give me the information that I need to know and they website address to check for more information...”*

These findings show that respondents use mobile phones to access information and knowledge useful to realise desired outcomes. Most of the mobile phone interactions with local authorities, formal institutions, and others were for purposes such as social or business concerns, and also for safety and advocacy issues.

Most respondents did not think that the use of mobile phones has enhanced political freedoms for them. However, in their narratives, it was evident that mobile phones facilitated respondents to access information, including political matters. The reported reason for reading political news on mobile phones was such as they *“rarely get news about my Burundi on local South African Broadcasting*

*Corporation, that's why I use my mobile phone for it...*” (Nastia), “*...I use a mobile phone to read news about congo because I need to know what is going on there. You do not always get news about congo on local TVs, not even on Aljazeera...*” (Fomutu).

Only three respondents, Buya, Fomutu, and Mika, affirmed to have used their mobile phones to comment on the political situation in their countries. “*.... when I access WiFi on my phone in places like restaurants, night clubs, and even shopping malls I can watch videos on YouTube about the government and opposition cat and dog ways of doing things ... sometimes I comment on some news of videos or share them with friends, or post them on my Facebook page...*”. Respondent Mika shared that he spends a considerable amount of time reading news on his mobile phone: “*... on my phone I usually access the website called Africatime.com to ready all the daily news about Congo. Sometimes I comment on the news. I use social media on my mobile phone to share with my online friends anything about refugees in South Africa especially during xenophobic troubles....*”.

### **6.3.2. The capabilities to effectively engage with wider networks**

The themes that were grouped under this category included the capabilities to develop and maintain relationships, to be socially and culturally connected, and to communicate effectively.

#### **6.3.2.1. Capability to Develop and Maintain social ties and relationships**

The literature on the use of mobile phones for social purposes shows that mobile phones are increasingly important in accessing and being accessible to people in a social network (Smith et al., 2011). With mobile phones it has become easy to stay close, regardless of the distance (Cecez-Kecmanovic et al., 2014). There is general consensus amongst the respondents that the change of geographic location resulting in moving to South Africa presented a real threat to their existing social relationships. Also, for someone to adapt and settle in a new city far from relatives and friends, it is important to develop new ties of friendship. Hence for the respondents, the use of mobile phones is viewed as a relief for it affords them the capabilities to keep in touch anytime anywhere.

It was easily observable in many respondents' comments that being separated from families and close friends has exposed them to emotional struggles. “*...I miss my people...*”, “*...that good old time with my friends...*” “*...when we video chat on imo I see them together in our house...*” “*...sometimes thinking of them I cannot sleep...*”. “*... it is difficult to live far from relatives...mobile phone has been of help...imagine today we can even see each other using imo*” (Buya).

Respondents evoked the geographical dispersion of refugees inside cities in South Africa, as contrasted with the social closeness of communities in their home countries. “*...back home we were living nearby our relatives. I could easily work to their houses to visit and make phone contact only when it is urgent.*

*But here we are dispersed in the big city and everyone is busy and rarely home. Mobile phone has become the only mean to localise friends keep in touch...we cannot say that we are friends if we do not talk regularly...” (Rabina).*

*“in this country we are highly mobile in terms of accommodation and work, without mobile phone, even your friend will struggle to locate you...” (Tezo).*

Within South Africa, refugees are nomadic and transient in terms of accommodation and work. Yet, for many reasons, including social and economic, they need to be in touch with their networks. Hence urban refugees’ use of mobile phones which allow them to keep in touch with relatives and friends, and relieve them of homesickness. With mobile phones, users are easily and immediately contactable, irrespective of their physical location. These findings are consistent with the literature showing that for refugees, mobile phones provide an invaluable link to scattered relatives and friends throughout the world (Hunter, 2015). Mobile phones have mitigated the distance between individuals, thus breaking down barriers related to geographical distance, and allowing users to communicate anytime anywhere. They use different media, including SMSs, voice calls, and video chats to stay in touch. Mobile phone internet capability provides users with the opportunity to check into social media websites such as Facebook. Users can communicate with their friends and comment on their posts.

Netia: *“...mobile phone helps me a lot to stay in touch with the people I grew up with. I left home long ago and I always struggle with homesickness. Without mobile phone it could be disastrous .... Since I left home things have changed a lot. But thanks to mobile phone I have news of friends. Even of these who have left the country...”*

Binti: *“...From the church, I have friends, Congolese and South Africans...I cannot spend a day without receiving a call. I can say that nowadays I live because of the church. My friend provides me with all kind of support whether emotional, material... you name it...thanks to mobile phone I keep in touch with my family and friends back home, my friends here in South Africa and all over the world...”*

In accordance with Smith et al., (2011), it is evident that networks enhance the capabilities in social, economic, and political spheres. Also, for the respondents, owning a mobile phone is a sign of caring about social relationships and not trying to live one’s own life separated from the others. There is a view that each one has an obligation of being available and keeping in touch with others. Even when a person cannot financially afford regular mobile phone communication, owning a mobile phone is viewed as a solution to the perceived social accountability of keeping in touch, as Sango explains:

*“...regular communication sustains friendships. With a mobile phone there is no more justification for not keeping in touch...when I do not have enough airtime I send an SMSs or I just beep...everyone*

*knows how to make a beep.... I like beeping [laughing] it always appears like a missed call. The person can call back but even if he does not at least he knows that I am things of him...”.*

This finding concurs with Donner (2010), showing that beeping also known as flashing has many different meanings such as ‘call me back’, ‘I am thinking of you’, ‘greetings’ and more. Beeping is a split-second call which happens when a phone call is made and immediately terminated, before it is picked up on the mobile phone whose number has been called. This research highlights that with the option of beeping, mobile phones enable users to keep in touch, regardless of the lack of financial means.

Respondent Gatera stated that his mobile phone allows him to be so much closer to relatives and friends than what it could be without it. *“...we rarely visit friends because everyone is busy trying to maintain...mobile phone breaks barriers to distance as it allows us to communicate with friends and relatives even when at work...”*. He believes that sharing with his friends on social media increases their affections even if the information that they are sharing seems trivial such as location, activities, and photos. Similarly, Kodani shared that: *“...mobile phone enables me to keep regular contact with many people than what I could do living with them in the same city. It is impossible to physically visit each other very enough. But with mobile phone no matter where they are in the world we can communicate easily.... even a like or a comment on someone’s post on Facebook is enough...”*.

The finding shows that the mobile phone is effective in passing on sensitive messages regarding certain events of life, such as birth, death, and anniversary, when it is difficult to attend. Respondents commented that by using their mobile phone they have been able to maintain their relationship with relatives in the host country and those back in the home country. Kowe commented:

*“because of better and cheap communication that mobile phone offers using WhatsApp, imo and facebook, I am here [South Africa] but I am involved in everything related to my family in Congo. On WhatsApp, we have set a family group for discussion of family matters and to just keep socialising to keep the family bond. Things like preparation of marriage, deciding on with school this cousin or that nice should register to, advice the young about how to behave in community... all is done on mobile phone...mobile phone makes it look like I am virtually in Congo while I am this far.”*.

However, some respondents complained that because of being easily contactable through their mobile phone, their relatives and friends back home put too much pressure on them, asking for financial assistance, as Buya explains: *“...because of mobile phones they [relatives back home] always disturb me. Without mobile phone, they could not be able to talk to me anytime they want. I would save some money...I know some people who refuse to answer their phones or always change their contact number*

*because they do not want to spend money on their families... but me I cannot do that, not only I need my phone because of my job, but also I have to help my family... ”*

The findings show that mobile phones afford urban refugees sociability. The use of the mobile phone is effectively enabling urban refugees to create and also to maintain ties with relatives and friends in the host country, as well as with those back home and elsewhere. This finding concurs with Andrade and Doolin (2016), stating that ICTs facilitate the maintenance of transnational connections and identities that matter for many people in contemporary society. The findings show that urban refugees do not underestimate the power of social relationships, and that the use of the mobile phone is crucial in creating, maintaining and strengthening ties in social networks.

### **6.3.2.2. *Capability to be socially and culturally connected***

The role of mobile phones in enhancing social and cultural connections has been stated in previous research such as that by Andrade and Doolin (2016) and Bacishoga et al., (2016). Similarly, in this research, it emerged that the use of mobile phones facilitates respondents to be socially and culturally active despite being far from their home countries. For being instantly reachable, mobile phones provide urban refugees with the means for interaction and communication with relatives and friends in the host country, and those back in the home countries and worldwide. They use mobile phones to share general information regarding, for example, the available opportunities, the challenges and related possible solutions, the perceived fate and hope, and the general news from home countries.

The use of mobile phones enables respondents to set up informal networks, often based on an ad hoc basis. Respondent Rabina stated that all her friends are from the refugee community. Asked to provide the reason why it happens to be like that, she explained: “...*I talk to every person, South Africans or foreigners. but it happens that most of the people who call me on mobile phone are fellow refugees. I think it is because they are my friends. ‘birds of same feather flock together’ as its said .... I always call my friends because whatever situation I can face there must be another refugee who had experienced it before and can help me out. How can I expect a help from a South African how never have any problem with access to the clinic, home affairs or getting a school for his children?... I think I do not have even one [South African citizen] in my phone contact list except for the public ones like police, emergency...*”

In the same manner, most of the respondents shared that they usually use mobile phones to contact friends and relatives in case of functional and immediate needs. For example, respondent Buya stated that most of his mobile phone communications are with refugees from his country of origin, because he trusts them more, they have a common past and have much affection amongst themselves. In many of the respondents’ narratives, elements of trust and solidarity were highlighted as being the key features

of mobile phone use amongst homogenous groups. Sharing of common characteristics such as being refugees creates the perception of being exposed to similar challenges, similar fate, and opportunities. Using mobile phones to share their experiences and circumstances results in the formation of informal social networks, which again are maintained by the use of mobile phones.

Respondents' narrative accounts also highlighted the social benefit of the mobile phone, as it is used for connectedness to others. In all the respondents' interviews, the ability to easily and quickly connect to others, whether family, friends or relatives was highly valued.

Many respondents have developed relationship networks beyond the refugee community, and use mobile phones to interact with these individuals. These includes people who respondents met in different life circumstances, such as at work, schools, churches, special events, and neighbours. On mobile phones they talk about issues of similar interests such as church, work or school programmes, economic, social, and security issues. *"...mobile phone enables me to keep contact with my former landlord. He is German but now is like South African...he always calls me to know how I am doing.... he helps me a lot. It is him who helped me to open a bank account and to get a visa for my brother's wife...I still use his address as my proof of residence..."* (Gatera).

