Campaigning in the age of digital media:

Exploring the influences of digital affordances on campaigning in environmental non-governmental organisations

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Plate 1. Digital campaigning in People's Climate March

Abstract

This thesis is a qualitative exploration into the affordances of digital media and environmental campaigning through the lens of media and communication geography. It is guided by the following question:

> How do digital media affordances influence the conduct of campaigning in environmental non-governmental organisations?

To address this question, this thesis follows the 'four paper route'. Specifically, this research relies on semi-structured interviews, participant observation, content analysis, and virtual ethnography to investigate core topics related to digitally-mediated campaigning: engagement, strategy, membership, and online communities.

To begin, the first paper examines how environmental campaigners frame engagement, and the extent to which these frames are coproduced with their adoption of digital media. The second paper explores how digital media affordances influence the ways in which ENGOs approach audiences, tactics, and organising structures when building campaign strategy. Expanding on findings from the second paper, the third paper investigates how digital media affordances are changing organisational perceptions of membership in the everyday vocabularies of ENGOs. Last the fourth paper adopts a virtual ethnographic approach to better understand how supporters take part in online communities (OCs), and the relationship of OCs to online and offline participation.

This thesis is timely and significant for several reasons. First, environmental politics have emerged as a major issue area within the international arena. The majority

of these politics are influenced by mass media. Thus, this research offers insight into how organisations harness and leverage digital media affordances for environmental activism and advocacy. Second, much of the scholarship exploring digital affordances and contemporary activism situates itself within social movements. Instead, by focusing on campaigns, this research provides an alternative unit of analysis below that of social movements yet above the level of individuals. Last non-governmental organisations (NGOs) have, and continue to, use campaigns to connect citizens and politics. Thus, understanding how digital media affordances are influencing campaigning is critical to realising the beliefs, aspirations, and needs of different groups within society.

To my parents and my brother,

who probably should have, but never did, tell me what to do

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Starting this DPhil was not the hard part. The hard part was finding the resilience to finish it. To face what often felt, not like two steps forward and one step back, but one step forward and two steps back. The hard part was all the stuff that did not end up written down on these pages. To each of you, you not only made the hard part easier, but you also made it the part that made me, all the more me.

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What the mass media offers is not popular art, but entertainment which is intended to be consumed like food, forgotten, and replaced by a new dish

– W.H. Auden

The media's the most powerful entity on earth. They have the power to make the innocent guilty and to make the guilty innocent, and that's power. Because they control the minds of the masses

– Malcom X

Whoever controls the media…controls the culture

– Allen Ginsberg

I've always thought that it's good to watch the news to find out what everybody else is looking at and believing, if only because that's how consensus is constructed

– Barbara Kruger

You used to have to own a radio tower or television tower or printing press. Now all you have to have is access to an Internet café or a public library, and you can put your thoughts out in public

– Clay Shirky

Preface

The inspiration for this research emerged from my own experiences as an environmental activist as well as my interest in the growing influence of digital media on contentious politics. Since the age of 17, I have been involved in the environmental movement, be it as a volunteer, a professional, or an activist. Indeed, one of my earliest memories of environmental campaigning is sitting in the Wilderness Committee's Vancouver office and folding leaflet after leaflet to protect Canada's Great Bear Rainforest. Needless to say, since those leaflets, campaigning has changed dramatically.

Together, technologies such as the Internet, databases, smart phones, social media, etc. are influencing the way citizens participate in politics. From camera witnessing to text messaging to tweeting, activists are able to reach larger audiences at faster scales than ever before. Whether it be the #Occupy movement or Arab Spring, we are living in an age when a video recorded on an iPhone can be uploaded to YouTube and spread to millions of people around the world in very little time and at very low cost. This ability to generate and disseminate content, to bypass censorial filters, to record and share events in real-time, makes political engagement and participation more and more accessible to everyday citizens. For these reasons, and many more, contemporary activism is drawing on digitally-mediated technologies for citizen engagement and mobilisation.

Indeed, during the course of this this research, digital media have come to the forefront in global politics. From the 2015 People's Climate March, to Brexit, to the 2016 American Presidential Elections, to the rise of the Islamic State, for better or worse,

digital media have become a critical tool in the political toolkit. During the time of writing, I also saw the explosion of alternative facts and fake news. Whilst not a central focus of this research, the pervasiveness of 'post-truth politics' further highlights the growing political influence of digital media and reinforces the idea that digital media exist both as objects and actors. It is within this evolving media landscape that this research is situated. In so doing, it aims to better understand the affordances of digital media on contemporary activism and environmental campaigning.

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List of acronyms

AoIR	Association of Internet Researchers
BINGO	Big International Non-Governmental Organisation
CR	Critical Realist
CUREC	Central University Research Ethics Committee
DIY	Do-It-Yourself
ECF	E-Campaigners Forum
ENGO	Environmental Non-Governmental Organisation
FOE	Friends of the Earth
GP	Greenpeace
HoP	Houses of Parliament
HQ	Headquarters
MP	Member of Parliament
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NRT	Non-representational theory
NVDA	Non-Violent Direct Action
OC	Online Community
OED	Oxford English Dictionary
PCM	Peoples' Climate March
T3	Tastes, Ties and Time
TTIP	Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership
WWF	World Wide Fund for Nature

Chapter 1:
Introduction

1.0 Introduction: Research aim and questions

The aim of this thesis is to better understand the interplay between digital media affordances and environmental campaigning. To address this aim, this thesis explores how digital media affordances influence the conduct of campaigning in environmental non-governmental organisations (ENGOs). Specifically, it examines environmental campaigning via four papers, each of which focuses on a central topic related to digital media: engagement/participation, strategy, membership, and online communities.

The majority of scholarship exploring digital affordances and contemporary activism situates itself within social movements (Anduiza et al., 2014; Bennett & Segerberg, 2013; Castells, 2012; Diani, 2000; Earl & Kimport, 2011; Harlow & Harp, 2012; Juris, 2012; Theocharis et al., 2015). Yet social movements are often heterogeneous, not time-bound, and difficult to generalise (Cox, 2013; Earl, 2013a). Thus, findings of research on social movements may not always be representative of broader phenomena (della Porta & Rucht, 2002). Then there is the issue that few studies investigate digital affordances through the lens of environmental politics. Of those that do, almost all focus on single campaigns and/or single organisations (Fisher & Boekkooi, 2010; Hestres, 2014; Katz-Kimchi & Manosevitch, 2015; Sison, 2013). To address these

gaps and contribute to literature on digitally-mediated activism, this thesis looks at digital media affordances from the vantage point of environmental campaigning.

In particular, I consider the intersections between digital media affordances, ENGOs, and campaigning. The following question guides this research:

> How do digital media affordances influence the conduct of campaigning in environmental non-governmental organisations?

By focusing on ENGOs, my unit of analysis resides below that of social movements yet above the level of individuals. To answer this overarching question, I follow the 'four paper route' and address four sub-questions related to digital media and campaigning:

(1) How do ENGOs frame engagement in campaigning, and to what extent are these frames coproduced by ENGOs' adoption of digital media?;
(2) How do digital media affordances influence the ways in which ENGOs approach audiences, tactics, and organising structures when building campaign strategy?;
(3) How do digital media affordances change organisational perceptions of membership in the everyday vocabularies of ENGOs?; and
(4) How do supporters contribute to online communities, and what is the relationship between their online and offline participation?

From these sub-questions, I cover four research topics as they relate to digital media affordances and campaigning (i.e. engagement/participation, strategy, membership, and online communities). Within their respective chapters, I also position each topic in relation to its associated literature.

To investigate these topics, I apply a qualitative approach to gain in-depth understandings of how big, international, and prominent environmental advocacy organisations use digital media for campaigning. Specifically, I draw on the everyday experiences of campaigners working at Friends of the Earth (FOE), Greenpeace, Sierra Club, World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF), and 350.org. This research offers several valuable contributions to the existing literature within media and communication geography as well as to broader debates related to digitally-mediated activism.

1.1 Position within geography: Media and communications geography

Historically, human geography has paid little attention to media and communications. Thirty years ago, geographers Burgess and Gold (1985, p. 5-6) argued the quality of geographical analysis exploring media was 'inadequate' and 'disappointingly small'. Ten years later, Hillis, 1998 (p. 543) held the view that this analysis continued to be 'invisible', 'under-theorised', and 'on the margins'. Even in the 2000s, Thrift, 2000 (p. 493) noted that there was 'remarkably little direct work on the media in geography'. Indeed, Stöber (2006) made similar claims, revealing that literature bridging media and communications and geography was fragmented at best. These perspectives illustrate a growing awareness of the need for human geography to better integrate explorations of media and communications into their fields of study.

More recently however, the beginnings of a 'communicative turn' can be observed in human geography. Within the last decade, a handful of geographers have

started to explore geographical processes through the lens of media and communication studies (Adams, 2009; Adams, Craine, & Dittmer, 2014; Kitchin & Dodge, 2011). Much of this work draws on earlier scholarship exploring representation in human geography and the power of media to 're-present' space/place (Aitken & Zonn, 1994; Castree & Macmillan, 2004; Hinchliffe, 2003; Spivak, 1988; Thrift, 1996). Whether it is through a photograph (Hoelscher, 2014), radio (Pinkerton, 2014), or a comic book (Dittmer, 2014), media develop, disperse, and reinforce representations of people and places.

In part, the growing emphasis on media and communications in human geography appears to relate to what Couldry and McCarthy (2004) describe as a 'pluralisation' or 'multiplication' of place afforded by advancements in digital media. For example, in their investigation of volunteered geographic information, Poorthuis and Zook (2014) argue that tools such as Google Maps, Wikipedia, OpenStreetMap, and Twitter create a 'layering' of space, which is always in the process of 'becoming'. Another motivation for a more communicative approach has to do with recent criticisms of 'hyper-specialisation' and the 'over-fragmentation' of human geography (Adams, Cupples, Glynn & Jansson, 2017, p. 2). Thus, to move beyond human geography's disciplinary silos, several of its theorists are drawing on media and communication studies.

From the other direction, media and communication studies are also experiencing a 'spatial turn' (Adams & Jansson, 2012; Couldry & McCarthy, 2004; Jansson & Falkheimer, 2006). Like human geographers, media and communications scholars are also attempting to tackle the challenge of disciplinary fragmentation and compartmentalisation (Adams, Cupples, Glynn, & Jansson, 2017). Indeed, according to Couldry and McCarthy (2004, p. 1),'one could almost call media and space the obverse

of each other…it is ever more difficult to tell a story of social space without also telling a story of media, and vice versa'. It is within these juxtapositions and intersections – or, put differently, an empirical adventure into the margins – that this research situates itself: in media and communication geography.

As an emerging sub-discipline of human geography, media and communication geography aims to better understand 'how communication produces space and how space produces communication' (Jansson & Falkheimer, 2006, p. 7). Central to this scholarship are three key terms: communications, geography, and media. According to Adams, Cupples, Glynn, and Jansson (2017, p. 4), 'communications are processes of mutual meaning-making between people'. Communications take place through various forms, ranging from spoken word to raising one's middle finger to a string of code in C++. Geographies 'are the spaces and place where communications happen, and which are constituted in part through communicative practices' (Adams, Cupples, Glynn, & Jansson, 2017, p. 5). Sometimes as enablers and sometimes as inhibitors, geographies contribute to the spatial organisation and the movement of communications. Last are media. These are the 'systems and structures that facilitate communication and connect, configure, or constitute geographies' (Adams, Cupples, Glynn, & Jansson, 2017, p. 1). Adams, Cupples, Glynn, and Jansson (2017, p. 5) explain:

> The medium of television, for example, includes not only television sets, remote controls, broadcasting antennae…(in short the physical stuff), but also producers, directors, sponsors, regulators…(the human stuff), corporate conglomerates, production studios, broadcasting networks, regulatory bodies, audiences…(the collectivities), as well as narrative forms, genres, tropes, [and] visual techniques…(the immaterial stuff). All of this comes to mind for us in the crowded word "media".

Together these three terms – communications, geography, and media – act as distinct elements, which come together to form a disciplinary triad.

In recent years, several key works have contributed to the emergence and development of media and communication geography (Adams, 2017; Couldry & McCarthy, 2004; Mains, Cupples, & Lukinbeal, 2015). Much of this scholarship investigates how media and communications 'form a connective tissue through space and between places' (Adams, Craine & Dittmer, 2014, p. 4). For example, Bull (2014) explores the ability of smartphones to create portable soundscapes, which facilitate the movement and convergence of places. Others are exploring how media and communications transform and blur the boundaries between public and private spaces. For example, there is a convergence between 'public' and 'private' when one: watches the news on the television in their living room (Meyrowitz, 1985); listens to music on smartphone whilst at the gym (Bull, 2014); or calls into a radio show whilst driving in their car on their daily commute (Pinkerton, 2014).

Meanwhile, another strand of scholarship is exploring how media and communications 'actively constitute spaces and places through techniques of representation, expression, and performance' (Adams, Craine & Dittmer, 2014, p. 5). Imagine a photograph of the Eiffel Tower. Immediately, you travel from 'here' to 'there' without ever actually leaving. You may even forget that 'there' is a 'mediated reality instead of reality itself' (Hoelscher, 2014, p. 19). In this way, media and communications may also create and/or reinforce representations, both positive and negative. For example, in examining *Grand Theft Auto IV*, Ash (2014, p. 126) demonstrates how video games perpetuate racial stereotypes such as 'black gangsterism' and 'ghettos'. Furthermore, the

geographies of media and communications contribute to the creation of sites of expression and performance. One need look no further than President Trump's use of Twitter:

> The concept of global warming was created by and for the Chinese in order to make U.S. manufacturing non-competitive (realDonaldTrump, 2012)

> 26,000 unreported sexual assults in the military - only 238 convictions. What did these geniuses expect when they put men & women together? (realDonaldTrump, 2013)

Thus, the practice of 'posting' or 'tweeting' becomes a form of spectacle and theatre (Somdahl-Sands & Adams, 2014). In short, these examples demonstrate the potential of mediated-spaces to become sites of representation and performance.

More and more, there is a budding relationship between the disciplines of media and communications and geography. My considered opinion is that there is a clear opportunity to contribute to the development of this emerging field. For example, I agree with Adams, Cupples, Glynn, and Jansson (2017, p. 3) who suggest that:

> Working at the ragged interface between these fragmented disciplines has repeatedly shown us the potential of not just charting out an alternative space beyond our disciplines, but also problematizing and relativizing epistemological changes within our respective disciplines.

Indeed, it is precisely the seeming contradictions and the 'problematizing and relativizing' of the respective disciplines, which has led to my interest in navigating this 'alternative space'; in effect, to launch myself into the 'ragged interface' of this

interdisciplinary triad. For these reasons, media and communication geography is my point of departure towards what can be said to be an empirical unknown.

1.2 Contributions to the literature

Fundamentally interdisciplinary, this thesis offers several theoretical contributions to existing literature on ENGOs, campaigning, and digital media (Chapter 7). To better understand these contributions, the following sections situate this thesis and introduce some of the key literature underpinning this research. In Chapters 3 – 6, I expand on this literature and provide a more focused review of each of the four topics investigated in this thesis.

1.2.1 Environmental non-governmental organisations and campaigning

Central to this thesis is the idea that ENGOs play a critical role in connecting citizens and politics. Of particular interest to this research are big, international environmental advocacy organisations, which help to advance the environmental movement and serve as organisational channels through which its values are expressed and reinforced (Lowe & Goyder, 1983). These ENGOs help to 'incubate' social movements and may become the 'dominant organisational forms into which movements develop over time' (Andrews et al., 2010, p. 1192). In this way, ENGOs are key players in driving collective action.

Specifically, they engage publics and help to mobilise political participation from the individual to the collective level. In other words, ENGOs have the potential to empower publics to move from passive collections of individuals to active participants in support of a common cause (Tilly, 1978).

To do so, ENGOs run campaigns. Indeed, they have a long history of campaigning that stretches back to the late nineteenth-century campaign against the plume trade (Jepson & Ladle, 2010). As a focus of analysis, campaigns are situated below the overarching environmental movement and above individual participation. Campaigning itself is a process and relies on a series of purposeful and interconnected actions undertaken to achieve predetermined goals (Baringhorst, 2009; Cox, 2013). In turn, goals are realised through the use of media and communication tools, which drive public support and leverage decision-makers. Through campaigning, ENGOs give voice to the beliefs and needs/wants of different groups within society and mobilise publics in social solidarity on given issue areas (Baringhorst, 2009).

Differences in beliefs thus influence campaign objectives, strategy, and audiences (Cox, 2013). For example, ENGOs may lobby decision-makers for policy change. This was the case in FOE's Bee Cause campaign, which targeted government officials as a means of securing a European ban on bee-harming pesticides. Likewise, 350.org lobbied for policy change in their fight against the Keystone XL Pipeline in the United States. Others, like the Marine Stewardship Council or the Rainforest Alliance, may focus on campaigning for behaviour change, for instance, encouraging consumers to buy certified products. Campaigns may also seek to raise awareness or popularise scientific knowledge

around major issue areas such as climate change or conservation, whilst other campaigns may focus on fundraising, such as WWF's Adopt an Animal.

In addition, the heterogeneity of ENGOs and their individual organisational cultures also means that some tend to collaborate with government and businesses, whilst others focus on the use of direct persuasion and/or coercive pressure to influence decision-makers. For example, ENGOs such as Earth First!, the Earth Liberation Front, and Sea Shepherd are known for their application of coercive pressure and 'civil disobedience' such as Sea Shepherd's targeting of Japanese whaling vessels during Operation Icefish. Campaigns may also build support through influencing key stakeholders including businesses, politicians, and/or celebrities; for example, Conservation International relied on celebrities to 'highlight the value of nature' in the Nature is Speaking campaign. Likewise, Greenpeace's Save the Arctic campaign displayed photos of celebrities wearing campaign t-shirts in protest against Shell's headquarters in London. In short, these examples represent the diversity present in campaigning as well as the variety in campaign objectives.

1.2.2. Media

Another major aspect underpinning this research is its focus on the relationship between campaigning and media. On first impression, the term media appears straightforward enough. Since its initial usage in the early 1920s, media has become commonplace in many of our everyday vocabularies. As the plural of medium, media are, in their simplest

sense, the ‘main means of mass communication’ (OED, 2017a). Indeed, the term media is ‘a truncated form of “media of communication”, which effectively highlights the “channels” through which communication takes place’ (Clarke, 2009, p. 1). Thus, whilst usage of media may only be a recent phenomenon, media themselves have existed for centuries. From the ancient rock art of the San peoples in Southern Africa to the Persian Empire’s postal system, from Ptolemy’s world map to Gutenberg’s printing press, from the radio to the Internet, media have shaped and continue to shape societies around the world.

Of particular relevance to this thesis are mass media. These include ‘the various technological means of producing and disseminating messages and cultural forms to large, widely dispersed, heterogeneous audiences’ (Chandler & Munday, 2011, p. 257). Biagi (2015, p. 8) describes mass media as: reliant on mass communication systems (e.g. print, television, the Internet etc.), able to deliver messages rapidly, and able to reach large groups of diverse audiences simultaneously or within short periods of time. Under this definition, examples of mass media are diverse and ubiquitous. For instance, they may range from broadcast (e.g. television and radio), to digital (e.g. email and text message), to outdoors (e.g. billboard and poster), to print (e.g. newspaper and magazine).

However, first impressions rarely tell the whole story. As Clarke (2009, p. 1) points out, ‘only the most naïve of understandings would conceive of a medium as a strictly neutral channel for conveying information’. Upon closer investigation, media are not only objects of communication, but they are also actors (McLuhan, 1964).
In other words, as actors, media are the institutions and infrastructures that create meaning, and as objects, media are meaning itself (Chadwick, 2013; Couldry, 2012;

Hjarvard, 2013). In this way, media become the 'means or agency through which communication takes place' and the 'process through which reality is apprehended or constructed' (Chandler & Munday, 2011, p. 270-271). Media emerge from the intersection of interests, practices, norms, and values (Craig, 2004). In turn, they shape, and are shaped by, technological, economic, social, and political forces (Couldry, 2012). In so doing, media become agents of interactivity and exchange, connecting 'one to one, one to many, many to one, and many to many' (Adams, 2010, p. 39). Craig (2004, p. 3) describes this complexity:

> "The media" is a catch-all term that includes transnational corporations, communication technologies, policy and regulatory frameworks, the practices of journalists, gossip columns, the nightly television news, blockbuster movies, advertisements, business magazines, music radio, the local newspaper and the Internet.

Indeed, 'to highlight the separateness of the media is not to appreciate fully how integral the media are to the meaning-making processes of a society' (Craig, 2004, p. 3).

In contemporary campaigning, ENGOs rely more and more on digital media. These are media that make use of digitally-compressed content shared at low cost and high speed with easy reproducibility across the Internet. Traditional analogue media may also be digitised, for example by uploading an old home video to YouTube. Within this thesis, the main forms of digital media that I investigate are social media or 'media that enable users to create and share content or to participate in social networking' (OED, 2017c). There is a tendency to misuse the term social media by framing it as a synonym for social network or a 'group of people who are socially connected to one another' (OED, 2017d). However, a social network is a sub-category of social media, which, in

turn, is a sub-category of digital media. Thus, for the purpose of this research, I adopt the general term digital media as it helps to avoid this ambiguity and is also most commonly used within the literature (Bennett & Segerberg, 2012; Bimber, 2017; Earl & Kimport, 2011).

1.3 Conceptual frameworks

To explore how digital media influence the conduct of environmental campaigning, this thesis draws on aspects of the following conceptual frameworks: 1) the public sphere; 2) participation; 3) relational geographies and the event; and 4) affordance theory. Key elements of each theory are addressed in the subsequent sections.

1.3.1 The public sphere

The notion of the public sphere has been largely attributed to German philosopher and sociologist Habermas (1989) and his work *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*. According to Habermas (1989, p. 27), the late 18th century saw the rise of an emerging political class in Western Europe, the bourgeoisie. Congregating in places such as the Paris salons and London coffee houses, the bourgeoisie engaged in public debates and discussions on issue areas of their time. Through this engagement, they 'formed a public body which, in sharp contrast to the old authorities, notably the state and the

church, provided the conditions for reason-based public opinion' (Iosifidis, 2011, p. 620). Habermas (1989, p. 27) called this discursive space the '[bourgeois] public sphere', describing it as 'where the private come together as a public'. The public sphere promoted civic engagement, encouraged communicative processes, and contributed to the formation of public will and opinion (Susen, 2011).

Since *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, the notion of the public sphere has been widely adopted across academic literatures (Dahlgren, 2005; Downey & Fenton, 2003; Fuchs, 2014; Schäfer, 2010; Schradie, 2011). Indeed, it is often seen as a central component of democratic health (Dahlgren, 2005). The notion of the public sphere is built around several premises or key dimensions. The first is that all citizens have access to it (Fuchs, 2014; Verstraeten, 1996). This allows for a greater heterogeneity of voices and diversity in public experiences and exchanges. Second, Habermas (1989, p. 108) emphasises the importance of reason and rationality in the formation of a 'rational-critical' public opinion. Third, through public opinion, the public sphere exerts pressure on decision-makers, which, in turn, holds them more accountable and 'question[s] the legitimacy of arbitrary forms of power' (Susen, 2011, p. 46).

Of course, there are limitations to Habermas' original conceptualisation of the public sphere. For example, by focusing solely on the bourgeoisie, Fuchs (2014) criticises Habermas of excluding other popular movements such as the working classes. Likewise, several feminists have also critiqued Habermas of being gender blind and of excluding women, homosexuals, and ethnic minorities (Fuchs, 2014; Susen, 2011; Verstraeten, 1996). In this way, marginalised groups who have historically had less opportunity to express their own interests, 'are very likely to be absorbed by a so-called overall "public

interest" that is not really "their" public interest' (Verstraeten, 1996, p. 351). Drawing on the work of Derrida (1992), Barnett (2008, p. 4) maintains that the public 'does not, cannot, and should be expected to speak in its own voice, in the first person. Rather, it is only cited and *spoken for*'. Likewise, Susen (2011, p. 54) argues that Habermas' public sphere 'stands in the tradition of a male-dominated social theory…[and] rests on the short-sighted view that we can, and should, privilege rational over non-rational forms of engaging with the world'. Indeed, Habermas' emphasis on an unbiased and neutral rationality has also faced criticism of creating utopian and idealised visions of a deliberative democracy and civic engagement (Iosifidis, 2011; Kleinschmit, 2012; Koc-Michalska, Lilleker, & Vedel, 2014).

A discussion on the public sphere also warrants a discussion on the concept of the public. According to Eden (2017), there is no single 'public' but instead publics are composed of groups within groups, each diverse and complex and varying in time and space. Similarly, whilst there is no single definition of public, Livingstone (2005) identifies various commonalities across its many dimensions. She argues that the term public 'refers to a common understanding of the world, a shared identity, a claim to inclusiveness, [and] a consensus regarding the collective interest' (Livingstone, 2005, p. 9). However, she also adds that public 'implies a visible and open forum of some kind in which the population participates in order that such understandings, identities, values and interests are recognised or contested'.

It is within these spaces that publics are convened (Barnett, 2008; Dickens & Butcher, 2016). Put differently, 'public refers not just to a *subject* or action, and not just to an *object* of action, but it also refers to a particular *medium* through which action

should be conducted' (Barnett, 2008, p. 3). In this way, publics are situated relations, which emerge through the process of addressing and responding to processual events (Barnett, 2008; Dickens & Butcher, 2016). This approach to publics is what Mahony and Stephansen (2016) suggest is emergence-oriented. Specifically, it seeks to understand how publics, in the plural, are 'called into existence, constituted or resourced and in how the processes that work to mediate publics draw on the agency of multiple social subjects variously affected by issues at hand' (Mahony & Stephansen, 2016, p. 588). In sum, publics are not pre-existing collective subjects. Instead, through relational practices and publicness, they are summoned and assembled (Mahony, Newman & Barnett, 2010).

Having introduced Habermas' (1989) notion of the public sphere and an introduction to the concept of publics, I now turn to the relationship between the public sphere and media. Given that media sit at the intersection of the public and private spheres, they are critical to how this intersection is defined, shifted, and exploited (Verstraeten, 1996). According to Butsch (2007, p. 7), traditional liberal political theory suggests that the media provide democracies with three positive functions: to act as watchdog over the state as an independent fourth estate; to act as an agency of information and debate for citizens to participate in their democracy; and to act as the voice of the people of the state. Likewise, Iosifidis (2011, p. 621, emphasis added) suggests:

> The media *should* facilitate the process of rational argumentation by providing a context of public discourse, which is essential for the formation of free and reason-based public opinion. The media *should* tend to maximise debates over political ideas and contribute to public information and argumentation, which are essential to the maintenance of democracy.

Drawing on the work of Blumler and Gurevitch (1995), Habermas (1996, p. 378) argues there are several tasks that the media 'ought' to do. For example, he suggests that the media ought: to take on the role of observers and report issues related to citizen welfare; to develop platforms for advocacy and debate; to incentivise citizens to become participants in politics rather than to passively consume information related to the political process; and to resist forces that attempt to subvert their independence and integrity (Habermas, 1996). When framed this way, 'media are cast as allies of citizens in their role of supervising democratic government through public opinion' (Butsch, 2007, p. 7).

This positive perspective of the media aligns well with contemporary theorists who advocate the participatory potential of digital media, for example media and communications scholar Henry Jenkins (2006, 2009, 2016; Jenkins et al., 2008; Jenkins, Ford & Green, 2013). Jenkins et al. (2008, pp. 5-6) define participatory culture as a culture with: relatively low barriers to artistic expression and civic engagement; strong support for creating and sharing creations with others; some type of informal mentorship whereby what is known by the most experienced is passed along to novices; members who believe that their contributions matter; and members who feel some degree of social connection with one another (at the least, they care what other people think about what they have created).

An example of participatory culture is seen in Jenkins's (2009) investigation of the blurring of fandom and activism in 'Do-It-Yourself' (DIY) video blogging on YouTube. In a campaign against Wal-Mart, fans from the Harry Potter Alliance partnered with activists from Wal-Mart Watch to create a series of *Harry Potter* parodies. Within

these short films, fans dressed up as Harry and Hermoine to battle 'Lord Waldemart', whose sinister practices included exploitation of workers, putting competitors out of business, and refusing to provide health care (Jenkins, 2009). In short, the accessibility and interactivity of YouTube enabled a collaborative form of DIY protest between entertainment fans and social rights activists.

In his later work, Jenkins (2016, p. 269) attributes the emergence of participatory culture to the intersections of three trends. First, is the development of tools and technologies that encourage user interactivity, such as the ability to archive, annotate, and appropriate content. Second, is the adoption of these tools by various subcultures, which is promoting emerging forms of DIY media production. Third, is what Jenkins (2016) suggests is an economic trend towards a preference for horizontally integrated media conglomerates. These are based on flows of images, ideas, and narratives across a variety of media channels and a demand for 'more active mode of spectatorship' (Jenkins, 2016, p. 269). Still, despite these trends and the shift towards a more participatory culture, Jenkins (2016, p. 271) does acknowledge that 'too often, we have fallen into the trap of seeing democracy as an "inevitable" outcome of technology change rather than as something which we need to fight to achieve with every tool at our disposal'.

Indeed, several scholars are advocating a more critical approach to exploring the influences of media on the public sphere (Butsch, 2007; Dahlgren, 2005; Fuchs, 2014; Susen, 2011). Habermas (1989) himself suggests that the massification, privatisation, and commodification of media are leading to a refeudalisation of society. Providing a contemporary example, Fuchs (2014) investigates the extent to which social media contribute to opportunities for political communication and the public sphere versus the

extent to which they create and/or exacerbate inequalities and exclusion. He finds three major trends. The first relates to digital divides and stratification patterns on Twitter around age, gender, ethnicity, and class. For instance, in 2013, a typical American Twitter user was: aged 18 – 34, white, had no children, held a university degree, and earned more than US $100, 000 per year (Fuchs, 2014).

The second trend identified by Fuchs (2014) has to do with the top social media topics and the number of followers of major users. Analysing a dataset of top Twitter topics from 2010, he finds that only 3 per cent were political as opposed to 28 per cent, which focused on entertainment and 40 per cent, which focused on hashtags (e.g. #rememberwhen, #haveuever etc.). A similar emphasis on entertainment exists with regards to the top followed Twitter profiles. For example, in 2013 Noam Chomsky had 87 901 followers as opposed to Justin Bieber who had 35.2 million (Fuchs, 2014). In sum, within social media topics and profiles, there is a clear preference for discussion and debate on entertainment rather than politics.

The final trend identified by Fuchs (2014) also relates to digital divides and centres around Internet access and social media usage rates. Exploring the 2011 Egyptian revolution, he reveals that only 26.4 per cent of Egyptians had Internet access and only 13.6 per cent were on Facebook. Fuchs (2014) then draws on a survey completed by the Tahrir Data Project of Tahrir Square activists (n = 1056). Within this survey, activists reported that during the protest, face-to-face communication was the number one form of protest communication (93%), followed by 'television (92%), phones (82%), print media (57%), text message (46%), email (27%), radio (22%), Twitter (13%), and blogs (12%)' (Fuchs, 2014, p. 196). Indeed, these findings demonstrate that whilst digital media may

be supplementary, due to limitations around access, usage, and literacy, interpersonal communication, traditional media, and telecommunications continue to be critical communication tools for activism.

In consideration of these three trends, Fuchs (2014) argues that digital media are not contributing to Habermas' (1989) public sphere. Further investigating digital divides, others have advanced similar arguments, suggesting that digital media do not enable universal access nor do they promote equal representation (Blank, 2013; Brown & Czerniewicz, 2010; Eubanks, 2011; Graham, 2011; Graham & Zook, 2013; Schradie, 2011). For example, in her examination of digital content production in the United States, Schradie (2011) finds that income, race, ethnicity, and gender continue to be major factors influencing individuals' online participation and usage. In other words, like Fuchs (2014), she argues that the digital public sphere is far from egalitarian and often further marginalises already peripheral publics. Likewise, exploring Internet usage and content production in the United Kingdom, Blank and Groselj (2014, p. 432) find that age, education, and gender are influential variables; 'young, better educated, and male Internet users are more likely to exhibit higher amounts and varieties of [Internet] use'. In sum, as highlighted by Eubanks (2011), the digital divide has not decreased but instead, has actually increased.

However, scholarship is moving beyond its earlier focus on binary Internet access (i.e. first-level divides) (Eastin, Cicchirillo, & Mabry, 2015) and Internet skills and usage (i.e. second-level divides) (van Deursen & van Dijk, 2010; Hargittai, 2002). Instead, Scheerder, van Deursen, and van Dijk (2017, p. 1609) argue that 'digital divides should be approached more comprehensively, in which not only Internet access, skills and use

are addressed but also the consequences of Internet use'. According to Wei, Teo, Chan, and Tan (2011), this is the third-level divide or a lack of beneficial outcomes despite the possession of digital skills and Internet use (Stern, Adams, & Elasser, 2009). Thus, in order to better understand the underlying complexities of digital divides, scholarship is moving away from its initial focus on access towards a growing focus on outcome (Stern et al., 2009; van Deursen and van Dijk, 2017; Wei et al., 2011).

In a different vein, drawing on the lens of media, Livingstone (2005) challenges the extent to which the notions of publics and audiences are mutually opposed. She suggests that under traditional approaches, 'audiences are denigrated as trivial, passive, individualised, while publics are valued as active, critically engaged and politically significant' (Livingstone, 2005, p. 17). This reductionist binary places publics at one end of the spectrum as active political participants and the audience at the other as passive political observers. Indeed, this idolised public role relates to what Mahony and Stephansen (2016, p. 589) identify as the 'engaged citizen' or the Habermasian ideal. This ideal often stands in sharp contrast to the role of audience particularly when positioned alongside media. Livingstone (2005, p. 18) summarises:

> The effect of media on their audience is seen to reposition what was or might be or should be, a public (knowing, thinking, influential) as a mere crowd (watching, sharing and emoting) or mass of consumers (driven by tastes, preferences and motivations).

Indeed there is a long history of scholarship, which positions the media as negatively influencing participation and the ideal of the active citizen, for example, by eroding the public sphere (Habermas, 1989), lessening civic engagement and social capital (Putnam 2000), and creating feel good activism with little political impact (Morozov, 2009).

Together, these studies make clear that whilst digital media have the potential to afford interactivity and sociality, the digital realm continues to be ripe with social inclusion and exclusion, power hierarchies, and inequalities (Schradie, 2011; van Deursen, and van Dijk, 2017; Wei et al., 2011). In other words, 'going online does not simply lead to participating in the new digital public sphere' (Schradie, 2011, p. 160). On one hand there is a suite of academic literature advocating the democratic potential of digital media and their role in citizen engagement, participation, and protest (Bennett & Segerberg, 2013; Castells, 2012; Earl & Kimport, 2011; Jenkins, 2006). On the other hand, several scholars have criticised the technological determinism associated with digital media, highlighting the inherent unevenness of the Internet and digital media technologies (Blank, 2013; Fuchs, 2014; Graham, 2011; Graham & Zook, 2013; Hargittai & Walejko, 2008). Thus, there appears to be a constant tension between scholarship that suggests digital media are contributing to a new and more participative digitally-mediated public sphere versus those who continue to reveal the multidimensionality behind its many divides.

1.3.2 Participation

The concept of political participation has a long and debated history, especially with regards to shifting media landscapes (Bennett & Segerberg, 2013; Carpentier, 2011; Dahlgren, 2009; Gil de Zúñiga, Jung, & Valenzuela, 2012). Van Deth (2014, p. 351) suggests that 'political participation can loosely be defined as citizens' activities affecting politics'. However, he acknowledges this to be a deceptively simple definition, which

includes everything from voting to guerrilla gardening to suicide protest. Indeed, the conceptual ambiguity surrounding political participation 'has confronted many researchers with the dilemma of using either a dated conceptualisation excluding many new modes of political participation or stretching their concepts to cover everything' (van Deth, 2014, p. 351).

As a starting point, Dahlgren (2006) maintains that political participation is more than just a feeling, but instead involves some form of practical, do-able activity. Exploring decades of scholarship related to political participation, Fox (2013, p. 500) identifies the general criteria around which definitional delineations tend to be conceptualised:

> Political participation is always active behaviour, and can be engaged in by an individual or a group, with the aim of affecting individual or group concerns. It can be either instrumental or symbolic, must be voluntary and can be legal or illegal…[and it may be targeted at more] than just the state or state-related services.

However, alongside this scholarship have come various critiques. For example, the constant emphasis on participation and its association with citizenship, both by scholars and practitioners, has led some to criticise participation as a form of 'tyranny', which comes from 'the illegitimate and/or unjust exercise of power' (Cooke & Kothari, 2001, p. 4).

Much of this backlash has emerged in response to the global proliferation of non-governmental organisations, power held by multinational funding agencies, and the misleading use of participatory rhetoric within the international arena. Exploring the 'participatory turn' amongst development agencies over the last few decades, Henkel and Stirrat (2001, p. 170) argue that participation has become 'the new orthodoxy'. They

identify several common themes underpinning this new orthodoxy, namely a stress on: bottom-up rather than top-down approaches; empowerment; the marginal; a distrust of the state; and a celebration of local knowledge (Henkel & Stirrat, 2001, p. 170-171). In response to the populist approach to participation, Hickey and Mohan (2004) summarise key arguments made against the participatory turn. These include an overemphasis on the local and an under-emphasis on wider structural components (Cleaver, 1999; Mohan & Stokke, 2000), a lack of understanding regarding the relationship between power and empowerment (Kothari, 2001), and the use of participation as a technical method instead of political methodology (Cleaver, 1999; Rahman, 1995).

Within recent years, several academics are revisiting earlier conceptualisations of participation (Chilvers & Kearnes, 2015; Mahony & Stephansen, 2016; Theocharis, 2015), whilst others are challenging the extent to which participation is tyrannical versus transformative (Hickey & Mohan, 2000; Kesby, 2005). For example, drawing on various works by Foucault, Kesby (2005, p. 2044) argues that 'even emancipatory discourses are systems of power with the capacity to dominate'. He posits that investigations into participation require scholarship to move beyond its traditional binaries towards a more Foucauldian understanding of power as inherently unstable, undergoing mutation, and performative. However, highlighting a limitation of the Foucauldian tradition, Marres and Lezaun (2011, p. 491) argue that what is also needed is 'an investigation that queries how objects, devices, settings and materials, not just subjects…serve to enact distinctive ideals of citizenship and participation'.

One such approach is put forward by Chilvers and Kearnes (2015, p. 302), who suggest reconceptualising participation as 'multiple, situated, co-produced and in the

making'. In this way, participation is fundamentally relational. Participation and participatory practices are not pre-given but instead, they are processual and emerge from a 'hybrid assemblage of material, social and discursive relations' (Chilvers and Kearnes, 2015, p. 54). Eden (2017) suggests that these practices can be *ex situ* and *in situ*. Specifically, they can be *ex situ* in that where they take place is not necessarily the site of decision-making and that participation may be facilitated or controlled by elites, e.g. a town hall meeting. However, participatory practices may also be *in situ*, whereby publics are involved first hand and present as decision-makers thus enhancing the potential for transparency and learning (Eden, 2017).

Within much of the literature exploring participation is also a focus on the concepts of citizenship and civic culture (Barnett, 2008; Couldry et al., 2014; Dahlgren, 2009; Jenkins & Carpentier, 2013). Traditionally, citizenship has 'referred to a particular set of political practices involving specific public rights and duties with respect to a given political community' (Bellamy, 2008, p. 3). Typical examples include voting, paying taxes, and campaigning. Bellamy (2008, p. 12) argues that participation is particularly important to citizens as 'their participation or lack of it play an important role in determining how far, and in what ways, [democratic politics] treats people as equals'. Often used in tandem with citizenship, the notion of civic culture was popularised by Almond and Verba in *The Civic Culture* (1963) and *The Civic Culture Revisited* (1980). Grant (2009, n.p.n.) summarises their work, suggesting that under traditional approaches, civic culture is 'a political culture characterised by (1) most citizens' acceptance of the authority of the state, but also (2) a general belief in participation in civic duties'.

Revisiting the concept of citizenship, Bellamy (2008, p. 17) expands earlier delineations and suggests the following definition:

> Citizenship is a condition of civic equality. It consists of membership of a political community where all citizens can determine the terms of social cooperation on an equal basis. This status not only secures equal rights to the enjoyment of the collective goods provided by the political association but also involves equal duties to promote and sustain them – including the good of democratic citizenship itself.

Here, the emphasis on participation is clear. Indeed, it is seen as a necessary duty to not only promoting, but also sustaining one's basic rights. However, as argued by Eden (2017), what counts as participation and participatory practice continues to be confined to the imaginaries of 'elites', for example, politicians, academics, and/or NGOs. In prioritising – and to some extent dictating – what counts as participation and one's civic duty, there is the potential to reinforce the challenges highlighted in Cooke and Kothari's (2001) 'tyranny', Henkel and Stirrat's (2001) 'new orthodoxy' and/or Mahony and Stephansen's (2016) 'engaged citizen'.

In order to better understand the relationship between citizenship and participation, Dahlgren (2005, p. 157) expands the concept of civic culture. Examining Dahlgren's (2003, p. 154-155) approach to civic culture, Couldry et al. (2014, p. 616) explain:

> Civic culture points to those features of the socio-cultural world – dispositions, practices, processes – that constitute *pre-conditions* for people's actual participation in the public sphere, in civil and political society… civic culture is an analytic construct that seeks to identify the *possibilities* of people acting in the role of citizens.

In this way, when thinking about participation, citizenship, and civic culture, 'the key…is to underscore the processual and contextual dimension: the political and politics are not simply given, but are constructed' (Dahlgren, 2005, p. 158). This is particularly significant in the contemporary context when exploring the entanglements between changing media landscapes, their affordances, and political participation (Couldry et al., 2014; Bennett & Segerberg, 2013; Dahlgren, 2009; de Zúñiga, Jung & Valenzuela, 2012).

1.3.3 Relational geographies and the event

Investigation into the concept of 'the event' first requires investigation into relational geographies and the production of relational space. Drawing on the works of Deleuze and Guattari (1983; 1988), Jones (2009) suggests that relational thinking replaces the structure-agency dichotomies of topography with topology, or a more fluid, connected, and encountered approach to space. Similarly, Massey (2005, p. 9) makes three recommendations for taking a more relational approach to space, namely to reframe space as: a product of interrelations constituted through interactions; a sphere in which distinct trajectories or multiplicities co-exist; and always in the process of being made. In other words, relational space is *becoming*.

Investigating the making of relational space, Murdoch (2008, p. 20) suggests the process is both consensual and contested:

> "Consensual" because relations are usually made out of agreements or alignments between two or more entities; "contested" because the construction of one set of relations may involve both the exclusion of some entities (and their relations) as well

> as the forcible enrolment of others. In short, relational space is a "power-filled" space in which some alignments come to dominate, at least for a period of time, while others come to be dominat*ed*. So while multiple sets of relations may well co-exist, there is likely to be some competitions between these relations over the composition of particular spaces and places.

Similarly, Doel (2007, p. 809) maintains that because space is '*continuously* being made, unmade, and remade by the incessant shuffling of heterogeneous relations, its potential can never be contained and its exuberance can never be quelled'. In this way, whilst space may – for a period of time – become stabilised, it can never be entirely mastered (Doel, 2007).

Alongside more relational approaches to space have been calls for more relational approaches to scale. Particularly critical and controversial, Marston, Jones, and Woodward (2005, p. 422) argue that the concept of scale within human geography should be eliminated. Instead, they propose a 'flat ontology', which:

> Does not rely on *any* transcendent predetermination – whether the local-to-global continuum in vertical thought or the origin-to-edge imaginary in horizontal thought. In a flat (as opposed to horizontal) ontology, we discard the centring essentialism that infuses not only the up-down vertical imaginary but also the radiating (out from here) spatiality of horizontality.

Marston et al., (2005) suggest that a flat ontology would counter scalar hierarchies, or what Dixon and Jones (1998, p. 251) term 'grid epistemology'. That is, 'a way of knowing that imposes itself upon and eventually becomes inseparable from those processes it helps to understand'. Cresswell (2012, p. 224) points out that within scalar hierarchies, there is a 'conflation of size (horizontally) with level (vertically) which provides an ordering frame of ways of knowing the world'. Thrift (2004, p. 59) raises a

similar concern and calls for 'this absurd scale-dependent notion [to be] replaced by the notion that what counts is connectivity'. In sum, by applying a flat ontology, Marston et al., (2005, p.423) reframe the world via flows and fluidity. Thus, they replace 'old notions of fixity and categorisation' with a more relational approach, which emphasises movement and mobility.

