The Construction and Influence of Information Trustworthiness in Social Movements

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Declaration

I, Men Heng Charlotte Im, confirm that the work presented in my thesis is my own. Where information has been derived from other sources, I confirm that this has been indicated in the thesis.

Abstract

In this doctoral thesis, I investigate the following: how information trustworthiness is constructed within social movements, and how its subsequent dissemination and comprehensions influences perceptions of trust and trustworthiness among social movement actors, with a particular focus in social media and the digital space. I ground my research in practice by choosing two case contexts of which to investigate the concept of information trust, Black Lives Matter of 2020 and the Hong Kong protests of 2019.

This research adopts a mixed methods methodology, with an explanatory sequential design. Data collection is categorised in three phases. The first phase is the social network analysis phase, which gives a holistic view of the information network under investigation. The second phase is the survey, in which I evaluated trustworthiness perceptions from social movement participants themselves. Interviews make up the third phase, where in-depth conversations were had with social movement participants to thoroughly understand their understanding of information trust.

Based on my research findings, I pose a framework for conceptualising information trustworthiness, explaining the subjective and objective dimensions that affects its conception, and how it then leads into the trust making process and finally affect practical change in actions or beliefs. This framework not only enhances our understanding but also underscores the pivotal role of trustworthiness perceptions, demonstrating the role of information trust within social movements. This framework offers practical implications on future social movement mobilisation, and on a wider scale, general applicability in other situations.

Impact statement

This work contributes to the conceptual discussion of information trust that builds upon a long history of trust conceptualisation. It offers a framework for application and critique, having been developed at the boundaries of interactions that inform and galvanise the activist space. However, it has wider application to different social situations. Through further testing and research, it has the potential to evolve into a fully functional model which will illuminate how we can both academically and practically understand information trust and trustworthiness, and how those concepts and decisions inform changes in behaviour and belief.

This framework provides valuable and practical insights for activists and the laymen alike, through breaking down how information trustworthiness perceptions are constructed, and thus determining how it affects trust decisions. As misinformation and disinformation take new forms in the digital space, it is even more pertinent to develop a critical awareness of how trust in information is developed, and potentially influenced. The work matters at a time of growing misinformation, disinformation and distrust, particularly of those in positions of power. My framework serves as a conceptual foundation of which enables us to explore conversations around information trust and trustworthiness with the very individuals who engages with them in their daily lives.

This research also illuminates the importance and necessity of mixed methods research in thoroughly examining social situations, especially complex spaces of social movements. While single-method studies have their merit and achieve depth that is otherwise limited in a mixed method study, the adoption of multiple worldviews, perspectives, and methods is what creates a holistic understanding of specific social contexts, and help researchers fully understand the world and populace under research in a theoretical and practical lens.

As a lecturer in Information Science, I have successfully advocated for the inclusion of information literacy in various modules across the curriculum. With the rise of Generative AI tools, disinformation and misinformation have become more complex and widespread. It is crucial for information practitioners to be aware of these issues, both in practice and in communicating the importance of accurate and accessible information to other sectors. The concept of information trust and trustworthiness empowers both staff and students to articulate the necessity of academic rigor and integrity in response to these technological developments. In addition, those who graduate will go into a range of information spaces and job roles. Both through my direct teaching, conference presentation and articles, it is to be hoped that wider actors in the information space will use my framework as a tool to navigate the complexity of trust.

This research has always been dedicated serving the community I am investigating. From both a researcher perspective, and a personal perspective, there were many challenges throughout the data collection process, and delicate care had to be practiced when navigating the social movement space. I believe this research has much to offer regarding how to navigate and operate with activists and social movement participants. It amplifies their voices and viewpoints within academia and in conceptual discussions.

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BLM	Black Lives Matter
HKP	Hong Kong protests
SNA	Social network analysis

1. Introduction

Through the passage of time, social movements have taken many forms and definitions, yet at their core, social movements are a form of purposeful collective behaviour organised by individuals in society, aiming to and capable of bringing change to the society they live in (Scott and Marshall, 2009). In recent years social movements have shifted to and are orchestrated through a wider range of activities, including online activism. As the threshold to participation is lowered through the proliferation of digital communication tools and social media, it has become easier for the ordinary person to know of and take part in social movements, thus leading to the potential for wider social change in society through activism (Lerner, 2010; Nah et al, 2006).

Whereas traditional participation in social movements denoted the need for an individual to actively enter particular physical spaces or gain certain memberships, the popular use of social media and digital communication tools in everyday life has meant that information about social movements and political participation can enter the household easily without obvious boundaries (F. Lee and J. Chan, 2018). Thus the ordinary person is given access to an abundance of information about political debates and discourse, and thus a greater number of people are undeniably touched by the information exchange around social movements and political change.

Individuals that participate in social movements often have a personal conviction, be it material or moral, that connect them to particular social movements (Wang and Liu, 2021). Delehanty (2020) uses the concept of personal moral authenticity to demonstrate that individuals engage in social movements because their “authentic moral self” is aligned to the cause. Social movement participants could normally be anticipated to care about the cause if they are to consider themselves part of social movements, and it usually denotes some degree of active participation. It may also denote some degree of sacrifice, including time and effort, or in a less ideal scenario threat of persecution or even actual persecution. This has not changed even as participation and engagement has become easier. Nevertheless, the forms and nature of engagement and activity have shifted.

A widened access to information provides opportunities, has brought accompanying questions and challenges. As individuals absorb information that concerns political upheaval and social change, there are questions about whether we accept information passively as truth. Misinformation and disinformation, tools used to twist and spread misleading or unconfirmed facts, have been an increasing issue on the internet. Individuals who thus blindly believe in whatever they see could be guided to false conclusions, develop confirmation bias, and internalize unsubstantiated beliefs (Lerner, 2010; Bovet and Makse, 2019).

This is a time of increased misinformation and disinformation, in which information is rendered as a political tool and even weaponised to push certain public narratives, thus warranting constant monitoring of information (Mundt et al, 2018). Individuals and parties with different political opinions accuse one another of fabricating news reports or rumours, whereas hoaxes

and conspiracy theories circulate around the internet being touted as the truth. Activists, too, face the same phenomena when using the Internet. Government agencies also use the Internet to quell social movements, either through manipulation, censorship, or outright banning social media sites (MacKinnon, 2011). Dergacheva and Tous-Rovirosa's (2020) paper describes how authoritarian state actors also make use of social media to sway public discussion and rhetoric to guide the media agenda.

In the study of social movements, information in isolation, not in relation to other factors, has perhaps been overlooked. Whereas literature surrounding social movements and participation touch on information as one of the many tools or mechanisms that drive participation in social movements, the conditions by which information is trusted for its own sake is an area about which further research needs to be conducted (Wilson and Dunn 2011; Tufekci and Wilson, 2012). Trust is also a concept explored in relation to social movements, but not specifically in relation to information holistically. Delehanty (2020) writes of the concept of "authenticity" influencing one's decision to disseminate information on social media, which is now part of the regular protest activity – but why information? What makes one decide to disseminate a piece of information, to trust it, insomuch that it motivates them to take part or deepen their engagement in social movements? What influences the creation of the idea of "authenticity"?

Information is a battlefield of political contest, but it is insomuch only effective if it is received by its intended recipients, trusted by them, and then capable of motivating them to participate in social movements. Conversely, it is capable of entirely destroying a social movement – information is crucial to not only gather people to the cause, but also in maintaining legitimacy and authenticity of the cause and its objectives, thus it is critical to a social movement's very survival. To that end, the conditions under which the recipient receives the information is dependent on the concept of trust – recipients trust that the information is what it purports to be, that its original source is a legitimate one, and that the information it conveys is relevant. Thus, it is essential that the concept of "trustworthiness of information" is interrogated further, instead of presupposing this concept as universal among all who choose to participate in social movements and spread information regarding their chosen causes.

This research aims to understand the complexity of how information trustworthiness is constructed within social movements, and how its subsequent dissemination and comprehensions influences perceptions of trust and trustworthiness among social movement actors, with a particular focus in social media and the digital space. The digital space loosely refers to activity and identities conducted on the Internet, be it on social media or on the World Wide Web. To explore how individuals within social movements perceive information trustworthiness, this study looked at two case contexts: the Hong Kong protests from 2019 onwards, and Black Lives Matter from 2020 onwards.

The overarching aim of the work is to explore the influence of the context of social movements on perceptions of trust and attitudes to information trustworthiness, and to that end situate the

concept of information trust within social movements, creating an applicable definition that is meaningful to real life contexts.

Two sub-questions emerged:

1. How is the concept of information trustworthiness understood by social movement participants?

2. How do the concepts of trust and trustworthiness influence information creation, consumption, and dissemination?

In this research, I use the term "perception" to denote a general concept of belief, insight, and understanding from social movement actors. The definition has been carefully chosen with the intention of keeping the concept open.

Trust literature is generally focused on trust between two parties. However, rather than being the relationship between two individuals, I examine trust between an individual and information. Thus, my focus is on information trustworthiness, rather than interpersonal trust. At the end of this thesis, I offer a framework that captures the concept of information trustworthiness. I argue that this can be applicable across domain and context.

Taking place in approximately the same timeframe, both the Hong Kong protests and Black Lives Matter movements are subject to many relatively identical external constraints, such as the communication technology available, as well as the impact of COVID-19 to offline protest actions. Relying heavily on digital communication tools and the internet as a medium for spreading information, this study hopes to explore the concept of information trustworthiness in the context of what is happening in real life. However, it is openly acknowledged that both movements also differ wildly in terms of cultural context, primary motivation, and trajectory of development, which will be further explored in this study. The work was developed within the pragmatic research paradigm using mixed methods. The data collection of this study was separated into three phases, which will then be elaborated on respectively. The first phase was social network analysis, the second being the survey phase, and the final phase were interviews. Data was collected through network analysis and interviews.

At the same time, I acknowledge my own positionality to the work as a Hong Kong citizen. While in Chapter 3, the methodology chapter, I discuss at length my decision to take a more distanced approach from my research area and avoid getting too close in more ethnographic methods, I do also believe it is impossible to entirely divorce myself from my research. My experiences and biases shape how I view the research topic, collect the research data, and interpret the findings. Hence, for transparency and in line with my research framework, I write in the first person.

I believe that a study into what is understood as trust and trustworthiness in information can widen our understanding of how social movements develop and flow around information, especially as more and more social movements have taken to the digital realm and gained

traction beyond the boundaries of time and space. This study enables the development of the concepts of trust and information trustworthiness to be part of a landscape which can be examined to better understand social movements and mobilisation as well as broader context. This may also serve as a useful reflection for activists and other political actors to employ in their political activities, and also prompt and encourage critical thinking from the citizen or society to better understand how their trust in the validity and authenticity of information are developed, constructed, and thus should be interrogated and examined more in-depth. Finally, I hope to situate the concept of information trust within social movements, creating an applicable definition that is meaningful to the social movement context.

1.1 Structure

This doctoral research contains 9 chapters. This chapter, Chapter 1, introduces the premise of this research and establishes the importance of my thesis. This chapter also contains a brief overview of the case contexts as well to establish the traits and characteristics of the contexts under consideration. Chapter 2, the literature review, explores key concepts in trust literature and social movement research to establish a foundation of which we can begin to examine the research question.

Chapter 3 lays out the methodology and research design, presenting all facets of my research design and the rationale behind it. It includes my own positionality to the work. This is followed by the three phases of data collection and analysis: Chapter 4 Social Network Analysis; Chapter 5 Surveys; Chapter 6 Interviews. Each phase stands in its own separate chapter where I reiterate the important methodological considerations, explain the data collection process, present the findings, and draw out insights that will aid in answering my research questions. Emerging key information about the methodology is also included in each chapter as the research progressed and adapted to findings from previous phases.

Chapter 7 Triangulation brings together all strands of my research. This chapter presents a proposed model of information trustworthiness construction based on my findings and invites discussion on the conclusions I have drawn. Chapter 8 serves as the conclusion to this thesis.

1.2 Overview of Case Contexts

This short section offers a brief overview of my chosen case contexts – the Hong Kong protests, and Black Lives Matter. The following descriptions set the scene for better understanding respondent attitudes and behaviours.

1.2.1 The Hong Kong protests

Coined a revolution, the Hong Kong protests (HKP) could be described as the product of a series of grievances and uncertainties that had culminated since the Handover against the Hong Kong government, as well as perceived intervention from the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) regime in China (Ngok Ma, 2015). Ever since the July 1 mass protest in 2003 against the then imminent national security legislation, the city has retained a deep involvement in social movements and civic participation. Anniversaries of the handover or national holidays are marked by political rallies and marches, and an annual commemoration event of the Tiananmen Massacre is always widely attended and received (Ngok Ma, 2015). Hong Kong made international headlines in 2014 with the Umbrella Movement, a civil disobedience movement that caused the paralysis of some of the main roads in the city.

The protests that began in 2019 were sparked by the proposed legislation of the extradition law amendment bill, with protestors fearing that the legislation would create a legal basis for extradition of activists from Hong Kong to China. What then sustained the protests, however, were the reported cases of extreme police brutality, persecution of politicians and journalists, mass incarcerations and allegations of sexual abuse, police sieges on university campuses, and alleged collusion with triads in physically assaulting protestors (Sum et al, 2019; Maguire, 2021; Wang and Liu, 2021). The tension between the government and the protesters have only heightened since then.

Further events over 2020 and 2021 contributed to rising tensions, further polarising the city and perhaps pushing both the regime and the protestors over the point of no return. Prominent activists and pro-democratic politicians have been arrested, or have been prosecuted by law enforcement. While physical protests have died down at the time of writing (2024), protestors have created the Yellow Economic Circle, stating that they would only buy from or consume media created by “Yellow” shops and individuals. Lennon Walls, a symbolic relic from the Umbrella Movement, could be easily found all across the city inside Yellow shops and public spaces. Large network television stations, such as TVB, is condemned to be spreading propaganda from the government, and a flurry of independent media and journalists emerged to take the place of established television and newspaper platforms (Leung, 2021). On the other hand, pro-CCP individuals and organisations have also gained a lot of traction, namely “Blue” groups and “Love” organisations, holding their own rallies and celebrations to show that they supported the current regime and CCP control. Protestors have also been accused of eliciting acts of violence and arson across the city, disrupting traffic and economic activity.

Internationally, protestors made use of social media networks such as Reddit and Twitter to garner support and attention from the international community. Lee and Ting describe the young people of Hong Kong as “digital natives” to summarise their knowledge in harnessing social media to their advantage (2015, p. 376). Foreign expats, reporters, and social media influencers in the city also contributed greatly through delivering news about the protests to non-Cantonese speaking audiences (Wang and Liu, 2021). Meanwhile, loose and informal verbal alliances were

forged between Hong Kong protestors with participants of social movements, especially those that are also fighting against authoritarian governments. The Milk Tea Alliance was one such example, as Thailand also saw their own social movements seeking to reform the monarchy. Protestors also use social media to lobby for support from politicians of other countries, namely that of the US. Meanwhile, sympathetic Hongkongers also arranged rallies, petitions, and the like in other countries such as the UK. In response, various nations have extended condemnation to the Chinese government and even created lifeboat or asylum policies for Hongkongers.

However, near the end of 2022 onwards enthusiasm perhaps has become tempered with resignation – Hongkongers now look to fleeing overseas, rather than staying in the city, prompting a wave of immigration (Yue, 2023). Vague ideas of establishing a new "Hong Kong" in another country have been discussed on social media platforms. To say that the goal of the Hong Kong protests is to survive would not be that far off in the eyes of protestors. The establishment – the police force, the HKSAR government, the NPC – has proven itself capable of physical violence and incarceration, and increasingly there is a looming belief that the movement would end with the mass diaspora of Hongkongers to other countries, and that Hong Kong as a city would become fully integrated into the CCP model of governance. The movement has perhaps reached a point of saturation – full independence of Hong Kong is the only thing that would satisfy protestors, but the fact remains that such an outcome is highly improbable.

1.2.2 Black Lives Matter

The concept of Black Lives Matter (BLM) stemmed from the murder of Trayvon Martin in 2012, developing into the hashtag #BlackLivesMatter that has come to represent a global social movement (Gallagher et al, 2018). Over the years, the law enforcement and judicial system of USA has come under heavy scrutiny, with controversial cases emerging such as Eric Garner, Michael Brown, and more recently Breonna Taylor and George Floyd. The movement gained international exposure rapidly, the phrase "Black Lives Matter" trending on Twitter and other social media networks. This has led to a more organised use of the phrase to shed light on the existence of systemic racism not only in the US, but across the globe, educating and bringing awareness of the issue to non-black demographics. Advocacy and activist organisations sprung up to sustain the movement beyond the events of 2013 – seeds sown for a much larger mobilisation in 2020.

In May 2020, the death of George Floyd sparked another round of protests under the banner of BLM, which quickly took flight on a global scale (Maguire, 2021). Footage of Floyd's encounter with law enforcement officers were circulated around the internet, eliciting rapid responses in the form of protests and rallies across the world. In the UK, actor John Boyega was one of the many figures within the nation to take a high-profile position in the movement, speaking in the rallies held in London about racism within the nation, potentially to the detriment of his own career. The movement burst against a backdrop of COVID-19, a Trump presidency, and waves of social movements that had burst around the globe.

At the same time, riots broke out across the US, with businesses and public institutions vandalised, damaged, and even looted. In response, police officers employed tear gas, rubber bullets, water cannons, and mass arrests to deter protestors, with some states responding with harsher measures than others (Harbarger, 2020). Journalists were also reportedly arrested or assaulted. Protestors were accused of looting and destroying both white-owned and black-owned businesses, and were using the opportunity to commit felonies and steal rather than exercising their right to protest (Maguire, 2021). Yet law enforcement agencies responded with more extreme physical means to repress the movement, and at the same time, the judicial system did not deliver a judgement that protestors agreed with – namely, police officers accused of murdering Breonna Taylor and George Floyd were not punished for their deaths.

Yet while the physical element of the movement in 2020 – namely, the protests, rallies, and riots – stemmed from specific cases of police brutality and the failure of the judicial system, BLM as a whole grew to be about addressing social injustice and racial inequality. Repeated incidents had given time and space for BLM to become a mature banner to rally behind, with well-established educational mechanisms and activist organisations providing numerous resources for mobilisation and education. Freelon et al (2016) state that the relative success of BLM is due to the concrete issue of police brutality, which contributes to the shaping of their collective identity. I argue that the concern of BLM as it is in 2021, has spread beyond police brutality at the time of writing (2024), as the movement engages with vocabulary associated with race and privilege (De Choudhury et al, 2016).

Rather than considering a specific policy or regime change as the end goal, BLM is largely believed to be aimed at changing the values of society, which then would influence policymakers and the world as a whole to pursue racial equality and dismantle white privilege. Trends on social media to promote Black-owned businesses, artists, and other individuals arose. Black films, media, and music were heavily promoted, and recent video games, such as Marvel's Spider-Man: Miles Morales, included explicit tributes to BLM. In the UK, the movement drew discussions on how the UK as a nation addresses systemic racism and imperial legacies, prompting reflection on historical figures such as Churchill. Monuments and statues of controversial figures were pulled down. In the US, states and cities adopted varying responses to the protestors, with some adopting a larger degree of repression while others, like Boston, pledging to combat racism. On an ideological level, BLM is not only about pursuing racial equality in law enforcement and legal systems, or just about dismantling particular structures. BLM is concerned with changes that occurs in a societal level, to educate people to not only just be "not racist" but to actively call out racism in both contemporary society and historical legacies.

2. Literature Review

This chapter first addresses literature concerning trust and trustworthiness, then explores the unique role of information among social movements. Throughout this thesis, it is necessary to acknowledge that this thesis will inevitably straddle multiple areas of research. This research seeks to marry various academic disciplines with real world practice.

The literature search utilised a variation of keyword searches across major academic databases. The keyword queries were a combination of the following for the literature review, grouped together here to show relevance:

- “social movements”, “activis*”, “Black Lives Matter”, “Hong Kong protest*”
- “trust*”, “interpersonal trust*”, “trustworthiness”,
- “fake news”, “disinformation”, “misinformation”
- “information behaviour”, “digital information behaviour”, “social media”, “communication”, “social media”

And the following for exploring the most appropriate methodology for my research design:

- “social network analysis”, “network”, “social media network*”
- “ethnography”
- “social movement research”
- “social media research”, “Twitter”
- “mixed methods”, “pragmatism”
- “interview”, “online interview*”

The above keywords and topics were combined and expanded upon throughout the research period, and I have presented here the key concepts that were the topics of exploration. The literature included in this chapter are centred around these disciplines: Social Movement research, Trust research, and Information Behaviour research.

However, this literature review does not include works that discuss and debate statistical models of trust. My search strategy, as is my research question, focuses on the qualitative dimension. Instead of providing a statistical perspective, or an objective answer, this research aims to explore subjective understanding of trust and trustworthiness. Thus, statistical models are considered as out of scope of my literature review.

Further, I focus on research on trust that centre around real time exchange. Many other disciplines investigate a concept of trust and trustworthiness from other perspectives. These merit acknowledgement but have been omitted from this study in order to remain on trust created between individuals in their interactions with information in real time. For instance, archival literature touches on the concept of provenance through time and its role in the trustworthiness of records as historical evidence.

2.1 Trust and Trustworthiness

Trust research spans across multiple disciplines, the concept of trust itself being important to various areas of study, with fields of psychology, philosophy, and management being the most active in discussions about what trust is and how it can occur. While most trust research concerns interpersonal trust, that is trust between two individuals, I believe the same theories of trust can be applied to trust towards information. Trust is defined in Mayer, Davis, and Schoorman (1995, p. 712) as "the willingness of a party to be vulnerable to the actions of another party based on the expectation that the other will perform a particular action important to the trustor, irrespective of the ability to monitor or control that other party". Möllering (2001, p. 404) defines it as, "a state of favourable expectation regarding other people's actions and intentions". Trust can be understood both as an active and passive behaviour – one makes active decisions to trust another when there is uncertainty, but may also possess passive subconscious trust in elements where uncertainty has been eliminated. Simmel (1950, p. 318) describes its function for an individual as, "a hypothesis certain enough to serve as a basis for practical conduct".

However, Möllering (2001) cautions that trust cannot be subsumed under decision-making and exchange theories. Trust is also understood as a mechanism to cope with uncertainty and risk. Luhmann (2017) argues that trust reduces social complexity through generalisation within systems. Through trust, certain possibilities can be discounted and excluded from thinking automatically. Frankel (1977, p. 36) denotes this as trust being used "where more exact knowledge is not available". Even as human interactions become increasingly digital, and communications become easier as enabled by mass communication tools, these theories regarding interpersonal trust still stand.

Trustworthiness thus is defined as having a potential quality of being trusted. Mayer et al (1995) describes trustworthiness as the proximal predictor of trust – there must be trustworthiness before trust would be given. To trust is an action initiated by the trustor – there is nothing the trustee can do to force the trustor to engage in trust (Möllering, 2019). Trustworthiness is thus also a quality that is subject to the trustor's evaluation. While individuals may attempt to look more trustworthy, or present information in a way that makes it look more credible, it is ultimately the trustor's decision as to whether they interpret the information they receive as satisfying their threshold of trustworthiness. Individuals choose to engage in trust when they perceive that the subject is trustworthy, be it a person or an item.

Various psychological and economic models of trust postulate that individuals make rational judgements based on the information they have. The difficulty is then about making the best judgement in the absence of all information so to achieve the best possible interests. Trust is thus embedded in a logic of consequentiality. Hardin (2001) introduces a theory of encapsulated interest, which sees trust as the assurance that one's interest is not threatened by the other, and Nannestad (2008) further explains that under such a lens, trustworthiness becomes the base of social cooperation and maintenance of relationships. In the discipline of computer systems and networks, trust is defined through measurable quantifiers generated through rigorous

calculations and tests (Rahimzadeh Holagh and Mohebbi, 2019). The lack of information thus inhibits this process and individuals find other ways to compensate.

Other theories of trust suggest non-rational approaches to trust, or otherwise postulating that there are elements beyond rational thinking that influences one's decision to trust. Lewis and Weigert (1985) differentiates between a cognitive base and emotional base for trust, describing emotion as an element outside of cognition that is active in trust. Uslaner (2002) sees trust as moralistic, rather than strategic, and is inherited through socialisation instead of based on calculations of risk or utility. Thus trust can be seen as being driven by social norms, rather than rational thinking.

Kunda (1990) introduces the concept of motivated reasoning, which suggests that individuals have a propensity to trust in what they want to trust in. Social media platforms certainly encourage information seeking behaviours that echo motivated reasoning. As social media users engage with various topics on these platforms, they make their preferences known, and in turn social media platforms will continue to show users information they are more likely to be interested in and like, rather than capturing the diverse topics and voices that exist on the platform in its entirety. Lewandowsky et al (2012) argue that cognitively, individuals tend to accept information as fact, until they receive a correction or retraction, which explains how misinformation proliferates.

Faith is another element frequently thought to influence trust-making. Giddens (1991, p. 19) defines trust as presuming "a leap to commitment, a quality of 'faith' which is irreducible". Simmel introduces the term suspension to refer to this elusive, intangible concept, and describes the process of trusting as suspending both belief and disbelief. Through the analysis of Simmel's theory on trust, Möllering (2001) conceptualizes trust as weak inductive knowledge combined with an unaccountable faith.

Other nomenclature has also been used in conceptualising and explaining trust decisions. Tomlin and Schnackenberg (2022) argue for the concept of transparency to serve as an antecedent to building trustworthiness. Within that concept are dimensions of disclosure, clarity, and accuracy. Turcotte et al (2015) stresses the importance of ideological congruence especially when assessing trust in media outlets. Their paper argues that institutional media trust is dependent on whether the news outlet aligns with the ideological leanings of individuals. These different starting points yield different ways of thinking about trust and trustworthiness perceptions.

Thus, the above discussions of trust should also be situated in context of information trust. Information is in the first place necessarily created and disseminated by individuals, whom can be subject to theories of interpersonal trust. The information created thus serves as a medium – a conduit of which one can make use of to form judgements on whether or not to trust. Further, trust exists not only on the interpersonal level, but also in constructed institutions. Möllering (2001) gives the example of money as one such institution. The online space, for instance, is where trust is not based on interpersonal relationships, but on information. E-commerce, or

online shopping, involves buyers and sellers engaging in a trusting relationship, perhaps mediated by a third-party platform, but nonetheless buyers and sellers can only act on trust that the other person is a legitimate buyer or seller. Tang and Liu's 2018 paper details how trust is built and mediated in e-marketplaces, stating additional factors such as trust in the e-marketplace, previous customer reviews, and the e-seller. Information thus can also be such an institution, as it is constructed, used, and exchanged much like currency. In the case of online shopping, information about the product, the seller, and previous experiences of other customers forms the basis of the trust-building. This is also more akin to generalised trust, as described by Nannestad (2008), where individuals do not enter a relationship explicitly but still engage in trust.

With the prevalence of the term "fake news" in recent years, there is a heightened debate around misinformation and disinformation. "Fake news" is described by Allcott and Gentzkow (2017, p. 213) as, "intentionally and verifiably false". Other papers also describe it in different terms with negative connotations, such as information pollution (Wardle and Derekshan, 2017), information warfare (Khaldarova and Pantti, 2016), or media manipulation (Marwick and Lewis, 2017). This thesis uses the terms disinformation and misinformation as a basis of discussion.

This paper takes the argument of Möllering (2001) that there is no encompassing theory of trust which can ever be uncovered. The myriads of trust theories evidences the impossibility of a universal principle of which trustworthiness of someone or something can be established definitively. How one decides to trust or perceive something as trustworthy is subjective, and dependent on the context they are situated within. All established trust theories are valid, and also invalid depending on the conditions and agents involved. It is thus not the intention of this study to attempt to develop a generalisable theory of trust, nor do I see it as useful or meaningful to the subject of my study. Instead, what this study aims to uncover is the formation of *perceptions* of trustworthiness, which will inform how one develops judgements on whether or not to trust. Therefore, this study is also primarily concerned with active trust, or how people *perceive* their own decisions to trust.

Trust is also closely related to decision making (Möllering, 2001). Within social movements, how does trust and trustworthiness impact how individuals interact with information, and further that, engage in practical action within social movements? Participants in social movements usually have a pre-established conviction in the interests, if not moral goodness, of their cause. Does that make it easier to develop trust, or is there a heightened need to assess trustworthiness so as not to dilute the authenticity of the cause?

2.2 Social movements and Information

In the digital age, information spreads at an unprecedented speed, and information circulated on social media by strangers becomes a primary source of knowledge and understanding of the world and other current affairs. Borrowing Buckland's (1991) classifications of information, it is most helpful to understand information in social movement as a "thing", that is the tangible

delivery of knowledge in the form of data, such as newspaper reports, photographs, facts etc. With the relatively widespread popularity of the Internet and social media applications, the digital realm has become embedded into popular and political culture (Lerner, 2010). The spread of information no longer relies on the word of mouth or paper publications, but has predominantly taken place on the Internet, which has been made good use of by political activists and actors seeking to direct social change (Vaccari et al, 2015). Thus, it has become increasingly important to understand how or why social movements take shape. More specifically, the role of information is framed to be perceived as authentic, trusted, and then used to reinforce narratives in favour of or opposing social change.

Social movements are a space that nurture collective sentiment and identity that ultimately leads to action. Politically charged, social movements are very often also emotionally charged, as the participants have individual stakes or reasons of which to support and take part in activities that very often confronts the status quo. In the digital age, many social movements have increasingly made use of social media to mobilise collective action and spread their message (Nah et al, 2006). A prominent example is the Arab Spring movement in Egypt, 2011, which many overseas would remember from the information coming through social media channels, as opposed to traditional news channels (Lotan et al, 2011). King (2011) argues that the key goal of social movements is to reach new audiences, which is certainly made easier by social media. Further, activists not only use social media to reach new audiences, but also to network and build relationships across different activist groups and social movements (Isa and Himelboim, 2018). The concept of "networked politics" and "networked social movements", as coined by Castells (2012) is increasingly becoming popular among academia as online technologies seemingly occupy a more central role in collective action and social change in the decreasing influence of central organisations. Social movements are formed by various networks coming together in a larger network, taking the form of a decentered structure as the importance of formal organisations decrease. Although online activism or online mobilisation is unlikely to replace offline activities, especially in areas where internet access is not universal, it is nonetheless well-evidenced that social media is well-suited to support and facilitate dynamic protests and engage international audiences (Wilson and Dunn, 2011).

The strategic framing of information and its dissemination remains an important driving force behind many recent social movements. Information generates rhetoric, such as the naming and labelling of marginalised groups or in turn, perceived oppressors. This labelling evokes ingroup and outgroup responses, which serves to motivate individuals to participate in collective action. From a constructivist viewpoint, it is natural that rhetoric and symbolisms become adopted or appropriated across various movements. Examples include the adoption of the three-finger salute from Hollywood film Hunger Games by resistance movements in Thailand; the #MeToo movement that gained traction mainly around the Harvey Weinstein case has spread across the globe, and was used in many other countries to bring light to sexual violence, abuse, and harassment in their own respective countries. As symbols are used to frame certain narratives, they gain legitimacy, amass empathy, and thus spread even further (Nah et al, 2006; Mundt et al, 2018; Wang and Liu, 2021).

Social movements are no longer contained within their own geographical space, as information and their accompanying meanings are circulated at a high speed through the internet, and has proven itself capable of forcing political change at an institutional or societal level. Thus it is essential to understand the how and why information becomes trustworthy in the context of social movements to better understand collective action in the modern era.

This research focuses on information that exist primarily on the internet, namely through social media platforms and messaging platforms. Social media is defined by Kaplan and Haenlein (2010, p. 61) as "a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and allow the creation and exchange of user generated content". In reality, there is an ever-expanding suite of applications and websites that fulfil that purpose, including forums, blogs, instant messaging applications, or traditional social media platforms such as Twitter (now known as X) or Facebook. The use of social media by social movements and activists have been studied, with most literature tending to agree on the usefulness of social media in amplifying the efforts of social movement mobilisation and organisation (Mundt et al, 2018; Freelon et al, 2016; Khamis and Vaughn, 2012). Vaccari et al (2015) describe social media as a forum for political activity, while Chadwick (2011) argues for the participatory potential of the exuberant information made available to individuals. Younger generations, in particular, have been assumed to embrace the emancipatory nature of social media much easier and more effectively (Fominaya, 2012). Westlund and Bjur (2014) credit this to the naturalization effect of media in young people's lives, where mediatisation has become a constant part of daily life. Meanwhile, Friedman (2014) used the term "square people" to describe young activists to capture their behaviour of amassing in physical or virtual squares, using social media and the World Wide Web as a lens through which to observe the world they are situated in.

There is some degree of skepticism about the impact of social media as a forum for political activity. Slacktivism, which is the act of solely engaging in online protest activities such as commenting on social media posts or sharing information through the internet, has been described as a phenomenon that distracts from effective collective action and the absence of strong motivations (Skoric, 2012). Gladwell (2010) writes in an article in The New Yorker that social media "makes it easier for activists to express themselves, and harder for that expression to have any impact". Christensen (2011) describe slacktivists as lacking the required commitment to achieve the political change they aspire to. Bimber and Davis' (2003) study argues that the selective nature of the web makes it so that political information will only reach those who are already engaged, thus otherwise ineffective in reaching uninterested audiences and hence failing in enlarging collective action. Overall, those who write of the detrimental effect of slacktivism see it as encouraging an illusion of participation, as opposed to actually leading to effective political change.

However, there is equally a strong argument of the effectiveness of online engagement in contributing to the wider social movement. Rojas and Puig-i-Abril (2009) argue that individuals who express themselves politically on digital media are also more likely to mobilize other people by different means, and in turn more likely to engage in other participatory acts. Boulianne's

(2009) study observes a strong correlation between internet use and political participation over time. Vaccari et al (2015) describes how online political engagement can facilitate self-expression, leads to other forms of engagement, and helps build a collective identity for social movements. Digital platforms have opened up possibilities for political organizing and engagement, as well as creating channels through which individuals can engage with social movements as part of a daily routine. Buechler (2016) sees the Internet as an organizational substitute for formal movement organisations in facilitating with collective actions. Vaccari et al (2015) argue that online methods of participation are not mutually exclusive, but rather overlap and reinforce one another, ultimately opening up possibilities for indirect mobilization processes.

To delve into the concepts of trust and trustworthiness of information, we must first establish the connection between information and social movements, and the role and impact it plays as written in literature surrounding activism and social movements. Broadly, social movement have been analysed through various theories, with each suggest differing origins or lens of examining how social movements take shape and evolve. Deprivation theory revolves around the idea that certain people or groups in society "feel that they are deprived of a specific good, service, or resource" (Sen and Avci, 2016). Resource mobilisation theory focuses on explaining how social movements mobilise resources to alleviate grievances, while political process theory emphasises the existing political atmosphere and the availability of political opportunities. Structural strain theory, proposed by Smelser in 1965, lays out six factors or steps of a process of how social movements grow. It begins from the existence of some form of societal problem or deprivation, recognition in society that this problem exists, the rise of an ideological solution to this problem, the occurrence of events that convert a nascent movement into a social movement, an openness to change on the part of society or the government, and finally the effective mobilisation of resources. Finally, new social movement theories developed in the 1960s draw away from a traditional Marxist lens that focuses on the economics and resources (Sen and Avci, 2016). Instead, new social movement theories look to other motivators of collective action and definitions of collective identity. Arising as a direct counter towards classical Marxist theories for analysing collective action, new social movement theorists look to political, ideological, and cultural influences (Sen and Avci, 2016). They also consider the impact of identity markers, such as ethnicity, gender, and sexuality, in building collective identity and influencing collective action (Buechler, 1995).

Across the various social movement theories, information fits into the role of a critical resource for sustaining political movements in practical terms, as well as contributing heavily to the building of collective identity. Borrowing from Lee's framework on resistance movements (2017), the transformation of individual activism into collective action can be described as involving three processes: conditions, mechanisms, and effects. Conditions such as grievances, injustices, or political conditions arise, which are then captured in mechanisms such as a news report or a rally, then translated into effects, or impacts. Information sits across all three: it can contextualise or summarise the condition through which grievances arise; it can be a deliberate mechanism employed to provide agency, enabling the transformation of individual sentiments into collective

action; it is also the product of action and critical to sustaining the movement beyond its immediate local and short-term impact.