Binti: *"...I like to make friends and mobile phone helps me to do that ... my friends are from all over...it happens that sometimes I meet with a someone like at church or a mall. After an interesting conversation we exchange contact numbers and since then we become friends...we chat on social media, comments on posts...and I know if possible we can help each other to sort out issues..."*

Linda: *"...sometimes I have friends with whom we just met somehow and exchange contact numbers...but it does not last for long with most of them. Only with those we chat more often..."*

The findings show also that urban refugees believe in community solidarity. To sustain the solidarity of the community, urban refugees use their mobile phones to connect with friends and acquaintances, mostly constituted from refugees from the same country. The majority of social networks of refugees with locals were not established over mobile phone conversations, but mobile phones are crucial in improving and strengthening their relationships. Comments like *"...we exchanged phone contact numbers and since then we became friends..."* (Binti) were common in respondents' narratives. Even though only two of the respondents have South African wives it is not rare to see a couple comprising a refugee with a non-refugee.

It emerges that mobile phones render users accessible, but frequent communication occurs only among intimate friends. Although mobile phones are crucial in maintaining social networks, in many of respondents' narratives it was evident that weak social ties among heterogeneous groups of individuals

are vulnerable and tend to disappear. To retain such social ties, frequent maintenance is required and mobile phones have proven well in doing that.

As a means of communication, mobile phones enable respondents not only to keep in touch with relatives and friends but also to maintain and express their cultural identity. In this regard, respondent Buya shared that his mobile phone keeps him updated with everything happening in the Burundi and international news. “... *I do not want to appear like a foreigner in my own country when I go back...*”. Respondent Mika shared that he uses his mobile phone to know what is happening in his country “...*now I have online friends. They are Congolese in diaspora ...we have an online forum where we discuss and share anything related to Congo. I using mobile phone to participate...*”. Respondent Fomutu used his mobile phone to show his children images of his home country “... *nowadays, with WhatsApp, imo, Facebook, distance is no longer the issue. When talking to someone in Congo, if there is something that I need to see such as a newly repaired road or a new building, he can take a picture with his phone and instantly send it to me via Facebook or WhatsApp or even show me via live video chat on imo...I show my children where we came from ...*” (Fomutu).

Using mobile phones affords respondents the opportunity to express their cultural identities, keeping in mind where they came from, and reaffirming who they are. This finding is in accordance with Andrade and Doolin (2016), who found ICT is a valuable means for resettled refugees to maintain attachments to their cultural backgrounds. Using a mobile phone, individuals can often enact new practices. In the above quote, Fomutu uses his mobile phone as a didactical tool to inculcate their cultural identity in his children.

### **6.3.2.3. Capability to Communicate effectively**

Arguments that mobile phones are excellent tools for communications abound in the literature. It is not surprising that the findings of this research show that the use of mobile phones affords urban refugees multiple forms of interaction, collaboration, exchange and dialogue. According to the respondents, mobile phone use is a crucial means of communication because of its unique properties, including that it is a personal device, it can be accessed at any time and in any location.

Lolo: “...*it is not like mobile phone is better than face to face conversation but it [mobile phone] is the best way of communicating anytime anywhere. I use my mobile phone to inform friends about events of my life, about a birthday, a party I attended, my work... I just post the information on my Facebook page and friends can post comments or chat with me.*”

It was found in the data that the mobile phone affords respondents many opportunities, including the opportunity to exchange their wider interests and ideas, to keep up with friends, colleagues, co-workers and relatives, irrespective of time and place. Mobile phones afford urban refugees the opportunity to

interact, to comment and post updates, to schedule dates and more. In the respondents' narratives, it was clear that mobile phone communication is advantageous, for it is interactive and eliciting in the sense that it triggers answer from the person being contacted. With mobile phones, users do not have to be at a fixed location to contact and interact with others. Wherever a person is, especially in urban areas, "you can make a phone call" (Linda). Also, mobile phone communication draws an immediate personal response, even when this could otherwise be difficult to achieve, as evidenced in respondent Shaba's narrative:

*"...mobile phone is good because you can communicate to someone you could never have the opportunity to talk to face to face...like one day I was dismissed by a ticket seller who did not recognise my refugees' status when I was trying to book a flight to Pretoria. Fortunately, phone contact number of the hierarchy were hanged on the wall in the waiting area. I immediately phoned the manager. she came and proceed with my booking.... she also apologised to me[laughing]..."*

In the same manner, respondent Tezo commented: *"...you can use your phone to contact the manager or the person in charge when the employee tries to despise you because you are a foreigner...you also receive immediate answer...I did it when the microwave that I bought was faulty after few weeks of purchase. It was under guarantee but the guy at the store come with a long story and refused to give my money back. Fortunately, I called to customer care contact number. They linked me to the store manager who immediately came himself and apologise and gives my money back..."*

As shown in these narratives, a mobile phone allows users to raise their concerns, but also to express their emotions better than when using letters. A mobile phone allows for sending SMSs or taking messages through voice mail when a call is unanswered, giving the user a certain degree of confidence that a message has reached the destination. Respondent Kowe comments:

*"... I got a letter from my daughter's school stating that she is slow in hearing. They wanted me to explain something in writing or by phone contact... I decided to contact them by phones because it is easy for me than in writing... when I called the line was busy but I left them a voice mail... they called me after few minutes ... and we agreed on the date they will visit my home...it was easy and quick. communication on mobile phone is direct, you talk I talk. It is not a one-way communication like a letter that you need to wait for answers..."*

Mobile phones provide users with the opportunity to deliver detailed voice messages, as there are no restrictions on the length of the message. Written messages can also be used to avoid misunderstandings, as Gatera explains: *"...because I have realised that sometimes there are misunderstandings in phone conversations... to avoid that I always use SMSs or emails to summarise my agreements with my customers and especially SMS to my employees ..."*

It emerges from these narratives that, using mobile phones, respondents were able to achieve outcomes that were difficult or simply could not occur without the use of mobile phones. It is evident that the nature or the technical features of the mobile phone used define the extent to which an urban refugee can engage or participate in the information society. Respondents stated that they usually access social networks over their mobile phone and rarely on the computer. Hence, individuals who possess mobile phones with Internet capability, and who can access WiFi or can afford to pay for data bundles, are likely to communicate more effectively and become more engaged in the information society. Respondents with mobile phones with Internet capability were able to engage in more detailed online discussions, comment on videos on YouTube or Facebook, activities in which an individual with a mobile phone without Internet capability cannot engage.

### **6.3.3. Capabilities to manage their own situation and solve problems**

In recent years, the usefulness of mobile phones has greatly increased, enabling users to perform more tasks in a mobile context (Harrison et al., 2013). Nowadays, mobile phones are used not only for basic communications but also for accessing the Internet. In many ways, mobile phones make life easier by providing users with an unprecedented level of connectivity. It emerged from the data of this research that the mobile phone affords to respondents the capabilities to manage their own situation and solve problems. Two themes that were identified and grouped under the category are the capabilities to make multi-tasking easier, and to guarantee security and transparency.

#### **6.3.3.1. Capability to Make multi-tasking easier**

Multi-tasking refers to the ability of an individual to engage in multiple tasks aimed at attaining multiple goals simultaneously (Chen & Yan, 2016; Kamal & Silva, 2013). In this thesis multi-tasking is viewed as the ability that mobile phones afford users to rapidly switch between different activities, or the opportunity to utilise mobile phones to perform more than one activity concurrently without interruption. Sending and receiving text messages is an essential communication channel for many mobile phone users. The findings of this research show that in addition to basic communication, respondents utilise their mobile phones as a multi-tasking device. For example, respondent Elena explained that “...*mobile phone has become very important to me...look! I have to run my small business and at the same time I have to look after the children. I do it on mobile phone because most of the time I'm not at home with them ...*”.

Similarly, respondent Lolo commented that the mobile phone enables him to seamlessly shift his school and work activities: “... *sometimes there is a change in my studying or working schedule...my mobile phone enables me to manage such situation by contacting my co-workers and negotiate a time swipe in working shift...*”.

Respondent Binti stated that even when she is off duty, she is “on standby” because her mobile phone can ring at any time. Respondent Tezo emphasised that without a mobile phone it could be much too difficult for him, as a parent, to study and work. *“I manage my activities over the phone. When I am at home or at work I use my cell phone to keep update with activities at school by communicating with colleagues and also to check for planned activities on Vula [an online collaboration and learning environment of a university used to support courses as well as other university-related groups and communities] ... since I live far from my school, I only go there when it is an imperative and because of my job plus family responsibilities...”*

The findings show that respondents were able to solve many of their everyday problems by utilising their mobile phones for seamlessly managing activities, even where they were not physically present. With mobile phones, distance is no longer the limit, as users do not necessarily have to be physically in a particular place to do something. Rwaki stated: *“... when I am at work I use my phone to make things happen at home. I just call my wife and give her instructions over the phone... if it is an urgent task to perform she does not have to wait for me”*.

Gatera: *“...I may be at home or somewhere and use my phone to buy electricity or something else like airtime...”*

In many ways, mobile phones have changed the manner of everyday routines of respondents’ lives. Multi-tasking has become possible from a variety of places. The findings show that no matter how spread out people are, and how busy they can be, the mobile phone enables them to communicate and achieve their goals. A mobile phone enables urban refugees to plan their activities, to schedule everyday routines and even to be productive while on the go. Duncan (2013) argues that mobile communication has blurred spatial contexts and time frames.

It emerged from the data that, for the respondents, the mobile phone is ubiquitous because it is mobile and, in addition to the communication capabilities, it affords to users a mixed bag of multimedia capacities like a music player, gaming, camera for videos and photos, social networking, web browsing, email applications, GPS and weather checking, radio, torch and a host of other activities. Respondent Kalu explained: *“...I use my phone not only for communications but also for entertaining myself with music, radio, with my phone, I no longer need things like a watch or torch or calculator, GPS to go places...with this smartphone I do many things”*

The findings show that by multi-tasking, respondents are benefiting from the use of their mobile phones to manage their daily activities. With mobile phones, multi-tasking has become a way of life, as users are able to shift between different activities and applications. However, the extent to which multi-tasking can be beneficial in managing their own situation depends on the features of mobile phones.

Users with smartphones can convey or receive larger amounts of information at once than can be done with an SMS on a basic mobile phone.

### **6.3.3.2. Capability to Guarantee security and transparency**

Guaranteeing security and transparency have to do with basic trust, and the assurance of disclosure and lucidity that people enjoy in their day to day transactions (Dé, 2006). The narratives reveal that for urban refugees, mobile phones are viewed as useful devices which provide safe and confidential means of communication. In addition, mobile phones are regarded as a useful tool for communication, which offers privacy for it is easy to use and can be used at more convenient times. Unlike traditional letters or emails, mobile phone communication, especially vocal communication, decreases the risk or the likelihood of sharing confidential information to an unintended audience.

*“... on mobile phone I express myself with confidence because I can recognise the voice and be sure I am not talking to the wrong person. That is why I am careful with SMSs because I am not 100% sure who is on the other side...”* (Tezo).

Respondents believe that mobile phones provide to users the opportunity to interact with local authorities for safety and advocacy issues, even though many complained about poor responses. Sango: *“I’ve used my cell phone to book an appointment with the UCT law clinic and they helped me to renew my refugees’ status when the home affairs refused to renew it...”*.