Indeed, the emphasis on relational approaches to space and scale has encouraged geographical imaginations to focus on flows, connectedness, and *becoming.* One such way of thinking is non-representational theory (NRT). NRT has emerged largely in response to human geography's preoccupation with representation (Anderson & Harrison, 2010; Thrift 1996). Thrift (1999, p. 296-297) challenges 'we cannot extract a representation of the world because we are slap bang in the middle of it, co-constructing it with numerous human and non-human others for numerous ends'. In other words, the world is not a 'meaningless perceptual mess in need of (symbolic) organisation' (Anderson & Harrison, 2010, p. 7). Instead, it is 'the context from, with and within which what we call subjects and objects emerge' (Anderson & Harrison, 2010, p. 8). NRT moves beyond human geography's earlier emphases on representations through text, discourse, signs, symbols etc. towards a style of thinking that explores the embodied experiences of everyday practice.

Central to NRT is the concept of 'the event'. Indeed, a focus on events allows for investigation into the ever-changing ways of being, doing, and thinking – or the potentialities and performativity – they afford (Dewsbury, 2000; Anderson & Harrison, 2010; Thrift, 2000). Dirksmeier and Helbrecht (2008, p. 4) summarise, '[NRT] is concerned with the flow of practices in time, with the "presentations" produced by acting

in the present rather than with the *post-hoc* reconstructions of the event'. In other words, NRT attempts to move beyond the perceived ending or temporal boundaries of an event, towards relational geography's focus on *becoming*.

However, defining the term 'event' is by no means a simple task. As a starting point, the work of Anderson and Harrison (2010) is particularly useful. They begin by reflecting on Cleopatra's Needle, a granite obelisk erected in London in 1878. Whilst the initial spectacle and unveiling of the monument in 1878 might be considered an event, so too is its erosion over time. Herein lies one way of conceptualising the event: 'a continual differing, if only in modest ways, that takes place in relation to an ever-changing complex of other events' (Anderson & Harrison, 2010, p. 20). In comparison, Anderson and Harrison (2010) explore a second example of a very specific event, September 11th. Indeed, the feeling of absolute surprise, catastrophe, and impression left behind by September 11th creates a sense of event that is different to that of the continuous erosion of Cleopatra's Needle. Dastur (2000, 179) elaborates and describes this interpretation of event as something that brings 'contingency, unpredictability, and chance into the world'.

Although both examples offer different ways of framing events, from the lens of NRT, they also share an underlying similarity. That is, in both examples:

> The event does not resemble, conform, or reproduce a set of *a priori* conditions. It does not *represent* those conditions. Rather, and in different ways, events break with their extant conditions, forcing or inviting us to think and act differently (Anderson & Harrison, 2010, p. 22).

In this way, events are made up of multitudes of fleeting contexts, each with more multitudes of transformative potential (McCormack, 2003; Thrift 2008). Indeed, discussing the potentialities of events, Dewsbury (2000, p. 475) reminds us to consider

that ‘everything that actually happens could also have always happened otherwise and simultaneously other happenings occur irrespective of…orientation’. Thus, when exploring the event, it is as important to consider what *could* have happened as what actually did. In sum, whilst the concept of event may be understood in various ways, NRT provides a way of thinking that repositions events according to their moment-by-moment potential (Anderson & Harrison, 2010; Dewsbury, 2000; Thrift, 2008).

Within NRT, the focus on events, both in the spectacular and in the everyday, is closely linked to the concept of performativity. Performativity rose to prominence during the 1990s, particularly with the works of Judith Butler (1990; 1993). Through her analyses, Butler (1990; 1993) offers critical insight into the construction of identities and the contestation and politicisation of bodies and place (McCormack, 2009). Butler (1990; 1993) also highlights that identities are not ‘pre-given attributes that a sovereign subject possesses but rather come into being through performative enactment of particular social norms’ (Rose-Redwood and Glass, 2014, p. 3). However, whilst Butler’s arguments provide a crucial foundation for thinking about representation and performativity, her work has come under scrutiny. For example McCormack (2009, p. 133) suggests she places ‘too much emphasis on the discursive construction of difference and identity’. That is to say, within the lens of NRT, performativity relates to ‘preformative presentations’ as opposed to representations or reflections of some ‘*a priori* order waiting to be unveiled, decoded or revealed’ (Anderson & Harrison, 2010, p. 22).

To better understand the concept of performativity from the lens of geography, Dewsbury (2000, p. 474) divides it into three themes. The first of these themes relates to the time or timing of an event. Specifically, to the way in which something takes place,

'both in the sense of it being actual, and in the way this etches out spaces, taking and possessing place' (Dewsbury, 2000, p. 474). Performativity relates to practice. Cadman (2009, p. 5) elaborates '[performativity] is not just an act in time, rather it is the spacing which allows the next moment; it enables the unexpected and transformative but also the mundane ability to simply go on'.

Second, is the way in which performativity is materially, viscerally, and sensually embodied. Herein lies the notion of embodiment. Thrift (2007, p. 126) suggests a body exists as 'more than flesh' or a 'finished organic whole'. Instead, a body affects and is affected by. Drawing on the works of Deleuze, Dewsbury (2009) argues that affect exists as a phenomenon, force, theory, and expression. Differentiating affect from emotion, he defines it as:

> An experiential force and a material thing that exists as a relational experience and a phenomenological realm in a noninterpretative and impersonal manner. As such it is a state of becoming, given that it prestructures codified emotional responses to physical experiences.

In this way, through the concepts of performativity and affect, bodies become more than just a combination of organs or carriers serving a particular function. Instead, they are the 'modes of speeds and slowness, and capacities for affecting and being affected' (Cadman, 2009, p. 5).

Third, is the understanding that within an event, there may be various centres, 'all resonating on different levels with different affective intensities' (Dewsbury, 2000, p. 487). In other words, through performativity, events are folded out of, and through, their own situations and architectures. Thus, performativity includes not just the results of an

event, but all the multitudes of possibilities that happened, could have happened, and/or happened, irrespective of original intent (Dewsbury, 2000).

1.3.4 Affordance theory

The final conceptual tool underpinning this thesis is Gibson's (1979) notion of affordances. In the clearest sense of the word, to afford is the ability to give. Gibson, (1979, p. 127) describes an affordance as 'what [the environment] provides or furnishes'. Affordances emerge from a relational process of exchange between actors and their environments. In this way, they include 'properties…that render [an object], consciously or otherwise, apt for the "project" (i.e. purpose and needs) of another' (Jepson and Barua, 2015, p. 96). McGrenere and Ho (2000, p. 1) identify three key properties of Gibson's notion of affordances: an affordance exists relative to the action capabilities of a particular actor; the existence of an affordance is independent of the actor's ability to perceive it; and an affordance does not change as the needs of the actor change.

Expanding on Gibson's (1979) conceptual work, Norman (1988) emphasises the importance of perception when thinking about affordances. According to Norman (1988, p. 9), affordance 'refers to the perceived and actual properties of the thing, primarily those fundamental properties that determine just how the thing could possibly be used'. He further highlights the importance of perception by describing a chair. 'A chair affords ("is for") support and, therefore, affords sitting. A chair can also be carried' (Norman, 1988, p. 9). Norman's (1988) emphasis on perception when conceptualising affordance

provides a slight deviation from Gibson's (1979) earlier work. In their investigation of the concept of affordances, McGrenere and Ho (2000) highlight the differences between Gibson's (1979) and Norman's (1988) interpretations. Table 1 provides a summary of their findings.

	Associated meanings
Gibson's conceptualisation of affordance	• Offerings of action possibilities in the environment in relation to the action capabilities of an actor • Independent of the actor's experience, knowledge, culture, or ability to perceive • Existence is binary – an affordance exists or it does not exist
Norman's conceptualisation of affordance	• Perceived properties that may or may not actually exist • Suggestions of clues as to how to use the properties • Can be dependent on the experience, knowledge, or culture of the actor • Can make an action difficult or easy

Table 1. Comparison of affordances as defined by Gibson and Norman (adapted from (McGrenere & Ho, 2000, p. 3))

Combining the works of Gibson (1979) and Norman (1988), Hjarvard (2008) maintains that any object, through its characteristics (e.g. shape, size, temperature, speed, etc.) may provide a variety of affordances. For example, a river may afford villagers with fish to eat whilst others may rely on it to swim and others yet may use it for transportation. Similarly, some objects, such as a teapot or a ladder, may be designed to invite a specific use and their use may depend on the characteristics of the actor who is interacting

(Hjarvard, 2008). In other words, 'the affordances of any given object make certain actions possible, exclude others and, in sum, structure the interaction between actor and object' (Hjarvard, 2008, p. 120). This enables an object to act whilst also being acted upon. Indeed, a focus on affordances is significant to this research as it forces one to consider not only the object/actor, but also the ongoing interactions between them.

Drawing on aspects from both Gibson's (1979) and Norman's (1988) conceptual works, this research recognises that media each have their own suite of affordances. That is to say, as technologies evolve, the majority of media 'serve in some way as prostheses, extending particular human capacities beyond their previous bounds' (Clarke, 2009, p. 1). For example, Clarke (2009) discusses how the invention of the telephone circumvented the traditional reliance on face-to-face communication and allowed for the transmission of information across greater distances (i.e. beyond the distance a voice can carry). Likewise, another example is seen in the evolution of recording technologies such as the gramophone and voicemail. With the emergence of these technologies, media afford an ability to stretch out the temporal boundaries of oral communication (Clarke, 2009). In short, affordance theory offers a strong foundation from which to explore the evolving digital media landscape.

Indeed, the evolution of media relates to an important point raised by Chadwick (2013, p. 25), who argues that 'what count as new media at any given time are therefore best seen as hybrids of newer and older media'. As hybrid media, digital media draw on several earlier media traditions or are said to be convergent. For example, print media can be seen to shape digital media. When searching the Internet, we browse pages, we upload files, we use text, and we bookmark interesting reads. Similarly, digital media can also be

understood as evolutions of visual media, film, and cinema (Chadwick, 2013). From video games to iPhones, users navigate through screens, rotating and cropping, zooming in and zooming out, combining image and sound. Another, and often less obvious, contributor to digital media is radar. Chadwick (2013, p. 39) explains 'radar embedded the idea of a screen that could be updated in real time according to the data being monitored'. Digital media make use of radar's real-time screen, which in turn allows for users to intervene and manipulate content in there 'here and now' (Chadwick, 2013; Manovich, 2002). In short, digital media are not necessarily new. Instead, they are an evolutionary, convergent, and hybrid product of older and newer media.

This thesis is also built on the idea that media have the power to mediate and to mediatise. Strömbäck and Esser (2014) distinguish between these two processes, with an emphasis on the latter. They suggest that mediation is a more neutral act, within which the medium of communication may transform the meaning or experience of a message. According to Hjarvard (2013, p. 19) mediation is 'the concrete act of communication by means of a type of media in a specific social context'. For example, a landscape photograph may be mediated by altering the original image in *Adobe Photoshop* to produce a new result. That is, through digital mediation (e.g. manipulating the image) a nature magazine may use the photograph to exhibit a new representation of a particular reality.

In contrast, mediatisation is a more long-term and dynamic process (Hjarvard, 2013; Strömbäck & Esser, 2014). It is the process of social and cultural change initiated by the increasing influence of media and media frames. Suppose, for example, that the majority of nature magazines, complemented by *Planet Earth* films and calendars of

tropical beaches, altered their images of nature to look more wild or pristine. Combined, these representations have broader social and cultural effects on the way people think about nature. Rather than educating the public about the current state of the environment and our contributions to its destruction, they create an illusion that nature is pure and safe, disconnected from human influence (Welling, 2009). This is the process of mediatisation in action. Thus, on one hand, 'the media have become integrated into the operations of social institutions and cultural spheres' (Hjarvard, 2013, p. 17). On the other hand, media have also become social and cultural institutions in their own right (Hjarvard, 2013). Indeed, they are so much a part of everyday life that publics often forget they are even there.

1.3.3 Digital media affordances

Following this train of thought and central to this thesis are digital media affordances. Digital media affordances may be understood as the changes or actions made easier by digital media relative to their technological predecessors (Earl & Kimport, 2011). Indeed, there is a wealth of interdisciplinary literature exploring digital media and affordances. Given the nature of this research, I am particularly focused on literatures exploring interactive digital media affordances and activism. This in line with the argument put forward by Couldry et al., (2014, p. 615) who challenge that it is unhelpful to 'simply [ask] what digital tools can add to stereotypical acts of citizenship…It is more helpful to ask how digital infrastructures can support a wider "civic culture"'. For example, during

the Global Justice Movement, digital afforded activists with more accessible communicative spaces and unfiltered information flows (della Porta & Mosca, 2005).

Likewise, during the Arab Spring, digital media afforded the collection and transmission of protestors' experiences and the formation of counterpower networks (Castells, 2012). During #Occupy, digital media afforded activists with a shared sense of connectedness and co-presence resulting in protest mobilisation (Juris, 2012). Similarly, the 15M Indignados demonstration in Spain also drew on digital media for mobilisation, which afforded participation opportunities to supporters with lower levels of previous political activity and organisational affiliations (Anduiza et al., 2014). Activists also relied on Twitter during the Anti-Austerity Movement in Greece, where it afforded the space for discourse between different actors and sustained protest mobilisation (Theocharis et al., 2015).

In addition, across social movements, organisers draw on digital affordances to engage, organise, and mobilise supporters. Examples include the use of websites during the Step It Up national day of action (Fisher & Boekkooi, 2010), email during the European Social Forum (Kavada, 2010), and social media during Greenpeace's Unfriend Coal campaign (Katz-Kimchi & Manosevitch, 2015). In addition to organising, digital affordances have also facilitated the development of new forms of political organisations such as MoveOn (Karpf, 2012), Avaaz.org (Kavada, 2012), 350.org (Hestres, 2014), and GetUp! (Vromen, 2014).

According to Bennett and Segerberg (2013, p. 47) the traditional logic of collective action centred around strong organisational coordination of action, collective action frames, and formal organisations to manage resources. In contrast, these digitally-

mediated forms of organisations and organising fit into what Bennett and Segerberg (2013, p. 47) term connective action. In other words, connective action has loose to no formal organisational coordination, relies on social technologies for coordination, and focuses instead on personalised participation rather than collective action frames, for example, the #Occupy Movement (Juris, 2012; Kavada, 2015). These studies demonstrate the significance of digital affordances on engaging, organising, and mobilising supporters. They also highlight the growing role of digital media in contemporary activism.

In sum, the majority of this literature can be grouped according to investigations into specific affordances such as: lowered participation costs (Bennett & Segerberg, 2013; Earl & Kimport, 2011; Karpf, 2016; Kavada, 2010); an increase in temporal and geographical scales of communication (Anduiza et al., 2014; Bennett & Segerberg, 2013; Castells, 2012; Karpf, 2012); a reduced need for co-presence (Bennett & Segerberg, 2013; Earl & Kimport, 2011; Juris, 2012; Kavada, 2010; Theocharis et al., 2015); and a more participative and/or interactive production, consumption, and dissemination of information and content (Carpentier, Dahlgren, & Pasquali, 2013; Fotopoulou & Couldry, 2014; Jenkins, 2006; McPherson, 2015).

1.3.4 Limitations of digitally-mediated campaigning

There are of course limitations to digitally-mediated campaigning and participation, many of which relate to first-, second-, and third-level divides. To begin, the use of digital

media requires physical and technical access as well as user literacy (Norris, 2001; Zook & Graham, 2007). This contributes to uneven diffusions of the Internet and associated technologies. When assessed alongside racial, ethnic, and economic imbalances, some have gone so far as to describe digital divides as digital apartheids (Brown & Czerniewicz, 2010; Purcell, 2014). In other words, whether it is between countries or between neighbourhoods, these imbalances further marginalise already peripheral publics. More so, an increasing focus on technological solutionism for solving complex problems may, however inadvertently, dismiss other important and/or underlying causes (Fuchs, 2014; Morozov, 2013). It goes without saying, not all problems can be solved with an iPhone.

There has also been criticism related to the forms of participation afforded by digital media. Authors like Gladwell (2010) and Morozov (2013) suggest that digitally-mediated participation relies on weak ties, low commitment, and social praise. Actions such as liking a Facebook post or signing an online petition are 'demonised' and framed as 'lazy' relative to their non-digital predecessors (Halupka, 2014, p. 116). Within both non-academic and academic writings, this form of 'lazy activism' is often described pejoratively as clicktivism (Halupka, 2014; Morozov, 2013) and/or slacktivism (Lee & Hsieh, 2013; Morozov, 2009; Rotman et al., 2011). However, a handful of scholars are challenging these labels and demonstrating the positive potential of actions such as mass email flooding (Karpf, 2010), signing online petitions (Lee & Hsieh, 2013), and political memes (Halupka, 2014). In short, there is a tendency to simply rely on the generic term clicktivist before exploring new opportunities for digitally-mediated participation. In this

way, clicktivist becomes less academic terminology and more ‘generalizable insult’ (Halupka, 2014, p. 130).

Some have also challenged the participatory potential of digital media. For instance, in his investigation on the political economy of digital media, Fuchs (2014) analyses various YouTube videos, Facebook fan pages, news sites, and Twitter user profiles to identify prominent information asymmetries. In turn, these asymmetries challenge the participatory nature of digital media. Fuchs (2014) also reveals how the majority of social media sites rely on capital accumulation models that are based on the ‘exploitation of the unpaid labour of Internet users and on the commodification of user-generated data and data about user behaviour that is sold as commodity to advertisers’. According to Fuchs (2014, p. 122), the exploitation of social media extends beyond the unpaid Internet users to ‘the salaried bourgeoisie of highly-paid workers in Internet companies’, to ‘low-paid precarious knowledge workers’, to the ‘slave workers extracting minerals that are used as raw materials [in the production of the iPhone]’. Indeed, similar arguments are found in studies exploring the political economy of media and the extent to which digital media can ever be truly participative (Barnett, 1997; Fuchs, 2012; Graham, 2011; Graham & Zook, 2013; McChesney, 2008; Mosco, 2008).

Another area of concern is identified by Lyon, (2003), McChesney (2008), and Mosco (2008) who discuss the use of media as a tool for public and private surveillance. Whether by governments or corporations, digital data are collected, analysed, and sold to the highest bidder. Over ten years ago, Lyon (2003, p. 13) was already revealing how Internet surveillance allows those collecting data to have power over ‘populations and persons thus directly and indirectly affecting [their] choices and chances’. For example,

drawing on the Facebook likes of over 58,000 volunteers, Kosinski, Stillwell and Graepel (2013, p. 5805) found that 'a wide variety of people's personal attributes, ranging from sexual orientation to intelligence, can be automatically and accurately inferred using their Facebook likes'. Indeed, Facebook's continuous economic surveillance reinforces Fuchs' (2014) argument that digital media are commodifying the digital and unpaid labour of users. As summarised by Fuchs (2014, p. 172), 'Faceboook does not make the world a better place; it makes the world a more commercialised place, a big shopping mall without an exit. It makes the world a better place only for companies interested in advertising, not for users'. In short, there are both advantages and limitations to the affordances of digital media. Thus, to better understand the implications of these affordances on digitally-mediated activism, this thesis explores the continuous and ongoing interplay between digital media, campaigning, and ENGOs.

1.4 A note on the terms campaigner and supporter

Throughout this research, unless otherwise specified, I adopt the general terms campaigner and supporter. Due to variations in job titles across organisations, I use the term campaigner to refer to senior professionals working within the environmental campaigning landscape. Likewise, I use the term supporter to refer to the constituents of ENGOs, often paying and/or voting members, as well as to individuals engaging with and/or participating in an organisation's campaign. As I discuss in more detail in Chapter 5, supporter is the default term used by research participants.

1.5 Structure of thesis

Chapter 1 introduces the sub-discipline of media and communication geography and situates this thesis within the broader literature on digital media and advocacy. Highlighting a current gap in research, it introduces the central research question: how do digital media affordances influence the conduct of campaigning by ENGOs? It also presents the four topic areas used to answer the overarching research question: engagement, campaign strategy, membership, and online communities.

Chapter 2 discusses the research methodology underlying this investigation. First, it introduces critical realism as the dominant research paradigm. It then examines different qualitative research designs and presents a rationale for the choice of grounded theory. Next, Chapter 2 presents the research methods (i.e. elite interviews, participant observation, and digital content analysis) and evaluates their limitations. This is followed by an overview of data collection/analysis, sampling strategies, and research quality. Chapter 2 concludes with a discussion of research ethics and some of the challenges of Internet research.

Chapter 3 investigates how ENGOs frame engagement, and the extent to which these frames are influenced by their adoption of digital media. It draws on data from in-depth elite interviews with senior campaigning staff. Chapter 3 reveals that ENGOs do not frame engagement in any single way. Instead, it shows that campaigners understand engagement as: 1) synonymous with participation; 2) an output of campaigning influenced by reporting and metrics; or 3) a deep process of empowering supporters, realised through political participation. In this way, Chapter 3 demonstrates how

engagement and participation are not exclusive of one another. Instead, they exist along a continuum. This chapter concludes with suggestions for future research.

Chapter 4 explores how digital media affordances influence the ways in which ENGOs approach audiences, tactics, and organising structures in their campaign strategies. It also draws on in-depth interviews with senior campaigning staff as well as participant observation. Chapter 4 demonstrates how digital media affordances influence campaign strategy by contributing to a more distributed model of organising and the creation of event spaces. Chapter 4 concludes with suggestion for future research.

Chapter 5 seeks to better understand how digital affordances contribute to changes in the organisational perceptions of membership in the vocabularies of ENGOs. Drawing on data from a review of historic campaigns and elite interviews, Chapter 5 reveals how digital media contribute to organisational porosity, organisational re-structuring, and a blurring of roles between staff and supporters. It also demonstrates that there is an increasing preference for the term supporter over member in the everyday vocabularies of environmental ENGOs. Chapter 5 concludes with a discussion on the implications of findings, with suggestions for future research.

Chapter 6 uses virtual ethnography to explore volunteer contributions in online communities and the relationship between online and offline participation. In particular, it draws on data from six local London groups on Greenpeace *Greenwire* and on interviews with Greenpeace staff and volunteers. Recently launched, *Greenwire* is a Greenpeace platform dedicated to volunteers. Chapter 6 finds that whilst moving towards an increase in participation, *Greenwire* is underutilised and is not yet meeting its full potential as envisaged by the organisation. This is evident in the opinions of Greenpeace staff and

volunteers as well as in an examination of who produces content, to what extent, and why. This chapter concludes with a discussion on online communities and suggestions for future research.

Chapter 7 discusses, reflects on, and concludes this thesis. It begins by revisiting the four research sub-questions (i.e. engagement, campaign strategy, membership, and online communities). It then evaluates the extent to which each question, as well as the overarching research question, has been answered. This is followed by a discussion on the findings of this research and its contributions to knowledge:

(1) To reveal three general ways in which campaigners frame engagement (i.e. synonymous with participation, an output of campaigning, and a deep process of supporter empowerment). From these frames, this thesis argues that, rather than adhering to particular hierarchies whereby one form of engagement/participation is seen as more valuable than another, the nature of participation/engagement should always be examined contextually. In so doing, it rejects the view that different forms of participation ought to conform to a hierarchy of any kind;

(2) To demonstrate the emergence of the distributed model in campaigning and to conceptualise it as a network-centric organising structure, which draws on digital media infrastructures to decentralise participation and build autonomous locally-based hubs of supporters;

(3) To introduce the concept of event space and define it as a relational and digitally-mediated space that stages sequences of events within events as well as their various potentialities.

Chapter 7 also critically assesses the limitations of this thesis and offers suggestions for future research in relation to emerging literature.



Plate 2. Mobile phone use by activists at People's Climate March

Chapter 2:
Methodology

2.0 Introduction

This chapter sets out an overview of the research methodology underlying my investigation. I begin with a discussion of the ontological, epistemological, and methodological factors that underpin adopting critical realism as my dominant research paradigm. I then examine several qualitative research designs and justify the use of grounded theory in Chapters 3 to 5 and virtual ethnography in Chapter 6. This is followed by an introduction of my research methods (i.e. elite interviews, participant observation, and content analysis) and a discussion of their potential limitations. I then outline my four phases of data collection/analysis and their associated sampling frames as well as the strategies that I applied to ensure research quality. This chapter concludes with considerations of research ethics and, drawing on relevant work across the social sciences, reviews some of the challenges of Internet research and digital methods within my investigation on media and communication geography.

2.1 Research paradigms

Research is not situated in a vacuum (Shaw, Dixon, & Paul, 2010). Instead, it evolves from internal influences such as an individual's past experiences, and from external influences such as their disciplinary tradition. In turn, these influences contribute to the construction of paradigms, which inevitably guide the direction of our research. In choosing a research paradigm, Guba (1990, p. 18) proposes three questions to consider:

(4) *Ontology*: What is the nature of the 'knowable'? Or, what is the nature of 'reality'?
(5) *Epistemology*: What is the nature of the relationship between the knower (the enquirer), and the known (or knowable)?
(6) *Methodology*: How should the enquirer go about finding out knowledge?

Loosely, ontology relates to 'the nature of being' whilst epistemology relates to the 'nature of knowing'. Shaped by different ontological and epistemological assumptions, each paradigm requires its own methodology with guiding principles and methods. Through exploring these three questions, I was able to choose a research paradigm for this study.

Specifically, I chose the critical realist (CR) paradigm. In particular, I drew upon the earlier influences of Roy Bhaskar (prior to his 'spiritual turn') as well as Andrew Sayer, Margaret Archer, and Andrew Collier. Central to critical realism, Bhaskar (1978, p. 36) argues that academic research often treats ontology and epistemology as

synonymous. The result is the potential for 'epistemic fallacy' whereby the researcher reduces that which exists (i.e. ontology) to their knowledge of it (i.e. epistemology).

Instead, to answer the question of ontology, CRs suggest that reality exists across three nested domains. These are the *empirical*, the *actual*, and the *real*. The *empirical* domain includes our observable experience. The *actual* domain consists of events that occur regardless of whether we directly experience them or not. Last the domain of the *real* includes everything that 'exists'. The domain of the real is guided by mechanisms, such as gravity or human nature, which in turn produce events. These mechanisms are 'real' regardless of whether they are experienced or not (e.g. seen, touched, smelled, tasted, heard etc.). For example, a passer-by may hear (i.e. experience) a tree falling in the forest (i.e. an event) due to gravity (i.e. a mechanism). However, gravity still causes the tree to fall, whether heard or not. In short, CRs examine the entanglements between 'what we experience, what actually happens, and the underlying mechanisms that produce the events in the world' (Danermark et al., 2002, p. 22).

It is this deeper focus on ontology that differentiates critical realism from other paradigms. In response to what some have called the 'naïve realism' (i.e. ontological reductionism) of positivists, CRs suggest that reality is only ever 'imperfectly and probabilistically apprehendible' (Lincoln, Lynham & Guba, 2011, p. 100). I have some doubts about the general positivist argument. In particular, my opinion is that reality cannot be necessarily known or 'true'. However, I also question the general constructivist argument that reality is always relative (Lincoln et al., 2011). Indeed, from a media and communications perspective, Hutchby (2001, p. 443) argues that there is a 'long-standing debate' within scholarship on technological affordances between positivism or 'the view

that worldly objects [e.g. mobile phones] have inherent properties that act as constraints on observational accounts', and constructivism or 'the view that the very "reality" of objects is itself an outcome of discursive practices in relation to that object'.

Given that the focus of this research on digital media affordances, I required an research paradigm that allowed me to move beyond this 'either-or' dichotomy towards a paradigm of 'both-and' (Danermark et al., 2002, p. 2). I agreed with Earl and Kimport (2011) who argue that too positivist an approach risks becoming technologically determinist by over-emphasising the material power of technologies. In other words, a positivist approach 'might claim that a technology has an inevitable use that will, without any human decision, affect social life' (Earl & Kimport, 2011, p. 36). On the other hand, I also agreed with Hutchby (2001) who criticises the constructivist assumption that technologies are by default *tabulae rasa* whose meaning is waiting to be interpreted. For example, to what extent are a coffee machine and an iPhone open to the same interpretations? Whilst both may have screens, both may allow you to make selections, both may be found in universities, 'it seems clear that at some level their very capacities differ' (Hutchby, 2001, p. 446). Thus, given that I both agreed and disagreed with positivism (i.e. the 'technical') and social constructivism (i.e. 'the social'), I adopted an alternative paradigm that was situated between the two: critical realism.

I then addressed the question of epistemology. I understood critical realism to be epistemologically 'modified objectivist' (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p. 110). Specifically, my perspective was that absolute objectivism was near impossible (Guba, 1990; Lincoln et al., 2011). For example, whilst 'reality' was independent to me, my *knowledge* of reality was 'mediated through the filters of language, meaning-making, and the social

context' (Oliver, 2011, p. 374). Therefore, through reflexivity and 'coming clean about [my] own predispositions' (Guba, 1990, p. 21), I aimed towards a form of impartiality (i.e. 'modified objectivism') or, at the very least, a recognition of my biases. As Maxwell (2012, p. 9) explains:

> While critical realism rejects the idea of "multiple realities" in the sense of independent and incommensurable worlds that are socially constructed…it is quite compatible with the idea that there are different valid *perspectives* on reality.

In short, from an epistemological standpoint, whilst I concluded that there was a single reality, I felt there were multiple ways of *knowing* that reality.

To provide a practical example, one might use the CR paradigm to explore the rise of post-truth in social media and political campaigning, e.g. the 2016 American presidential elections and Brexit. The Oxford English Dictionary (OED, 2017b) defines post-truth as 'relating to or denoting circumstances in which objective facts are less influential in shaping political debate or public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief'. Post-truth politics are often grounded in fake news or what Chadwick (2013, p. 272) argues is 'the exploitation of the technological affordances and incentive structures of social media platforms [and] online search engines…to spread fabricated information for financial and/or political gain'. Thus, from the perspective of a CR, despite the existence of a single reality (or 'truth'), post-truth politics draw on digital media affordances to create multiple ways of *knowing* that reality (or 'post-truths').

Next, I considered the third question of methodology. Upon ruling out positivism and constructivism based on their ontological and epistemological criteria, I was left to consider, and ultimately reject, a critical theory paradigm. According to Guba and

Lincoln (1994, p. 109) *critical theory* is a general term, which denotes 'a set of alternative paradigms', for example 'Neo-Marxism, feminism, materialism, and participatory inquiry'. First, I deemed the critical theory paradigm of better use to a more focused investigation such as a case study, due to critical theorists emphasis on shared inquiry and co-research with participants (Lincoln & Guba, 1994). Specifically, throughout the course of this research, campaigners were not involved in its planning, organisation, or analysis (Bergold & Thomas, 2012; Guba & Lincoln, 1994).

Second, whilst I was exploring digitally-mediated environmental activism, the aim of this research was neither emancipatory nor transformative. Thus, I did not see it to be methodologically aligned with critical theory, which emphasises the uncovering and excavating of 'historical and subjugated knowledges that point to experiences of suffering, conflict, and collective struggle' (Giroux, 1988, p. 213). In other words, I considered that critical theory was better suited for research that extended beyond interpretation towards social action (Lincoln & Guba, 1994). Thus from an ontological, epistemological, and methodological perspective, CR seemed best aligned with my worldviews as well as with my research questions.

2.2 Research approach and design

Having selected my research paradigm, my focus then turned to my research approach and design. Given the nature of my research questions, I considered a qualitative approach most appropriate. First, a qualitative approach allowed for the application of a

dialogical methodology. I saw this as an opportunity to gain rich descriptions of engagement (Chapter 3) and membership (Chapter 5) as well as insights into digitally-mediated processes such as campaign strategy (Chapter 4) and online communities (Chapter 6). Second, a qualitative approach enabled me to collect holistic and personalised accounts from both campaigners and supporters. Furthermore, it encouraged my immersion in the natural settings of participants (e.g. the E-Campaigners Forum, the People's Climate March, and *Greenwire*), where I was then able to become both researcher and research instrument. Last a qualitative approach afforded me the opportunity to draw on multiple data sources, whilst also providing flexibility through an emergent design (Creswell, 2014).

Next, the exploratory nature of this research lent itself to various research designs. At the onset, I did not select narrative research or phenomenology. In general, these designs required small sample sizes (Starks & Trinidad, 2007) and I judged that they would not necessarily provide enough breadth to explore the research questions. I then considered case study research; here my focus would be on a single campaign or ENGO. However, upon reviewing the literature I found there were already a handful of studies with a case study design (Fisher & Boekkooi, 2010; Hestres, 2014; Katz-Kimchi & Manosevitch, 2015). Thus, I decided against using narrative, phenomenology, or case study designs.

I then looked at ethnography. Given the challenge of bounding potential research communities (e.g. supporters, activists, organisations, campaigns etc.), the traditional approach of offline ethnography seemed ill-suited. The culture of immersion in participants' day-to-day practices required by ethnography would prove difficult, what

with limitations around access, confidentiality, and legality. Yet to better understand supporters' experiences and based on feedback from my assessors, I did adapt an ethnographic design in the later stages of my research (Chapter 6). This allowed me to include a chapter rooted in virtual ethnography (Hine, 2000; Kozinets, 2002) where I immersed myself in an online volunteering community.

According to Hine (2008, p. 257) virtual ethnography 'transfers the ethnographic tradition of the researcher as an embodied research instrument to the social spaces of the Internet'. That being said, given the monolithic amount of archived social interactions coupled with the live access to contributing users, Kozinets (2015) argues that the practice of ethnography is undergoing considerable change. Specifically, he maintains '[virtual ethnography] is positioned somewhere between the vast searchlights of big data analysis and the close readings of discourse analysis' (Kozinets, 2015, p. 4). Critical to virtual ethnography is the ability of academics to 'take seriously the social reality of online settings, whilst also exploring their embedding within everyday life' (Hine, 2008, p. 257). For these reasons, in Chapter 6, although I explored the online community *Greenwire*, I recognised that members' participation was fluid and moved back and forth between on- and offline settings. In addition, I sought to become a more active ethnographer, to move beyond the passive analysis of discourse, and to engage with supporters. Thus, in addition to virtual ethnography's principal method of participant observation, I also relied on interviews with both Greenpeace staff and supporters to understand how their online experiences intersected with their offline lives.

Upon ruling out other designs, I was left with grounded theory (Creswell, 2014). Given the focus of this research on understanding digitally-mediated social processes, I

was of the opinion that the simultaneous data collection and analysis of grounded theory allowed for flexibility and an emergent design. This also meant that I was better able to direct and define my data, zooming in and out of potential routes for theoretical investigation (Charmaz, 2006). Furthermore, the use of theoretical sampling advocated by grounded theorists helped me to narrow the scope of my research to subject experts and to establish boundaries around sample size. This was significant given the complex and extensive organisational structures of ENGOs as well as the dynamism of campaigning. For these reasons, and given that there was limited theory on the influence of digital media on ENGOs, grounded theory seemed the appropriate design. It allowed me to address this gap in the literature and to develop preliminary theoretical foundations upon which future research can build.

Rooted in sociology, Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss (1967) developed grounded theory as a 'methodological marker that countered the increasing hegemony of quantitative methods and changed the status of qualitative research' (Charmaz, 2012, p. 375). Glaser and Strauss sought to advance a methodology where, through simultaneous data analysis and collection, the researcher constructed a theory 'grounded' in its own data. Central to grounded theory is a constant comparison of data and the use of theoretical sampling to recruit 'participants with differing experiences of the phenomenon so as to explore multiple dimensions of the social processes under study (Starks & Trinidad, 2007, p. 1375). Since its inception, grounded theory has developed into three schools: the systemic procedure (Strauss & Corbin, 1990); the emerging design (Glaser, 1992); and the constructivist approach (Bryant, 2002; Charmaz, 2006).

After exploring these different schools, the constructivist variant seemed the best fit for this research. I ruled out the systemic procedure because of its methodological focus on technological procedures and validation. Like Glaser (1992) and Charmaz (2006), I agreed that forcing theory rather than allowing it to emerge through discovery went against the underlying principles of grounded theory. I also ruled out the emergent procedure with its emphasis on a more positivist paradigm (Bryant, 2003; Charmaz, 2008). My epistemological views aligned more closely with the constructivist variant, which 'treats the research process itself as a social construction' (Charmaz, 2008, p. 403). I agreed with Charmaz (2006) who proposes that any final theories are thus suggestive, incomplete, and inconclusive. For example, whilst theory did emerge from my data, I was ultimately responsible for its interpretation and construction. For these reasons, I adopted the constructivist variant of a grounded theory design.

At first, there may appear to be a tension between a CR paradigm and the adoption of the constructivist variant of grounded theory. However, Oliver (2011) reveals otherwise, arguing that the two are well aligned. For example, Danermark et al. (2002, p. 76) maintain that a central aim of CR is 'describing and conceptualising the properties and causal mechanisms generating and enabling events…and then describing how different mechanisms manifest themselves under specific conditions'. According to Oliver (2011, p. 383), this aim fits well with grounded theory's emphasis on constant comparative analysis and on understanding the underlying 'properties and dimensions of conceptual categories'. Likewise, as explained in Section 2.1, whilst CRs reject the notion of multiple realities, they recognise there are multiple ways of knowing reality (Hutchby, 2001; Lincoln & Guba, 1994; Maxwell, 2012). In turn, constructivist grounded

theory served as a tool to help me examine these 'ways of knowing' and the deeper structures underlying them.

2.3 Research methods

My next decision was to select research methods. Based on my research paradigm, approach, and design, I opted to use elite interviews, participant observation, and digital content analysis.

2.3.1 Elite interviews

I completed interviews with both campaigners and supporters. I selected interviews as a tool for data collection because of their ability to encapsulate a range of different, and potentially conflicting, perspectives on digital media affordances and environmental campaigning. Interviews also provided me with access to historical and present accounts of campaigning that were not always easily observed (Creswell, 2014). Furthermore, interviews enabled me to direct the line of inquiry according to emerging codes whilst also remaining responsive to the concerns of my interviewees (Charmaz & Belgrave, 2012). These characteristics were important as they allowed me to move beyond simply identifying digital media affordances to understanding how interviewees experienced

them.

Kvale (2007) recommends using different interview forms for different purposes. Following this suggestion, I drew on in-depth and semi-structured elite interviews. Whilst traditionally associated with political figures, elite interviewing has broadened to include 'persons who are leaders or experts in a community' (Kvale, 2007, p. 70). Within this research, I framed elites as leaders or experts within the environmental campaigning community. Given the breadth of my research questions, targeting elites provided me with data rooted in a rich portfolio of expertise and experience. Elites also helped me to build relationships with other individuals who otherwise may have been inaccessible (Odendahl & Shaw, 2001; Pierce, 2008).

In total, I completed 36 elite interviews with senior campaigners from FOE, Greenpeace, Sierra Club, WWF, and 350.org. Ongoing from July 2014 to April 2016, interviews took place via Skype/phone (n = 22), email (n = 8), and in-person (n = 6). Face-to-face interviews lasted between 45 to 90 minutes and used limited topic-related questions (Appendices 1 - 4), which allowed for a question-discussion style inquiry (Pierce, 2008). These interviews were recorded either electronically and/or via comprehensive field notes. I used field notes in the instances where: a) participants preferred not to be recorded; or b) I felt that recording was not appropriate for the interview setting and risked influencing interview dynamics. Electronic recordings were transcribed, and together with the field notes, uploaded for storage and coding in NVivo data analysis software (Smyth, 2012).

Email interviews followed a similar format, where interviewees were sent a series of limited topic-related questions, to which they replied in-text. Whilst email interviews

were not always as extensive as face-to-face interviews, they did provide direct and 'to the point' responses supported by key examples. My experience with email interviewing was similar to that of Meho (2006). Specifically, I also found that 'participants interviewed via email remained more focused on the interview questions and provided more reflectively dense accounts than their face-to-face counterparts'. In addition, email interviews also offered elites with an alternative mode of interviewing rather than simply declining to interview. Emails were also uploaded for storage and coding in NVivo.

Whilst there were several advantages to using elite interviews, they also had their limitations. First, there was the challenge of limited access (e.g. unlisted contact details, gatekeepers, lack of time, uninterested participants etc.). Second, there were only so many experts who met interview criteria (e.g. language, years of experience, seniority, field of expertise etc.). These limitations were apparent in the high percentage of experts who declined to interview. For example, of the total 86 interviewees I contacted, 58 per cent declined (n = 50). However, this was to be expected in elite interviews. In other words, whilst interviewing 10 shoppers at Tesco may be too few, interviewing 10 heads of state would be a lot. Thus, like any research method, elite interviews faced their own limitations. Table 2 provides an overview of interviewee demographics. The specific sampling strategies are discussed in conjunction with data collection/analysis in Section 2.4.

	N	Total (%)
Sex		
Male	25	69
Female	11	31
Age		
18-29	8	22
30-39	15	42
40-49	4	11
50+	9	25
Years of related work experience		
0-5	3	8
5-10	16	44
10-20	8	22
20+	9	25
Region		
Asia and the Pacific	9	22
Europe	16	39
North America	11	28

Table 2. Overview of interviewee demographics

I continued interviewing until I reached a point of theoretical saturation. That is, until further interviews revealed no new data and/or returned already identified codes. Although there is no single guide to interview sample size, I did find general recommendations related to different designs. Whilst I was aware that one's sample size depends on one's research, I kept in mind recommendations that a typical sample size in grounded theory was between 20 to 50 interviewees (Charmaz, 2006; Marshall et al., 2013; Creswell, 2014).

2.3.2 Participant observation

A second tool for data collection was participant observation. First and foremost, participant observation allowed me to immerse myself in the lives of both campaigners and supporters. In so doing, I was able to better understand the culture, the meanings, and the language of environmental campaigning from the 'inside'. Participant observation also enabled me to examine how campaigners and supporters interacted with digital media in their everyday practice and over a prolonged period of time. It also provided 'behind the scene' access to campaigning, an activity often obscured from public view (Jorgensen, 1989). Furthermore, as I became more familiar with campaigning practices, I was able to define and refine categories related to my inquiry, grounding my findings in the data (Charmaz, 2006; Jorgensen, 1989).

As a participant observer, one of the limitations I faced was the possibility of being intrusive or invading private spaces. This was particularly the case when dealing with activist communities. Thus, I had to be careful to maintain community codes of conduct as well as anonymity. Data from participant observation took place in three field sites (Section 2.4) and was collected via comprehensive field notes, informal dialogues, electronic documents (e.g. emails, social media, messaging threads, online forums), and visual documents (e.g. photos and videos). It was then uploaded for secure storage and coding in NVivo analysis software.

2.3.3 Digital content analysis

The final method I employed was digital content analysis. Researchers have long drawn on documentary and textual resources as potential sources of data (Weber, 1990). However, with the emergence and proliferation of digital media, a whole new suite of data is available to researchers in the form of user-generated content. According to the Association of Internet Research (AoIR):

> The scope and context of Internet research have been dramatically expanded through the continuing global diffusion of the Internet into nearly every country in the world, as facilitated through a growing array of devices (including game consoles, Internet-enabled phones and other mobile devices) and ever-increasing bandwidth; rapidly expanding suites of new communication applications; and the increasingly seamless interweaving of online and offline activities and experiences (Markham & Buchanan, 2012, p. 2).

For researchers, the Internet exists simultaneously as phenomenon, tool, and field site (Markham & Buchanan, 2012). When understood this way, there is an ever-evolving landscape of digitally-mediated content that can be used as a potential data. Digital content collected for analysis for this thesis included: digital content as 'object' (e.g. annual reports, meeting minutes, campaign briefs etc.); and digital content as 'interaction' (e.g. webpages, social profiles, photos, videos, messaging threads, online forums etc.).

Digital content analysis had several advantages. To begin, it provided a non-obtrusive method for investigating the behaviour of supporters as well as insight into their areas of interest (Weber, 1990). In so doing, I was able to assess content without having to necessarily assess its producer. I also used digital content to explore organisation-to-

supporter and supporter-to-supporter relationships. In turn, digital content analysis allowed me to examine 'complex social and communication patterns' created through the interactions of individuals, organisations, and technologies (Kim & Kuljis, 2010, p. 369). It also enabled me to immerse myself in the language of supporters and to explore how this language related to their patterns of participation. As such, I was better positioned to critically evaluate the multiple meanings embedded within digital content.