Castells (2012) uses networks to explain political protests and collective action in the digital age. Through visualizing protest activity through an interconnected structure of organisation and information flow, they explain how social movements are organised and mobilised in the digital space. Although critical of the impact of social media on collective action, González-Bailón and Wang (2016) reveal how this logic echoes behaviour in non-online social networks. As network communities are formed in the digital space, information flows between them in a much freer manner than in conventional methods of information sharing, enabling communications that do not rely on traditional power structures or hierarchies that enable collective mobilization. For instance, Gerbaudo (2012) argues that based on his studies of the Arab Spring, the 'Indignados' in Spain, and the Occupy campaign in the US, it can be concluded that social media facilitates the rise of 'softer' forms of leadership that can be borne out of self-organised movements. Bennet and Segerberg (2013) describe this as the logic of connective action, where communication becomes a new form of organisation due to digital technology, moving away from traditional social movement theories in explaining how collective action is formed, thus negating a need for formal organisational structures or collective identity. Individuals develop personal action frames that motivate them to take part in social movements, and these personalized or small group-based actions thus generate a culture which encourages such behaviour. They attribute this to how communication enabled through digital media facilitates the sharing of these personal frames or individual actions.

Through the lens of resource mobilisation theory, Carroll and Hackett (2006) describes the democratisation of communication as a mode of action taken by social movement organisations to influence discourse and build a sympathetic audience. Only when the audience trusts in the communication mechanisms, views the origin of these communications as authentic, that the audience become receptive to the information object and the underlying cause. In my case studies of Hong Kong and BLM, this involves the building of alternate media and creating an audience that is critical towards traditional media elites. Participants in social movements deliberately seek out news sources that they perceive to be democratised – or, otherwise free from intervention of the machines of which they believe to be oppressing them (Carroll and Hackett, 2006). Lee and Chan (2018) summarises this as social media being seen as an alternative platform for challenging the coverage from traditional mainstream media, allowing them to bypass gatekeepers, so activists can create and disseminate their own messaging without mediation. This applies to all stakeholders in the movement, no matter the political view or decision. In cases where there is a lack of perceived trustworthy media, people seek to create their own, while simultaneously playing an active part in destroying the authenticity of media that they deem untrustworthy, and thus unworthy of being labelled as authentic. Carroll and Hackett (2006) describe this as social movements seeking to reduce asymmetry and dependency on traditional media outlets.

In the case of Hong Kong, independent media such as Stand News and independent journalists are lauded by those labelling themselves as pro-democracy, earning themselves widespread recognition alongside mainstream media (Leung, 2021). In the case of Black Lives Matter, videos circulated around the internet becomes the norm of sharing information, whereas official information channels, such as news coverage and traditional media outlets are criticised for being selective with their reporting (Mundt et al, 2018). Meanwhile, channels of communication produced by the police are sabotaged deliberately, an information collecting app of the police force spammed and flooded by K-pop videos rather than the information they had sought out to collect (Sunio, 2020).

These actions are effective in causing confusion in the opponent, or rallying sympathetic audiences, precisely because information sharing is a crucial mechanism which evokes both psychological and physical reaction in members of society, prompting them to respond to social movements. Information is structured and disseminated, taking multiple formats, such as media coverage, records, or even conversations between friends. Through the dissemination of information, social movement participants engage in meaning-making as the information they share shapes the discourse within the social movements (Carney, 2016). The content of information contextualises the conditions, which in turn justifies the cause, and the successful dissemination of such information triggers affect and other emotive responses from the recipient. In the context of social movements, common sentiments include grievances, feelings of injustice or underrepresentation, or even appealing to a personal moral imperative, which can then be exacerbated through the deliberate and strategic framing of information (Delehanty, 2020). Emotive responses then can be transformed into physical responses, such as joining in-person protests or rallies, and the further sharing of information, thus creating a cycle of which information circulates to reinforce such sentiments.

Further, the information disseminator is also the information recipient. At any point in the flow of information, it can be added to, altered, destroyed, or even revived by anyone. The information recipient determines whether or not information is to be trusted, and then decides if the degree of trust they have in a particular piece of information is sufficient to then take further action beyond simply receiving the information. Actions primarily involve becoming an information disseminator, such as sharing information through social media, or talking about it verbally in their immediate social circles. Further actions involve commonly accepted physical activity, such as donating, signing petitions, or taking part in protests. Radical actions, such as hate crimes or other morally dubious activities may also emerge as a result of receiving information. Vaccari et al's (2015) research into political discussions on Twitter around the 2013 Italian general election deduce that those who engage more in online political expression, such as publishing or sharing information, are more likely to engage in activities that have a higher impact, including in-person activities.

It is however undeniable that there are other factors and immeasurable psychological elements that can contribute to influencing participants into taking action in the context of social movements beyond information itself (Suh and Reynolds-Stenson, 2020). While the digital realm

is important to communication and organisation, it's position in relation to offline activities should not be overexaggerated. Although offline activism is outside the scope of this thesis, it must be noted that both of my case studies have also had a heavy offline presence that led to media coverage. However, while the power of such events towards generating sentiment and building reputation is significant, it is through the internet that individuals are made aware of these events happening in the first place, and it is also through the digital space that these events are captured and disseminated for interpretation by others.

Moreover, censorship, be it from authoritarian governments, or self-censorship, remain a major limitation to the spreading of information. Dergacheva and Tous-Rovirosa's (2020) study of Russian networked authoritarianism argues that state actors are equally as capable and effective in influencing political discourse and conversations. MacKinnon (2011) further looks into specific mechanisms that prohibit or manipulate the flow of information and communication, such as censorship, legal restrictions, banning of sites, or use of internet trolls. It will be the task of this study to investigate whether such factors influence what social movement participants believe to be true.

Information by itself in isolation means nothing without the vehicles with which to disseminate it and the actors to interpret it. Nonetheless, a study into what is understood as trust and perceptions of trustworthiness when specifically applied to information can widen our understanding of how social movements develop and flow around information, especially as more and more social movements have taken to the digital realm and gain traction beyond geographical boundaries. This thus enables the development of the concepts of trust and information authenticity as a useful analytical tool with which social movements can be better examined. This may serve as a useful reflection for activists and other political actors to employ in their political activities, but also prompt and encourage critical thinking from the participant or society to better understand how their definitions of authenticity and trust are developed, constructed, and thus should be interrogated and examined more in-depth, and should not be accepted as always objective and true.

3. Methodology and Research Design

This research aims to understand the complexity of how information trustworthiness is constructed within social movements, and how its subsequent dissemination and comprehensions influences perceptions of trust and trustworthiness among social movement actors, with a particular focus in social media and the digital space. To explore how individuals within social movements perceive information trustworthiness, I look at two case contexts: the Hong Kong protests from 2019 onwards, and Black Lives Matter from 2020 onwards.

In this chapter, which is the substantial writing, I further explain how my case contexts can effectively serve as the subject of study. I then proceed to explain the application of a pragmatic research paradigm and mixed methods research design. The data collection of this study is separated into three phases, which will then be elaborated on respectively. The first phase is social network analysis, the second being the survey phase, and the final phase will be interviews. This will be proceeded by a discussion of the ethical considerations that concern this research. The chapter ends with a brief exploration about the limitations of my chosen methodology.

The aim of my research design is to help me explore the influence of the context of social movements on perceptions of trust and attitudes to information trustworthiness, and to that end situate the concept of information trust within social movements, creating an applicable definition that is meaningful to real life contexts. To do so, the following objectives will be achieved through my data collection:

- Reveal and understand patterns of information creation and dissemination among social movement participants
- Examine how various social movement participants see the role of information creation and dissemination
- Explore the role of information trustworthiness in influencing information creation and dissemination within social movements

Although this study adopts pragmatism as the research paradigm, the focus of my study – the perception of trust – is very much informed by a social constructionist viewpoint. In this approach, knowledge, or the objective truth is understood as socially produced, a co-construction of symbols, culture, and language. As is evidenced in my literature review, the concept of trust is one of ongoing debate and discussion, and is defined or perceived differently by different fields of study. Perception of knowledge is informed by our social practices, our culture, and similarly the perception of trust and trustworthiness can only be understood as differently defined by every individual, depending on their experiences and circumstances. Therefore such research is needed – under circumstances where we cannot possibly obtain objective measures of trust and trustworthiness, and how is it being understood by individuals in a particular politically and emotionally charged context? How does information trust shapes, or is shaped by, the context of study? If we cannot understand how people truly perceive trust and trustworthiness, how do we

then move forward in our research of social movement participants and internet-driven activism?

3.1 Background

I have selected two social movements to serve as the context of my research, namely the Hong Kong protests from 2019 onwards and the resurgence of Black Lives Matter in 2020 onwards. Choosing specific social movements grounds my research into a real-world context, which is extremely fitting given that the phenomenon under study is very much a product of the social world. Although I do not achieve the same level of depth with both social movements as one would do if employing a case study methodological approach, I nonetheless place emphasis on the intrinsic qualities of both cases that influenced the way I approach my research questions. In an earlier section, I have already outlined my case contexts. In this chapter, I explain how my chosen case contexts uniquely serve to answer my research question.

Both Black Lives Matter and the Hong Kong protests have fundamental differences in origins and trajectory. Black Lives Matter is an ideology that primarily hopes to evoke fundamental changes in societal and institutional values. It is thus more or less a broad movement that can be echoed in multiple cultural and historical contexts. Most discussion surrounding Black Lives Matter has also taken place in Western democratic countries. The case of the Hong Kong protests is vastly different. It is first and foremost a localised movement opposing what they perceive as authoritarian rule in East Asia. Largely pragmatic and programmatic, the end goal of the various strands in the protest revolves around Hong Kong gaining some form of autonomy.

However, both social movements also share similarities that make them especially meaningful in research to uncover how contemporary social movements have evolved and changed. What makes them uniquely suited for this study is the very visible digital presence of both movements, the prominence of the citizen journalist and the citizen participant, and the constant struggle against counter-narratives by government and other institutional forces on the very platform of this study.

As social media becomes universally prevalent in our daily lives, it has also taken up an effective and key role of communication and outreach among activism and social movements (Carty, 2014). The internet plays a massive role both in creating and spreading information for both movements, which has benefitted advocacy and mobilisation. BLM in particular has very effectively used internet advocacy to spread ideals beyond geographical boundaries. Using BLM as a case study, Mundt et al (2018, p. 1) describes social media as being able to strengthen the movement by "facilitating collective meaning-making and the creation of support networks" and expand the movement by enabling coalitions and disseminate non-dominant discourses about the cause. Social movements spread across social media, reaching international audiences and forming parasocial relationships. Different social movements can cross paths and form alliances, whereas one social movement can create branches occupying various geographical and occupational spheres. Chung et al (2021, p.1) describes the ability of social movements to allow "boundary-

less conversations" between individuals. In the case of the Hong Kong protests, Twitter protestors have found fellow participants in social movements taking place in Vietnam, Thailand, and other Asian countries that view China's rise and diplomacy as a threat, creating the use of the #MilkTeaAlliance between various social movements that originate from different countries. Although looking at the Umbrella Movement in 2014, Lee and Ting (2015) already observed that youth activists in Hong Kong then already developed expertise in social media and mass media logic to spread their message while counteracting the agenda-setting ability of traditional media channels.

Both movements are primarily characterised by a lack of leadership, and accompanying that, a rejection of high-level institutions or organisations, a trend that has been visible in social movements of the last decade (Gleason, 2013; Mundt et al, 2018). There is a need for alternate information sources other than government or mainstream media channels, which is where the concept of trust becomes heavily tested. Both movements inevitably fostered a distrust in government channels and national news, and while there are key figures that speak for either movement, there is no one political group or individual that can claim to control the mobilisation of the people. Instead, discourse is shaped by the individual, either offline or online. Literature looking into BLM argue that the structure of the movement, or the lack thereof, means that the broad audience enjoy a narrative agency which thus encapsulates diverse voices, and can engage in the shaping of the dominant discourse and alter meaning-making within the movement (Yang, 2016; Ince et al, 2017; Gallagher et al, 2018).

Bonilla and Rosa (2015) attributes the successful spread of the #BlackLivesMatter hashtag in 2014 to the role of citizens framing the story of the death of Michael Brown, and Ransby (2017) argues that BLM is more powerful precisely because they have rejected the old style of social movement leadership, which is top-down focused. In Hong Kong, independent journalists and news outlets have sprung up to document protest activities and social injustices, most of which choose to do so by either uploading video recordings or livestreaming on social media channels. Both movements have thus taken great advantage of the public sphere that is social media, forming discourses and creating a shared sense of movement identity (De Choudhury et al, 2016).

However, the open entry into the space of which social movement discourse takes shape also means that counternarratives can also form. The #AllLivesMatter hashtag exists to argue that BLM protestors discriminate against police officers and/or white people, whereas in the case of Hong Kong, the Hong Kong Police Force created a Twitter account that posts in English and uses popular memes in an attempt to create a positive international image (Gallagher et al, 2018). However, while BLM protestors tend to still be able to express their opinions freely, comparatively Hong Kong protestors have been strongly discouraged from voicing their anti-government sentiments after a series of arrests of activists based on what they have said or written. Although this level of authoritarian rule has not been officially cemented in legislation, it leads to a form of self-censorship. That is not to say BLM protestors have not faced backlash or prosecution of other kinds because of what they have expressed (Toppa and Masilungan, 2021).

The choice of these two movements was made due to the similarities and unique differences both share, which is what construes them as excellent contexts for comparison. They are very recent social movements, happening in a very comparable timeframe, where information is still being actively shared among protestors and discourse is still being actively shaped. They are, at the same time, old social movements. As described earlier, BLM was introduced in 2012, while a push against institutional racism and white privilege exists even longer before that, albeit lacking in a unifying symbol that is the term Black Lives Matter. Meanwhile, the Hong Kong protests happen in a city which is very familiar with widespread movements and collective action (Lee and Chan, 2018). The population is arguably still feeling the effects from the Umbrella Movement in 2014, which saw a large number of participants then which has since been broken by the Anti-Extradition Law Amendment Bill Movement in 2019. As such, both populations are arguably used to participating in social movements.

By choosing two timely cases that share base similarities, but differ wildly in cultural context, I hope to thus be able to apply my research in different situations and approach it from different perspectives, thus developing an in-depth and comprehensive understanding of my research question. I thus also gain diverse data sources and data sets from which to infer.

This study began in 2020, as the COVID-19 pandemic meant that the majority of the world were socially distancing and were discouraged from participating in public activities. Both my case contexts also began in roughly the same period, and participants faced the same constraints on what they could do in-person. As a result, a majority of key activities often started taking shape on the internet and then fed into offline events. Due to the existence of the pandemic, as well as the potential risk involved in taking part in offline events, which may involve clashes with counter protestors or law enforcement, many who felt for both of my case contexts opted to voice their support on the Internet. As such, an insight into internet behaviour, rather than offline behaviour, was considered to provide an even more interesting snapshot of the construction of information trustworthiness in both chosen case contexts.

Further, the persistence of the COVID-19 pandemic limited travel and face-to-face interactions, and also led to the proliferation of using internet communication tools. Thus, I did not incorporate any essential face-to-face elements in my design, to ensure that I had enough flexibility to react to any further developments due to the pandemic. However, I do anticipate for the possibility of face-to-face data collection, namely through interviews, should research participants feel more protected in a face-to-face setting than through internet communication tools.

There is also a personal element to my choice of case contexts that influences my chosen method of engaging with them in research. I have participated in social movements in the past, and frequently express my political opinion on social media platforms. While I do not self-profess as an activist, I have taken sides in social movements and taken part in protest activity, such as attending in-person rallies or circulating online petitions. My prior experience of being within social movement communities alerts me to the importance of assessing information trustworthiness.

Thus, I am very much part of this phenomenon that I am hoping to study. Born and raised in Hong Kong, I innately feel more familiar with one of my case contexts than the other, but I also have strong personal opinions on Black Lives Matter that I have expressed on social media. The line between participant and researcher had to be carefully balanced – how could I ensure that my own perceptions on information and trust would not influence my findings? This is a question that I carry throughout the research process.

Hence, I avoided employing an ethnographic method, as I recognise that I have already been impacted affectively by both movements and am unable to remain impartial. Ethnography is a popular method in both social movement and information studies literature. Digital ethnography, or netnography, is also increasingly prevalent in observing communities that exist in both online and offline spaces. The approach involves the researcher entering the community and interacting with the space of study directly, either as an observer, an active researcher, or a participant. If I had chosen an ethnographic approach, or perhaps even just a netnographic approach, there is a strong possibility that I would be easily swept up in the rhetoric and fervour of both movements given my relationship with both. Thus, I adopted data collection methods that would help me maintain a distance with both case contexts. I as a social media user continued to be part of the networks of both social movements, but I as a researcher could establish a separate lens through which to view my case contexts. However, I also acknowledge that it is impossible to entirely divorce myself from my case contexts despite where I position myself. Similarly, I do not believe I am using a case study approach – my research aims to create generalisable findings across social movements, and do not offer the in-depth or rich understanding that case studies would deserve as described by Choemprayong and Wildemuth (2017).

Finally, privacy and anonymization of data was very much on the forefront of my mind. Participation in social movements has always and always will contain a certain element of risk for individuals. In the case of Hong Kong in particular, legislation introduced in 2021 has made it potentially illegal to profess participation or even simply support in the local protests, even if these activities take place overseas. I do not wish to put myself or any other individual at risk. Thus, I placed a heavy emphasis on incorporating privacy into my research design, the details of which I will delve into later on, alongside other data protection and privacy implications.

3.2 Pragmatism as a research paradigm

Although I self-identify as being more of a constructionist at heart, pragmatism is the approach I chose in tackling my research question. As Morgan (2007, p. 49) describes, paradigms are "systems of beliefs and practices that influence how researchers select both the questions they study and methods that they use to study them". This study in particular is thus influenced by pragmatism, defined by Tashakkori and Teddlie (2003, p. 713) as "focus[ing] instead of 'what works' as the truth regarding the research questions under investigation" (quotations in original).

Most importantly, pragmatism seeks not to exclude any methods, theories, or approaches, but is focused on using the right tools to answer the right questions.

While traditional paradigms tend to attribute a positivist worldview for quantitative research, and a constructionist worldview for qualitative research, pragmatism is described as a research philosophy that "goes beyond any given methodology or any problem-solving activity" (Denzin, 2012, p. 81). Biesta (2010) describes this as the breaking down of hierarchies between positivist and constructivist ways of knowing, so that what is meaningful can be drawn out from both. Particularly useful to this study on perceptions of trust and trustworthiness is the acknowledgement of multiple realities and understandings of empirical inquiry, and instead to focus on solving problems in the "real world", which can accommodate both objective and subjective approaches (Creswell and Plano Clark, 2011). Its emphasis is on utility and how research can be meaningful to the practical world. Most importantly, it acknowledges the unpredictability of human nature – human subjectivity, when tackling real life problems, will always introduce irregularities and shifts to theories (Morgan, 2007). As this research deals with perceptions, human subjectivity must necessarily be acknowledged as constant throughout the research process.

It is impossible to divorce the study of social movements from the real world – theory and real world application must go hand in hand. Della Porta (2014) describes the field of social movement research as dominated by methodological pluralism, where research is predominantly problem-oriented. Similarly, it is meaningless to study the construction of concepts without the involvement of social movement participants. How do they make sense of the concepts of trust and trustworthiness, and what implications does it have for their activity for information to be trustworthy? Through the lens of pragmatism, I can understand how socially constructed concepts are observed and understood as they are in the field, by those who are involved in and are impacted by information trust and trustworthiness within social movements. Thus, the design of my research is out of a desire to produce socially useful knowledge as described by Yvonne Feilzer (2010). It is meaningless to me to understand the concept of trust and trustworthiness without case contexts to ground my research in.

Shannon-Baker (2015) suggests that this is also a paradigm that recommends a balance between subjectivity and objectivity, and is characterised by an emphasis on communication and shared meaning-making in order to create practical solutions to social problems. Brewer and Hunter (2005) even argue that the combination of methods in pragmatism encourages or even requires the integration of different theoretical perspectives to interpret the data. Thus this is also an approach that fits my choice of mixed methods research design, and the emphasis on reflexivity, very well. The primary concern of a pragmatic research study is in the research question, generating research based in particular social problems, but also generalisable to others (Tashakkori and Teddlie, 2003; Shannon-Baker, 2015).

Ultimately, the focus on my study – the very abstract concept of trust – necessitates a pragmatist lens. It is meaningless to discuss trust and trustworthiness isolated from the very actors who make

use of it and are impacted by it. As discussed in my literature review, I am of the view that it is impossible to develop a universal, objective definition of trust. Trust cannot be understood separately from the context that it is situated in, and individual understanding of trust is necessarily influenced and constrained by one's own interpretations of events and experiences. Morgan (2014) states that under a pragmatist paradigm, any attempt to produce knowledge thus occur within a social context. Thus, it would be wholly inappropriate to hold any discussion of trust and trustworthiness without considering how it is viewed by the actors of my chosen context – social movements – and how it thus impacts their beliefs and actions. Thus, through a pragmatic lens, I direct the focus of my research onto which definitions of trust are "most meaningful", and thus select methods that are "most appropriate" for social movement actors (Morgan, 2007, p. 53). The concept of trust and trustworthiness that I aim to interrogate is necessarily developed from the perspective of social movement actors, for this research to be meaningful.

3.3 Mixed methods research design

This study uses a mixed methods research design. Tashakkori and Creswell (2007, p. 4) define mixed methods research as "research in which the investigator collects and analyses data, integrates the findings, and draws inferences using both qualitative and quantitative approach or methods in a single study of program of inquiry". I make use of both qualitative and quantitative methods, as per my pragmatist paradigm. Specifically, I employ an explanatory sequential mixed methods approach, as described by Cresswell and Plano Clark (2011, p. 224). Quantitative data is first collected to build onto the qualitative phases, enabling me to explore, expand on, and evidence quantitative findings in a way that is rooted within the communities of study. I split my methodology into three sequential phases, in which the previous phase influences the designs of the proceeding phases. However, all the phases will be revisited throughout the study, allowing for iteration and reflection to enrich the data collected and analysed in previous data collection phases. Finally, all data collected over the course of the study are meant to be analysed holistically - as they complement each other and help with triangulating findings.

The first phase involves creating the framework of my data and outlining the wider context of which information can be studied within both social movements. Using social network analysis, I will be constructing and analysing network graphs that capture how social movement participants interact on Twitter. For each social movement, two network graphs will be created to explore how information flows between social movement participants, one focusing on follower relationships and the other focusing on specific actions of direct interaction. This will be followed by a survey phase, in which I disseminate a large-scale electronic survey on social media to gather quantitative data about the information behaviours of social movement participants, so to understand the phenomenon from the perspective of participants. Surveys are aimed towards social media users who are aware of the two case contexts, who will be asked questions surrounding their social media usage, information consumption and disseminating behaviour, and how information on the Internet impacts their participation in social movements. Finally, the

last interview phase narrows the focus to information creators and disseminators of both of my case contexts, gaining qualitative data that can explore in-depth conversations with these key figures. Through holding dialogue with information disseminators regarding information trustworthiness, this phase aims to explore in-depth motivations for information creation and dissemination, thus confirming or challenging findings from previous phases.

As appropriate for a sequential approach, the findings of each phase feed into the design of the next, allowing for not only reflection on the previous phase, but also expansion on the latter to accommodate any areas not sufficiently answered by the previous. At the end of the three phases, all findings will be triangulated and analysed in order to validate conclusions, as well as explore any discrepancies.

The findings of each research phase inform the design of the next, allowing for the synthesising and triangulation of data collected using both quantitative and qualitative methods. Each research phase sets the scene of the next and targets different aspects of my research question, allowing for reflexivity throughout the process. Using different data sources and data sets will enable me to achieve the in-depth understanding that research into case studies demands, whereas using different data collection and analysis techniques complement one another. By using both qualitative and quantitative methods, I am able to approach my research question through multiple analytical angles and gather data from different sources, thus making best use of the strengths of my chosen data collection methods and compensating for their respective weaknesses. The process of triangulation at the end will effectively combine these multiple sources of data, that will corroborate, enrich, or challenge the findings of these multiple perspectives, thus strengthening the research (Pickard, 2013; Creswell and Plano Clark, 2011).

Mixed methods research is described as research which "...combines elements of qualitative and quantitative research approaches... for the broad purpose of breath and depth of understanding and corroboration" (Johnson et al, 2007, p. 123). Mixed methods research has been discussed heavily for its ability to guide the combination of both positivist quantitative research methods and constructivist qualitative research approaches. Mixed methods research is not simply using multiple methods, but instead is mixing in "all phases of the research process", as coined by Cresswell and Plano Clark (2011, p. 2). Much like pragmatism, mixed methods research assumes that there are "multiple legitimate approaches to social inquiry", and that any given approach is "inevitably partial" (Greene, 2008, p. 20).

While this study has an explanatory sequential design, other forms of mixed methods research include exploratory sequential design, where qualitative data collection occurs first to set the basis for quantitative exploration (Creswell and Plano Clark, 2011). Meanwhile, convergent designs, also known as parallel designs, is when separate sets of quantitative and qualitative data are collected in the same general time frame, and are compared side by side to answer the same research question (Creswell, 2015). Finally, there are conversion designs of mixed methods research, which involves transforming qualitative data to quantitative data, or vice versa, and datasets will be analysed in both forms (Tashakkori and Teddlie, 2009). Florczak (2014) further

names three advanced designs: Intervention, where qualitative processes are interjected upon an exploratory sequential design; social justice, where the data analysis is transformed into themes that lead to a call in action; multistage evaluation, which is best used to determine the success of a program or activities within a specific setting.

I chose to use an explanatory sequential design to first collect quantitative data, thus gaining a large data sample to capture and draw out generalisable findings, which will then be explored and affirmed, or challenged, in subsequent qualitative data collection phases. Simply employing quantitative data collection and analyses renders me incapable of capturing the subjective dimension in my research question, which concerns the human perception of trust and trustworthiness. However, simply employing qualitative data collection is insufficient to capture the wide scope of both social movements. Thus, a mixed methods research design, with both quantitative and qualitative data included, is necessary to answer my research question thoroughly. Ultimately, an explanatory sequential design allows me to narrow the focus from the wider context, to a large sample group, and finally to select individuals, with increased depth in each phase.

Through the mixing of approaches, I thus gain a more comprehensive understanding of how social movement actors perceive information trustworthiness and are influenced by information flow. At the end of my data collection, I aim to analyse the findings of all three phases together and combine them through triangulation. In the library and information sciences discipline, Lai Ma (2012, p. 1865) says, “the term ‘information’ is not objective, subjective, or normative in itself because it plays different roles in relation to different ontological referents and so has different types of validity claims”, thus arguing for the need of mixed methods to fully understand the objective and subjective dimensions of information behaviours and practices. My research straddles numerous realms – trust research, social movements, information behaviour and information flow – the multitude of dimensions necessitate the need for a mixed methods research approach. Morgan (2014) argues that pragmatism is not only a paradigm suited for mixed methods research, but is in fact suited for all social research. It thus stands that it is pragmatism and a mixed methods research design that would properly address the areas of inquiry of this research. As described by Denscombe (2008, p. 272), methods when mixed “produce a more complete picture, avoid the biases intrinsic to the use of monomethod design, and [is] a way of building on and developing initial findings”.

Mixed methods also afford me a large degree of space for reflection and flexibility throughout the research process. Coupled with a pragmatic lens, I remain open to the possibility of uncovering of meaning from multiple angles through combining the objective and subjective (Biesta, 2010). The mixing of methods also means the mixing of different ways of knowing, which leads to better understanding of the concept under inquiry (Timans et al, 2019). As social movements are dynamic spaces that may change rapidly, it is thus important for me to reflect on and anticipate the need for change as the research takes shape. I do not limit the use of quantitative or qualitative analytical methods to any of my phases, and maintaining such openness meant I could adjust my data collection strategies and analytical approaches at any point. Further, it would be

difficult for singular data collection methods, from singular perspectives, to attempt to broach the scale and spread of mass social movements. The integration of both quantitative and qualitative data complements and supports each other's weaknesses, and the diversity of involved methods and participants offers perspectives that can fully address the research question, which is what drives my research design (Cresswell and Plano Clark, 2011).

However, mixed methods research tend to place emphasis on the practical dimension of research, and has been primarily criticized for lacking in philosophical foundation and epistemological framework (Denzin, 2010; Lai Ma, 2012). Yvonne Feilzer (2010) also points out that there is little agreement on a framework or paradigm in the field that accommodates the diverse nature of mixed methods research, and recommends pragmatism as a worldview, which this study is rooted in. Although the discussion of pragmatism as a paradigm for mixed methods research has been increasing, there is still yet insufficient discussion on the philosophical implications of using pragmatism in social research (Morgan, 2014).

Zepada-Millán, Wallace, and Ayoub (2014) summarises the common critiques of mixed methods research, including the familiarity the researcher must have in both quantitative and qualitative methods they are using, the need to identify which objectives are addressed by each method, and acknowledging that mixed methods research is difficult to replicate and takes a lot of time. Rigidity must also be practiced to ascertain that I am truly conducting mixed methods research, instead of simply using multiple research methods.

3.4 First phase: Social Network Analysis

The first phase in my methodology consisted of creating two graphs for both movements from social media activity respectively, allowing a total of four graphs for social network analysis. Social network analysis is a "broad strategy for investigating social structures", which is precisely what social media networks create (Otte and Rousseau, 2002, p. 441). The very act of interacting with one another constitutes the construction of social networks (Hansen, 2011). Starting from several activist or organisational Twitter accounts with large followings who predominantly tweet about either social movement, I examine the public accounts that follow these larger accounts, and take note of their interactive activities on Twitter. This includes follows, retweets, replies, and mentions of such accounts.

Twitter is a microblogging site developed in 2006. It is commonly used now for real-time information and discussion, and users can be found in most countries in the world with internet access (Weller et al, 2014). Many politicians and political parties interact with constituents and other concerned parties on Twitter, and Schuster et al (2021, p. 214) describe its functions as enabling users to "directly exchange information, to further disseminate information, to engage in public conversations, or to attract the attention of specific users". Zamir (2014) evidences the use of Twitter in social movements as a tool for forming opinions, communication, as well as organising protests. Users set up a public or private profile on Twitter, and can post messages of

up to 280 characters on their feed, called Tweets. Users can also follow other users to receive their Tweets in their own feeds. Users can also reply, retweet, or like other user's tweets. Conversely, users can block other users or report them for inappropriate behaviour. In this way, each user has their own agency in deciding their actions in interacting with one another, and with the wider movement. They are all individual actors, although differing in influence and power, and the recognition of such dynamic behaviour can be represented through social network graphs.

Drawing data from the Twitter Developer API with programming scripts (e.g. Python), I will create two graphs for each movement respectively using Gephi, an open source network visualisation software, for analysis. The first graph looks at interactions between users – tweets, replies, retweets, and mentions. This is done through capturing activity of users tweeting about particular hashtags or keywords happening in real time. The behaviour captured in this network indicates active information creation and interaction. Meanwhile, the second graph captures follow relationships between users, which perhaps indicates subgroups of communities as well as similarity in interests among users. This will be done through snowballing follower relationships from prominent accounts known within the respective social movement participants as information disseminators.

Through the generated graphs, I aim to identify the information sources that are interacted with the most within Twitter in both movements, thus enabling me to understand the complexity, or lack thereof, of information flow in the digital realm when it comes to social movements. I seek to capture how information flows between individuals, identifying the types of sources that people trust and engage in the most. Through social network analysis, I hope to gain insights into trends in communication, as well as explore how information is disseminated through the digital landscape (Chung et al, 2021; Conover et al, 2011). The findings and the networks themselves will set the foundation for my research and the basis of discussion moving forward.

Social networks are essentially structures constructed by nodes, linked together by edges, or ties. González-Bailón and Wang (2016, p. 95) describe these networks as "reflect[ing] organic forms of organization and they create a structure through which information flows", and further describe them as structures that reflect communication and power. Often, a node would represent an individual unit – for example, a person – and edges would refer to the relations between two units. Relationship between the nodes are visualised through edges, which can be directed or not depending on whether or not information exchange is reciprocated, or only one-sided. These edges are also mechanisms that allow nodes to affect one another indirectly, and the position of a node within the network determines the opportunities and constraints it may encounter (Kane et al, 2014). Edges may also be weighted in the graph to denote relative importance or influence. Wetherell et al (1994) argues that the focus is on the characteristic of ties in a social network, rather than individual nodes. It is the relationships and interactions that thus gives meaning and insight into how individuals receive and make use of information within a network.

Multiple levels of analysis can be brought together in the same network (Hanneman and Riddle, 2005). On a macro level, the network is analysed and interpreted as a whole, creating a big picture of the information landscape. On a meso level, subgroups of nodes can be identified to draw meaningful conclusions about the diversity of membership within these networks. These subgroups, or clusters, are formed when individual nodes become more interconnected with each other. In the example of Twitter, users who follow each other or actively interact with each other self-gravitate into a cluster of their own (Carrington et al, 2005). Finally, a micro level analysis that focuses on individual nodes allows me to identify possible obstacles or enablers of information flow within networks. Online social networks emulate the protest dynamics, information structure, and even power relations in real life, thus giving me a glimpse or a starting point of how to understand my case contexts conceptually. What is expected to happen in the real world can be reflected in the graph, while what is revealed in the graph may similarly guide us towards finding behaviours in the real world.

Social network analysis is the study of social relationships, their patterns, and their implications according to Wasserman and Faust (1994). While the study of social networks predate the proliferation of the internet, the principles of social network analysis and online social network analysis largely remain the same. However, Kane et al (2014) describes social media as allowing for a richer range of possible relational ties, as social media platforms support multiple type of ties coexisting at the same time. At the same times, interactions between nodes are constrained to the types of behaviours allowed by the functions of social media platforms. Social networks have been further defined by Oliveira and Gama (2012, p. 99) as “a set of social entities, such as people, groups or organisations, with some pattern of relationships or interactions between them”, and are constructed from relationships between social entities, instead of focusing on the social entities themselves.

Social network analysis aids in capturing and conceptualising patterns of relationships among actors and understanding how wider networks or contexts influences individual and collective behaviour. Della Porta (2014) argues that the shape of networks is connected to forms of action used within it, whereas in a more resource-oriented view Cinalli (2004) posits that the relational characteristics and structure of social networks impact on the social actors within it, who aim to maintain and gain resources through these networks. Freeman (2004) describes the patterns of people’s interactions as being important features of the very individuals who display such patterns. Through the creation and analysis of social networks, I can understand the structure and dynamics between social movement actors, and identify social factors which contribute to the very creation of these networks.

Social network analysis has been used in research into the intersection between social movements and the internet. Isa and Himelboim (2018) used this method to analyse the #FreeAJStaff movement and highlight the importance of social mediators in social movement conversations. Chung et al (2021) combined social network analysis with content analysis to examine offline and online activities of the Boycott NFL movement, demonstrating a correlation between the two. It is the innate nature of social media to enable the formation of social

networks. On Twitter, the platform that I explore in this phase of this study, interactions can come in the form of passive behaviours, such as following another user, liking, or retweeting someone else's tweets. Active behaviours include posting tweets, quote tweeting, mentioning other users, or replying to someone else's tweets. All of the above behaviours factor into and create parasocial relationships through Twitter, and can take place between people who know each other in real life, or complete strangers who share nothing in common other than interest in the tweet they are interacting with. In the same way, social movements form networks on Twitter as individuals congregate together over shared interest in the particular cause or movement. In a study using social network analysis on the Shahbag Movement of Bangladesh, Zamir (2014) evidences that information cascade behaviour can be seen among protestors, in which they propagate information by observing their immediate neighbouring nodes. Thus, Twitter is perhaps uniquely suited for social network analysis.