Similarly, respondent Mika: *“Since the xenophobia eruption in 2008 we [Amis BK] are in phone contact with many organisations that deal with refugees such as the UNHRC, the police, and ONGs. It may be about a seminar or briefing during tension related to xenophobic attacks. whenever I receive an urgent information concerning refugees in South Africa, I inform the members throughout mobile phone SMSs. During the upsurge in xenophobic attacks in 2015, the police and other NGOs have been contacting us and requesting us to urge fellow refugees to avoid hot spots such as townships, or moving by trains and avoid to make ourselves noticeable. whenever we receive such information we inform Amis BK members by SMS. ...although using SMSs is expensive, we do not have a choice for now. because I am not sure that all of them using social media such as Facebook or WhatsApp could be cheaper but such technology is not yet used by everybody”*.

The sense of security provided by mobile phone use involves also economical security and its use as a lifeline in case of emergency, as expressed in the following excerpts:

Seleo: *“...the cell phone itself is like money in your pocket. I know many people who did not have any cash money with them and gave their cell phones as pledges or simply sell out to sort themselves out from a situation. I did it myself on two occasions, on my way to South Africa I sold my cell phone when*

*I was stranded in Zimbabwe .... I also gave my phone as a pledge to a guy who requested to be paid to get me a job... ”*

Linda: *“...also this phone can quickly be converted into cash money...I sold my phone to paid my rent when I did not have other alternatives ...”*

Rwaki explained that his phone has a passcode option but for emergency reasons he does not use it *“...what is the point of having ‘In Case of Emergency’ number in a locked phone? I urged my wife never to lock her phone with a passcode for anything can happen and maybe someone can try to use the phone to contact relatives ... also do not keep your secret on the phone”*.

The finding shows that mobile phones afford respondents a sense of security. Respondent Nastia explains that she always uses email in every single communication that she needs to keep a record of, such as communication with her landlord regarding the rental. Nastia mentioned that whenever her landlord is not willing to use email, she uses SMSs. *“...I do this because I know many [refugees] who have been victims and I advise them about email correspondence to keep written record of communication. To do it one do not need to go to the internet café. You do it on your mobile phone ... even if your phone is lost, your email address is not lost and you can access it anywhere... ”*.

Mobile phones provide users with the possibility of keeping written records of communication such as SMSs or email which can serve as a reference, or shared with third parties if needed. In South Africa, most of the refugees find it difficult to rent accommodation from rental agencies because of too many conditions such as being a holder of a South African ID or passport if a foreigner, providing a pay slip, two months' security deposit, and a bank statement. The documentation provided to refugees is not recognised by most private and even public authorities. Many refugees in South Africa do not have formal employers and consequently, do not have pay slips. Therefore, most of the refugees deal privately with houses owners who advertise their accommodations on the internet, or through word of mouth. However, with no formal contract, it often results in abuse, fraud, and deception.

## **6.4. Summary of the chapter**

This chapter presents the analysis of the factors that shape the use of mobile phones by urban refugees in South Africa. The findings show that the use of mobile phones by urban refugees for interacting within the social field is structured by conversion factors namely, the affordances of mobile phones, the personal factors, and the socio-environmental factors. Those conversion factors enable or restrict the use of mobile phones by urban refugees in South Africa.

The chapter also presents the analysis of capabilities associated with mobile phone use by urban refugees in South Africa. The findings show the unique contribution of the use of mobile phones by

respondents to make strategic life choices in a context where they were previously denied them. The findings show that urban refugees in South Africa use their mobile phones to generate the capabilities to negotiate ways to participate in the information society, the capabilities to effectively engage with wider networks, and the capabilities to manage one's own situation and solve the problem. The discussion of the findings is presented in the following chapter.

## **7. DISCUSSION OF THE RESULTS**

### **7.1. Introduction**

The aim of this thesis is to critically explore the factors which shape the use of mobile phones by urban refugees in South Africa and their capabilities for empowerment. The previous chapter analysed the factors that shape the use of mobile phones by urban refugees in South Africa as well as the capabilities associated with their use of mobile phones. This chapter discusses the findings of this thesis in a broader context and compares them with the existing literature, in order to demonstrate the contribution to knowledge in the IS field of research. In discussing the results, this chapter makes a particular reference to the theoretical framework (based on the integration of Sen's CA and Bourdieu's TOP) which constitutes the explanatory theory for this research. In so doing, the discussion of the findings presented in this chapter sheds light on the research objectives and answers the research questions of this thesis.

The remainder of this chapter is divided into three sections in which the contents interact and overlap to a high degree, as during the data analysis. Section 7.2 discusses the research findings relating to the factors that shape the use of mobile phones by urban refugees in South Africa. Section 7.3 discusses the capabilities associated with mobile phone use by urban refugees in South Africa, and the empowerment generated. In Section 7.4 a framework is presented and discussed to highlight the emerging interrelationship between agency, social structures, mobile phone use, capabilities, and empowerment.

### **7.2. Capital and the factors that shape mobile phone use by urban refugees in South Africa**

This research highlights that urban refugees' daily lives are characterised by interactions with people and institutions, and that mobile phone use plays a crucial role in mediating such interactions. On their arrival in South Africa, refugees face a myriad of challenges, including rebuilding their capital that were disrupted or lost by leaving their homes. To survive, they have to compete with locals for the very limited opportunities available in South Africa (Breen et al., 2016). The use of mobile phones emerges as crucial in every domain of life of urban refugees. Mobile phone use has facilitated respondents throughout their journey to the host country, where it also enables them to accumulate and convert different forms of capital into capabilities, for example:

- Economic capital such as in finding employment or casual jobs, for self-employment in the form of small business.
- Cultural capital such as the education, language, and legitimisation of their knowledge in the new field.
- Social capital such as the adherence to a particular social group, creating and maintaining friendships and relationships in form of social networks and ties.

- Symbolic capital such as recognition and good reputation amongst fellow refugees.

As in Andrade and Doolin (2016), this research shows that mobile phones offer urban refugees access to information that can assist in their orientation and adaptation into a new social field.

This research found that the opportunities, as well as obstacles for urban refugees in South Africa to use mobile phones for empowerment, reside in the affordances of mobile phones, the socio-environmental factors, and the personal factors. It emerged from the analysis of data that those factors inter-relate and are embedded within the capital which, according to Bourdieu (1993) constitute a central source of power within a field. It is important to note that these factors, together with capital, are complementary in explaining the use of mobile phones. This research contributes to the literature by showing that individuals' "opportunities and prospects depend crucially on what institutions exist and how they function" (Sen, 1999, p. 142) but also on the availability of capital and on individuals' own abilities to make use of the opportunities. These findings lend credence to the critical research perspective assumptions that alienating circumstances can be found in agents themselves, as well as in the environment they live in (Cecez-Kecmanovic, 2011). The extent to which the use of mobile phones can contribute to the empowerment of urban refugees in South Africa depends on those factors. Their mobile phone use reveals how their habitus is constantly being structured as the result of disruption in and between fields, and by adaptation.

### **7.2.1. The personal factors and mobile phone use**

This research finds that personal factors or personal characteristics of respondents constitute one of the factors that frame their use of mobile phones. In the CA, Sen (1992) argues that personal factors influence how an individual can convert the characteristics of the commodity into a functioning. Using the CA, Hatakka et al. (2016) found that personal conversation factors make it difficult for some individuals to benefit from ICT access. In this research, the personal factors included the necessity of the mobile phone and awareness of its features, the availability of or lack of financial resources, the frustration of being excluded, and the lack of confidence in the English language. These personal factors reflect also the habitus for individual respondents. For in Bourdieu's (1990a) TOP, habitus is "embodied history, internalised as second nature" (p. 56).

The respondents' necessity of mobile phone use and their awareness or unawareness of its features influence their use. There was evidence that the respondents' motivation for using mobile phones emerges from the necessity and values of these tools, which enables them to satisfy their personal needs and desires. As Sey (2011) argues, individuals use mobile phones in the ways that make sense to them. For urban refugees, mobile phones are necessary for communication, social interaction, for accessing information and other things. Mobile phones are also seen as a symbol of identification and recognition in a social group. This research shows also that the respondent's un/awareness of the features of mobile

phones affects the extent of their use. The respondents who are familiar or have experience with particular features or functions of their devices (e.g. using a search engine, buying or making airtime transfer on their phone, accessing news online) find it easy and pleasant to perform these activities. The respondents who lack knowledge or who are not aware of certain features, distrust some of the potential of the devices and miss the opportunities that they could obtain using their mobile phones. This finding shows that individual's personality traits and mental abilities affect his/her goals and practice. For it is difficult for an individual to desire what he cannot imagine as possible (Nussbaum & Sen, 1993).

The availability of, or lack of financial resources, also referred to as economic capital in Bourdieu's TOP facilitates or hinders their mobile phone use in an effective way. The data shows that for the majority of respondents, the costs associated with mobile phones (prices of handsets, the tariff of communication, repair cost and loss of devices) is still out of their reach. It is evident that the majority of urban refugees in South Africa have restricted income. However, because of the necessity of mobile phones in their everyday life, they perceive that their lives will be more vulnerable without it. For many of them the consequence of limited financial resources includes relying on social media for communication, even though it is not as reliable as voice calls and SMS. This is because not every mobile phone user accesses social media, and sometimes users switch off cellular data to avoid spending and to save battery power. The affordability or unaffordability of mobile phone services reflects each respondent's position in the field.

The respondent's position in the field is internalised in the habitus. The respondents who easily afford the costs of mobile phones "*communicate regularly*" and are fortunate to improve their capital – for example strengthening ties in social networks. Those who can not afford them, "*communicate rarely*" as a way of trying to save. For the unequal distribution of capital in a field is both the result of, and a key mechanism of, the social reproduction of power and privileges (Abel & Frohlich, 2012). The affordance in terms of income is likely to foster an empowering use of mobile phones. The urban refugees in South Africa who can afford mobile phones with optimum features are likely to become more engaged and benefit from the use of mobile phones. The findings support the literature showing that the cost of mobile phone communications does remain a significant barrier to effective use (Rashid & Elder, 2009). Even though today the market is filled with affordable and lower-priced mobile phones with innovative technology (Hawthorne, 2016; RIA, 2013), the findings show that a large number of urban refugees are unable to afford the costs associated with the use of mobile phones. For these, the inability to afford them became a hindrance to the effective use of mobile phones.

The frustration of being excluded influences urban refugees' use of mobile phones in such a way that many exclude themselves from using their mobile phones in engaging in activities they believe they are excluded from. It happens because, in the social field, social practices create and establish habitus (Kirchberg, 2007). At the same time, this practice, through habitus, modifies the social field. As such,

because of the frustration, many respondents have lost trust and avoid using mobile phones in activities such as managing bank accounts, online booking, searching for jobs posted online, and using mobile money transfer. Bourdieu (1977) argued that habitus comprises internalised class conditions that lead to the embodiments of rules of the game and habits unconsciously. As a result of frustration, many of the respondents miss the opportunities enabled by mobile phones use. In a sense, being a refugee in South Africa is less important than the position it places someone relative to others in terms of opportunity such as using a mobile phone to achieve desired outcomes.