However, despite the many advantages of digital content analysis, it also had its limitations. First, not all group members participated and/or contributed equally to the generation of content (Lai & Chen, 2014; Preece, Nonnecke & Andrews, 2004). This meant that the voices of some members were louder than others. There were also limitations around user agreements and terms of service. Therefore, I had to be particularly sensitive to how I used my data (Zimmer, 2010). Finally, when dealing with fragments of content, data was not always easy to analyse without first understanding the greater context in which it was situated (Caliandro, 2017). For these reasons, digital content analysis also had its limitations.

2.4 Data collection/analysis and sampling frames

In accordance with grounded theory, data collection and analysis were iterative and took place in four phases. The following sections describe each phase of data collection/analysis and their associated methods and sampling strategies.

2.4.1 Phase one: Scoping

The initial phase of data collection/analysis focused on the exploration and scoping of 'sensitising concepts' as points of departure (Charmaz, 2006, p. 16). To lead me into the data, I used critical case sampling to complete a historic review of environmental campaigns. Critical cases highlighted key themes and aspects of particular importance to the research questions (Patton, 1990).

I began with the late nineteenth century campaign against the plume trade, one of the earliest environmental campaigns (Jepson & Ladle, 2010). Then, in selecting campaigns from 1889 forwards, I reviewed those that were seen to pioneer emerging technologies of their time (e.g. pamphleteering, landscape photography, colour television, Internet databases, digital media etc.). From this sample, I identified leading campaigning ENGOs, tactical repertoires, common issue areas, and patterns in the evolution of environmental campaigning over time. This review allowed me to begin to draw boundaries around my research questions as well as to familiarise myself with potential field sites and interviewees. From the findings of this review, I then selected the most prominent, active, and international ENGOs in environmental campaigning. Sampling criteria included ENGOs who: were early adopters of digital media campaigning, were considered to be leaders in the environmental campaigning landscape, had global offices and were issue generalists, and specialised in non-violent campaigning. Based on these criteria, I further narrowed my sample to comprise: FOE, Greenpeace, Sierra Club, WWF, and 350.org as leading campaigning organisations to be further explored.

With their diversity in ‘size, duration, range and scope of activities, in ideology, cultural background, organisational culture and legal status’, the roles of ENGOs vary (Princen & Finger, 1994, p. 6). This variation challenges the extent to which there is a ‘single’ environmental movement. For example, Jepson (2017) argues that the conservation movement, which is in and of itself a sub-movement of the broader environmental movement, is an amalgamation of at least five distinct movements emerging between the 19th and early 20th centuries. Thus, to account for the heterogeneity of the environmental movement, this research narrows its focus to ENGOs displaying ‘the hallmarks of "mature" non-profit advocacy organisations’ (Bosso, 1999, p. 398). In particular, these are leading organisations with a major campaign presence across diverse issue areas (i.e. issue generalists). They also have formal organisational structures, specialised professional staff, and global offices. It is also worth noting that legal requirements related to campaigning vary from country to country. Thus, some ENGOs may have different or multiple statuses depending on country-specific legal and regulatory frameworks.

2.4.2 Phase two: Data collection and initial coding

The second phase of data collection/analysis included the first round of elite interviews (*n* = 12) and participant observation selected via theoretical sampling. Given it was still early in the research, theoretical sampling allowed me to be open to the data and to emerging concepts (Charmaz, 2006; Patton, 1990). For the first round of elite interviews,

I selected participants who: worked at one of these five sampled ENGOs; were leaders of their organisation's campaigning, engagement, mobilisation, membership, and/or digital teams; and had several years of work experience either as senior campaigners and/or decision-makers. I also approached sampling so to encourage diversity in: sex, age, years of related work experience, and geography (Table 2, Section 2.3). I considered these criteria important as they focused the sample of potential interviewees to subject experts and included variation amongst interviewees. The first round of elite interviews also enabled me to learn the language of campaigners and to lay the foundation for my initial coding.

Participant observation during this phase took place in two field sites. The first site was the 2015 E-Campaigners Forum (ECF), which:

> Aimed to bring together diverse participants who share broadly similar goals around improving our world and…[to] help them learn from one another and [to] inspire them to think beyond their current practices, roles, and plans (Fairsay, 2015).

Over the past few years, ECF has become one of the leading events for advocacy campaigners, bringing together participants from around the world. It included workshops, teachings, keynote speakers, and open space knowledge exchange sessions. There were 140 participants in total whose experience covered campaigning, fundraising, media, digital, and/or policy. During ECF, I volunteered as the event photographer and was overt about my background. This allowed me to move freely between people and places unobtrusively, observing sessions whilst also respecting the event's *Chatham House Rule* (ECF, 2015). As a volunteer, I adopted the role of *participant* and *observer* whereby I actively participated in discussions, training, and knowledge exchange

sessions. I also organised an open space session on ‘Framing and Measuring Engagement’.

ECF generated data related to emerging theories as well as insight on common challenges facing the campaigning community. It also enabled me to observe campaigners in a natural setting, therefore working around the issue of limited access. I also found that ECF created an open and collaborative environment where conversations were not pre-scripted or organisationally-generic. However, to respect the privacy of the event and event participants, data was supplementary to this dissertation, in that it was used as a point of comparison with interview data rather than on its own. Plates 3 and 4 were taken during ECF.



Plate 3. Role as participant and observer during ECF workshop and open space session on metrics in campaigning



Plate 4. Role as participant and observer during ECF knowledge exchange and open space session on digital storytelling

The second observation site was the 2015 People's Climate March (PCM). In anticipation of the 2015 United Nations Climate Change Conference in Paris, a coalition of climate groups and activists organised a global march on 29 November 2015. The 2015 PCM included more than 2300 local marches across 175 countries with over 785, 000 supporters marching (350.org, 2017). My role during PCM was *participant* and *observer*. In contrast to ECF, data from PCM enabled me to understand the contemporary campaigning experience through the lens of supporters. In addition to marches, PCM provided insight into the use of digital media for engaging and mobilising supporters to participate before, during, and after the event (Plate 5).



Plate 5. Role as participant observer in 2015 PCM in London

For the most part, data analysis in the second phase focused on initial coding. Specifically, I used data to further mine for analytic ideas (Charmaz, 2006). To do so, I began the process of line-by-line coding where I named each segment of data and clustered labels into possible routes for future inquiry. This allowed me to discover the assumptions and concerns of participants, to reflect on my own interpretations, and to identify gaps in the data (Charmaz, 2006). I also began memo-writing as a tool to make analytical comparisons in the data (Charmaz, 2006; Glaser, 1992). Throughout the research, memos provided an opportunity to play with my ideas, to practise writing potential theories related to my four research topics, and to disentangle emerging codes and categories. In turn, memos helped to bridge the process of data collection and analysis as well as to navigate the development of theory.

2.4.3 Phase 3: Focused coding and the emergence of theory

In the third phase of data/collection, I returned to interviewing. However, this round of elite interviews (n = 17) was more specific. Specifically, I used snowball sampling to identify potential interviewees by following repeated recommendations of campaigners that I interviewed in earlier phases. In this way, my sample initially broadened as new names were recommended and then narrowed as key names were mentioned again and again (Patton, 1990). Whereas the first round of interviews centred on campaigners, the second round was more flexible. Thus, I targeted elites who were not necessarily affiliated with campaigning but considered especially knowledgeable and experienced on

topic areas within the five sampled ENGOs (e.g. Director of Fundraising, Head of Advancement etc.).

At this stage, I analysed the data through focused coding. Revising and refining earlier codes enabled me to move through the data, identifying those that recurred the most. I then began to condense and synthesise data by making decisions on the direction of inquiry and the development of theoretical categories (Charmaz, 2006; Glaser, 1992). A major challenge I faced during focused coding was to avoid imposing my biases onto the data. For example, at the onset of the research, I saw digital affordances as advantageous to campaigning. However, throughout coding I had to be aware of this position and to make sure that my assumptions did not go unexamined (i.e. were not taken-for-granted) (Charmaz, 2006). Advanced memo writing helped to address this challenge by providing a tool for reflexivity.

2.4.4 Phase 4: Confirming and disconfirming theory

The final phase of data collection/analysis involved moving from a macro to a micro level in theory development. Having drawn on the perspectives of campaigners to explore topics related to engagement (Chapter 3), campaign strategy (Chapter 4), and membership (Chapter 5), I was interested to see how these themes were unfolding in practice. Therefore, in Chapter 6, I adopted Greenpeace's *Greenwire* as a field site through which to explore supporter experiences in online communities through: a) participant observation; and b) digital content analysis. I then followed with my third and

final round of elite interviews.

Greenpeace launched *Greenwire* in 2014 as a global meeting place for their supporters. Within *Greenwire*, individuals 'join groups, host events, run campaigns, share photos, videos, blogs and news, and join with other interested activists' (Greenpeace, 2014). In this way, *Greenwire* is both culture and cultural artefact shaped by social practices (Hine, 2008; Rogers, 2013). I selected *Greenwire* as a critical case based on recommendations from interviewees, its relatively large user base, and its significance both to Greenpeace as well as to other organisations building similar platforms (e.g. Sierra Club's *AddUp*). Furthermore, given the 'newness' of these participative spaces of activism within environmental campaigning, I saw *Greenwire* as a pioneer and early adopter.

First, I collected data as a participant observer. In line with Hine's (2008) argument that virtual ethnographies do not only take place online and given my location, I decided to focus on the Greenpeace *Greenwire* United Kingdom. From there, I narrowed my sample to London, given its overall significance in the UK, as well as its high population density. I further narrowed my sample to local groups located within the inner boroughs. These were: Camden; Greenwich and Lewisham; Kensington; Shoreditch; Southwark; and South West London. I subsequently joined each of these groups and observed them all for six months. However, given that the platform was both culture and cultural artefact, in addition to observing present-day interactions, I also moved through the historic interactions of members (e.g. digital footprints and archives) within each local group. Whilst my earlier phases of data collection/analysis focused more on the perspectives of campaigners, the fourth phase of data collection/analysis

aimed to better understand the everyday experiences of supporters. Thus, participant observation allowed me to navigate through the platform and to investigate its 'feel'. In turn, I was able to empathise and relate to supporters' journeys without the use of obtrusive methods.

In addition to participant observation of *Greenwire*, I analysed digital content generated within the local groups. Bounding this sample was fairly straightforward, as participant observation allowed me to identify the site's layout and key features. To begin, I analysed content generated by supporters within the core navigation channels of *Greenwire*'s dashboard (Plate 5). These were: *shoutbox*, *blogs*, *visual media*, *documents*, *ideas*, and *news*. In total, my sample included 482 data points collected from July 2014 to July 2016. Data points were content drawn from the following channels: shouts (i.e. instant messages) (n = 395); blogs (n = 51); visual media (i.e. photos and videos) (n = 20); documents (n = 12); ideas (n = 2); and news (n = 2). Digital content analysis provided insight into general patterns and trends in user behaviour. In addition, it served as a mechanism within which to compare interview findings from campaigners to what was happening on the ground according to the participation of the organisation's supporters.

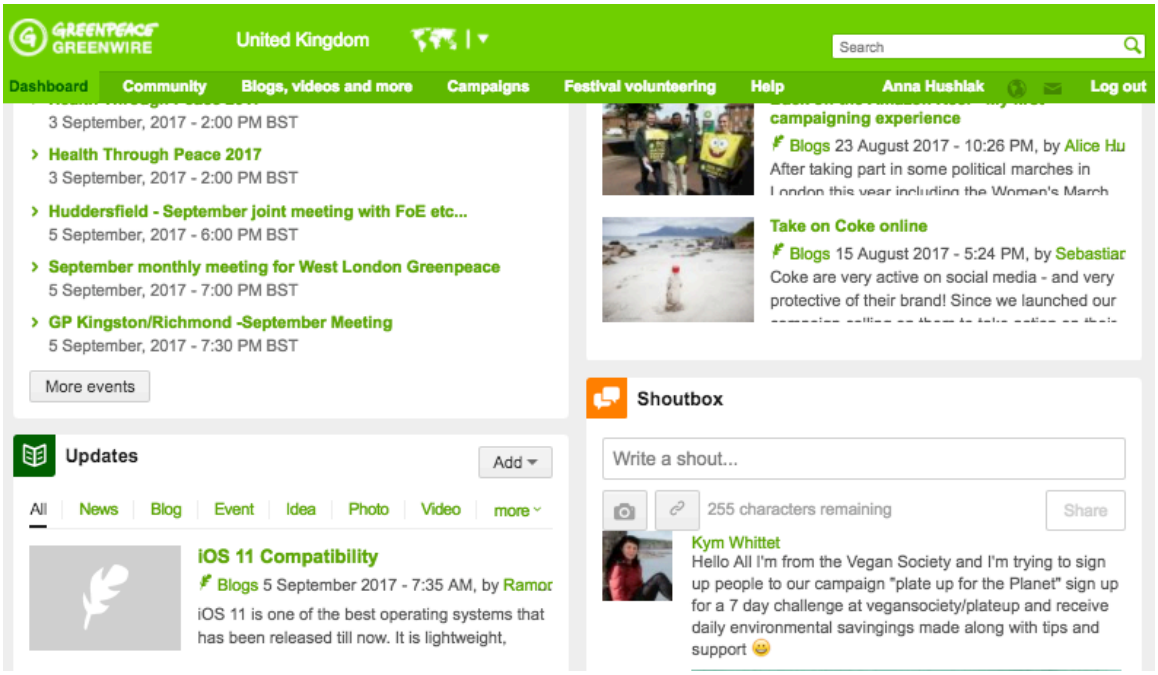


Plate 6. Overview of *Greenwire* dashboard

Last I completed the final round of elite interviews (n = 6). There were two main aims driving the final interviews. The first was to provide an opportunity to explore the voices of supporters. For these interviews, I selected participants via theoretical sampling. Focusing on my sample of the six local London groups, I interviewed local group leaders, each of whom was also a volunteer. This decision was based on local groups leaders having a long history of volunteering as well as having experience volunteering across different roles.

The second aim was to use these interviews to confirm or disconfirm earlier data. Confirming and disconfirming cases meant that I could test the viability of emerging theories with new data (Patton, 1990). This was of particular importance when it came to understanding the influence of digital media on campaigning from an audience other than

campaigners themselves. It also helped to once again navigate my own bias related to the advantages of digital affordances. During data collection, I continued with focused coding. In addition, memo-writing transitioned to be more theoretical as I sorted and integrated memos and concepts (Charmaz, 2006).

2.5 Research quality

Throughout my investigation, I also considered research quality. Within quantitative inquiry, reliability (e.g. reproducibility) and validity (e.g. accuracy) are the principal tools used to measure research quality (Creswell, 2014). However, within qualitative inquiry, the emphasis on reliability and validity are a controversial subject. This concern appears to relate to 'the positivist idea that the truth can be discovered by applying the method of the natural sciences to the study of the social world' (Hammersley, 1992, p. 195). In response, several theorists have generated alternative frameworks for evaluating qualitative research quality (Creswell, 2014; Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Hammersley, 1992).

Despite differences in terminology across emerging frameworks, there is considerable overlap in their methodological recommendations. Therefore, throughout my investigation, I drew on common recommendations as a foundation from which to ensure research quality. My strategies included:

(7) *Triangulation*: I collected data from multiple sources (i.e. interviews, participant observation, and digital content analysis) as well as applied mixed sampling

strategies for variation (i.e. critical case, theoretical, snowball, and confirming/disconfirming);

(8) *Member checking*: I completed a series of follow-up conversations where I presented and discussed my findings with key contributors to ascertain whether they felt my conclusions were accurate and representative;

(9) *Rich, thick descriptions*: I selected methods, which allowed for deep and detailed investigations into core themes and emerging theoretical development;

(10) *Clarification of researcher bias*: I evaluated my ontological and epistemological beliefs through careful selection of my research paradigm and design relative to my research questions. I also used memo writing to evaluate and challenge my own biases. Last I wrote a reflexive account to provide transparency around my own experiences and assumptions and to highlight their potential influences on my research;

(11) *Prolonged immersion in field*: I scheduled long in-depth interviews as a means of building trust and collecting more open data. I also observed both campaigners and supporters, which provided a more holistic understanding of campaigning from somewhat 'opposing' lenses. Furthermore, the duration of my immersion in *Greenwire* allowed me to develop a close familiarity with the community and their everyday interactions; and

(12) *Peer review*: I approached colleagues working within similar fields to assist with peer review of my papers. In addition, I intentionally drew on the publishing process and comments from reviewers as a tool for content-specific feedback.

2.6 Ethics

As researchers, we are responsible for our subjects. When considering ethical decision-making, one of the challenges I faced was the dynamism of research. In other words, when I began my investigation, I had one idea of what I was going to do. Inevitably, as my research progressed my idea evolved. Ethical decision-making was therefore a continuous part of my inquiry and required constant revision and revaluation.

Throughout my research, I adopted a non-consequentialist approach within which I placed my participants above anything else. This meant the guarantee of participant autonomy, beneficence, non-maleficence, and justice (Israel & Hay, 2006; Wiles, 2013). In addition, in accordance with professional guidelines, the Central University Research Ethics Committee (CUREC) at the University of Oxford granted me approval for research.

To ensure the protection and wellbeing of my participants, I also followed several ethical procedures. When contacting potential interviewees, I provided them with an overview of my research as well as a description of what their involvement would entail. Given that I am self-funding, there was no conflict of interest around sponsorship; nor did I use incentives to encourage participation. If willing, interviewees granted informed consent and interviews then occurred at a time/place of their choosing. If unwilling, contacts were thanked for their time and consideration and correspondence concluded. Given the campaigning community was quite small, and I was communicating with individuals in senior roles, all participants remained anonymous. Throughout data collection/analysis, I created a database with interviewee details. However, I have not

included these details in this thesis or publications, in order to respect principles of anonymity. In addition, any information that interviewees wished to remain confidential was also made clear before, during, and after interviews. Whilst I included confidential data in my analysis, I did not include it in the write up of this dissertation or final publications.

I followed a similar procedure for gaining access to field sites for participant observation. For instance, to observe ECF, I provided the event organiser with an overview of my research, discussed how I intended to use collected data, and obtained permissions. In contrast, the scale and the openness of PCM required that I drew on my own moral framework in decision-making rather than obtaining permissions from any/every single individual. Given that I was in a sense observing myself, I used my own judgement in ascertaining ethical responsibility. For example, I did not single out participants and instead kept my observations general to the broader event and/or based on my own personal experiences as a supporter.

Where my approach to ethics became more interesting was when I drew on digital methods and immersed myself in Internet-mediated spaces. I imagine researching 'The Internet' is not unlike attempting to research 'The World'. Both are phenomenally complex entanglements of human and non-human, indefinitely shaped by systems within systems and impossible to reduce to a single component. Further complicating matters, as a 'field site' the Internet – and its associated technologies – are both actors and objects existing in relation to one another (Ruppert, Law, & Savage, 2013). Indeed, the Internet is more than hardware; one need only consider its inequalities, divides, power, and/or political economies (Fuchs, 2012; Gerlitz & Helmond, 2013; McChesney, 2008; Mosco,

2008). Housley, Dicks, Henwood, and Smith (2017, p. 607) further challenge that with the advent of Web 2.0, the open data movement, access to big data sets, and social media archives, scholarship is facing new opportunities to interrogate data 'in ways that are not yet fully formed and remain open to methodological scrutiny, reflection and innovation'. In this way, as Caliandro (2017, p. 1) describes, 'The Internet structure has become a very complex, fluid, and fragmented space. Within this space, it is not always possible to consider the "classical" online community as the privileged field site'. Here, lies the difficulty of delineation. How does one attempt to draw boundaries for something that appears to be, in many ways, 'boundary-less'?

This was one of my first considerations when attempting to narrow the scope of my virtual ethnography. In Chapter 6, whilst I moved from the 'Internet as field site' to '*Greenwire* as field site', *Greenwire* itself was still a massive community and like the Internet, existed across multiple times, spaces, and scales. Thus, to further limit my scope, I bounded my site temporally and spatially. For these reasons, and given my location, I selected London as a field site and limited the temporal scale to 6 months of real-time participant observation and two years of archival observation (July 2014-July 2016). Doing so meant that I had to accept that my findings existed as a single 'snapshot' of *Greenwire*. In other words, whilst I am writing now, there is no doubt new data that have since been generated and that the community itself has evolved. Similarly, it is likely that some old data (e.g. shouts, blogs, photographs etc.) have since been deleted, leaving conversations to simply be erased, as if they did not exist to begin with.

I also faced a much broader question: as academics how do we account for, and adapt to, the emergence of new methods and new methodologies? At present, there is an

expanding literature exploring the emergence of digital media, devices, and Internet-based research (Caliandro, 2017; Driscoll and Gregg, 2010; Marres and Gerlitz, 2016; Ruppert, Law, & Savage, 2013). Highlighting a common theme running throughout much of this literature, Bimber (2017, p. 11) argues, 'The ubiquity of digital media and the extent to which it is woven into the fabric of social and political life has changed how research can best proceed'. Similarly, discussing differences between ethnography and virtual ethnography, Hine (2008, p. 257) reflects, 'how far "virtual ethnography" should continue to be a marked category of ethnography is therefore debatable', whilst Marres and Gertliz (2016), demonstrate the importance of first understanding the relationship between media and method. In other words, media may 'steer social inquiry into specific directions' yet as researchers, we can 'deploy our methodology to work against this type of bias [and media effects]' (Marres & Gerlitz, 2016, p. 40). Whilst answering how research ought to best proceed is beyond the scope of this thesis, it does trigger a form of reflection regarding the extent to which methodologies and ethical considerations are/are not (or rather should/should not?) evolve alongside the emergence of new technologies.

For example, to observe and analyse content from *Greenwire*, I followed guidelines proposed by the Association of Internet Research (AoIR) ethics committee (Markham & Buchanan, 2012). First, I contacted Greenpeace with an overview of my research. Upon gaining approval from a senior staff member overseeing the platform, I contacted each of the six local groups leaders. I provided each group leader with details of my research and then obtained their permission to explore local groups. In addition, I reviewed *Greenwire's* user agreement and ensured that I did not violate any of its articles and that I respected their code of conduct. As a *Greenwire* member myself, I used my

profile to publicly disclose my background and contact details. By default, *Greenwire* users are legally required to be over 18 years of age so I did not draw on data from minors. I also kept all users anonymous and to ensure confidentiality, I did not use any data that could be of potential harm to either Greenpeace or individuals within the *Greenwire* community. Finally, I discussed my ethical procedures with colleagues working within a similar space to get a 'second opinion' thus encouraging a deliberative and consultative approach to ethical decision-making (Markham & Buchanan, 2012).

I would also like to add a few points about ethics and Internet research. For my investigation of *Greenwire*, I reviewed various discussions related to obtaining consent when exploring online communities. The general consensus across these guidelines was to be considerate and to be practical (Madge, 2007; Markham & Buchanan, 2012; Orton-Johnson, 2012). Dickens and Butcher (2016) also suggest that academics rethink conventional approaches to ethics, publicness, and visibility. Specifically, through their involvement with a youth-based research project, Dickens and Butcher (2016) reveal a tension between the use of media and the convening of publics as an opportunity for participants' self-reflection and self-development versus their potential harm (e.g. social rejection). Considering these discussions and guidelines, I was aware that it was impractical to contact and obtain consent from every group member across the six groups due to factors such as the volume of members, possibility of fake accounts, fluctuating populations, varying degrees of activity etc. For these reasons, I contacted Greenpeace as the owner of the platform. I also felt in adhering to principles of good governance, it was important to obtain permissions from group leaders who, in a sense, were the gatekeepers and representatives of local groups.

Whilst I did try my best to adhere to ethical decision-making, I was aware of the constant tension between what may be considered public vs. private space. On one hand, *Greenwire* was accessible to anyone interested in creating an account, which made it a publicly available platform. The UK user agreement further contributed to the blurring of boundaries between private and public spaces. For example, it specified, 'When you join the Greenpeace *Greenwire* community…you are joining a community of like-minded people which is supported – and not controlled or directed – by Greenpeace UK' (Greenpeace, 2014). Together, the ease and accessibility of creating an account combined with ambiguity around ownership enhanced perceptions of *Greenwire* as a public space.

On the other hand, *Greenwire* was also a private space. The simple fact of needing an account to log on demonstrated the granting of access and the presence of gatekeepers. Arguably, registering account details may have had more to do with building supporter databases and email lists and less to do with privacy. Regardless, within the *Greenwire* community, as well as within the user agreement, there was definitely an expectation of privacy. However, the extent to which these expectations of privacy were realistic was difficult to ascertain. For example, they may have been illusions created by factors such as an inability to see all the other users reading an individual's content and/or lurking within the community (Madge, 2007). Therefore, whilst *Greenwire* local groups may have felt their content was private, in many ways it was also permanent (i.e. archived) and public.

As an Internet researcher, the blurring between private and public space was a critical issue area related to ethical decision-making. A clear example of a breach in such ethics can be seen in the "Tastes, Ties, and Time" (T3) dataset collected and released by a

group of Harvard and University of California, Los Angeles, researchers in 2008. The T3 dataset drew on the Facebook profiles of a cohort of around 1,700 university students and collected information ranging from relationship statuses to housing records to emerging friendship groups (Zimmer, 2010). However, despite initial attempts at anonymity, T3 researchers failed to protect their participants, many of which were re-identified. Thus, as Zimmer (2010, p. 317) highlights, 'the changing nature – and expectations – of privacy in online social networks are being increasingly debated and explored'. Specifically, Zimmer (2010) raises several concerns related to Internet research with regards to the amount and type of personal information collected, the improper access to personal information, the unauthorised secondary use of data as well as the potential for errors in personal information and datasets.

Given the T3 case study and emerging literature related to digital research, it was important to recognise that whilst *Greenwire* was a field site with publicly available data, it was also a social community. This required that I understood users not simply as data points but also as human subjects (Madge, 2007; Markham & Buchanan, 2012; Orton-Johnson, 2012). Indeed, reflecting on the ethics of virtual ethnography, Driscoll and Gregg (2010, p. 15) describe their own experiences:

> She thinks of herself as knowing most of these people well, and if she cares about some of them more than others she cares about the group as a whole. They are part of the fabric of her everyday life now, and she feels as obliged as anyone else, and indeed more than many, to turn up to chat on Saturday night/Sunday morning. Is she a "member", then, or a "participant observer"? When she intervenes to appears or protest, is she "working"?...They know she is an academic… but they do not see her as an academic any more than the member above her...is seen as an astrophysicist or the one above that as a graphic designer. She is an integral part of this community.

When reframed this way, and given the nature of the community itself was centred on activism, I had the moral obligation to protect my participants and to ensure their privacy. Because of this, *Greenwire* shifted to less of a public space and more of a private space, as that was how my subjects saw it. In short, ethical decision-making was an ongoing part of my research. This was particularly the case when navigating boundaries – or lack of – within Internet research.

2.7 Some reflections on positionality

Throughout this research, I faced contrasting experiences to my earlier academic and professional work. For example, in my relationships with subsistence communities in South Africa (during my Master's thesis) and Honduras (working as an environmental consultant), I was often interpreted as 'holding the power' in our interactions. That is to say, I was perceived as a white foreigner with an education, and with enough financial flexibility to afford to come and go. Additionally, in communities entirely dominated by religion and superstition, I was sacrilegious in my non-theism. However, this time around, when engaging with my research participants, my role seemed to have switched entirely.

Whilst I did not feel that my race or religious views influenced the interactions I had with participants, I was very much aware of my age, my gender, and of being an academic. Given my focus on elites, interviewees were often older than me and had several decades of work experience in their respective fields. The difference in age was

anticipated and meant that at the beginning of my research, interviews were much more of a listening exercise as I was less knowledgeable than my participants. However, as my knowledge of the subject grew, this dynamic changed. A memorable moment was the realisation that 'listening to interviews' had transitioned to 'discussions with colleagues'; I had become less student and more conversation partner.

However, what I had not anticipated were the differences in willingness to help in relation to my gender. In general, it was not that men were more willing to help, but, rather, that women seemed to be *less* so. Of course, there were exceptions and, of all of the women that I did have the opportunity to speak with, each was incredibly supportive. Where I did observe discrepancies related to gender was in my attempts to gain access to ENGOs. I discussed this observation with some of my interviewees, both men and women; they suggested that older interviewees nearing the end of their careers did have an interest in training the next generation, irrespective of gender. Equally, they suggested that a reluctance of women to help other women might emerge from professional competition in a sector where men occupied many of the senior roles. Whilst not related explicitly to my research, this observation did trigger a reflection on the role of gender in interviewing. It also led me to consider the continuation of the gender gap in the UK and the barriers many women still face in advancing their careers both in academia and industry.

In addition, I felt that my position as an academic also influenced interview dynamics. Whilst interviewees could see the importance of academia, there was a general tendency to dismiss it relative to work 'on the ground'. Conversations with campaigners revealed that they were often of the opinion that academia was 'too slow', 'detached',

and not really representative of the ‘real world’. This scepticism related to the degree to which they saw academia influencing activism and socio-ecological change. This meant that some interviewees ‘tolerated’ academia but saw it as ‘disconnected’ from practical and applied solutions and, as a result, did not always take my investigation as seriously as they might have if I was coming from the position of activist.



Plate 7. Greenpeace activists at People's Climate March (Southwark Group)

Chapter 3:
Environmental campaigns, digital media, and framing engagement/participation: Output or process?

3.0 Abstract

This article explores how environmental campaigning organisations are framing the term engagement, and the extent to which these frames are influenced by their adoption of digital media. Research findings are based on data from 36 elite interviews with senior professionals at leading environmental campaigning organisations. They reveal that campaigners frame engagement as: 1) synonymous with political participation; 2) an output of campaigning; or 3) a process of empowering supporters realised through political participation. Upon identifying these frames, this research discusses the importance of differentiating between political engagement and participation in a campaign landscape increasingly mediated by digital affordances.

Keywords: environmental campaigns; engagement; digital media; political participation; ENGO; framing

3.1 Introduction

Environmental non-governmental organisations (ENGOs) use campaigns to connect citizens and politics. Through campaigning, they become critical links between citizens and the public and private sector. Campaigns help to realise the beliefs, aspirations, and needs of different groups within society. To drive campaigns, ENGOs rely on the political participation of supporters, which they mobilise via media and communication technologies. Yet with the rise of digital media, the notion of engagement is also emerging in their logics. For example, World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) aims to 'learn from [their] supporters as well as engaging, informing, and inspiring them' (WWF-UK, 2015, p. 11). Likewise, Greenpeace's Mobilisation Lab is 'prioritising and pioneering world-class citizen engagement strategies' (Greenpeace, 2015). From, the Sierra Club (2014), 'Whether we engage people through activism or outings...we want all global citizens to care about the natural and human environment'. Needless to say, across ENGOs, engagement is very much a part of their everyday vocabularies.

In addition to practitioner communities, the notion of engagement has developed a similar prominence in academic writings on contentious politics (Boulianne, 2009). For example, a comparative bibliometric search revealed that the number of articles exploring political engagement has increased by 10 per cent (Web of Science) and 7 per cent (Scopus) over the last ten years. In contrast, over the same period of time, articles exploring political participation have only increased by 7 per cent (Web of Science) and 2 per cent (Scopus). Furthermore, Boulianne (2009) identified a total of 38 different studies exploring Internet use through the lens of political engagement. Together, these examples

demonstrate that the notion of engagement appears to be an increasingly common research topic within academic literature on contemporary politics.

The advancement of engagement as a buzzword appears to coincide, and indeed may be a response to, the potential for interactivity and the facilitation of new forms of participation afforded by the Internet and digital media (Bimber, Flanagin, & Stohl, 2012; Boulianne, 2015; Jenkins, 2006). For example, digital media are argued to shape socialisation and communication opportunities (Chadwick, 2013; Gil de Zúñiga, 2015). Also, they have been shown to influence political participation and mobilisation (Bennett & Segerberg, 2013; Earl & Kimport, 2011). Likewise, digital media are also demonstrated to influence the development of action networks (Anduiza et al., 2014) and tactical repertoires (van Laer & van Aelst, 2010).

In campaigning, political participation is critical to ENGOs, who rely on its momentum to mobilise campaigns, harness the media, and leverage decision-makers. Indeed, the importance of political participation extends beyond campaigning and relates to broader questions on citizenship, participatory culture, and democracy (Dahlgren & Alvares, 2013; Eden, 2017; Jenkins, 2006) Yet with the growing prominence of engagement as a buzzword, it remains unclear how engagement and participation are conceptually distinct. This differentiation is important as a failure to do so risks overlooking critical differences between the two (Dahlgren, 2009; Ekman & Amnå, 2012). For example, treating the two terms as interchangeable may threaten the reliability and accuracy of investigations on political participation. This is particularly the case with emerging actions forms afforded by digital media and 'expanding repertoires of participatory opportunities' (Theocharis, 2015, p. 2).

Thus, to address this gap, this research investigates how ENGOs frame engagement, and the extent to which these frames are influenced by their adoption of digital media. Frames are understood as the ways in which individuals organise, structure, and interpret meaning (Goffman, 1974; Scheufele, 2000). Overall, this research aims to better understand how digital affordances shape engagement and the relationship of engagement to political participation from the perspective of environmental practitioners. This article is situated within the landscape of environmental politics, which have emerged as a major issue area within the international arena. Environmental politics are fundamentally interdisciplinary, incorporating diverse actors who operate across equally diverse frames. Thus, to take a snapshot of these frames, this research explores how prominent ENGOs are approaching engagement and the implications of them doing so.

This research begins with a brief introduction to the concepts of political participation and engagement. It then explores the relationship between campaigning and media. Next, drawing on data from elite interviews, it demonstrates how environmental campaigners frame engagement and the potential relationship of these frames to digital media. It concludes with a discussion on the different conceptualisations of engagement and research contributions, whilst also providing suggestions for future research.

3.2 Conceptual tools

3.2.1 Political participation and engagement

The concept of political participation has been widely debated across literatures (Carpentier, 2011; Theocharis, 2015; van Deth, 2014). In particular, the past two decades have seen considerable backlash against the global proliferation of non-governmental organisations and what some have heralded as a 'tyranny' of participation (Cooke & Kothari, 2001; Hickey & Mohan, 2004; Kesby, 2005). For example, Henkel and Stirrat (2001, p. 170-172) describe participation as 'the new orthodoxy', which, in and of itself, has become a 'specific cultural concept' and 'part of an equally specific vision of society'. Within this new orthodoxy, Henkel and Stirrat (2001) suggest that there is a particular emphasis on the relationship between participation and empowerment. However, they argue that under the new orthodoxy, the notion of empowerment relates less to giving power to beneficiaries and more to Foucault's concept of 'subjection' (Henkel & Stirrat, 2001). Put simply, 'the attempt to empower people through the [participatory] projects envisaged and implemented by the practitioners…is always an attempt, however benevolent, to reshape the personhood of the participants' (Henkel & Stirrat, 2001, p. 182).

More recently, and in part as a continuation of earlier backlash, several scholars are advocating more transformative approaches to conceptualising participation (Chilvers & Kearnes, 2015; Mahony & Stephansen, 2016; Theocharis, 2015). For instance, in an effort to 'remake participation', Chilvers and Kearnes (2015, p. 302) put forward an

alternative approach whereby participation is understood to be 'multiple, situated, co-produced and in the making'. They reject the move to normalise and professionalise participatory practices (i.e. the new orthodoxy) and instead advocate reflexivity in understanding the various ways in which publics 'make meaning, know and act in the world' (Chilvers & Kearnes, 2015, p. 322).

However, attempting to define the boundaries of a participation that is 'multiple, situated, co-produced and in the making' remains a constant challenge (Chilvers & Kearnes, 2015, p. 302). For example, if our understanding of political participation is not kept at a manageable size, we risk its conceptual dilution through endless permutations of activity and expression (Theocharis, 2015). Voting Green in an election, signing an e-petition against fracking, donating money to the World Wide Fund for Nature, emailing a Member of Parliament, marching in a climate march, boycotting Shell, planting a guerrilla gardening seed bomb, sharing Greenpeace's event on Facebook, liking a friend's eco-conscious photo on Instagram – what counts as political participation and what does not? More importantly, do these boundaries matter? Van Deth (2014, p. 351) elaborates:

> The continuous expansion of the modes of participation has confronted many researchers with the dilemma of using either a dated conceptualisation excluding many new modes of political participation or stretching their concepts to cover almost everything.

Under this line of thought, boundaries do matter. Some argue that a clear delineation of political participation allows for more systematic investigations into civic behaviours (Fox, 2014; Theocharis, 2015). Others suggest that these investigations may also be used to evaluate citizenship and civic culture (Couldry et al., 2014; Dahlgren, 2003; Mahony & Stephansen, 2016) or even democratic health and social capital (Ekman & Amnå,

2012; Putnam, 2000; Skocpol, 2003). According to these works, the issue of delineating participation is a central concern to theory.

However, the challenge of delineating participation is further complicated by the growing emphasis on engagement. According to Berger (2009, p. 335), 'engagement as it is currently used includes political, social, and moral components, or the entire "kitchen sink" of public and private goods'. Like political participation, the concept of engagement varies depending on the context in which it is applied. In other words, like participation, it is also open to definitional flexibility (Gil de Zúñiga, Copeland, & Bimber, 2013). The definitional flexibility of engagement means the term can be vague and ambiguous. For example, if a supporter tweets about a campaign on Twitter, does this mean they are participating, they are engaged, both, or neither? On the other hand, definitional flexibility may also broaden the concept of engagement (and for that matter participation) to include a wider range of actions and/or expressions of citizenship (Livingstone, 2005; Marres & Lezaun, 2011). In sum, whilst it has its advantages and disadvantages, definitional flexibility complicates the challenge of navigating between participation and engagement even further.

Within the context of this research, participation is understood as the expression of political agency achieved through taking deliberate action (Dahlgren, 2009). As one of the few scholars attempting to differentiate between these two terms, Dahlgren (2009), further suggests that engagement may be understood as the subjective and focused attention of an individual on a specific issue area. In other words, engagement is a feeling and this feeling is a precursor to the act of participating (Dahlgren, 2009). For example, a student may be engaged in a lecture. They may feel curious, they may feel attentive, and

ultimately, they may feel empowered to take action. However, participation occurs when those feelings are translated into action. For example, when that student raises their hand to ask a question. In short, when engagement and participation are explored comparatively, political participation may be the translation of engagement, or focused attention, into taking deliberate action.

3.2.2 Campaigns and digital media

Campaigning may be understood as a series of purposeful and interconnected actions undertaken to achieve predetermined objectives via communication tools (Baringhorst, 2009; Cox, 2013; Eden, 2017). Campaigns may be action-driven, when they aim to mobilise publics in support of social solidarity in issue areas (Baringhorst, 2009). Action campaigns tend to be thematic and underlined by shared group identities, values, and beliefs. They are also temporal in that, unlike social movements, they are time-bound. Central to the success of campaigning is public engagement and participation. Engagement and participation build and sustain the momentum of campaigns, whilst also persuading and leveraging decision-makers.

ENGOs have a long history of campaigning. Indeed, the late nineteenth century campaigns against the plume trade were some of the earliest within the modern environmental movement (Jepson & Ladle, 2010). Whilst the environmental movement itself has evolved to become a diverse landscape, campaigning has always sat at its heart. In the contemporary context, this has led to a suite of different campaign aims. For example, ENGOs may campaign to change policy or consumer behaviour. In other cases,

they may aim to raise awareness on growing issue areas or fundraising. Across these aims, ENGOs may also play different roles such as collaborator, persuader or coercer (Cox, 2013; Taylor & van Dyke, 2003).

To achieve campaign aims, ENGOs use tactics to leverage supporters and target decision-makers. Together, these tactics form repertoires or the collection of actions that an organisation can take (van Deth, 2014). Whilst repertoires differ from campaign to campaign as well as from organisation to organisation, there are some key tactics across repertoires. Examples include direct action (e.g. stunts, boycotts etc.) and direct organisational channelling (e.g. email, e-petitions etc.) (Earl & Kimport, 2011; Kriesi, 2011). When leveraged, these tactics help campaigners to achieve collective objectives within given systems of power (Cox, 2010).

To implement tactics, campaigners rely on various forms of media. Media are both the institutions and infrastructures that create content as well as content itself (Couldry, 2012). In this way, media are both actors and objects, which emerge from the intersection of interests, practices, norms, and values (Craig, 2004). Chandler and Munday (2011, p. 270-271) describe '[media are the] means or agency through which communication takes place' and the 'process through which reality is apprehended or constructed'. As actors and objects, media are essential to the distribution of information to publics and to generating and strengthening external support (Hansen, 2010). Campaigners harness the media to reach and mobilise large-scale audiences. Baringhorst (2009, p. 14) explains, 'mobilising target groups and getting mass media resonance are closely intertwined: high media resonance and high resonance with the addressed target audiences necessitate each other'.

Yet media may also limit campaigners. For example media wars may backfire and damage the reputations of ENGOs. Furthermore, traditional media, such as print and television, tend to rely on centralised, broadcast, and one-way communications (Blumler & Kavanagh, 1999). Indeed, through media convergence, there is a degree of overlap between traditional and digital media in the potential for interactivity, for example, call-in opportunities on radio shows or the letters and comment sections in newspapers. However, with digital media, the frequency, speed, and scale of this interactivity is dramatically increased (Harlow, 2012; Karpf, 2016; Springer, Engelmann, & Pfaffinger, 2015). The rigidity of traditional media also requires supporters to take action at specific times and places, which can create high social costs to participation (Earl & Kimport, 2011). Recognising this, Eden (2004) argues that it is often easier to hire professional activists, for example *Crowds for Rent*, than to mobilise citizens.

With the development of the Internet and its associated technologies, several ENGOs are moving towards digital campaigning. As the term suggests, digital campaigning draws on media that make use of digital data. Digital media are digitally compressed content that are shared via the Internet and/or computer networks. Examples include text, imagery, audio, and video. Traditional media may also be digitised, for example, a home video may be encoded and uploaded to YouTube. However, like all media, the term digital media includes more than just physical objects but also the people, institutions, and infrastructures associated with their production, dissemination, and consumption.

Of particular interest to this research are interactive digital media or digital media that allow for user-generated content, multi-directional flows of communication and

information, and co-creation (Bennett & Segerberg, 2013; Earl & Kimport, 2011). Expanding Gibson's (1979) notion of affordances, Earl & Kimport (2011) introduce the concept of digital media affordances or the changes or actions made easier by digital media relative to their technological predecessors. In other words, an affordance of digital media is what digital media provide, give, or furnish (Gibson, 1979). Clarke (2009, p. 1) expands, '[digital media affordances] serve in some way as prostheses, extending particular human capacities beyond their previous bounds'.

For example, a major affordance of digital media is their influence on political participation. Digital media have the potential to make information more accessible and available to publics. In so doing, they may also reduce costs to participation, enabling citizens who may be less invested to take part (Bennett & Segerberg, 2013; Chadwick, 2013; Earl & Kimport, 2011). Furthermore, digital media may contribute to activists' ability to mobilise participation as demonstrated by America's MoveOn (Karpf, 2012), the #Occupy Movement (Juris, 2012), Spain's 15M Movement (Anduiza et al., 2014) and Australia's GetUp! (Vromen, 2014).

There are of course inequalities, divides, and exclusions related to the affordances of digital media on campaigning (Scheerder, van Deursen & van Dijk, 2017). For instance, Internet-mediated communication requires both physical and technical access to infrastructure and information (Fuchs, 2014; van Deursen & van Dijk, 2010; Zook & Graham, 2007). Beyond access, literacy, and usage, there may also be inequalities in the potential outcomes of digital affordances or 'third-level divides' (Scheerder, van Deursen & van Dijk, 2017, p. 1609). Likewise, digital media may favour citizens who are already politically active rather than those who are uninterested (Baringhorst, 2009). In so doing,

privileged individuals or elites may end up 'speaking for' rather than 'speaking with' (Barnett, 2008). This in part may relate to algorithmic architecture, which automatically filters information according to personalised preferences (Bucher, 2012; Pariser, 2011). In addition, an increased focus on technological solutionism may dismiss the underlying causes of complex problems (Fuchs, 2014; Morozov, 2013). For example, the general coining of the Arab Spring uprisings as 'Twitter Revolutions' over-simplified what were very multi-faceted and very real forms of protest (Dahlgren & Alvares, 2013).