There is a non-exhaustive list of measures, or insights, that can be gleaned from social network graphs. Caiani (2014) lists various measures which can be statistically concluded and then interpreted on multiple levels of network graphs, all which highlight different facets of one social network. Guzmán et al (2021) summarises metrics as mostly either looking at quantifying the relevance of a node, discovering subgroups, or understanding information propagation. The latter two goals are what I aim to achieve in this phase of my research. Metrics that I will apply to my research include:

- Density of the network: This metric illustrates how interlinked actors are with one another, through either interacting with one another or following one another. Oliver and Myers (2003) argue that the density of networks can influence participant rates in protest, as information spreads faster in denser clusters and networks (Lerman and Ghosh, 2010).
- Degrees of centrality in the network: This metric measures the number of edges entering or leaving a node. This identifies the existence of any central actors in the networks, and the spread of their influence in information creation and dissemination. Central actors are individuals who occupy key positions in networks, in a way that allows them to become key content sources within as well as across subgroups of a network (Lin and Himelboim, 2019).
- Betweenness centrality of nodes: This metric measures the number of shortest paths between two nodes, and can reveal the existence of any bridges, gatekeepers, mediators, or information brokers for different parts of the network. They facilitate communication between clusters that otherwise will not interact with one another, allowing information and other resources to flow between the network (Wasserman and Faust, 1994; Hanneman and Riddle, 2005; Himelboim and Han, 2014; Isa and Himelboim, 2018).
- Community detection and modularity: These metrics identify clusters or subgroups of nodes that interact with each other more (Ozer et al, 2016).

Twitter terms and conditions state that mining of their data is not allowed, nor can data be taken from private accounts and tweets. Only public accounts and publicly published tweets will be used to generate the graphs, which will only be accessible to myself and my supervisory team. The generated graph itself will not contain any identifiable data when presented or published. In accordance with Twitter terms and conditions, as well as referring to Twitter guidance, no scraping or identification of individuals will be done. Data will only be used for trend analysis and other observations. Specific accounts or tweets will not be named or presented in final publication. However, the nature of Twitter is such that users can make their accounts public or private at any time – viral tweets can get hidden, or even deleted, thus causing their accounts or tweets to be private.

However, there are limitations to this approach, which is why this is followed by two other data collection methods that approach the research question from different angles. Online networks and ties cannot be assumed to accurately reflect offline relations beyond the internet (della Porta, 2014). With the use of the internet comes the creation of online personas, multiple accounts by the same individual, automated accounts, and many other elements that may skew the representation of the data I have collected, which cannot be all identified and accounted for during the course of research. Kane and Labianca (2011) point out that social media networks cannot reflect negative relationships, which exist and have a high impact in traditional social networks. Social movements cannot be understood simply by looking into online activity and neglecting offline activity. In fact, Chung et al's (2021) study into the #BoycottNFL movement revealed that offline triggering events are very often the cause for online discussion and collective action to happen. That is certainly true in both case contexts that I have chosen. González-Bailón and Wang (2016) also argue that online social networks are subject to the same conditions and constraints as offline ones, and thus do not necessarily lead to decentralised or fluid structures.

Moreover, there are many others who simply choose not to use social media, or use social media other that Twitter for the social movement activity. While Black Lives Matter and the Hong Kong protests both have observable presence on Twitter, it is not the only space they can be seen in, nor is it necessarily the space they are the most active in. Kane et al (2014) points out that social network analysis does not capture the affective dimension that exist between individuals in actuality, whereas Crossley (2010, p. 8) also describes social network analysis as reducing "relationships to numbers".

However, this phase of research does render meaningful insights into information creation and diffusion in a particular internet space, and provides a strong enough window into the information landscape of which social movement participants of my case contexts are situated in. The limitations of social network analysis is part of the reason why a mixed methods approach is necessary. Where social network analysis can give me the larger context and quantify elements within it, the survey and interview phase allows me to understand the affective and also personal dimension that I hope to understand in this study.

3.5 Second phase: Surveys

The construction of the survey builds on the findings from the generated graph. Taking into account the conclusions drawn from the analysis of the various metrics, the survey aims to discover whether perceptions of information trustworthiness and information flow aligned with results from the previous stage. Further, the survey also expands on the findings from the previous stage to explore how individuals interact with one another and with information, gaining insight into why the resulting graph was the way it was generated. This phase also aims to explore questions surrounding social media usage of protestors as an information receiving and dissemination platform, and how they perceive concepts of validity and trustworthiness.

To obtain a satisfactory dataset for analysis, I aimed to collect 100 responses from each social movement. This survey was disseminated through social media platforms that are commonly used to spread information of both contents, such as Twitter and Reddit. Participants would then self-identify to take part in the survey, as described through the invitational text that will accompany the survey link. In doing so, I centre respondents to those who are more likely to have a persistent digital presence, which aligns with the scope of my research being contained within the digital space. Being entirely electronic and self-administered, the survey is able to reach populations that may be wary of having to reveal their own identities to researchers. Moreover, internet dissemination allows the survey to reach large amounts of potential respondents in a short time across the globe, which is appropriate to the international reach of my case contexts (Yun and Trumbo, 2000). The survey included questions regarding age range, social movement participation, internet behaviour, and political opinion. Qualtrics, a UCL approved software, was used to collect survey data, which includes personal identifiers such as age range, and other data such as internet habits and social movement participation.

The survey was piloted and adjusted accordingly before large-scale dissemination. Five categories of respondents were targeted: Those who perceive themselves as actively and heavily participating in either movement; Those who perceive themselves as sympathetic but not heavily involved in either movement; and those who are not involved at all. To build a rapport with the protesters and improve response rates, I asked social media users to share the link to the survey, and provided respondents with detailed information about the study, fully informing them of the purpose of the study and measures to protect their privacy.

Survey design differs according to the targeted audience, and my audience are those that are internet proficient and have a regular use of social media. As such, I assume that my audience will not have significant problems with undertaking the survey on a technological level. I developed my survey design from a respondent-centered lens as described by Smyth (2017), which considers how respondents experience the questions, how they can be helped to answer accurately, and what design features of the survey would cause problems to them. Dillman et al (2009) and Stern et al (2014) also bring up the importance of visual design and compatibility with different electronic devices, which I will also consider in my survey.

Questions were primarily close-ended, thus generating measurable constructs. Likert scales (1982) were used to create categories for respondents to relate to, especially to gauge their perception of their social media use and interaction with information. Respondents were also asked attitude-related questions, such as agree/disagree types, as well as be asked to rank their subjective opinion on various matters. Open-ended questions were also included, allowing some space for respondents to share more subjective opinions should they choose to. The primary limitations of surveys lie in the rigidity of questioning and inability to engage with respondents, and I hoped to mitigate this by having some open-ended questions. I also hoped that respondents who may be unsatisfied with the limited options of the close-ended questions will feel respected as research subjects by having the space to say what they want instead of being constrained to selecting pre-written answers. However, the number of open-ended questions was limited as participants may be reluctant to answer many open-ended questions. Thus, the open-ended questions were intended to be viewed as optional for those who want to share more explicit views, as opposed to being a cognitive burden.

The survey questions would inevitably be invasive in nature, as I ask respondents to recall everyday behaviours on social media, as well as activities in social movements. To protect their identities, very minimal demographic data were collected in the survey so to reduce chances of them leaving personal information, nor were IP addresses recorded, increasing response privacy. All questions were left optional, and although this may have led to skewed responses to questions, I considered surrendering control to respondents is my way of navigating the power imbalance that comes with being the researcher and designer of the survey. I also hoped that the feature of anonymity would be made more apparent with the lack of questions surrounding personal identifiers or detailed demographic data, which in turn may encourage respondents to be more honest with their answers and thus avoid acquiescence, as individuals with particular political views may hesitate to express themselves openly (Wright, 2005). Acquiescence is the tendency of survey respondents to agree with questions being asked, due to a variety of reasons, such as personality or cultural traits, perceived power imbalances, or the superficiality of information retrieval (Javeline, 1999; Krosnick, 1991; Smyth, 2016).

However, it must be acknowledged that the survey is but a limited representativity of the population (Mosca, 2014). It would not be able to capture or represent different slices of these social movements, not to mention marginalised voices or communities, or those that have no internet access. Although I had some open-ended questions, the majority of questions will be close-ended, thus not allowing for added nuance. There was also no guarantee of respondents interpreting the questions as I, the researcher, had intended them to be, although this was hopefully mitigated as much as possible through piloting the survey. It would also be difficult to determine non-response rate, which contributes to not being able to determine whether the responding population is accurately indicative of the wider movement (Wright, 2017).

Quantitative data generated from survey measures were analysed through Qualtrics. Any qualitative data that were generated through open-ended questions was coded thematically in

NVivo. With any open questions, data was carefully scrutinized to ensure that individuals cannot be identified.

3.6 Third Phase: Interviews

The final stage in data collection was a series of semi-structured interviews with participants of either social movement, who receive and disseminate information in the digital space. Whereas my previous phases aimed to capture a relatively objective set of data, this phase of data collection aimed to capture more subjective, personal accounts and narratives of individuals who interact with information, and how the concept of trustworthiness is perceived by these individuals. Interviews will be coded for thematic analysis. These interviews were designed to last 1 hour each.

To best ensure safety and data protection, I used Microsoft Teams to conduct the interviews. However, given the political nature of the case contexts I am exploring, I assumed that interviewees may have a strong need for a sense of control and agency in the interview process, as they may need to be reassured of their safety. Thus, if the interviewee had a strong reason to use an alternative software, I would have allowed for that possibility subject to satisfactory data protection and privacy considerations. If the interviewee had a strong reason not to use any video conferencing software, a face-to-face interview would have been allowed provided that the interview takes place within the UK in a safe environment.

Given the scale of both social movements, it would be quite unlikely to achieve saturation, which is when there can be no new data or themes that can be generated from the research (Fusch and Ness, 2015). Considering that both movements developed across years, societies, and even nations, it would take a longitudinal study of considerable manpower to possibly capture every nuance and facet of information flows and conception of trustworthiness in the movements. Thus, I limit the number of 10 to each movement.

Recruitment was done through actively inviting influential social movement actors to participate through publicly available contact methods, such as private messaging on social media channels, or through email. These respondents were initially purposively sampled, but any recommendations of any potentially interested interviewees were considered. A loose definition of “influential” is adopted here. Influential social movement actors may be those who represent particular advocacy groups or have organised protest events, or have been creating or sharing large amounts of information. This is similar to Isa and Himelboim’s (2018) categories of social mediators on social media, with elites being those with large number of followers and connections, and non-elites as individuals who become social mediators simply through their activities on Twitter.

I used a loose interview guide to inform the direction of my questions but remained flexible to topics that may come up that I had not anticipated, either during the interview or during the

research process. Whereas the social network analysis phase and survey phase primarily created generalisable data that informs the wider context, the interview allowed me to discover individual subjective opinions of those embedded within the information landscape of my chosen case contexts. Hughes and Bertrand (2005) describes this process as facilitating interaction between the individual and the researcher to clarify meanings and shared understandings. Through holding dialogue with information disseminators, I aimed to explore how information trustworthiness influence information behaviour, and other factors which may affect information consumption and use.

The previous two data collection stages determined the variables to be explored in this stage, thus influencing the direction and construction of questions. Further, interviews allowed me to explore areas that are otherwise not reflected or explained through quantitative analysis in the previous stages, and may confirm or challenge initial findings from previous data. The semi-structured nature of the interviews allowed me to reflect and respond to participants' opinions. By expanding on survey data and social network graph in my questions, I had the opportunity to gain a more in-depth understanding from the perspective of actors who are embedded within and have a personal involvement in social movements. By understanding their use and dissemination of information and own measures of trustworthiness, combined with the data collected from surveys, I hoped to gain a holistic representation of how trust in information relates to social movement actors that hold differing influences within social movements.

Interviews were transcribed by myself, then coded and analysed in NVivo. Thematic analysis was used to identify concepts and meanings that are relevant to the research question, and eventually tied back with the other phases of my study. The process of thematic analysis involves searching across the data set to identify, analyse, and report on repeated patterns, interpreting them into meaningful insights through selecting codes and constructing themes. As Ryan and Bernard (2000) describes, thematic analysis is very much informed by the epistemological orientation and theoretical positions of the research, thus giving it flexibility and is not bound to any particular paradigm. Braun and Clarke (2012) describes it as a method used to search for common sets of experiences, thoughts, behaviours, or meanings. I used an inductive approach, where themes are derived from the researcher's data. I followed Braun and Clarke's 2006 framework of a recursive thematic analysis process.

This is the one stage of my study that I cannot entirely keep a distance from the participants of this study. As I personally carried out the interviews and interact with participants, I am aware that it would be inevitable for my own personal assumptions and opinions to enter the conversation. To build a rapport with my interviewees means to avoid the distant persona, and it would be impossible for me to gain honest answers from my interviewees if I portray myself as uncaring or unsympathetic to the cause they stand for (James and Busher, 2006). Interviews are a co-construction between the interviewer and the interviewee – the questions that are being asked and the manner of which they are asked are equally as important as the responses (Roulston, 2006).

However, the interview phase is also what will make up for the lack of reflexivity and emotional dimension in the other two phases of this study. Interviews capture the personal experiences of participants, and the use of open questions and follow-up questions gives flexibility to gather data and expand on themes that cannot be explained in-depth in the other data collection phases (Chen and Hinton, 1999). This is the section in which I fully address the subjective element in my research question – perception. While the survey revealed a broad overview of how protest participants understand information trustworthiness and the impact of information on mobilization, the interview phase gave me the opportunity to have a close dialogue with individuals about the role of information in their activism work, and more importantly, how they interrogate concepts of trust and trustworthiness.

There are challenges associated with conducting interviews, one of such being the tendency of interviewees to give socially desirable answers (Schuman et al, 1981). I also fully acknowledged that I would be entering this phase of study not only with my own presupposed understandings, but also the findings from the other data collection phases, and through such I hoped to remain aware and not let my understandings or viewpoints influence the interviewee. Moreover, while I did not deliberately make my own political opinions explicit to participants, I believe it would be difficult to avoid doing so entirely while developing rapport with them, and I have taken this into account while interpreting responses.

Even in the transcription and the coding process, Campbell et al (2011) also stresses the necessity to be aware of any personal biases or preconceptions, while maintaining a degree of objectivity to ensure impartial and fair representation of data. Potter and Hepburn (2012) place emphasis on understanding how the researcher's own biases and pre-assumptions come through in the questions that are being asked, and the narratives that are formed based on transcription and interpretation.

3.7 Ethical concerns

Confidentiality and anonymity were of utmost importance in my data collection and research design. As argued previously, social movements, especially my chosen case contexts, denote a certain degree of risk to its participants. As such, for each data collection phase I considered the best possible ways to mitigate possible issues that may arise.

Further, I also account for my own positionality and how it influences my research design. Although I intended to remain impartial during this research process, I acknowledge that it is impossible to achieve. I thus bear in mind how my experiences and standpoints inform my assumptions and how I approach my research questions.

This research has received approval from UCL's Research Ethics Committee, with the Project ID of 20105/001.

3.7.1 Data protection and confidentiality

During the social network analysis phase, users were unable to know of or consent to my use of their data, even if it is publicly available. Bearing that in mind, as well as UCL ethics guidelines surrounding use of social media data in research, my dataset will not be published or made public in any capacity. Data would only be aggregated and used for summarisation and trends analysis, and will not include any identifiers of specific tweets or accounts. Moreover, only publicly available accounts and tweets were included in the dataset. As users can choose to make their account private or public at any point, I would remove any data that becomes private that I am aware of. I also abided by Twitter Developer API guidelines, of which is where my data comes from. Although this may limit the depth of the analysis I could have performed on the dataset, I believe the ethical considerations far outweigh the supposed gains.

During the survey phase, participants may have been put at risk, as the survey may include questions concerning involvement and knowledge of social movements. As such, participants were made aware that they can withdraw from the survey from anytime, and all questions were made optional so that participants retained the freedom to not respond to particular questions. Participants were not asked to leave any form of personal identifiers, nor were IP addresses collected. Responses to open-ended questions were also scrutinised carefully to ensure that no personal identifiers can be inferred from responses included in the dataset. If such responses exist, they would be excluded from the dataset. Any quotations used will be anodyne or paraphrased. I will also conduct searches on the Internet for similar content that may cause the individual to be identified through particular phrases they use.

During the interview phase, participants may be put at risk due to the topics we may cover in the interview, namely those concerning political issues. To best protect their privacy, measures are put in place to maintain confidentiality and protect personal data. Interviews are aimed to be conducted remotely, which would be more covert than face to face interviews. To best guarantee confidentiality and protect personal data, all data will be collected and processed in the UK, using software or platforms that are UCL approved. Microsoft Teams will be used as the primary method of conducting and recording the interviews. Recordings will be destroyed after transcription. As described previously, should participants have an explicit reason to use an alternate method, data protection and internet safety will be taken into account when carrying out the interview. Face to face interviews will only be conducted if the participant has reason to not use any video conferencing options that are secure, and the participant is based in the UK. These interviews will be recorded using a secure and encrypted voice recorder, and recordings will be deleted from the device after transcription. Moreover, personal identifiers of the participant will be pseudonymised as soon as possible in all concerning data, and the key will be kept in a password-protected document that only I have access to. Although quotations may be used in the final work, no personal identifiers or data will be made public. Any quotations used will be anodyne or

paraphrased. I will also conduct searches on the Internet for similar content that may cause the individual to be identified through particular phrases they use.

A detailed participation information sheet and consent form was given to participants before the interview, as well as adequate time and methods for them to reach back if they had any questions or concerns. Potter and Hepburn (2012) stress the importance of clarity for participants, so they fully understand what is asked of them and the role in the research. Their data and responses are pseudonymised, and they will be explicitly informed of their right to withdraw from the study from the participant information sheet and consent form provided to them up until the point their information is aggregated into the study.

3.7.2 Distress from participating in research

Whereas I do not anticipate that interviews or questionnaires will raise any specific topics or issues that might be sensitive, embarrassing, or upsetting, I had prepared for the possibility that participants may experience potential distress during participation due to the subject matter being discussed. Participants were given warning in the participant information sheet of potentially sensitive or upsetting topics, along with contact details to myself, my principal supervisor, and the UCL Research Ethics Committee. Participants are also made fully aware that they can refuse to answer any question, or to withdraw from the study at any time without repercussions.

3.8 Overall limitations

There are many other angles and facets that cannot be covered in this study, and would perhaps serve as good starting points for any continuation of this research.

The most prominent is perhaps the use of online-only data collection methods overlooks much of the impact of offline connective actions. I believe that future research that expands the scope to include non-digital spaces would uncover even more factors that contribute to information creation and trust-building, especially in other social movement contexts which may have a stronger offline presence or network. Garcia et al (2009) point out that it is very rare that members of online communities have no offline contact. Further, I have only captured public social media data on a very limited number of platforms, at a very specific time period. Each social media platform usually targets different demographics in the world, and thus can be dominated by quite varying opinions and worldviews. The nature of Twitter itself is also not explored in this study as a factor affecting communication and information flow. Kane et al (2014) cautions how social media platform design must be considered in developing social network theories. Moreover, developments in both social movements, as well as social media channels, invariably change over time, which is not captured in this study. I believe that if I had chosen different

platforms, or at different time periods, such as Telegram, Facebook, or Instagram, my findings could render much different results.

It is also difficult to verify the authenticity of the accounts by online participants, which in turn cannot guarantee the truthfulness of their statements. Mann and Stewart (2001) state that it is important to consider whether or not the individual participant is who they claim to be. However, it also begs the question of whether or not it was necessary to even ascertain the authenticity of identity – it is increasingly common for individuals to have online personas or identities, which are not intended for deception but to better protect their own safety and privacy. In my case contexts in particular, when individuals may face ostracization from their workplace, lives, or even persecuted by law enforcement, it is thus crucial for them to have an online persona that cannot be connected back to their actual selves. While it is necessary for me as the researcher to be honest about my identity and intentions, it would be insensitive for me to request my interviewees to divulge details about their activities.

Further, my choice to not make use of more personal and up-close data collection methods and research designs, such as ethnographic methods, makes it more difficult for me to reach the more inaccessible or secretive elements of social movements. As explained in my introduction, the very nature of social movements infers a certain degree of risk. Thus, social movement participants may choose not to have public presences on the Internet, or may not take part in academic research due to fear of being identified. Communities which have a lower Internet usage or Internet presence are thus also not represented fully in this study.

Another element I wish to raise is the use of multiple languages in both of my case contexts. Both the use of English and Cantonese are prevalent in Hong Kong, but also result in the creation of different communities based on a preferred language. English-speaking protestors may have very different interactions with social media as opposed to those who only speak Cantonese. Black Lives Matter, as described previously, should be seen as a global movement, not just US-focused, and thus it is only natural to assume that there are many discussions surrounding Black Lives Matter not conducted in English, and is influenced by local cultural narratives as well as the wider movement. It falls outside of the scope of this research to capture the various language communities that are involved in social movements, but I nonetheless feel there are various interesting stories that can be told by looking at non-English language communities within social movements.

4. Phase 1 - Social Network Analysis

4.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I explain the first phase of my data collection: the social network analysis (SNA) phase. I first describe the process of how I carried out my data collection. I then set out to describe in length the findings of Phase 1 of my data collection, and discuss any insights. Finally, I pose and outline any further points of query or unanticipated conclusions that I would like to address in Phase 2 and 3 of my study.

In this phase, I visualise the information relationships between protestors and other Twitter users, revealing patterns of information creation and dissemination among social movement participants. Further, this phase will identify key influencers and information brokers on Twitter, and although these individuals will not be named in this thesis due to privacy and ethical considerations, the generated insights will allow me to understand and examine their presence and relative importance in the networks, and make sense of how information flows and spreads within the digital space.

To do so, I will be using social network analysis on two datasets scraped from Twitter. The Twitter function of "follow" enables a user to subscribe to the activity of another user. Thus, it is a social media platform that allows users to directly receive, share, and exchange information (Schuster et al, 2021). When followed, the user will see tweets, retweets, and likes from the followed account. In turn, the followed account will gain a follower count on their profile, and if that account is a public account, the followed account will be able to see who has followed them. Riquelme and González-Canterqiani (2016) describes this as a user-to-user relationship, one of the four types of public relationships that exist on Twitter. The others are user-to-tweet-, tweet-to-tweet, and tweet-to-user.

However, it should be noted that social network data were collected before Elon Musk's takeover of Twitter, which led to massive policy changes that affect how individuals use the platform, including increased content moderation (New York Times, 2022). The long-term implications towards free speech on Twitter is yet to be seen, but Musk's actions have sparked controversy among users, and have prompted many to use alternative social media platforms instead. Further, in the writing of this chapter, it had also been announced that the Twitter Developer API would no longer be free (TwitterDev, 2023).

4.2 Data collection

The first step of constructing the dataset was to decide on specific accounts to act as the origin points of the social networks.

Firstly, there is the recognition that the chosen accounts and the subsequent generated network graphs are not necessarily representative across the entire protest movement. Secondly, the recognition that the criteria I chose to narrow down the option of accounts is necessarily subjective. The choice of choosing Twitter, over other social media accounts, is also largely due to the overlap of use between the two social movements. This is not to say that other social media platforms such as Instagram do not share this overlap, and also not to diminish the information networks that exist on social media platforms that are only used by one social movement and not the other. This is also influenced by the large proliferation of studies which had employed Twitter to research social behaviours, particularly in activist spaces, demonstrating its effectiveness to capture and analyse such phenomena. (See: Dergacheva and Tous-Rovirosa, 2020; Bovet and Makse, 2019; Gleason, 2013; Dubois and Gaffney, 2014; Chung et al, 2021; Isa and Himelboim, 2018)

The algorithm underpinning the recommender systems influences the information that is made available to the users of the platform. Although the algorithm may have an impact on the information behaviour of the users, and thus an argument could be made that Twitter data may present a skewed version of the information networks, I see this as part of the experience of sharing information in the digital space. Just as my research is affected by the algorithm, the information behaviour of individuals are also affected by this very same algorithm.

There are many metrics through which Twitter accounts can be measured for influence, some by follower count, by interaction count, or other forms of engagement (Riquelme and González-Canterqiani, 2016; Zhang, 2012; Jabeur et al, 2012; Romero et al, 2016). Given that the purpose of this research is not to capture or develop a complete or comprehensive social movement network on Twitter, it must be kept in mind that the generated graphs are merely a representation that provides a window of insight into the two social movements, and is necessarily biased towards my subjective selection of the initial starting accounts where the data is derived from.

A preliminary list of possible starting accounts was created for each social movement. These accounts are recognised as accounts that primarily disseminate information about my two case contexts, and are still active at the time of writing. These accounts were found through recommendation from social movement participants, my own previous experience in social movement circles on Twitter, as well as using Google and Twitter's search functions around key slogans, words, or names that are used in both of my case contexts. An incognito browser was used to minimise how search algorithms would influence the results based on my own personal use of Twitter and social media. These accounts will not be identified in this thesis by name. 11 accounts were shortlisted for Black Lives Matter, while 12 accounts were shortlisted for the Hong Kong protests. Three accounts were then chosen from each list to be used in my study.

In the process of selecting the final three accounts, I had the respective criterion in mind. Firstly, these accounts had to be relatively free from controversy within their movements, thus reducing

the possibility of followers who were bots or hate accounts. Secondly, I also tried to reduce the possibility of overlap of followers among the three accounts. Thus, I choose accounts that targeted different audiences, be it in terms of geographical space or age. The variety of accounts meant that the information they provided could also be different, increasing the chances of revealing a broader picture of how the protest network can be seen on Twitter. Thus, I also chose different types of accounts, as the information they would share would also differ. For example, an individual activist might be more likely to share individual opinions or observations, whereas general information accounts may refrain from injecting personal commentary. The different content they would communicate also meant that their followers would likely be expecting and looking for different types of information and information behaviours from these accounts. I did not consider factors such as account age, follower count, or number of tweets posted. Their importance, for the purposes of this graph, is not how influential or well-loved they are within the movement, but by their identity as information disseminators and by how wide their spread is on Twitter.

From BLM, I selected the Twitter accounts of one activist, one organisation dedicated to the movement, and one organisation based in the UK that is dedicated to the movement.

From HKP, I selected the Twitter accounts of one activist, one organisation dedicated to the movement, and one general information account dedicated to the movement which primarily tweets in Cantonese, the primary language in Hong Kong.

It is to be noted that this selection could be considered entirely arbitrary. Both movements have far more than a dozen accounts that would be fit for answering my research question, but it is not the intention of this study to either capture or dissect the entirety of the social networks of either social movement. However, as written previously the intention of this phase is to get a generalised, broad view of the online social networks of both movements on Twitter. Any of these accounts would have fit the criteria for this phase of my study, and would have wrought meaningful insights. Nonetheless, I believe three from each movement would be sufficient to give me an overview of both movements in order to make sense of how information flows within them, taking a first step towards understanding and answering my research question.

Once the three accounts were identified, a Go script, nucoll, developed by J.P. de Vooght (2019) was used to collect data from the accounts through Twitter Developer API. The script automatically collected first- and second-degree relationships of each account - this refers to the followers of the account, as well as the mutual followers of these followers. The generated data was then combined into one graph for each social movement, which serves as the complete dataset for analysis.

The term **node** will also be used interchangeably to refer to individual Twitter users that are within this network. The connection between nodes are denoted by arrows and lines going between each node, which is referred to as **edges**. The direction of the edges indicate the flow of

relationship – if the arrow only goes from one node to another, then the former account follows the latter account. However, if the arrow goes both ways, this means that the accounts mutually follow each other. Similarly, if there are no arrows or lines between nodes, it means that the two Twitter accounts as represented as those particular nodes do not share any direct relationship. This is explained using the term degree. A node with a higher degree would have more arrows going either in or out, and vice versa. Through these edges, entire networks are constructed as nodes can reach other nodes that are far away, but are connected through various different edges. The formation of these social systems are as Borgatti and Lopez-Kidwell (2014, p. 43) describes, "…networks through which information (or any resource) flows from node to node along paths consisting of ties interlocked through shared endpoints."

Only nodes with a degree of 9 or above were included in the final visualisation. This filters out Twitter users with less than 9 average followers or following, as it is likely that users that have a degree less than 9 would either be inactive users, or do not engage enough within the cluster to create a significant impact on the network of information flow. However, no major data cleaning was conducted beyond that, and it is likely that the final dataset also contains bot accounts or non-active accounts. The decision was made to retain these nodes as although they may not be active or human agents, they are still integral to forming parts of the network which allow for information to flow freely.

The remaining nodes are then presented into the graphs in this chapter, going through the Yifan Hu layout, followed by the Force Atlas 2 layout, before finally presented using the Fruchterman Reingold layout. Venturini et al's 2011 paper provided some guidance on the choice of layout. The Yifan Hu layout highlights isolated nodes, allowing me to identify any outliers. The Force Atlas 2 layout pulls out any information brokers, making it easy to analyse and pick out these important nodes. Finally, the networks were presented with Fructerman Reingold, which emphasises clustering, enabling ease of observation as well.

In this chapter, these visualisations presented show the networks in their entirety, illustrating the breadth of these social networks as captured on Twitter. The exact account names and any other identifying characteristic have been omitted for data protection purposes, as explained in Chapter 3.

Of course, it must be acknowledged that the generated graphs are not necessarily representative of the entire protest movement. As only three accounts were chosen for each movement, there are countless other information disseminators that may not be reflected in the networks I can capture with the three accounts. I have already identified the limitation of the study in terms of account selection. A further limitation to be examined is in what is not included in this study – fringe groups, secretive groups, and other groups of individuals who may not feel they are represented by the large dominant information disseminators. As in political movements, it is often common to observe differences in opinion within the same political side, leading to smaller

fractured groups. In the context of the social network captured in this study, these groups may be presented as isolated clusters that are not connected to the captured snapshot, hence be left out of this study.

4.3 Findings

4.3.1 Overall characteristics

Within social networks, especially in the chosen platform of Twitter, individuals come together to form communities. These communities often centralise around a few prominent actors (Chung et al, 2021). In the case of this research the social networks as visualised in the graphs are formed on the basis of common political views and participation. However, within this large network are smaller clusters that can be formed by other factors.

Carrington et al (2005) define clusters in a network as being created through self-organisation by social actors. Individuals within the same cluster tend to be more interconnected with each other than with individuals in other clusters, and thus tend to communicate more with one another on shared topics and interests, thus enabling information flow to a higher degree than they would with those outside of their clusters (Pavan, 2014; Wu et al, 2011). Clusters could be formed based on a variety of common characteristics, such as age, ethnicity, or occupation (Freelon et al, 2016). Within the context of Twitter, individuals who are in the same cluster tend to be more exposed to each other's tweets, and they would follow those within the cluster as they would share.

However, social networks are also formed by individuals with heterogeneous backgrounds, likes, and dislikes. Simply because they share affinity for a social movement does not mean they are the same in any other way. Within social networks, sub-communities, or clusters, can form based on factors other than mutual participation in social movements. For instance, Ahmed et al's 2017 study discovered that the common trait of sharing a language was what enabled inter-community interaction throughout the Malaysian General Election in 2013, instead of sharing a common political view.

Clusters thus reveal communities of information, in which individuals interact with each other and exchange information. Of course, not all communities are the same – there are those with tighter interconnections and thus are denser (Hansen et al, 2011). The higher the density, the more effective clusters become in sharing information, as individuals within the cluster are more prone to actively engaging in information exchange (Lerman and Ghosh, 2010). However, clusters that are not as tightly interconnected also serve the purpose of highlighting communities in which information can flow within, which may otherwise be isolated.

In a quantitative approach, clusters are identified based on the clustering coefficient, which is the degree to which a particular node is embedded within a tightly bound set of other nodes (Dubois

and Gaffney, 2014). Using the Louvain method inbuilt into Gephi, with a modularity strength of 1.5, without randomisation, clusters were generated in the network graph and nodes were given colours to enable differentiation. Clusters are also referred to **communities** within social network analysis studies. The Louvain method is a popular community detection algorithm, used in network analysis to identify clusters and communities within graphs, where nodes that are more densely connected to each other within the community, than those outside the community. This density is indicated with modularity (De Meo et al 2011). A high modularity score indicates a strong division of the network into communities.

In this sub-section, I present the network graphs of the respective moments, colour-coded according to cluster to identify overall characteristics and infer expected information behaviour and rationale behind.

4.3.1.1 Black Lives Matter

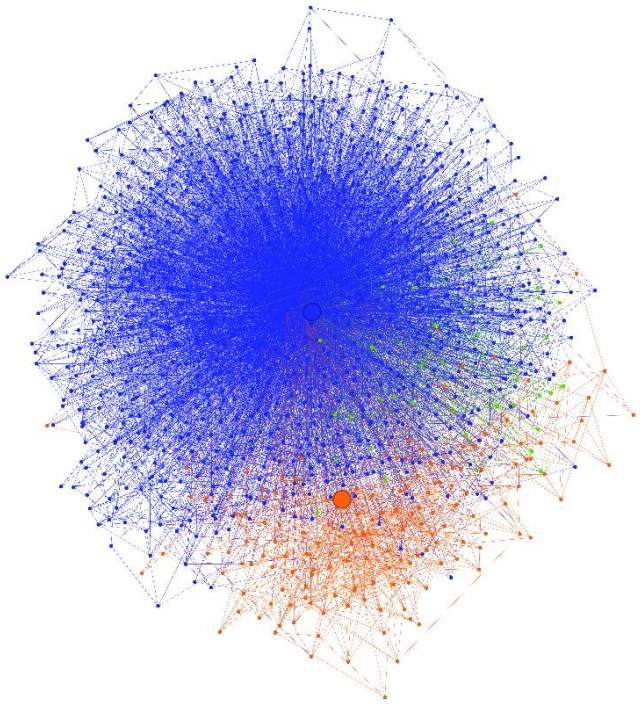


Figure 1 BLM network showing two main (blue and orange) and a peripheral (green) cluster which is less dense. The three starting accounts are indicated with larger nodes.

Three clusters (or communities) are captured in the network as shown in Figure 1. There is a large dark blue community and a smaller orange community, which will be central to our discussion of the BLM follower network. The green community sits at the periphery, without an immediately clear indication of what they coalesce around. This green community is also interspersed within the boundaries of the orange and blue communities, almost hidden within these larger clusters. In deeper examination, this is a less dense cluster with looser connections, formed by like-minded individuals who care about BLM, but play a less proactive or prominent role when compared to the other clusters identified. As the green community is heavily embedded and intermingle with both the dark blue and orange community, perhaps more attention can be devoted to the larger communities present.

The dark blue community is a large, diverse group of activists, organisations, and politicians that are heavily affiliated with BLM. There are multiple nodes in this cluster that are of significant size, revealing its relative importance in the information network, which will be expounded upon later in this chapter.

The orange community also consists of the same group of individuals as the dark blue community, but with a defining difference – these accounts all seem to be more situated within the UK. In the

initial selection of accounts for BLM, two of the three accounts were primarily US based, while one was based in the UK. This has inadvertently created a geographical divide, which is reflected in the generated network graph and serves as the primary divide between the two biggest clusters.

Within these two clusters, it is evident that these groups are formed by a diverse group of individuals and groups, of which there is little common thread beyond an affiliation with the BLM movement. This poetically echoes the very nature of the movement itself – as a universal struggle against racial inequality and white supremacy (Freelon et al, 2016). Participants of the social movement come from all walks of life, thus forming the large group seen in the network graph as all are brought together by a common cause. Their identities on Twitter reveal more than simply their participation in BLM, and thus the banner of BLM is further understood as part of their persona, rather than a whole.

However, is this group really as cohesive as it is presented in the network graph? The dark blue group and orange group are seemingly clustered from the network by nothing more than their geographical location – the former being that of accounts by users based in the US, the latter being that of accounts by users based in the UK. The lack of further distinct commonalities between accounts thus cannot lead to the conclusion that the group, in real life, would also be as unified. In the process of selecting the initial accounts for this phase of data collection, I observed that many individual users may include BLM related slogans or hashtags in their profile description or username, but do not tweet about it or share information about it often. It can also be assumed that many users would have created their Twitter accounts as a personal account first, before using it to engage with BLM. Thus, their affiliation or affection for BLM is a stance or indication of political orientation, but does not encapsulate their internet identity the same way it would for a protestor that is heavily involved with the organisation of BLM protests. Instead, it could perhaps also suggest a weakness in the information network of BLM – if there are only loose associations between members, the connection between individuals would be less tight and less personal. In turn, trust may not have played a major role in these connections being formed.