The lack of confidence in the English language was also found to hinder the effective use of mobile phones. As Ouane and Glanz (2010) note, communication can both empower and disempower. Respondents who lack confidence in the English language avoid engaging in a mobile phone conversation in English, which is the commonly spoken language in urban South Africa. And when they do, they struggle to make themselves understood through voice conversation over the mobile phone. All the 22 respondents of this research are urban refugees from the African Great Lakes region countries, namely the DR Congo, Burundi, and Rwanda. In these countries, English is not one of the languages commonly spoken except for Rwanda, where in 2008 it was been declared as the sole medium of instruction after many years of using French and Kinyarwanda (Tabaro, 2015). Communication is essential for accessing and creating knowledge (Ouane & Glanz, 2010). The lack of proficiency in the commonly spoken language constitutes a personal factor that leads urban refugees to be deprived of the capabilities to use mobile phones for negotiating pathways within set structures.

### **7.2.2. The socio-environmental factors and mobile phone use**

In addition to the personal factors, this research found that the social and environmental factors facilitate, but can also hinder, urban refugees' use of mobile phones for empowerment. As with Sen (1999), this research shows the importance of giving "simultaneous recognition to the centrality of individual freedom and to the force of social influences on the extent and reach of individual freedom" (1999b, p. xii). With regards to Bourdieu's TOP, the social structures consist of the existing social practices of a particular field, which includes the economic structures, political structures, social factors such as social norms, public policies, customs, social networks, conventions, and practices. The socio-environmental factors which were found to be of particular relevance in the context of this research consist of the social influence, policies and regulations, the stereotype about refugees and the challenges of documentation, and the geographical location.

In accordance with the literature, the research found that social influence affects the use of mobile phones (Rogers, 1995; Venkatesh et al., 2003). This research reveals that social influence such as others' opinions, general tendencies, practices, media and public discourse determine the way urban refugees use mobile phones. This includes the activities that urban refugees engage in, and the frequency and

mode of communication. It happens this way because the rules of the game are shared by everyone in the field, and are internalised in the form of habitus (Bourdieu, 1990a). This research shows that for urban refugees, being constantly reachable and available to others is not motivated by personal desire alone, but also because it is perceived as an accountability of each one. Consciously and unconsciously urban refugees use mobile phones in conformity with the rules of the game, in exchange for advantages such as social recognition. In so doing appropriate behaviour is assured.

The policies and regulations also affect, directly or indirectly, the use of mobile phones by urban refugees in South Africa to participate in various activities, either economic, social or political. Most of the policies and regulations require individuals in the country to produce their IDs on various occasions. This includes when buying a mobile phone (especially on a contract basis), opening a bank account, sending and receiving money, and booking or buying online. Another illustration is RICA (the Regulation of Interception of Communications and Provision of Communication-Related Information Act) which requires all mobile phone users in South Africa to provide personal identification details.

However, the identification documents that the refugees receive from the DHA are not recognised by many public and private organisations (Gordon, 2016b; Landau & Kabwe-Segatti, 2009). In addition, when the verification of these refugees' IDs is initiated, The DHA takes a long time, or does not reply at all. Consequently, many refugees find themselves directly or indirectly denied the opportunity of using mobile phones in activities such as mobile commerce and mobile banking. As Kirchberg (2007) puts it, power relations result from the historical processes and can be seen as institutionalised embodiments of individual actions and thoughts.

The stereotype about refugees and the challenges that documentation poses, negatively affect the use of mobile phones by urban refugees in South Africa. It emerges that for urban refugees in South Africa, owning a mobile phone does not necessarily mean having the opportunities to use it effectively. Many respondents have experienced missed opportunities because they could not use their mobile phone in certain activities due to exclusionary requirements. It is evident that the frustration of being excluded, as experienced by certain respondents and which negatively affect their use of mobile phones, is caused by stereotypes about refugees and the excluding policies and regulations. These constitute networks of ideology that are sometimes taken for granted or invisible. The findings concur with Thomas and Parayil (2008), showing that mobile phone use can empower individuals, but can also increase inequalities because it is evident that socially advantaged individuals are more likely to be able to effectively use their mobile phones to achieve desired outcomes than socially excluded individuals. Using Bourdieu's terminology, the findings show that the South African social field is a playing field of forces where host community-agents, through symbolic and cultural capital, consciously and subconsciously strategize to re-enforce their interests and positions as superiors and masters by attempting to impose or at least constrain urban refugees' actions, behaviours, perceptions, conceptions, desires, judgement, meaning,

etc. It is clear that the South African social field is characterised by the regularised and institutionalised unequal positions of social agents, and by competitive struggles within them (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992).

The environmental factors also affect mobile phone use by urban refugees. Zheng (2009) asserts that environmental factors such as institutions, infrastructure, climate, and public goods enable or hinder an individual's freedom to benefit from available opportunities. In the context of this research, the geographical location appears to be of particular relevance. For the respondents, urban South Africa generally provides a conducive environment for mobile phone use. This includes the quality of mobile network infrastructure, availability of electricity, timely update of mobile phone apps, and so forth. Respondents use their mobile phones to identify their current location and easily get directions. Data show also that, for some respondents, the geographical location appears to be advantageous, while for others it is not the case. For example, two respondents have access to limited daily free WiFi in their neighbourhood, one has unlimited free WiFi at school and another at her workplace. The geographical location was disadvantageous for three respondents who stay in townships where rent is affordable to them. They said their mobile phones have been confiscated more than once by street hooligans.

### **7.2.3. The affordances of mobile phones**

It is argued that “user experience encompasses the experiential, affective, and cognitive aspects of a person interacting with a product, system or service” (De Oliveira, Cherubini & Oliver, 2012, p. 14). This research shows that the affordances of mobile phones significantly vary the capabilities for empowerment of urban refugees. There are opportunities and constraints relating to the technological features of mobile phones. Mobile phones differ in terms of value and usage. Respondents value mobile phone use for its ubiquity, usefulness, and usability. Therefore, mobile phones with optimum features, such as those with Internet capabilities, are likely to facilitate the respondents to become more engaged and to benefit from their use. These findings are consistent with Qureshi (2011), who argues that the role of ICTs in enabling development is in the ways peoples can use technologies to take actions and decisions that allow them to lead better lives. The data shows, for example, that respondents whose mobile phones have Internet capabilities could access online content and social media at their convenience, while those whose mobile phones do not have Internet capability would either borrow one that does, or go to an Internet café.

The generated benefits are tangled with some relativities as the technological advancements are defined by the norms and standards that are current at a particular point in time. Hence, the capabilities of using mobile phones in a given activity may define individuals as empowered now, in today's context, but may not be seen as empowered in the years to come. If for example, in the past, the opportunity to make and receive voice calls or SMSs was seen as empowering, that does not seem to be enough today given

the current advancement of mobile phone technology. Other capabilities need to be considered, such as the ability to access multimedia online contents over the mobile phone, or to make payments or bookings online. These findings are consistent with Zheng (2009), suggesting that the properties of mobile phones including the storage and processing of information, knowledge generation and transfer, synchronous and asynchronous communication across space and time, networked connectivity and multimedia content, provide the user with the means which can be converted into the capabilities to achieve desired outcomes.

Other technological contexts of mobile phones which were highlighted included the portability of the device, the connectivity, performance, the availability, and the multimediality (on the positive side), and the small screen size, the keypad size, the connectivity, performance, battery life, and loss of devices as a result of theft (on the negative side). This finding concurs with Oosterlaken and van den Hoven (2011) who include technical artifacts among the resources that may contribute to the expansion of an individual's capabilities. However, beyond the simplistic notion of resources, the findings of this research provide a more critical account of mobile phone use, highlighting the importance of the design and regulation of mobile phones on users' experience. Hence, even though what matters for a mobile phone are the capabilities engendered by its use, the affordances of mobile phones should not be neglected when assessing mobile phone use for empowerment.

### **7.3. The Relationship between Mobile phone use and Capabilities for Empowerment**

This research has argued that the genuine opportunities urban refugees have for using mobile phones for undertaking the actions or engaging in activities they desire are crucial for their empowerment. Thus, the existence of capabilities pre-supposes positive agency-structure relationships (the structurally transformative agency), and the availability of capital, which constitute the resources necessary in providing the means to achieve desired outcomes.

The literature shows that refugees in South Africa experience social exclusion and social inequality (CoRMSA, 2012; Crush et al., 2016; Gordon, 2016b). When people are denied access to resources that would enable them to acquire capabilities, they become excluded and disempowered (Sen, 1999). The unequal distribution of capital is part of the broader structures of inequality in the social field (Abel & Frohlich, 2012). This research has found that, in addition to other forms of exclusion experienced by urban refugees in South Africa, on many occasions, they are also denied opportunities of using mobile phones in an effective way. For the individuals under such conditions, empowerment has to be understood as the expansion in their ability to make strategic life choices in a context where they are denied them (Kabeer, 1999).

This research argues that, for the urban refugees in South Africa, the use of mobile phones would be considered empowering when it enables the realisation of meaningful desired goals. That is when the individuals, using mobile phones, exert their agency effectively in line with their valuable beings and doings. When using mobile phones, the capabilities can be converted into achievements. Based on the analysis of data, this research identified eight particular capabilities for empowerment that respondents generate from mobile phone use. These were grouped into three categories, namely, the capabilities to effectively engage with wider networks, the capabilities to negotiate ways to benefit from the information society, the capabilities to manage one's own situation and to solve problems. These capabilities were inferred from the activities that the respondents were actually able to achieve using mobile phones (Andrade, & Doolin, 2016). As such, they constitute achieved functionings – empowerment. These capabilities interact and overlap to a high degree, as it will be noticed in the detailed discussion that follows.

### **7.3.1. Capabilities to negotiate ways to participate in the information society.**

The research shows that, by using their mobile phones to communicate, urban refugees are participating in economic and financial activities, improving access to services, and to various information.

Firstly, the analysis shows mixed results with regard to urban refugees' capability to participate in economic and financial activities as a result of mobile phone use. In the context of this thesis, economic capital was operationalized as urban refugees' abilities to use mobile phones to directly or indirectly create opportunities to acquire resources or to convert the use of mobile phones into economic resources. Economic resources refer to the financial and physical capital which can be invested and converted into other forms of capital.

The economic impact of mobile phones is established fairly well (i.e. increased income and productivity, reduced transaction costs, and enhanced market efficiency and competition) (Chew et al., 2015). The majority of respondents explained that using mobile phones has given them more opportunities or enhanced their capabilities of exercising economic activities. Respondents were using their mobile phones for obtaining market information, improving entrepreneurial skills in term of generating or reducing expenses, increasing access to economic resources (finding and retaining customers), or accumulating funds and managing money by saving costs and time and reducing expenses. The findings illustrate the economic benefits of mobile phones, whose use is believed to increase access to timely and relevant information (Billieux et al., 2015), enable autonomy and increase choice (Chew et al., 2015). Using their mobile phones, urban refugees are enabled to make informed decisions ahead of undertaking actions such as visiting friends who may not be available. A mobile phone contact enables the user to save time and cut some costs. For some respondents, mobile phone use enables them also to improve business opportunities, as they could contact and be contacted by customers. These findings concur with the literature showing that mobile phones enable the expansion

of market boundaries and improvement of supply chains (Smith et al., 2011). However, there is considerable evidence, that for many of the respondents, the affordances of mobile phones such as lack of or presence of Internet capabilities, personal factors such as the un/affordability in terms of income, and the socio-environmental factors such as the social influence, have both enabled and hindered mobile phone use for exercising economic activities.