In addition to these divides, the limitations associated with digitally-mediated activism have contributed to the establishment of the pejorative term clicktivism (Gladwell, 2010; Halupka, 2014; Morozov, 2009). For example, Morozov (2009, n.p.) describes digitally-mediated activism as 'feel good online activism that has zero political or social impact'. In general, *clicktivism* describes digitally-mediated 'impulsive, disposable action that is easily replicated and reproduced' (Halupka, 2014, p. 120). Thus, a major challenge associated with digital campaigning is the tension between 'quantity of supporters' versus 'quality of action' (Karpf, 2012). However, what remains to be seen is the extent to which these prejudices relate to an inability to categorise new forms of digitally-mediated participation according to traditional hierarchies (Theocharis, 2015). In sum, there is much debate on what digital media have the potential to do versus what they actually do in practice.

3.3 Research methods

To explore how ENGOs frame engagement, this research adopted a qualitative approach to research rooted in constructivist grounded theory (Charmaz, 2006). Grounded theory was selected as it allowed for simultaneous data collection and analysis, which was seen to provide more flexibility when exploring the dynamism of campaigning. To start, I conducted a historic review of iconic environmental campaigns beginning with the late nineteenth century campaign against the plume trade, one of the earliest examples of modern environmental campaigning (Jepson & Ladle, 2010). Moving forward through the environmental movement to contemporary and ongoing campaigns, I identified ENGOs that were early adopters of emerging campaigning technologies of their time, for example pamphleteering, nature photography, or personal video recorders.

From this historic review, the next step was to narrow the sample. Thus, I focused on ENGOs who were pioneering the use of digital media in their campaign strategies, were well-known and/or leaders in the global environmental campaigning landscape, had international offices and worked across multiple issue areas, and specialised in non-violent direct action campaigning. From these criteria, the final sample of ENGOs comprised Friends of the Earth (FOE); Greenpeace; Sierra Club; WWF; and 350.org.

Next, I used purposive and theoretical sampling to identify interviewees from these ENGOs based on their campaigning experience and their fit to emerging theory (Charmaz, 2006). Specifically, I drew on in-depth elite interviews to explore not only how interviewees conceptualised engagement but also their experiences of it (Creswell, 2014; Kvale, 2007). Within the context of this research, elites were seen as leaders or experts in the digitally-mediated environmental campaigning community. The general inclusion criteria focused on interviewees who: worked at one of the five ENGOs

identified during the historic review; were leaders of their organisation's campaign, mobilisation, digital, and/or communications teams; and had several years of work experience as senior campaigners and/or decision-makers. These criteria were important as they narrowed the scope of potential interviewees to subject experts. Sampling criteria also helped to establish boundaries around sample size. This was significant given the complex and extensive organisational structure of the five ENGOs.

In addition, interviewees were also selected to obtain variation in opinions. Thus, they were also sampled in an attempt to include diversity in: sex, age, years of related work experience, and region of work. These variations were important as they allowed for a range of perspectives to be explored whilst also identifying common patterns and themes across opinions. Table 3 provides an overview of interviewee demographics.

	N	Total (%)
Sex		
Male	25	69
Female	11	31
Age		
18-29	8	22
30-39	15	42
40-49	4	11
50+	9	25
Years of related work experience		
0-5	3	8
5-10	16	44
10-20	8	22
20+	9	25
Region of work		
Asia and the Pacific	9	22
Europe	16	39
North America	11	28

Table 3. Overview of interviewee demographics

Interviews took place from July 2014 to April 2016. In total, 86 potential interviewees were contacted and given an overview of the research via email, after which 50 declined to interview. This demonstrated a limitation of elite interviews, which are notorious for smaller sample sizes. The remaining 36 interviews were conducted via: Skype (n = 22); email (n = 8); and in-person (n = 6). Face-to-face interviews lasted between 45-90 minutes and followed a standard set of interview prompts related to engagement, digital media, and campaigning. Interviews were recorded and transcribed. Transcripts, along

with comprehensive field notes taken during the interviews, were uploaded to NVivo for data analysis.

Email interviews followed a similar semi-structured format, with interview questions embedded in the email (Meho, 2006). Whilst not as extensive as face-to-face interviews, email interviews yielded more direct responses. This paralleled Meho's (2006, p. 1291) findings on email interviewing where 'participants interviewed via email remained more focused on the interview questions and provided more reflectively dense accounts than their face-to-face counterparts'. In addition, email interviews provided elites, who are often pressed for time, with an alternative mode of interviewing rather than simply declining to interview. Taken together, interviews resulted in 319 single-spaced pages of transcripts.

Data analysis occurred in phases and took place alongside data collection (Charmaz, 2006). Initial coding was used to mine interview transcripts line-by-line for analytic ideas. During this process, each segment of data was named and clustered into labels, which were then considered as possible routes for future inquiry. Following the initial coding phase, data were re-examined under focused coding. This entailed revising and refining earlier codes to identify recurring themes and to develop theoretical categories related to campaigners' frames, digital affordances, and conceptualisations of engagement and participation (Charmaz, 2006).

Data collection and analysis were completed in accordance with professional guidelines set by the Central University Research Ethics Committee (CUREC) at the University of Oxford. Given the environmental campaigning community was small and

that this research was interviewing senior staff and decision-makers, all interviewees (and their organisational affiliations) were kept confidential.

3.4 Findings

3.4.1 Digital affordances and framing engagement

The first topic explored in the interviews related to how campaigners understood engagement. Responses indicated that campaigners framed engagement in three ways: 1) synonymous with participation; 2) an output of campaigning; and 3) an ongoing process. At the onset, a large majority of interviewees used the term engagement synonymously with participation. For example, a Communications Manager stated, 'Engagement is participation and participation is engagement'. Amongst these interviewees, engaging supporters was described as getting them to take deliberate action such as 'getting people on the streets'.1 Through descriptions and definitions of engagement as 'taking action', engagement appeared to be synonymous with participation.

Yet when asked to discuss the relationship between engagement and participation, there was a conflicting result. All interviewees attempted to differentiate between the two. A Senior Campaigner reflected, 'for me engagement feels like a more shallow thing than if someone participated'. Thus, at the beginning of the interviews, a large majority

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[1] Social Media Manager (9 March 2015)

[2] Managing Director (22 July 2015)

framed engagement and participation as synonymous. However, when further probed, all interviewees agreed that engagement and participation were different. In short, whilst 'engagement as synonym' appeared to be an initial framing category, upon further reflection interviewees instead described engagement as a prerequisite to participation. In other words, whilst an initial coding category, the first framing (i.e. as synonymous) became less relevant as the research went on.

The second group of interviewees included a substantial number who framed engagement as an *output* of campaigning. These interviewees were deliberate in their differentiation between *engagement* and *participation*. They suggested that engagement is a buzzword, encouraged by internal organisational pressure and upwards reporting. As a result of this pressure, there is a strong imperative to 'measure' engagement through metrics such as recruits, signups, and reach. For example, a Head of Digital Network and Mobilisation described engagement as the 'magic number' required by funders when reporting on campaign outputs. Likewise, a Campaign Manager explained, 'there is an agenda whereby we need to have as many people as possible engaging with our work…so engagement is just another metric'. As a form of metric, organisations appeared to treat engagement as an output, leaving several campaigners uneasy with the term. For instance, a Global Digital Coordinator commented, 'Engagement is one of those things I'm really burnt out on…which is why my reaction to "engagement" is like "ugh I don't even know" [sighs]'. Within the second group of interviewees, this sentiment was common; they framed engagement as a campaign output used for little more than upwards reporting.

The third framing of engagement is one of an ongoing *process*, extending beyond any single campaign. Most interviewees understood engagement in this way and suggested that engagement is a means of empowering supporters and building deep relationships. When framed as a process, engagement is more fluid and less easy to categorise. For example, a former New Media Director and now Senior Campaigner, mused:

> Engagement is peaking people's interest and bringing them along on a journey, engagement is inspiring people to action, engagement is providing a pathway for people to take action who are already interested…it is getting people to do stuff or providing ways for people to do stuff…[laughs] Maybe?

When described as a process, engagement means developing long-lasting relationships and fostering a collective sense of 'being part of something'.[2] For example, a Senior Campaigner described, 'my definition of engagement is building relationships...it is a relationship of substance and it is two-way'. Thus, when framed as a process, engagement appears to relate to the creation of communities and supporter empowerment.

However, to understand engagement as a process, interviewees consciously differentiated it from participation. A Communications Manager reflected, 'awareness is the first step, which then leads to engagement, which leads to some type of participation'. A few campaigners described this process as a 'ladder'. For example, a supporter may engage with a campaign by reading a Greenpeace blog post on Facebook. Next, they may

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[2] Managing Director (22 July 2015)

climb to the second rung where they participate, for example by signing an e-petition or emailing a Member of Parliament (MP). As they climb higher, for instance hanging a banner on a national monument, the intensity of their participation increases and so does the associated risk. In discussing the 'ladder of engagement', many campaigners recognised that engagement and participation are not the same thing. However, they were unable to identify the point at which engagement *becomes* participation. For example, a campaigner attempted to explain, 'through engagement you can have participation, but not necessarily'.

Whilst the boundaries between engagement and participation are not clear, it is clear that for the majority of interviewees, these two terms are different. However, conceptual ambiguity made it difficult to differentiate whether interviewees were discussing engagement or participation or both. Thus, to acknowledge this ambiguity, the following sections use the term engagement/participation.

3.4.2 Digital affordances and engagement as output

When framed as an output, the most common discussion topic amongst interviewees related to digital media and the challenge of measuring engagement/participation under conceptual ambiguity. In other words, given that there is no clear definition of what campaigners are evaluating, it is difficult for them to know how best to do it. For example, a Senior Content Strategist disclosed, 'I used three different programs to monitor stats and each of them gave me different numbers'. From a different

organisation, a Digital Director explained, 'we don't have a single solid metric'. Reflecting on over 25 years of experience, a Senior Campaigner acknowledged, 'I don't think we even have tools to measure engagement'. In sum, findings from the interviews revealed that despite the organisational focus on engagement/participation and the pressure for reporting, there is no overarching method for measurement.

The increased 'reach' afforded by digital media further complicates the difficulty of measuring engagement/participation. All interviewees described reach as the speed and scale at which organisations communicated with supporters. They further suggested that 'speed' included both the dissemination of content as well as their own reaction time. A Head of Campaigns suggested:

> Social media is not just a way of engaging on the specifics of a campaign. It helps us to have a constant rolling news update about everything that is happening, which allows us to share…in ways we weren't able to do before.

Digital media enable campaigners to distribute content to supporters at faster speeds. However, supporters also expect campaigners to respond and react immediately. For a large majority of interviewees, this creates a sense of engaging supporters 'in the here and now'.[3] In addition to an increase in speed, reach also increases the scale of communication with supporters. For example, a Digital Campaigns Director described digital media as 'tools to reach new audiences on a more massive scale than ever before'. Most interviewees held the view that digital media afford diversified supporters, increased supporter numbers, and wider supporter networks. As such, digital media create

[3] Head of Online (November 2 2015)

a ‘drum beat’ that engages supporters ‘again and again’.[4]

Reach also emerged as one of most common metrics used by the majority of campaigners to measure engagement/participation. For example, they are required to report on list numbers, website traffic, brand support (e.g. ‘likes’ and ‘shares’), and direct communications (e.g. ‘open rates’). A Head of Digital Mobilisation suggested, ‘we are being driven by quantitative measures. The number of Facebook followers, the number of Twitter followers etc.’. Likewise, a Senior Campaigner explained, ‘we judge the effectiveness of our YouTube videos on the number of views. Similarly, our Facebook posts on the number of likes and shares. That’s just the traditional way we do it’. All interviewees suggested that digital media afford them with an increased reach. However, reach itself emerged as a metric used by campaigners to measure supporter engagement/participation.

Some interviewees saw the increased use of metrics as advantageous to engagement/participation within campaigning. For example, they suggested that metrics allow campaigners to build more accurate supporter strategies based on actual user data. A Senior Content Strategist put forward, ‘digital actually gives us more insight into behaviour’. They elaborated, ‘once you get people on your website, you can see where they go and what they do in way you can’t with a letter writing campaign’. Several interviewees were of the opinion that metrics afforded by digital media enable them to track and monitor how supporters interact with content. Due to this affordance, some

[4] Managing Director (July 22 2015)

interviewees felt that metrics generate greater insight on supporters' preferences and behaviours.

However, a large majority of interviewees also held the view that metrics such as reach are superficial. They suggested that metrics overemphasise the quantity of engagement/participation at the expense of evaluating its quality. This appeared to relate to what interviewees commonly labelled 'vanity metrics'. Vanity metrics are superficial or 'feel good' metrics resulting from easy-to-manipulate data such as page views or email subscribers. For example, a Senior Campaigner challenged, 'the amount of emails that people open or don't open gives you an indication about the words that you use but I'm not sure that that means engagement'.

Instead, most interviewees wanted to understand the qualitative experiences of supporters and/or more 'actionable' metrics. For instance, a Digital Director suggested, 'our success is measured by rather hard-to-quantify things like how many people overall might self-identify as being part of the movement'. Likewise, a Global Digital Coordinator explained, 'Engagement is still a thing. But we try to measure our success a lot more by how many people actually turned up and did something'. Metrics do provide campaigners with greater insight into user behaviour. However, most interviewees were sceptical of using vanity metrics as indicators of engagement/participation. Instead, they advocated developing tools to evaluate the quality of engagement/participation in addition to its quantity.

That being said, despite calls for more qualitative tools, there were few suggestions on what these tools would look like in practice. This also appeared to be a pre-digital challenge. For example, a Senior Campaigner mused, 'I'm not sure we've ever

had a qualitative measurement of people's experience with campaigns'. According to a few interviewees, there have been some preliminary attempts to develop more qualitative measures. For example, WWF's *Earth Hour* uses a live chat service and encourages dialogue on supporters' experiences in real-time. Other ENGOs such as Greenpeace, Sierra Club, and 350.org are building interactive campaign platforms, which seek to better understand 'supporters' journeys'. Despite these attempts, quantitative evaluation tools remain far more accessible and available than qualitative tools. Thus, vanity metrics continue to dominate how campaigners measured engagement/participation and reinforce engagement as an output rather than as a process.

3.4.3 Digital affordances and engagement as process

When framed as a process, the most common discussion topic amongst interviewees related to the contribution of digital media to what interviewees termed 'people power'. Most interviewees held the view that 'people power' is an emergent property of the process of deep engagement/participation. For example, they suggested that through engagement/participation, supporters increase their autonomy and become 'free agents'.[5] Many interviewees were of the opinion that this process also equips supporters and enables them to co-create campaigns. However, not all interviewees shared this opinion. For example, those who saw engagement as an output suggested that ENGOs continue to

[5] Head of Digital Networking and Mobilisation (24 July 2014)

direct campaigns, affording little autonomy to supporters.

Discussions on 'people power' related to the potential for personalisation afforded by digital media. Several interviewees suggested that digital media enable supporters to generate content based on their self-identity and own narratives. This drove engagement/participation 'from the heart'.[6] For example, campaigners create general content, which supporters can then tailor to their own individual context. A Communications Manager explained:

> People are taking the campaign and making it their own based on whatever agenda is relevant. If you can relate it to something that they can see in their everyday life or something that they have experienced, it becomes that much more compelling a narrative. It engages them in a better way.

A large majority of interviewees attributed increased personalisation to digital media. Digital media were also seen to provide the space for 'produsage' or the ability of supporters to both produce and consume content. Describing produsage and co-creation, a Head of Campaigns acknowledged, 'even a few years ago, the idea that you could have this sort of conversation with people was unheard of'.

However, several campaigners were sceptical of the idea of 'people power'. In particular, they questioned the extent to which digital media allow for supporter representativeness and diversity. Reflecting on 25 years of experience, a Senior Campaigner observed:

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[6] Senior Engagement Advisor (July 10 2014)

> I am getting the feeling that we are talking to the same people and we are not really communicating on a bigger level. That is the nature of this medium. At the end of the day, you read whatever you are interested in because otherwise you won't get it in your media channels. Exposure is limited to the same people who are already interested.

Identified by a few interviewees, this phenomenon was described as a 'filter bubble'. These interviewees suggested that digital media create a sense of engaging with diverse supporters, for example both climate activists and climate sceptics. Thus, campaigners are under the impression they are also engaging with diverse beliefs such as climate change is real vs. climate change is not real. In reality, interviewees suggested that campaigners are instead engaging with a closed group of supporters (e.g. climate activists) and reproducing a single homogenous belief (e.g. climate change is real). As a result, a few interviewees argued that the 'filter bubble' risks excluding, and even further marginalising, already peripheral publics.

3.4.4 Digital affordances and engagement/participation in practice

A second topic revealed by interviews was how digital affordances influenced supporter engagement/participation in practice. A large majority of interviewees suggested that digital media create a wider range of opportunities to engage/participate across actions of different intensities. For example, many interviewees discussed low to high barrier actions, which appeared to relate to the 'ladder of engagement'. They described 'low barrier actions' as low risk and requiring little commitment (e.g. emailing a MP). Next, 'midrange actions' are medium risk and medium commitment and include activities such

as marches. 'High barrier actions' pose the greatest risk, for example the legal implications of political stunts. They also necessitate a high level of individual commitment such as taking on leadership, coordinator, and/or organiser roles.

The different understandings of engagement (e.g. output or process) influenced how campaigners seek to engage supporters in practice. Meaning, the way campaigners *think* about engagement affects what they *do*. For example, when framed as an output, engagement strategies mainly focus on low barrier actions and relate to easy-to-capture metrics. In contrast, when framed as a process, engagement strategies incorporate actions of different intensities in order to build a supporter's journey. Regardless of how interviewees framed engagement, they all argued that low barrier actions (e.g. signing an e-petition) are critical to campaigning. Many interviewees further suggested that low barrier actions are tools to help supporters realise their potential to do more. A Communications Manager maintained, 'I will never discount that initial step towards the cause'. As a process, engagement and participation exist along a continuum. This means that narrow support (e.g. low barrier action) has the potential to expand into more active support (e.g. high barrier action) for a wider cause.

Discussing different action intensities led to a wider conversation on the term clicktivist. Drawing on ten years of experience, a Head of Activism and Mobilisation, reflected:

> The trouble with clicktivism is that it…suggests they [supporters] are unwilling to do any more or that their action at that level is not of value. It isn't the case…Often they do want to do more depending on the issue and depending on the encouragement they are given.

A large majority of interviewees argued that clicktivism belittles supporters and dismisses more accessible forms of activism. In so doing, they maintained that it devalues and discredits the contributions of supporters. Furthermore, rarely, if at all, does a campaign depend on low barrier actions alone. Thus, clicktivism does not always encompass the plurality of actions possible within individual campaigns.

Indeed, interviews revealed a general distaste for the term clicktivist. However, all interviewees also agreed that low barrier actions are not enough to drive change. For example, several interviewees suggested that a dependency on low barrier actions risks 'cheapening' digital campaigning and making it 'too easy to do'.[7] This belief was present regardless of whether engagement was framed as output or process. A Senior Campaigner stressed:

> An email list of a hundred million people…isn't going to save the Arctic. What will save the Arctic is how [we] can encourage and empower those millions of people to do something apart from clicking through a website.

Almost all interviewees were of the view that digital media afford greater opportunities for supporters to take action. They also agreed that low barrier actions are critical to empowering supporters. Yet on their own, low barrier actions are not enough to guarantee a campaign's success. Thus, regardless of whether interviewees framed engagement as output or process, they rely on engagement strategies that integrate opportunities to take action across a suite of different intensities.

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[7] European Union Campaign Manager (31 October 2014)

3.5 Discussion and conclusion

This research offers a logic of explanation and discovery into how environmental campaigners frame engagement and the extent to which these frames are influenced by their adoption of digital media. It reveals that digital media have affected practitioners by forcing them to reconsider the terms engagement and participation within the realm of advocacy campaigning. Influenced by these affordances, a key contribution of this article is its identification of, and insight into, the ways in which campaigners frame engagement. Specifically, it finds no evidence of a single agreed upon definition.

However, this research does uncover three general and practitioner-based conceptualisations of engagement. This contribution is significant as it takes the first step towards differentiating engagement and participation, thus addressing a current gap in the literature. As argued by Berger (2009, p. 336), 'engagement is a uniquely appropriate term for understanding how to make democracy work, but only if we understand its full significance. At present we do not'. Furthermore, unlike other literatures (Boulianne, 2015; Dahlgren, 2005), this research draws on the perspectives of practitioners themselves. In so doing, it presents a typology of engagement as: 1) synonymous with participation; 2) different to participation insofar as it is an output of campaigning influenced by reporting and metrics; and 3) a deep process of supporter empowerment, which translates into participation.

Despite initially being approached as synonymous, upon deeper discussion all campaigners agreed that engagement and participation should be treated as conceptually distinct. Specifically, this research confirms that campaigners consider engagement to be

'more shallow', appearing as the first step in a supporter's journey towards participation. In other words, this article argues that engagement is the state of 'being interested' or 'being attentive to'. In contrast, it reveals that campaigners conceptualise participation as taking action, for example, walking in a march. In this way, this research also makes old literature newly relevant by demonstrating how, in order for engagement to translate into participation and for participation to be realised, 'there must be some connection to practical, do-able activities' (Dahlgren, 2009, p. 81). In short, a theoretical contribution of this article is its use of practitioners' experiences to identify how campaigners are framing engagement and the distinctions between these frames in practice.

The findings of this research are significant as a failure to differentiate between engagement and participation risks overlooking could-be critical differences between the two. For example, if understood as a subjective state, then to be engaged is to be interested and to have one's attention occupied. However, being interested or being attentive is not necessarily the same as taking action. Berger (2009, p. 340) explains, 'in common parlance, one can…engage *with* a subject, or be engaged *by* a subject'. According to Berger (2009, p. 340), both the sense of being 'engaged in' and 'engaged by' imply attention without activity. For example, one might be engaged by a photograph; in this case, engagement 'is the verb form for [passive] spectators' (Berger, 2009, p. 340). Thus, when engagement and participation are treated as synonymous, there is a risk of misconstruing the degree to which supporters, or publics more broadly, are interested (i.e. attentive) versus active in given issue areas.

This problem is further exacerbated, when, in addition to failing to differentiate between engagement and participation, we also fail to differentiate between forms of

engagement. In turn, this has implications on our general understandings of, and trends related to publics, citizenship and participatory culture, and overall perceptions of democratic health (Chilvers, 2015; Couldry et al., 2014; Dahlgren & Alvares, 2013; Livingstone,2005). For instance, critiquing Putnam's (2000) claims of failing civic engagement, Ekman & Amnå (2012) argue that when 'such fears are exaggerated – the development of "critical citizens" is not the same thing as the erosion of democracy, and the assumption of the decline and fall of civic engagement is, at best, premature'. In short, without greater conceptual clarity and when 'used by scholars to mean completely different things, [engagement] is basically a useless concept – it confuses more than it illuminates' (Ekman & Amnå, 2012, p. 284).

For these reasons, this article offers an early attempt at navigating between different *forms* of engagement. For example, framing engagement as an *output* used to generate numbers for reporting is different to framing engagement as a *process* of empowering supporters and building long-term relationships. The differentiation between forms of engagement is significant as it relates to the challenge of evaluating engagement. That is to say, this article demonstrates how different conceptualisations of engagement require different methods for engaging supporters and for measuring the success of that engagement. Coleman & Firmstone (2014, p. 840) confirm, the 'discourse around public engagement moves across all of these meanings, often without acknowledging the very different methods needed to make engagement work in one context rather than another'. At a fundamental level, our understandings of engagement/participation must allow for and accommodate context.

Indeed, this article reveals how the use of the pejorative term clicktivism may be a result of failing to differentiate between different forms of engagement. For example, Halupka (2014, p. 115) suggests that clicktivism is the 'simplification of online participatory processes: online petitions, content sharing, social buttons [etc.]'. Indeed, this research demonstrates that, when framed as an output, engagement exists as little more than a buzzword, the success of which is evaluated by vanity metrics used for internal upwards reporting. The focus on reporting appears to parallel a similar trend related to standardising participation or what Chilvers and Kearnes (2015) suggest is a preoccupation with impact. Specifically, they argue that 'the relatively unitary notion of impact evokes a linear model of the relationship between knowledge and action' (Chilvers and Kearnes, 2015, p. 306). Like participation, a focus on reporting leaves both the method of engaging supporters, and the way in which this engagement is measured, superficial and focused on the quantity of supporters rather than the quality of their actions (Karpf, 2012). In so doing, engagement – and indeed participation – are reduced and treated as if all forms of taking part are the same. In short, the distinction between forms of engagement uncovered in this research is significant. Specifically, it reveals that framing engagement as an output reinforces claims of clicktivism and, by reducing engagement/participation to singular forms, suggests that digitally-mediated activism is superficial and ineffective (Gladwell, 2010; Halupka, 2014; Karpf, 2012; Morozov, 2009).

However, this article shows that when campaigners frame engagement as a process, their focus is on gradations of supporter empowerment, people-power, and campaign co-creation. In other words, when engagement is seen to exist along a

continuum with participation, low barrier actions are important first steps that may lead to higher intensity actions. From the perspective of campaigners, this article demonstrates that framing engagement as a process helps organisations to avoid devaluing and discrediting low barrier actions and instead view each supporter's contribution to be as legitimate as the next. Thus, an alternative evaluation strategy may be to measure the *translation* of engagement into participation, for example, the moment where a student goes from listening to raising their hand; in other words, capturing when a supporter transitions from being interested to taking action. Doing so would recognise that whilst conceptually distinct, both engagement and participation are contextual and their application varies on a case-by-case basis. Indeed, Chilvers and Kearnes (2015, p. 302) argue that participation – and in my considered opinion, engagement – are 'continually being remade'. As such, what is needed at present is the adoption of reflexive practices, as well as a culture of collective experimentation, so to re-imagine the potentialities of engagement and participation.

In addition, a focus on the translation of engagement into participation may also help to address concerns related to the tyranny (Cooke & Kothari, 2001; Hickey & Mohan, 2004; Kesby, 2005) and the new orthodoxy of participation (Henkel and Stirrat, 2001). Similarly to development organisations, this research finds that ENGOs are also emphasising empowerment when discussing engagement and participation. However, despite this growing emphasis, it remains unclear what it means for a supporter to be empowered and whether this decision is being driven by supporters themselves. This ambiguity risks reinforcing Henkel and Stirrat's (2001, p. 171) argument that empowerment has 'become the objective' of many organisations instead of 'the means'.

In this way, ‘even emancipatory discourses’, for example, the participatory language used by campaigners found within this research (e.g. people power, co-creation etc.), has the potential to become ‘systems of power with the capacity to dominate’ (Kesby, 2005, p. 2043). Indeed, Hilton, McKay, Crowson and Mouhot (2013, p. 56) demonstrate how the majority of prominent non-governmental organisations are predominantly the products of ‘engineers, scientists, lawyers, and academics’ or the elites of professional advocacy.

This research argues that rather than adhering to particular hierarchies whereby one form of engagement/participation is seen as more valuable than another, the nature of participation/engagement should always be examined contextually. In so doing, it rejects the view that different forms of participation ought to conform to a hierarchy of any kind. Whilst this research identifies three framings of engagement, it is limited in its ability to identify and systematise supporter actions associated with these conceptualisations. Thus, one avenue for future studies may be to develop a meta-review of action forms and to ascertain whether practitioners – and, equally importantly, supporters – categorise these actions as engagement and/or participation. Likewise, findings of this research are also limited to environmental advocacy campaigning and specific ENGOs. Thus, another area for future research is to explore conceptualisations of engagement across different sectors and more varied organisations. This may help to develop a more systematic methodology of evaluating engagement/participation as well as to establish greater consistency across conceptualisations. Last, more research is needed to better understand the differences between what digital media have the potential to do versus what they actually do in practice. Such an examination might evaluate the affordances of digital media from the experiences of supporters rather than professional elites. This would provide a point of

comparison to the opinions of campaigners found in this research, many of which may have been influenced by professional obligation and organisational rhetoric.

Chapter 4:
Digital media affordances and campaign strategy: Audiences, tactics, and organising structures from the perspectives of campaigners

4.0 Abstract

Environmental non-governmental organisations (ENGOs) have a rich history of innovation in their use of media for campaigning. To better understand how communications in campaigning are changing with the rise of digital media, this research explores the influence of digital affordances on audiences, tactics, and organising structures within a campaign's strategy. To do so, it draws on participant observation and elite interviews with 36 experts from 5 ENGOs that are known to pioneer emerging media of their time. This research finds that digital media affordances influence campaigning by contributing to data-driven campaigning, organisational porosity, the creation of an event space and a more distributed model of organising. These findings are significant, as they provide qualitative insight into the affordances of digital media on campaign strategy and insight into the everyday experiences of campaigners.

Keywords: Digital media; mass communication; non-governmental organisations; event space; distributed model

4.1 Introduction

Campaigning sits at the heart of collective action. In other words, campaigns enable political participation to evolve from the individual to the collective level. Media have long played a role in this process. For example, newspapers, radio, and television transform political landscapes into contested terrains. More recently, scholars have begun to explore how digital media may also contribute to campaigning and protest. For instance, digital media may reduce barriers to action networks and facilitate organising (Bennett & Segerberg, 2013; Earl & Kimport, 2011). They may also contribute to an organiser's tactical repertoire. As a result, digital media may increase access to, and the number of forms of, political participation (van Laer & van Aelst, 2010).

ENGOs have always been trail-blazers in their 'innovative usage of digital media' (Katz-Kimchi & Manosevitch, 2015, p. 250). For example, through media 'mind bombs', Greenpeace developed a 'significant visibility around the world' (Carvalho, 2010, p. 170). Furthermore, at the time of writing, several large ENGOs are developing and/or improving digital media campaign platforms including: Greenpeace's *Greenwire*, Sierra Club's *Add Up*, World Wide Fund for Nature's (WWF) *Earth Hour*, and 350.org's *Fossil Free*. This creative use of mass media, combined with the diversity of environmental campaigning and its growing international saliency in global politics, make environmental campaigning particularly well suited for research.

Yet despite the growing uptake of digital media by ENGOs, few studies have investigated how digital affordances are influencing professional campaigning strategies. More so, even fewer studies explore digital affordances and campaign strategy from the

perspectives of professional campaigners themselves. Thus, to contribute to scholarship on digital media affordances and environmental campaigning, this research explores how digital affordances are influencing the development of ENGO campaign strategies. To do so, it draws on the perspectives of senior campaigners at five professional campaigning ENGOs: Friends of the Earth (FOE); Greenpeace; Sierra Club; WWF; and 350.org, to better understand three topic areas related to campaign strategy: audiences, tactics, and organising structures.

To begin, this article reviews the concepts of affordances, non-representational theory, media, and campaign strategy. It then positions these concepts relative to digital media and advocacy. Next, this article discusses the choice of elite interviews and sampling strategy. It then presents research findings on the affordances of digital media on campaign audiences, tactics, and organising structures. It concludes with a discussion on the contributions of this research and, reflecting on some limitations, this article then offers suggestions for future research.

4.2 Conceptual tools

4.2.1 Affordances

Introduced by Gibson (1979), the notion of affordances centres around relational exchange. Specifically, Gibson (1979, p. 127) defines an affordance as 'what [an object, e.g. the environment] provides or furnishes [to another]'. In other words, an affordance may be understood as what an object is able to give to another through the process of

relational exchange. Identifying three key dimensions underpinning affordance theory, McGrenere & Ho (2000) suggest that an affordance: exists relative to the action capabilities of a particular actor; is independent of the actor's ability to perceive it; and does not change as the needs of the actor change. For example, a forest may afford villagers with shelter from a storm whilst others may rely on it for food and others yet may use it to collect wood for a fire.

More recently, several media and political communication scholars are expanding Gibson's (1979) notion of affordances and exploring it alongside evolutions in digital media (Bennett & Segerberg, 2013; Earl & Kimport, 2011). Specifically, Earl & Kimport (2011) argue that digital media affordances are the changes or actions made easier by digital media relative to earlier media forms. For example, they suggest that digital media have the potential to afford citizens with the ability to simultaneously organise and participate across multiple times and spaces thus minimising a historic reliance on co-presence in protest. In other words, Clarke (2009, p. 1) argues that as media evolves, media affordances may 'serve in some way as prostheses, extending particular human capacities beyond their previous bounds'.

4.2.2 Non-representational theory (NRT)

Initially led by geographers Nigel Thrift, John-David Dewsbury, and Derek McCormack, NRT shifts the focus of geography from representation towards the embodiment of everyday practice (Anderson & Harrison; 2010; McCormack, 2003; Thrift, 2007). Anderson and Harrison (2010, p. 7) argue that within NRT, 'the meaning of things comes

less from their place in a structuring symbolic order and more from their enactment in contingent practical contexts'. In this way, NRT adopts a more relational approach to practice and the spaces within which such practices occur. Indeed, relational spaces are emergent, unfolding, and interrelated as they are always in the process of being made or *becoming* (Doel, 2007; Jones, 2009; Woodward, Jones & Marston, 2012).

Central to the emphasis on becoming, embodiment, and everyday practice in NRT is the notion of performativity. McCormack (2009, p. 133) defines performativity as 'the quality of practices that means they are generative of the world rather than merely reflective'. Differentiating performance and performativity, Dewsbury (2000, p. 475) challenges that:

> Whilst constituting a discreet act – the performance – the performative is not itself a concept signifying such an act. The performative is the gap, the rupture, the spacing that unfolds the next moment allowing change to happen.

Put differently, the concept of performativity relates to the various means and encounters (e.g. physical, sensational, etc.) through which we enact societal values (Butler, 1990; Gregson & Rose, 2000; Nash, 2000). In sum, NRT seeks to understand how embodied practices affect lived experiences, and in turn, how these experiences have the potential to fit into the wider politics of the event (Richardson, 2013, p. 128).

Critical to NRT, as well as to campaigning, is the concept of the event. In reaction to an earlier emphasis on representation within human geography, through the lens of NRT, 'what pass for representations are [instead] apprehended as performative presentations' (Anderson & Harrison, 2010, p. 22). Thus, NRT is marked by 'an attention to events and the new potentialities for being, doing and thinking that events may bring

forth' (Anderson & Harrison, 2010, p. 19). In this way, NRT re-positions the notion of events to include both the surprising and the subtle. For example, an event may be an activity, a thing, or a moment that takes place, something that leaves a feeling of importance and significance, a sense of 'having happened' such as a protest. However, from the lens of NRT, an event may also be the mundane or the unnoticed, say for example, the accumulation of dust on a desk. In this way, an event exists as 'a continual differing, if only in modest ways, that takes-place in relation to an ever-changing complex of other events' (Anderson & Harrison, 2010, p. 20).

4.2.3 Campaigning and digital media

Much of the contemporary research on digitally-mediated activism explores affordances through the lens of social movements (Anduiza et al., 2014; Castells, 2012; Juris, 2012). However, social movements are incredibly heterogeneous, encompassing a wealth of actors, issue areas, and media. This heterogeneity means that it may be difficult to generalise across movements (Earl, 2013b). In other words, the extent to which individual findings are representative of broader phenomena is not always clear (della Porta & Rucht, 2002). Thus, to limit this enquiry, this research focuses on the modern environmental movement, and within this movement, this enquiry is further narrowed to professionally-driven environmental campaigns (Eden, 2017). In comparison to social movements, these campaigns are time-bound and are designed around definite goals, thus there are more cases to evaluate and their outcomes are often more defined. For example,

a campaign has a given endpoint whereas a social movement may be ongoing for decades. In short, a focus on campaigning allows for an alternative lens through which to explore digital media affordances.

Advocacy campaigns help ENGOs to shift political participation from the individual to the collective level. These campaigns are a series of purposeful and interconnected actions taken towards specific goals and enabled by communication tools (Cox, 2013). As a focus of analysis, campaigns lie between the overarching environmental movement and the level of individual action. Describing campaigning, Everett and Storey (1987) highlight four common characteristics. They suggest that campaigns are purposeful, aimed at large audiences, time-bound, and reliant on media for their success. Through campaigning, ENGOs aim to achieve procedural change, which in turn, helps to achieve broader substantive and/or normative change (Keck & Sikkink, 1998).

It is also worth highlighting some of the differences between grassroots versus professional activism and campaigning. Whilst these divisions are not always clear, various scholars have attempted to disentangle them. In his literature review on grassroots activism, Horton Smith (1997, p. 269) defines grassroots associations as 'locally based and basically autonomous, volunteer-run…groups that [are composed] of volunteers'. However, whilst Horton Smith (1997) emphasises the importance of the local within grassroots activism, this research recognises that, particularly with the emergence of digital media, contemporary grassroots activism may exist across multiple scales. Grassroots campaigning generally relies on activities that are driven from the bottom-up,

more individualised, and often self-organising, with little to no central organisational involvement (Bennett & Segerberg, 2012; Hara & Estrada, 2005; Horton Smith, 1997).

In contrast, the professionalization of activism has been closely tied to the rising influence of big, international non-governmental organisations (Bosso, 2003; Hilton, McKay, Crowson & Mouhot, 2013; Jordan & Maloney, 1997). Much of this research investigates this shift, raising concern as campaigns move away from more voluntary roots towards increasingly professionalised, technocratic, and business-like enterprises. In this way, some argue that, within contemporary activism, professional managers (Walker, McCarthy & Baumgartner, 2011) and highly specialised experts and service providers (Hwang & Powell, 2009) are replacing volunteers and pushing elite policy agendas (Hilton et al., 2013). Hilton et al. (2013, p. 54) summarise the professionalization of activism as being driven by 'modern NGOs' or 'massive non-profit enterprises with [Chief Executive Officers], marketing directors, campaign officers, publicity machines, and brand-name recognition'. Indeed, Bosso (2003, p. 407) goes so far to describe professional campaigning as a 'protest business'.

That being said, irrespective of whether grassroots or professional, of particular importance to campaigning are mass media, which exist as both objects and actors. As objects, mass media are 'the various technological means of producing and disseminating messages and cultural forms to large, widely dispersed, heterogeneous audiences' (Chandler & Munday, 2011, p. 257). Examples range from television to radio, billboards to posters, newspapers to magazines, and emails to video-blogs. As actors, mass media emerge from the interplay between communication networks, institutions, and infrastructures. Craig (2004, p. 3) elaborates:

> "The media" is a catch-all term that includes transnational corporations, communication technologies, policy and regulatory frameworks, the practices of journalists, gossip columns, the nightly television news, blockbuster movies, advertisements, business magazines, music radio, the local newspaper and the Internet.

In this way, media sit at the intersection of public and private spheres (Dahlgren, 2005). Here, media have the potential to shape, whilst also being shaped by, technological, economic, social, and political forces (Couldry, 2012; Craig, 2004).

More recently, with the growing prominence of digital media, scholarship is exploring their influence on activism (Earl & Kimport, 2011; Karpf, 2012; Chadwick, 2013). Digital media are media that use digitally compressed content and are shared via the Internet and/or computer networks. Of particular interest to campaigners are interactive digital media, which allow for user-generated content, communication between users, and emerging forms of 'Do-It-Yourself' (DIY) politics (Bennett & Segerberg, 2013; Jenkins, 2016). For example, several investigations examine how digital media may lower participation barriers and costs of organising (Anduiza et al., 2014; Earl & Kimport, 2011; Juris, 2012).

Digital media may also provide campaigners with greater insight on audiences, for example, through the use of analytics. In his recent investigation of analytic activism, Karpf (2016, p. 1) argues that one of the most important digital affordances is not 'in the capacity of disorganised masses to more easily speak, but in the capacity of new civil society organisations to more effectively listen'. Examples of combinations of these affordances are illustrated through case studies such as Arab Spring (Castells, 2012),

#Occupy (Juris, 2012; Milan, 2015b), and Spain's *Los Indignados Movement* (Anduiza et al., 2014).

Another avenue of research explores how digital media contribute to the tactical repertoires of activists (van Laer & van Aelst, 2010). Online petitions, hashtag activism, email bombs, hackathons, cloud protesting, and Wikileaks are all examples of new tactics afforded by the Internet and digital media technologies. Digital media have also facilitated the rise of the 'Twitterati' and 'Blogosphere' (Potts, Simm, Whittle, & Unger, 2014). For example, Potts et al. (2014) illustrate how, following Hurricane Katrina, the Katrina Bloggers drew on digital media to campaign for city improvements. In similar cases, activists relied on websites for the Step It Up national day of action (Fisher & Boekkooi, 2010), email for the European Social Forum (Kavada, 2010) and social media for Greenpeace's Unfriend Coal campaign (Katz-Kimchi & Manosevitch, 2015).

Digital media also influence how activists organise and mobilise. A handful of scholars are examining the extent to which digital media are creating 'digitally-enabled' (Earl & Kimport, 2011) forms of organising such as 'connective action' (Bennett & Segerberg, 2013) or 'cloud protesting' (Milan, 2015a). For example, in her discussion on cloud protesting, Milan (2015a, p. 2) argues that digital media, such as social networking sites, have the potential to create 'a specific type of mobilisation that is centred on individuals and their needs, identities, and bodies'. Through this process, digital media may contribute to the formation of 'temporary, elusive, and action-oriented micro-organisations' (Milan, 2015, p. 5). A similar argument it made by Karpf (2012, p. 172) who describes the rise of the 'Internet-mediated organisation', for example America's

group MoveOn, whose membership 'is defined through a minimal threshold of participation [such as] clicking a link [or] signing a petition'.

With the proliferation of digital media, various scholars are revisiting earlier debates around media convergence (Chadwick, 2013; Dwyer, 2010; Jenkins, 2006). Dwyer (2010, p. 2) describes media convergence as 'the process whereby new technologies are accommodated by existing media and communication industries and cultures'. From books to photographs to cinema, Gasher (2014) suggests that the coupling of digitisation and computer networks has enabled greater integration across media forms. These processes also have the potential to simplify the production and consumption of media, whilst also increasing their reach (Gasher, 2014; Jenkins, 2006). Similarly, Chadwick (2013, p. 25) rejects the idea that there is a separation between 'old' and 'new' media and instead challenges that 'what count as new media at any given time are therefore best seen as hybrids of newer and older media'. In turn, some argue that the boundaries between audiences, producers, and content are blurring (Jenkins, 2006; Livingstone, 2005).

However, media convergence extends beyond the technologies themselves. Dwyer (2010, p. 8) explains, 'convergence is never just a technological process but is implicated in, and expressed as, profound and ongoing social, cultural, and economic change'. For example Dwyer (2010) explores various waves of industrial convergence between media corporations and governments as well as regulatory convergence or the blurring of media forms, politics, and economics. This raises several questions related to the social role of media producers – particularly corporate conglomerates – and the extent to which everyday citizens are involved not only in the production of media (Graham,

2011; Hargittai & Walejko, 2008), but also in setting regulatory agendas (Bird, 2010: Dwyer, 2010). From the perspective of advocacy, Hilton et al. (2013, p. 148) suggest that whilst NGOs rely on media to shape and mould public opinion, they have also 'become beholden to their publics too'. Indeed, this has proved, 'equally, both liberating and restricting' (Hilton et al., 2013, p. 148). Specifically, with more dialogical technologies, both NGOs and publics set agendas, dictate policy, and have become major players in the campaigning arena.

4.2.4 Campaign strategy: Audiences, tactics, organising structures

In his seminal work *Encoding/Decoding*, cultural theorist Hall (1980) challenges traditional notions of the audience as a passive, homogenous entity. Instead, he argues that audiences are groups of individuals, each of whom is active in interpreting – or 'decoding' – the meaning of a text based on their own context (e.g. education, religion, gender, race, class, etc.). Similarly, Livingstone (2005, p. 36) maintains that viewing the audience as passive observers who are separate from publics 'no longer fits either the subtleties of media texts of the complexities of media power in late modern societies'. Thus, similarly to the concept of publics, audiences are neither pre-existing nor homogenous nor a single collective (Livingstone, 2005; Mahony & Stephansen, 2016). Instead, through the relational practice of encoding and decoding, there is also the potential for audiences to be assembled and convened (Barnett, 2008; Mahony, Newman & Barnett, 2010).

Within environmental campaigning, Cox (2013) distinguishes between three main types of audiences, each of which is necessary to strategy. These include a campaign's base or its core supporters, its opponents, and its persuadables or audiences who are undecided but may be potential supporters in future (Cox, 2013). Campaigners themselves tend to focus on engaging with their core supporters and persuadables (Cox, 2013). Thus, when using the term audience in the interviews, these are the two sub-groups to which interviewees are referring.