Rather than forming information clusters based on specific information needs, BLM clusters seem to be based more on geographical and national associations, where they can receive information from convenient information sources they may have encountered in local or national news. In the same vein of thought, the looser clustering hints that individuals are not personally attached to other members of the other group. The attachment is thus much more functional.

4.3.1.2. HKP

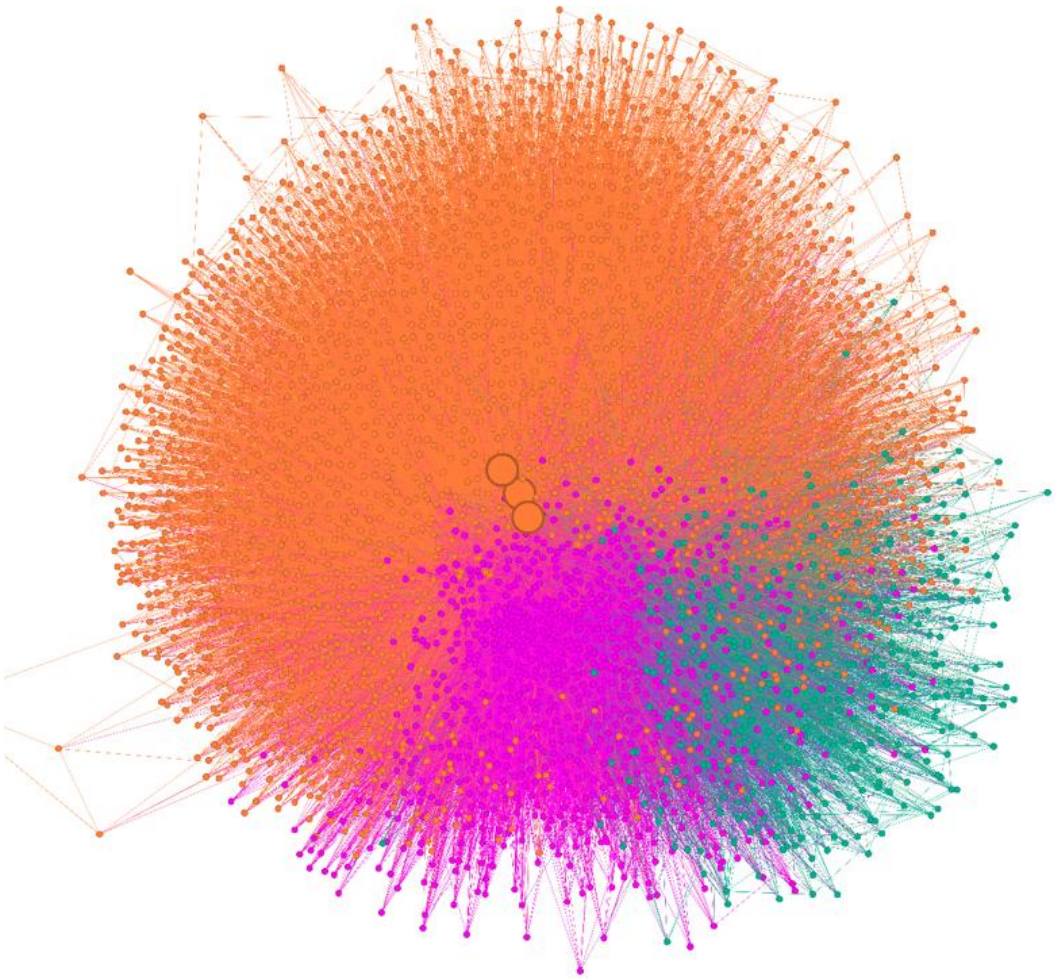


Figure 2 HKP network showing two main (orange and pink) and a peripheral (turquoise) cluster which is less dense. The three starting accounts are indicated with larger nodes.

Three predominant clusters, or communities, are observable in this network as shown in Figure 2. There is a large orange community, which is mainly consisting of activists, politicians, and other participants in the Hong Kong protest. The pink community, although small, consist of many figures that are influential within the information network, which will be explored later in the chapter. This group is largely formed by journalists and writers. The final group is a turquoise-coloured cluster, which is formed by an assortment of individuals that are peripherally related to

the protests, such as activists of other movements, or politicians that have voiced support for the protest.

In comparison to the BLM graph, there seems to be more of a visible explanation for the formation of the clusters. Twitter would not have been the first platform of communication for Hong Kong protestors. Traditionally, the main social media channels prolific in Hong Kong would be private messaging applications like WhatsApp or Telegram, or social media applications like Facebook or LIGHK (an online forum site used by Hongkongers), as seen in Lee and Ting's 2021 study on communication and media practices of Hong Kong activists during the Umbrella Movement. Twitter is not a commonly used platform in Hong Kong. Instead, protestors would have created a Twitter account with an explicit agenda, which is for express purposes of connecting with protestors (mostly overseas), or to share information in hopes of gaining international sympathy. Thus, unlike BLM users, Hong Kong protestors would have created their Twitter accounts as part of their protest activities. As of 2022, many exiled activists have also created Twitter accounts to continue their advocacy work overseas. Thus, it is perhaps unsurprising that these Twitter users coalesce together to form a community. After all, their sole purpose of having a Twitter account is to create, receive, and share information about the Hong Kong protests. Meanwhile, the pink community of journalists and writers not only share an interest in the protest as a topic of investigation, but likely also share professional ties with one another. Although information flows freely between the two clusters, the pink cluster can be naturally assumed to occupy a heavier role in terms of creating information that then spreads through the network.

The turquoise community merits discussion as well. These are individuals that might have interacted briefly with protestors, but ultimately cannot be considered as part of the movement. They may have once expressed verbal support, or perhaps condemned the Chinese government, which is viewed as the opponent of Hong Kong protestors. As indicated in the network, they are followed by a large enough number of Hong Kong protestors to be captured and included in this network and form a distinct cluster. Their role within the information network, thus, deserves further investigation in this study.

4.3.1.3 Main Highlights

Both protest movements have formed clusters that look vastly different from one another. Having formed around different distinctions – one being geographical, the other being occupational, it can be inferred that the information individuals expect to receive in this network will also be different. The BLM network seems to have a broader information behaviour, with less harsh clustering when compared to the HKP network. Thus, the information they received could be assumed to be less specialised and less curated as compared to the HKP network. In turn, the HKP network have distinct clustering around different identities in relation to the protests. Groups that

cluster around politicians, for instance, may be expecting information relating to topics such as elections or policies. Meanwhile, those that cluster around journalists may prefer information that is more related to on the ground activities.

4.3.2 In-Degree and Out-Degree Centrality

The degree of nodes in the generated graphs refer to the number of connections, which translate to number of overall followers and followings. In-degree centrality indicates the number of incoming links to a node and in this context the number of followers an account has; Out-degree indicates the number outgoing links or else the number of accounts, an account is following. In simple terms, in-degree demonstrates how popular an account is, while out-degree captures how active they are in engaging other accounts (Schuster et al, 2021). Within a social network, in-degree and out-degree centralities can uncover different characteristics of a particular individual pertaining to their role in disseminating and receiving information.

While degree cannot be considered a determinant metric that illustrates the practical influence about an account, it can be assumed that they occupy rather important positions within the flow of information (Jain and Sinha, 2020). After all, given the nature of Twitter, it can be assumed that accounts with many followers would find it easier to spread their Tweets to a wider audience. Thus, having a large number of followers help individuals disseminate information effectively and widely (Tufekci and Wilson, 2012). Ahmed et al (2020) even makes the argument that in-degree centrality can highlight users who are potentially the most trusted.

In-degree refers to the number of incoming links into the individual node. In the context of this study, this refers to the number of followers an individual node would have. In social media, individuals who are followed by many thus have a greater influence, as their posts or comments are visible to more people. Various scholars have described the implications of the in-degree metric: this metric measures the ability to incite responses or reactions (Huffaker, 2010); measures audience (Vermeer and Araujo, 2020); measures the attention a user receives especially if a social network analysis had been done not just on follower count, but interactions (Isa and Himelboim, 2018); and denotes the individual as a significant source of information (Zamir, 2014; Isa and Himelboim, 2018). Ahmed et al (2020) proposes the implications of a high in-degree as perhaps denoting a most trusted user, which is perhaps most directly relevant to the research question of this thesis.

Out-degree, in the particular context of this study, describes how many others a particular individual is receiving information from. Out-degree refers to the number of outgoing links from an individual node. On Twitter, this would refer to how many accounts an individual is following. The more accounts someone is following, the more sources they will receive information from.

Huffaker (2010) denotes it as measuring expansiveness, which means how far a user can reach. This perhaps also hints to a greater willingness to seek out more sources of information, thus reflecting the increasingly decentralised nature of contemporary social movements (Ransby, 2017).

However, what it can hint to towards is the reciprocity of relationships within a network. Reciprocity can normally be measured by looking at both the in-degree and out-degree. It is thus the extent which a user follows someone who follows them back – hence, they are connected with a double-ended arrow, instead of a one-sided one. It is the extent to which directional flows are reciprocated, and measures the mutuality of relationships (Isa and Himelboim, 2018). Huffaker (2010) describes this method as converting networks into symmetric relations, with the sum of reciprocal symmetric relations calculated for each node. According to Wasserman and Faust (1994), reciprocity denotes mutual connections between users, which we can then in turn infer that reciprocity would also denote information exchange. It may be an inactive information exchange, but it is an accessible channel nonetheless.

4.3.2.1 Black Lives Matter

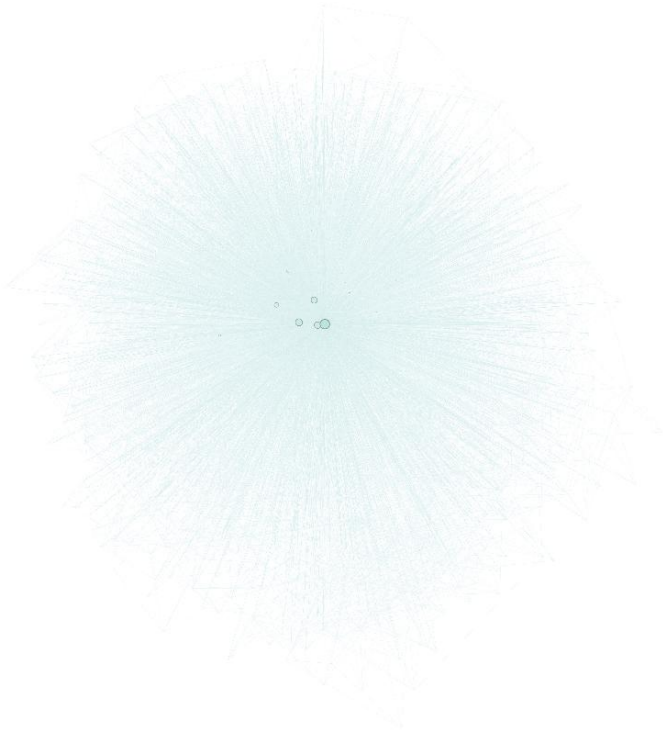


Figure 3 BLM network showing in-degree. Higher in-degree indicated by deeper colour and larger size of nodes.

In Figure 3 and 4, it can be seen that here are few users with significantly high in-degree whom stand out in the network, and are largely part of the large blue cluster (the mostly US activist cluster) that serves as the majority cluster in the network. Out of these nodes, only one of them was part of the three accounts I selected to create the network from. In fact, one of the initial accounts is not visually prominent at all in any of the metrics discussed in this chapter. Although I did not select the initial accounts with the assumption that they would be of any prominent significance in the information flow, it was still surprising to have one of them disappear within the network. However, this perhaps also evidences the diversity of the network – an account that I, as a researcher, considered potentially important, is not significant at all in comparison to the multitude of information creators and disseminators within the network captured.

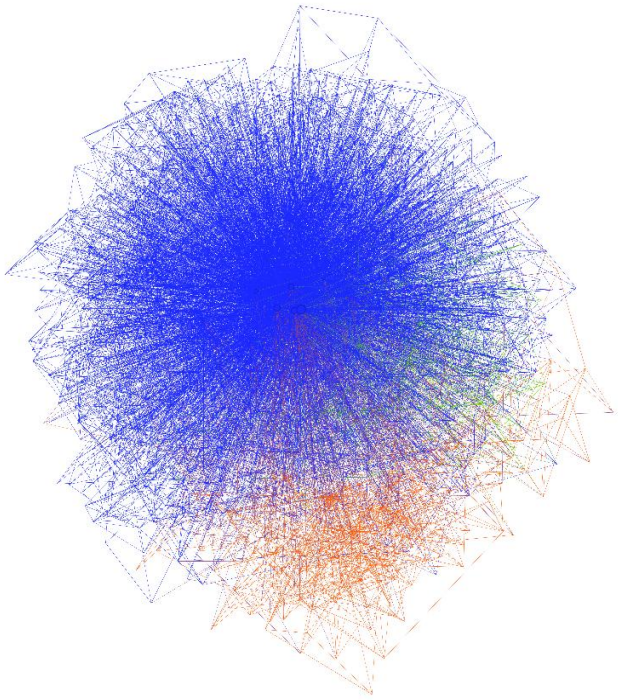


Figure 4 BLM network showing in-degree, within the two main (blue and orange) and a peripheral (green) cluster. Higher in-degree indicated by larger size of nodes.

Of those that did stand out, these were mainly activists, educators, politicians, and other individuals. The presence of educators as part of this significant group perhaps confirms the nature of BLM as predominantly ideological in nature. Or, rather, the end goal of BLM is concerned with challenging, and even dismantling societal structures, which requires education and transformation of the understanding of society (Freelon et al, 2016). Hence, educators are crucial to spreading information in the movement, both to convert people to the cause and also provide an ideological justification to the movement and creating a collective identity, which aids effective social movement organisation (Bennet and Segerberg, 2011). However, individuals possess

multiple identities. Are these educators also activists? Participants in social movements? How does the overlap of identities influence the perceived trustworthiness of the things they say? Are they perceived as neutral educators by other participants of BLM? These questions merit further investigation.

There were little if not zero organisations that were identified with high in-degree. This phenomenon will also be seen in the Hong Kong protest network which will be presented in the next section of this chapter. In terms of BLM, however, organisations are the ones that usually receive media attention and are attributed to various protest activities. Yet, their presence in the information network is much lower than individuals. There are various possible explanations for this occurrence. Firstly, this could be reflecting the loose, individualistic structure of the social movement. Within contemporary social movements, individuals and smaller organisations are given more avenues to participate in social movement mobilisation, entering spaces which would have been traditionally gatekept by large organisations, traditional media, and the government (Isa and Himelboim, 2018). Although organisations may be more well-known and visible, they are not necessarily anymore authoritative, and thus trustworthy within the social movement than individuals. Secondly, this may reveal that the role of the organisation is perhaps only more useful in terms of organising offline protest activities, but have little influence on online protest activities. Instead, social media has facilitated the individual to have an equal, or even larger voice than organisations, thus echoing Bennet and Segerberg's logic of connective action as explained in Chapter 2. Thirdly, the limitations of social network analysis may have misrepresented the role of organisations. This network graph only captures a small slice of the protest information network on Twitter, and thus there is the possibility of it presenting heavily skewed results (Gleason, 2013).

This graph, when viewed through the lens of out-degree, presents a different picture. Most nodes seem to have a larger out-degree, than an in-degree, indicating that they tend to receive information, and is less important in the capacity of information disseminator. This is expected of a network graph created in this manner.

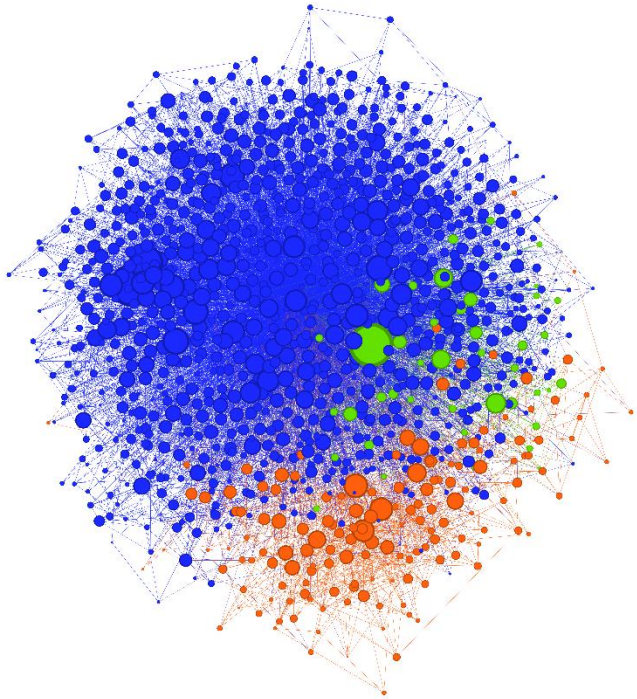


Figure 5 BLM network showing out-degree, within the two main (blue and orange) and a peripheral (green) cluster. Higher out-degree indicated by larger size of nodes.

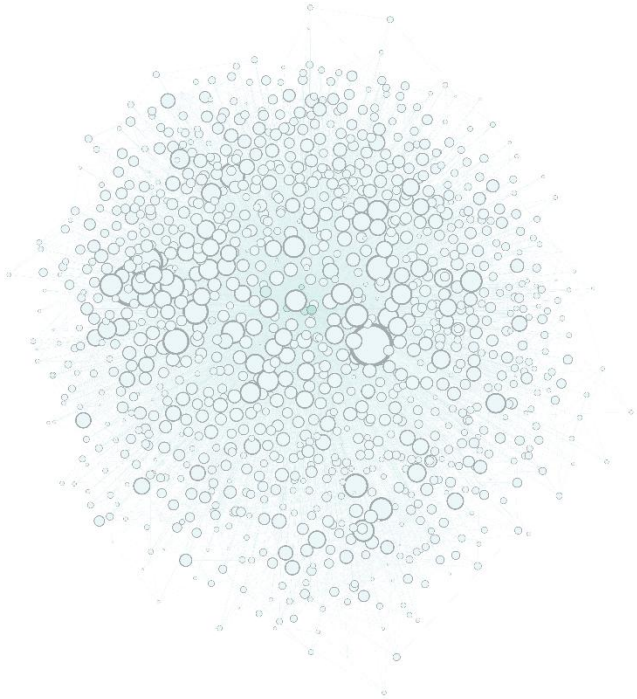


Figure 6 BLM network showing out-degree against in-degree. A higher out-degree is indicated with a larger node size. A higher in-degree is indicated with a deeper colour.

However, when placing the in-degree and out-degree lens together in Figure 5 and 6, it can be observed that users with high in-degrees do not tend to have heavy out-degrees. Discussed in isolation, it seems that this is nothing surprising – after all, it is impossible for a person with a following of millions to follow every single follower back. Reciprocity, thus, should not be expected from users with high in-degrees. From the perspective of social movements, it may seem counter-intuitive, as communication is an integral part of mobilisation. The inclusion of the common people's voice is also key to the legitimacy of such activism. However, the lack of reciprocity observed should not be solely interpreted as a breakdown of collective action, but possibly as a reflection of the impact of mass communication technologies on social phenomena, or possibly a continuation of the hierarchical dynamic of traditional activism pre-mass communication. This also illustrates a limitation of SNA.

Instead, the behaviour of these accounts are better described as them acting as **hubs,** as they act as central points of information dissemination but do not exhibit a similar degree of interaction reaching out to other information sources (Newman, 2001). It can be assumed that they are more passive in their engagement with fellow social movement participants.

4.3.2.2 Hong Kong protests

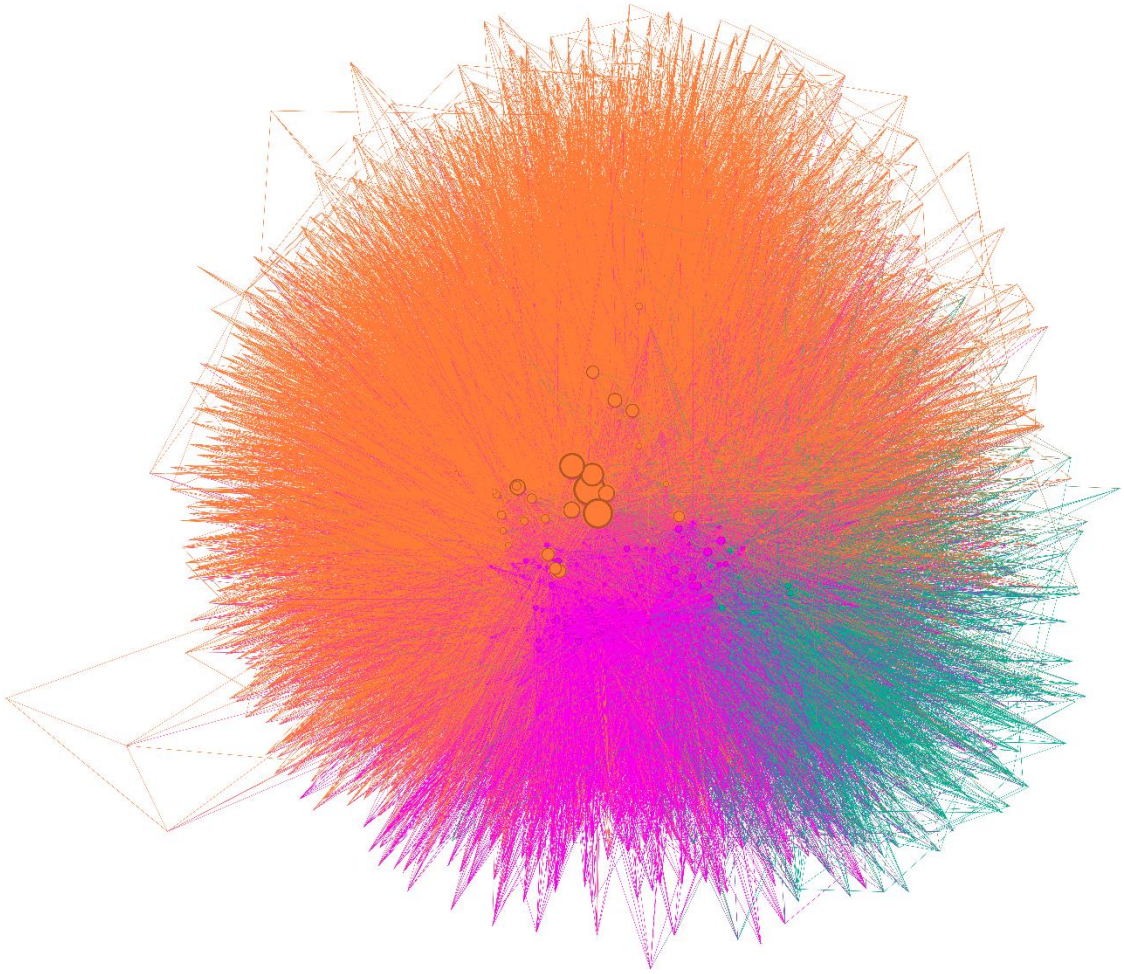


Figure 7 HKP network showing in-degree, within the two main (orange and pink) and a peripheral (turquoise) cluster. Higher in-degree indicated by larger size of nodes.

The network graph of the Hong Kong protests is fairly straightforward when viewed through the lens of in-degree, as seen in Figure 7. The three accounts that I selected were all the ones that stood out in the graph. However, is this due only to the network construction process, or is it also indicative of the real world?

Users with high in-degrees are various activists and Hong Kong politicians. These two identity labels are perhaps interchangeable in most cases given the rich history of protesting in Hong Kong as detailed in Chapter 2. Journalists and writers also stand out in this regard. All communities

have their significant nodes, perhaps indicating the more equal weight or importance of each of these clusters, that they all have users that others look to.

Similar to BLM, individuals occupied a more prominent position than organisations, though to a less apparent degree than seen in the BLM graph. The importance of political and protest organisations in Hong Kong has been on the decline since 2014, with the protests largely taking the stance that they had no leader (Ku, 2020). The perceived failures of traditional political parties, along with the persecution and dissolution of newer ones, meant that activist organisations found it difficult to develop an established presence. Instead, independent politicians and activists are usually more authoritative than the organisations they belong to. With the imprisonment and exile of many individuals, this has elevated them into the position of martyrs and thus of better standing within protestors. Lam-Knott (2018) describes this as a shift towards horizontal dynamics as Hong Kongers adopt an anti-hierarchical view towards protest structures and mechanisms.

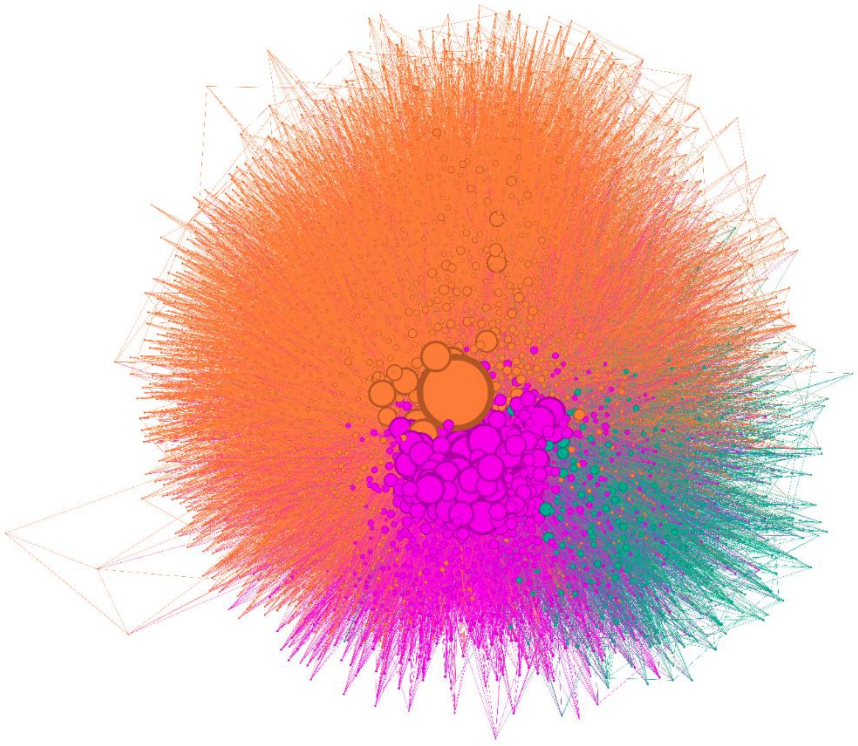


Figure 8 HKP network showing out-degree, within the two main (orange and pink) and a peripheral (turquoise) cluster. Higher out-degree indicated by larger size of nodes.

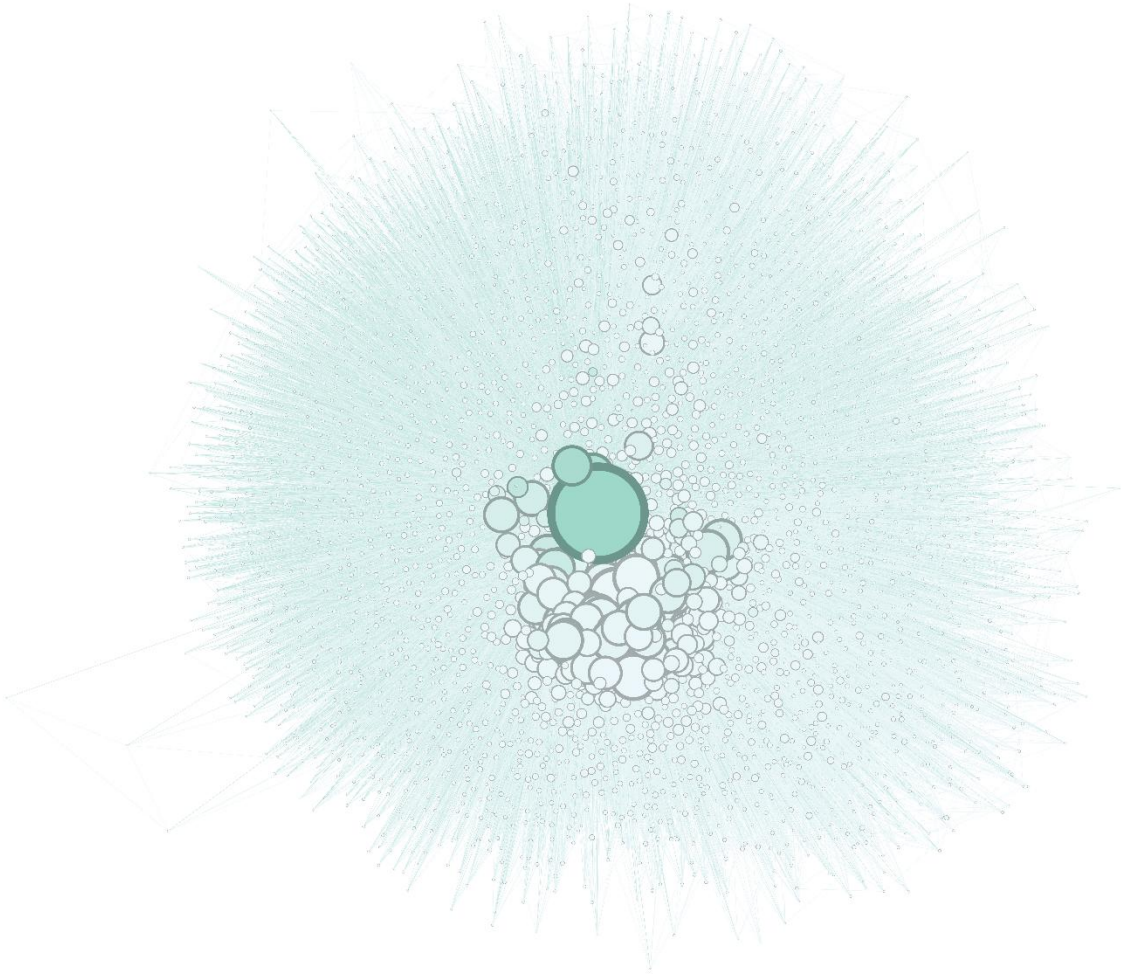


Figure 9 HKP network showing out-degree against in-degree. A higher out-degree is indicated with a larger node size. A higher in-degree is indicated with a deeper colour.

Many nodes with high in-degree also have high out-degree, as seen in Figure 8 and 9. In the context of this network, such behaviour implies that users who have many followers are also following many people. In turn, this means that users who act as information sharers are also information receivers. Compared to the BLM graph, it is observable that information hubs within the Hong Kong protest network are also active pursuers of information. Rather than being simple hubs, these nodes play an active role in engaging those of which receive their information. They

interact and follow other information sources, and also play a more active role in connecting with other nodes within the network.

4.3.3 Betweenness centrality

The other metric that is the focus of discussion is the betweenness centrality. The metric of centrality shows the proportion of nodes that are adjacent to each node (Freeman, 2004), while betweenness is the extent to which a particular node is connected to other nodes through various edges. In short, these nodes are on the paths of information flow – multiple information exchanges go through them, and connect users to other users like bridges.

Burt's theory of structural holes (2007) quite succinctly describes the need for such connections. There are gaps within the network which cause the structure to suffer. In turn, when users are connected together, bridges are formed. Some prominent users create bridges between two isolated clusters, and thus broker information across the boundaries that separate the two communities.

These users are also known as **information brokers**. Zamir (2014) describes users with higher numbers having more control over more information routes, whereas Isa and Himelboim (2018) uses betweenness centrality to identify individuals that others rely on to connect to other users. They facilitate information exchange, but also have the ability to cut off access between users. Information sources or individuals who do not have direct access to one another is thus only connected through these particular information brokers. Cela et al (2014) thus argue that information brokers hold power within the network. More successful information brokers have multiple connections, and thus have more influence over the information that goes through to various communities. This is supported by Kwak et al's 2010 paper, which argues that top influencers have a greater impact than ordinary people. Within this network, information brokers with multiple connections and a high betweenness centrality thus have a greater impact than normal nodes with a low betweenness centrality.

Himelboim et al (2014) draws attention to the benefit of information brokers to facilitate cross-cluster collaboration. Or rather, the existence of information brokers denote that at some point, two isolated networks have been given the opportunity to connect to one another and thus form a larger information network. Kende et al (2016) describes this as acting as a nucleus in a network of like-minded actors.

Within the Internet, individuals are given the ability and agency to become an information broker, assuming the role of facilitating information change either actively or passively. Literature has already established the prominent influence of information brokers for online social movements (Isa and Himelboim, 2018); strategic public diplomacy (Himelboim, 2014); and crisis communication (Isa and Himelboim, 2018). Vermeer and Araujo (2020) stresses the fact that **any**

individual can become a key source of information, and thus become an information broker. This is particularly observable in social movements in the digital age, where protesters are no longer reliant on government channels or large media companies as the sole source of news (Isa and Himelboim, 2018). There are further theories that conceptualise the real-world implications of betweenness centrality, as discussed in the literature review of this thesis. Theories on social influence, for instance, aim to dissect how opinions are disseminated and influence others. Thus, the existence of information brokers is crucial in an information network and acts as an important figure facilitating healthy information flow.

However, although this section is written as if all nodes with high betweenness centrality are acting as information brokers, this is not necessarily true. Betweenness centrality has no definite causal relationship with one's capacity and willingness to act as information broker. It must be borne in mind that this relationship can be logically assumed, but is not guaranteed, as will be highlighted later in this chapter. Further, information access is multifaceted. Twitter, or even social media networks as a whole, is only one way of accessing the same type of information. Interpersonal networks, physical distribution such as newspapers or advertisements, can create information paths that are unbeholden to information brokers.

4.3.3.1 BLM

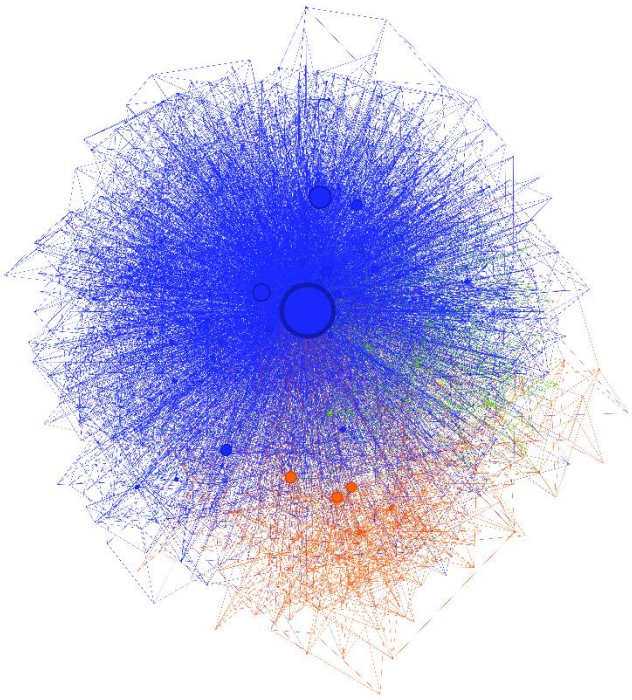


Figure 10 BLM network showing betweenness centrality, within the two main (blue and orange) and a peripheral (green) cluster. Higher betweenness centrality indicated by larger size of nodes.

Nodes with high in-degree tend to have high betweenness centrality, but this relationship does not necessarily hold true in the other direction. Popularity does not thus define one's ability to act as a bridge of information, although it could be assumed that users with higher in-degree would be more effective in acting as information brokers.

For BLM, these potential information brokers are largely in the dark blue community, as shown in Figure 10. Perhaps this is natural, given the large coverage of this cluster. Information brokers within the orange community consist of organisations, authors, and educators, all based in the UK, linking the two communities together and enabling the spread of information across geographical boundaries. Although BLM originates from the US, it has very much spread to be a global movement, a slogan echoed across the globe. Information brokers serve as conduits of information that allow these information networks to be formed and connect with one other.