Further, the analysis shows that mobile phone use affords urban refugees in South Africa the capability to improve access to services. Respondents shared that the mobile phone has enabled them to access certain services, including transport, municipal services such as electricity and water, business services such as banking, communication (airtime and data), information about local retailers' promotion and sales, and local weather information. Respondents affirmed that accessing services on mobile phones is convenient and time-saving. The findings illustrate today's greatly increased usefulness of mobile phones, allowing users to perform more tasks in a mobile context. Previous studies have also mentioned the role of mobile phones in enabling refugees access to services such as health services (Newman et al., 2016), in learning (Chen & Yan, 2016), and banking (Majchrzak et al., 2016).

Furthermore, mobile phone use affords urban refugees in South Africa the capabilities to improve access to timely and relevant information, crucial to organise their everyday activities. Respondents use their mobile phone to access needed information from friends, local authorities, public and private institutions, but also to get information available online. The information that respondents are enabled to access using their mobile phones consists of everyday material such as information regarding social concerns, employment opportunities, advice or guidance on how to do and get things, but also information on the political situation in their home countries and about their relatives' whereabouts. These findings are consistent with Wall, Campbell and Janbek (2015) showing that mobile phone use enables refugees to cope with information precarity. By enabling access to information, mobile phones enable refugees and migrants to mitigate or solve everyday uncertainties of life (Harney, 2013).

### **7.3.2. Capabilities to engage effectively with wider networks.**

This research shows that mobile phone use by urban refugees is more oriented towards the engagement with wider networks than for wealth generation. For all the respondents, the most valued function of a mobile phone is the ability to keep in touch with wider networks. It is argued that in the context of mobile phone use, the principal pathways through which agency is enacted is provided by network and information (Smith et al., 2011). With its diverse modes of communication ranging from just being contactable to the option of beeping, SMS, throughout to video calls and social media options, mobile phone use affords urban refugees the opportunities to develop and maintain ties and relationships, to be socially and culturally connected, and to be enabled to communicate effectively. However, such

characteristics of mobile phones serve to amplify the pressures on urban refugees to provide financial assistance to their relatives back home (Hunter, 2015).

Mobile phone use facilitates urban refugees' social connection and harnesses the challenges caused by living dispersed in urban cities far from their homeland and their loved ones. Urban refugees are dispersed and highly mobile due to work and accommodation needs. The findings present the mobile phone as a tool for association, enhancing both individuals' association or dissociation in society. Mobile phone use facilitates respondents to overcome isolation, as they develop social ties and maintain relationships with relatives and friends who provide them emotional support, a feeling of safety and confidence. The potential of mobile phones for this purpose has been recognised previously, especially with regard to expanding possibilities for connectedness between individuals. Trust and the perception of being exposed to similar opportunities and fates emerged as key reasons for social solidarity within a homogenous group among urban refugees. Such social solidarity is strengthened and sustained by mobile phone use, which affords them a means of communication anytime anywhere. Also, it emerged that most of the respondents' mobile phone communication is for social purposes with intimate friends, the majority of whom are people from the same country, while the majority of respondents have only a few friends who are not refugees. However, a network limited to homogeneous individuals limits the amount and content of information accessible to the group.

Mobile phone use affords urban refugees the opportunities to express their cultural identity. In fact, refugees' lives are not restricted to the local context of the host society. Their identities as well as their transnational connections matter for their well-being. By leaving their home countries, refugees have been forced to abandon their ancestral homes and their established lifestyle, their economic and cultural resources, and their social relations and environment. While sporadic communication inhibits transnational practices (Hunter, 2015), this research shows that, thanks to mobile phones, urban refugees are able to reinforce their past connections and to reaffirm and uphold their cultural identities. With mobile phone use, urban refugees are even capable of managing household affairs back home.

In addition, urban refugees consciously and unconsciously tend to keep their cultural identities as they are mostly attached to and interact with people from a similar background. The refugees' desire for cultural identities is also manifested in the respondents' narratives, in which they were referring to their home countries most of the times. The findings show that the use of mobile phones is a valuable means to satisfy urban refugees' need for maintaining cultural identities, as it enables them to seek and to access information about their home countries. By enabling constant communications with friends, mobile phone use develops in refugees a sense of maintaining cultural identity, providing them with a feeling of belonging to a community, trust, safety and confidence, having friends and improving their social position in the community.

Mobile phone use helps urban refugees to communicate effectively. Mobile phones afford users constant connectivity and accessibility to others. It also provides to users a sense of connection to the

world. Respondents report that mobile phones provide them with the opportunity to engage in instant and interactive communication, even with people that it could be otherwise impossible to talk to. In accordance with the literature, this research shows that social networks enable lesser or greater benefits from the engagement with technology (Clayton & Macdonald, 2013; Helsper, 2008).

### **7.3.3. Capabilities to manage own situation and solve problems.**

This research shows that mobile phone use enables urban refugees to make multi-tasking easier and to guarantee transparency and security. The advances in mobile phones, especially smartphones, have dramatically promoted the types and number of activities users can simultaneously engage in – multi-tasking (Chen & Yan, 2016). Urban refugees in South Africa use mobile phones to connect to social networks, take and share pictures, access information on websites, read online news, locate an address, and other activities. As such, many aspects of life of urban refugees in South Africa are made easier by the use of mobile phones, which enable them to frequently shift between different activities, including studying, working, parenting, socialising, entertainment, etc. These findings concur with literature that the mobile phone's ease of communication has led to many changes in social practices, daily activities becoming increasingly intertwined as the boundaries between personal and professional become more porous (Donner et al., 2011). Mobile phones also provide users with the ability to take advantage of opportunities when these arise.

Guaranteeing security and transparency is another outcome that urban refugees generate from mobile phone use. Sen (1999) explains that protective security provides a social safety net for protecting the vulnerable from further deprivation such as poverty or unemployment. While in numerous studies many mobile phone users have voiced concerns over the security of their personal information (Lin, et al., 2015), that seems not to be a preoccupation for most of the respondents in this research. Instead, for many respondents, the use of the mobile phone provides a sense of security and confidence, but with caution. To be sure that the communicating is with the right person, it has to be vocal.

The findings also show that the use of mobile phones enables urban refugees to address dilemmas and contingencies that they face in their new and unfamiliar environment. As Sen (1999) explains, the transparency guarantees have to do with the need for openness, where people expect the assurance of disclosure and lucidity that people enjoy in their day-to-day transactions. Using mobile phones, the respondents interact with local authorities for safety, service delivery, and emergency. Respondents use mobile phones to disseminate among themselves some safety tips, and for others vital information. Some respondents innovatively use their mobile phones as a means for guaranteeing transparency by keeping written records of communication, which can serve as a reference or be shared with third parties if needed. The information stored in a mobile phone creates opportunities for investigation (Casey & Tumbull, 2011). It emerged that mobile phones are enabling urban refugees to minimise and alleviate

daily challenges, to frame future expectations and aspirations, and to prepare for anticipated events and situations.

#### 7.4. A Proposed Conceptual Framework for mobile phone use for empowerment.

The data analysis and discussion identify complex relationships between the conversion factors, capital, mobile phone use, and capabilities for empowerment. It emerged that the capabilities, conceived as the genuine opportunities an individual enjoys (Sen, 1999), is enriched by Bourdieu’s conception of capital, social structures, habitus, and field. This research shows that within fields, individuals have unequal opportunities to use their mobile phones for specific activities or actions they value. As such, it is argued that the integration of Bourdieu’s TOP and Sen’s CA provides the framing to conceptualise the relationships among factors that shape the use of mobile phones and empowerment of urban refugees in South Africa. The findings of this research together with the concepts from Bourdieu’s TOP and Sen’s CA are used to develop a framework for explaining the social mechanisms through which mobile phone use enhances the empowerment of urban refugees in South Africa. The framework, depicted in Figure 8, visualises the causal process by which urban refugees’ use of mobile phones generates capabilities for empowerment. This research suggests that the use of mobile phones enhances the individual’s agency, creating conditions or capabilities to negotiate structural opportunities and constraints. The capabilities for empowerment are contingent on conversion factors and the availability of capital.

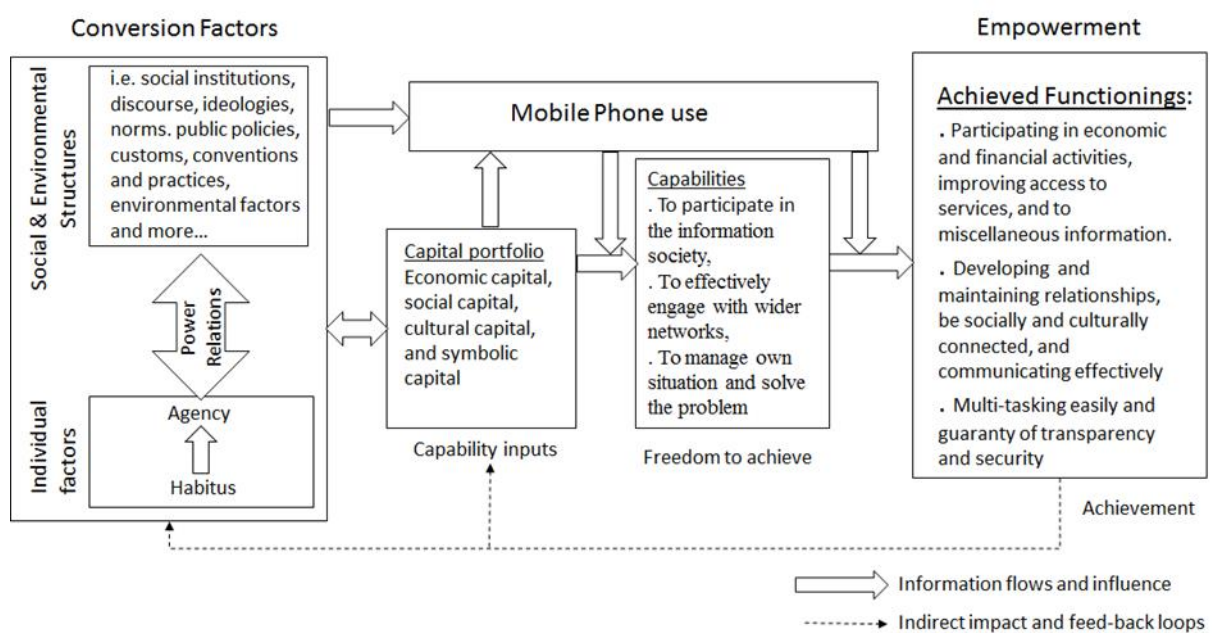


Figure 8: A dynamic framework for theorising mobile phone use for empowerment. Source: Author’s own elaboration based on the integration of Sen CA and Bourdieu TOP, and empirical findings.