The second dimension many ENGOs consider when building a campaign's strategy is tactics. Tactics are the actions that are used to carry out a strategy (Cox, 2013). They are diverse and range from: conventional tactics rooted in political persuasion such as lobbying, voting, and petitioning; confrontational tactics, which often interrupt daily practice, for example marches, strikes and demonstrations; violent tactics such as those that inflict bodily, material and/or economic harm; and cultural tactics, for example, music, street theatre, slam poetry, film, or photography (Taylor & van Dyke, 2003). All together, a collection of tactics forms a campaign's tactical repertoire. In other words, the toolkit that ENGOs use to build a campaign's momentum, intentionality, and collective identity (Taylor & van Dyke, 2003).

Most common to professional ENGOs are tactics based on the principles of nonviolent resistance and peaceful protest. Within the literature, there are cases of 'radical ecoterrorists', for example Earth First! and the Earth Liberation Front, who are seen to take a more violent approach to campaigning (Posluszna, 2015, p. 109). However, these organisations are well in the minority within the contemporary professional environmental campaigning landscape. Instead, 'the choice of particular tactics…[is]

fairly predictable, limited, and bounded by the repertoires that protestors have learned' (Taylor & van Dyke, 2003, p. 265). For big, international ENGOs, such as those investigated in this research, tactical repertoires tend to include forms of non-violent direct action, for example marches or sit-ins, and direct organisational channelling such as petitions or emailing a Member of Parliament (MP).

A third dimension considered by campaigners in developing a campaign's strategy is the structures they use to organise their audiences. Organising structures are the underlying mechanisms guiding how campaigners establish, coordinate, and mobilise interested audiences. Within classical literature on organising structures, the central focus has been on the role of formal organisations in mobilisation (McAdam, McCarthy & Zald, 1996; McAdam, Tarrow & Tilly, 2001). Within the bulk of this research, there is an emphasis on centralisation, a clear division of roles, and hierarchical decision-making. More recently however, scholarship is taking a more multifaceted approach. For instance, Bennett and Segerberg (2013) advance the logic of connective of action. The major difference between connective action versus collective action being variations in the role of communication technologies (as opposed to formal organisations) in facilitating protest.

For example, Bennett and Segerberg (2013) discuss the emergence of crowd- and organisationally-enabled networks. Crowd-enabled networks may be seen as the 'purest' form of connective action, whereby citizens rely on dense and layered communication networks to organise themselves independently of any central organisation, for example, the #Occupy movement. Unlike crowd-enabled networks, organisationally-enabled networks do not shun formal organisational coordination. However, unlike collective

action networks, organisationally-enabled networks require organisational actors to 'step back from projecting strong agendas, political brands, and collective identities' (Bennett & Segerberg, 2013, p. 50). Thus, under connective action, in both crowd-enabled and organisationally-enabled networks, digital media act as organising structures, which in turn, help to facilitate protest.

4.3 Research methods

To explore how digital affordances are influencing ENGO campaign strategies, this research adopted a qualitative approach situated within grounded theory (Charmaz, 2006). This allowed for the constant comparison of data through simultaneous collection and analysis. In turn, this research was able to construct theory 'grounded' in its own data. Given that campaigns are dynamic and operate across broad landscapes of actors and issue areas, the cyclical nature of grounded theory was selected to help draw research boundaries. Research methods included a review of historic campaigns, semi-structured interviews, and participant observation.

As a starting point, I selected the late nineteenth century campaign against the plume trade, which is one of the earliest examples of modern environmental campaigning (Jepson & Ladle, 2010). From this campaign, I moved forward through the modern environmental movement and distinguished ENGOs who pioneered emerging media technologies of their time (e.g. pamphleteering, colour television, personal video recorders, mobile phones, etc.). Drawing on the historic content analysis, I then focused

my sample to professional ENGOs who: were early adopters of digital media campaigning, were considered to be leaders in the environmental campaigning landscape, had global offices and were issue generalists, and specialised in non-violent campaigning. Based on these criteria, the final sample of ENGOs comprised Friends of the Earth (FOE); Greenpeace; Sierra Club; WWF; and 350.org.

Next, I used purposive sampling to identify interviewees based on their professional experience as campaigners and their fit to emerging theory (Charmaz, 2006). Within this research, I drew on Kvale's (2007) conceptualisation of elites as leaders or experts, which I then applied to the digitally-mediated environmental campaigning community. Overall, inclusion criteria included experts who: worked at one of these five sampled ENGOs; were leaders of their organisation's campaigning, mobilisation, and/or digital teams; and had several years of work experience either as senior campaigners and/or decision-makers. I also approached sampling so to encourage diversity in: sex, age, years of related work experience, and geography. I considered these criteria important as they focused the sample of potential interviewees to subject experts and included variation amongst interviewees. This was significant given the complex and extensive organisational structure of the five sampled ENGOs. Table 4 provides an overview of interviewee demographics.

	N	Total (%)
Sex		
Male	*25*	69
Female	*11*	31
Age		
18-29	*8*	22
30-39	*15*	42
40-49	*4*	11
50+	*9*	25
Years of related work experience		
0-5	*3*	8
5-10	*16*	44
10-20	*8*	22
20+	*9*	25
Region of work		
Asia and the Pacific	*9*	22
Europe	*16*	39
North America	*11*	28

Table 4. Overview of interviewee demographics

I drew on in-depth elite interviews to better understand the everyday experiences of campaigners as well as to gain entry into their world (Creswell, 2014; Kvale, 2007). Interviews took place from July 2014 to April 2016. In total, I relied on email to contact 86 potential interviewees, of which 50 declined. The high decline rate demonstrated a limitation of both this research and elite interviews, which are notorious for smaller sample sizes. I conducted the remaining 36 interviews via: Skype (n = 22); email (n = 8); and in-person (n = 6). The face-to-face interviews were between 45-90 minutes long, during which I followed a standard set of interview prompts related to campaign strategy and digital media. Interviews were recorded and transcribed. Upon completion of the interviews, I then uploaded interview transcripts, along with comprehensive field notes taken during the interviews to NVivo for data analysis.

Email interviews followed a similar semi-structured format, with interview questions embedded in the email (Meho, 2006). Although email interviews were not necessarily as extensive as face-to-face interviews, they provided more direct responses and key examples. My experience with email interviewing paralleled that of Meho (2006, p. 1291), who found that 'participants interviewed via email remained more focused on the interview questions and provided more reflectively dense accounts than their face-to-face counterparts'. Another advantage of email interviews was that they provided elites, who were often pressed for time, with an alternative mode of interviewing rather than simply declining. In total, my interviews resulted in 319 single-spaced pages of transcripts.

Throughout the course of this research, I also undertook participant observation. My two principal sites for participant observation were: the 2015 E-Campaigners Forum (ECF) and the 2015 People's Climate March (PCM). ECF was one of the leading events for advocacy campaigners and brought together individuals from backgrounds in campaigning, fundraising, media, digital strategy, and/or policy. The PCM was a global march for climate, which included more than 2600 local marches across 162 countries around the world. To observe campaign strategy from the lens of an audience member, I joined the PCM in London where, throughout the day, I spent time marching with each of the 5 sampled ENGOs. These field sites provided me with access to participants in their natural settings, which allowed me to engage in conversations that were not necessarily pre-scripted. Participant observations were recorded in the form of field notes and were also uploaded to NVivo for analysis.

In line with grounded theory procedures, I completed my data analysis in phases alongside data collection (Charmaz, 2006). I relied on initial and line-by-line coding to mine interview transcripts for analytic ideas. During this process, I labelled and clustered each segment of data, after which I used clusters to consider potential routes for future and/or follow up investigation. Upon completion of the initial coding phase, I re-examined data through focused coding. This included revising and refining earlier codes as a means of identifying recurring themes and to develop theoretical categories related to campaign strategy and digital media (Charmaz, 2006).

To ensure ethical integrity, the Central University Research Ethics Committee (CUREC) at the University of Oxford approved this research. To respect participants and to minimise any potential risks, throughout this article, all interviewees were kept confidential and separate from their organisational affiliations. I also made sure to obtain all necessary permissions from ECF's organisers as well as to disclose my own role as researcher both to organisers and participants. PCM required a more discretionary approach due to its size and scale. Given that I was in a sense observing myself, and the process of protest more broadly, I used my own judgement in ascertaining ethical responsibility rather than obtaining individual permissions.

4.4 Findings

4.4.1 Digital affordances and campaign audiences

Interviews confirmed that digital media influence how ENGOs think about their audiences when building campaign strategies. The first topic raised by interviewees related to the terminology they used to refer to audiences. Responses suggested that the boundaries between the terms supporter and member are blurring. Traditionally, the notion of membership appeared to relate to governance and fundraising. A Head of Advancement suggested that, members were seen to 'provide governance for the organisation' whilst another interviewee summarised, 'whether you are a member or not just comes down to paying your dues'.[8] Instead, a supporter was described as an audience member that took any action towards the campaign. A Head of Digital Networking and Mobilisation reflected, 'I do think those definitions are going away...they are not relevant anymore'. This appeared to relate to shifts in the interests of their audiences. Specifically, interviewees suggested that audiences are more interested in supporting general issue areas (e.g. climate change) rather than being members of specific organisations (e.g. Sierra Club, Greenpeace, WWF etc.) or campaigns. For instance, 'a lot of supporters are cross-fertilising with each other and breaking down [traditional] lines of self-identity'.[9]

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[8] Former Executive Board of Director and Volunteer Leader (1 December 2016)

[9] Head of Digital Networking and Mobilisation (24 October 2014)

The movement of audiences across and between campaigns and organisations appeared to be the result of a greater level of organisational porosity afforded by digital media. For example, during 350.org's PCM, I observed individuals who identified and marched with Greenpeace but who held signage in support of FOE. According to traditional definitions of membership, many of the protestors were not members of Greenpeace, 350.org, or FOE. Yet digital media enabled them be supporters of all three. In other words, digital media afford audiences with the permeability to navigate across and between organisations and campaigns depending on which issue areas appeal to them.

The second topic raised by interviewees related to how ENGOs approached audience targeting and segmentation. These discussions focused on the importance of digital media in providing data on user behaviour. A Senior Content Strategist explained, 'Digital gives us more insight into behaviour'. For example, by monitoring and tracking user interactions, interviewees can target content for their audiences with more accuracy and efficiency. Several interviewees suggested that user behaviours such as click-through rates, webpage interactions, and browsing history allows them to better understand the 'stickiness' of their content and to tailor their marketing strategies. The volume of data generated and the ability to track data production in real-time was seen as a major change in strategy relative to pre-digital campaigning.

Audience targeting also went hand-in-hand with audience segmentation. In particular, the volume of data on user behaviour enables most interviewees to customise their communications. A Senior Campaigner described:

> We have broken the audience strategy down into different types of segments. So, we have different categories of the public. We have identified different characteristics amongst those people. Theoretically, we talk to those people in different ways and we design our campaigns to reach them in different ways.

Despite the advantages of digitally-customised segmentation, a few interviewees were uncomfortable with mass profiling. They suggested that it made relationships with audiences less authentic and more mechanistic. In their view, instead of seeing supporters as individuals, they become little more than data points. A Head of Mobilisation and Activism considered, 'It's treating supporters like cattle'. They elaborated, 'it's not paying attention to nurturing a relationship'.

4.4.2 Digital affordances and campaign tactics

Responses from interviewees also suggested that digital media influence campaign tactics. However, the extent of this influence remained a debated subject. Though in the minority, a few interviewees suggested that digital media have little influence on campaign tactics. For example, a Senior Campaign Advisor challenged, 'campaigning hasn't changed in a few hundred years'. Another argued, 'campaigning will be the same

for the next five years as it has been in the last 40-50'.[10] However, a large majority suggested campaigning is very different. This difference in opinion appeared to relate to the tension between whether there was a convergence between 'old' (e.g. pre-digital) and 'new' (e.g. post-digital) tactics.

All interviewees agreed that traditional tactics remained central to mobilisation. For example, 'Just because there is digital, it doesn't mean you can ignore your traditional media'.[11] The continued emphasis on traditional tactics related to limitations associated with digital media such as 'digital noise':

> I often describe Twitter as a fast flowing river. Unless you are looking into the river as things go by, you are never going to see them…there is too much distraction and messaging going on.[12]

Furthermore, most respondents saw the majority of 'new' tactics as digitally equivalent to their traditional predecessors. For example, drawing on 30 years of experience, a Senior Campaigner explained, 'an online petition isn't wildly different to a paper petition from twenty years ago'. However, in contrast to their predecessors, interviewees were of the opinion that digital tactics carry less weight and do not leverage decision-makers as easily. A Campaign Manager warned, 'whilst you can have an impact using new technology, after awhile thresholds increase'. Thus, whilst digital media were seen to afford more efficient communication, it was not always more effective.

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[10] Head of Mobilisation and Activism (24 October 2014)

[11] Communications Manager (16 April 2015)

[12] Senior Campaign Advisor (18 July 2014)

4.4.3 Digital affordances and campaign organising structures

Interviews also confirmed that digital media influence the design and adoption of organising structures within campaign strategy. Interviewees labelled emerging structures with various tags. These included: distributed, decentralised, participatory, hybrid, and open-source. For this article, I adopt the general term *distributed model* to describe these professionally-driven and digitally-mediated forms of organising structures. Whilst structures differ from organisation to organisation, the majority of them share five common features related to convergences afforded by digital media.

The first common feature within the distributed model was a convergence between on- and offline participation. 'No movement has ever changed the world it if is only online'.[13] All interviewees agreed that online participation did not replace offline face-to-face interaction. In particular, interviewees suggested that offline participation built strong ties, human connection, and a sense of community. This enabled supporters to feel as if they were 'part of something'[14] and that they 'had impact'.[15] Thus, within the distributed model, campaigns continued to require participation 'on the ground'.[16]

However, whilst interviewees emphasised the importance of offline participation, they also recognised the importance of online participation to the distributed model. A

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[13] Digital Director (8 July 2014)

[14] Volunteer Coordinator (22 August 2016)

[15] Volunteer Coordinator (19 August 2016)

[16] European Union Campaign Manager (31 October 2014)

large majority of interviewees suggested that taking action online was a critical first step to empowering supporters. The ability to participate online was seen as a distinction afforded by digital media relative to earlier media forms. Online participation allowed supporters to participate with little risk or demand. For example, using a template to email a MP required less time, money, and commitment than posting a hand-written letter or chaining oneself to an oilrig. Indeed, most interviewees suggested that online participation was often a precursor to offline participation. According to a Senior Campaigner, 'narrow support often widens into supporting wider issues'. Taking action online also allowed interviewees to communicate with larger audiences and at faster speeds. In so doing, digital media were seen to influence the temporality and spatiality of professional campaigning, enabling interviewees to 'reach new audiences on a more massive scale than ever before'.[17]

Several interviewees also discussed how to translate online participation offline and vice versa. A large majority of interviewees were concerned with getting supporters to 'move beyond' online participation, for example signing an e-petition, to taking action offline, for instance attending a march.[18] Yet only a small number described the opposite: instances of offline participation driving participation online. These interviewees proposed that shifts from offline to online created second waves of mobilisation following initial offline events. These included opportunities for: 1) supporters who participate offline to continue their participation online; and 2) supporters who do not participate offline, for example due to lack of accessibility, to participate online. For

[17] Head of Campaigns (23 October 2014)

[18] Head of Online (11 February 2015)

instance, in describing the PCM, a Social Media Manager suggested that digital media were 'a way for people who weren't at the march to be part of it'. Within the distributed model, the boundaries between online and offline appeared to be blurring. Instead, they were shaped more by fluidity and flows rather than traditional perceptions of rigidity or fixedness. Instead of existing as binaries (e.g. on- vs. offline), these participatory sites were relational, folding and unfolding around diverse subjects and events, converging to create what this article terms *event space*.

Second, within the distributed model, all interviewees worked to mobilise supporters across different scales. In particular, with the reach and near instantaneity as well as personalisation, afforded by digital, mobilisation appeared to be more 'flat'. For example, interviewees suggested that professional ENGOs set global action frames, which were then adapted and individualised to local contexts. For instance, WWF's *Earth Hour* aimed to 'create a sustainable world'.[19] From this call, WWF then encouraged supporters to shape it to major issue areas within their local/regional politics. For example, in Earth Hour 2015, this included protesting Arctic drilling in Russia, encouraging sustainable development in Wales, and creating solar power in Nepal. Likewise, Greenpeace's Save the Arctic encouraged supporters around the world to run 'their own mini campaigns'.[20] To do so, campaigners 'set up basic parameters and then give the campaign away', challenging supporters to take part and run their own petitions, marches, and stunts.[21] Together, these examples showed how campaigners were

[19] Communications Manager (27 October 2015)

[20] Head of Campaigns (23 July 2014)

[21] Head of Campaigns (23 July 2014)

attempting to use digital media to counter scalar hierarchies and to create more contextual and relational approaches to scale.

Another discussion point related to convergent scales was the use of digital media to capacitate local leaders. For several interviewees, mobilisation was not about winning campaigns but about empowering local groups. For example, a Digital Director emphasised building 'grassroots campaigns led by local leaders'. The emphasis on local capacitation appeared to relate to more fluid and connected geographies afforded by digital media. For instance, a Senior Campaigner challenged, 'the reason *Fossil Free* has spread worldwide is because it's not actually connected to one place. You can do it wherever you are'. In other words, a campaign's ability to not be connected to any single place but instead to connect to multiple places was seen by campaigners as spatial, scalar, and temporal advantages afforded by digital media. This appeared to contribute to their goal of capacitating local leaders in local contexts, who in turn, through a network effect, contributed to promoting individualised and collective campaigns.

Third, within the distributed model, digital media were seen to afford campaigners with more opportunities for decentralised or 'network-centric' organising. In other words, campaigners relied on independent local organisers (e.g. 'hubs'), which were connected via digital media to small and central managerial bodies. In this way, there appeared to be, not only a decentralisation of professional activism, but also a layering of networks within networks or systems within systems. More often than not, volunteers drove these hubs and coordinated amongst themselves. This was in contrast to pre-digital campaigning, which was largely driven by professional and top-down models. Examples of the distributed model's hub system include Greenpeace's *Greenwire,* Sierra Club's

AddUp, WWF's *Earth Hour*, and 350.org's *Fossil Free.* A campaigner from 350.org recounted:

> For each hub we had a blog page, a Facebook page, a Google email and an email list so people could communicate with each other. People would request a hub, we would set up the digital side of it and then we would give them the reins.

In this way, digital media affordances were seen to contribute to the development of autonomous cells of supporters or more of a networked approach. A large majority of interviewees held the view that this created a greater degree of decentralisation in organising structures, moving away from what has traditionally been very centralised, prescribed, and vertical.

Several interviewees also expressed the opinion that decentralisation made organising more participatory and dialogical. An interviewee from Greenpeace reflected, 'rather than talking on behalf of people, we act like a megaphone'. Another from FOE recounted, 'rather than being directed or broadcast to, your voice is heard and you're involved'. In this way, many interviewees have drawn on the ability of digital media to highlight more personalised or individual narratives in an attempt to encourage supporters 'to go wild'.[22] Interviewees suggested that the distributed model was a way to allow supporters to drive their own campaigns according to what they valued most. For example, 'You [as a campaigner] must be happy to lose control because that is where a campaign's strength comes from'.[23]

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[22] Managing Director (22 July 2015)

[23] Senior Campaigner (17 November 2015)

Yet a substantial number of interviewees also suggested that too much decentralisation compromised the effectiveness of organising. 'We have had failures with setting up local groups where, without a clear purpose and without support, they fall apart'.[24] From 350.org, another interviewee explained:

> It took a ton of management and we had to bring on extra support. With this kind of distributed model, people think you can just set it up and let it run by itself, but that's not true. You do have to have the staff and the time and the ability to manage it.

Thus, whilst interviewees expressed the view that decentralisation was important, they also suggested that a degree of centralisation is necessary. Not all supporters want to be organisers or are as committed as others. For example, during the PCM, a supporter stated, 'I don't want more responsibility; I find it tough enough campaigning anyway'. Thus, to accommodate for variations in supporters' preferences, distributed models were neither totally centralised nor totally decentralised. Instead, they relied on an ongoing and flexible tension between the two. In short, the distributed model was neither fully 'grassroots' nor fully 'professional' but instead, sat at the intersection between the two.

This tension lead to the fourth feature of the distributed model revealed by the interviews. Namely, interviewees suggested that digital media provided the infrastructure, communication channels, and resources for professional ENGOs to adopt different roles, moving back and forth between being campaigners and organisers. The more centralised the organising model, the more campaigners' roles related to campaigning or a 'professionalised' activism. For example, in the FOE Bee Cause campaign, the campaign

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[24] Global Digital Coordinator (17 November 2015)

was managed from the top down. Specifically, campaigners set actions for their supporters such as 'email your MP' or 'get a Bee saver kit'. In contrast, the more decentralised the model, the more campaigners' roles related to organising or what was more of a 'bottom up' or 'grassroots' approach. For example, in 350.org's Fossil Free campaign, the role of campaigners was to coordinate and direct interested audiences to the appropriate channels, leaving supporters to set their own actions. A more centralised model meant supporters depended on a central authoritative body or a model that more closely resembled traditional professional activist organising structures. On the other hand, a more decentralised grassroots-like model organised supporters into local hubs, where supporters themselves took independent and autonomous action.

The final feature of the distributed model was a convergence between interviewees' ideas of building a campaign versus movement. The majority of interviewees used these terms interchangeably, but demonstrated a preference for movement. For example, a Senior Campaigner recounted, 'Divestment is not a campaign, it's a movement'. Likewise, WWF Earth Hour was labelled as a 'people's movement'.[25] The convergence of campaign and movement appeared to relate to a general perception that digital media afforded a 'narrowing of time and space'.[26] That is to say, a large majority of interviewees held the view that campaigns were no longer temporally or spatially bound. This appeared to relate to the increased reach afforded by digital media and the ability of campaigners, supporters, and content, to move between, across, and

[25] Communications Manager (16 April 2015)

[26] Canada Digital Organiser (29 March 2015)

through, more relational geographies. As such, many interviewees suggested that with the fluidity afforded by digital media, campaigns were always in process of becoming.

4.5 Discussion and conclusion

Findings from interviews confirm that digital media affordances influence how ENGOs build a campaign's strategy. This article explores these affordances through three dimensions: audiences, tactics, and organising structures. To begin, this article investigates the rise of data-driven campaigning or the reliance of professional ENGOs on digital media to monitor and track audiences' interactions with content, for example click-through rates, social media likes, webpage interactions, and browsing histories. This is significant as it demonstrates a shift in campaign strategy towards customisation and a greater focus on tailoring campaign content to individuals' preferences rather than to a general mass-audience. In so doing, data-driven campaigning enables ENGOs to design different campaign strategies to reach a range of audience sub-groups in different ways.

The emphasis of campaigners on digital media as opportunities to provide insight into audience behaviour parallels Karpf's (2016) investigation of analytic activism. In particular, this article supports and expands his argument that digital media are contributing to a culture of 'digital listening' (Karpf, 2016, p. 2). Specifically, this research shows how digital media afford campaigners the ability to not only listen to audiences, but also to respond to them with more accuracy and in real-time thus changing the speed, flow, and pace of contemporary campaigning. The increased interest in 'listening' to audiences may also be demonstrative of a broader shift in thinking where

campaigners treat their audiences less as passive observers and more as interested publics (Livingstone, 2005). However, whilst this article reveals that there are several advantages to data-driven campaigning, it also shows how an over-emphasis on digital media risks treating supporters as data points in a marketing campaign rather than as individuals supporting and participating in advocacy. In so doing, there is the potential to further reinforce criticisms regarding the corporatisation of ENGOs and the separation between volunteers (i.e. supporters) and professional activists (Bosso, 2003; Hilton et al., 2013; Walker et al., 2011).

This research also highlights the potential of digital media to afford audiences with a greater level of mobility across campaigns and ENGOs, creating more porous boundaries between campaigns, organisations, and supporters. Indeed, it appears that audiences are more interested in supporting general issues areas, such as climate change, rather than being members of specific organisations, such as Greenpeace or the WWF. This shift, both in the vocabulary of campaigners (i.e. from member to supporter) and in the preferences of audiences is significant, as it may be indicative of a deeper transition away from what may be becoming dated concepts of membership. Shaw, Dixon and Paul (2010, p. 13) explain, 'These concerns over categories are not simply pedantic; they have implications for causality, for how we go about explaining the world'. In other words, this affordance highlights what may be the start of a digitally-mediated erosion of traditional approaches to understanding audiences, not only in campaigning, but also amongst professional advocacy organisations as a whole.

With regards to digital media affordances and tactics, this research finds there are two principal challenges facing campaigners: the potential for campaign communications

to be lost in digital noise; and the potential for digital tactics to carry less weight than their pre-digital predecessors. Herein lies some of the problems associated with media convergence and binary thinking (Chadwick, 2013; Fuchs, 2017). These challenges are most visible with direct channelling tactics. For example, this research shows how an email may be considered an evolution of letter writing and e-petitions an evolution of paper petitions. As Chadwick (2013, p. 35) argues, 'what count as new media at any given time are therefore best seen as hybrids of newer and older media'. Yet whilst email expands the reach of ENGOs, findings from this research demonstrate how thresholds at which digital tactics have an impact on decision-makers are constantly increasing. Thus, it reveals that whilst digitally-mediated tactics are more efficient at reaching different audiences, they are not always more effective at mobilising them. In this way, this research rejects the 'either/or' approach when considering tactics and instead shifts towards patterns of thought based on 'both and'.

Whilst the earlier sections of this article identify several affordances of digital media on campaign strategy, the main contributions of this research are found in its investigation of digital media affordances and organising structures. Specifically, in its identification and conceptualisation of: 1) event space; and 2) the distributed model. Let us return to the notion of the event, both as the spectacular and – through the lens of NRT – the mundane (Anderson & Harrison, 2010; McCormack, 2003; Thrift, 2007). Findings from this research suggest that when discussing events, the majority of campaigners focus on the first framing of the event, in other words as spectacular, having significance, and planned, for example the PCM. Closely linked to this framing is the notion of an overt performance, for instance attending a march. As summarised by Hilton et al. (2013, p.

149), ‘media events orchestrated by the likes of Greenpeace have made it clear that NGOs must appreciated the notion of the spectacle…if their campaigns are to secure prominent coverage’.

However, what remains less obvious, are all the moments in between. Coming back to the example of the PCM, this article reveals that there are also sequences of events *within* events. In other words, despite the initial event and its performance, before, during, and after, there were multitudes of activities, both expected and unexpected. For instance, second waves of online mobilisation following the initial offline event. In addition, for each of these unplanned variations, were also their associated potentialities (Anderson & Harrison, 2010). In this way, digital media afford wider opportunities to take part in campaigning by creating a relational space where participation is simultaneously multi-spatial (e.g. on-, offline, both, etc.), multi-temporal (past, present, future, all etc.), and multi-scalar (local, regional, national, global, all). Within this space, actors move beyond the actual event (e.g. PCM) or performance (e.g. attending a march) to the performativity of everyday practices and encounters, in other words, the spacing that unfolds before, during, in between, after etc. (Dewsbury, 2000).

This also provides for more fluid participation, which itself extends beyond the materiality of a single performance or a single site (Woodward et al., 2012). Together, these affordances create what this research terms *event space*. In some ways, this is the ‘stage’, formed by the intersections of continuously changing spatialities, temporalities, and scales afforded by digital media, within which events – spectacular and mundane – are always ‘in process’ or continuously becoming; that is, event space is the space made for practices existing within the folds or ‘in between’.

The second contribution of this research is its unveiling of the *distributed model*. This article defines the distributed model as a network-centric organising structure, which draws on digital media infrastructure to decentralise professionally-driven activism and participation. In theory, the distributed model also builds autonomous and locally-based hubs of supporters, which in turn rely on digital media to translate professionally and globally-driven action calls set by formal organisations into individualised and contextual initiatives decided by hubs of volunteers. A particularly interesting point raised by campaigners within this research is the idea that the distributed model offers a 'return' to grassroots activism. There are however differences between the two. Unlike grassroots activism, which relies on informal communities of volunteers (Horton Smith, 1997), the distributed model continues to be organisationally-led and driven by professional activists and large ENGOs. In this way, the distributed model lies at the intersection of grassroots activism, which is informally organised from the bottom up, and professional activism, which is formally organised from the top down. However, unlike grassroots activism, the distributed model is still governed by professional organisations themselves.

In this way, it is perhaps less of a 'return' to grassroots activism and more a repurposing or retrofitting of the governance, inclusivity, and participatory potential of professional advocacy. Specifically, the distributed model is distinct as digital media afford ENGOs with the potential to draw on opportunities for real-time and multi-directional interactivity with exponentially greater reach (Bennett & Segerberg, 2013), DIY politics driven by everyday citizens (Jenkins, 2016), and a reduced need for co-presence (Earl and Kimport, 2011). In turn, digital media have afforded ENGOs with the

potential to shift their roles, becoming less campaigners (or professional activists) and more organisers within a networked model.

However, in many ways, campaigners interviewed within this research are themselves performers, representing their organisations through their use of professional rhetoric. In turn, they create particular narratives or myths, for example, the 'return to grassroots activism' or the notion of 'building movements not just campaigns'. Taking a more critical approach, Hilton et al. (2013, p. 59) warn that ultimately these positions 'should be understood not as histories, but as marketing exercises…[which] serve to obscure the reality of the organisation as a multinational environmentalist corporation'. Furthermore, the majority of big, international NGOs rely on external advertising agencies to design emotional storytelling and foundation myths relevant to their audiences (Hilton et al., 2013; Rose, 2011). Thus, a more critical approach reveals that through organisational rhetoric, campaigners portray particular narratives that align with supporters' values, yet at its core, the distributed model continues to be enabled and shaped by professional activist organisations.

There are several opportunities for further research. For example, a limitation of this research is its focus on the perspectives of campaigners only. Thus, future investigations could explore digital affordances from the perspective of campaign audiences, for example, an organisation's supporter base or opposition. This would help to situate the perspectives of ENGOs and the execution of campaign strategy in the experiences of those for whom it is designed and to further explore whether the potentialities discussed by campaigners are actually manifesting on the ground. There is also an opportunity to investigate the preference for the term supporter over member and

whether this has any practical implications, for example on an organisation's governance or fundraising models. Other investigations may want to compare the distributed model (e.g. Greenpeace's *Greenwire* and/or Sierra Club's *AddUp*, and WWF's *Earth Hour*) against traditional grassroots models, which are unaffiliated with professional organisations. In other words, to better understand the intersection between professional campaigning and grassroots campaigning, and the extent to which new hybrid models are emerging between the two.



Plate 8. Greenpeace volunteers painting signs (Camden group)

Chapter 5:
Re-assessing membership? Digital media and the rise of the supporter in environmental non-governmental organisations

5.0 Abstract

This article explores how big international non-governmental organisations (BINGOs) working within the environmental sector are approaching the terms member and supporter in their everyday vocabularies, and the relationship of these terms to digital media affordances. To do so, it draws on data from in-depth elite interviews with senior professionals at Friends of the Earth, Greenpeace, Sierra Club, World Wide Fund for Nature, and 350.org. Findings suggest that digital media are contributing to organisational porosity, organisational re-structuring, and a blurring of roles between staff and supporters. Because of this, there is an increasing preference for the term supporter over member in the everyday vocabularies of environmental BINGOs. The uptake of supporter merits discussion, as – from the views of BINGOs – it may serve as an indicator of the potential of digital media to disrupt and potentially even undermine traditional approaches to membership in environmental BINGOs.

Keywords: BINGO; digital media affordances; membership; supportership; organisational porosity

5.1 Introduction

For many big international non-governmental organisations (BINGOs) in the environmental sector, membership plays a critical role in governance and fundraising. Dues and donations from constituencies provide these professional BINGOs with a steady stream of funding and contribute to their organisational sustainability (Bosso, 2003; Connolly & Hyndman, 2017; Jepson & Ladle, 2010; Jordan & Maloney, 1997). In addition, membership may reinforce governance structures and help to answer calls for greater organisational legitimacy and accountability (Crack, 2013; Edwards, 2011; Jepson, 2005; Keating & Thrandardottir, 2016; Kilby, 2006). Indeed, 'there are far more members of the public who are members and supporters of environmental non-governmental organisations than there are professional campaigners staffing [these organisations]' (Eden, 2017, p. 121). However, the roles and responsibilities of members are often unclear, varying from organisation to organisation, and even varying within the same organisation. Indeed, several academics have critiqued BINGOs as 'protest businesses' (Jordan & Maloney, 1997, p. 22) where members are more 'organisational wallpaper' than active participants (Bosso, 2003, p. 407). This has largely been in response to the growing presence and prominence of BINGOs in civil society and their reliance on members for passive support such as fundraising.

It is thus clear that, given the ambiguity around the roles and responsibilities of members, membership itself remains 'a deceptively complicated concept' (Baumgartner and Leech, 1998, p.408). Furthermore, despite the historical significance of membership, the term supporter is rising to prominence within the lexicons of environmental BINGOs.

For example, in their 'supporter promise', the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) maintains, 'our supporters are at the very heart of what we do' (WWF-UK, 2017, n.p.). Likewise, Greenpeace explains 'supporter*s* [are] the secret of our success…[they] are our biggest secret' (Greenpeace, 2004, n.p.). Indeed, the growing adoption of the term supporter seems to coincide, and may even be a response to, emerging forms of participation afforded by digital media (Anduiza et al., 2014; Theocharis et al., 2015; van Laer & van Aelst, 2010).

At first, the growing usage of supporter seems a matter of semantics. However, upon closer analysis, the prevalence the term of may be an indicator of broader changes, for example the potential of digital media to undermine, and even erode how professional BINGOs have traditionally approached membership and their members' roles. While earlier literature has examined differences between membership and non-membership organisations (Putnam, 2000; Skocpol, 2003), much of this work does not take into consideration the adoption of digital media by BINGOs nor does it investigate these changes through the vocabularies of organisations themselves. Thus, to better understand the shift in lexicon from membership to supportership and the potential implications of such a shift on organisational thinking, this research explores how digital affordances are contributing to perceptions of membership in the everyday vocabularies of environmental BINGOs.

To begin, this article provides a brief overview of the conceptual resources underpinning this research. In particular, it details the rise of BINGOs in civil society and highlights the importance of membership to organisational governance and fundraising. Next it discusses the notions of publics, civic culture, and citizenship and introduces the

concept of affordances relative to digital media. It then provides an overview of the research design, methods, and sampling frame. This is followed by a presentation of research findings and the rise of what I term supportership and organisational porosity. This article concludes by discussing the implications of these shifts and offers recommendations for future research.

5.2 Conceptual tools

5.2.1 The rise – and rise – of BINGOs

Over the past two decades, BINGOs have grown in presence and prominence in civil society. To illustrate, the approximate number of non-governmental organisations operating within the United States in 2011 totalled 1.58 million, a 21.5 per cent increase from 2001 (Pettijohn, 2013). Classic opinions of BINGOs and civil society tend to frame this growing influence as positive, asserting that BINGOs are 'doing good' (Larsen, 2016, p. 22). Likewise, Jordan and van Tuijl (2006, p. 3) argue that there is 'a broad-based consensus that non-governmental organisations [are] a good thing…the core of active civil societies'. Furthermore, Willetts (2011, p. 35) suggests that by positioning themselves as 'altruists', BINGOs perpetuate general classic ideas that, by default, they are 'worthy of support'. In sum, within classic narratives, BINGOs are seen as a form of moral champion, whose role it is to challenge, protect, and uphold the interests of society.

However, as the influence of BINGOs has grown, so too has the degree of public scrutiny of their behaviour. In particular, scholarship is critical of the professionalisation of BINGOs which are seen to act as 'non-profit corporations' (Bosso, 2003, p. 408). In other words, BINGOs are now 'collectively controlling billions of dollars, employing tens of thousands of people worldwide, and adopting increasingly corporate strategies, organisation and cultures' (Igoe &Brockington, 2007, p. 439). Several factors are leading scholars to rethink the classic narratives of BINGOs, including increases in: the number of organisations (Lehman, 2007); funding (Bosso, 2003; Connolly & Hyndman, 2017; Keating & Thrandardottir, 2016); political influence (Crack, 2013; Lehman, 2007; Willetts, 2011); role in service delivery (Jepson, 2005; Kilby, 2006); and involvement in public scandals (Gibelman & Gelman, 2001; Jepson, 2005; O'Dwyer, 2014).

As a result, a wealth of work is bringing into question the legitimacy and accountability of BINGOs as well as the extent to which they are still best equipped to represent the interests of civic society (Edwards, 2011; Hilton, McKay, Crowson & Mouhot, 2013; O'Dwyer, 2014; Keating & Thrandardottir, 2016). For example, Hilton et al. (2013, p. 54) maintain that 'over the last few decades NGOs have professionalized politics, taking it away from Whitehall and Westminster, and operating according to a logic of expert knowledge and professional behaviour'. Eisenberg (2000, p. 45) challenges the classic narrative of BINGOs as moral champions and argues that just 'because [they] provide good work', it does not mean that 'they need not be accountable to anybody'. Similarly, Jepson (2005, p. 516) explains that BINGOs 'must themselves be accountable, otherwise their legitimacy will decline and with it their capacity to advocate their cause successfully'. Thus, to build legitimacy and develop accountability, there is

growing pressure on BINGOs to integrate governance systems into their organisational structures. In turn, this may allow for better management of their assets (Jepson, 2005) as well as may ensure that they adhere to their organisational values when fundraising.

5.2.2 On the importance of membership: Governance and fundraising

One of the most common organisational models adopted by professional environmental BINGOs for governance is the constituent organisational model (Bradshaw, 2007). According to Bradshaw (2007), this model relies on formal membership and aims to integrate selected members into organisational decision-making, policy development, and planning. In this model, constituents may hold their organisations accountable and may contribute to the development of organisational legitimacy. For example, individual members may be elected to a governing board as constituent representatives. They may also have the opportunity to participate and/or vote in annual general meetings, which contributes to establishing a system of checks and balances. Eden (2017, p. 121) explains, 'having many members is helpful…because it suggests that [BINGOs'] arguments are well supported by the wider population, giving them greater legitimacy and their arguments more weight'. Under the constituent model, BINGOs are required to report on their activities and finances. In theory, this may help to further develop accountability and legitimacy by establishing transparency and trust between an organisation and its stakeholders (Connolly & Hyndman, 2017; Crack, 2013; Kilby, 2006).

In addition to governance, membership bases are also important to ensuring the financial sustainability of many BINGOs. Andrews et al. (2010, p. 1192) suggest that the ability of BINGOs to deliver services and programs often depends on members' contributions of 'money, time, effort, and skill to common purpose'. Within the constituent model, fundraising tends to be either restricted or unrestricted. Restricted funds typically have contractual requirements and are given by governments, foundations, or other donors for specified purposes (Jepson & Ladle, 2010). In contrast, fundraising from membership provides BINGOs with a steady stream of access to funds that do not have contractual requirements or are unrestricted (Jepson & Ladle, 2010). This enables BINGOs to use funds as they need (e.g. overheads, research, campaigns, emergencies, etc.), thus making unrestricted funds an invaluable financial resource.

Jepson and Ladle (2010) observe that the bulk of unrestricted funds tend to come from membership dues and donations as well as from member legacies. For example, in 2000, more than 80 per cent of the Sierra Club's revenue came from annual dues, donations to campaigns, and life memberships (Bosso, 2003, p. 406). Likewise, according to the majority of voluntary organisations surveyed in the United Kingdom (n = 77), historically, the most important function of membership has been as a source of income (Lowe & Goyder, 1983). A similar trend exists in the United States where, on average, member organisations request contributions nine times per year (Putnam, 2000). More recently, Eden (2017, p. 121) finds that 'Greenpeace UK reported income from over £15 million in their 2013-2014 accounts, of which over £13 million came from supporters and legacies'. These examples make clear that under the constituent model, member

contributions provide BINGOs with access to unrestricted funds and are thus critical to an organisation's flexibility and financial sustainability.

Yet membership is time consuming to build and can also be expensive to maintain. For example, membership organisations spend an average of 20-30 per cent of their budget on member recruitment (Jordan & Maloney, 1997; Putnam, 2000). Member retention may also place a significant financial burden on BINGOs, and this is particularly challenging given the increasing sophistication of, and competition within, the BINGO fundraising market. For example, from 1980 to 1990, the membership of Greenpeace USA increased from 250 thousand to 2.3 million people. Yet, in the five years after this, it lost 83 per cent of its members, demonstrating the high variability and uncertainty related to member retention (Bosso, 2003). In short, membership may create a 'catch-22' for BINGOs. On one hand, they rely on member contributions for financial sustainability; on the other, they face the constant challenge of recruiting and retaining members at an affordable cost.

5.2.3 Publics, citizenship, and civic culture

In order to critically approach membership, this article also considers the notions of publics, civic culture, and citizenship. Specifically, it draws upon the works of Barnett (2008), Eden (2017), Mahony and Stephansen (2016), and Mahony, Newman, and Barnett (2010) to sharpen its conceptual synthesis. Unpacking the notion of publics, Mahony, Newman, and Barnett (2010, p. 2) argue that 'a public is not best thought of as a

pre-existing collective subject that straightforwardly expresses itself or offers itself up to be represented'. Instead, Barnett (2008, p. 26) suggests that 'publics are called into existence, *convened*, which is to say that they are sustained by establishing relations of attention whose geographical configurations are not given in advance'. Eden (2017, p. 1) shares a similar view and maintains that 'the public is not one group, but a highly diverse and complex set of groups that vary by context in time and space'. In sum, amongst these scholars, there is common agreement that there is no such thing as a homogenous, singular or unified 'public'. Instead, publics are multiple, heterogeneous, and always assembling.

Second, this article draws on the concepts of citizenship and civic culture and their relationship to participation. Whilst the difference between public and citizen is not always clear, the later tends to be associated with more active or obligatory forms of participation (Cooke and Kothari, 2001; Couldry, Stephansen, Fotopoulou, MacDonald, Clark & Dickens, 2014; Dahlgren, 2009). According to Bellamy (2008, p. 17):

> Citizenship is a condition of civic equality. It consists of membership of a political community where all citizens can determine the terms of social cooperation on an equal basis. This status not only secures equal rights to the enjoyment of collective goods provided by the political association but also involves equal duties to promote and sustain them – including the good of democratic citizenship itself.

Related to citizenship, is the notion of civic culture. Building a more integrated and interrelated model of civic culture, Dahlgren (2003) attempts to 'relate citizens' political involvement and their uses of media' by adopting a perspective that 'understands citizens' participation in terms of meaningful action' (Dahlgren, 2003, p. 152). According to Dahlgren and Alvares (2013), participation is a deliberate expression of agency and is

different to simply accessing or interacting with media. Following these lines, Dahlgren (2003, p. 155) argues that civic culture is an 'analytic construct that seeks to identify the possibilities of people acting in the role of citizens'; in other words, civic culture is not pre-supposed or pre-determined but instead, is a form of participatory potential.

5.2.4 Digital media affordances and advocacy

With developments in media and communications technologies, a new suite of literature is emerging related to the affordances of digital media on advocacy (Bennett & Segerberg, 2013; Earl & Kimport, 2011; Karpf, 2012). Digital affordances are the changes of actions made easier by digital media relative to earlier media forms (Earl & Kimport, 2011). In other words, as Clarke (2009, p. 1) describes, media affordances 'serve in some way as prostheses, extending particular human capacities beyond their previous bounds'. For example, Guo and Saxton (2013) find that digital media encourage citizen participation by acting as an educational tool and making information more accessible. Similarly, Earl and Kimport (2011) observe that digital media also reduce the costs of participation and encourage less invested citizens to take part by decreasing the need for co-presence in advocacy. Digital media also create new and/or hybrid forms of participation, as well as widening an organisation's tactical repertoire (Chadwick, 2013; van Laer & van Aelst, 2010). For instance, digital media enable citizens to participate in activism via websites (Fisher & Boekkooi, 2010), blogs (Gil de Zúñiga et al., 2009), social media (Katz-Kimchi & Manosevitch, 2015), email (Kavada, 2010), and e-petitions

(Wright, 2015).

Digital media may also afford citizens with increased opportunities for political participation and interactivity through the generation of user content. For example, Anden-Papadopoulos (2013) finds that protestors used mobile-camera phones to record the death of Neda Agha Soltan during a 2009 demonstration in Tehran. In so doing, they produced user-generated content that allowed them to bypass censorial filters, to record their repression, and to create public testimony (Anden-Papadopoulos, 2013). Similarly, investigating the Katrina Bloggers, Ortiz & Ostertag (2014) demonstrate how user-generated content enabled publics to protest and get involved in rebuilding New Orleans following hurricane Katrina. In short, through lowering barriers to entry, widening tactical repertoires, and allowing for user-generated content and interactivity, digital media affordances are shown to influence how individuals participate in advocacy.