However, what is interesting is the prominent in-degree of one singular node in the centre of the network. The size of the visualised node represents its relative in-degree compared to all other

nodes in the dataset. From the graph, it is clearly observable that this singular node is overwhelmingly larger and darker than the rest, while the other nodes with high in-degree look very much smaller compared to it. Thus, within this dataset, there is one singular prominent information hub, perhaps suggesting that information dissemination is quite central and thus sources are not diverse. This node is an organisational account.

The smaller green community do not have any visibly prominent information brokers. However, as we know that this cluster is connected to the wider network through follow relationships, it is extremely likely that there are users who are acting as the bridge connecting the green cluster to the network – or else, the cluster would be isolated from the network and hence would not have been captured in the generated graphs. These users when considered individually may not be significant in their ability to broker information, but collectively they form enough linkages to form a part of the network captured in this thesis. Whether or not information reaches them at the same speed, or the same quality, requires closer examination.

4.3.3.2 HKP

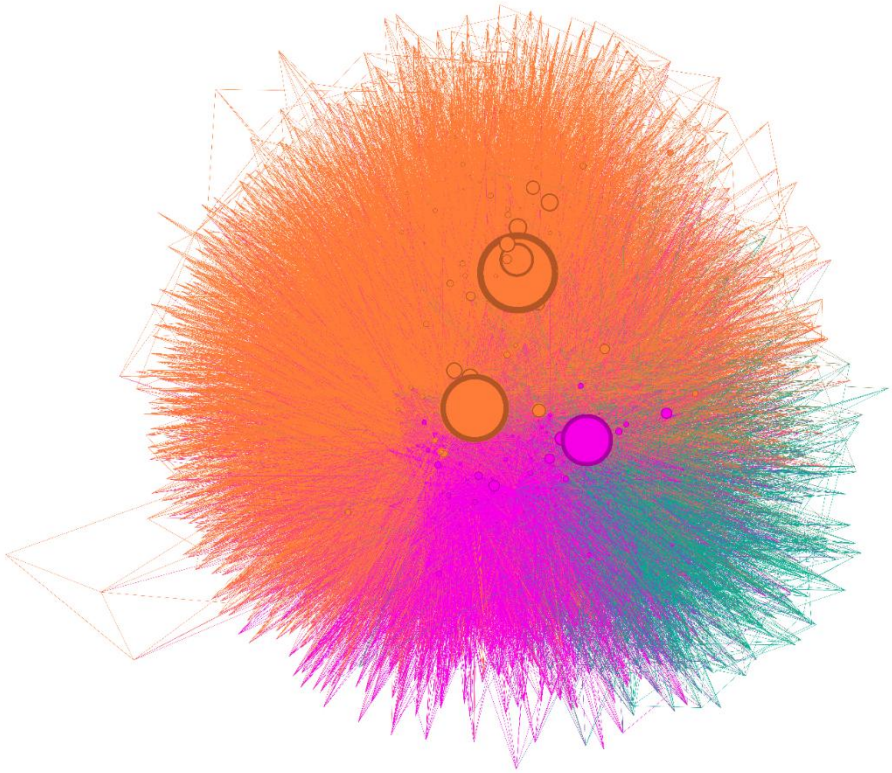


Figure 11 HKP network showing betweenness centrality, within the two main (orange and pink) and a peripheral (turquoise) cluster. Higher betweenness centrality indicated by larger size of nodes.

There are a significant amount of information brokers from both the orange and pink clusters, as seen in Figure 11 above. The pink cluster has a higher average betweenness centrality, which can be explained by their occupation – as journalists and writers, it is natural that information collection and dissemination would be part of their social media behaviour and facilitate their functionality in brokering information. They would also be prone to following one another to get up to date information for their occupation as well. These transactional relationships explain a more equal distribution of betweenness centrality as observed here, as more information brokers stand out.

Otherwise, the initial accounts are also the ones with the highest betweenness centrality. These information brokers are well-known, relatively high-profile individuals that are active in engaging with the communities. This behaviour is reflected or perhaps evidenced through social network analysis, as these information brokers all have high out-degrees as well.

4.3.3.3 Main Highlights

The nature of the clustering informs the nature of the information brokers observed. The non-specific, broad clusters of BLM means that individuals rarely coalesce around a single or a few central characters. Their association is instead based on a mutual interest in the topic, rather than individuals, hence the loose but many connections they form which have created a gigantic cluster within the network.

Meanwhile, the clustering of HKP is more apparently purposeful, as argued in Section 4.3.1.3 above. As individuals are seeking for specific types of information, they are thus less likely to be connected to a wider information network without the help of information brokers. Multiple information brokers are needed to form the network as individuals all have their specific niches or interests.

4.4 Limitations and Anomalies

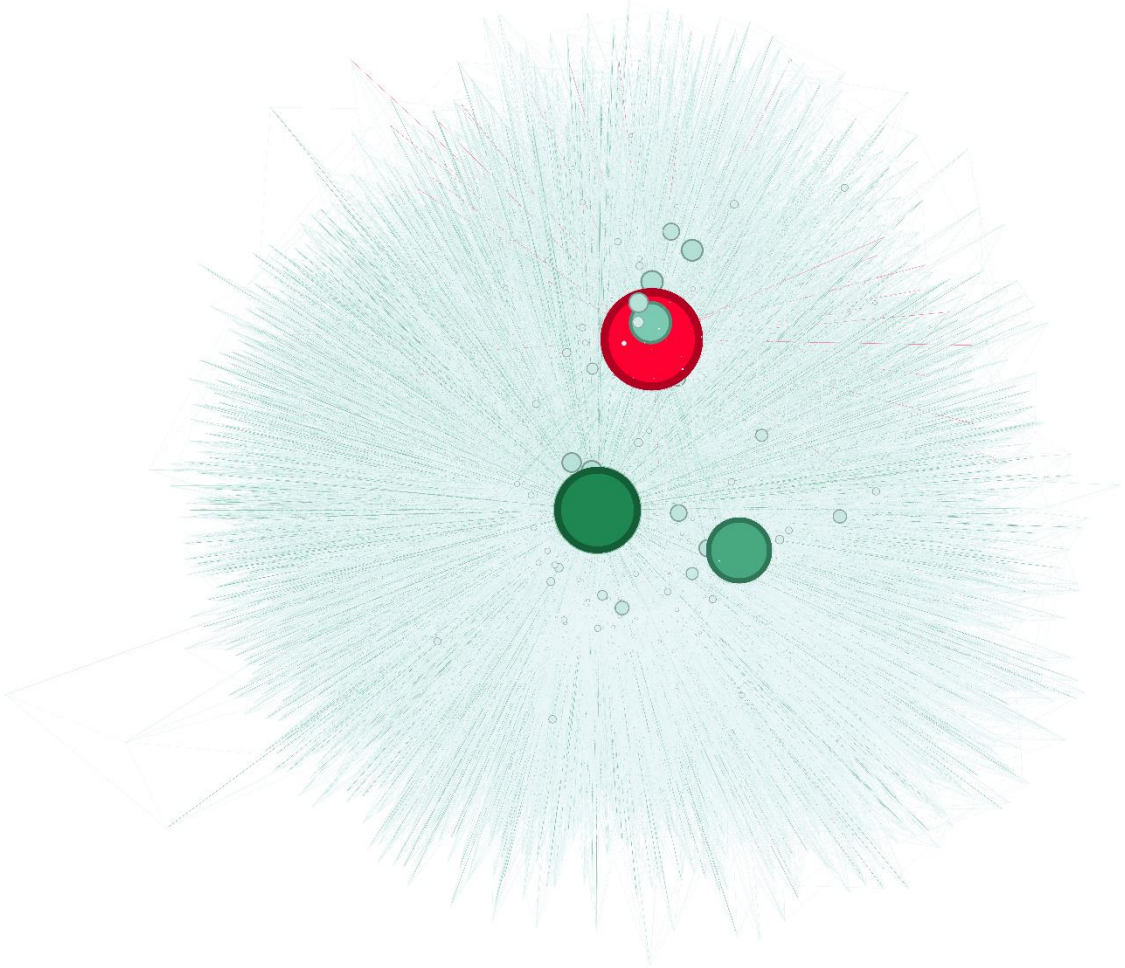


Figure 12 HKP network showing an anomalous node (red). Higher betweenness centrality indicated by deeper colour and larger size.

There are nodes which have a high betweenness centrality, insomuch that they stood out in a brief glance, yet have very little value to the research question at hand. The red-coloured node in Figure 12 above, in the representation of the Hong Kong protest graph, is a prime example. In simply filtering by betweenness centrality, this node appears to be much more influential than all the other prominent nodes. However, when singling out this node to investigate, it is quickly clear that this node is in no capacity to act as an information broker in the network. It is a personal account that has very few followers and following, and doesn't share any information about the Hong Kong protests. As in my use of SNA, I have constructed the networks based on followers and

following path. The appearance of this anomaly captures the limitations of SNA in this particular context and data collection methods that I used in this phase of my research.

If anything, this highlights the main limitation of social network analysis that informs the decision to incorporate it as part of a mixed methods study, and justifies the necessity of including a survey and interview phase that fills in the gaps. This echoes Schuster et al's observation that (2011) it is questionable whether the findings of social network analysis that focuses on social media can be transferred offline. Moreover, Isa and Himelboim (2018) point out that social network analysis simplifies all dynamic interactions into a singular simple connection, and hence cannot reveal the nuances that occur within these online interactions. The Louvain method, in particular, generates non-overlapping communities, where an individual only belongs to one cluster. Whereas, in real life individuals can belong to multiple communities at the same time (De Meo et al, 2011). Similarly, I believe it is also a simplification to reduce Twitter accounts to mere nodes, as the current representation in this chapter cannot capture the different characteristics of different users that otherwise influence how information flows between them. Thus studies that solely use social network analysis as a tool to examine relationships should acknowledge that viewing interaction solely through a singular lens of social network analysis is not necessarily indicative of the real world.

4.5 Conclusion

This chapter has discussed at length the limitations of this particular application of SNA on the dataset. As it is, the network graphs only show the current state of networks, but reveal nothing about the rationale behind why they look like what they are right now. Further, the innate constraints and limitations of the chosen social media platform should also be considered, as addressed in 4.1 and 4.4. Further, this phase of the research was conducted between 2022 and 2023. With the shifts in technological trends and global politics, does the network captured in this research still hold? That merits further study.

However, some key conclusions can be summarised:

First, the networks of both social movements are not entirely homogeneous, but there are prominent communities that share more characteristics which leads to them perhaps having a larger presence. Different clusters with identifiable characteristics can be located within the network, with Black Lives Matter having more of a geographical divide when it comes to the boundaries of the communities, while for the Hong Kong protests occupation seems to be the main differing factor. Further, there also exist peripheral actors within the information flow, who may not have observable actions that frequently relate to the social movements but nonetheless are part of and perhaps contribute to the information exchange. Well-connected users thus have more access to resources, information, and influence (Wildemuth, 2017).

Second, I have identified the existence of different actor roles in the information flow within both networks. There are both information hubs and information brokers that exist in both networks, thus forming a healthy network that effectively facilitates the flow of information. There are individuals that can act as both hubs and brokers, and others that has a more effective role in one than the other. However, the most prominent and thus perhaps important individuals sitting within the information network are most often both brokers and hubs.

Third, that while social movement networks can have their differences, there are general observable similarities and trends that map to what we currently understand about contemporary social movements. Both movements present information networks that centre around information brokers and hubs that are independent actors, demonstrating diversity in sources of information that overcome traditional gatekeepers. Both movements also bring together individuals and connect them together in a cohesive network, enabling the flow of information between actors that may otherwise be disconnected.

Fourth, that information flow and behaviour within social movements cannot be generalised – that each context is uniquely different, and thus lead to different information networks. The purpose of choosing two movements has been laid out earlier in this thesis – however, even within social networks with overlapping tactics, and having a similar access to the same technological tools, the information network exhibits different behaviours. Within the Black Lives Matter network, lower reciprocity is observed from prominent information hubs. As such, it can be deduced that information hubs within this social movement act more as a passive disseminator, and not so much of an information receiver. However, there are more users with a high out-degree, indicating that other users are actively seeking out information. This may also imply that users are actively engaging with diverse sources of information, rather than relying on a few information hubs.

Within the Hong Kong protest network, a higher reciprocity is observed, as users with high in-degree also have a high out-degree. This is perhaps hinting to the active nature of the movement, as hubs also participate in conversations and information exchange. This may also be due to more background and contextual factors such as the differing habits of using social media platforms among different demographics.

Hubs are also spread more across the clusters, which poses questions as to whether there is a less cohesive organisation regarding information within the movement. However, although both networks exhibit different information behaviours, both reflect a more decentralised structure of contemporary social movements.

Fifth, I reflect on how social network analysis can be applied to social movements that operate both in digital spaces and in the physical world. Social network analysis has given a very good overview of both movements, identifying information communities and allowing the investigation into how information flows between these clusters. Further, it also sheds insight into

the information behaviour of the different actors that play prominent roles in dissemination of information, as well as confirming that online behaviour to an extent echoes offline behaviour.

However, there are also flaws with relying on this method, which highlights the need for qualitative phases to fill in the blanks, as well as explain and contextualise connections. More qualitative indicators, such as the interpersonal relationship between the different nodes, the reputation of users, or even the quality of the information itself cannot be revealed (Riquelme and González-Canterqiani, 2016). However, these indicators are crucial to understanding the perception towards trust.

Moreover, the presence of the researcher bias is very much visible and should be taken into account. All but one of the initial accounts that I selected occupied prominent roles in both networks. Thus, do the initial accounts occupy prominent roles as a reflection of reality, or is it simply because the entire dataset is generated based on their relations? As stated in the beginning of this chapter, the choice of the initial accounts is entirely subjective and contains a degree of randomness, and could easily be substituted by many other visible accounts and generate an entirely different dataset. A repeated study using the same method could very well create different observations.

Further, the Musk takeover of Twitter, which served as the basis of my dataset, highlights the uncertainty of using social media data and how digital information flow is inherently constrained by the medium it is conducted on, which is also reflected by the many things this graph cannot tell us. It is impossible to draw definite conclusions between data and the real world without considering the context of which this is situated in.

Finally, I list some questions that merit further exploration, which shaped the design of my survey and interview questions and inspire discussion:

- There is the presence of information brokers in both networks. Are they necessarily **more** trustworthy than other users? What sets them apart as information brokers? Does the relative significance of information brokers equate an equally significant degree of trustworthiness?
- A lack of importance of organisations for both Black Lives Matter and the Hong Kong protests was observed. Is this indicative of real life? Are individuals considered more trustworthy than organisations?
- How does the cultural setting and context of both movements influence their information behaviour, and thus how they perceive trust?

5. Phase 2 – Surveys

5.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I explain the second phase of my data collection: the survey phase. I first describe the process of how I carried out my data collection. I then set out to describe at length the findings of Phase 2 and discuss any insights. Finally, I reflect on the contributions of Phase 1 on this section of data collection, and identify final directions of inquiry in Phase 3 of my study.

In the previous chapter, I have captured and analysed the information networks of both my case contexts, Black Lives Matter (BLM) and the Hong Kong protests (HKP). Through those networks, I have identified patterns of information behaviour and how that could potentially influence who and how social movement participants engage in trust. I have also identified information brokers in both networks and explained their significance, drawing attention to their assumed trustworthiness.

Through the design of the questions, the surveys aim to expand upon the findings of the previous phase. The use of SNA has illuminated a macro view of information dissemination and reception within both social movements. However, what goes behind the scenes? How can this research make sense of the decisions behind all of those particular little nodes? For each node is an individual person with their own considerations that influence their decision-making on what to trust, and ultimately, what to share further into their networks.

Taking into account the conclusions drawn from the analysis of the various metrics, the survey aims to discover whether perceptions of information trustworthiness and information flow aligned with results from the previous stage. Further, the survey also expands on the findings from the previous stage to explore how individuals interact with one another and with information, gaining insight into the machinations within the information networks identified in the previous phase. The survey aims to investigate more precise information behaviour.

My research question explores *perceptions* of information trust and trustworthiness. I must reiterate that the concept of trust is meaningless if it cannot be applied to the context that it is situated in. Definitions of trust are thus always theory unless it can be understood by and tested against an actual population.

5.2 Data collection

Two surveys were prepared for each social movement. To guarantee comparability and eliminate subjectivity, both surveys were completely identical, with only small wording changes in the introductory text and the completion text to reflect which social movement participants the survey was aimed towards. Otherwise, all questions and options given were exactly the

same. The surveys are included in Appendix 2. In this sub-section, I detail the decisions that informed the design of the survey, as well as other factors such as privacy, consent, bias, and obstacles that informed the data collection process.

A decision was made to have two separate surveys, rather than having one for each. This enabled more targeted dissemination as the overlap between the two target groups – BLM participants and Hong Kong protest participants – is not obviously present. Thus, two different surveys would be disseminated through different channels, and separate introductory text would be needed along with other amendments in order to personalise the experience for each social movement. At the end of the survey, respondents were invited to share the survey link with people in their networks, and were provided a link to the survey of the other social movement in case they had participated in both and were willing to share their experience.

The survey was separated into three sections. The first section of the survey asked questions regarding respondents' social movement and social media behaviour. In other words, this section seeks to establish the setting of where individuals are engaging with information, and how deeply embedded they are within the social movement context and the landscape of risks against which they are situated. The second section of the survey seeks to find out how trust is involved in the process of *receiving* information, while the third section investigates how trust influences the process of *sharing* information, as seen through the lens of fact-checking behaviour. The last two sections involved more attitudinal questions which hope to categorise respondents' behaviour and paint a picture of how their perceptions of trust influence their decisions *to* trust.

However, it should be acknowledged that although for the purpose of this research receiving information and sharing information is commented on separately as if they are two different processes, in reality they are often simultaneous or even automatic behaviour, rather than carefully thought-out steps.

Further, the construction of the various questions either stem from insights garnered from Phase 1, or from inherent gaps that existed in Phase 1 that needed to be addressed. The strengths of a mixed methods approach can be clearly seen through this action.

Open ended questions, or free text responses, is a prominent feature of this survey. With it were the use of Likert scales to capture attitudinal responses. As reiterated throughout this thesis, what my research hopes to answer is how social movement participants *perceive* information trust, and thus uncover how the concept of trust is constructed within the social movement context. To do so, questions that capture subjective opinions and attitudes are necessary to engage respondents fully and understand how *they* interpret and understand the concept of trust, instead of being informed by my own assumptions and analysis.

In the Likert scales, I did not include the “neutral”, or “neither agree or disagree” option. Instead, I used either “Unsure”, or “I did not...”. Academics have written on the issue of acquiescence, where respondents have a tendency to agree rather than to disagree (Dillman et al 2014). Similarly, the “neutral” or “neither agree or disagree” becomes this easy option for respondents to default to. As such, I included “unsure” or “I did not…” that more accurately described respondents who would truly have no opinions on the topic due to lack of experience and engagement, and forced respondents to state a perspective (Wolf et al, 2016).

Fellow PhD researchers in the fields of information studies, and social movement research, were invited to sense-check the survey. Further, activists in my personal network were also invited to fill in the survey as a trial run. In total, 6 individuals were involved in the piloting process. I approached all of them individually to get feedback on the design of the survey, and made amendments after considering their suggestions.

The surveys were disseminated through various social media channels under my name in December 2022, and were closed on February 2023. On Twitter, tweets containing information about the survey were posted under my personal account that was normally used to engage with academics, and prominent activists from both movements were invited to retweet and share the survey to their respective networks.

On Reddit, moderators of the subreddits r/BLM, r/politics, r/USA, and r/HongKong were contacted in order to ask for permission to disseminate the surveys in their subreddits. This was done to express respect for the space created by protestors for protestors – as a researcher, I considered myself as infringing on this space. I also avoided subreddits which explicitly stated they would not allow research links or external links to be posted.

Using the in-built visualisation tools within Qualtrics, a general overview of the data was gathered. The relevant statistics enabling comparison, such as mean, standard deviation, and other factors were automatically calculated with Qualtrics and are presented for analysis below.

Survey data was then imported into NVivo in order to analyse the free text answers, which were then thematically coded according to Braun and Clarke (2006). This also enabled the same codebook to be used across the surveys and the interviews of phase 3, allowing for triangulation and synthesising of findings. The majority of qualitative analysis will be presented in the following chapter with the interview data. Meanwhile, this chapter focuses on the quantitative dataset and delivers findings regarding the microview of information behaviour exhibited by social movement participants, and thus inferring the relationship between information behaviours and trust perceptions. However, as mentioned above free text answers were a large part of this survey. Even in close-ended questions or multiple-choice questions, I often left an “other” option for respondents to elaborate their answers or provide alternate choices.

5.2.1 Privacy

The following aspects were all considered, but ultimately were not included in the survey. Other specific demographical data such as age, gender, income, or occupation, which are commonly asked in other surveys, was not included in this research.

There are obvious benefits to collecting answers in these aspects. Age, gender, income, occupation, and other factors will play a part in influencing one's information behaviour, and by extension may affect their perceptions of information trust. To forego data as such is to forego a significant area of exploration of my research question.

However, the decision was made from the onset to not ask to collect too many demographic data markers as this could potentially identify respondents, and thus put them at risk. Moreover, through refraining from collecting personal data, I also hope to put respondents at ease and feel safe in order that they could continue answering the survey. Due to the political nature of the research topic, the comfort and safety of participants was given primary importance.

This is confirmed by my observations during the dissemination period. In my initial tweet that contained the links to the survey, there were some interactions from potential respondents that expressed concern over the data that the survey would collect.

5.2.2 Consent

Incomplete responses were also deleted from the dataset. Although incomplete survey responses can also garner meaningful insights, I decided to not save the data as leaving a survey without completing it was the only way respondents could withdraw their consent from the study. In the beginning of the survey, participants are given information about how their data is used through a participation information sheet linked to the introductory text. They are then asked to confirm that they have read and understood how their data is to be used in this research. Moreover, as all questions are left optional, they can simply skip questions that they do not want to answer.

As the survey did not collect IP addresses or any personal identifiers, it would be impossible for respondents to decide to withdraw their consent once the survey is submitted. Hence, respondents were not able to change their mind and withdraw from the study once their response had been submitted. Therefore to use unsubmitted responses within my dataset would contravene a participant's decision not to complete and participate in the study. Qualtrics keeps unfinished survey responses for a week, in which if the respondent decided to come back to it, they could continue to respond to the survey. Data is deleted after one week of inactivity.

Thus, respondents who might have accidentally clicked out of the survey, or had to take a break, could still return to the survey and not be considered as withdrawing from the study.

5.2.3 Bias

Of course a researcher's bias is inevitable. Phase 2 also marks the midway point of interaction with my target audience – compared to the desk-based social network analysis, and the intimate interviews, the survey tool allows participants to be led into a framework designed by the researcher to confirm or test hypotheses.

For close-ended questions, my own assumptions and biases are easy to be seen. The phrasing and vocabulary used reflects how I view the concept under investigation, from the perspective of a researcher, and as a former participant of social movements. The survey questions and pre-set responses are thus necessarily influenced by my personal subjective experience, written under the lens of my singular perspective.

The piloting of the survey helps identify and eliminate some of the bias. However, the PhD researchers and activists are from comparable backgrounds – well-educated and used to academic jargon. To suggest that a survey be entirely free of bias is hardly possible.

5.2.4 Obstacles

The first and perhaps most prominent obstacle is non-response. A week after the initial invitations for the survey was sent out, only the public tweets posted on Twitter achieved any sort of interaction, and that also stopped drastically after the first two days. The broad nature of both movements meant that its very strength also led to a difficulty in dissemination. As there was no one central point of leadership or authority, it was difficult to find a starting point through which the survey could be publicised.

Comparatively, the BLM survey also received much less responses. Repeated pushes were needed to increase the response rate of the BLM survey, but even then the response numbers pale in comparison to the Hong Kong protest survey. While the Hong Kong protest survey achieved the goal of 100 respondents at the time of closing, the BLM survey only achieved 10 usable/submitted responses by that same point in time.

There are multiple possible explanations: As an Asian Hong Konger, I am more visible in Hong Kong protest networks. My personal details, such as my profile picture and my name, are visible in the platforms of dissemination, from which my ethnic background can be deduced. Thus, Hong Kongers might feel more comfortable responding to my survey after deducing that I am likely of the same identity. Conversely, BLM respondents might be more wary of someone who is not Black that is conducting research amongst their spaces.

Possible questions arise about the nature of the flow of information within BLM. Phase 1 of this study proves that there *is* information flow and interaction within BLM, but is it a relevant information flow that is currently still operating? Are individuals instead talking about different things within the same network?

As such, I had to put in significantly more effort to promote the BLM survey. Beyond Twitter and the public forums, I also sent emails to various activist groups and networks, as well as reaching out to professional networks unrelated to either social movements or BLM in an attempt to reach a wider audience, hence, there was simultaneously a more targeted and a broader approach used.

5.3 Findings

5.3.1 General demographics and overview of information behaviours

Q6 “Where are you currently based?”

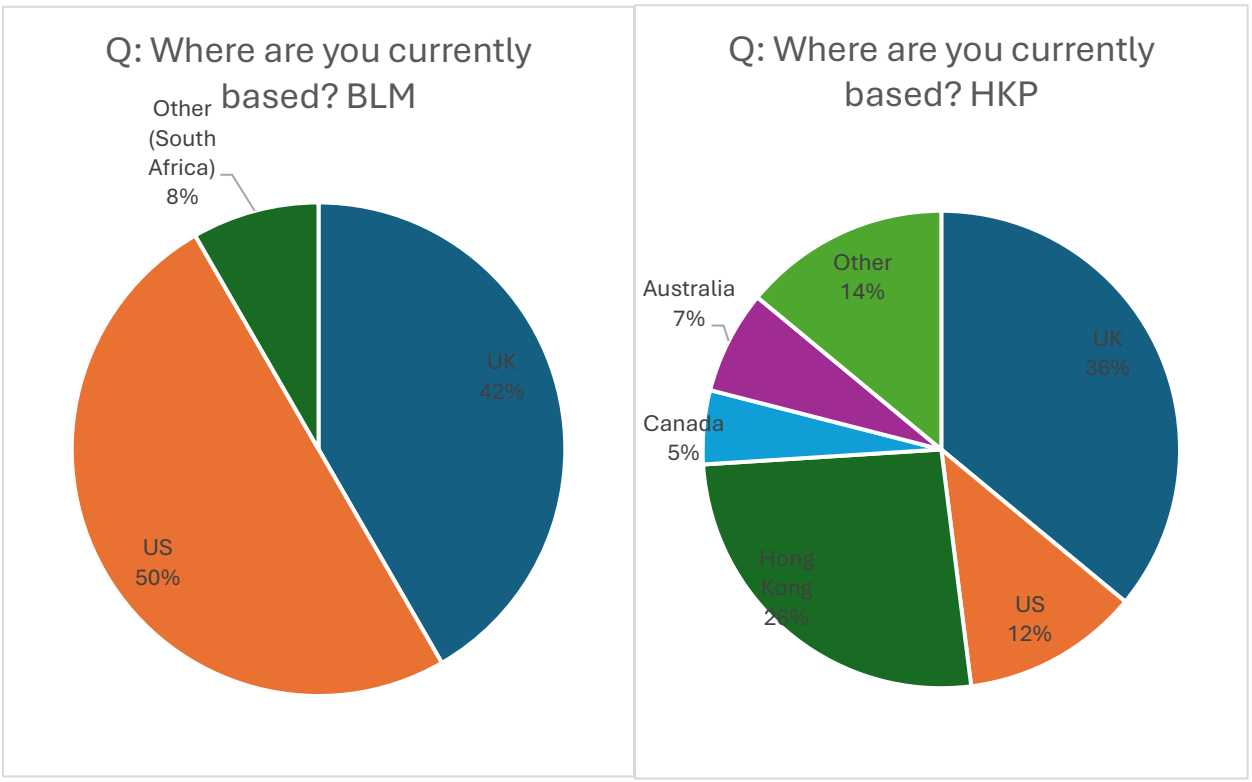


Figure 13 'Where are you currently based?' Responses. BLM (left) and HKP (right).

To establish the cultural context of where the respondents of both cases operate in, respondents were asked to select where they were currently based, shown in Figure 13.

For BLM, there was a fairly even distribution between being situated in the US and the UK. Given that I am UK-based myself and most of the dissemination networks I used were UK-based, I was not surprised to see a high proportion of respondents coming from the UK. However, it is also interesting to note that the survey still reached a significant US population.

For HKP, respondents were mostly from the UK (36%), though closely followed by Hong Kong (26%) and followed by the US (12%). Again, the heavy tilt towards the UK can be explained by my own positioning. However, it is possible that it is demonstrating the diaspora of protesters leaving Hong Kong to countries that they consider as more democratic. Conversely, it also demonstrates the breadth of individuals involved who are not based in Hong Kong – despite that the cause of the Hong Kong protests are inherently localised to Hong Kong. As the next section will indicate, there are also multiple languages at play.

Through having chosen these two specific social movements, this research chooses to deal with respondents operating globally. It must be acknowledged that different countries and cultures would have different internet behaviours, and thus access or receive information differently. However, information – the spread of this survey being a prime example – overcomes geographical boundaries. Thus, it can be reasonably expected that information can be accessed globally. At the same time, with the breadth of nationalities answering the survey, my research will also yield generalisable insights on information trustworthiness perceptions.

Q10 “Do you receive or share information in a language that you do not normally communicate in?”

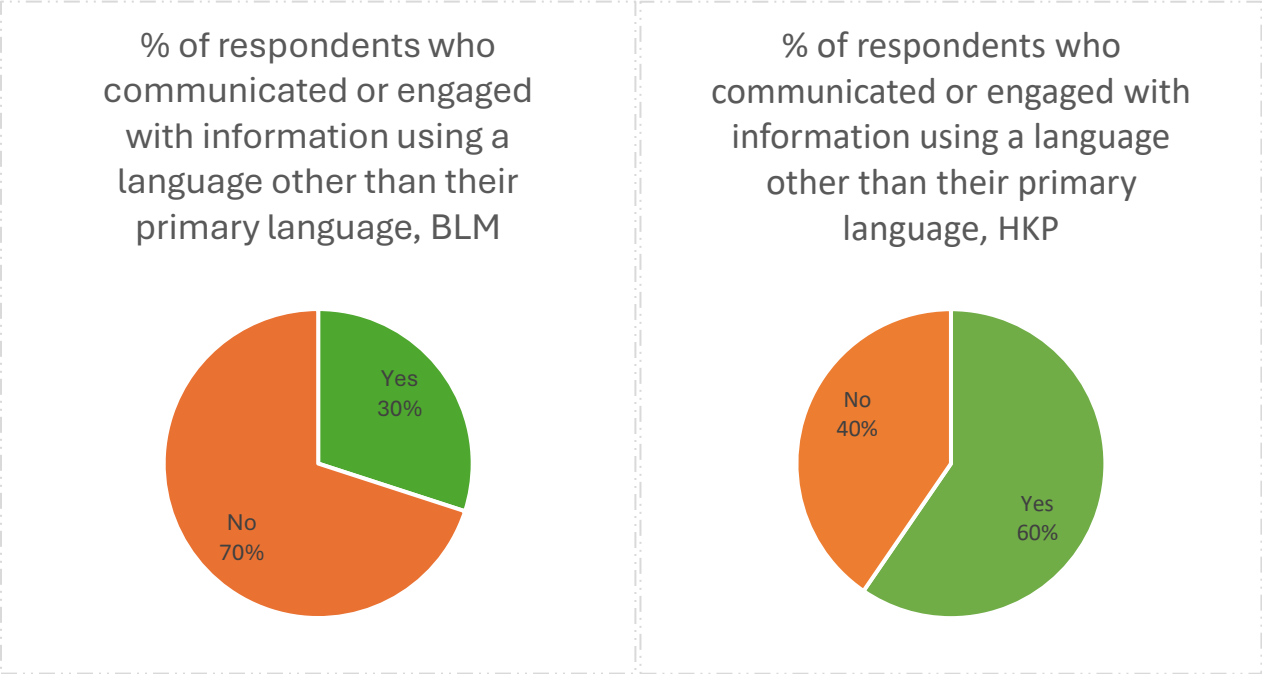


Figure 14 'Do you receive or share information in a language that you do not normally communicate in?' Responses. BLM (left) and HKP (right).

Accompanying the geographical diversity of the response group is the language diversity, shown in Figure 14. Respondents were asked whether they specifically used another language that is not their primary language to engage in information about the movements. The question is left deliberately vague and up to the respondents own interpretation – the main aim of this question was to determine whether or not individuals would put in *effort* to engage in information when it was not in their preferred or most used language. Thus, once again establishing whether or not information could in fact cross language boundaries. When they are in fact sharing information and nomenclature across geographical and language boundaries, could it be then inferred that the methods of understanding and constructing information trust would also spread?

Among the respondents of BLM, 30% of them expressed that they would communicate in another language. Meanwhile, 59% of HKP expressed that they would communicate in another language. This correlates with the demographics collected earlier and re-affirms that information flows are crossing geographical and language barriers, as presented in the previous phase.

Across both movements, similar nomenclature was used to explain why they would communicate about the social movements in another language. Some explanations tend to be more focused on more practical purposes, including facilitating information seeking, as well as to communicate and network with other like-minded individuals. For instance, there were two

responses among HKP that expressed that information was more readily available in Cantonese, thus necessitating them to have to use Cantonese to obtain the information they need.

Q11 “Currently, in a typical day, how much time do you spend on engaging with protest-related activities?”

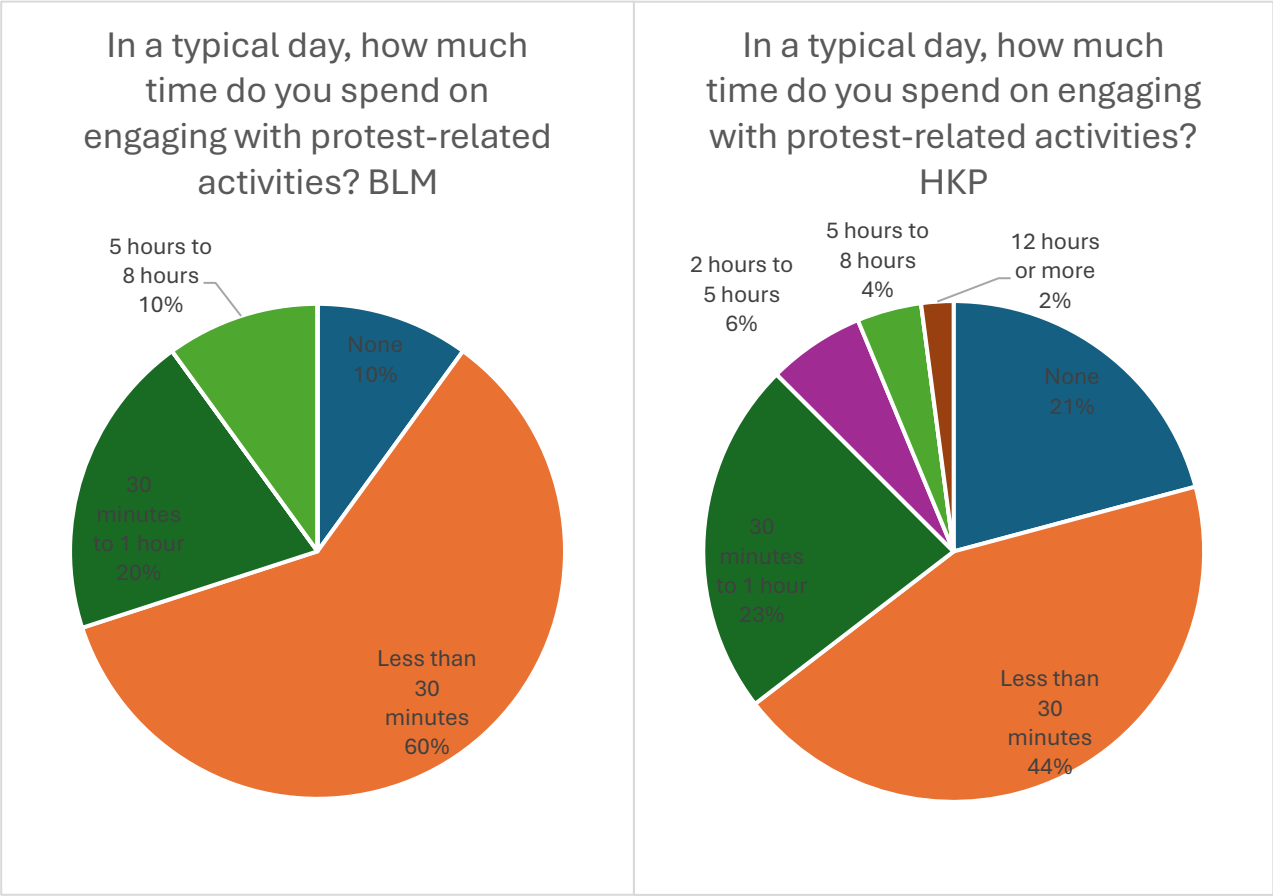


Figure 15 'Currently, in a typical day, how much time do you spend on engaging with protest-related activities?' Responses. BLM (left) and HKP (right).