In this framework, *conversion factors* are considered as consisting of a mix of the personal factors and the social and environmental structures. The personal factors, considered as the internal structures, are found to be constituted by individual's agency, habitus (personal history and disposition), personality traits (value, frustration, creativity) and mental abilities (like literacy, creativity), physical conditions, age, gender, metabolism, skills, and other items. The social and environmental structures, also referred to as social contexts, are comprised of the field's external structures pertaining to the existing social practices of a particular field. These include the economic structures, political structures, social factors (such as social norms, public policies, customs, social networks, conventions, and practices), the affordances of mobile phones, and the environmental conditions such as geographical location, infrastructure, and climate.

Capital, as conceptualised by Bourdieu (1997) consist of the resources that may be converted into capabilities. On many occasions, the findings of this research show that the availability, or lack of, capital shapes the respondents' experience with mobile phone use. The availability of capital affords the opportunities to use mobile phones in a meaningful way, and the lack of capital impedes the opportunities. As Clayton and Macdonald (2013) argue, the different forms of capital that individuals "bring to technology in terms of their own socio-economic positions and internalized dispositions or habitus, is key in influencing the way in which technology might (or might not) be used as well as perceptions of benefits gained (p. 948)". The literature shows that the resources or capital portfolio of an individual determine the position occupied in the field (Abel & Frohlich, 2012; Thompson, 2008). The findings also show that mobile phone use has enabled respondents to accumulate and convert different forms of capital into capabilities.

This research proposes that the conversion factors shape the use of mobile phones and the capabilities for empowerment. The conversion factors are both functional and relational. They are functional because they can serve as facilitators and enablers, but also they can be hindrances or constraints to the desirable use of mobile phones. They are relational because, under different circumstances, they can differ from person to person. As with Zheng and Stahl (2012), this research rejects any assumption that mobile phones are intrinsically valuable. Mobile phones "are means to ends but never ends in themselves" (Zheng & Stahl, 2012, p. 64) and their use should, therefore, be evaluated in terms of their contribution to empowerment.

In the context of this research, it emerges that the affordances of mobile phones, the socio-environmental factors, and the personal factors reinforce each other and shape the opportunities for urban refugees to use mobile phones. In this relationship, the socio-environmental factors and the affordances of mobile phones constitute the determining structures because, as the data show, they determine the use of mobile phones by either enhancing or hindering the ability of urban refugees to make meaningful use of mobile phones. For example, while the data show that social influence entices

respondents to use mobile phones for maintaining social ties, the challenge of documentation hinders many of them from using mobile phones in certain crucial activities such as mobile payment.

The personal factors constitute the individual determination and point to the agency, the individual ability to choose behaviours or actions (Bonvin, 2016). Agency was operationalised as the respondents' power or the extent to which one can resist/oppose constraints of the field. It is evident that agency is embedded within the habitus, the "...structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures..." (Bourdieu, 1990a, p. 53), which pertains to personal factors as well. As with the determining structures, the individual's determination, to which the availability of capital is very crucial, shape the use of mobile phones as well. The findings show for example that respondents with awareness of features of their mobile phones are able to perform certain activities with accuracy and completeness, such as social networking, web browsing, email applications, GPS and weather checking. As with Orlikowski (2000), this finding shows that the use of technology is strongly influenced by users' understanding of the properties and functionality of a technology.

Therefore, this research suggests that mobile phone use should be viewed as a social-technological practice that results from the combination of the determining structures and the individual determination. The combination of the determining structures and the individual determination implies the interrelationship between structure and agency. As with Bourdieu (1990a), this research reiterates that, rather than treating agency and structure as distinctively apart, agency and structure mutually constitute one another – the conversion factors. These findings are consistent with Bourdieu's conceptualization of the relationship between individual agency and social structures as continually interconnected and co-constitutive, rather than discrete and separable (Burke et al., 2009, p. 63). As Cockerham (2005) argues, there is no hypothetical moment when agency gets free from social structures. Clearly, agency is not only a product of habitus and personal characteristics but also of a particular field's structures with its power relations.

As visualised in this framework, the interactions between the individual agency and social structures are based upon *power relations* in social fields (Bourdieu, 1986; Kirchberg, 2007; Luttrell et al., 2009; Wacquant, 2014). Such influential relationship may be implicit or hidden (Carlone et al., 2015) because individuals are not consciously aware of all the influences on their behaviour (Burke et al., 2009). For example, the data show that the activities of the few respondents who use mobile banking or use mobile phones for online shopping are very limited. Data show also that in South Africa there exist regulations and rules that exclude all non-holders of a South African ID book/card or foreign passport. Levina and Orlikowski (2009) and Luttrell et al. (2009) state that power relations shape the capabilities and the resources that individuals can access within a particular social field and thus, regulate the positions that individuals occupy. As the data show, policies and regulations in South Africa, directly and indirectly,

exclude refugees from buying mobile phones on a contract basis. As Luttrell et al. (2009, p. 6) argue, "...power relations shape agency, opportunities, and wellbeing".

The agency-structural conditions affect positively and negatively the use of mobile phones by urban refugees and therefore the resulting outcomes. The structural conditions together with individual disposition exert deep pressure on mobile phone users, providing more opportunities to some individuals than to others. Mobile phone use does not necessarily result in empowerment because it requires the intervention of more complex conversion factors (Zheng & Stahl, 2012). It is clear that the way in which power relations shape urban refugees' use of mobile phones affects their capabilities for empowerment. The disempowerment can be viewed as the result of the structurally reproductive agency, in contrast to the structurally transformative agency which is empowering.

On the one hand, in relation to the structurally reproductive agency, the findings show that personal factors, the socio-environmental factors, and the affordances of mobile phones shape mobile phone use by urban refugees to contribute to the reproduction of status quo in social structures. Personal factors contribute to the structurally reproductive agency when micro level beliefs contribute – through habitus – to a re-iteration of social patterns of self-exclusion and to the reproduction of the status quo in social disadvantages. This happened, for example, when some respondents did not dare to use their mobile phones to engage in activities that they believed they are excluded from. In some cases, such beliefs were not based on facts, but resulting from their own unawareness and frustration. One respondent commented: "...*I do not know much about mobile money transfer and we cannot try it ... I think it must be risky for refugees...*". To some extent, such frustration has become doxa, deep-founded, unconscious beliefs, and a perception that informs their practices in terms of lifestyle, actions, and thoughts (Bourdieu, 1977). Consequently, such doxa have resulted in the practices that contribute to the reproduction of social status quo.

Structurally reproductive agency happens also at the macro level, as a result of the socio-environmental factors. This happens when, for example, social influence (norms), policies and regulations (laws, rules), the stereotype about refugees, and documentation challenges hinder or prevent urban refugees' capabilities to achieve desired functionings. As Robeyns (2006, p. 163) decries, "human beings are not given the opportunity to live the best possible lives or to achieve their potential". An example is the public and/or private sectors' policies, laws and rules whose implementation excludes refugees from using mobile phones to participate in e-commerce activities, or from buying a mobile phone on contract or SIM card, or from mobile financial services such as sending or receiving money. These policies and rules are the manifestations of symbolic power active in the field (Bourdieu, 1987). Individuals often experience symbolic power without being conscious, depending on rules of the fields they are in at a given moment. Bourdieu (1987) explains that symbolic power legitimises existing economic and political relations and contributes to the inter-generational reproduction of inegalitarian social

arrangements. The data show for example that refugees are excluded when a green bar-coded ID or passport is required for buying a mobile phone on a contract deal, or for renting an accommodation from rental agencies (see Figure 10, in Appendix C), or for participating in most of the mobile financial services in South Africa. As Clayton and Macdonald (2013) argue, individuals who remain excluded from the opportunities technologies might provide are increasingly exposed to the risk of being left behind and exposed to further deprivation.

On the other hand, the findings show also instances when the conversion factors (personal factors, the socio-environmental factors, and the affordances of mobile phones) shape mobile phone use by urban refugees in non-trivial ways, resulting in the modification of social structures. This is because individuals are active agents who can choose their behaviour in term of strategies and practices. The findings suggest that urban refugees exercise a certain degree of agency. In their daily routines, they use their mobile phones in multiple ways to fight for relative positions on the social field. Owning and using a mobile phone already suggests that the individual has exchanged or invested some economic capital to pursue their own strategies. Therefore, urban refugees are not to be considered as passive individuals, marionettes whose actions are fully automated by social structures acting as external forces. An illustration is, for example, that some respondents use their mobile phone to negotiate ways to participate in the information society by participating in economic activities. Doing as such implies that urban refugees have a certain degree of agency for practices. They question the nature of social exclusion and inequality by fighting for relative positions on the social field. As Calone et al (2015, p. 2) argue, “structures change as a result of the choices and actions of individuals and groups, whose choices and actions are constrained by structures”.

The framework in Figure 8 shows that mobile phone use is influenced by conversion factors and can, in turn, influence the conversion of resources (capital) into capabilities, and from capabilities to empowerment. Hence, the value of mobile phones depends upon individuals’ capabilities (genuine opportunities) to convert their use into valuable functionings. Mobile phones are empowering when their uses serve as facilitators or enablers for a person – perhaps together with others in the similar situation – to achieve functionings he/she have reasons to value and functionings that can strengthen his/her agency. Hence, central to this framework is the capabilities and the value creation associated with the use of mobile phones, when these tools enable the expansion in people’s ability to make strategic life choices in a context where they were previously denied to them.

This framework emphasises that empowerment, considered as achieved functionings (Madon, 2004; Robeyns, 2006), should also be considered as capabilities when dynamically the process is influenced by the feedback loops at each stage. That is when the achieved functionings of an individual or group, reinforce the agency and are going to re-shape the whole process, i.e. the future conversation factors, the capability set and the uses of mobile phones. The dynamics arise in the sense that empowerment is

a process that involves interacting circumstances and experiences across all the spheres of life over a period of time. The data show, for example, that frequent mobile phone communication enables respondents to develop and maintain social networks and relationships. At some times, the social network becomes part of the respondents' social capital, from which they may gain valuable information using mobile phones. Another example is that, for the refugees who have seen improvements in their English language skills, the English language will no longer be an issue that will affect mobile phone use. As such, social fields are subject to permanent adjustments due to results of social practices. Kirchberg (2007) argues that in the social field, social practice creates and establishes the habitus, but "this practice, via the means of habitus, also modifies social surroundings, that is, the social field" (p. 118). The process is taking place in sequential periods of time and results in reproduction or transformation of social life.