Another line of inquiry related to digital media affordances and advocacy explores how organisations are drawing on digital affordances for supporter mobilisation (Hestres, 2014; Karpf, 2012; Katz-Kimchi & Manosevitch, 2015). Specifically, digital media may contribute to faster organisational responsiveness (Chadwick, 2013) and a greater independence from mainstream media (Katz-Kimchi & Manosevitch, 2015). Scholarship describes these emerging forms of mobilisation under various headings such as 'digitally-enabled' (Earl & Kimport, 2011), 'Internet-mediated' (Karpf, 2012), 'connective action' (Bennett & Segerberg, 2013), 'networked collective action' (Rainie & Wellman, 2014), and 'cloud protesting' (Milan, 2015b). Further case studies of this digitally-mediated mobilisation are abundant and include the Global Justice Movement (della Porta & Mosca, 2005), Arab Spring (Breuer et al., 2015; Castells, 2012), #Occupy (Juris, 2012),

Spain's *Indignados* (Anduiza, Cristancho, & Sabucedo, 2014), and the Anti-Austerity Movement in Greece (Theocharis, Lowe, van Deth, & García-Albacete, 2015).

A third area of investigation explores the extent that digital media are influencing the organisational structure of advocacy organisations and organising networks (Bennett & Segerberg, 2013; Bimber et al., 2012; Chadwick, 2013; Earl & Kimport, 2011; Karpf, 2012). Specifically, with digital media, several scholars examine the emergence of new forms of advocacy organisations and/or networks. These organisations/networks tend to rely on digital media to facilitate loose coordination, which may even replace the presence of more formal organisations (Anduiza et al., 2014; Bennett & Segerberg, 2013; Castells, 2012). In this way, some claim that with digital media, there is 'potential to bypass organisational membership' altogether (Anduiza, Cristancho, & Sabucedo, 2014, p. 755). Examples of these digitally-mediated advocacy organisations/networks include MoveOn (Karpf, 2012), Avaaz.org (Kavada, 2012), 38 Degrees (Chadwick, 2013), and GetUp! (Vromen, 2014).

Despite the potential advancements in the participatory potential afforded by digital media, like many technologies, they also have their drawbacks. For example, Fuchs (2014) challenges that several authors (Benkler, 2006; Jenkins, 2008; Shirky, 2008) treat digitally-mediated participation as an ideology in and of itself. Indeed, he argues that these works neglect various aspects of capitalism, for example the use of targeted advertising and economic surveillance to commodify and exploit user-generated data (Fuchs, 2014).

Similarly, uneven diffusions of the Internet and digitally-mediated technologies, such as physical and technical access and/or usage, have created deep divides between

the digital haves and have-nots (Brown & Czerniewicz, 2010; Hargittai & Walekjo, 2008; Purcell, 2014; Schradie, 2011). Furthermore, it is more than limited physical access that determines how Internet users interact and access information; 'because of the nature of virtual topologies, there can never be a singular divide' (Graham, 2011, p. 223). In orther words:

> Space created within the Internet is not binary in the sense that a person is either inside or outside…there are rather countless small (although important and often insurmountable) "digital divides" preventing movement through the topologies of the Internet and limiting access to cyberspaces (Graham, 2011, p. 222).

Thus, whilst digital media have the potential to afford more opportunities for participation there are also risks associated with an overemphasis on these opportunities. If a more critical approach to digital media affordances is not adopted, there is potential to dismiss its capitalist-centric underpinnings as well as to further privilege already privileged groups (Elliott and Earl, 2016; Fuchs, 2014; Tilly and Wood, 2009).

The above examples illustrate what is now becoming a well-established corpus of literature exploring the affordances of digital media on advocacy. However, despite the growing prominence of this literature, little work investigates the relationship between digital media and membership, and even less work draws on the day-to-day experiences of professionals working at BINGOs. Thus, to address this gap in research, this article aims to better understand how digital media affordances contribute to changing perceptions of membership in the everyday vocabularies of environmental BINGOs.

5.3 Research methods

To investigate how digital media affordances are influencing perceptions of membership in environmental BINGOs this research applied a qualitative approach based on constructivist grounded theory (Charmaz, 2006). In order to provide more flexibility for discovery and to account for the dynamism present in BINGOs, grounded theory was selected as it allowed for simultaneous data collection and analysis. As a starting point to identify prominent environmental BINGOs with active membership bases, I conducted a historic review of iconic environmental campaigns beginning with the late nineteenth century campaign against the plume trade, one of the earliest examples of organisationally-driven environmental campaigning (Jepson & Ladle, 2010). Moving forward through the environmental movement to contemporary and ongoing campaigns, I identified prominent BINGOs and early adopters in their use of emerging technologies of their time, for example pamphleteering, nature photography, and 24-hour news.

Following the completion of the historic review, I then moved to further focus my sample. I identified BINGOs who relied on digital media in their organisational strategies, were well known and/or leaders in the contemporary environmental movement, had international offices, and worked across multiple issue areas. From these criteria, the final sample of BINGOs comprised Friends of the Earth (FOE); Greenpeace; Sierra Club; WWF; and 350.org.

Next, I used purposive and theoretical sampling to identify interviewees from the five sampled BINGOs (Charmaz, 2006). In particular, I selected interviewees based on

their experience relative to my research questions and their fit to emerging theory. Drawing on Kvale (2007), I framed elites as leaders or experts in organisational membership and/or digital media within the environmental advocacy community. My final inclusion criteria included interviewees who: worked at one of the five sampled BINGOs; were leaders of their organisation's fundraising, membership, mobilisation, and/or digital teams; and had several years of work experience as senior professionals within their respective organisations. I also selected interviewees to obtain variation and diversity in experience (e.g. sex, age, years of related work experience, and region of work). I deemed these criteria to be significant as they allowed me to focus my sample on subject experts as well as to, given the scale of the 5 BINGOs, set a realistic boundary around sample size. Table 5 provides an overview of interviewee demographics.

	N	**Total (%)**
Sex		
Male	*25*	69
Female	*11*	31
Age		
18-29	*8*	22
30-39	*15*	42
40-49	*4*	11
50+	*9*	25
Years of related work experience		
0-5	*3*	8
5-10	*16*	44
10-20	*8*	22
20+	*9*	25
Region of work		
Asia and the Pacific	*9*	22
Europe	*16*	39
North America	*11*	28

Table 5. Overview of interviewee demographics

Interviews occurred from July 2014 to April 2016. In total, I contacted 86 potential interviewees and provided them with an overview of the research via email, after which 50 declined to interview. This highlighted a limitation of this research, and elite interviews more broadly, which are notorious for smaller sample sizes. I conducted the remaining 36 interviews via: Skype (n = 22); email (n = 8); and in-person (n = 6). Face-to-face interviews lasted 45-90 minutes and relied on a standard set of interview prompts related to membership, governance, fundraising, and digital media. Interviews were recorded and transcribed. I then uploaded transcripts as well as comprehensive field notes taken during the interviews to NVivo for data analysis.

Email interviews followed a similar semi-structured format, with interview questions embedded in the email (Meho, 2006). While not as lengthy as face-to-face interviews, email interviews did yield more concise responses. Similarly to Meho (2006, p. 1291) 'participants interviewed via email remained more focused on the interview questions and provided more reflectively dense accounts than their face-to-face counterparts'. An additional advantage of email interviews was that they provided elites, who tend to be limited for time, with an alternative mode of interviewing instead of declining to interview. Taken together, interviews resulted in 319 single-spaced pages of transcripts.

In line with grounded theory, data analysis and collection occurred in phases and took place alongside one another (Charmaz, 2006). I relied on initial and line-by-line coding to mine interview transcripts for analytic ideas. While doing so, I began the process of naming data with labels and grouping them into clusters, which I then relied on for potential future inquiry. After the initial coding phase, I used focused coding to re-

examine earlier data. This meant revising earlier codes and identifying recurring themes. From focused coding, I developed theoretical categories related to traditional motivations for membership, current perceptions of membership, and the ways in which BINGOs think about supporters (Charmaz, 2006).

This research was approved by professional and ethical guidelines set by the Central University Research Ethics Committee (CUREC) at the University of Oxford. To respect the privacy of interviewees, and given that they hold senior and visible roles within their organisations, I have kept their names and organisational affiliations anonymous.

5.4 Findings

5.4.1 Traditional motivations for membership

The first topic to emerge from the interviews related to how interviewees think about the concept of membership. Specifically, interviewees confirmed that there were two principal traditional motivations for building and maintaining membership: 1) governance; and 2) fundraising. Most interviewees saw organisational governance as a major motivating factor for having a large membership base. For example, several interviewees were of the opinion that membership contributes to governance by building an organisation's legitimacy and accountability. A Head of Advancement summarised, 'members play an important role in providing governance for the organisation'. For

instance, within Greenpeace, members have voting rights at annual general meetings where they also elect board members to monitor organisational and financial performance. Sierra Club follows a similar model:

> Members do in effect have a lot of power. It's not an absolutely democratic thing. A lot of the same people get elected over and over so there's not a lot of dynamics going on in the ranks. But in theory yes, [members] do have a lot of power, especially at the local level.

According to these interviewees, membership contributes to organisational governance by enabling more inclusive decision-making and increased transparency.

Still, several interviewees were unconvinced of the inclusivity of membership as well as of the degree of power afforded to members in practice. For example, in discussing accountability and to whom environmental BINGOs should answer, a Senior Campaigner argued that organisations 'should consider membership the whole planet and not just people who give donations'. In other words, some interviewees felt that the notion of membership is too exclusive. Still, despite perceived limitations of membership, interviewees confirmed that traditionally, membership has played an important role in the governance of BINGOs.

Second, most interviewees also understood membership to be central to organisational fundraising. For example, in an average year, Greenpeace 'regular givers' account for 85 per cent of annual income. It appears to be similar for the Sierra Club, with two interviewees describing membership as 'just paying your dues'. According to interviewees, not only are fees central to fundraising, but also to how organisations define and differentiate their members. In addition, two other interviewees asserted that membership also provides indirect financial opportunities. For example, one interviewee

held the view that member networks can 'increase your brand awareness…completely free of cost'.[27] In short, for most interviewees, fundraising was a motivating factor driving environmental BINGOs to build and maintain member bases.

5.4.2 Perceptions on the contemporary relevance of membership

The second discussion topic to emerge from the interviews has to do with the extent to which interviewees still considered membership relevant. These discussions centred on two themes: 1) the degree to which traditional principles underpinning membership had eroded; and 2) the degree to which current definitions of membership were too rigid. First, in discussing the 'erosion' of membership, a majority of interviewees held the view that with digital media, membership has lost its significance. For example, discussing membership and its relationship to governance, a Global Digital Coordinator explained:

> Being a member used to mean something. It meant that you had some ownership and control over how an organisation worked. The idea that Avaaz has 38 billion members is just bullsh--, it doesn't make sense.

Likewise, reflecting on 25 years of experience working at Greenpeace and 350.org, a Senior Campaigner acknowledged, 'membership has become irrelevant'. These interviewees shared the view that traditional understandings of membership are 'eroding',

[27] Communications Manager (16 April 2015)

largely due to the proliferation of digital media.[28] This appeared to relate to the emergence of more digitally-mediated organisations such as Avaaz, Change.org, and 350.org. As a result of this perceived erosion, several interviewees suggested that for older environmental BINGOs, membership has less to do with advocacy and more to do with keeping up the organisational appearance of 'good governance' and 'ticking boxes'.[29] For this reason, several interviewees were of the opinion that the traditional notion of membership is less relevant in the contemporary and more digitally-mediated context.

The second theme related to the continued relevance of membership explores interviewees' perceptions of its definitional rigidity. Most interviewees were of the opinion that traditional understandings of membership are 'too narrow'[30] and 'outdated'.[31] Specifically, they suggested that the term member means little more than an individual who participates passively in an organisation's fundraising. Thus, the majority of interviewees held the view that current understandings of membership do not provide citizens with enough flexibility to account for variations in more diverse forms of participation. For example, an interviewee from Sierra Club explained:

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[28] Advocacy and Environmental Campaigns Senior Advisor (23 October 2014)

[29] Digital Campaigns Coordinator (16 July 2015)

[30] Offline Mobilisation Developer (4 April 2016)

[31] Digital Organiser (29 March 2016)

> Internally we talk about member recruitment. Member, member, member. I'm like, "Member? That's a pretty weird idea for a lot of people these days". They don't want to be a member of a club, that's insane! They might take one action one day and then might go on three outings a month later. They might disappear for a year and then they might come back and go on a rally, who knows?

Several interviewees argued that imposing the term on citizens pigeonholes constituents into fixed, limited, and/or rigid roles. In so doing, these roles do not allow for flexibility in participation. A Senior Campaigner from FOE elaborated, 'what we don't want to do is decide that "Person A" is a supporter and "Person B" is an organiser. It's not like that. We don't want to give people labels'. A Senior Campaigner from 350.org expressed a similar sentiment. They described, 'the barriers of membership and these definitions are going away. They create a limitation to what is much broader with digital media and [labels] are not relevant anymore'. Findings made clear that for several interviewees, to be a member means to be boxed into fixed and restricted roles. In particular, interviewees suggested that the category is little more than an instrument for fundraising. For these reasons, a substantial number of interviewees shared the view that membership is too rigid a term and did not account for some of the more active forms of participation afforded by digital media.

5.4.3 Fundraising and governance in non-constituent models: 350.org

Expanding on the relevance of membership, a third discussion topic explored by interviewees relates to environmental BINGOs that did not adopt the constituent organisational model. In particular, 350.org emerged as a counterpoint, acting as an

example of an organisational structure that does not rely on a membership base for fundraising and governance. For example, interviewees from 350.org explained that they do not view themselves as part of a membership organisation, commenting that they 'don't really talk about membership'.[32] Instead, 350.org adopts a philanthropic patron model, which is guided by a key organisational figurehead: Bill McKibben.

The philanthropic patron model used by 350.org also appeared to relate to the temporal and spatial geographies of environmental BINGOs. Specifically, the constituent model seems to be more common amongst older and/or European BINGOs who are rooted in a more socialist heritage, for example WWF. Instead, the patron model appears to be more prominent amongst younger organisations such as 350.org and/or BINGOs whose roots come from a more philanthropic heritage, which interviewees suggested is traditionally more common in the United States.

According to interviewees, under the philanthropic model, fundraising does not rely primarily on members' contributions. A Senior Campaigner explained, 'we do some small-dollar supporter fundraising but not a lot…that's always a secondary ask'. Instead, 350.org appears to depend on a patron with access to high net worth individuals and donor communities. An interviewee explained:

[32] Digital Director (8 July 2014)

> I don't think 350.org could have the model they have, which doesn't focus on a huge list and raising a lot of money, if they didn't have Bill McKibben at the top of it…Without his connection to the donor community, I don't think they could have the membership model they have.[33]

Amongst most interviewees, a major concern was identifying which membership model is more effective for fundraising and the extent to which membership continues to be necessary for financial sustainability. A Director of Digital Innovation speculated, 'If [members] weren't paying dues, would they give more on a regular basis? Would you make more revenue than if you asked them for membership fees'? In short, as an example of an alternative to the constituent model, 350.org emerged as a case to illustrate some of the potential trade-offs between membership and fundraising.

In addition, several interviewees also used 350.org as counterpoint to discuss governance in non-membership organisations. Specifically, they highlighted how 350.org uses 'local volunteer hubs' to decentralise decision-making and citizen participation. In so doing, staff at 350.org suggested that their roles centre more on organising and less on campaigning. A former Volunteer turned Campaigner explained, 'decision-making happens at the local level, within groups themselves and by local organisers'. Instead, the role of staff at 350.org is to provide tools and training to interested citizens:

> We're a movement-facilitative organisation…we help the movement see itself. That means we don't see ourselves as controlling our supporters. They are movement drivers and participants much more than they are members.

However, despite local hubs having the ability to set their own agendas and campaigns, it

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[33] Former Executive Board of Director and Volunteer Leader (1 December 2016)

remained unclear how much involvement they actually had in shaping the overall direction of 350.org. That being said, for the past two years, 350.org has received two consecutive four-star ratings from Charity Navigator, the primary 'charity watchdog' in the United States. In 2016, 350.org scored 95 per cent on its financial performance and 93 per cent for accountability and transparency (Charity Navigator, 2017). Therefore, 350.org serves as a point of contrast bringing into question the extent to which traditional approaches to membership may be reconsidered with regards to governance in the contemporary context.

5.4.4 From membership to supportership

The fourth discussion topic identified by this research is a growing emphasis on the notion of supporter. All interviewees demonstrated a general preference for the term supporter over member in their everyday vocabularies. This preference was apparent regardless of which organisation interviewees were from. For example, ninety-one per cent of interviewees consistently described constituents as supporters, whereas only 9 per cent adopted the term member. Of this 9 per cent, interviewees only used member when referencing specific roles affiliated with legal articles of association. However, when discussing constituents in general, all interviewees used the term supporter. This demonstrated the increasing prevalence and preference for the term supporter in interviewees' organisational vocabularies.

However, making sense of how interviewees framed supporters was more challenging than understanding how they framed members. In general, a large majority of interviewees associated 'supporting' with taking action. However, the idea of 'taking action' appeared to exist along a continuum. For example, at one end of the continuum, a Fundraising Director described supporters as 'anyone who has taken an action to help'. More centrally situated, a Director of Digital Innovation suggested supporting was 'regularly taking action' and 'being involved in some way'. Whilst at the other end of the continuum, a Digital Director noted that supporting was 'taking action that's commensurate with the scale of the crisis'. These examples made clear that interviewees understood 'supporting' to be synonymous with 'taking action' and that the intensity and frequency of action existed along a continuum. Yet there was no apparent or consistent response when asked what 'taking action' entailed in practice.

As a result, supporter emerged as a general umbrella term, which described various forms of participation. For example, throughout the interviews, the term supporter encompassed the roles of: activist, donor, organiser, participant, public, user, volunteer, and even member. This was the case regardless of whether interviewees were from membership or non-membership organisations. For example, an interviewee from Greenpeace used the term supporter to describe volunteers, whilst an interviewee from Sierra Club used the term supporter to describe online users. Likewise, an interviewee from 350.org used the term supporter to describe organisers, whilst another from WWF used the term supporter to describe publics. Summarising the confusion and ambiguity around how interviewees attempted to categorise their constituents, one described:

> A lot of people that we would call donors would say they are members because they see membership in a different way…but under our definition, they are donors and they think they are members but they are just supporters so it varies.[34]

Together, these examples highlighted the definitional and conceptual ambiguity around the notion of supporting. The breadth of interviewees' responses further demonstrated the wealth of potential roles and responsibilities associated with being a supporter. To account for this diversity, supporter appeared to be a general umbrella term used by interviewees to include and encompass the many different ways of 'taking action'.

5.4.5 Digital media affordances and supportership

Pulling together the first four findings, the final discussion topic explores how digital media influence the adoption of the term supporter in the everyday vocabularies of environmental BINGOs. Responses fit into three groups of affordances where, from the views of campaigners, digital media are seen to contribute to: 1) more permeable boundaries between organisations and a greater concern amongst supporters for issue areas rather than organisational affiliations; 2) organisational restructuring and culture change; and 3) a blurring of roles between staff and supporters as well as an increase in opportunities for user-generated content.

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[34] Fundraising Director (4 March 2016)

To start, most interviewees were of the opinion that digital media lessen the boundaries between environmental BINGOs and their supporters and create a degree of what may be called organisational porosity. In particular, digital media were seen to shift public consciousness to be less on specific organisational affiliations, such as a commitment to 350.org or Greenpeace, and more on general issue areas such as a commitment to tackling climate change. At the same time, campaigners held the view that digital media provide the channels for citizens to move between different organisations, issue areas, and campaigns. A Head of Digital Networking and Mobilisation recounted, 'through our Facebook and Twitter feeds a lot of supporters are cross-fertilising with each other and breaking down lines of [organisational] self-identity'.[35] Similarly, a Director of Digital Innovation explained, 'it's impossible to systematise supporters. There's very little brand loyalty and it's not really about that anymore'.

Most interviewees suggested that organisational porosity related to a more 'distributed' form of networked-activism afforded by digital media. In other words, in traditional membership models, one of the main roles of professional staff has been the creation of content for publication. Yet with the potential for interactivity afforded by digital media, interviewees maintained that there were new possibilities for user-generated content; therefore this function, like the primary campaigning role, was now seen as a distributed and co-created one. Coming from a membership organisation, a Head of Campaigns explained:

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[35] Head of Digital Networking and Mobilisation (24 October 2014)

> The idea of co-creation and supporters taking ownership is a more bottom-up approach. Before we used to be very much top down and centralised. Now, we have a more decentralised system where…we are trying to harness people power to plug into movements and to give ownership away.

To account for these changes, several ENGOs are drawing on digital media to build more distributed and supporter-centric platforms. Examples include Greenpeace's *Greenwire*, Sierra Club's *AddUp*, WWF's *Earth Hour*, and 350.org's *Fossil Free*. For instance, Greenpeace's *Greenwire* is:

> An online community that offers support to anyone who wants to make an active contribution to the goals Greenpeace seeks in its campaigns. It is an online platform for people who want to join activities of Greenpeace, or for people with similar goals who want to organise their own activities.

Campaigners suggested that user-generated content allows supporters to become more active agents in driving and co-creating the discourse of campaigns. An interviewee from WWF explained, 'people are taking campaigns and making them their own…if you can relate it to something that they can see in their everyday life or something that they have experienced, it becomes much more compelling'. From the perspective of campaigners, through user-generated content and the potential for co-creation afforded by digital media, supporters are in many ways taking on what are traditional roles of professional staff and less the traditional role of members. In turn, this appears to be a further factor potentially influencing the shift from member to supporter.

The move towards what this research terms supportership also coincides with the second theme emerging from the interviews: digital media affordances and organisational restructuring/culture change. All interviewees suggested that digital media contribute to

BINGOs' desire to build more participative relationships with their constituencies. Several interviewees further described this trend as a cultural 'return to grassroots activism'.[36] They suggested that this 'return' is the result of organisational restructuring and culture change afforded by digital media. For instance, with the help of digital media, Greenpeace is implementing *7 Shifts,* a seven-phase strategy for organisational culture change including a transition from egocentric to network-centric organisation. Campaigners from Sierra Club gave similar accounts of restructuring and culture change, which are demonstrated through the emergence of their online campaigning platform *AddUp*.

Using 'big data' and 'predictive algorithms', *AddUp* is an interactive campaign platform that allows supporters to have a greater, more 'grassroots' involvement in advocacy. Interviewees from Sierra Club suggested that digital affordances contribute to reinvigorating their constituencies as well as to shifting the organisation towards service provision:

> Think of the Sierra Club as a service platform. It's about having the ability to influence an issue and make change happen. Supporters are going to go with whoever provides them with the tools, the brand, the organisation, whatever it takes, to leverage that change.

Like the Sierra Cub, campaigners from 350.org also rely on digital media for service provision. For example, a Digital Organiser explained, 'our focus is more about the support aspect...being there for whatever strategic advice or digital services we can

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[36] Head of Mobilisation and Activism (24 October 2014)

provide'. Interviewees proposed that digital media afford more participative organisational structures built around the provision of services. For example, staff at 350.org described providing supporters with access to online training, downloadable resources, and how-to-guides (e.g. hold a workshop, run a meeting, organise campaigns, start a petition).

Another affordance that was discussed by the majority of interviewees was how culture change affects the boundaries between professional staff and supporters. In effect, they suggested that the shifting of the role of professional staff to the provision of services has the potential to blur traditional boundaries between the two groups. Increasingly, from the perspective of ENGOs, supporters choose how to campaign, and even what to campaign about. Indeed, the majority of interviewees saw their roles as organisers, facilitators, and/or amplifiers rather than as campaigners. To a great extent, they saw digital media as tools through which the campaigning role can be passed to supporters. A Head of Campaigns recounted, 'rather than talking on behalf of people, we act [as their] megaphone'. Indeed, this shift in roles appears to be a potential factor contributing to the shift in terminology from member to supporter.

5.5 Discussion and conclusion

This article reveals that digital media affordances are influencing how environmental BINGOs frame the concept of membership. Drawing on the experiences of staff at professional campaigning organisations, this article reveals two traditional motivations

for building and maintaining membership within the constituent model: governance and fundraising. From the perspective of BINGOs, the traditional concept of membership directly relates to the act of voting and/or paying monthly dues. However, this article finds that within the everyday vocabularies of organisations and their staff, the notion of supporter is rising to prominence. These findings are significant as they reveal, from the perspective of campaigners, the potential of digital media to disrupt, and even erode, traditional ways of thinking about membership within BINGOs. That being said, in order to better understand what digital media have the potential to do, versus what they are actually doing in practice, as well as the implications of these affordances on membership, a more critical approach is required (Bosso, 2003; Jordan & Maloney, 1997; Larsen, 2016; Willetts, 2011).

Indeed, this research reveals how the definitional rigidity of current framings of membership does not account for more diverse forms of participatory potential afforded by digital media. Several studies have documented some of the ways in which digital media provide new ways to participate in advocacy. From websites (Fisher & Boekkooi, 2010), to social media (Katz-Kimchi & Manosevitch, 2015), to e-petitions (Wright, 2015), digital media have the potential to enable more diverse action repertoires (van Laer & van Aelst, 2010).

Yet despite the growth in opportunities to participate, this article demonstrates that when the participation of members is restricted to voting and/or donating, traditional definitions of membership are not flexible enough to account for emerging forms of digitally-mediated participation or what Couldry et al. (2014, p. 616) suggest is an evolving form of ‘digital citizenship’. In other words, by pigeonholing an individual into

a given and/or fixed role (as traditionally defined by the term member), the participatory potential of publics may be limited to more passive forms of support such as fundraising (Bosso, 2003; Jordan & Maloney, 1997; Painter & Paxton, 2014). In turn, this may further reinforce criticisms of BINGOs as 'protest businesses' (Jordan & Maloney, 1997) and 'non-profit corporations' (Bosso, 2003) whilst also excluding, and even devaluing, emerging forms of digitally-mediated participation.

In my considered opinion, I argue that there continues to be a place for membership within BINGOs. However, I agree with practitioners that from an organisational perspective, the concept of membership itself is changing. Indeed, findings from this research suggest that traditional approaches to membership are dated and – like any concept – these approaches need to be revaluated and updated in the wake of changing media landscapes. In addition, there appears to be a misalignment in how constituents self-identify and view their support versus how organisations categorise them. In turn, whilst aware of this discrepancy, it appears that organisations exploit this misalignment, yet at the same time, they also fail to recognise it. This is significant for both campaigners and constituents as a lack of re-conceptualisation and transparency contributes to definitional ambiguity around roles and responsibilities as well as the degree to which constituents are expected, and by whom, to participate.

For example, whilst digital media may have the potential to afford opportunities for user-generated content and co-creation, there appears to be an assumption amongst campaigners that these affordances are necessarily 'good'. In other words, whilst digital media may enable supporters to take on greater roles, it remains unclear whether supporters themselves want these roles or whether organisations are imposing them.

Indeed, herein lies a question of autonomy. In many ways, the emergence of platforms such as *Greenwire*, *AddUp*, and *Earth Hour* are driven by organisational initiatives and not by constituents themselves. These initiatives pre-suppose that supporters actively want more participative roles many of which have traditionally been undertaken by paid and professional staff.

Under a more critical approach, the emphasis of campaigners on 'co-creation' and 'user-generated content' may be seen to parallel concerns raised by earlier scholarship regarding the 'participatory turn' (Cooke & Kothari, 2001; Henkel & Stirrat, 2001; Hickey & Mohan, 2004). Indeed, much of the organisational rhetoric used by interviewees creates a sense of 'déjà-vu'. For example, over a decade ago, Henkel and Stirrat (2001, p. 170) suggested that participatory approaches had become a form of 'new orthodoxy', which stressed bottom-up decision-making, empowerment, and local knowledge. Similarly, Kothari (2001) challenged that there was a lack of understanding between power and empowerment whilst Mohan and Stokke (2000) argued that a focus on the local risked dismissing wider structural components.

When reframed as such, there is a potential risk that the blurring of roles between supporters and campaigners may become exploitative and does not necessarily translate into more inclusive, or even desirable, forms of participation. In this sense, although digital media may afford more potential for participation (Earl & Kimport, 2011; Guo & Saxton, 2013; van Laer & van Aelst, 2010), the extent to which supporters actually want to take on greater roles, and whether they consent to doing so, remains unclear. Indeed, this relates to broader debates regarding power and governance as well as the role of the citizens versus publics in shaping civic culture. For example, whether participation – and

more specifically, certain forms of participation – are decided by the individual versus the extent to which they are presupposed to be obligatory and/or part of their civic duty (Cooke and Kothari, 2001; Dahlgren, 2009; Eden, 2017).

To account for the changing media landscape and shifts in constituent behaviours, this research shows how BINGOs are adopting supporter as a more inclusive and flexible term within their organisational lexicons. Specifically, this article reveals that the term supporter refers not only to the constituents of BINGOs, for example voting and/or paying members, but also to individuals engaging with and/or participating in an organisation. Put simply, from the view of campaigners, to be a supporter means to take action. Indeed, the idea of supportership introduced in this article may be an attempt on the part of BINGOs to adapt to the potential for more varied forms of participation potentially afforded by digital media. In many ways, the shift in lexicon from member to supporter parallels a similar shift in academic thinking from a homogenous 'public' to heterogeneous 'publics'. Put differently, the definitional limitation of the current notion of membership assumes that constituents exist as a single collective with a fixed role. Instead, by adopting a broader, relational, and more fluid approach, like publics, supporters may also be convened (Barnett, 2008). Indeed, Eden (2017) argues against the idea of a single public or such thing as a homogenous 'membership'. Rather, she suggests that 'the ephemeral and shifting memberships of [environmental] groups and the practices and publics that enact them are continually being re-invented and re-valued' (Eden, 2017, p. 126). That is to say, moving towards a more inclusive approach (i.e. supportership) has the potential to encourage constituents to take on different roles across different times and spaces depending on individual context (Eden, 2017).

In this way, the growing focus on the notion of supportership, as opposed to membership, may be an attempt on the part of BINGOs to be innovative and to keep up with the preferences of their constituents and/or younger generations of supporters amidst changing mediascapes. Thus, in conjunction with the 'next generation of political advocacy groups' (Karpf, 2012, p. 4), supportership may in some ways, be seen as the next generation of membership. Along similar lines, Bimber, Stohl and Flanagin (2009, p. 76) suggest that digital media affordances provide the opportunity to 'combine the characteristics of traditional organisation forms with non-hierarchical networks resulting in new forms of relations among members, leaders, and other stakeholders'. Drawing on the affordances of digital media, organisations such as Avaaz.org (Kavada, 2012), 38 Degrees (Chadwick, 2013), and GetUp! (Vromen, 2014) have 'redefined organisational membership and pioneered novel fundraising practices' (Karpf, 2012, p. 4). This research uncovers a similar trend in the case of 350.org. In other words, the emergence of such organisations suggests more than a simple disruption to the concept of membership, but what may be the beginnings of a potential shift towards new ways of framing membership all together.

This research also identifies several overlapping affordances influencing the rise of supportership in environmental BINGOs. Of particular significance, it reveals how digital media may lessen the boundaries between organisations and to potentially allow for greater supporter mobility; I term this phenomenon organisational porosity. According to campaigners, the porousness of an organisation relates to a general shift in public consciousness from organisational affiliation, for example Greenpeace, to general issues areas such as climate change. Indeed, Bennett and Segerberg (2013, p. 127) argue

that with digital media, it is 'possible for individuals to personalise [calls to action] without being required to adopt particular political values or identifications'. In short, this article shows how digital media provide the channels and discursive spaces for supporters to move across and between organisations in order to participate in specific issue areas.

The growth in organisational porosity appears to relate to the potential for interactivity (Jenkins, 2006) and user-generated content (Anden-Papadopoulos, 2013; Ortiz & Ostertag, 2014) afforded by digital media. Building upon previous studies, this research demonstrates how user-generated content, as well as the creation of supporter-centric platforms (e.g. *AddUp*, *Earth Hour*, and *Greenwire*), and a shift towards service provision may enable supporters to co-create organisational discourse and campaigns. In this way, with the affordances of digital media, 'conventional organisations play a less central role than social technologies' (Bennett and Segerberg, 2012, p. 12). However, adopting a more critical approach raises an important question: to what extent are there differences between what digital media *can do* versus what they *actually do*?

For example, revisiting earlier concerns related to digital divides (Brown & Czerniewicz, 2010; Graham, 2011; Purcell, 2014; Schradie, 2011) provides a departure point from which to explore participation, organisational porosity, and inclusivity. For instance, Hargittai and Walekjo (2008) find that even with the growing adoption of digital media and lowered participation barriers, neither content creation nor sharing is randomly distributed among diverse groups of people. Instead, the extent to which individuals participate continues to be influencd by factors such as socioeconomic status and gender (Hargittai & Walekjo, 2008). This is particularly relevent for environmental BINGOs, which have historically privileged socio-economic elites (Jepson & Ladle,

2010; Lowe & Goyder, 1983). Indeed, findings of this research reveal that through co-creation and increasing opportunties to generate their own content, supporters' participation has the potential to become more porous across organisations. However, whilst exploring supporter inclusivity is beyond the scope of this article, this research does beg the question: co-creation and organisational porosity for whom? Thus, this article finds that whilst digital media may have the potential to afford more opportunities to participate, it remains unclear who determines what counts as participation, who benefits from this participation, and the extent to which overall, participation is actually more inclusive.

Thinking forward, there are several avenues for future research. For example, a limitation of this research is that it did not have the scope to explore each sampled BINGOs' governance mechanisms. Yet it does reveal that the ways in which campaigners use the term member in organisational lexicons is shifting. Thus, future studies may wish to investigate how digitally-mediated and non-membership BINGOs develop legitimacy and approach questions related to governance. For example, if supporters are less interested in maintaining organisational affiliations, to whom are organisations accountable? Additionally, whilst it identifies the rise of supportership, this research is limited in its ability to investigate the extent to which this shift may have major implications on the long-term financial sustainability of BINGOs. Thus, another area for inquiry may be to investigate digital affordances and the financial risks and potential trade-offs between constituent and non-constituent membership models. Last, given the evolution of organisational forms facilitated by digital media, future research may also seek to examine trends in the general growth and/or decline of membership BINGOs and

the extent to which environmental advocacy organisations are adopting more distributed and/or non-membership organisational models.

Chapter 6:
Greenpeace *Greenwire*:
Exploring volunteer participation in online communities

6.0 Abstract

With the growing uptake of digital media by environmental non-governmental organisations (ENGOs), several organisations are drawing on digital affordances to build online communities for their volunteers. Thus, to better understand the contributions of volunteers in online communities and the relationship between online and offline participation in volunteering, this article explores Greenpeace's *Greenwire*. Specifically, it examines what content is being generated and by whom, what functions the generation of content serves, and the affordances of *Greenwire* with regard to volunteering. To do so, it draws on a digital content analysis and participant observation of six local London *Greenwire* groups as well as semi-structured interviews with both Greenpeace staff and volunteers. Despite affording several opportunities to contribute to volunteer participation, this article finds that that, to date, *Greenwire* is not yet meeting its full participatory potential as envisaged by Greenpeace.

Keywords: environmental non-governmental organisation; online communities; volunteering; participation

6.1 Introduction

In 2015, an estimated 14.2 million people formally volunteered at least once a month in the United Kingdom (National Council for Voluntary Organisations, 2017). Indeed, a brief reflection on volunteering invokes images of Greenpeace street canvassers, clerks at Oxfam community shops, school groups collecting food for local shelters, or parents coaching sports teams. Without a doubt, volunteers are essential to the sustainability of many non-governmental organisations (NGOs). From administrative tasks to direct action, volunteers help to lessen the workload of staff (Musick & Wilson, 2007), provide valuable technical expertise (Pickerill, 2003), and bring momentum to campaigns (Raja-Yusof, Norman, Abdul-Rahman, Nazri, & Mohd-Yusoff, 2016). In so doing, volunteers are active contributors in the day-to-day operations and organisational performance of the vast majority of NGOs (Eliasoph, 2013; Henriksen & Svedberg, 2010; Musick & Wilson, 2007; Raja-Yusof et al., 2016).

Consequently, many NGOs are starting to build online communities (OCs) as tools to better support and manage their volunteers. According to Preece (2000, p. 10) OCs emerge from a combination 'of people interacting socially and sharing a purpose, of policies to guide these interactions, and of computer systems to facilitate the sense of togetherness'. The growing focus of NGOs on OCs appears to relate to the affordances of digital media. These are the actions or changes made qualitatively easier by digital media relative to their technological predecessors (Earl & Kimport, 2011). For example, research suggests that digital media may afford opportunities for greater interactivity (Jenkins, 2006), co-production (Linders, 2012; Nielsen, 2010), and new/hybrid forms of

participation (Chadwick, 2013; van Laer & van Aelst, 2010). Drawing on these affordances, OCs have the potential to provide members with opportunities for skill-sharing and knowledge exchange (Foster, 2016), identity building and a sense of social belonging (Hercheui, 2011; Stokes, 2017), and mental and emotional support (Hercheui, 2011; Martončik & Lokša, 2016).

This research explores one such online community: Greenpeace *Greenwire*. Through a virtual ethnography of *Greenwire*, this article aims to better understand the contributions of volunteers in OCs and the relationship between volunteers' online and offline participation. In particular, this research examines what content is being generated and by whom, as well as what functions content generation serves. It further explores the affordances of OCs and the fluidity between on- and offline participation. In so doing, this article seeks to bridge two fields of literature that have so far been approached as independent: volunteering and OCs. It also helps to advance literature on the method of virtual ethnography (Baym, 2010; Hine, 2000; Kozinets, 2015).

I will begin with a brief overview of volunteering and OCs. Next, I will introduce *Greenwire* as a field site and discusses the use of content analysis, participant observation, and semi-structured interviews. Findings are then presented, first with regard to the archival content analysis of *Greenwire* and then with regard to interviews with Greenpeace staff and volunteers. This article concludes with a discussion of digital media affordances, OCs, and volunteering.

6.2 Conceptual tools

6.2.1 Situating volunteering

Adopting a traditional approach to volunteering, Cnaan, Handy and Wadsworth (1996) identify four dimensions that differentiate volunteering from other activities. The first dimension, *free choice*, suggests that volunteering occurs by will and not by coercion. Second is remuneration, which relates to the *nature of the reward* and whether the cost to the individual is higher than the benefit received. Next is *structural context*, which refers to whether an activity is formal or informal. In other words, whether one is a street canvasser for Greenpeace (i.e. formally volunteering) versus helping a neighbour unload their car (i.e. informally volunteering). The fourth and last dimension relates to the *degree of connection* between volunteers and beneficiaries, for example whether one is volunteering for their family or a local shelter. Together, these four dimensions help to define the boundaries of volunteering. Specifically, according to Cnaan, Handy and Wadsworth (1996), volunteering occurs by free will, provides little or no remuneration, takes place formally, and involves a degree of separation from one's immediate relationships.

Volunteering is critical to NGOs for several reasons. For example, volunteers may help reduce financial pressure by lessening staff workloads. In some cases, volunteers may also provide NGOs with donations and/or membership fees (Bosso, 2003; Painter & Paxton, 2014). Volunteers may also have specialised expertise or skills needed by NGOs. For instance, Pickerill (2003) describes how environmental organisations relied on

volunteers to build and maintain campaign websites. Volunteers may also contribute to building organisational legitimacy and accountability. For example, volunteers may nominate board members and/or hold voting rights in general meetings. In short, volunteering is critical to the development and sustainability of NGOs. Indeed, 'many social movements begin, and flourish, as volunteer efforts' (Omoto & Snyder, 2002, p. 1705).

6.2.2 The explosion of online communities

From medicine to health, business to marketing, psychology to sociology, the scope of the literature exploring OCs is multidisciplinary and wide-ranging. Bridging these studies, Hercheui (2011) identifies three defining characteristics of OCs: common interests, rules, and voluntary membership. Specifically, OCs may develop when 'a group of individuals voluntarily come together because they have interests in common…[and] accept adhering to rules (such as rules of admission, exclusion, and behaviour)' (Hercheui, 2011, p. 5). Emerging from the interplay of these characteristics, OCs are communities of practice. In other words, an online community defines itself 'simultaneously by its membership and by the practice in which that membership engages' (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet, 1992, p. 464).

In her literature review of OCs, Hercheui (2011, pp. 12-14) reveals some of their common affordances. In particular, she finds that OCs afford: information and emotional support; the formation of social capital; the reinvigoration of geographically-based communities; and foster the construction of social identity and belonging. Across

disciplines, studies on OCs are confirming different variations of these affordances. For example, in his investigation of an online illness community, Foster (2016) demonstrates how OCs redistribute medical knowledge and skill-sharing for patient empowerment. Applying another lens, Stokes (2017) explores how Black American adolescent girls use OCs to represent themselves and their sexuality. Still different yet, Martončik & Lokša (2016) investigate how *World of Warcraft* OCs contribute to social belonging.

In this way, OCs are also sites of performance, where through members' social practices, they may become a form of public sphere (Mahony, Newman & Barnett, 2010). Not unlike the Paris salons and London coffee houses, OCs act as discursive spaces where 'the private come together as a public' (Habermas, 1989, p. 27). In so doing, OCs exist as forums, which have the potential to promote civic engagement, encourage communicative processes, and contribute to the formation of public opinion (Susen, 2011). Dahlgren (2005, p. 148) elaborates and maintains that 'a functioning public sphere is understood as a constellation of communicative spaces in society that permit the circulation of information, ideas, debates…and also the formation of public will'. Several theorists suggest that through their potential to afford interactivity, digital media are shifting communication from *one-to-many* to *many-to-many* (Benkler, 2006; Jenkins, 2006; Schradie, 2011). In other words, through shaping the 'structures, representations, and modes of interaction' related to communication (Dahlgren, 2005, p. 150), digital media have the potential to contribute to the formation of new forms of public spheres.

However, whilst digital media are contributing to the formation of new forms of public spheres, there are still barriers and inequalities around them. For example, Verstraeten (1996, p. 351) argues that marginalised groups who have historically had less

opportunity to express their own interests, 'are very likely to be absorbed by a so-called overall "public interest" that is not really "their" public interest'. These practices of inclusion/exclusion are often most apparent in debates related to digital divides and inequalities around digital adoption, access, and usage patterns and skills. For example, in their investigation of refugee groups' opportunities to access and use digital media, Alam and Imran (2015) find barriers related to migrants' income, mobility, and availability. Similarly, in her investigation of content production in the United States, Schradie (2011) finds that income, race, ethnicity, gender, and education all influence an individual's ability and willingness to produce content. Similar findings exist across the literature from pupils in South Africa (Brown & Czerniewicz, 2010) to seniors in Switzerland (Friemel, 2016) to language contributions to Google Maps (Graham, 2013). In short, whilst the Internet and digital media have the potential to afford new forms of public spheres, participation within these spheres – and the outcomes of this participation – continues to exist across inherently uneven geographies.

6.2.3 Participation in Online Communities

All online communities share a common condition: their survival depends on the participation of their community members. However, in her literature review on participation and OCs, Malinen (2015, p. 232) finds that most studies frame participation as 'an active-passive dichotomy based on the visibility of activity'. In other words, an individual's participation is 'active' if they are contributing to their community via

actions like posting. In contrast, an individual's participation is 'passive' if they are lurking or staying silent (Sun, Rau, & Ma, 2014). Indeed lurking appears to be the norm. For example, in his investigation of digital health communities, van Mierlo (2014, p. 2) describes the *1 per cent rule* or *90-9-1 principle*. Analysing content from 63, 990 users across four social networks, van Mierlo (2014, p. 2) finds that '90 per cent [of online community members] observe and do not participate, 9 per cent contribute sparingly, and 1 per cent create the vast majority of new content'. In short, within most of the literature on participation and OCs, there is a clear division between contributors and lurkers and a similar division between active and passive participation.

Yet some scholars are advocating a reconsideration of these divisions. In so doing, they are shaping the move towards more flexible understandings of participation. For example, in her study of an adult learning community, Gray (2004) illustrates that the distinction between contributor and lurker is not always so well-defined. Rather, members can be both active and passive, moving back and forth between the centre of a community and its periphery. Likewise, in their research on the behaviour of lurkers, Preece, Nonnecke, & Andrews (2004, p. 221) suggest that lurkers are more than simple 'selfish freeriders'. Indeed, they identify several reasons why community members participate passively. For example, lurkers may be learning community norms and rules of engagement and/or may have the desire to be helpful by not crowding or complicating community interfaces (Preece et al., 2004).