As seen in Figure 15 above, the majority of respondents tend to spend less than 1 hour on protest-related activities. Bearing in mind that data collection was carried out years after the height of both movements, it can be concluded that social movement participation only constitute a small part of an individual’s wider information behaviour, and so this study gives us a glimpse into this focused period of time.

5.3.2 Social movement behaviour

Respondents' behaviours in social movement were captured. This was to firstly ascertain the perceived level of involvement that would qualify them as social movement participants, using self-identification to capture their perceptions of participating in social movements. This was also to establish a baseline understanding between me, the researcher, and the respondent, the social movement participant. Through understanding how they understood what activities 'qualified' them as social movement participants, I was able to test my own understanding and be informed of what kind of activist population my respondents were from. This aided me in developing my interview questions in the next phase as I was able to understand the populations under research. The responses are captured in Table 1, Figure 16, and Figure 17 below.

Social Movement Behaviour				
	BLM		**HKP**	
Option Text	**Past involvement**	**Current involvement**	**Past involvement**	**Current involvement**
Physical activities				
Organising physical protests, rallies etc.	4.55%	1.79%	19.15%	10%
Created art, visual media, or other creative works for physical protests	9.09%	1.79%	34.04%	10%
Documented, recorded, or photographed physical protest-related activities in-person	13.64%	3.57%	51.06%	16%
Participated as a protester in physical protests, rallies etc.	22.73%	5.36%	82.98%	22%
Undertook violent physical activities, e.g. attacking buildings	4.55%	0%	6.38%	0%
Participated as first aid	0%	0%	4.26	0%

member/volunteer or in other healthcare related role				
Provided protesters with support, such as providing food supplies, car rides, information etc.	18.18%	3.57%	48.94%	4%
Virtual/online activities				
Organised virtual activities, such as online petitions, hashtags etc.	9.09%	1.79%	22.45%	8%
Created art, visual media, or other creative works for virtual activities	4.55%	1.79%	22.45%	8%
Participated in virtual events	11.36%	7.14%	40.82%	28%
Participated in discussions by posting comments online	15.91%	12.5%	61.22%	34%
Shared information you read online with friends and family	25%	12.5%	81.63%	60%
Reading about the protest	22.73%	17.86%	93.88%	72%
Monitored law enforcement activity and relayed it to protesters	6.82%	3.57%	34.69%	16%
Documented or archived protest-related activities for long-term use	2.27%	1.79%	44.90%	24%
Wider support				

Supported arrested protesters financially or legally (i.e. through bar pro bono work, sending supplies or letters)	11.11%	0%	30.43%	12%
Donated monetarily to activists, protesters, or other organisations related to the social movement	38.39%	8.93%	65.22%	26%
Participated in other peripherally related activities, such as participating in academic forums, buying protest-related merchandise, or viewing documentaries about the protest	44.44%	8.93%	89.13%	46%
Not currently involved in the movement	-	3.57%	-	22%

Table 1 Table of responses to participation in protest activities for BLM and HKP

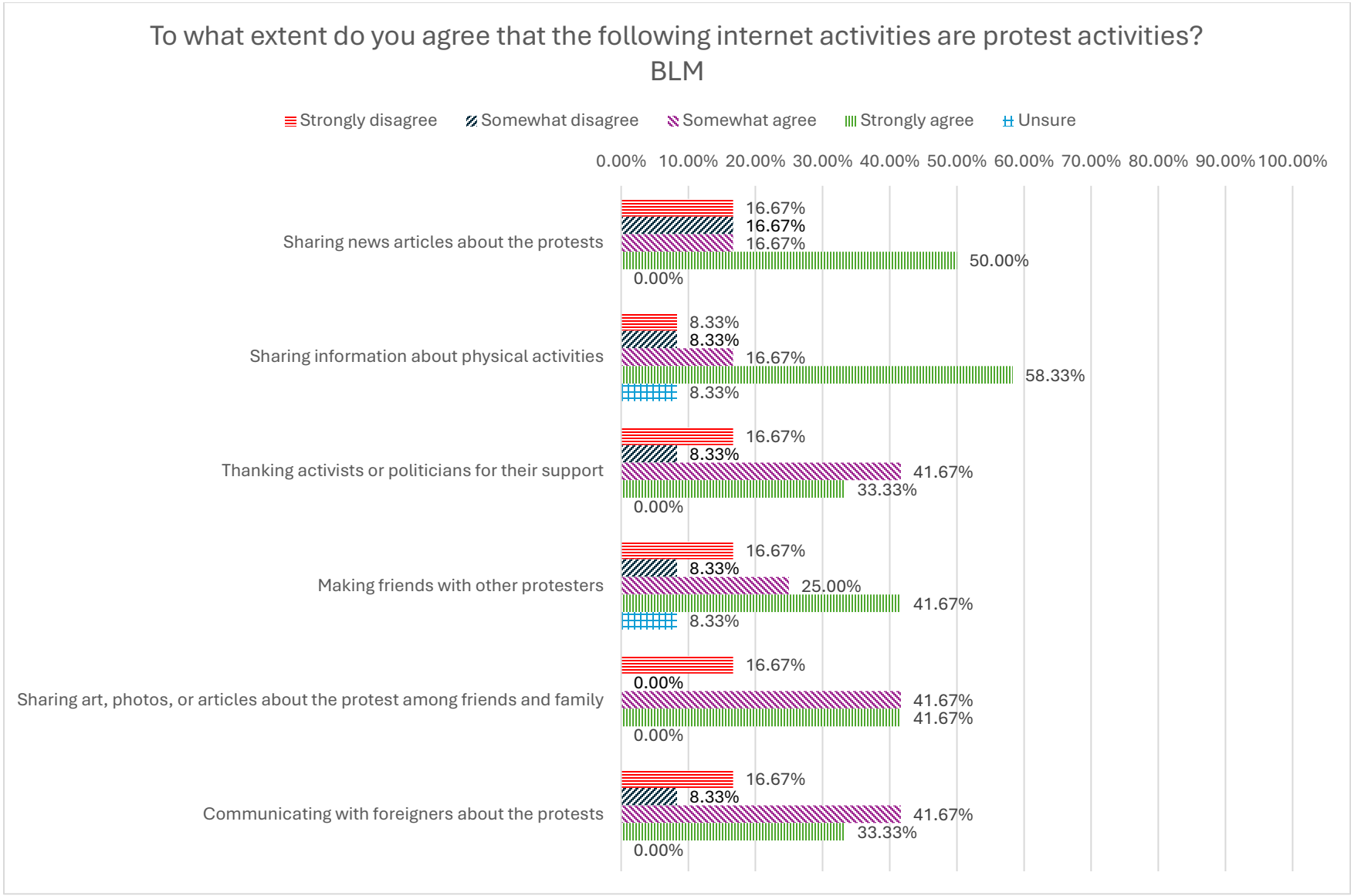

To what extent do you agree that the following internet activities are protest activities?
BLM
Strongly disagree
Somewhat disagree
Somewhat agree
Strongly agree
Unsure
0.00% 10.00% 20.00% 30.00% 40.00% 50.00% 60.00% 70.00% 80.00% 90.00% 100.00%
Sharing news articles about the protests
16.67%
16.67%
16.67%
50.00%
0.00%
Sharing information about physical activities
8.33%
8.33%
16.67%
58.33%
8.33%
Thanking activists or politicians for their support
16.67%
8.33%
41.67%
33.33%
0.00%
Making friends with other protesters
16.67%
8.33%
25.00%
41.67%
8.33%
Sharing art, photos, or articles about the protest among friends and family
16.67%
0.00%
41.67%
41.67%
0.00%
Communicating with foreigners about the protests
16.67%
8.33%
41.67%
33.33%
0.00%

Figure 16 'To what extent do you agree that the following internet activities are protest activities?' BLM Responses

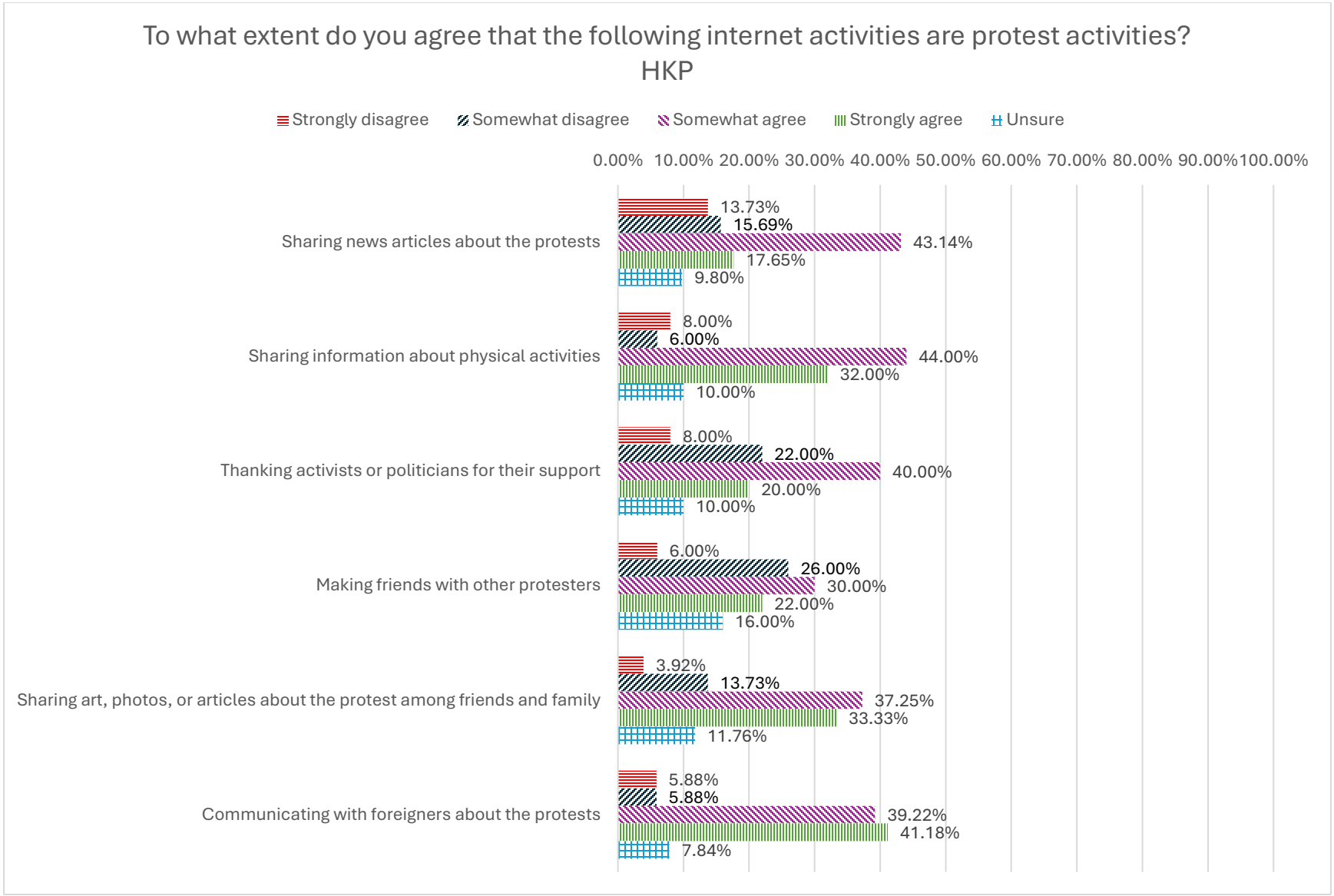

To what extent do you agree that the following internet activities are protest activities?
HKP
Strongly disagree
Somewhat disagree
Somewhat agree
Strongly agree
Unsure
0.00% 10.00% 20.00% 30.00% 40.00% 50.00% 60.00% 70.00% 80.00% 90.00% 100.00%
Sharing news articles about the protests
13.73%
15.69%
43.14%
17.65%
9.80%
Sharing information about physical activities
8.00%
6.00%
44.00%
32.00%
10.00%
Thanking activists or politicians for their support
8.00%
22.00%
40.00%
20.00%
10.00%
Making friends with other protesters
6.00%
26.00%
30.00%
22.00%
16.00%
Sharing art, photos, or articles about the protest among friends and family
3.92%
13.73%
37.25%
33.33%
11.76%
Communicating with foreigners about the protests
5.88%
5.88%
39.22%
41.18%
7.84%

Figure 17 'To what extent do you agree that the following internet activities are protest activities?' HKP Responses.

The following questions are referred to in this sub-section:

Q2. “Since the beginning of your participation in the Hong Kong protests, how have you been involved with or connected to it in terms of physical activities?”

Q3. “Since the beginning of your participation in the Hong Kong protests, how have you been involved with or connected to it in terms of virtual/online activities?”

Q4. “Since the beginning of your participation in the Hong Kong protests, how have you been involved with or connected to it in terms of wider forms of support?”

Q5. “Are you currently still involved with the Hong Kong protests? If yes, in what ways?”

Q7. “To what extent do you agree that the following internet activities are protest activities?”

From survey responses, it can be summarised that overall BLM respondents engaged more in dimensions of internet protest activity. They also had a much stronger agreement on behaviours such as sharing and reading information as being social movement actions. This correlates to the more educational elements of the movements as explored in Chapter 3.

Their current level of involvement in protest activities also seem similar to their previous levels of involvement, engaging in the same activities, as presented in Table 1. In general, there is an observable normalised acceptance of internet activities as valid protest activities. One aspect that is highlighted is that individuals seem to read information more than they share information.

For HKP responses, other aspects stood out. The “other” option was made use of frequently to list out activities that were not included in the preset answers, the biggest one being “translation”. This reflects the characteristic of the protest being bilingual. There was also an emphasis on “non-violent” activities, in contrast to one of my preset answers containing “violent activities” as a descriptor.

> HS22: “Although I understand the question, I take issue with the word ‘violent’ in the description of activities. ‘Violence’ is either an arbitrary moral judgement, or a legal conclusion based on international law governing peaceful assemblies. In addition, distinguishing between harm to persons versus property is important, and here you have explicitly designated harm to property as an example of violence.”

Although there is also a general sense of acceptance of internet activities as protest activities, it is to a lesser extent than the BLM response. There is also a notable dip in physical participation, but that can be explained due to the passing of the National Security Law in Hong Kong and other persecution from law enforcement.

5.3.3 Social movement internet use

Having established their social movement behaviour, I then shifted my focus in learning about their internet use, and thus information behaviour, regarding social movements. The platforms and methods of receiving and sharing information were asked. The responses are summarised in Figures 16-18.

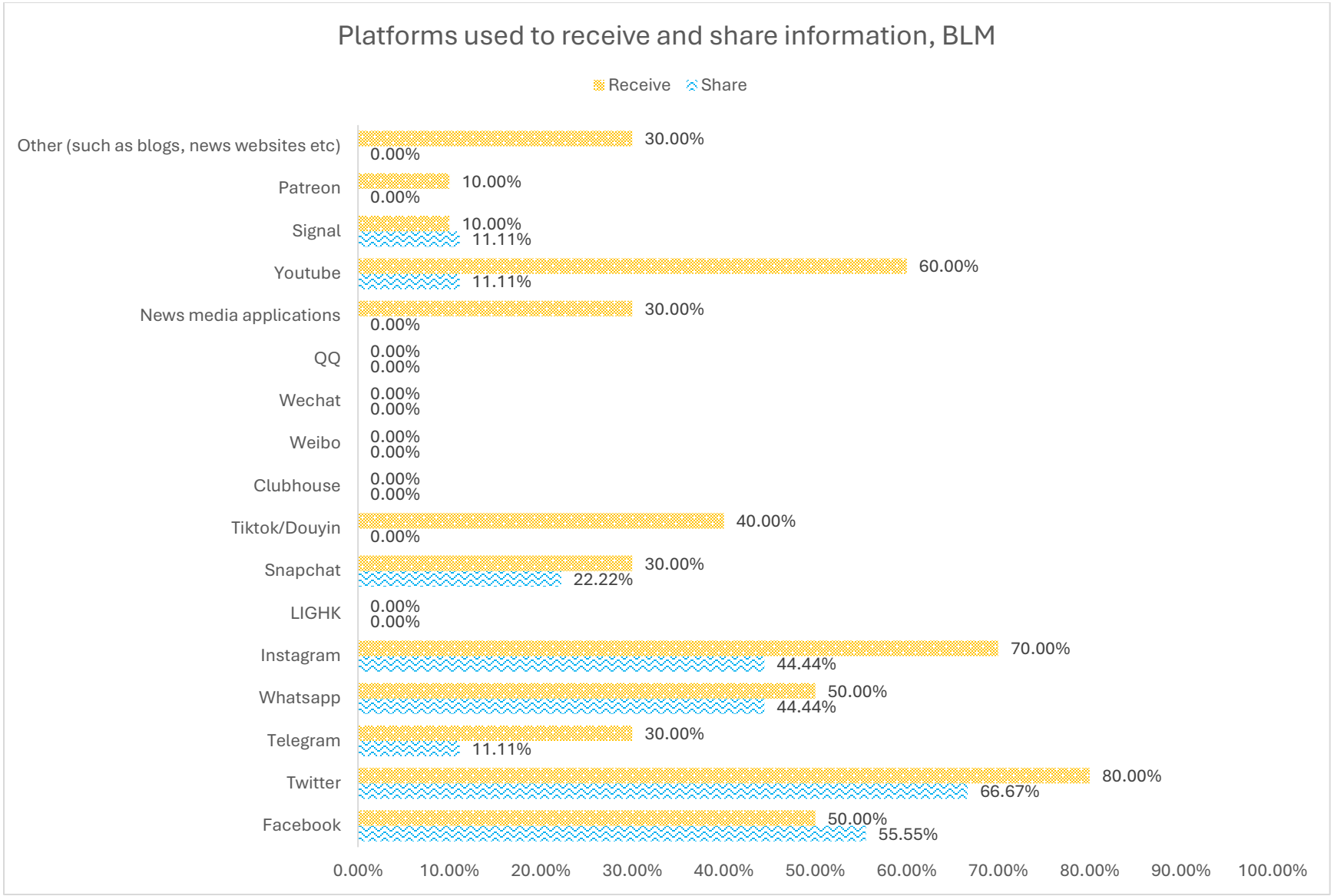

Platforms used to receive and share information, BLM
Receive
Share
Other (such as blogs, news websites etc)
30.00%
0.00%
Patreon
10.00%
0.00%
Signal
10.00%
11.11%
Youtube
60.00%
11.11%
News media applications
30.00%
0.00%
QQ
0.00%
0.00%
Wechat
0.00%
0.00%
Weibo
0.00%
0.00%
Clubhouse
0.00%
0.00%
Tiktok/Douyin
40.00%
0.00%
Snapchat
30.00%
22.22%
LIGHK
0.00%
0.00%
Instagram
70.00%
44.44%
Whatsapp
50.00%
44.44%
Telegram
30.00%
11.11%
Twitter
80.00%
66.67%
Facebook
50.00%
55.55%
0.00%
10.00%
20.00%
30.00%
40.00%
50.00%
60.00%
70.00%
80.00%
90.00%
100.00%

Figure 18 'What platforms do you use to receive/share information?' BLM Responses.

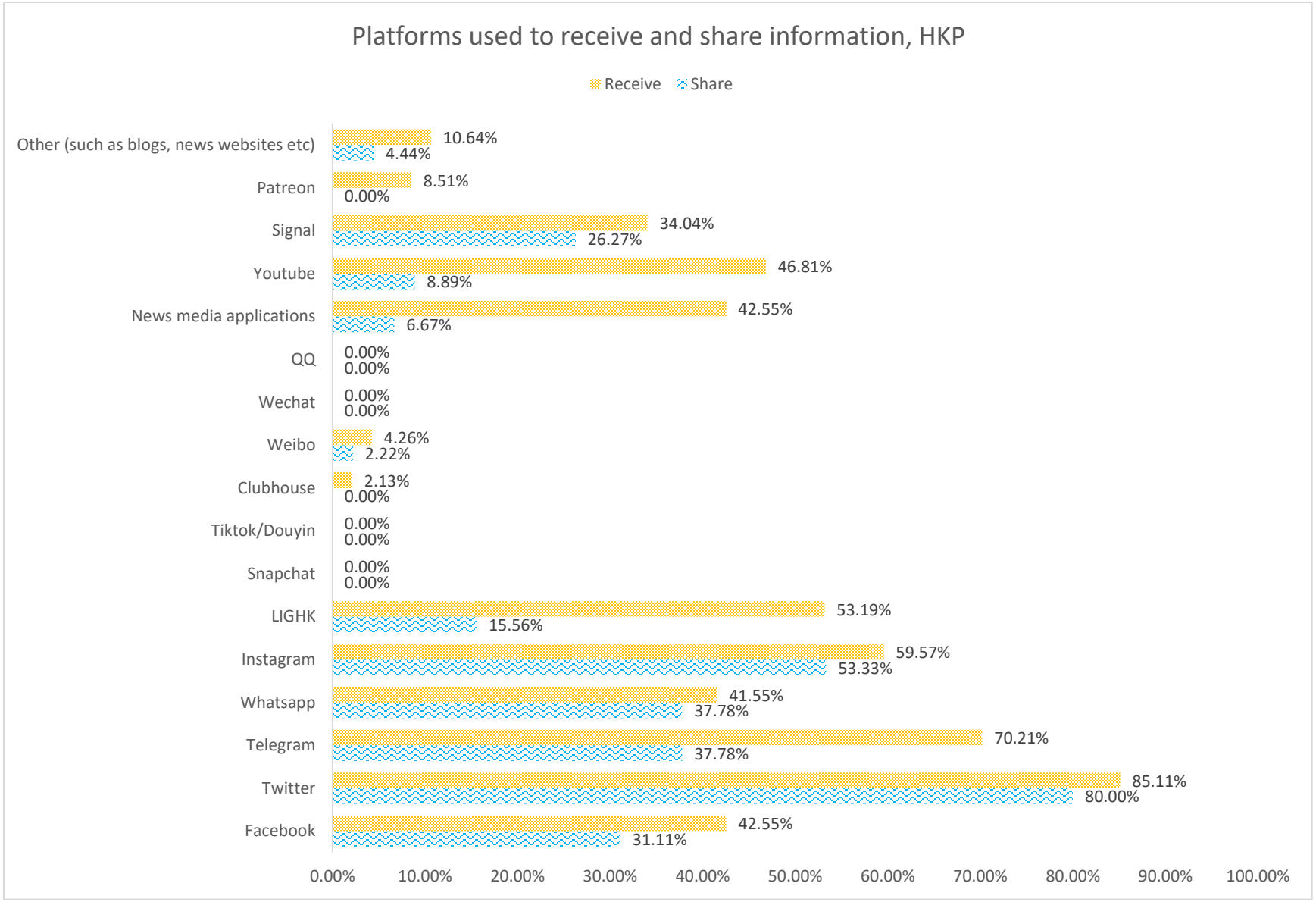

Platforms used to receive and share information, HKP
Receive
Share
Other (such as blogs, news websites etc)
10.64%
4.44%
Patreon
8.51%
0.00%
Signal
34.04%
26.27%
Youtube
46.81%
8.89%
News media applications
42.55%
6.67%
QQ
0.00%
0.00%
Wechat
0.00%
0.00%
Weibo
4.26%
2.22%
Clubhouse
2.13%
0.00%
Tiktok/Douyin
0.00%
0.00%
Snapchat
0.00%
0.00%
LIGHK
53.19%
15.56%
Instagram
59.57%
53.33%
Whatsapp
41.55%
37.78%
Telegram
70.21%
37.78%
Twitter
85.11%
80.00%
Facebook
42.55%
31.11%
0.00%
10.00%
20.00%
30.00%
40.00%
50.00%
60.00%
70.00%
80.00%
90.00%
100.00%

Figure 19 'Which platforms do you use to receive/share information?' HKP Responses.

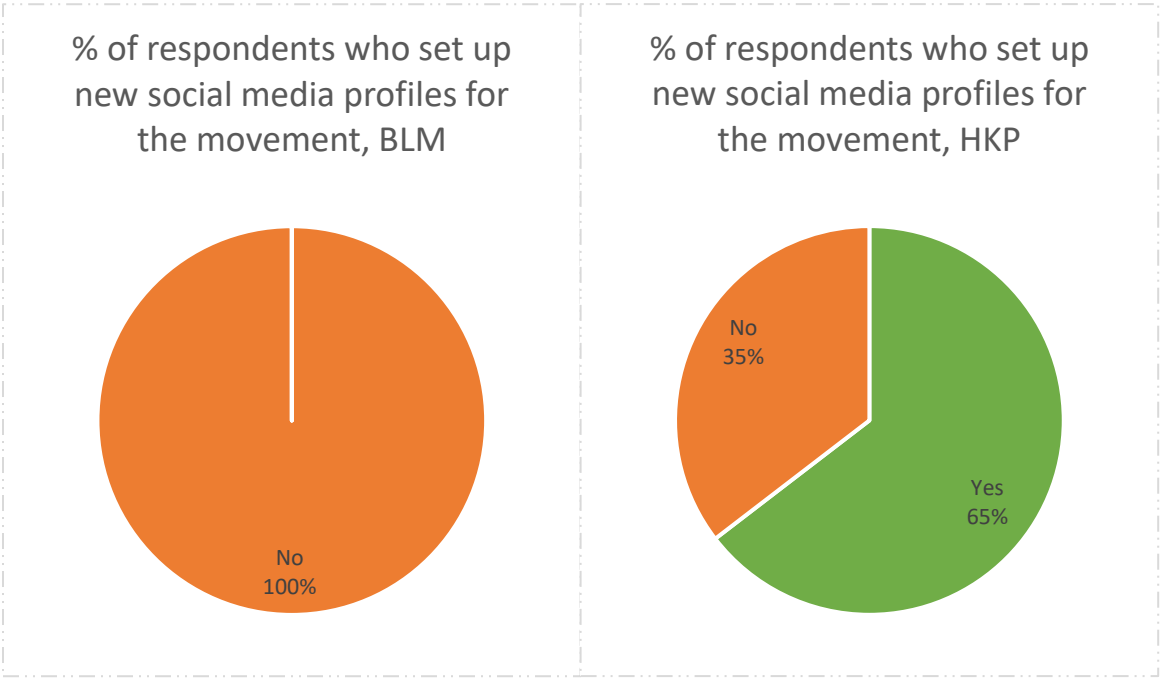


Figure 20 'Did you create new social media profiles or register for new messaging applications for the social movement?' Responses. BLM (left) and HKP (right).

In the digital space, it can be estimated that the platforms through which information is spread holds a subtle influence on the information that is contained and shared within, as individuals utilise the platform's unique functions (Howard et al, 2011). With the following questions, I hope to evaluate whether respondents perceive the impact of the platform on the trustworthiness of the information they receive.

Q8 "Which platforms do you receive information about the [protests] from?"
Q9 "Which platforms do you share information about the [protests] from?"

Very similar platforms were used to receive and share information by both social movements. Of course, there were regional variations (for instance, TikTok/Douyin was used by BLM protestors, but not by HKP protestors), but overall the same platforms were chosen by respondents of both movements. This speaks to the strength of instant communications in contemporary social movements. However, news media applications were also popular choices of both movements, indicating that the position of traditional sources of information still persist

and have not been entirely replaced. Some responses identified specific news channels or media. Other platforms that were identified included Reddit, Discord, and local news channels.

For BLM, Twitter was the most popular option for both *receive* (80%) and *share* (66.67%). The second most popular option for *receive* was Instagram (70%), while Facebook was the second most popular option for *share* (55.55%). Of the options chosen, Facebook and Signal were platforms where more respondents indicated that they *shared* information on those platforms, compared to those that indicated they *received* information using those platforms. Meanwhile, there were platforms which were only used to *receive* information. These included Patreon, TikTok, and more traditional information sources such as news media applications. Other than Twitter and Instagram, YouTube (60%) was also indicated as a popular platform for *receiving* information, along with Facebook (50%) and WhatsApp (50%). News media applications was at 30%.

For HK, all of the chosen options had more users indicating they used those platforms to *receive* information, compared to using them to *share*. Twitter once again was the most popular platform for both *receive* (85.11%) and *share* (80%). Telegram was the second most chosen for *receive* (70.21%), while Instagram was the second most popular choice for *share* (53.33%). Other frequent platforms of receiving information included Instagram (59.57%), LIGHK, a Hong Kong-based forum (53.19%), YouTube (46.81%) and Facebook (42.55%). News media applications was at 42.55%.

All in all, Twitter emerged as the platform being used most often, both to receive or share information. This is to be expected as Twitter was the main platform through which this survey was disseminated, and as explained in previous chapters, this was due to the high population of users of both movements on Twitter. Both groups of respondents also *received* more information than they *shared*, especially for HKP where all social movement platforms were used more to *receive* rather than *share*. This attests to the importance of information brokers, who keep the information flow going between populations. If individuals merely *received* information passively without *sharing*, information networks would not be created and information dissemination would not be possible.

Q12 “Did you create new social media profiles or register for new messaging applications for the social movement?”

Q13. “Do you include any real information (such as your age, address, school, name, or appearance) on your online profiles? If yes, on which platforms and why?”

Q14. “Do you share personal anecdotes (such as stories about your day, about people around you) on your online profiles? If yes, on which platforms and why?”

Respondents were then asked as to whether they had set up new social media platforms for the express purpose of participating or engaging with their social movements. To actively set up channels of communication indicates a desire to be more involved within the information network, either to receive or share more information that is considered relevant to them. This was also followed up by questions which asked if they shared personal information (that would identify them directly) or personal anecdotes (that would identify them indirectly) on social media tools and platforms. To reveal personal information, directly or indirectly, is to be vulnerable. Where anonymity is normalised and favoured in online activism, such openness is assumed to be less preferable.

Of BLM, no respondents chose the options "yes" when asked if they had made new profiles. All thus used existing social media tools and platforms to receive and share information, and it can be inferred that existing means of communication already satisfied their information need. Further, a majority would not share personal anecdotes, but would share personal details, citing reasons such as career networking or family purposes.

> BS9: "Because I already had access to the resources and people I needed to with the applications and social media profiles I had."

Thus, private information shared could be summarised as moreso due to utility purposes, while anecdotes that may reveal more in-depth information about themselves would not be made public to protect their privacy.

For HKP, a very different response trend was captured. While there were those that indicated that they were satisfied with existing social media, as they had sufficient information, or already had an audience base that they had established. However, a majority (65%) set up new profiles. Reasons cited included increased security, increased availability of information and communications, or to reach a wider audience. Telegram and Signal were examples raised for the former two reasons, while Twitter was mentioned for the last reason. However, there was also a marked sense or consensus that any real or identifiable information was only included or provided in social media profiles made before 2019. Profiles set up for the movement were very much distinct from those set up before the protest, with safety and privacy cited frequently as the reason for this separation. Much like BLM respondents, those that did include real information in their profiles were mainly for career networking or keeping in touch with family and friends.

> HS27: "No [to including personal information]. Unless that profile is not used for anything protest related. I just make multiple profiles for different purposes"

> HS12: "No. I used to do it in the past, when we were all more naive about social media. Nowadays I don't share that type of information anymore because I became more aware of the risks of posting personal data online."

However, for both movements there were respondents that indicated that revealing personal information, as opposed to valuing privacy, was necessary. The act of revealing real and identifiable information was seen as a method to check for credibility and authenticity. Thus, an authentic persona was seen to be more trustworthy. The balance between vulnerability and honesty will be explored in the next chapter as well.

> BS4: “Yes, on FB, because it is my personal microblog, and on Twitter, to humanize my tweet output”
>
> HS1: “Yes on Twitter - increase level of authenticity, people would pay more attention if they can tell you are a real person with real experiences”
>
> HS8: “Yes on Twitter and IG, that's because I would be perceive as authenticate voice when I spread news and insight about Hong Kong. Anonymity also posed barrier to networking with like-minded individuals or activists based in Hong Kong”
>
> HS12: “Yes, on FB, Twitter, Instagram and WhatsApp. Generally, I don't feel the need to hide my identity, and when it comes to sharing information related to the HK protests, I also believe that knowing the identity of the people who share the information adds credibility to it, as there are a lot of bots, trolls and intended misinformation on social media.”
>
> HS23: “Twitter mostly, just because it seems like a good way to mainten engagement”

To take a step further, there are also some responses from respondents that did not consider privacy or anonymity as necessary to their internet activity.

> HS3: “Yes, on Instagram and Reddit. I don't care about my privacy.”

5.3.4 Trustworthiness perceptions

Borrowing from the loose categories of rational (or cognitive) and non-rational bases established in my Literature Review chapter, the same framework is seen to be applicable to help conceptualise and summarise insights from this phase of data collection.

In the design of the survey, three perspectives were measured to capture how respondents engaged in trust. The first perspective concerned trust in information sources, or in other words trust in individual agents. A second perspective concerned trust in information content. Finally, the third perspective approached trust from the angle of misinformation and disinformation, which hoped to capture explanations of how easy it was for respondents to engage in trust.

Together, the three dimensions hoped to probe respondents into thinking about trust in different ways.

5.3.4.1 Source-based trust

The first set of questions associates trust with particular information sources. Respondents were given a brief definition of the term "disseminators" used in the survey.

"'Disseminators" refers to anyone who actively shares information, either privately or publicly.

Q15 "Do you receive or share information from the following categories of information disseminators?"
Q16 "How trustworthy do you find the following categories of information disseminators?"

Figures 21 – 23 show the responses to these questions.

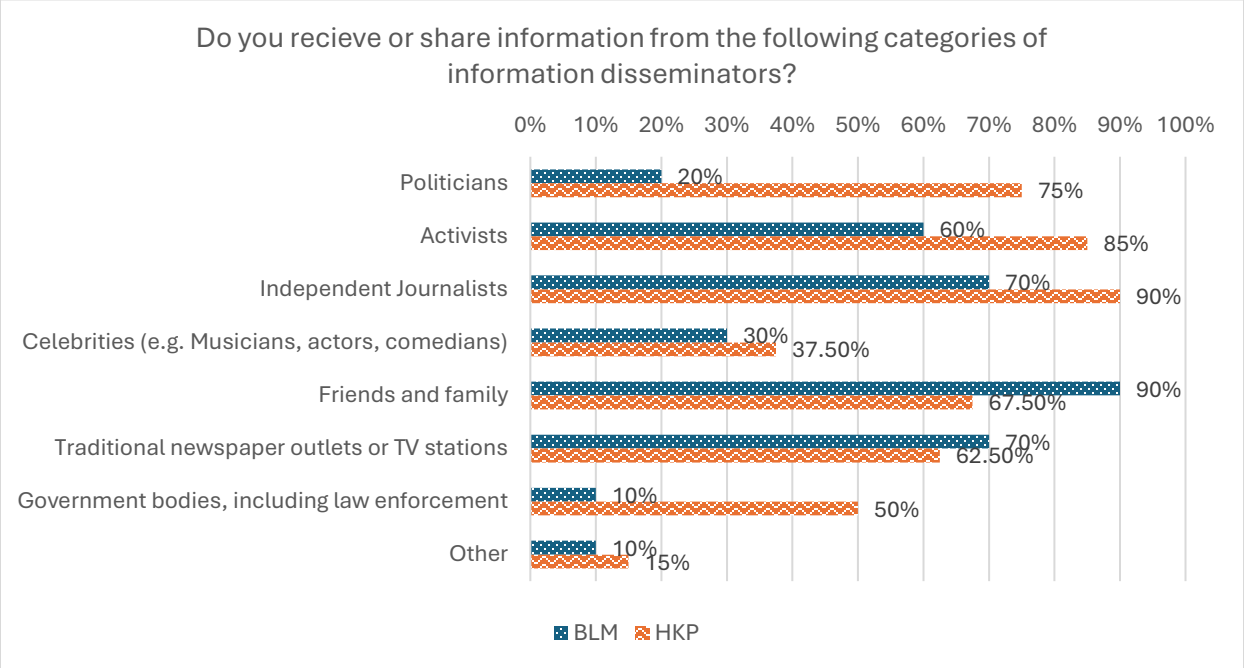


Figure 21 'Do you receive or share information from the following categories of information disseminators?' BLM and HKP responses.