This framework offers an explanation of the process by which mobile phone use contributes to empowerment in the context of social exclusion and inequality. It argues that mobile phones should not be viewed as neutral, and readily able to be drawn upon to enable empowerment. Instead, it proposes that in the context of social exclusion and inequality, mobile phone use should be viewed as a social-technological practice which results from the combination of the individual determination and the determining structures. As discussed earlier, the framework presented in this thesis is informed by, but also differs from, the works of earlier authors who have sought, from different angles, to show how ICTs can be linked to Sen's CA. An illustrative example is Andrade and Doolin (2016). They use Sen's (1999) CA to explore what people are actually able to do and achieve with ICTs. They recognise that the generation of capabilities is "contingent on existing social arrangement and environmental conditions" (p. 413). However, they did not elaborate on how these affect the generation of capabilities through ICT use. This is evident because their research is based only on Sen's (1999) CA which, according to Oosterlaken (2012) and Zheng and Stahl (2011) does not provide a deep discussion of possible constraints on human agency.

Kleine's Choice Framework (2010, 2011) developed as a tool to analyse, understand, and represent the role of ICTs in the development process. In the Choice Framework, agency is resource-based, with ten types of resources encircling the individual's genetically determined characteristics including age, gender, ethnicity, etc. (Attwood & May, 2015). However, as this research shows, habitus, which is a psychological resource, constitutes an important aspect of agency. In addition, the Choice Framework does not elaborate on the interrelationship between agency and structure, as does this research by highlighting 'power relations'. Further, in the Choice Framework, the individual's choice constitutes the principal and overarching development outcome. In this research, as with Sen's CA, the capabilities remain the principal matter of empowerment, and mobile phone use can enable and enhance users' agency and capabilities for empowerment.

## 7.5. Summary of the chapter

This chapter discusses the findings of this thesis in order to shed light on the research objectives and answers the research questions of this thesis, and to demonstrate the contribution to knowledge in the IS field of research. It emerges that the use of mobile phones is crucial in every domain of life of urban refugees in South Africa. However, for using mobile phones for empowerment, there are opportunities and obstacles which reside in the affordances of mobile phones, the socio-environmental factors, and the personal factors. The discussion of findings reveals that opportunities and prospects of urban refugees to use mobile phones for empowerment depend crucially on what institutions exist and how they function but also on the availability of capital and on refugees' own abilities to make use of the opportunities. The use of mobile phones and therefore the resulting outcomes are affected positively and negatively by the agency-structural conditions. Therefore, genuine opportunities are crucial for using mobile phones to accumulate and convert different forms of capital into capabilities for empowerment. It is argued that the integration of Bourdieu's TOP and Sen's CA provides the framing to conceptualise the relationships among factors that shape the use of mobile phones and empowerment of urban refugees in South Africa. The proposed framework in Figure 8 offers an explanation of the process by which mobile phone use contributes to empowerment in the context of social exclusion and inequality. In this framework, the use of mobile phone is viewed as a social-technological practice that results from the combination of the determining structures and the individual determination. The use of mobile phone is influenced by conversion factors and can, in turn, influence the conversion of resources into capabilities, and from capabilities to empowerment.

## 8. CONCLUSION

### 8.1. Introduction

This concluding chapter starts with an overview of this thesis. The subsequent section discusses the contributions of this thesis. The last section presents its limitations as well as avenues for future research.

### 8.2. Overview of the research

The aim of this thesis was to critically explore the factors which shape the use of mobile phones by urban refugees in South Africa and their capabilities for empowerment. The research question for this thesis was “*How does mobile phone use enable capabilities, and what factors shape mobile phone use and capabilities for the empowerment of urban refugees in South Africa?*” The review of the literature shows that, in general, ICT impact is dialectic in the sense that it can empower and disempower (Carmody, 2009). However, there is a scarcity of deeper insights showing why mobile phone use is empowering for some individuals and not for others. The findings of this research show that what is lacking is an understanding of factors that shape the individuals’ use of mobile phones and the capabilities for empowerment, and of how exactly ICTs contribute to empowerment. This research fills the gaps identified in the literature. Thematic Analysis was used on the collected data, guided by the constructs of a theoretical framework based on the integration of Sen’s CA and Bourdieu’s TOP.

The findings of this research suggest that mobile phone use affords valuable capabilities – real opportunities for empowerment of individuals experiencing social exclusion and inequality. It highlights, however, that the generation of these capabilities is contingent on power relations in the social field, which links social structures to agency. Social structures and individual’s agency together constitute the conversion factors, which can facilitate or hinder individuals’ capabilities for empowerment offered by mobile phone use. In the context of this research, the conversion factors are constituted of interrelated factors, namely the technological context of mobile phones, the socio-environmental factors, and the personal factors, for which the availability of capital is crucial. Therefore, depending on these conversion factors, capital can be accumulated and converted into capabilities for empowerment.

This research shows that the technological context of mobile phones significantly varies the capabilities for the empowerment of urban refugees. The technological features of mobile phones, such as Internet capabilities, processing speed, and battery life, present opportunities and constraints to the users. The socio-environmental factors, together with the technological context of mobile phones, constitute the determining structures. In the context of this research, the socio-environmental factors consist of the

social influence, policies and regulations, the stereotype about refugees and the challenges of documentation, and the geographical location. While social influence, policies and regulations, and the geographical location either facilitate or hinder mobile phone use by urban refugees, the stereotype about refugees and the challenges of documentation appear to only have negative influences. The personal factors constitute the individual determination, point to the agency, and reflect the habitus for the individual. The personal factors which were found to be of particular relevance to this research included the necessity of mobile phones and awareness of its features, the availability of or lack of financial resources, the frustration of being excluded, and the lack of confidence in the English language.

The findings show that the use of mobile phones offers urban refugees many opportunities for accumulating and converting different forms of capital into capabilities, and capabilities into empowerment. The empirical analysis suggests eight particular capabilities for empowerment that urban refugees in South Africa generate from mobile phone use. These capabilities were grouped into three categories: the capabilities to negotiate ways of benefit from the information society, the capabilities to effectively engage with wider networks, and the capabilities to manage one's own situation and solve problems. This research has shown that mobile phone use affords urban refugees the capabilities to negotiate ways to participate in the information society. Mobile phone use enables urban refugees in South Africa to participate in economic and financial activities, to improve access to services and to various information. This research has shown also that mobile phone use affords urban refugees the capabilities to effectively engage with wider networks by enabling them to develop and maintain relationships, to be socially and culturally connected, and to communicate effectively. The data shows, for example, that social networks constitute crucial sources of information that refugees access and share using their mobile phones. Further, this research has shown that mobile phone use affords urban refugees the capabilities to manage their own situation and solve problems. Mobile phones make multi-tasking easier for urban refugees, enabling them to shift between different activities, including studying, working, parenting, socialising, and entertainment. Mobile phone use also affords urban refugees a guarantee of transparency and security when these tools are used to gain a social safety net, protecting them from further deprivation such as unemployment and social isolation.

### **8.3. Contributions**

The contributions of this thesis are classified into three areas – the theoretical, the methodological, and the practical contributions.

### 8.3.1. Theoretical Contributions

This thesis contributes to the theory in the field of IS by proposing a dynamic framework for theorising mobile phone use for empowerment. The proposed framework in Figure 8 offers an explanation of the process by which mobile phone use generates or fails to generate capabilities for empowerment in the context of social exclusion and inequality. It provides researchers with precise constructs for better theorising and explaining the mechanisms and social practices that shape mobile phone use and the capabilities for empowerment. The proposed framework distinguishes itself as useful among related frameworks, as it emphasises the importance of the individual user of mobile phones and the local structural context – agency and social structures. It suggests that researchers on mobile phone use for empowerment need to look beyond social agents' immediate behaviours to take into consideration the broader context of social exclusion by focusing on conversion factors, human diversity, and capabilities. Therefore, the framework proposed in this thesis enables a context-sensitive analysis of the interplay between the macro level (structural conditions, field) and micro level (agency, habitus, capital). The result is a holistic understanding of factors or conditions that shape mobile phone use and the capabilities for empowerment. This thesis has shown that the social exclusion phenomenon is part of the complex situation involving the whole society and should not be considered as an abstract and separate context. This framework enables researchers to empirically explore the capabilities that are generated by mobile phone use, and the circumstances under which such capabilities occur.

Therefore, despite the enormous transformative potential of mobile phones, their impact on urban refugees' empowerment depends on the capabilities to translate their use into desired functionings. While the findings identified in this research concur with the results of many others studies, this research adds to scientific knowledge in a unique and important way. This research provides a grounded explanation for a better understanding of the dialectic nature of mobile phone use, by uncovering the reasons why and how, using mobile phones, certain individuals generate capabilities for empowerment whilst others fail to do so.

Further, this research contributes to the theory by operationalizing Sen's CA. Studies have claimed that extending the CA with other theories enhances its explanatory power (Hill, 2003; Robeyns, 2006; Zheng & Stahl, 2012). By integrating Sen's CA with Bourdieu's TOP, this research addresses the common criticisms of CA evoked in Chapter Three. First, the issue of structural inequalities. While it has much to offer, the CA overlooks the role of capital in shaping an individual's agency. However, this research and the resulting framework have shown that capital, as conceptualised by Bourdieu (1997), allow an assessment of key components of power relations and social inequality directly relevant to agency. Second, while CA has been criticised for not providing an explicit theorization of technology (Oosterlaken, 2012), this research clearly shows how mobile phone use is shaped by the conversion factors, and how dynamically those are shaped by the use of mobile phones. Therefore, instead of

viewing a mobile phone as a neutral means readily to be drawn upon to enable empowerment, this research proposes that mobile phone use should be viewed as a social-technological practice that results from the combination of the individual determination and the determining structures. Third, while CA is criticised for not providing sufficient discussion about possible constraints on agency CA, this research makes a link between the process of empowerment by emphasising the interrelationship between the conversion factors and the local context in which individuals live. It draws particular attention to the power relations in the social field, in which are based the interactions between the individual agency and social structures.

Furthermore, this research contributes to the body of knowledge in the field of IS. As noted in the literature review, studies of mobile phone use by refugees in developing countries have received minimal attention (Bacishoga et al., 2016). This research, therefore, addresses the concern about the lack of empirical evidence from detailed field research on mobile phone use and empowerment. It undoubtedly contributes to the literature in ICT4D, by showing how the socio-environmental conditions and personal factors together with availability or lack of capital shape the capabilities for empowerment that can be generated through mobile phone use. As such, this research discovered much that was previously unknown about factors that enable or hinder urban refugees in South Africa from generating capabilities for empowerment through mobile phone use.

### **8.3.2. Methodological Contributions**

The findings of this research result from the adopted critical ethnography method which draws on an analysis of mobile phone use experience of 22 urban refugees in South Africa, in order to develop an explanation of factors which affect their mobile phone use and empowerment. This research contributes to the methodology by drawing from critical theory to operationalize the integrated Sen's CA and Bourdieu's TOP framework. It has been claimed that drawing from critical theory strengthens and enriches Sen's CA in relation to ICTs and human development (Zeng & Stahl, 2012). This research has shown not only how critical theory enriches CA (Zeng & Stahl, 2012), but also how CA and Bourdieu's TOP are complementary and mutually enriching, and how the resulting framework is strengthened by critical theory. As discussed in Chapter Four, critical theory aims to unveil the causes of unwarranted alienation and domination, to enhance the opportunities for realising human potential (Klein & Myers, 1999). Similarly, the proposed framework of this research enables the understanding of the processes that shape individuals' capabilities for empowerment.