This scholarship is also challenging which activities actually constitute participation. For instance, in their case study of an online gift exchange site, Suhonen, Lampinen, Cheshire, & Antin (2010) show that participation may extend beyond the

action of posting to include activities such as browsing and editing one's public profile. Several researchers also argue that lurking, in and of itself, is a form of participation (Han, Hou, Kim, & Gustafson, 2014; Lai & Chen, 2014; Malinen, 2015; Sun et al., 2014). In particular, lurking plays an important role in OCs as it enables newcomers to become familiar with community culture (Lai & Chen, 2014). In addition, through activities such as browsing, lurking may also generate community traffic and indirect participation. For example, it may contribute to the development of community metrics such as 'number of recent visitors or current page views, or rating and voting tools' (Malinen, 2015, p. 232).

In other words, lurking is a means of developing a community's 'mass'. Indeed, lurkers may be part of an active audience, within which participants are engaged in various processes such as perceiving, interpreting, and/or evaluating. Thus, the act of lurking is different to the act of 'non-using', the latter being someone who signs up for an account but does not use it. In contrast, lurking is a type of participation, whereby community members are present and exist in the form of audience. Thus, with these investigations taken into consideration, this article approaches participation as the expression of agency achieved through taking deliberate action (Dahlgren, 2009), which may be perceived as more passive (e.g. lurking) and/or more active (e.g. contributing).

6.3 Research methods

6.3.1 Field site selection and description

This research is part of a large and engaging body of scholarship, which is advancing and further legitimising virtual ethnography and/or the potential to use digital media as field sites (Caliandro, 2017; Driscoll & Gregg, 2010; Eli, Dolan, Schneider & Ulijaszek, 2016). Caliandro (2017, p. 3) elaborates, 'it is not only particularly interesting but also concretely viable to study the everyday practices of social actors and the cultural forms emerging from them, in and throughout the Internet'. Thus, to explore volunteering and OCs, this article investigated Greenpeace *Greenwire*. As an organisation, Greenpeace is a strong case for several reasons. Specifically, Greenpeace is a global leader in activism and an innovator in its creative use of media. Likewise, according to Katz-Kimchi & Manosevitch (2015, p. 250) Greenpeace is 'the most prominent and media savvy environmental group' and a 'trail blazer in its innovative usage of digital media'. Furthermore, as a pioneer of the modern environmental movement, Greenpeace has 'garnered a significant visibility around the world' (Carvalho, 2010, p. 175). Indeed, it is Greenpeace's 'spectacular style of direct action' that has shaped its 'high profile and international renown' (Zelko, 2004, p. 128).

Furthermore, with the proliferation of digital media, several NGOs are considering the use of digital affordances and OCs for volunteer management. Of these emerging communities, one of the largest and most active is Greenpeace's *Greenwire*. According to Greenpeace (2016), *Greenwir*e is:

> An online community that offers support to anyone who wants to make an active contribution to the goals Greenpeace seeks in its campaigns. It is an online platform for people who want to join activities of Greenpeace, or for people with similar goals who want to organise their own activities.

Thus, in line with Kozinets' (2002, p. 63) evaluation criteria for selecting sites for virtual ethnographies, I used *Greenwire* because, relative to similar platforms, it has: 1) a more focused and research question-relevant group; 2) higher 'traffic' of postings; 3) larger numbers of discrete message posters; 4) more detailed or descriptively rich data; and 5) more between-member interactions.

Following my selection of *Greenwire* as my field site and my joining the community, I was directed to create a public profile, join *Greenwire* sub-communities such as local groups, skill shares, interests groups etc., and browse informational resources. The community also featured an online chat room with instant messaging, navigational channels for creating and sharing volunteer-generated content, and information on current campaigns. To guide newcomers there was also a help page with tips for getting started, FAQs, and contact information. Plate 9 provides a visual snapshot of the *Greenwire* dashboard.

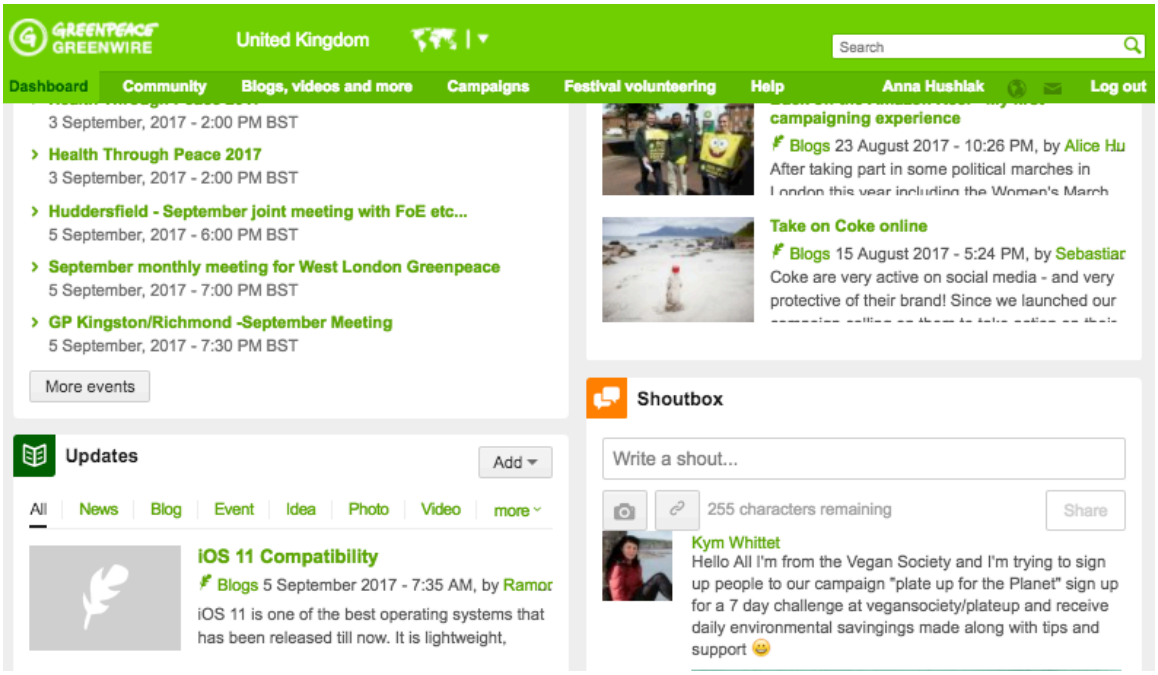


Plate 9. Overview of Greenwire dashboard

At the time of this research, Greenpeace was in the process of releasing *Greenwire* and it was only then available to 21 offices. Based on my location, I focused on local volunteer groups in the United Kingdom. To narrow this sample, I identified London as a field site given its size, influence, and diversity. Within London, I then selected groups based on their length of time on *Greenwire* ($n < 2$ years). The six local groups chosen for this sample were: Camden; Greenwich and Lewisham; Kensington; Shoreditch; Southwark; and South West London.

6.3.2 Data collection and analysis

According to Malinen's (2015) literature review, only 16 per cent of 83 articles exploring OCs used qualitative methods. Thus, to address this gap and to better understand users' experiences of digitally-mediated social spaces, this research adopted a virtual ethnographic methodology rooted in mixed methods (Baym, 2010; Hine, 2000; Kozinets, 2015). Exploring OCs and ethnography, Driscoll and Gregg (2010, p. 16) explain:

> Each online scene or space, whether declared to be a community of not is organised both by its specific form…and by an order of appropriate identity practices associated with that form. Across these different cultures, modes of belonging mediate these practices. The browser, the stranger, the guest, the fringe dweller, the member, the manager and the star are all recognisable across many online communities and formats.

Central to this research is the argument that 'the distinction between online and offline worlds is…becoming less useful as activities in these realms become increasingly merged in our society, and as the two spaces interact with and transform each other' (Garcia, Standlee, Bechkoff, & Cui, 2012, p. 52). From a methodological point of view, Foster (2016, p. 27) explains that online social spaces are 'simultaneously static archives of social action meriting systematic archival-style research and living, active social spaces with their own rituals, organisational schemes, and modes of interaction'. As such, virtual ethnographies rely on mixed-method approaches to capture historic traces of social action as well as *in situ* observations to better understand community dynamics.

Thus, data collection was exploratory and relied on participant observation, content analysis of digital archives, and semi-structured interviews. As an observer, I

spent 6 months (July 2016 to December 2016) conducting formal observations of the six local London groups on *Greenwire*. In tandem, I completed an analysis of archival content generated by community members over a two-year period (July 2014 to July 2016). Data collected from volunteer-generated content totalled 482 entries, which I extracted from *Greenwire*'s core navigation channels. Data entries included: *shouts* or instant messages (n = 395); blogs (n = 51); visual media in the form of photos and videos (n = 20); documents (n = 12); ideas (n = 2); and news (n = 2).

Additionally, given that I sought to understand the relationship between online and offline participation, I also conducted 11 semi-structured interviews with Greenpeace staff (n = 7) and local group volunteer coordinators (n = 4). Using purposive sampling, I identified and selected interviewees from Greenpeace who were in senior roles and who specialised in engaging, mobilising, and/or managing volunteers. I then identified the principal volunteer local group coordinators of the six London groups. From this sample, I interviewed 4 volunteers; the remaining 2 coordinators declined to interview. Interviews ranged from 45 to 90 minutes and took place via: Skype (n = 9); in person (n = 1); and email (n = 1) and were recorded and transcribed. To encourage fluidity, interviews followed a semi-structured format and continued until they reached a point of saturation (Creswell, 2014; Kvale, 2007).

Simultaneous to data collection, I used NVivo qualitative data software to analyse observational field notes, archival content from *Greenwire*, and interview transcripts. Analysis was inductive, with coding taking place in three phases: initial, focused, and theoretical. This allowed for critical analysis of emerging categories and flexibility in decision-making (Charmaz, 2006). During the different coding phases, themes were

focused and re-focused, allowing me to zoom in and out and to move across different clusters of data.

6.3.3 Ethical considerations

This research was granted ethical approval by the Central University Research Ethics Committee (CUREC) at the University of Oxford. In addition, I also followed the ethical guidelines proposed by the Association of Internet Researchers (Markham & Buchanan, 2012). Specifically, I contacted Greenpeace with an overview of my research and was granted approval from a senior staff member overseeing *Greenwire*. Next, I contacted and obtained informed consent from local group coordinators who acted on behalf of their communities as representatives. I also reviewed *Greenwire*'s user agreement to make sure that I did not violate any of its articles and to ensure that I upheld and respected its code of conduct. Last I used my public profile to disclose my background. When in exchange with community members, I also provided contact details should they have questions and/or concerns.

6.4 Findings

6.4.1 Archival content analysis of Greenwire

6.4.1.2 General overview of volunteer contributions

Content analysis provided an overview of the contributions of volunteers the six London groups. In total, there were 642 *Greenwire* members with an average of 128 members per group. Table 6 provides an overview of group numbers.

Sampled London *Greenwire* group	**Number of members**
Camden	*n* = 130
Greenwich and Lewisham	*n* = 58
Kensington	*n* = 76
Shoreditch	*n* = 179
Southwark	*n* = 97
South West London	*n* = 102
Total	***n* = 642**

Table 6. Overview of member numbers by sampled London *Greenwire* group

Of the total 642 members, *Greenwire* listed 76 per cent as 'active'. According to Greenpeace (2016), active members are 'people who volunteer about once a month (or more) to carry out specific tasks in order to help meet Greenpeace's objectives'. Since the launch of *Greenwire* in July 2014 through to July 2016, members have joined at an average rate of 25 per month.

Content analysis also revealed general participation trends around community members and content generation. Across the six London groups, only a small number of members (18.7%) generated content, leaving a large majority (81.3%) lurking. The number of contributors was reduced even further when investigating frequency of content generation. Examining the greatest form of content generation (i.e. *shouts*), findings

showed that the top 15 most frequent contributors generated 64.8 per cent of total content. Furthermore, 80.0 per cent of these contributors appeared to have formal roles with Greenpeace such as volunteer coordinators, *Greenwire* community coaches, and/or Greenpeace staff. In short, findings suggested that a small group of core community members was responsible for the bulk of content generation across the six local groups.

6.4.1.2 *Shoutbox* and *shouts*

The online chat room (*shoutbox*) and chats (*shouts*) were by far the most frequent content generated on *Greenwire* (81.9%). The first major function of *shouts* (49.1%) was for members to socialise with other members. A Shoreditch member encouraged, 'Join up and spread the word! Let's build some HYPE'. Whilst the majority of *shouts* centred on Greenpeace activities, some related to broader environmental issues such as climate change. For example, a Southwark member asked 'Anyone want to kick some climate derriere with me in Paris..? Cheap Eurostar tickets and free accommodation. Saving the world and croissants involved'. Members also used *shouts* to interact and check in with one another. A Camden member replied, 'Hi [name] I am good thanks, how are you? Yes definitely it would be great to catch up'.[37] In this way, *Shoutbox* appeared to play a similar role to social media feeds and/or walls. In particular, *shouts* encouraged community members to engage in multi-modal conversations with one another and to

[37] Camden Group Member (September 2015)

stay informed of upcoming events and activities.

The second most common function of *shouts* (47.0%) was to organise and mobilise members. Specifically, many *shouts* (17.7%) focused on assigning roles, setting up schedules, and signing up volunteers. There also appeared to be a difference between *shouts* about volunteering and *shouts* about campaigning. Volunteering was more focused on organising, involved less direct action, and included more administrative and logistical work such as cleaning and/or preparing signage, painting banners, and making postcards. A Shoreditch member posted 'Hi guys! Still looking for some help to clean some tents this Monday at GP HQ [Greenpeace headquarters]. Anyone available for a few hours?' On the other hand, *shouts* on campaigning were focused on mobilisation, and included calls to action such as marching, protesting, and/or signing online petitions. For example, a South West London member urged, 'Latest online petition to tell David Cameron to ban plastic microbeads...join the thousands who have signed already'.

The third function of *shouts* was for community members to give and receive support (24.6%). In particular, *shouts* were tools for members to share individual content such as media, resources, and/or updates on personal projects. Equally, *shouts* were mechanisms for members to offer positive feedback. A Southwark member encouraged, 'Welcome [new member]! *Greenwire* is your oyster! Explore and have fun! Can't wait to read your blogs ;-)'. Some members also used *shouts* as tools for reflection. Describing a recent experience campaigning, a South West London member recounted:

> Lobbied Chuka Umunna today outside the HoP [Houses of Parliament]. He was no help at all, e.g. in reply to "Why didn't you oppose fracking?" he said "don't worry, there is going to be NO fracking in Streatham". Leaving fossil fuel in the ground? Simply not possible.

In this way, *Shoutbox* was an interactive space for members to share content whilst also receiving support from the broader community.

6.4.1.3 Blogs

Accounting for 10.5 per cent of total material, blogs were the second most generated content after *shouts*. The most common function of blog posts (49.0%) was to share individuals' highlights of campaigning. For example, a Camden member discussed their experience volunteering for Greenpeace's *Detox* campaign:

> The afternoon was spent talking to shoppers and raising awareness of the unethical use of [perfluorinated chemicals], a toxic chemical used to waterproof North Face coats…There was a genuine feeling that they [customers] had been betrayed by The North Face and many were shocked that such a trusting and family orientated brand would sustain this unethical method of production.

Like *shouts*, blogs were tools for encouraging discussion. Yet unlike *shouts*, blogs were more elaborate. They provided community members with the freedom to immerse themselves in a deeper level of deliberation and to assess their campaign journeys.

A second function of blogs (23.5%) was for community members to discuss politics and current affairs. In particular, *Greenwire* was as a space for members to share their opinions on political events. For example, discussing the *Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership* (TTIP), a Kensington member challenged:

> Given this [economic] uncertainty and reservation from parts of the public on what TTIP may hold, don't we deserve an honest and open discussion – and not just secrecy that has become the status quo in negotiations?

Community members also used blogs to encourage discussion and debate on contentious politics. As a result, *Greenwire* was an interactive knowledge commons, shaped by the political opinions and debates of members.

A substantial number of community members (19.6%) also used blogs to reflect on their own individual beliefs. These posts were similar to what one might write in a journal, where authors mused on their role within larger social and/or institutional structures. Many of these posts included a degree of contemplation where community members reflected on and attempted to define their values. A Camden member shared:

> We are at the inevitable crossroad and have been for awhile now, we are running out of junctions…to make the changes required to save the planet and everything attached to it. There is no longer time for this fear of change and the commitment required to achieve it, the time to act is now and we need to embrace it!

Through writing and sharing their stories, community members explored their individual selves in a collective environment. In so doing, they reflected on their beliefs and values as well as on the underlying motivations influencing their roles as volunteers.

The final function of blogs was for community administration (7.8%). Administrative blog posts included attachments of meeting minutes and/or notes on monthly meetings.

6.4.1.4 Visual media and documents, ideas, and news

Comprising 4.2 per cent of total materials, visual media were the third most popular content generated by community members. The primary function of visual media was to showcase members' experiences volunteering and/or campaigning. Plates 10-12 are examples of media content posted in *Greenwire* local groups.



Plate 10. Volunteer street stall, image belongs to Kensington local group



Plate 11. Volunteers making banners, image belongs to Camden local group



Plate 12. Campaigning to #*SaveOurSeas*, image belongs to Southwark local group

6.4.1.5 Remaining channels: Documents, ideas, and news

The remaining navigation channels had very little content. Only 2.5 per cent of total material was in the form of 'documents' and included either campaign briefs or meeting minutes. Next, the 'ideas' channel of *Greenwire* had only two posts, also leaving it underutilised. These posts covered suggestions and potential activities for upcoming monthly meetings. Last the 'news' channel of *Greenwire* was also underused with only two posts, which summarised highlights from the 2015 People's Climate March.

6.4.2 Interviews with Greenpeace staff and volunteers

6.4.2.1 Affordances of Greenwire on volunteer participation

Interviewees confirmed that *Greenwire* is influencing the relationship between online and offline in volunteering. Specifically, Greenpeace staff suggested that *Greenwire* affords enhanced connectivity between community members and increases flexibility around volunteering. An Offline Mobilisation Developer described:

> To be a volunteer you need a lot of commitment and a lot of time and time on the weekends. People don't always have that, especially with families. So we are trying to break this structure up and make volunteering more flexible.

A few staff members were also of the opinion that *Greenwire* provides affordances not only to volunteers but also to the organisation. They suggested that data generated from OCs provides greater insight into volunteers' behaviours and preferences. In turn, this enables Greenpeace to customise and to tailor content according to different segments of volunteers. Additionally, the architecture behind *Greenwire* enables Greenpeace to more accurately track participation. A Head of Mobilisation and Digital Networking discussed algorithms as tools to:

> Measure and track how many people had posted and organised a meeting in their community, how many people had showed up at a rally, [and] how many people had posted online and engaged in support for other volunteers.

Along similar lines, two interviewees were of the opinion that *Greenwire* also helps to manage volunteers. For example, through email lists and/or built-in messaging features, *Greenwire* affords campaigners with a network-centric communication system. In turn, this allows Greenpeace to be more efficient when mass-distributing organisational content.

Volunteers also discussed the affordances of *Greenwire* with regard to participation and volunteering. All volunteers agreed that *Greenwire* contributes to organising and mobilising. They attributed this to features such as email lists, joint scheduling, and the ability to create and share information and resources in real-time. In addition, several volunteers also emphasised that *Greenwire* allows for the element of surprise when organising. In other words, community members are able to share information and to plan direct actions in private and amongst fellow activists. A Local Group Coordinator and Volunteer explained, 'Greenpeace does quite a lot of activity that

they don't want the public to see so some of *Greenwire* is closed so you can only get updates if you are a member of a group or you have been admitted'.

In turn, the closed nature of *Greenwire* calls for 'strong house rules', which help to establish trust between community members.[38] Most volunteers associated these affordances with greater privacy and security, especially when discussing non-violent direct action (NVDA). Some also suggested that 'gate keeping' minimises the risk of online abuse and 'trolling'. In this way, volunteers were of the opinion that the privacy and security provided by *Greenwire*, combined with its communication features, affords them greater ease in organising and mobilising members.

Yet despite these benefits, interviewees also suggested that *Greenwire* has many limitations. One volunteer acknowledged, 'I must admit that we don't use *Greenwire* so much'.[39] All volunteers attributed this preference to the limited usability and functionality of *Greenwire*. For example, several volunteers described *Greenwire*'s navigation as 'complicated', 'confusing', and 'overwhelming'. Despite more recent improvements to user experience, volunteers were of the opinion that *Greenwire* is still counterintuitive and burdensome:

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[38] Local Group Coordinator and Volunteer (22 August 2016)

[39] Local Group Coordinator and Volunteer (17 August 2016)

> On Facebook if someone sends me a message, it pings up on my phone and I read it and I reply directly. To do the same thing on *Greenwire* involves receiving an email on my phone, opening the email, clicking on the link in the email, which then takes me to the browser, which I then have to log into, and then go to the messaging tab and *then* I can reply. So Facebook, swipe and reply. *Greenwire*? Swipe, click, click, click, click, click, click, click, reply.[40]

All volunteers shared the view that the user experience of *Greenwire* could be improved by making it more straightforward and easier to navigate. For these reason, volunteers preferred to use platforms other than *Greenwire*.

A further limitation highlighted by volunteers is that *Greenwire* does not yet have the ability to link with other platforms. This was seen as significant as it makes *Greenwire* a standalone solution. In turn, this reinforces its lack of external integration with other sites and contributes to perceptions of a limited user experience. One volunteer explained, 'I've already said I'm going to an event on Facebook. Why do I need to say it somewhere else as well?'.[41] It was clear that most community members are already reliant on other media sources such as Facebook or What'sApp. For example, a volunteer explained, 'we tend to use Facebook as it's just currently more interactive'.[42] Several interviewees suggested that this is due to established user habits, whilst others related it to a lack of content and interactivity on *Greenwire*. For instance, one volunteer

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[40] Local Group Coordinator and Volunteer (22 August 2016)

[41] Local Group Coordinator and Volunteer (22 August 2016)

[42] Local Group Coordinator and Volunteer (17 August 2016)

acknowledged, '*Greenwire*'s not a hotbed of discussion and activism'[43] and another compared *Greenwire*'s online community to a 'holding page'.[44]

Greenpeace staff also discussed the limitations of *Greenwire*. A central criticism was that its uptake and success depends on the willingness of individual country offices. For example, offices that rely on their volunteers for administration and/or fundraising appear to be less willing to grant them greater autonomy and vice versa. Because of this, a few staff members suggested that some offices are not maximising what *Greenwire* was intended for. A Senior Coordinator explained:

> Mexico, Brazil, and Argentina are all doing really well…they are big countries and are used to using online platforms to coordinate and communicate. In the Netherlands, where *Greenwire* started, it is working but it's not working as well as you would expect. It's a small country and people want to meet offline rather than relying on an online tool to talk to their neighbours.

Differences between offices meant that Greenpeace has to customise *Greenwire* on a country-to-country basis. Most staff members were of the opinion that this makes the logistics of *Greenwire* complex and introduces technological barriers. In other words, 'you cannot translate [*Greenwire*] one hundred per cent across cultures so you cannot really build a personalised page because it needs to be adapted from New Zealand to Thailand to Mexico'.[45]

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[43] Local Group Coordinator and Volunteer (19 August 2016)

[44] Local Group Coordinator and Volunteer (23 August 2016)

[45] Volunteer Lab Offline Mobilisation Developer (4 April 2016)

A final limitation raised by Greenpeace staff relates to perceptions of the importance of online participation. All staff members saw online participation as a starting point from which to encourage deeper forms of participation and future commitment. A Senior Campaigner explained, 'there is a stark dichotomy in people's minds between online and offline...one of the drums we have been beating for awhile is to end that dichotomy'. Similarly, a Senior Coordinator challenged, 'tools like *Greenwire* are really showing [Greenpeace] that we need to bridge the on- and offline'. Yet most volunteers did not consider online participation to be on par with offline participation. For example, a volunteer described, 'I don't think there is much point to online activism only because the problems of the world aren't caused online'.[46] In this way, there is tension between Greenpeace staff and volunteers with regards to the importance of online versus offline participation.

6.4.2.2 Volunteering: In practice

A second discussion topic revealed by interviews relates to the roles of volunteers and their willingness to participate. Given that volunteers interviewed for this research are also local group coordinators, they have more responsibilities than ordinary volunteers. These include: organising group members; facilitating and chairing meetings; delegating tasks and managing activities; and overseeing communications. Some

[46] Local Group Coordinator and Volunteer (22 August 2016)

coordinators also volunteer as community coaches. Unlike the role of coordinators, which are self-selecting, Greenpeace recruits community coaches. Coaches are responsible for welcoming, directing, and supporting online community members. Therefore, the majority of coordinators and coaches consider themselves to be 'bridges' between Greenpeace and their local groups. This was the case both on- and offline. All volunteers stressed that the aim of local groups is not fundraising. Instead, they promote the work of Greenpeace through campaigning and activism. Indeed, local groups saw themselves as 'foot soldiers', providing momentum and volume to the missions of Greenpeace.[47]

A major factor influencing volunteers' willingness to participate is the desire to build value-driven communities. Upon returning from years abroad, a volunteer explained, 'I didn't know a lot of people...it was actually quite welcoming to find a like-minded community from my local area'.[48] Likewise, another described wanting to build a community of 'like-minded people' after moving to London.[49] The emphasis on 'like-mindedness' appears to relate to establishing shared values. In particular, volunteers seek to promote environmental change and to encourage sustainability. One explained, 'my schooling was in environmental law and I have always wanted to get into the field'. Another affirmed, 'I have been interested and passionate about the environment for quite a few years'. The emphasis on building value-driven communities was also identified by

[47] Local Group Coordinator and Volunteer (23 August 2016)

[48] Local Group Coordinator and Volunteer (22 August 2016)

[49] Local Group Coordinator and Volunteer (23 August 2016)

Greenpeace staff. Specifically, they highlighted the importance of 'aligning values' and knowing what 'makes people tick'.[50]

Discussions on participation also led to discussions on how to manage it. Interviewees confirmed that offline groups face a similar issue to online groups when it comes to sustaining participation. In particular, low member retention and chronic no-shows are a constant challenge. Some volunteers suggested that this is a London-centric issue, given the transient nature of the city and its high degree of turnover. A further explanation proposed by two volunteers was that people 'grow up' and their priorities change.[51] In other instances, there are clashes in expectations and group dynamics. A volunteer elaborated, 'Sometimes things click, sometimes they don't. More often than not, they don't'. Another mused, 'it's not easy to know why [members] don't come back, maybe it's just not for them'.

6.4.2.3 Volunteer autonomy

The final topic to emerge from the interviews was volunteer autonomy. Within the context of the interviews, autonomy was seen as the extent to which volunteers are involved in decision-making and self-government. Discussions on autonomy highlighted contrasting views between staff and volunteers. For example, a large majority of staff saw *Greenwire* affording the infrastructure for volunteers to be 'free agents' and local groups

[50] Head of Digital Networking and Mobilisation (24 July 2014)

[51] Local Group Coordinator and Volunteer (22 August 2016)

to be 'autonomous cells'. They further saw *Greenwire* as a tool to enable staff and volunteers to co-create campaigns, encouraging volunteers to 'take actions on issues in their own way'.[52] This parallels what most staff described as a general organisational shift and culture change. For example, a Head of Campaigns explained:

> With this idea of co-creation and [supporters] taking ownership of the campaign, we have a much more bottom-up approach, whereas before Greenpeace used to be very much a top-down and centralised system. Greenpeace International would say 'do this' and the offices did it.

Throughout the interviews, the majority of staff stressed the need for decentralisation and co-creation. From the perspective of Greenpeace staff, this related to an organisational focus on empowering volunteers and granting them greater autonomy. To contribute to this shift, *Greenwire* was seen as a tool to capacitate volunteers to be 'part of the processes, the planning, and the organising'.[53]

Yet according to volunteers, despite organisational restructuring and the development of *Greenwire*, there does not yet appear to be any obvious change to their autonomy. Indeed, several volunteers described their interactions with Greenpeace as 'prescriptive', 'very very coordinated from above', and 'do what you're told'. There also does not seem to be much in the way of co-creation. Instead, local groups receive a 'monthly campaign update' composed of background briefings, materials, and a list of actions. Indeed, one volunteer explained that campaigns and information are 'pushed

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[52] Senior Campaigner (17 November 2015)

[53] Offline Mobilisation Developer (4 April 2016)

their way'.[54] Most volunteers also agreed that campaigns tend to be global, with little focus on local issues. This further contributes to what many volunteers understood as a top-down approach. In sum, despite the launch of *Greenwire*, there was a general consensus amongst volunteers that to date, they have not been afforded more autonomy.

Indeed, the majority of staff explained that increasing autonomy requires a huge amount of resources from often-limited budgets. Most staff also saw fear within the organisation as an additional challenge. Fear related to '[missions] failing'[55] but also to a fear of 'losing the brand'[56] and '[Greenpeace] losing its soul', for example fear that a supporter may engage in violent, as opposed to non-violent, direct action.[57] Thus, some staff held the view that despite the affordances of *Greenwire*, organisational culture continues to be too conservative, 'Byzantine', and in need of a 'behaviour change'.[58] In sum, whilst individual staff members championed using *Greenwire* as a mechanism to increase volunteer autonomy, to do so in practice remains a major organisational challenge.

At the same time, the majority of volunteers revealed they did not actually want more autonomy. One elaborated, 'we're busy enough as it is and there's already so much responsibility in coordinating'.[59] Another stated, 'I don't want that flexibility…I like

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[54] Local Group Coordinator and Volunteer (19 August 2016)

[55] Senior Engagement Advisor (23 October 2014)

[56] Senior Campaigner (17 November 2015)

[57] Offline Mobilisation Developer (4 April 2016)

[58] Senior Campaigner (17 November 2015)

[59] Local Group Coordinator and Volunteer (19 August 2016)

being told what to do'.[60] Most volunteers suggested that they do not have the time, skills, or desire to take on any more responsibility. Indeed, one coordinator had already stepped down from their role as they felt it was too demanding. Thus, whilst at the individual level, Greenpeace staff emphasised volunteer autonomy, interviews with volunteers suggested they wanted otherwise.

6.5 Discussion and conclusion

This research draws on Greenpeace's *Greenwire* to explore volunteer contributions in OCs and their relationship to volunteer participation. Examples of affordances identified by this research include the ability of *Greenwire* to enhance volunteer connectivity and to afford volunteers with more flexibility in how they participate. For instance, features such as email lists and joint scheduling make organising and mobilising more efficient. These features are significant as they have the potential to reduce the need for co-presence between volunteers and Greenpeace Staff. In so doing, affordances such as the above examples, have the potential to allow for greater temporal and physical manoeuvrability both to volunteers and organisations, undoubtedly a major advantage when planning and executing NVDA across multiple scales.

Given Greenpeace's focus on NVDA (Carvalho, 2010; Zelko, 2004), this research also demonstrates how *Greenwire* affords an environment within which upcoming

[60] Local Group Coordinator and Volunteer (22 August 2016)

actions may be kept private. For example, through gatekeeping and strong 'house rules', coordinators are able to reinforce community norms, minimise the risk of 'trolling', and maintain a sense of safety amongst community members. In so doing, OCs may afford volunteers and staff with opportunities to coordinate, organise, and mobilise without the external scrutiny of potential adversaries.

However, one of the most significant affordances of *Greenwire* is its potential for interactivity amongst its community members. For example, this article demonstrates how *shouts* and blogs may encourage volunteers to engage and to support one another, creating a sense of like-mindedness, solidarity, and shared values. It also shows how the dynamism and sociality potentially afforded by *Greenwire* means participation may be reframed as more fluid, moving between on- and offline communities. This finding is significant, as it illustrates the continuity between on- and offline participation and thus helps to further deconstruct the perception of a dichotomy between the two. In this way, despite Greenpeace and Greenpeace volunteers having a strong offline heritage, this article highlights how, from the perspective of participation, the current division between on- and offline is less clear. Indeed, this study finds that a large majority of community members lurk on *Greenwire* and underutilise certain channels. These findings differ from earlier studies, which focus solely on online participation (Rau, Gao, & Ding, 2008; Sun et al., 2014; van Mierlo, 2014). Specifically, they reinforce the importance of reframing participation as fluid and contextual, unbound by a simple binary of on- versus offline spaces.

However, despite the above affordances, this research also demonstrates that *Greenwire* has not yet met its full participatory potential as envisaged by Greenpeace.

Perhaps then, the more important questions are: will it ever and to what extent is this actually desirable? For example, in her investigation of campaigning publics, Eden (2017, p. 132) maintains that, 'by their very nature, NVDA protest actions tend to be carried out by a small core group of activists, even smaller than the core of established non-governmental organisations'. She further argues that the presence of smaller but more committed publics relates to the establishment of 'core cliques' (Eden, 2017, p. 132), many of which are built through years of common experiences, shared values, and evolving community practices.

A similar finding exists on *Greenwire* where, even with the encouragement of community coaches, the general level of 'active' (as defined by Greenpeace) volunteer participation across the community is low. This provides further evidence of van Mierlo's (2014) *90-9-1 Principle*, and extends this literature by demonstrating that the prominence of lurking also exists in environmental volunteering and activist communities. In the case of *Greenwire*, the sustainability of the entire community depends on a 'core clique' (Eden, 2017, p. 132) of volunteers and/or staff. This raises an important point regarding the extent to which NGOs should attempt to imitate the architecture of pre-existing social media platforms such as Facebook versus whether they should design alternatives rooted in their own individual organisational visions, missions, and values. Indeed, by mimicking platforms generated by large, for-profit, technology companies, NGOs are both competing, and in some ways reinforcing, systems built on neoliberal market principles, targeted advertising, selling personal data, and economic surveillance (Eli et al., 2016; Fuchs, 2014; Gerlitz & Helmond, 2013). Perhaps then, it is less about imitating

existing corporate architectures and more about innovating or imagining alternative systems all together.

In addition, this research also demonstrates that there is a continuity between different forms of participation and that this continuity is not always linear. For example, it not only shows how volunteers transition to more active forms of participation, such as the adoption of the role of coordinator and/or community coach, but also finds that the opposite holds true, for example becoming 'inactive' on *Greenwire*. This too diverges from the findings of previous literature, where there is an emphasis on active rather than passive forms of participation (Halupka, 2014; Han et al., 2014; Morozov, 2013). Specifically, this article demonstrates how more active participants may intentionally choose to take on more passive roles, for example stepping down from the position of coordinator. These findings are significant, as they encourage a reconsideration of not only the dichotomy applied to how we divide on-/offline participation but also in the perceived division, and often favouring, of active/passive forms of participation.

The emphasis and favouritism of forms of participation relates to one of the most paramount points of discussion arising from this research: the inconsistencies in perceptions of volunteer autonomy. Specifically, this article reveals how on one side, Greenpeace staff emphasise wanting to grant volunteers more opportunities for more 'active' participation such as decision-making and self-governance, for example through the infrastructure provided by *Greenwire*. In contrast, this research also shows how, in the experiences of volunteers, their participation is prescribed. Specifically, volunteers perceive decision-making and governance as highly centralised and run from the top-down. These findings are significant, as they serve as a point of contrast to the majority

of literature on digitally-mediated participation (Bennett & Segerberg, 2013; Castells, 2012; Earl & Kimport, 2011).

Specifically, this research demonstrates how, *in theory,* and from the perspectives of organisers, digital media have the potential to decentralise participation. Yet, *in practice*, and from the perspectives of those on the ground, this does not appear to be the case. This highlights a major tension between what digital media affordances have the *potential* to do versus what they *actually* do. Furthermore, this article shows that volunteers do not always want greater autonomy, or even more 'active' forms of participation as defined by the organisation. Indeed, the opposite holds true. That is to say, for many volunteers there is often a reluctance and lack of desire to take on more responsibility. Therefore, this research challenges much of the academic literature on digital media affordances and participation. In particular, it encourages greater consideration of underlying power dynamics within OCs. For example, the extent to which an organisation such as Greenpeace and its 'core cliques' can provide realistic portrayals of *Greenwire* members' voices or whether these are mere representations of members' voices, framed by organisational agendas and rhetoric.

Indeed, if a more critical approach to participation is adopted, findings from this research raise the question: what does reaching 'full participatory potential' actually look like? More so, is this even desirable, and if so, for whom? To discuss 'the potential for' indicates an intentional end point and sought after final outcome. It also assumes that this end point has been determined by a singular entity and pre-existing collective subject (Mahony, Newman & Barnett, 2010). In reality however, it is unlikely that this singular entity can 'speak for' (Spivak, 1988) the diversity of voices present within *Greenwire*,

and even more so, for those not on *Greenwire*. Returning to Verstaeten (1996), it remains unclear the extent to which Greenwire includes – or is even designed for – those marginalised groups who have historically had less opportunity to express their own interests. In this way, whilst interviewees from Greenpeace emphasise the importance of value alignment, it is uncertain who sets those values and to whom they are being aligned.

For example, in its current form, what constitutes active participation appears to be determined by Greenpeace rather than by volunteers. So, from the perspective of NGOs, what does a fully participative online community look like and to what extent is this in alignment with community members themselves? Which actions are included/excluded in conceptualising participation and who really decides what it means to be 'active'? A more critical approach to unpacking *Greenwire*'s 'participatory potential' makes it clear that it is near impossible to determine or dictate the frequency, intensity, and type of participation required for 'full potential' to ever be reached. Furthermore, attempts to do so are often set by a core group, which does not necessarily represent the multiplicity of voices or the 'public interest' of the community as a whole (Mahony, Newman & Barnett, 2010; Schradie, 2011; Verstraeten, 1996).

A similar line of inquiry exists when discussing desirability and who is ultimately responsible for members' participation on *Greenwire.* All too often, there is an assumption that a failure to participate rests with a community's members rather than the actors building and managing community platforms. An example is the manifestation of the pejorative use of *lurker* (Sun, Rau, & Ma, 2014; van Mierlo, 2014) and a general fixation with members 'being active' (Malinen, 2015). Given the technological

limitations of *Greenwire* identified by this research, for example usability and functionality, a more critical approach to tackling low levels of participation (if indeed, they need to be tackled at all), sees a shift in responsibility from those using the platform to those deploying it. In short, if members are to play more active roles on *Greenwire*, they need access to a space, which has the capacity to not just represent, but also encourage, a diversity of voices. In this way, such a space would provide room to express and challenge established hierarchies (e.g. 'core cliques') without jeopardising a community's sustainability. Indeed, this research argues that ultimately, the responsibility for members' participation (or lack of) lies in the hands of the organisation managing an OC, not in those of the volunteers attempting to use it.

Thinking forward, this article provides various avenues for future investigation. For example, whilst it identifies several potential affordances of *Greenwire*, it is limited in its stand-alone focus on *Greenwire*. Thus, future research may wish to compare multiple platforms so to understand the generalizability of research findings. Also related to generalizability, another limitation of this research relates to its sampling. Future studies could compare larger samples of volunteers across different locations, more varied roles, and/or organisations. Likewise, whilst exploring the technological features and/or system architecture of *Greenwire* was beyond the scope of this research, future research may wish to explore how different technological specifications and features and/or configurations of content may motivate and/or demotivate participation. This relates to the potential to draw on digital media affordances to imagine alternative platforms and logics of interactions beyond those that already pre-exist. Perhaps most

necessary, is greater research into the idea of participatory potential and its implications on how we approach, understand, and legitimise participation, if indeed we do.

Chapter 7:
Conclusion

7.0 Introduction

This chapter discusses, reflects on, and concludes this thesis. It begins by revisiting the four themes of this research (i.e. engagement, campaign strategy, membership, and online communities) and evaluates the extent to which its questions have been met. This is followed by a discussion on the contributions of this research. This chapter concludes with a critical assessment of research limitations and suggestions for future research in position to emerging literature.

7.1 Thesis aim and questions

7.1.1 Sub-question 1: Digital media and engagement

Participation is of critical importance to ENGOs. However, with the ubiquity of digital media, the notion of engagement is also emerging in their logics. This increased focus on engagement is not unique to practitioner communities. Indeed, it is developing a similar prominence within the academic literature on political participation (Boulianne, 2009). The term itself appears to be a buzzword related to digitally-mediated interactivity and

participation (Earl & Kimport, 2011; Jenkins, 2006) as well as to an increased focus on analytics (Karpf, 2016). However, despite engagement becoming commonplace in the everyday vocabularies of both practitioners and academics, its meaning – especially relative to participation – remains unclear.

To address this ambiguity, Chapter 3 demonstrates how campaigners frame engagement and the extent to which their frames are influenced by their adoption of digital media. Findings reveal that, across ENGOs, there is no single conceptualisation of engagement. However, general understandings can be grouped into three frames whereby engagement is: 1) synonymous with participation; 2) an output of campaigning influenced by reporting and metrics; and 3) an ongoing process of empowering volunteers, realised through participation. Chapter 3 shows that engagement and participation are not exclusive to one another, but instead exist along a continuum. Within this continuum, there is a tension between framing passive participation (i.e. engagement) as an output rather than as part of a broader process related to active participation.

7.1.2 Sub-question 2: Digital media and campaign strategy

ENGOs have long relied on media for communications in campaigning. Media allow campaigners to be actors and to shape the public sphere, transforming political landscapes into contested terrains. In this process, ENGOs rely on the media to gain buy-in from supporters and to leverage decision-makers. With the onset of digital media, there have been several investigations into the affordances of digital media with regard to activism

(Earl and Kimport, 2011; Bimber, Flanagin and Stohl, 2012; Bennett and Segerberg, 2013). Yet despite the growing uptake of digital media by ENGOs, few studies have investigated how digital affordances are influencing campaign strategy. Nor have many studies investigated digital affordances and campaigning from the perspectives of campaigners themselves. Thus, to address these gaps, Chapter 4 explores how digital media affordances are influencing the development of campaign strategies at ENGOs.

Specifically, Chapter 4 examines digital affordances relative to three aspects of campaign strategy: audiences, tactics, and organising structures. In so doing, it shows how digital media influence the ways in which campaigners target and segment campaign audiences and the potential of digital media to create more porous organisational boundaries. It also reveals that despite the growing prevalence of digital media, ENGOs continue to rely on both 'old' and 'new' tactics when campaigning is moving beyond discussion of 'either/or'. Chapter 4 then identifies an emerging organising structure: the distributed model or a network-centric organising structure, which draws on digital media infrastructure to decentralise professionally-driven activism and participation. Last, this chapter introduces the notion of event space and discusses its relational and performative practices.

7.1.3 Sub-question 3: Digital media and membership

Traditionally, membership has been integral to the fundraising and governance of many big international non-governmental organisations (BINGOs). In particular, BINGOs rely

on the membership model to establish organisational legitimacy and accountability (Wong, 2012). In addition, member fees and donations are critical to the financial sustainability of many BINGOs, creating a steady stream of unrestricted funds (Bosso, 2003; Jepson & Ladle, 2010; Lowe & Goyder, 1983). However, the reliance of many BINGOs on members for fundraising has led to criticisms of BINGOs as 'protest businesses' (Jordan & Maloney, 1997) and 'non-profit corporations' (Bosso, 2003) many of, which reinforce similar criticisms related to the participatory turn within the non-profit sector (Cooke & Kothari, 2001; Henkel & Stirrat, 2001; Mohan & Stokke, 2000). Furthermore, given the ambiguity surrounding the roles and responsibilities associated with membership, this continues to remain 'a deceptively complicated concept' (Baumgartner & Leech, 1998, p. 408).

Thus, to better understand how environmental BINGOs think about membership, Chapter 5 explores traditional notions of membership and the extent to which these perceptions are changing with the proliferation of digital media. Findings reveal that campaigners at environmental BINGOs prefer the term supporter over member when describing their constituencies. Interviewees also suggest that, whilst still relevant, in the contemporary and digitally-mediated landscape of campaigning, the concept of membership is changing. Chapter 5 demonstrates how this change relates to an increase in organisational porosity afforded by digital media, transformations in organisational rhetoric, as well as a potential shift in the roles of ENGOs towards service provision and support staff.