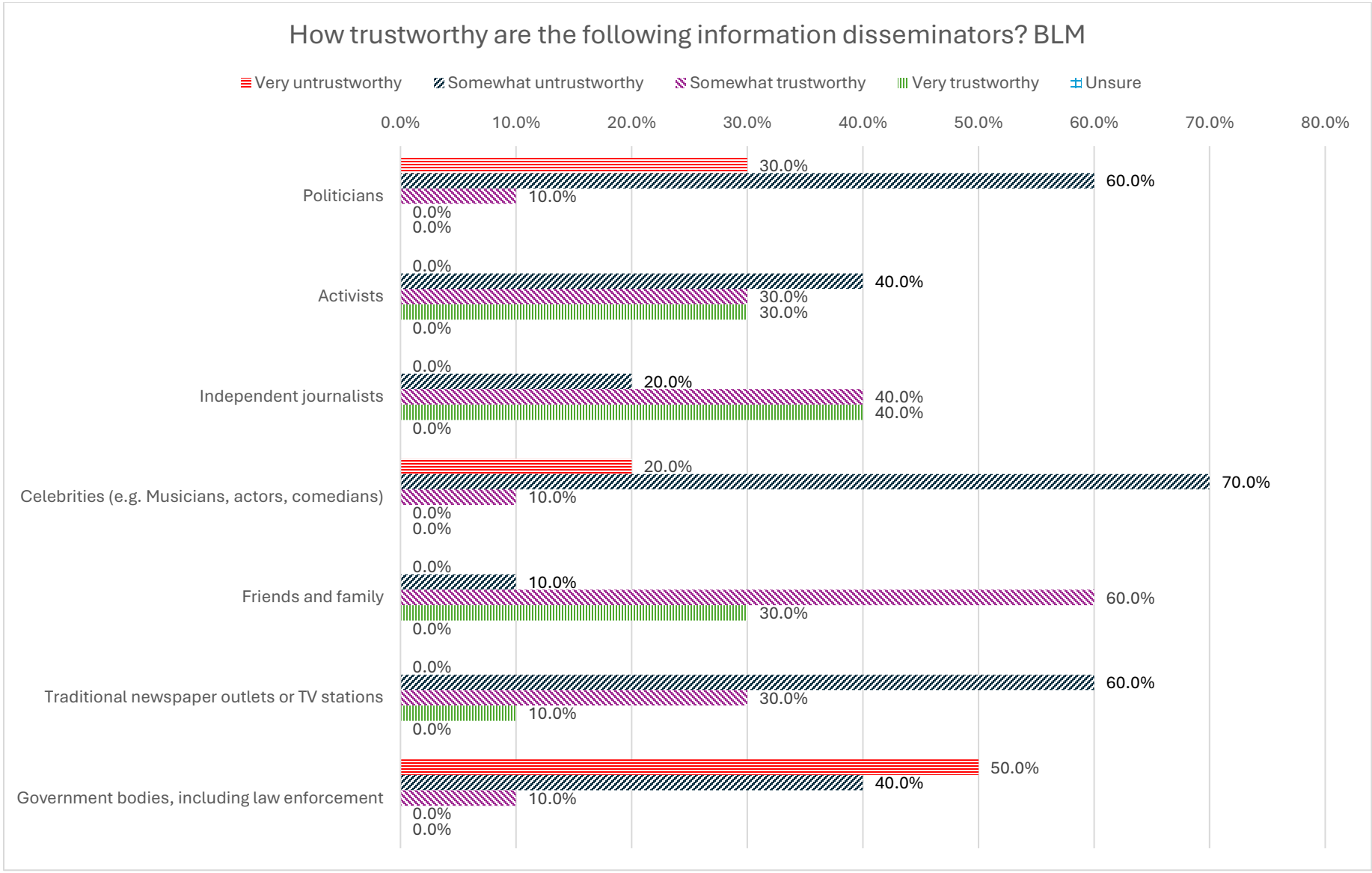

How trustworthy are the following information disseminators? BLM
Very untrustworthy
Somewhat untrustworthy
Somewhat trustworthy
Very trustworthy
Unsure
0.0%
10.0%
20.0%
30.0%
40.0%
50.0%
60.0%
70.0%
80.0%
Politicians
30.0%
60.0%
10.0%
0.0%
0.0%
Activists
0.0%
40.0%
30.0%
30.0%
0.0%
Independent journalists
0.0%
20.0%
40.0%
40.0%
0.0%
Celebrities (e.g. Musicians, actors, comedians)
20.0%
70.0%
10.0%
0.0%
0.0%
Friends and family
0.0%
10.0%
60.0%
30.0%
0.0%
Traditional newspaper outlets or TV stations
0.0%
60.0%
30.0%
10.0%
0.0%
Government bodies, including law enforcement
50.0%
40.0%
10.0%
0.0%
0.0%

Figure 22 'How trustworthy do you find the following categories of information disseminators?' BLM Responses.

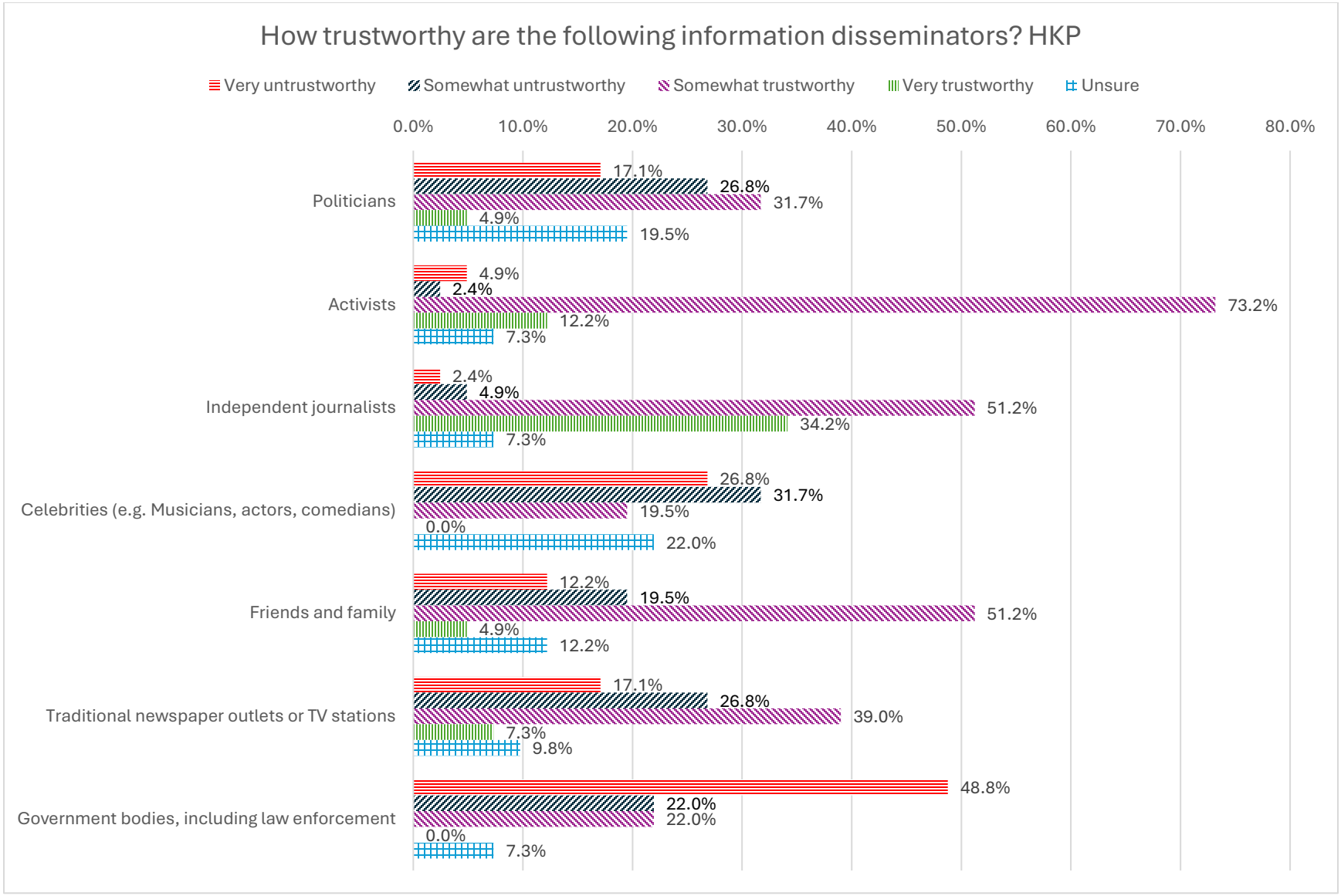

How trustworthy are the following information disseminators? HKP
Very untrustworthy
Somewhat untrustworthy
Somewhat trustworthy
Very trustworthy
Unsure
0.0%
10.0%
20.0%
30.0%
40.0%
50.0%
60.0%
70.0%
80.0%
Politicians
17.1%
26.8%
31.7%
4.9%
19.5%
Activists
4.9%
2.4%
73.2%
12.2%
7.3%
Independent journalists
2.4%
4.9%
51.2%
34.2%
7.3%
Celebrities (e.g. Musicians, actors, comedians)
26.8%
31.7%
19.5%
0.0%
22.0%
Friends and family
12.2%
19.5%
51.2%
4.9%
12.2%
Traditional newspaper outlets or TV stations
17.1%
26.8%
39.0%
7.3%
9.8%
Government bodies, including law enforcement
48.8%
22.0%
22.0%
0.0%
7.3%

Figure 23 'How trustworthy do you find the following categories of information disseminators?' HKP Responses

Eight common categories of information disseminators – active sources of information – were identified as relevant to social movement participants. “Information dissemination” falls under one of the main tasks of information brokers. These were politicians (including all political inclinations and parties), activists, independent journalists (journalists who are not regularly employed by established news media), celebrities, friends and family, traditional newspaper outlets or TV stations, and finally government bodies. An “other” option was also given, and received responses included social media pages and groups, non-government organisations, and academics. There were also responses that were “online friends” and “online news media” specifically on top of the existing categories.

Respondents were asked to identify which ones were influential information brokers, and then independently asked whether they would consider these categories as trustworthy.

Of BLM, friends and family was the most popular information disseminator at 90%. This is followed by independent journalists (70%) and traditional news media (70%). The least used information disseminator were government bodies (10%) and politicians (20%).

For HKP, the popularity of information disseminators is ranked differently. Also at 90%, the information disseminator most used by HKP participants were independent journalists, followed by activists (85%) and politicians (75%). Meanwhile, celebrities were the least popular option of 37.5%.

Despite using the same platforms, it can be concluded that the sources of information being sought could be quite different. For instance, friends and family, which was the most chosen category of BLM, was only ranked 4th for HKP. Meanwhile, 75% of HKP respondents received or shared information from politicians, but only 20% of BLM respondents did so. HKP respondents exhibited a higher tendency to receive information from government organisations and politicians when compared to BLM as well.

Thus, it can be concluded even when employing the same tools, the information network or ecosystem cannot be summarised or generalised by broad strokes. Who they engage with, who they learn from, who they trust – it cannot be assumed that all social movements present the same picture. Different groups naturally gravitate towards different information sources.

However, there are some general trends – more traditional protest-related groups like activists, independent journalists, and traditional news media outlets are more popular sources of information, while unconventional sources like celebrities are generally not perceived as a reliable source of information.

This chapter has now established who my case contexts engage with and learn from. The next question is then *who* do they trust? Respondents were asked to what extent they considered these eight categories to be trustworthy. The degree of trust can be then quantified through weighting out of 5, with categories with trust scores closest to 1 as most untrustworthy, and

categories with trust scores closest to 5 being most trustworthy. The scoring is presented in Figures 23 and 24.

For BLM, the categories considered most trustworthy to least trustworthy are: friends and family; independent journalists; activists; traditional news media; celebrities; politicians; and finally government bodies. Overall, the average trust mean is at 2.31 out of 5. Most categories fall under untrustworthy, with only the categories of friends and family, and independent journalists, with a mean above 3, thus considered as trustworthy by respondents.

For HKP, the categories considered most trustworthy to least trustworthy are: independent journalists; activists; friends and family; politicians; traditional news media; celebrities; and finally government bodies. The average mean trust is 2.77, which is only a little more than the score of BLM.

When focusing on the less trustworthy end of the results, it is apparent that both movements consider government bodies as least trustworthy. The overwhelming sense of distrust towards the government can be easily explained through the prosecution, oppression, and police brutality against protestors throughout both movements. In many cases, the government institutions and machines themselves are the opposing forces for social movements to achieve their goal, clear examples being BLM and HKP, my chosen case contexts. Overall, respondents expressed a stronger sense of doubt, but only slightly. Perhaps it could be inferred that while it is easier to know what *not* to trust, it is much harder to trust something with certainty.

Comparing Tables 12, 13, and 14, we can see a correlation between how people trust and where they get their information. The higher their trust in a particular category of information disseminator, the more they receive and share information from the same category. A side by side comparison of both social movements' most popular and most trusted disseminators is presented in the table below for ease of discussion. In Table 2, the information categories are ranked in descending order, based on the percentage of respondents who would receive information from them (popularity) as well as how the mean score of how trustworthy respondents found them (trust).

BLM		**HKP**	
Most popular disseminator	**Most trusted disseminator**	**Most popular disseminator**	**Most trusted disseminator**
Friends & family	Friends & family	Independent journalists	Independent journalists
Independent journalists	Independent journalists	Activists	Activists
Traditional news outlets	Activists	Politicians	Friends & family

Activists	Traditional news outlets	Friends & family	Politicians
Celebrities	Celebrities	Traditional news outlets	Traditional news outlets
Politicians	Politicians	Government bodies	Celebrities
Government bodies	Government bodies	Celebrities	Government bodies
Least popular disseminator	**Least trusted disseminator**	**Most popular disseminator**	**Least trusted disseminator**

Table 2 Comparison of disseminator popularity and trust

Although not completely identical, it is clear that there is a positive correlation between the degree of trust individuals put in information sources, and how often they rely on these sources for information. However, this correlation only exists in relativity – individuals are more inclined to receive information from sources they consider more trustworthy, *over* information from sources they consider less trustworthy. When looking at the exact scores, some contradictions occur. For instance, BLM receives information from activists and traditional news outlets to a large extent, yet the majority of respondents also described as "somewhat untrustworthy". Similarly, 75% of HKP respondents receive information from politicians, yet only 36.6% consider them as either "somewhat trustworthy" or "very trustworthy"

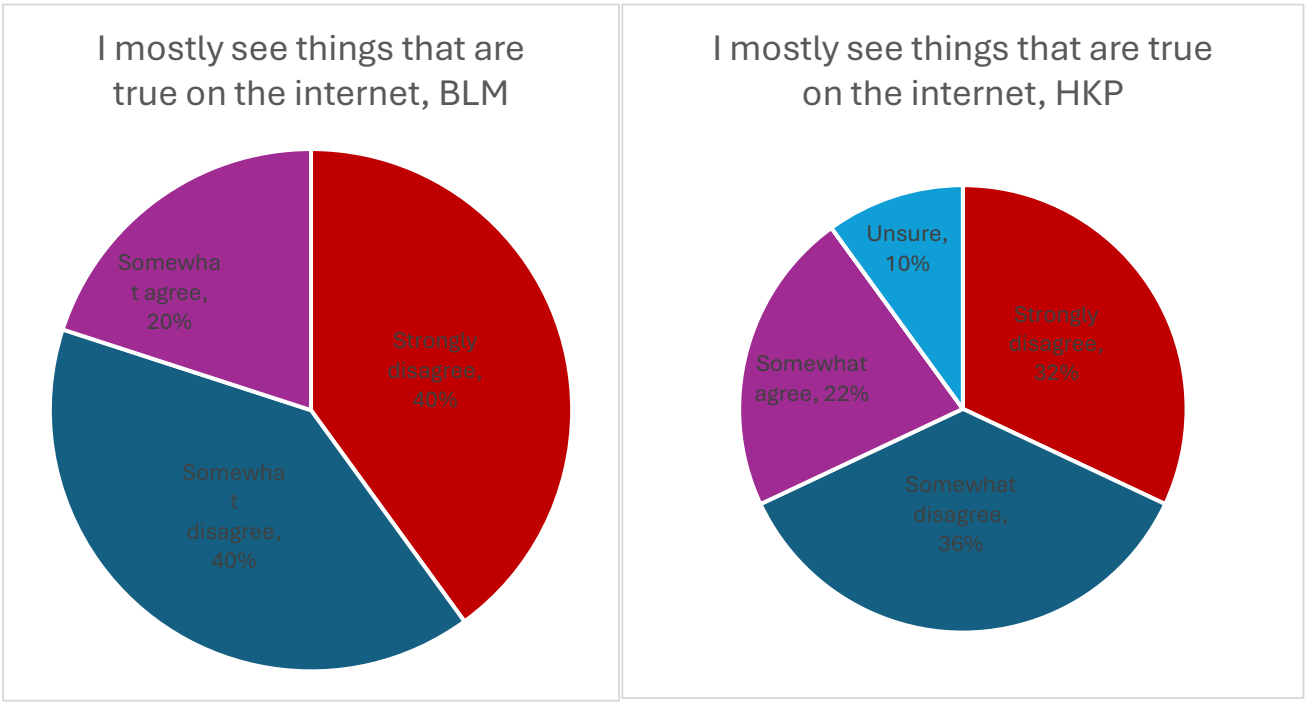


Figure 24 Responses to statement 'I mostly see things that are true on the internet'. BLM (left) and HKP (right).

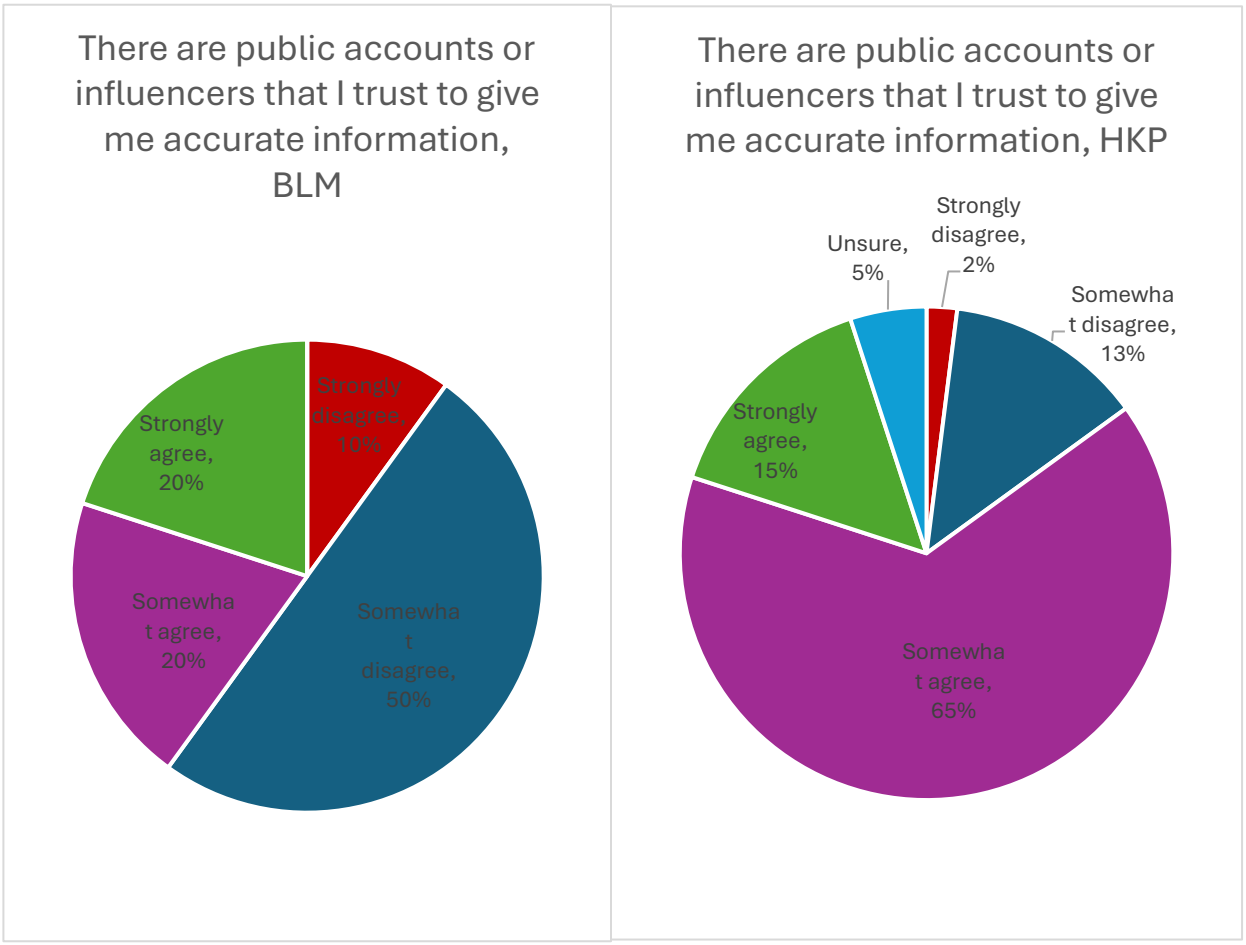


Figure 25 Responses to statement 'There are public accounts or influencers that I trust to give me accurate information'. BLM (left) and HKP (right).

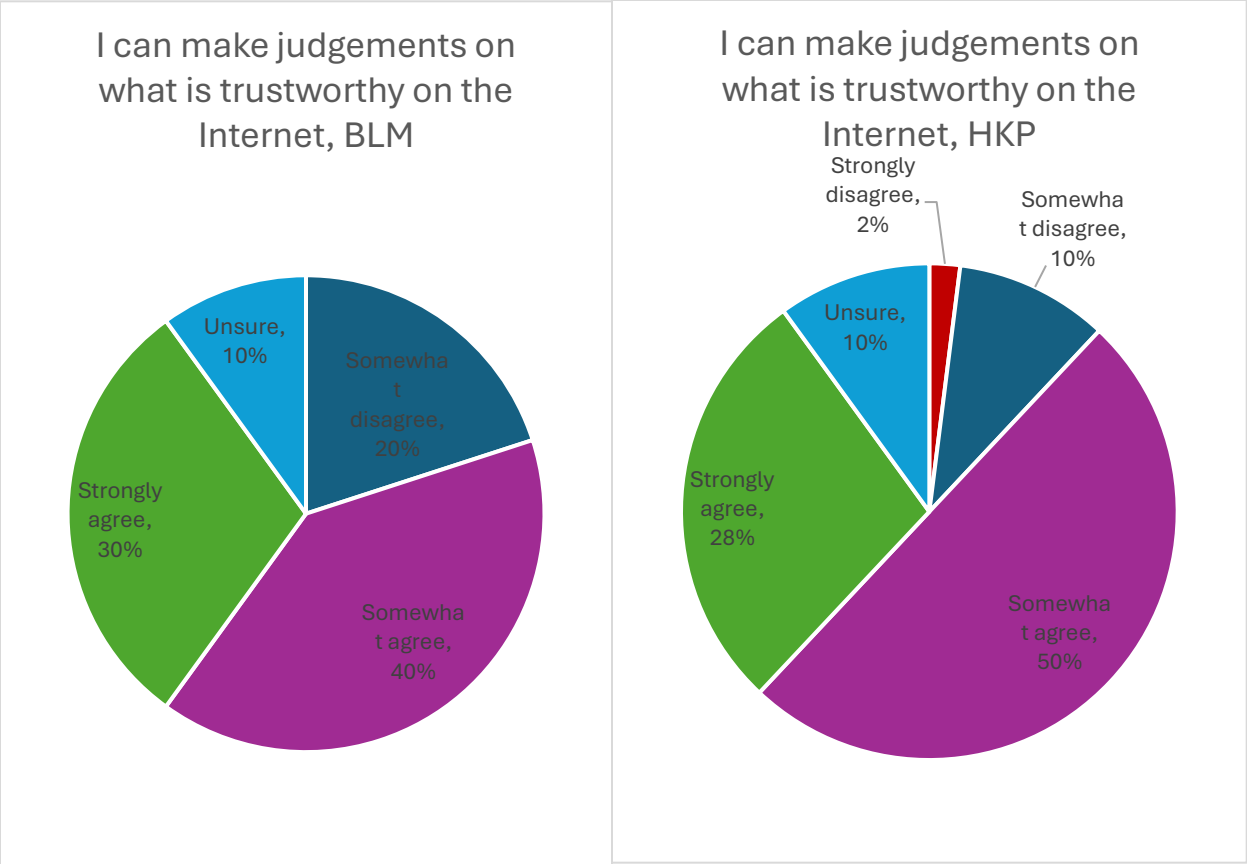


Figure 26 Responses to statement 'I can make judgements on what is trustworthy on the Internet'. BLM (left) and HKP (right).

As validation, indirect questions were used to continue probing source-based trust. Respondents were instead given statements to read and were asked whether they agreed or disagreed. The options given to them were “strongly agree”, “somewhat agree”, “somewhat disagree”, “strongly disagree”, and “unsure”. These statements were also mixed in with other topics.

Q27 “I mostly see things that are true on the Internet.”

In Figure 24, both groups of respondents expressed an overwhelming distrust in internet information, with BLM having 40% strongly disagreeing and 40% somewhat disagreeing that they mostly see things that are true on the internet. HKP also had 32% and 36% picking those options respectively. There were no respondents who picked the option of “strongly agree”.

Q27 “There are public accounts or influencers that I trust to give me accurate information.”

When asked specifically about whether there are public accounts or influencers that were trustworthy, there are still more than half of respondents that were inclined to disagree from BLM, with 10% strongly disagreeing and 50% somewhat disagreeing, as seen in Figure 25. However, HKP exhibited the opposite response, with only a collective 15% disagreeing. Majority of respondents at 65% somewhat agreed that there are public accounts or influencers that they consider as trustworthy.

Q27 "I can make judgements on what is trustworthy on the Internet."

Both groups also claim to have high confidence in their ability to ascertain information trustworthiness on the internet according to Figure 26. BLM had 30% strongly agree and 40% that chose somewhat agree that they could make judgements on what was true on the internet. Only 10% disagreed and 10% were unsure. HKP also had a somewhat similar distribution, with 28% strongly agreeing, 50% somewhat agreeing. There was also 10% of uncertainty.

Having understood **who** is considered as trustworthy, I then question why respondents found these particular sources as trustworthy.

5.3.4.1.1 Rationales for trust

As a tool for data collection, the use of Likert scales in the survey naturally lend itself to easily measuring rational bases or trust. Most of such reasonings fall under the general behaviour of evaluating the outcome or value of trusting against a certain measurement.

Non-rational bases of trust can be heavily inferred from the responses in the open-ended questions. First, it must be established that for the purposes of discussion, the use of the description "non-rational" only denotes that these reasons for trust are instinctive, where trust is given without an active process of reasoning as in the aforementioned rational explanations of trust.

Respondents were asked to recall a specific source they trusted, and then a specific source they distrusted. With these sources in mind, they were given a list of options that each described a possible reason that would lead to their trust or distrust in these sources. The options are then compiled below under larger categories, and are mapped to one another to show how the same trait or reason impacts trust and distrust either similarly or differently. The responses are shown in Table 3.

Q17. With the source you trust the most in mind, for example a certain Twitter account, or a particular politician, why do you consider them more trustworthy than others?

Q18. With the source you trust the least in mind, for example a certain Twitter account, or a particular politician, why do you consider them less trustworthy than others?

5.3.4.1.1.1 Rational bases

Rational Bases for Trusting			Rational Bases for Not Trusting		
Option Text	BLM	HKP	Option Text	BLM	HKP
Past Experience					
They have usually delivered accurate information in the past.	30%	80%	They have usually delivered inaccurate information in the past	80%	74.36%
They deliver accurate information that is unrelated to the protests	30%	32.50%			
Credibility					
They are able to provide proof for their information	40%	82.50%	They have been proven to lie by myself or others	50%	66.67%
They have been fact checked by myself or others	40%	65%			
Frequency					
They frequently deliver information	20%	20%	They don't normally share a lot of information on the social movement	20%	12.82%
Reputation					
They have organised a lot of protest events	20%	5%			

They are highly respected within the protest community	20%	50%	They have a bad reputation within the protest community	30%	53.85%

Table 3 Table of breakdown of bases of trust

There are roughly four concepts that act as rational bases of trust in this survey. **Past experience, Credibility, Frequency, and Reputation.** These concepts are also often seen across trust literature and serve as a broad categorisation of the rational bases of trust probed here.

Although there are some comparable similarities between the two respondent groups, I would hesitate to say that there are generalisable traits. In fact, a conclusion can be drawn that the same framework for trust *cannot* be blindly applied across the board. For instance, HKP found past experience of trustfulness as a reason for trusting a source, with 80% of respondents selecting it. Yet only 30% of BLM respondents did the same. Conversely, 20% of BLM respondents valued practical experience of organising protests, while only 5% of HKP agreed.

Overall, the category of **Past experience** was much more important as a reason for trusting for HKP (80%) than in BLM (30%). However, a bad past experience was a significant motivator for distrust for both respondent groups, with 80% of BLM respondents and nearly the same percentage of HKP choosing it as a reason as to why they would not trust.

Credibility achieved less polarising results. HKP respondents valued direct proof with 82.5% picking this option, whereas the process of fact checking was only at 65%. Functionally speaking, both achieve the same end result, but fact-checking implies one extra step, a supplementary action or resource. In terms of distrust, however, not having a credible past did not automatically exclude one from ever being trustworthy. Only 50% of BLM and 66.67% of HKP chose this option as a reason why they would not trust a source.

Frequency of information had little bearing on either trust or distrust for both groups. It could be thus inferred that dedicated information accounts are not necessarily more trusted by virtue of sharing copious information. Instead, the other factors listed here such as reputation, credibility and past behaviour are stronger determinants.

Reputation was also not that significant to BLM, with only 20% choosing either option that corresponded to this category. HKP, however, placed a bit more emphasis on direct reputation within the protest community, with 50% choosing this option. Though, overall reputation was not as popular a reasoning as past experience and credibility.

Past experience with the source, and **credibility** of the source emerged as the most influential bases of trustworthiness. Interestingly, the statements under **credibility** have more to do with

the content of the information as well as past experience with the source, rather than innate characteristics of the source itself. **Credibility** here is associated with being able to provide proof for what they say, or having had had proof to say that they are a trustworthy source.

5.3.4.1.1.2 Non-rational bases

Non-Rational Bases for Trusting			**Non-Rational Bases for Not Trusting**		
Option Text	BLM	HKP	Option Text	BLM	HKP
Trust by Proxy					
They are recommended by friends or family	0%	7.5%	Friends or family say that they are untrustworthy	10%	12.82%
They are recommended by popular activists or influencers	10%	17.50%	Other popular activists or influencers say that they are untrustworthy	20%	17.95%
Receive Affirmation					
They share the same opinions as me	10%	32.50%	They don't share the same opinions as me	20%	23.08%
Trust in Own Beliefs					
I enjoy reading/watching their content	20%	22.50%	I don't enjoy reading/watching their content	20%	20.58%
I know them personally	20%	30%	I know them personally	10%	2.56%
Attractiveness of Content					
They are entertaining or creative in delivering information	20%	1.08%	Their content is boring and unentertaining	10%	2.56%

Table 4 Table of responses of bases for non-rational bases of trusting

Respondents were asked to do the same thing for a set of non-rational bases of trust, as shown in Table 4 above. Overall, these were less popular options compared to rational bases. The loose categories chosen here are: **Trust by proxy, Receive affirmation, Trust in own beliefs, and Attractiveness of content.**

Trust by proxy was much lower than expected. Overall, respondents did not seem to put much trust into sources recommended by friends and family, activists, or influencers. However, when compared to the results of Table 4, these categories of disseminators were considered as more trustworthy than others.

Surprisingly or unsurprisingly, in terms of rational bases the reasons that are most related to self-agency and self-validation had higher scores. These were **Receive affirmation** (20%) and **Trust in own beliefs** (20%). The former meant that respondents were more likely to trust someone who shared the same opinions that they had, which parallels the theory of motivated reasoning (Kunda, 1995). The latter, meanwhile, meant that instead of having trust in sources based on certain qualities of the source itself, respondents trusted in themselves and their ability to discern whether someone is trustworthy, which parallels the findings earlier as demonstrated in Figure 26. Both options that fall under the category of **Trust in own beliefs** reveals their trust in themselves – that what they like, or what they trust, would naturally be more trustworthy.

However, when compared to rational bases, the percentages are low. The most influential category for BLM was **Trust in own beliefs** and **Attractiveness of content.** For HKP, this was **Receive affirmation** (32.5%). That being said, the percentages are quite equal across all categories with negligible difference.

The trustworthiness perceptions of individuals largely rely on rational bases of trust to establish criteria. Non-rational bases of trust may help them make on the spot judgements, but is not usually considered when being asked in hindsight or retrospect just as in this survey. However, that may also play into respondent biases – they may desire to portray themselves as more rational, and downplay the importance of affective factors.

5.3.4.1.2 Communal trust

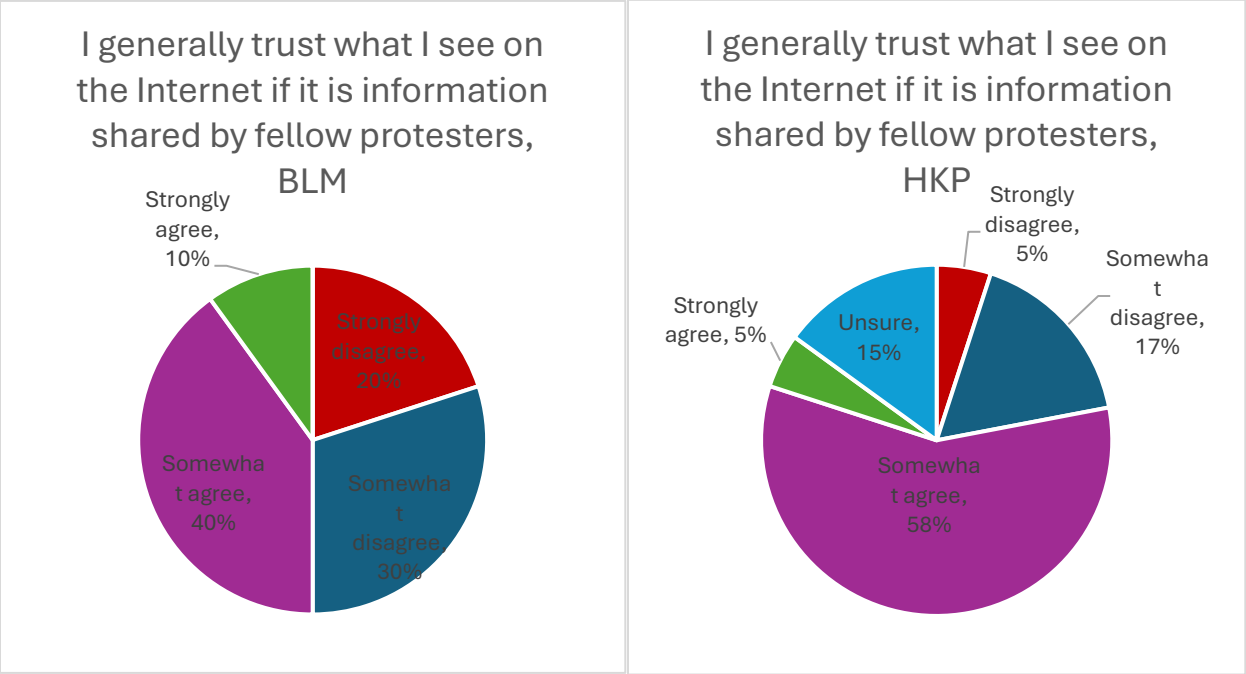


Figure 27 Responses to statement 'I generally trust what I see on the Internet if it is information shared by fellow protesters'. BLM (left) and HKP (right).