The contextually rich critical ethnographic strategy used in this thesis contributes to IS research methodology. As Genzuk (2003) and Myers (1999) argue, ethnography offers the benefit of providing an in-depth understanding of people and their situation. The level of empirical analysis addressed in this research differs from previous related studies. As Lin et al. (2015) report, most of the existing IS

research on mobile phones have adopted interpretivist and positivist approaches, and have focused on the regional or national level and on the immediate organisational context. This thesis addresses the theory-data gap. It is probably the first empirical ethnographic research on mobile phone use by refugees in developing countries conducted by a refugee. Being an urban refugee in South Africa for about 10 years, I embarked on this research with personal concerns and a fixed view towards the experience of mobile phone use by urban refugees in South Africa. However, throughout the fieldwork, I learned that such experiences are multiple and more complex. Based on my experience with this research, I agree with Walsham (2017) that as researchers, we should see ourselves and behave as co-contributors to knowledge, with everyone else but not as experts, bringing top-down knowledge about the role and value of ICTs in development.

### **8.3.3. Practical Contributions**

This research has implications for understanding the contributions of the use of mobile phones for empowerment. For this research has shown that mobile phone use presents potential for empowerment. Yet, to achieve such potential, relevant socio-environmental factors, personal factors, and the technological context of mobile phones are critical. As such, its findings can feed into the policy-setting processes of government or organisations seeking to assist urban refugees, such as the ones presented in Chapter Two, by facilitating the formulation of their intervention strategies.

In addition, as a critical ethnographer and urban refugee, I consider being part of the social phenomena as one of the strengths of this research. Having conducted this research, I consider myself as an empowered urban refugee user of mobile phones. This is because, with self-reflection, I have succeeded in escaping from the entrapment of my own worldview about mobile phone use by urban refugees in South Africa. Therefore, there is a reason to believe that, as with myself, the findings of this research can contribute to the empowerment of urban refugees in South Africa, and perhaps of other individuals in a similar situation. By bringing to light the factors that shape mobile phone use by urban refugees, it is evident that this research has exposed the explicitly or implicitly hidden interests, important beliefs, assumptions and social practices that facilitate or constrain capabilities for empowerment. As a critical researcher, I believe that with the findings of this research I have accomplished my important task of “identifying possibilities of change and assisting the dominated, powerless and exploited to have a voice and emancipate themselves”( Cecez-Kecmanovic, 2010, p.7). As Hammersley (1992) argues, it is through enlightenment and other means, such as seeing their true interests and situation, that people are empowered.

## **8.4. Limitations of this Research and Areas for Further Research**

This thesis has attempted to critically explore the factors which shape the use of mobile phones by urban refugees in South Africa and their capabilities for empowerment. The findings presented in this thesis reflect the varieties of respondents' experiences with the use of mobile phones. The explanations provided in this research may be incomplete and indeterminate (Avgerou, 2013), however, they have sufficient generality to be useful in other contexts. There is room for further research, perhaps over time because technological advancements are defined by the norms and standards that are current at a particular point in time. In addition, empowerment is a process and, as Bourdieu (1990a) argues, social fields are dynamic and subject to endless changes, as those who dominate in a given field are in a position to make it function to their advantage. Future research could investigate the mechanisms of mobile phone properties that lead to the outcomes – to the capabilities for empowerment. Further, this research has been conducted only with a specific group of the population experiencing social exclusion and inequality. It is therefore inconclusive to account for the broad applicability of the proposed framework, because the context of urban refugees in South Africa had a strong influence on the findings. Future research, using the proposed framework, could be of benefit through a rich investigation of mobile phone use and the empowerment of underprivileged communities with varying challenges.

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# Appendix A

## Interview Guideline

The main research question is: *How does mobile phone use enable urban refugee empowerment?* The secondary research questions are:

- *How does mobile phone usage enhance urban refugees' empowerment?*
- *What conditions enable/hinder urban refugees' empowerment through mobile phone use?*
- *How does mobile phone usage interact with these conditions?*

1. Personal background:

Gender and age group: 18-20, 21-25,26-30,31-35,36-40,41-45,46-50,>50

Marital status: Single, married, married with children, live-in relationship.

Education: primary, secondary, trade, tertiary. Other qualifications.

Occupation and other income sources.

How long have you been a refugee?

2. The following general questions help to identify the communication use patterns among urban refugees when mobile phones are considered:

Tell me about your use of a mobile phone. What do you use your/a mobile phone for and why (reasons: social, work...), and how (services or activities performed: chat, SMS, MIM, call, search, read info...)?

3. The following questions help in collecting empirical data about the secondary research questions:

**Q1.** Do you think using your mobile phone has enhanced your capabilities (or given you more opportunities) of exercising economic activities? If yes, how? If no, why?

**Prompts:** Helps you economically. This could include improving your entrepreneurial skills (generate income or reduce expenses), accumulate funds and manage your money (E.g. mobile internet banking), increases access to economic resources, obtain market information.

**Q2.** Do you think using your mobile phone has enhanced your capabilities (or given you more opportunities) of exercising political freedom? If yes, how? If no, why?

**Prompts:** Get informed or be aware of political issues, to participate in local/national issues. These could include activities such as interacting with local authorities, participate in community decision making (e.g. online polls/petitions), expressing your opinion or voicing your concerns about your community( e.g. grievances, petitions), participate in any group activities (political groups, pressure groups,...) and so on.

**Q3.** Has using your mobile phone enabled/restricted your capabilities (or given you more opportunities) of exercising social activities? If yes, how? If no, why?

**Prompts:** To interact and/or share information with your family and the broader community, improve your status, leadership and management skills, get involved in group activities or voluntary work, access to facilities in terms of education, health, sanitation, marriage systems.

**Q4.** Do you think using your/a mobile phone has provided you with opportunities for transparency and informational freedom? If yes, in which way? If no, why?

**Prompts:** Increase/decrease trust between you and the people you interact with. Or can help you receive reliable information, news or service and enable you to be trusted.

**Q5.** Do you think using your mobile phone has protected you from further deprivation? If yes, how? If no, why?

**Prompts:** Access information about your security and safety such as the way general security is practiced in the neighbourhood, your rights and obligations as a refugee. This includes warning systems for natural disaster protection, weather condition, all risk associated with mobile phone and internet use such as fraud and piracy.

**Q6.** Do you think mobile phone use has enabled/restricted the outcomes of **Q1** to **Q5**? In which way and why?

**Q7.** Can you identify anything that mobile phone usage has enabled you to do that you had not realised you could do?

**Q8.** Is there anything you were hoping to use your/a mobile phone for, but have not been able to? If so, which ones and what do you think are the reasons/causes?

**Q9.** Can you think of any improvement (different from **Q1** to **Q5**) you realised resulting from mobile phone usage?

**Q10.** Can you suggest anything that would improve mobile phone usage to better meet your needs?

# Appendix B



UNIVERSITY OF CAPE TOWN  
**FACULTY OF COMMERCE**  
Igniting Knowledge and Opportunity



## **Mobile Phones Use and Empowerment. The Case of Urban Refugees in South Africa**

Hello, my name is Kasky Bisimwa. I am conducting research towards a doctoral degree and would like to invite you to participate in the project.

The aim of this research is to critically investigate factors or conditions which enable or restrict urban refugees' empowerment through mobile phone use. I am interested in finding out about mobile phone use experience of urban refugees in South Africa. The finding of this research will inform the Information Systems research community about the capabilities that can be generated through mobile phone use and the factors that may enhance or constrain urban refugees from translating their mobile phone usage into capabilities. The findings may serve to inform organisations seeking to assist urban refugees about the factors to take into consideration when crafting their intervention strategies.

Please understand that your participation is voluntary. You may decline to participate or you can withdraw from participation any time you wish. There will be no consequences. However, I would be grateful if you would assist by allowing me to interview you.

If you choose to participate, the interview will take about 30 minutes. I will also request your permission of recording the interview. It is your right to agree or refuse the recording of the interview. No cost will be involved and this research does not pose any risk of harm either immediate or long range.

You will not be asked to supply any identifiable information, ensuring anonymity of your responses. Voice recordings and transcripts will be destroyed at the end of the project.

Should you have any questions regarding the research please feel free to contact me on 079 614 8868 or [kaskymiami@yahoo.fr](mailto:kaskymiami@yahoo.fr)

By signing this participant consent form, you are agreeing to participate in the research project entitled "Mobile Phones Use and Empowerment. The Case of Urban Refugees in South Africa".

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix C

Figure 9: Map of Africa's Great Lakes Region (Source: Google)

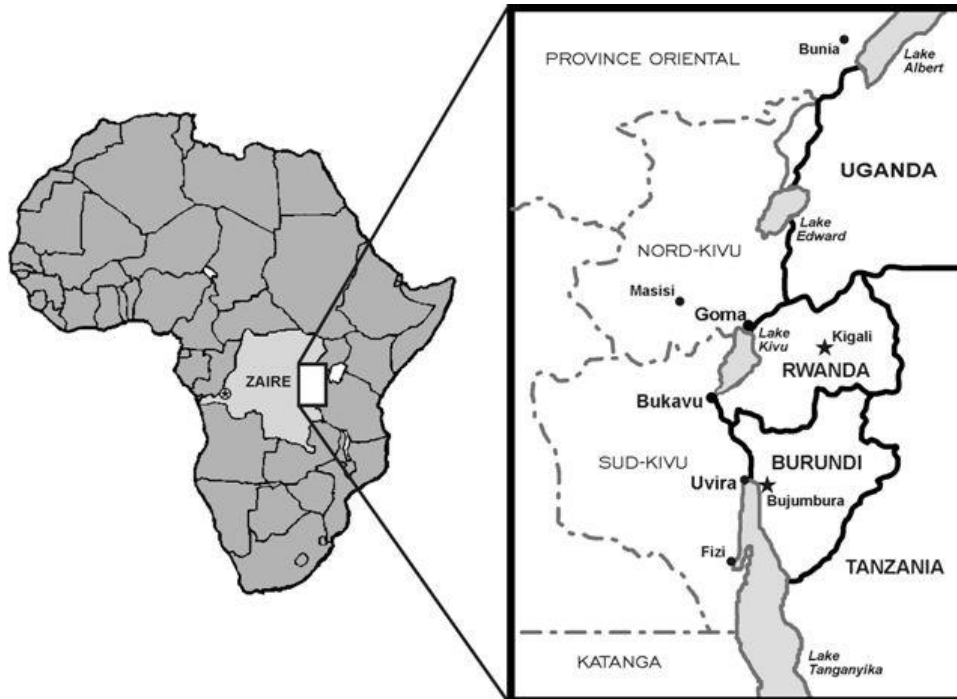


Figure 10: A photograph of a poster on building with flats to let in Cape Town (Taken by the researcher)