7.1.4 Sub-question 4: Online communities and volunteering

Like membership, volunteering has also played a critical role in the sustainability of ENGOs. Volunteers help staff to manage their workloads (Musick & Wilson, 2007), whilst also providing technical expertise (Pickerill, 2003), and momentum for campaigns (Raja-Yusof et al., 2016). To help support and manage volunteers, many ENGOs are developing online communities (OCs). These communities are built upon interactivity and shared purpose, guiding policies, and technologies that facilitate network-centric interactions (Preece, 2000). In turn, OCs may afford volunteers access to new skills and knowledge (Foster, 2016), establishment of self-identity and social belonging (Hercheui, 2011; Stokes, 2017), and various forms of support (Hercheui, 2011; Martončik & Lokša, 2016).

Thus, Chapter 6 aims to better understand the contributions of volunteers in OCs and the relationship between online and offline participation. To do so, Chapter 6 undertakes a virtual ethnography of Greenpeace's *Greenwire*. In particular, it examines what content is being generated, by whom, and what function content generation serves. Chapter 6 also relies on interviews with Greenpeace staff and volunteers to explore the affordances of *Greenwire* for volunteer participation. Chapter 6 shows that *Greenwire* is not yet meeting its full participatory potential as envisaged by the organisation. It also reveals how *Greenwire* continues to face several technological limitations, such as usability and integration, and finds that the majority of community members are lurkers. In addition, Chapter 6 reveals a tension between staff and volunteers with regards to the degree of autonomy afforded by digital media and demonstrates a difference between

what digital media may have the potential to do versus what they are actually doing in practice.

7.2 Overall conclusions and contributions to knowledge

How are digital media affordances influencing the conduct of campaigning in environmental non-governmental organisations?

This thesis helps to enrich current understandings within media and communication geography of the affordances of digital media in the conduct of campaigning in ENGOs. One of the first contributions of this research is its identification and formation of a clearer conceptualisation of engagement. There is no evidence of a single, agreed upon definition of engagement amongst practitioner communities. Likewise, there is similar conceptual ambiguity surrounding engagement within the academic literature (Boulianne, 2009). However, findings from my research reveal three general ways in which engagement is framed by campaigners: 1) as synonymous with participation; 2) as different to participation insofar as engagement is an output of campaigning influenced by reporting and metrics; and 3) as part of a deep process of supporter empowerment, which translates into participation. These three notions of engagement are significant, as they provide a theoretical confirmation of the need to re-examine the concept of political engagement/participation relative to evolving media landscapes.

In agreement with Bimber (2016, p. 11-12), this research confirms that 'what is needed most at present is a sharper theoretical synthesis on the part of people advancing

new theories…in order to better engage scholars who have not traditionally attended well to the changing media context'. These findings are relevant because if engagement/participation is not re-evaluated relative to the emergence of digital media, we risk dismissing potential insights and limit theory to definitional delineations that are too narrow and too rigid to account for emerging forms of participation. Similarly, if not treated as conceptually distinct, there is a risk of misconstruing the degree to which supporters – and indeed publics more broadly – are interested (i.e. engaged) versus taking part (i.e. participating). In line with Chilvers and Kearnes (2015, p. 325), this research aims to develop 'a conception of participation that is sensitive to its productions, circulations and effects and is applicable across a range of temporal, spatial and cultural contexts'.

For example, in Chapter 3, I demonstrate how a broader conceptualisation of engagement/participation allows for participation to be understood as a stage in a process, existing along a continuum with engagement. When framed as part of a process, low barrier actions, for example signing an e-petition, become important first steps in securing a supporter's commitment to a campaign. In addition, low barrier actions have the potential to widen into more active forms of support, for example, non-violent direct action. A broader conceptualisation of engagement/participation also highlights that, whilst there may be continuity between different ways of taking part, this continuity is not necessarily linear. For example, in Chapter 6, I show how volunteers not only transition to more active forms of participation (e.g. becoming community coordinators), but also how the opposite holds true (e.g. stepping down from roles, becoming 'inactive' etc.). In sum, when engagement/participation is limited to more narrow

conceptualisations, such as an output of campaigning, supporters face criticisms of clicktivism (Gladwell, 2010; Morozov, 2009) and their participation is reduced, diluted, and over-simplified (Halupka, 2014).

Throughout this research, campaigners emphasise the importance of higher barrier actions or more active forms of engagement/participation versus low barrier actions or more passive forms of engagement/participation. An example is seen in Chapter 3, where I identify what campaigners call the 'ladder of engagement'. Within the ladder of engagement, there is a clear preference for what are perceived as more 'active' actions such as stunts and marches versus more passive actions such as sharing a post on Facebook. Indeed, the idea of a 'ladder' implies something to be climbed; thus, when framed this way, the relationship between engagement and participation becomes hierarchical. In so doing, this research reveals that there is an obvious preference – both in academic literatures and practitioner communities – for one form of participation over the other (Lane & Cin, 2017; Lee & Hsieh, 2013; Morozov, 2009; Rotman et al., 2011).

Applying a more critical lens, I am of the opinion that this preoccupation with more active forms of participation is actually a step backwards in the evolution of academic thought. Rather than reframing participation as 'multiple, situated, co-produced and in the making' (Chilvers & Kearnes, 2015, p. 302), it seems to ignore earlier warnings related to the tyrannical potential of participation (Cooke & Kothari, 2001; Henkel & Stirrat, 2001; Hickey & Mohan, 2004). For example, in Chapter 5, I draw parallels between campaigners' emphasis on 'co-creation', 'empowerment', and 'user-generated content' and the organisational rhetoric used by development organisations over a decade ago (Henkel & Stirrat, 2001). In this way, 'even emancipatory discourses',

such as campaigners' participation-centric vocabularies (Chapters 3, 5, and 6), may become 'systems of power with the capacity to dominate' (Kesby, 2005, p. 2043).

Similarly, I also reveal how ENGOs aim to draw on the affordances of digital media to redefine their roles less as campaigners and more as organisers. Again, there are echoes of earlier scepticism, such as Henkel and Stirrat's (2001, p. 183) critique of NGOs and participatory rural appraisal:

> By disowning the process they initiate, development agencies thus set themselves up as only 'facilitating'. In other words, authors and practitioners… tend to avoid the necessity for taking on responsibility for the outcomes of their intervention.

Kesby (2005) suggests that whilst all actors attempt to secure their interests, 'some (e.g., intervening NGOs) are better positioned than others (e.g., ordinary village folk) to maximise "their strategic agency" and (literally) recruit others into facilitating their projects' (Kesby, 2005, p. 2046). Related examples are found in Chapter 4 (e.g. the distributed model), Chapter 5 (e.g. supportership), and Chapter 6 (e.g. *Greenwire*). Specifically, in Chapter 5, I also show how ENGOs are using digital media to provide services, for example, strategic advice or campaign materials, to supporters. In this way, this thesis reveals how digital media contribute to a blurring of the roles of ENGOs (i.e. campaigner vs. organiser) as well as to their growing involvement as service providers and support-staff. In so doing, I show how, using emancipatory and empowerment discourse, these initiatives pre-suppose that supporters actively want greater responsibility and are imposing what have traditionally been the paid roles of professional staff.

Furthermore, in Chapter 6, I identify an inconsistency between the views of Greenpeace staff and those of supporters with regards to decentralising participation. Specifically, throughout this research, campaigners (from Greenpeace and other ENGOs), advocate the use of digital media for increasing supporter autonomy and empowerment as well as enabling the co-creation of campaigns. Indeed, similar findings are found in the literature on digital media and user-generated content (Anden-Papadopoulos, 2013; Jenkins, 2006; Ostman, 2012). However, in Chapter 6, I demonstrate that in the case of *Greenwire*, there was little to no change in the degree of autonomy perceived by supporters. Indeed, I show how campaign participation continues to be driven from the top down, highly centralised, and conservative around opening up campaigns to supporters. This finding is relevant, as it highlights an inconsistency between what campaigners suggest is occurring with regards to digital affordances versus what supporters are experiencing in practice. In addition, it also contrasts some of the earlier literature, which advocates the use of digital media for participatory practices such as co-creation (Anden-Papadopoulos, 2013; Jenkins, 2006; Ostman, 2012). This finding is significant, as it serves as a form of 'counter-example' to earlier chapters and raises a question to emerge from this research: if campaign co-creation is supposedly occurring, why and who is actually advocating it?

Indeed, much of this literature (Cooke & Kothari, 2001; Henkel & Stirrat, 2001; Hickey & Mohan, 2004) encourages one to rethink who is ultimately responsible for supporters' participation, or in many cases, a lack thereof. Furthermore, this participation is often treated as synonymous with citizenship and civic duty (Gladwell, 2010; Morozov, 2009; Putnam, 2000). For example, in Chapter 6, I find that Greenpeace sees

Greenwire as not yet meeting its full 'participatory potential' as they had originally envisaged by Greenpeace. Indeed, there appears to be a general assumption, both amongst practitioners and within the literature (Lane & Cin, 2017; Lee & Hsieh, 2013; Rotman et al., 2011), that a lack of participation is the fault of community members rather than those building, deploying, and managing the community itself. Furthermore, as I demonstrate in both Chapters 3 and 6, the idea of 'participatory potential' presupposes a particular outcome of what participation should ultimately look like. A more critical approach suggests that campaigners, rather than supporters, determine this ideal. In so doing, there is the potential to reinforce power asymmetries as well as the establishment of core cliques (Eden, 2017) and/or beliefs of privileged elites (Fuchs, 2014; Jordan & Maloney, 1997; Schradie, 2011).

Yet, in Chapter 3, I demonstrate how campaigners lack a clear methodology when attempting to evaluate and determine the 'success' of this participatory ideal. I maintain that the absence of a clear methodology relates to the ambiguity and lack of conceptual clarity surrounding the terms engagement and participation. In other words, as I show in Chapter 3, when there is no clear definition of what campaigners are evaluating, it is difficult for them to know how best to do it. This relates to what Chilvers and Kearnes (2015) argue is a 'preoccupation with impact'impact. Specifically, I show how the conceptual ambiguity surrounding engagement/participation is currently manifesting through the campaigning community's pervasive use of vanity metrics. These are the superficial metrics that emerge from easy-to-manipulate data, for example the number of likes on Facebook, the number of retweets on Twitter, or the number of email subscribers. Indeed, conceptual ambiguity, combined with growing internal pressure for

upwards reporting, results in a focus on guaranteeing a quantity of engagement/participation rather than its quality.

However, according to Carpentier (2012, p. 172), 'the enforcement of participation is defined as contradictory to the logics of participation, and that the right not to participate [or to participate how one chooses] should be respected'. However, what counts as participation – and often as one's civic duty as a citizen – continues to be defined by the imaginaries of elites (Cooke & Kothari, 2001; Eden, 2017; Mahony & Stephansen, 2016). For these reasons, Preece, Nonnecke and Andrews (2004, p. 203) criticise the general emphasis on active participation, arguing that anything less is often considered 'second-class'. I too reject this implied hierarchy of participation and provide evidence to support my claim. Specifically, I am of the opinion that more 'passive' forms of participation such as low barrier actions (Chapter 3) or lurking (Chapter 6) still have the potential to enrich community dynamics. For example, in Chapter 6, I demonstrate how online communities rely on passive participation to create audiences, mass and momentum, as well as to increase traffic and click through rates, which in turn, may strengthen public visibility.

Likewise, in Chapter 6, I argue that if all members of *Greenwire* are leaders or active participants, the community risks being as paralysed as when there are no leaders at all. These findings are significant because when priority is given to active participation, less active members are often categorised as inferior and unimportant and their participation tends to be devalued and discredited. Examples of this include the pejorative use of clicktivist in Chapter 3 and lurker in Chapter 6. Furthermore, as I demonstrate in Chapter 4, with the increasing reliance of campaigners on data-driven campaigning,

which is in and of itself, ethically questionable, supporters are providing ENGOs with insight into their behaviours, albeit not always intentionally. Expanding on Karpf's (2016) argument that digital media are contributing to organisations' ability to 'digitally listen', one could also consider the provision of data to ENGOs as a form of participation in and of itself. Thus, I am of the opinion that if approached as 'taking action' (Chapter 5), various forms of participation should be encouraged and equally valued.

I agree with Eden (2017, p. 138) who challenges that such a binary (i.e. passive vs. active participation) 'implies a scalar hierarchy that often becomes shorthand for importance' with 'X' seen as less significant than 'Y'. Thus, I suggest that the conceptualisation of participation move from hierarchy back to continuum and expand to include a range of actions, each as legitimate as the other. This way, rather than adhering to particular hierarchies whereby one form of engagement/participation is seen as more valuable than another, the nature of engagement/participation becomes reflexive, processual, and contextual. This is in line with Chilvers and Kearnes (2015, p. 302) who suggest that participation is 'continually being remade'. Thus, I reject the view that different forms of engagement/participation ought to conform to a hierarchy of any kind.

The second contribution of this research is what I identify as the distributed model in professional campaigning. The emergence of the distributed model is significant, as it is increasingly being used as a form of 'template' in contemporary campaigning. For instance, during the course of this research, four of the five sampled ENGOs built, or are in the process of building, campaign platforms based upon the distributed model. Examples of the distributed model identified during this research include: Greenpeace's *Save the Arctic,* the Sierra Club's *AddUp*, WWF's *Earth Hour*, and 350.org's *Fossil*

Free. Emerging from the experiences and vocabularies of campaigners, I conceptualise the distributed model as a network-centric organising structure, which draws on digital media infrastructures to decentralise professionally-driven activism and participation. It does so by building autonomous, independent, and locally-based networks of supporters who rely on digital media to translate overarching organisational calls to action into their own individualised and contextual initiatives (Chapter 4).

Campaigners' suggest that the distributed model draws on digital media to allow for a 'return to grassroots activism' (Chapter 4). In contrast, I argue that it is less a return and more of a repurposing or retrofitting of professional advocacy. I suggest that the principal difference between grassroots activism and the distributed model is that unlike grassroots activism, which relies on informal volunteers (Horton Smith, 1997), the distributed model is organisationally-led by professional activists and large ENGOs. However, in an attempt to move beyond the reductive polarisation of grassroots vs. professional activism (Bennett & Segerberg, 2012; Earl & Kimport, 2011), the distributed model blends the decentralisation traditionally associated with grassroots organising with the centralisation traditionally associated with professional organising. In this way, I argue that the distributed model sits at the intersection between the two and bridges their borderlines.

For instance, in Chapter 4, I show how 350.org adopted the distributed model as a means to organise supporters for the PCM. Yet, despite supporters being provided with the necessary tools, for example training, networks, and social media accounts, campaigners were integral in managing supporters and providing them with a clear purpose. Likewise, in Chapter 6, I demonstrate how, from the perspective of supporters

themselves, many individuals do not want more and/or full responsibility of a campaign. Thus, whilst previous studies, for example Bennett and Segerberg's (2013) 'crowd-enabled network' or Castells' (2012) and Shirky's (2008) 'organising without organisations' describe how digital media may eliminate the need for formal organisations, this research demonstrates otherwise. Specifically, I reveal how even within the distributed model, professional organising structures are neither totally centralised nor decentralised but instead, rely on an ongoing tension between the two.

To do so, the distributed model relies on various affordances of digital media. Specifically, as I demonstrate in Chapter 4, it uses the ability of digital media to draw on opportunities for real-time and multi-directional interactivity whilst also providing the potential for exponentially greater reach. Similarly, as I show in Chapter 6, within the distributed model (e.g. *Greenwire*)), digital media may enhance volunteer connectivity and allow for greater flexibility in participation, for example by using email lists and joint scheduling to minimise the need for co-presence. Earl and Kimport (2011), Juris (2012), and Kavada (2010) support this finding and argue that digital media encourage a sense of connectedness that is less temporally and spatially bound. Also the potential for user-generated content and co-creation afforded by digital media (Chapters 3, 4, 5 and 6) expands Jenkin's (2016) investigation into 'DIY politics' by showing how supporters are adopting more formal roles within a networked organisational model. As findings in Chapter 6 suggest, the distributed model draws on the potential for interactivity and sociality afforded by digital media to create a sense of community, like-mindedness, and solidarity.

Also unique to the distributed model is its emphasis on digital media for data-driven campaigning. This finding is well positioned alongside Karpf's (2016) recent work exploring the uptake of analytics in activism. According to Karpf (2016, p. 2), advocacy organisations are using digital media to test 'which tactics and techniques are most effective at engaging new supporters, forging deeper ties with existing supporters, and leveraging power over targeted decision makers'. Expanding on what Karpf (2016) describes as a 'culture of testing', this thesis provides evidence of, and further insight into, campaigners' reliance on digital data for campaigning. Specifically, in Chapter 4, I reveal how ENGOs use digital media to monitor and to track audience's interactions with, and generation of, content. Examples include collecting and analysing data from click-through rates, social media likes, content shares, webpage interactions, and browsing history. Drawing on this data, the distributed model is built around user preferences and behaviours. In so doing, if shifts professional activism in the direction of customisation and tailoring campaign content to individuals' preferences rather than to a general mass-audience united as a single collective under a homogenous call to action.

However, a limitation of a dependency on the use of digital media within the distributed model is that the contemporary media landscape is over-saturated with digital noise. The concept of digital noise emerges throughout this research and relates to the idea of 'information overload'. Earlier research, for instance Kavada (2010, p. 367), describes information overload as a 'cacophony' of information, which together makes 'it difficult to decide whose voice or opinion should prevail'. Similarly, in his investigation of 'communicative overload', Nielsen (2009, p. 277) argues that the characteristics that lead digital media to be seen as enabling are also the same characteristics that disable, for

example, by providing too much information. The findings of this thesis extend such research. Specifically, they reveal that, to minimise the risk of digital noise or a digitally-mediated 'information overload', whilst heavily digital, the distributed model continues to rely on old and new media tactics for campaigning (Chapters 4 and 6). Based on these findings, this thesis encourages a shift in academic debate. In particular, I maintain that future scholarship move away from arguments on the competition between 'old *versus* new media' in campaigning (Bennett, 2012; Castells, 2012; Nielsen, 2010) to better understanding media convergences, hybridity, and the complementarity of 'old *and* new media'.

The distributed model is also distinct in that it draws on the affordanceaffordances of digital media to enable greater organisational porosity or the movement of supporters between organisations. For example, with the explosion of Facebook groups, Twitter channels, online communities such as *Greenwire*, large-scale digitally-mediated protests such as the PCM etc., this thesis finds that the boundaries between organisations appear to be more permeable. In exploring the spatial and temporal boundaries of media and sociality, Livingstone (2005, p. 13) describes this phenomenon as 'communicative connectivity'. Expanding the notion of communicative connectivity, I argue that the distributed model relies on a broad and digitally-mediated shift in public consciousness whereby citizens are less concerned with organisational affiliations (e.g. Greenpeace) and more concerned with issue areas (e.g. climate change). According to Bennett and Segerberg (2013, p. 127) digital media make it 'possible for individuals to personalise [calls to action] without being required to adopt particular political values or identifications'. Within the distributed model, I show how digital media further enable

this shift, providing the communication channels and networks for supporters to cross-fertilise (Chapter 5). Indeed, with the affordances of digital media, it is possible that 'conventional organisations [may] play a less central role than social technologies' (Bennett & Segerberg, 2012, p. 12).

However, a more critical approach examines differences between what the digital media have the potential to do in theory versus what they actually do in practice. For example, whilst the distributed model has the potential to draw on digital media to enhance interactivity, sociality, and political participation, it continues to be designed, implemented, and managed by professional and elite activist organisations. Thus, one wonders whether the distributed model, as well as a broader emphasis on culture change (e.g. Greenpeace's *7 Shifts* in Chapter 5) is a genuine attempt on the part of ENGOs to redesign professional advocacy or more of a branding initiative. As cautioned by Hilton et al. (2013, p. 59), these shifts 'should be understood not as histories, but as marketing exercises…[which] serve to obscure the reality of the organisation as a multinational environmentalist corporation'. When repositioned this way, one is again reminded of Jordan and Maloney's (1997) and Bosso's (2003) concerns of ENGOs acting as protest businesses and non-profit corporations.

Indeed, this highlights an important line of inquiry raised by this thesis: to what extent should these organisations be attempting to mimic the architecture of pre-existing platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram etc., as opposed to build their own alternatives? For example, in Chapter 6 I discuss how, by imitating the platforms developed by large, for-profit, technology companies, Greenpeace is not only competing against these corporations, but in many ways, reinforcing the systems, structures, and

beliefs upon which they are built. In other words, rather than designing imaginaries based on their own organisational vision, mission, values, etc., they are contributing to the establishment of a status quo based on neoliberal market principles, targeted advertising, harvesting personal data, and economic surveillance (Elit et al., 2016; Fuchs, 2015; Gerlitz & Helmond, 2013). Whilst designing an alternative model is beyond the scope of this research, I suggest that thinking forward, it is perhaps less about imitating existing corporate architectures and more about the resistance and counterpower required to innovate alternative imaginaries all together.

The third contribution of this research is its development of the concept of event space, an idea that emerges during the course of this research. I conceptualise event space as a relational and digitally-mediated space, which stages sequences of events within events as well as their various potentialities. To provide a theoretical foundation from which to further explore event space, I draw on aspects of non-representational theory (Anderson & Harrison, 2010; Dewsbury, 2000; Dirksmeier & Helbrecht, 2008; Thrift, 2007). Specifically, in Chapter 4, I investigate how digital media have the potential to influence participation relative to the concepts of events (Anderson & Harrison, 2010: McCormack, 2003; Thrift, 2007) and performance (Cadman, 2009; Dewsbury, 2000; Woodward et al., 2012).

For example, in my investigation of the PCM (Chapter 4) and *Greenwire* (Chapter 6), I demonstrate how within event spaces, digital media may widen opportunities to take part. In particular, they have the potential to create forms of participation that are simultaneously multi-spatial, multi-temporal, and multi-scalar. In this way, participation is connected and fluid, blurring actions in online spaces (e.g. posting a shout in *Shoutbox*)

intowith offline spaces (e.g. marching in the PCM) and vice versa. Participatory encounters are also temporally co-existent. For instance, within *Greenwire,* members' content, such as a photograph posted to *Shoutbox*, exists in the present moment when it is generated as well as being a snapshot of a past event. Yet as time goes on, whilst that same post becomes archived and exists as past content, members may choose to access it again at any time in the present. In this way, a single action comesbrings with it the potential for multitudes of planned and unplanned variations of that activity and each ofas well as its many associated possibilities (Anderson & Harrison, 2010).

Similarly, in Chapter 4, I show how during the PCM, through the generation of content, supporters were able to participate in the event prior to the march, during the march, and after the march as well as to make the march newly relevant and/or extend its lifespan by creating second waves of protest following the initial event. Indeed, the continuousness and processual nature of this event space enables actors to move beyond the performance of a 'spectacular event' (e.g. marching in the People's Climate March) to the performativity of everyday practices and encounters. In so doing, participation is extended beyond the materiality of a single performance or single site (Woodward et al., 2012). In sum, within event space, participation is always becoming, unfolding into the moments before, during, after, and in between (Cadman, 2009; Dewsbury, 2000).

An important aspect of the entanglements between participation, the distributed model, and event space is the ways in which they encourage us to rethink the concepts of publics and audiences. For instance, in Chapter 5, I detail how the notion of supporter is rising to prominence in the organisational lexicons of professional ENGOs. Whilst I argue that there continues to be a place for membership, I also agree with campaigners

that the concept of membership is changing relative to shifts in the contemporary media landscape. Thus, findings from this research suggest that the adoption of the term supporter over member can be positioned relative to a similar shift in academic thinking from a such as reframing the homogenous 'public' toas heterogeneous 'publics' (Barnett, 2008) as well as fromand audiences as 'passive observers' to 'active participants' (Livingstone, 2005). Karpf (2012, p. 4) challenges that organisations such as MoveOn, Avaaz.org (Kavada, 2012), 38 Degrees (Chadwick, 2013), and GetUp! (Vromen, 2014) are the 'next generation of advocacy groups'. Expanding upon this literature, I suggest that supportership, may, in some ways, be seen as an evolution of 'digital citizenship' (Couldry et al., 2014, p. 616) or the next generation of membership or even what Couldry et al., (2014, p. 616) frame as 'digital citizenship'.

Indeed, by adopting broader definitional delineations, I demonstrate the ways in which supportership moves beyond the idea of membership as a single collective with pre-given and fixed roles (Chapter 5). Similar to publics, I argue that supporters may also be convened (Barnett, 2008) and like audiences, may take on different roles across different times and spaces depending on their individual contexts (Chapter 6). This is in line with Eden, 2017, p. 126) who maintains that 'the ephemeral and shifting memberships of [environmental] groups and the practices and publics that enact them are continually being re-invented and re-valued'.

In Chapter 6, I use the example of *Greenwire* to show how supporters may be convened through the distributed model and within event spaces. Through the potential for sociality, publicness, and relational practices afforded by *Greenwire,* supporters are called into existence (Mahony & Stephansen, 2016), summoned, and assembled

(Mahony, Newman & Barnett, 2010). Chapter 6 also demonstrates how *Greenwire* draws on digital media affordances to become simultaneously public and private. For example, it is public in that it is open to anyone; and yet also private in that community members are required to create an account and gatekeepers monitor for trolls, ensuring that 'house rules' are upheld and maintained. However, a downside to this is thatOn the flip side, the enforcement of gatekeeping, monitoring, and community regulations risksmay risk making the community socially exclusive whereby its culture is determined by a small core clique (Eden, 2017) determiningdetermines community culture and defines the status quo.

In addition, *Greenwire* is also public in the Habermasian sense (Habermas, 1989), acting as a discursive space where supporters come together to debate politics. Yet *Greenwire* also faces similar limitations to those of Habermas's (1989) public sphere. For example, the extent to which it attempts to act as a single entity (Mahony, Newman & Barnett, 2010), which can 'speak for' (Spivak, 1988) the diversity of voices present within *Greenwire,* and even more so, for those who are not. Further investigating digital divides, various scholarship has challenged the participatory and publicness of digital media, suggesting that they do not enable universal access nor do they promote equal representation (Blank, 2013; Brown & Czerniewicz, 2010; Graham, 2011; Graham & Zook, 2013; Schradie, 2011).

Whilst examining the demographics of individual volunteers was beyond the scope of this research, it does beg the question: to what extent do variables such as those identified by Schardie (2011) (i.e. income, race, ethnicity, and gender) or Fuchs (2014)

(i.e. age, race, marital status, education, and income) also influence social inclusion/exclusion in digital campaigning?

Indeed, such an investigation is particularly salient given environmentalism's historical roots as a movement of privilege and elites (Jepson & Ladle, 2010). Doing so may help to move towards greater social inclusion and Kesby's (2005, p. 2051) reconceptualisation of empowerment:

> Rather than being concentrated in the hands of a few, [power] is redistributed among the many; rather than being hierarchical, vertical, dominating, and exploitative, it is reciprocal, lateral, accountable, and facilitating; rather than power over others, [empowerment] describes power with others.

Indeed, applying critical approaches to investigating digital media affordances helps to avoid charges of technological determinism or what has become a form of 'fetishising' of emerging technologies (Castells, 2012; Shirky, 2008). For instance, in Chapter 3, I report ways in which an over-reliance on digital media risks over-emphasising 'quick-fix-solutions' or low-barrier actions rather than enabling disruptive, inclusive, and sustainable change. Indeed, the reductive nature of technological solutionism has the potential to dismiss the many root causes of complex problems such as economics, politics, and/or inherently uneven geographies (Fuchs, 2014; Graham & Zook, 2013; Morozov, 2013). As captured by Eubanks (2011, p. 42), the digital divide is 'actually a product of social structure and institutionalised inequality'. In this way, investigations into the affordances of digital media also require a focus on systemic power, structures, and institutions (Eubank, 2011).

Similarly, whilst digital media have the potential to encourage sociality, interactivity, and participation in theory, in practice, they are not always representative of

the diversity and heterogeneity of publics and their worldviews. For example, Chapter 3 provides a glimpse into campaigners' experiences navigating *filter bubbles*. Somewhat similar to the concept of *echo chambers* (Karpf, 2012; Milan, 2015b), the term *filter bubble* was coined by Pariser (2011, p. 80), who describes it as:

> A prosthetic solution horizon: It provides you with an information environment that's highly relevant to whatever problem you're working on…but when the problem you're solving requires the bisociation of ideas that are indirectly related…the filter bubble may narrow your vision too much.

Whilst the notion of a *filter bubble* is not new, this research does contribute to Pariser's argument (2011) by offering a logic of verification grounded in the collective experiences of senior campaigners, thus making his work newly relevant. In addition, in Chapter 3, I also demonstrate how the growing use of analytics and algorithms combined with the reach afforded by digital media risks further segregating and polarising audiences, many of which are already peripheral and/or marginalised (Eastin, Cicchirillo, & Mabry, 2015; Eubanks, 2011; Fuchs, 2014; van Deursen & van Dijk, 2010; Hargittai, 2002). In so doing, I show how digital media may give the false of impression of representativeness and diversity where in practice campaigners are engaging with a closed audience (e.g. climate activists) and reproducing a single homogenous belief (e.g. climate change is real). In short, throughout the course of this research, I demonstrate that whilst there is a distinction between what digital media have the potential to do versus what they are actually doing in practice. In this way, investigations into digital media affordances require a critical approach, which questions and considers how uneven geographies, inequalities, and social inclusion/exclusion continue to manifest in the digital realm.

7.3 Research Limitations

As is the case for all research, decisions must be made and with them come certain limitations. The first limitation of this research relates to its sub-questions. Whilst I was able to answer my sub-questions, in retrospect they were too broad in their emphasis on campaigns. The issue of breadth over depth appears to be a common challenge in literatures exploring digital affordances and activism (Bennett & Segerberg, 2013; Castells, 2012; Guo & Saxton, 2013). I am of the opinion that this limitation had an impact on my findings. Specifically, these provided a critical analysis of changes occurring in the campaigning landscape more generally, rather than deep investigation into a single case. However, despite being a limitation, the focus on campaigns is, in and of itself, also a factor that makes this research distinct from other research (Anduiza et al., 2014; Kavada, 2015; Milan, 2015a; Theocharis et al., 2015). Thus, in defence of campaigns as a unit of analysis, I feel that the limitation was not on campaigns per se, but rather on focusing on *too many* campaigns.

Here again lies the challenge of 'bounding'. My original research question sought to explore evolutions in campaigning throughout the course of the modern environmental movement. To do so, I identified how emerging technologies had influenced environmental campaigns and the metamorphosis of these changes over time. For example, I explored how the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds used pamphleteering and letter writing to build public consciousness around the Cruel Killing of Birds during the late nineteenth century. Similarly, I examined how the Sierra Club drew on nature writing and advancements in landscape photography to campaign against

flooding California's Hetch Hetchy valley in the early twentieth century. Another example emerged during Greenpeace's 1976-1983 Save the Seal campaign, where the roll out of colour television alongside the introduction of personal camcorders enabled activists to produce and disseminate their own content. However, during these early phases of research, I realised that any one of these technologies alone could be a thesis topic.

So, from this initial investigation, I further narrowed the scope of my research to specific technologies (i.e. digital media) and moved from the level of the environmental movement to the level of campaigns. The switch in focus from movements to campaigns arose from suggestions that too broad a focus on social movements may make it difficult to generalise (della Porta & Rucht, 2002; Earl, 2013a). I also thought that the examination of multiple campaigns and campaigning organisations would allow for a more revealing comparative analysis.

However, throughout the course of my thesis, it emerged that my research was not so much about the campaigns per se (e.g. Save the Arctic, Fossil Free etc.) as about the actors driving them (i.e. ENGOs, campaigners, and supporters). This required a readjustment of my aims as my dissertation progressed. Therefore, rather than focusing Chapters 4 and 5 on campaigning specifically, I instead used these chapters as opportunities to explore digital affordances from different perspectives, for example, organisations and their supporters. In turn, this was an attempt at tackling the breadth of my original questions and moving away from the issue of 'too many campaigns' towards a focus on the actors behind them.

The second limitation of this research relates to my interview sample. For example, many of my interviewees were white males between the ages of 30 – 39 or 50+. This appeared to relate to a general lack of diversity within senior positions in my sampled ENGOs. Furthermore, given that I was self-funding throughout the course of my DPhil, I was financially limited when it came to completing fieldwork. Thus, the majority of my data collection was limited to sources that I could access from within the United Kingdom and to individuals who spoke English, as I could not afford translation services. Because of this, this research is particularly focused on environmental campaigning in North America, Western Europe, and Australia and the Pacific. In short, all of the factors mentioned above contribute to what may be a limited representativeness in my interview sample.

Interviewing elites also presented me with the challenge of gaining and securing access. In part, my limited access was due to the number of requests elites receive and to their prioritisation of work-related responsibilities. Gatekeepers, as well as respecting the privacy of interviewees (Chapter 2, Section 2.3.1), also limited my access. In reviewing the literature, these appear to be common challenges associated with elite interviewing (Huggins, 2014; Kvale, 2007). For example, whilst I had access to contact details for general administrative staff, the details of senior staff were rarely public. In an attempt to circumnavigate this obstacle, I began identifying individuals via LinkedIn and Twitter. However, in so doing I faced the challenge of respecting privacy and the need to strike a balance between being persistent and being pushy. Demonstrative of the challenge of accessing elites, of the 86 individuals I contacted for interviews, 58 per cent did not

respond and/or declined. In retrospect, I might have had a better response rate had I chosen less senior interviewees.

Interviews with campaigners, and this research itself, may also be seen through the lens of NRT (Anderson & Harrison, 2010; Dewsbury, 2000; Dirksmeier & Helbrecht, 2008; Thrift, 2007). In particular, I wish to reflect on the concept of performativity and the degree to which findings are representative of views beyond those of privileged and elite participants. For example, this thesis reveals the use of particular language and organisational rhetoric, organisational culture shifts, and the development and deployment of platforms modelled on for-profit enterprises. However, if examined more critically and drawing on concepts from NRT, this thesis may be considered a form of 'stage' and each of these findings as performances acted by campaigners who represent professional organisations and agendas. In this way, I was aware of the importance of challenging interviewees rather than extrapolating from their statements that 'X is true' because 'Y says so'.

Thus, alongside the challenge of sample size, I also realised that the voices of supporters were less central in my work and only emerged in the later stages of my research. This was largely due to the original aims of this thesis, which centred on campaigns and ENGOs. Whilst the thesis itself focused on ENGOs, it became apparent throughout the course of my research that supporters also played a critical role in both campaigning and volunteering. Given the amount of time required to identify, vet, contact, correspond, and arrange interviews, I attempted to overcome this limitation by adjusting my methods in the later stages of my research, for example with the use of virtual ethnography. Originally, I had thought to compare different platforms using the

distributed model (e.g. Sierra Club's *AddUp* and WWF's *Earth Hour*); however, doing so appeared to contribute to the challenge of breadth over depth. Therefore, I chose to focus on *Greenwire* and to then narrow that focus from an international to a national to a municipal level. In addition, instead of only interviewing senior staff, I broadened my interview sample to include Greenpeace volunteers. Yet, despite my best efforts, this also proved difficult with only $n = 4$ of 14 volunteers in the London area responding to interview requests.

From a methodological standpoint, interviews with campaigners and this research itself may also be seen through the lens of NRT (Anderson & Harrison, 2010; Dewsbury, 2000; Dirksmeier & Helbrecht, 2008; Thrift, 2007). For example, findings from this thesis reveal the use of particular language and organisational rhetoric, organisational culture shifts, and the development and deployment of platforms modelled on for-profit enterprises. If examined more critically, this thesis may be considered a form of 'stage' and each of these findings as performances acted by campaigners who represent professional and elite organisations and agendas.

7.4 Directions for future research and emerging literature

Looking forward, there are various avenues for future research. One obvious area would be to further elaborate the conceptualisations of engagement that I identify in this research. For example, the creation of a conceptual framework for the different forms of engagement/participation and/or a repertoire of actions would help to better understand

the diverse spectrum of supporter activities and emerging forms of digital citizenship (Couldry et al., 2014; Dahlgren, 2009; Eubanks, 2011) undertaken in practice. Likewise, such a study could also interrogate factors influencing the development of frames across different sectors of civil society. This would allow for insight into common factors influencing framing within the non-profit sector. It would also serve to bridge academia and practitioner communities, grounding theoretical frameworks in the everyday practice of NGOs. Such investigations would be in line with recent literature calling for a reconsideration of how we approach research on digital media, collective action, and political participation (Bimber, 2017; Ekström & Sveningsson, 2017; Jenkins, 2016; Theocharis, 2015).

Another avenue would be to explore different sampling strategies. For example, future studies could compare a larger sample of supporters both within a single organisation and across different organisations. This would allow for investigation into digital affordances from the lens of supporters, which, similar to my findings on autonomy in Chapter 6, might challenge the views of campaigners (i.e. professional elites) as identified in this thesis. A greater emphasis on supporters might also allow further investigation into the intersections between activism and volunteering from the experiences of participants themselves. In turn, this might help ENGOs to revaluate how they frame their supporters as well as their roles and responsibilities in organising relative to the emergence of digital media. I am of the opinion that such a line of inquiry would fit well within current studies exploring digitally-mediated volunteering (Hughes & Tapia, 2015; Kaufhold & Reuter, 2016; Raja-Yusof et al., 2016).

Another alternative for sampling strategy would be to implement a similar study, but to focus on ENGOs campaigning in lower income countries. This would help to examine whether my conceptual claims about digital affordances can be similarly applied across contexts where there may be greater restrictions on technological infrastructures, access, usage, literacies, and outcomes (Eubanks, 2011; Fuchs, 2014; van Deursen & van Dijk, 2010; Hargittai, 2002; Schradie, 2011). Likewise, sampling could also be adapted to examine informal campaigning groups or smaller grassroots organisations. For example, in his latest book, Karpf (2016, p. 3) suggests that digital affordances 'provide substantial value to organisations with 1 million members whilst being virtually irrelevant to organisations with 10,000 members'. Thus, exploring smaller and/or less-resource rich organisations would help to better understand the extent to which such organisations are reliant on digital media and what their affordances potentially enable.

There were also findings that emerged during this research that were left unanswered. For example, whilst this research revealed the importance of metrics and analytics for reporting participation, there appeared to be no consistent methodology through which this was done. Whilst there is a burgeoning literature on the rise of analytics and algorithms in shaping social order, activism, and collective action (Karpf, 2016; Milan, 2015b; Saurwein, Just, & Latzer, 2015), future scholarship could examine current forms of reporting and seek to develop a model or matrix for measurement. This would allow practitioners to have greater consistency in their evaluations of data-driven campaigning as well as to provide academics with points of reference for comparative analysis.

Another area for future research that would expand this thesis would be further investigation into the distributed model. For example, follow-up research may choose to explore this model in practice through the use of case-study research. Such an investigation would help to better understand the relationships between digital media and the tension between centralising and decentralising activism as well as where there are overlaps between professional and grassroots advocacy. This would also allow scholarship to pull together features of current yet fragmented studies (Bennett & Segerberg, 2013; Milan, 2015a; Rainie & Wellman, 2014) into a single synthesis. Likewise, whilst this research reveals and introduces the notion of supportership, examining the implications of the changes to membership was outside of my scope. Thus, there is room for future studies to more closely examine the relationship between digital affordances and potential impacts on the fundraising/governance structures of NGOs.

Last, this research continuously faced the challenge of 'bounding'. This issue is particularly apparent within Internet research that is dynamic and in constant flux. Whilst there is a large and lively body of scholarship exploring digital methods, both within and beyond human geography (Caliandro, 2017; Dickens & Butcher, 2016; Driscoll & Gregg, 2010; Marres & Gerlitz, 2016), there is room for future research to explore potential imaginaries and/or to develop new methodologies to account for the issue of 'bounding' digitally-mediated systems. This would help to advance emerging scholarship on the ethics of Internet research and contribute to furthering the legitimacy and ethics of research rooted in digital methods (Diamant-Cohen & Golan, 2016; Foster, 2016; Lee, 2017; Zimmer, 2010).

7.5 In closing

Research is a journey, a constant dance of two steps forward and one step back. All together, the collection of 'one step backs' often ends up being the most interesting aspect of the research itself. At the beginning of this thesis, I set out to explore an emerging subfield of human geography, media and communications geography. During this exploration, whilst the shape of my research twisted and turned, I continued to be guided by a single overarching question: how are digital media affordances influencing the conduct of campaigning in environmental non-government organisations?

Over the last four years, the conclusion that I have reached is this: in more ways than we will likely ever know. That is to say, I am of the opinion that it is incredibly difficult – if not impossible – to identify every possible affordance of digital media in campaigning. However, I also hold the view that through investigating questions related to digital media affordances and engagement, campaign strategy, membership, and volunteering, this thesis has built a strong foundation from which future research may expand. However, doing so requires a careful and critical approach, where investigations make a distinction between what digital media have the potential to do versus what they are actually doing in practice. Indeed, despite the opportunities afforded by digital media, the geographies of the digital realm continue to be inherently uneven, divided, and unequal. Still, this thesis reveals how, like the various media before them, digital media have come to play a critical role in today's environmental politics. No doubt, the emerging media of tomorrow will do so even more.

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Appendix 1: Sample interview protocol for Paper 1

Sample interview protocol for Paper 1: Environmental campaigns, digital media, and framing engagement/participation: Output or process?

Opening questions:

- What role do you see digital media playing in campaigning?
- To what extent do you think we are experiencing anything 'new' with digital media? What is the impact on the ground?
- What would you say are some strengths/limitations of digital media?

Topic specific questions:

- What do you think it means 'to be engaged'?
- How does your organisation define engagement?
- How does your organisation measure engagement? Why is evaluation important?
- Based on your experience, how are campaigners changing their engagement strategies?
    - How do supporters want to use digital?
    - How are campaigners using digital?
- How do digital media influence participation?
- If you were writing a 'guide' on engagement, what would you include?
- What would you like to see in the future when thinking about engagement?

Appendix 2: Sample interview protocol for Paper 2

Sample interview protocol for Paper 2: Digital media affordances and campaign strategy:

Audiences, tactics, and organising structures from the perspectives of campaigners

Opening questions:

- What role do you see digital media playing in campaigning?
- To what extent do you think we are experiencing anything 'new' with digital media? What is the impact on the ground?
- What would you say are some strengths/limitations of digital media?

Topic specific questions:

- How have communications evolved over time?
- How do digital media influence campaign strategy?
- How do digital media influence how you think about, and engage with, audiences?
- How do digital media influence tactics in campaigning?
- How do digital media influence the way you organise and mobilise?
    - What did you do pre-digital?
    - Have you seen changes with digital?
- What role does your organisation play in campaigning?
- How do you think about on- versus offline participation?

Appendix 3: Sample interview protocol for Paper 3

Sample interview protocol for Paper 3: Re-assessing membership? Digital media and the rise of the supporter in environmental non-governmental organisations

Opening questions:

- What role do you see digital media playing in campaigning?
- To what extent do you think we are experiencing anything 'new' with digital media? What is the impact on the ground?
- What would you say are some strengths/limitations of digital media?

Topic specific questions:

- How would you define being a member? Is this different than being a supporter?
- If you were a member, how would you see your role? If you were a supporter?
- What do you want from your ideal member? Ideal supporter?
- How are members/supporters important to your organisation? Is this changing?
- To what extent do you see digital influencing membership?
- Have traditional membership models changed at all with the uptake of digital media?
- What are some of the drawbacks of membership? Pre-digital? Post-digital?
- How do you see the future of membership?

Appendix 4: Sample interview protocol for Paper 4

Sample interview protocol for Paper 4: Greenpeace *Greenwire*: Exploring volunteer participation in online communities

Opening questions:

- What role do you see digital media playing in volunteering?
- To what extent do you think we are experiencing anything 'new' with digital media? What is the impact on the ground?
- What would you say are some strengths/limitations of digital media?

Topic specific questions: Staff

- How is Greenpeace as an organisation embracing digital?
- What is *Greenwire*? What inspired Greenpeace to build it?
- What makes *Greenwire* unique? How could it be improved?
- What is the role of a volunteer? Do you see a difference between being a volunteer, a supporter, a member, or an activist?
- Do you see a difference between taking action on- versus offline?

Topic specific questions: Volunteers

- How do you see yourself in relation to Greenpeace? Volunteer? Activist? Supporter? Member?
- Why did you decide to start volunteering? What motivated you to take on a greater role (i.e. coordinator)? What does that role entail?
- What is the group like? Does everyone participate?
- How much flexibility do you have to set your local group's agenda? To make decisions? To start campaigns? Do you want more autonomy?
- How do you use *Greenwire*? How does the group use *Greenwire?*
- Are there any things that make *Greenwire* really stand out? How could it be improved?

- What does your group use for day-to-day communications? *Greenwire*? Something else?
- Do you see a difference between taking action on- versus offline?