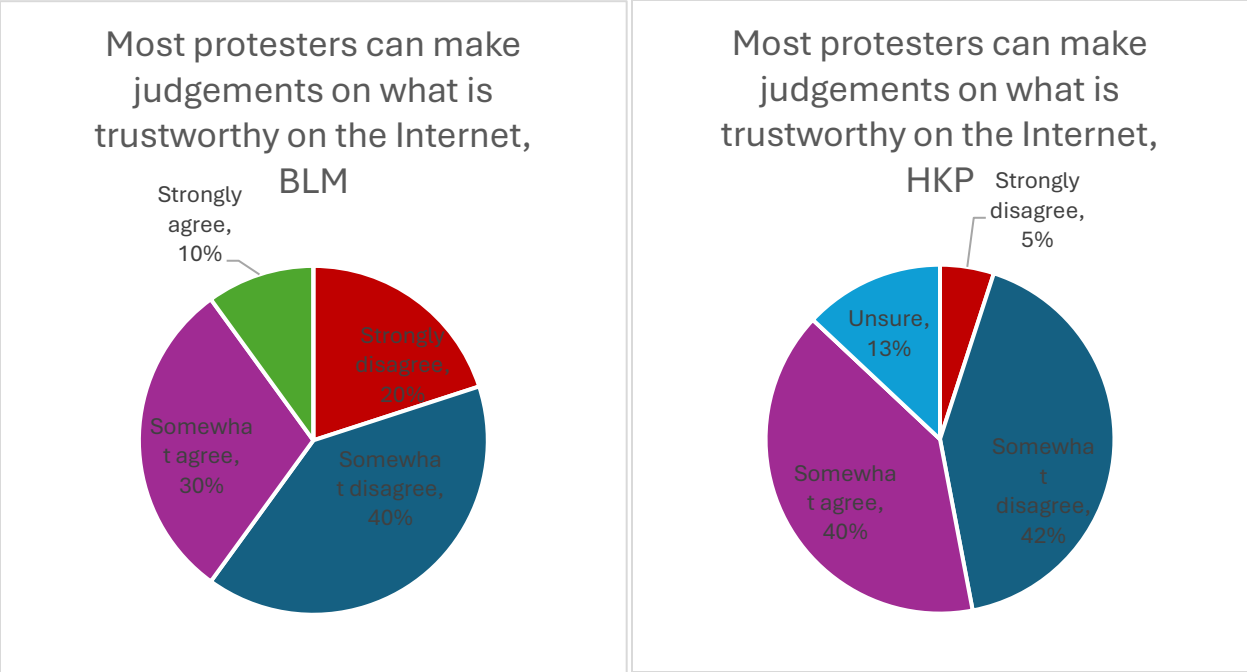


Figure 28 Responses to statement 'Most protesters can make judgements on what is trustworthy on the Internet'. BLM (left) and HKP (right).

Why do you consider a particular source not trustworthy?		
Option Text	BLM	HKP
I believe they are paid by someone else to spread false information about the social movement, either to discredit it or paint it in a better light	40%	51.28%

Table 5 Table of responses on one of the options for untrustworthy sources

Another dimension captured in this chapter is the overall trust in the protest community. The definition of community is not within the scope of this research – the use of the word "community" in the survey refers to fellow protesters. Much like the perceptions of trust, I hold that the question of "what makes up the protest community" is contextual and is approached differently by different individuals, and thus merits its own study independently. Thus, respondents are free to interpret what "protest community" means to them.

The first question clumps the protest community together as a homogeneity, as shown in Figure 27. Fundamentally, the question asks respondents whether they trust the protest community

they sit in. Or, in other words, whether or not the people *like* them are trustworthy. For BLM, it was an even split, with 40% somewhat agreeing, 10% strongly agreeing, versus the 20% strongly disagree and 30% somewhat disagree.

Interestingly, as an interviewee reminded me during the writing of this chapter, BLM suffered a major trust crisis in 2022 when the co-founders of prominent BLM networks were accused and/or found guilty of using donations meant for the movement to buy their own personal property (NBC News, 2022). This undoubtedly had an impact on people's perceptions of how trustworthy the movement as a whole could be.

Comparatively, HKP respondents expressed far more generalised trust. Only 17% somewhat disagreed and 5% strongly disagreed with the idea that they generally trusted information that fellow protesters shared. 58% somewhat agreed, and 5% strongly agreed. Interestingly, 15% expressed that they were unsure. In hindsight, it could have provided valuable insights if the 15% who were unsure had been able to explain their reasons. Contextually, HKP did not have a major crisis of trust incident like BLM, possibly there is also the idea of a common shared identity that is felt by participants.

The second question, as shown in Figure 28, then delves into whether they believe the general protest community possess the ability to discern what is trustworthy and what is not. BLM once again exhibited more skepticism, with over half disagreeing. 20% chose strongly disagreeing, and 40% somewhat disagreeing. However, there were still 30% somewhat agreeing and 10% strongly agreeing. For HKP, respondents also exhibited more skepticism compared to the first question, with 5% strongly disagreeing and 42% somewhat disagreeing. Only 40% chose somewhat agree, with 13% being unsure.

However, recall figure 26 that asks respondents to describe their own ability to discern what is trustworthy or not, most respondents thought they were confident in such ability and that they would be able to judge true information from disinformation and misinformation. It can be seen that while individuals have a higher confidence in themselves, many do not carry the assumption that others would do the same. This may also explain why trust by proxy as seen in Table 4 received a lower score than anticipated.

The third question, presented in Table 5, concerns who is *not* part of the respondents' perceived community. When asked why they would consider a particular source untrustworthy, 40% of BLM and 51.25% of HKP chose the option of "I believe they are paid by someone else…". This option was taken out of Tables 3 and 4 for in-depth analysis, however when taking into account the entire question, we can see that this option was among the most popular options for distrust in a particular source.

This question essentially asks respondents whether they believe that there is the existence of counter-agents: specific individuals who spread disinformation with intent. Throughout both

social movements, the existence of such individuals have persisted. Such disinformation could take the form of propaganda or more subtle forms of manipulation of information. There are prominent influencers who build their following based on disinformation, as they are welcomed by those who agree with their stance in the first place.

5.3.4.2 Content-based trust

This second dimension of trust explored in this subsection is that of content-based trust. Rather than focusing on who the information came from, I hoped to have respondents think about information independently. What made a piece of information trustworthy to their eyes?

Not only do questions in this section ask about a different dimension of information, I also approached it from another angle. Rather than looking for criteria that would make information be considered as trustworthy, I asked the opposite – what would make you fact-check a piece of information? The act of fact-checking implies the existence of doubt – after all, if one trusted in something wholly, there would not be a need to eliminate doubt through employing additional actions. It is through the elimination of doubt that one thing becomes trustworthy.

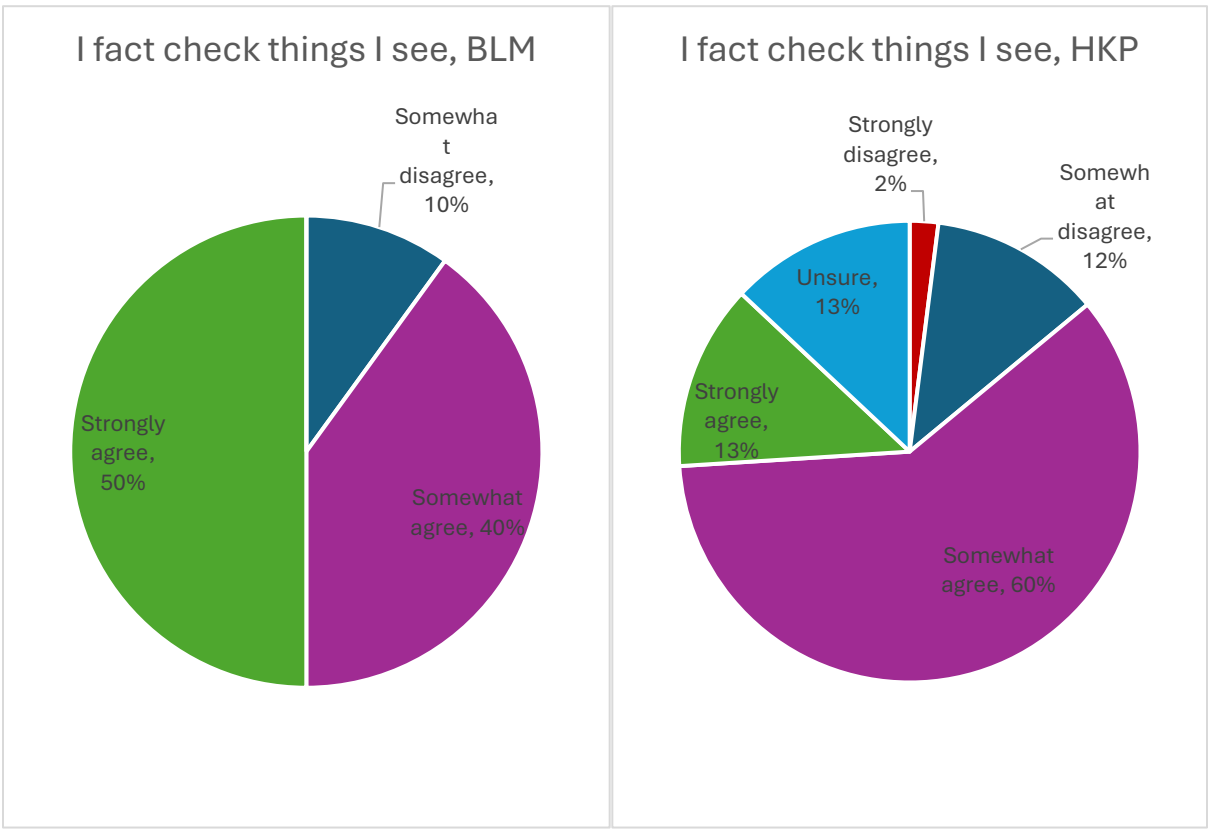


Figure 29 Responses to statement 'I fact check things I see'. BLM (left) and HKP (right).

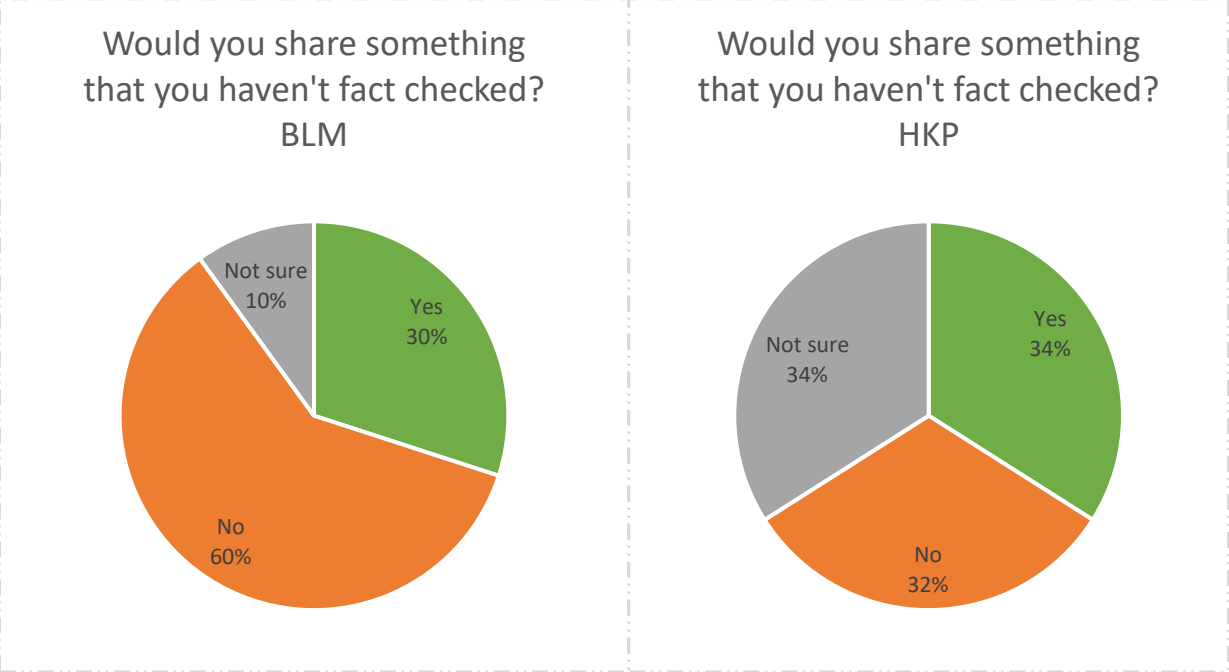


Figure 30 Responses to statement 'Would you share something that you haven't fact-checked?' BLM (left) and HKP (right).

Q27. "I fact-check things I see".

Overall, there was an overwhelming belief from respondents in their activeness in fact-checking, as shown in Figure 29. BLM respondents showed a higher initiative, with 50% choosing strongly agree, and 40% choosing somewhat agree. HKP only had 13% strongly agree, but there were 60% that chose somewhat agree. Surprisingly, 13% chose unsure.

Respondents were then asked as to whether their skepticism would encourage or discourage them from sharing information – do they share information that they have not fact-checked? The results are shown in Figure 30.

Q25. "Would you share something that you haven't fact checked?"

BLM exhibited a higher awareness or understanding of information literacy, with 60% indicating that they would not share something they hadn't fact-checked. 30% indicated that they would, while 10% were unsure. Respondents from HKP showed a much more diversified response. There is an even split between yes, no, and unsure. Given that the majority of respondents indicated that they *would* generally fact-check, the same trend does not wholly translate to their information sharing behaviour.

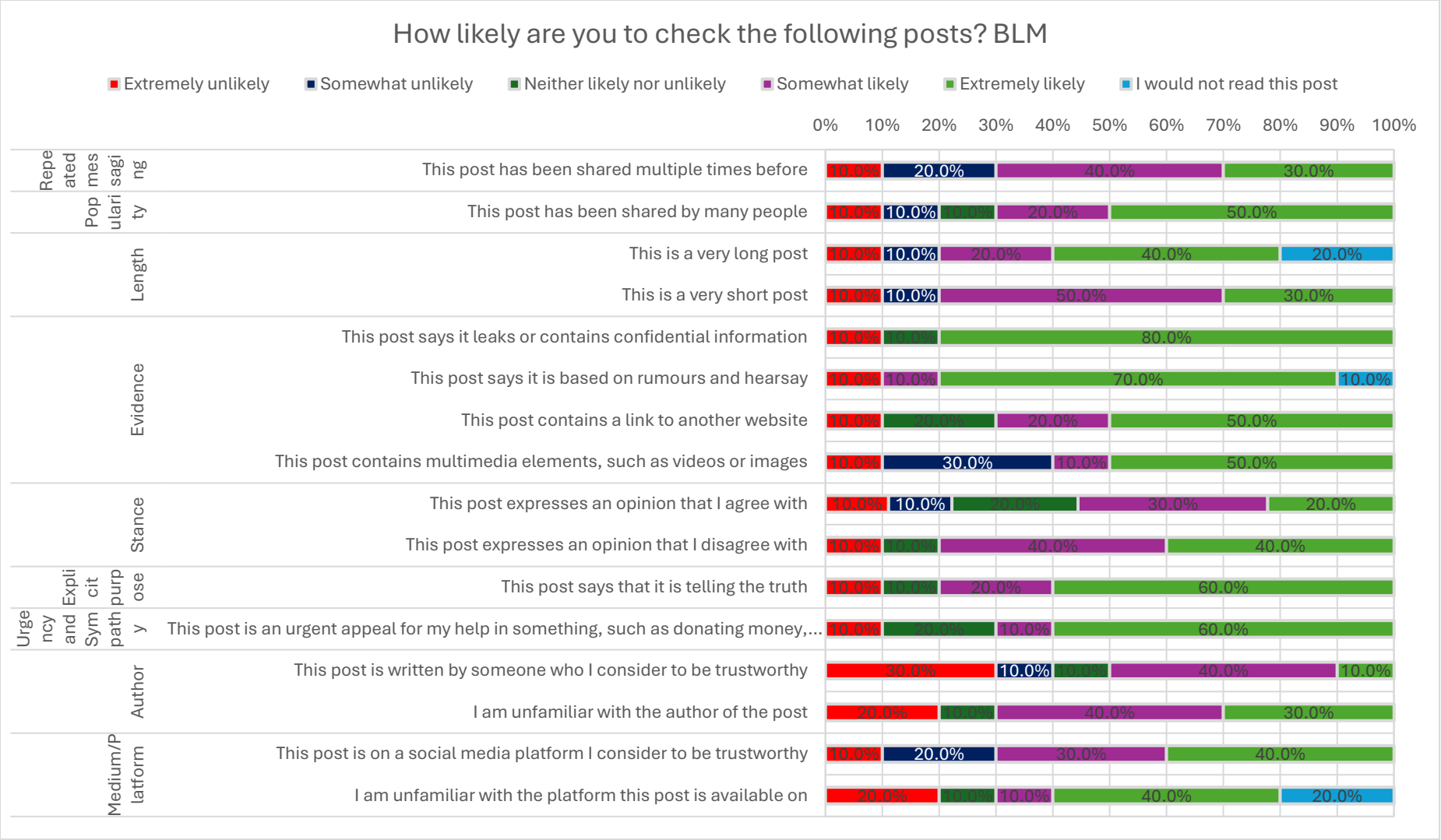


Figure 31 'How likely are you to fact-check the following posts?' BLM Responses.

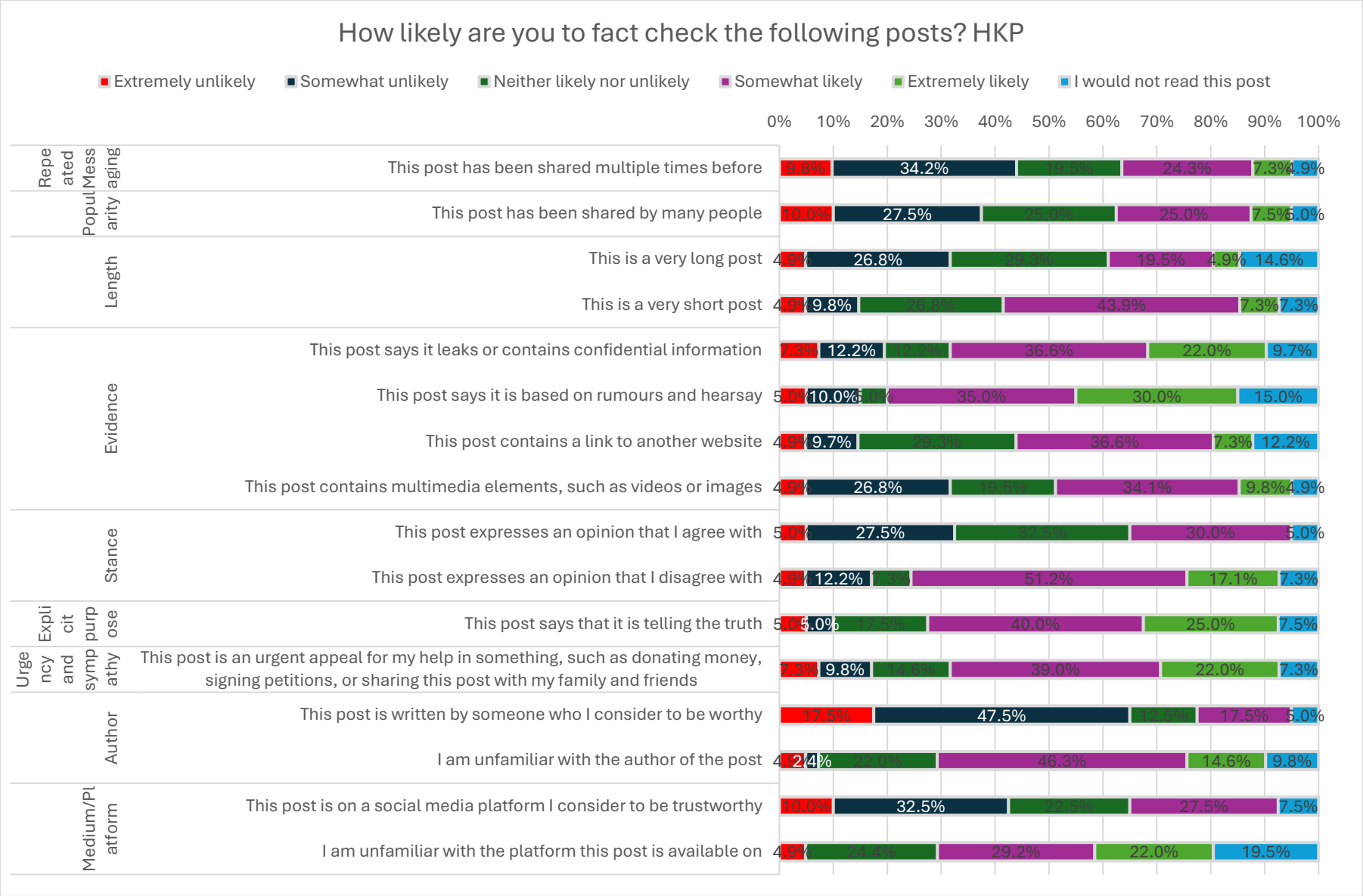

How likely are you to fact check the following posts? HKP
Extremely unlikely
Somewhat unlikely
Neither likely nor unlikely
Somewhat likely
Extremely likely
I would not read this post
0%
10%
20%
30%
40%
50%
60%
70%
80%
90%
100%
Repeated Messaging
This post has been shared multiple times before
9.8%
34.2%
19.5%
24.3%
7.3%
4.9%
Popularity
This post has been shared by many people
10.0%
27.5%
25.0%
7.5%
5.0%
Length
This is a very long post
4.9%
26.8%
19.5%
4.9%
14.6%
This is a very short post
4.9%
9.8%
43.9%
7.3%
7.3%
Evidence
This post says it leaks or contains confidential information
7.3%
12.2%
36.6%
22.0%
9.7%
This post says it is based on rumours and hearsay
10.0%
35.0%
30.0%
15.0%
This post contains a link to another website
4.9%
9.7%
36.6%
7.3%
12.2%
This post contains multimedia elements, such as videos or images
4.9%
26.8%
34.1%
9.8%
4.9%
Stance
This post expresses an opinion that I agree with
27.5%
30.0%
5.0%
This post expresses an opinion that I disagree with
4.9%
12.2%
51.2%
17.1%
7.3%
Explicit purpose
This post says that it is telling the truth
5.0%
40.0%
25.0%
7.5%
Urgency and sympathy
This post is an urgent appeal for my help in something, such as donating money, signing petitions, or sharing this post with my family and friends
7.3%
9.8%
39.0%
22.0%
7.3%
Author
This post is written by someone who I consider to be worthy
17.5%
47.5%
17.5%
5.0%
I am unfamiliar with the author of the post
46.3%
14.6%
9.8%
Medium/Platform
This post is on a social media platform I consider to be trustworthy
10.0%
32.5%
27.5%
7.5%
I am unfamiliar with the platform this post is available on
4.9%
29.2%
22.0%
19.5%

Figure 32 'How likely are you to fact-check the following posts?' HKP Responses.

To explore the qualities of trustworthy content, respondents were given hypothetical posts with only one variable and had to then indicate how likely they were to fact-check these posts.

Respondents were shown 16 descriptions of hypothetical posts that corresponded to 9 larger categories of factors that may influence one's impression or opinions on an information post. These categories are **Repeated Messaging, Popularity, Length, Evidence, Stance, Explicit Purpose, Urgency and Sympathy, Author,** and **Medium/Platform.** Respondents were asked to indicate to what extent they would fact-check each of these posts. Instead of the "unsure" option given for other similar questions, I gave the options of "neither likely nor unlikely" and "I would not read this post" instead. This is to accommodate common social media behaviours, where readers of information posts may read through a post and instantly scroll past without further thought. "I would not read this post" would also potentially denote a complete rejection of the information presented – a refusal to accept or take in the information entirely.

Overall, the responses are largely similar or mappable to their responses in Figure 29. Much like their fact-checking habits, BLM respondents exhibited a general trend or larger tendency of skepticism and fact-checking. For all the options given, at least 50% of respondents indicated that they would be inclined to fact-check the hypothetical post to some degree.

For HKP, a large majority of the hypothetical posts also had more than 50% of individuals indicating that they were likely to fact-check it. Due to the higher number of responses, there was also a higher proportion of respondents choosing "neither likely nor unlikely" and "I would not read this post".

The first category is **Repeated Messaging**, where information is shared multiple times and thus exposed to readers repeatedly. **Popularity** is very much a similar category, but rather than simply being shared multiple times, it is also shared by many people instead by a few individuals. For repeated information, BLM were more likely to fact-check (70%) than to not (30%). However, HKP respondents were in fact less likely to fact check (31.6%) than to not (43%). The responses for **Popularity** is extremely similar for both response groups. Except, there is a higher percentage of BLM respondents that indicated they were extremely likely to fact-check it as 50%, compared to the 30% for the **Repeated Messaging** scenario.

Length presents two extremes – a very long post versus a very short post. For short posts, both response groups indicated they were likely to fact-check it, with "somewhat likely" being the most popular option. For long posts, more BLM respondents chose the option of "extremely likely" to fact check (40%). However, for HKP the most popular option chosen is "neither likely nor unlikely" (29.3%) followed by "somewhat unlikely" (26.8%). While BLM respondents held more doubt for this scenario, HKP respondents had a more neutral attitude and were less inclined to fact-check.

The third category of **Evidence** is used to evaluate four common forms of evidence that could be used by the creator of the information to evidence or substantiate the information that they present at the time. Confidentiality, rumours, directing to another URL, and visual proof.

The first two statements deal with claims. The first, confidentiality, claims that it is revealing exclusive information, or in other words, information that should not be accessible by the reader of the post. It is also likely that information is claimed to be authoritative. An overwhelming 80% of BLM respondents indicated that they were "extremely likely" to fact-check it. For HKP, 56.6% of respondents also indicated they were likely to fact-check, compared to 19.5% that would not.

For rumours and hearsay BLM also had 80% who were likely to fact-check the post. For HKP, this form of evidence received the most doubt out of the four hypotheticals provided, with 65% of respondents indicating they would fact-check it. This form of evidence also received the most neutral "I would not read this post" for both BLM (10%) and HKP (15%) out of the four forms. As discussed earlier, by selecting this option respondents are also indicating a complete rejection of the information, that they do not even think this piece of information is worth their time or effort.

The third form of evidence makes use of external links, which requires readers to click on and trust that the link itself is legitimate, and then make judgement on the original information. Both HKP and BLM again indicate that they are more likely to fact-check than to not. Only 10% of BLM and 14.6% of HKP indicated that they were unlikely to fact-check this hypothetical post. Out of all four, this post received the most "neither likely nor unlikely" responses from both BLM (20%) and HKP (29.3%) for this category.

The last hypothetical included is visual proof. This information makes use of videos or images, often of real life events. However, this could also include drawings and animations. This form of evidence is less likely to be fact-checked by both BLM (40%) and HKP (31.7%), thus most likely to be considered trustworthy by respondents out of all four hypothetical posts. In fact, this post is one of the last doubted overall across all the categories for BLM.

Stance presents one scenario where the information aligns with one's opinion – thus, affirming it and generally providing favourable and appeasing information, and another scenario where the information presented challenges one's opinion, thus challenging their beliefs or viewpoints. There is an observable preference for fact-checking information that respondents disagree with, than that of what they agree with.

For BLM, 50% of respondents indicated they would fact-check it, but only 20% chose the option of "extremely likely", compared to the 30% who chose "somewhat likely". 20% of respondents chose not to fact-check it, and the remaining 20% chose the neutral option of "neither likely nor unlikely".

Responses from the HKP dataset received much more divided distribution. When encountering information that agrees with their opinion, only 30% of HKP respondents indicated that they would likely fact-check it. Instead, most HKP respondents chose “neither likely nor unlikely” at 32.5%. Those who were likely not to fact-check it was also proportionately higher, also at 32.5% combined.

However, when it came to opinions they disagreed with, both populations expressed a higher degree of doubt. Innately, information that challenges or goes against one’s own beliefs is more difficult to consider as trustworthy, and this is observable in this dataset. For BLM, only 10% of respondents indicated they would not fact-check it. 40% of respondents chose “extremely likely”, another 50% chose “somewhat likely”, and 10% chose the neutral option. Similarly, HKP respondents also overwhelmingly chose to fact-check it, with 51.2% choosing “somewhat likely” and 17.1% choosing “extremely likely” (collectively 68.3%, the highest proportion of respondents choosing to fact-check out of all available hypothetical posts).

Comparatively, the category of **Explicit Purpose** expresses an unsubstantiated information post – one that merely claims to be truthful, without providing evidence. For both movements, respondents indicated they were more likely to fact-check it, both going over 50%. However, there were still some respondents who would not fact-check it at all, with 10% for BLM and 5% for HKP.

The category of **Urgency and Sympathy** describes posts creating a sense of urgency or immediate action, such as explicitly asking readers to “share and RT” the information, donate to particular organisations, or sign petitions. In hindsight, it would generate more nuanced insights to have split this category into more detail. For BLM, “extremely likely” is again the most popular option chosen at 60%. HKP respondents were not as certain, with only 22% choosing “extremely likely”, but a collective 61% also indicated some inclination to fact-check.

Author and **Medium/Platform** concern the original source of information – the who and the where. For instance, if the information is shared on a news media website, it may be viewed as more likely to be authoritative and trustworthy when compared to something shared on an unfamiliar forum.

The trustworthiness of the **Author**, as perceived by the respondent, was the least doubted, or perhaps the most influential category affecting the trustworthiness of the information that is put out by this author. Only 10% of BLM indicated they were “extremely likely” to fact-check, the lowest number choosing this option among all hypothetical posts. In turn, 30% of respondents indicated the opposite – that they were “extremely unlikely” to fact-check, the highest proportion of this action chosen among all categories. A very similar response is observed from the HKP dataset. No respondents chose “extremely likely”, and only 17.5% answered “somewhat likely”. Meanwhile, a collective 65% indicated that they were unlikely to fact-check. For HKP, this is the only category with more than 50% respondents inclined not to

fact-check. Meanwhile, general trends for both movements as very similar – what they would fact check and what they wouldn't.

Divorcing Content from the Creator		
Option text	BLM	HKP
I don't consider them trustworthy, but they deliver information that I trust	10%	7.50%

Table 6 Table of responses on divorcing content from the creator.

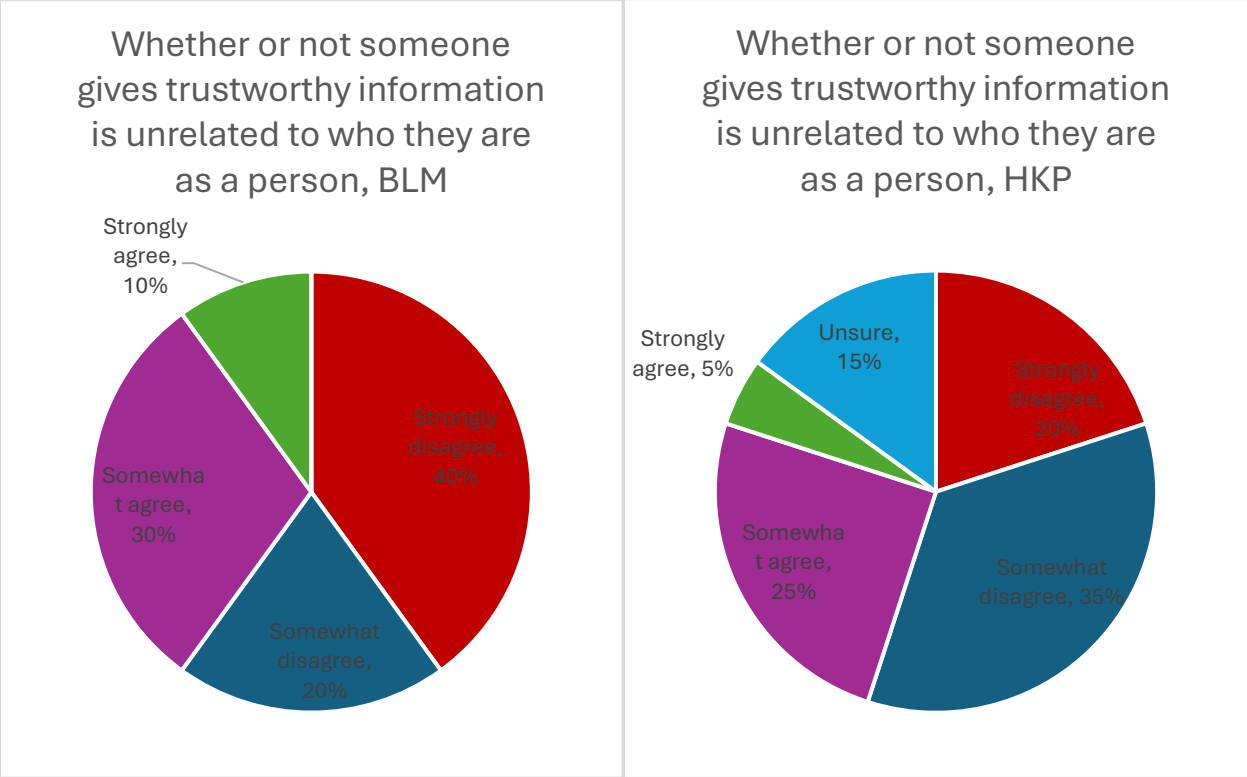


Figure 33 Responses to statement 'Whether or not someone gives trustworthy information is unrelated to who they are as a person' Responses. BLM (left) and HKP (right).

This chapter has established how individuals perceive trustworthiness of information sources, and how they perceive trustworthiness of information content. The section asks a poignant question: Is the person *behind* the information a significant impact shaping perceptions of

information trustworthiness? Are the two definitively related? Or, in other words, is content-based trust linked to source-based trust?

When respondents were asked to think of a trustworthy source and consider why they were trustworthy, the following option was given: “I don’t consider them trustworthy, but they deliver information that I trust” (shown in Table 6). Of which, 10% of BLM respondents chose this option, and 7.5% of HKP chose it as well. This is not a significant proportion of respondents, but nonetheless it is still noteworthy that there is a small capability of divorcing the content from the creator.

As a confirmation, a later question asked respondents to indicate to what extent they agreed with the statement “whether or not someone gives trustworthy information is unrelated to who they are as a person”, as seen in Figure 33. Of BLM, 40% strongly disagreed, and 20% somewhat disagreed. Conversely, 10% strongly agreed and 30% somewhat agreed. It was rather balanced between agree and disagree, with an inclination towards disagreeing.

Meanwhile, HKP also had a similar distribution of responses, with 20% strongly disagreeing, 35% somewhat disagreeing, as compared to 5% strongly agreeing and 25% somewhat agreeing.

Yet, when recalling earlier data as presented in Table 4, knowing the sources personally, i.e. who they are, was one of the stronger non-rational motivations behind whether an information source was perceived as trustworthy, with 20% of BLM and 30% of HKP choosing that option.

The perception of trustworthiness of a source impacts the trustworthiness of the information. This is established throughout multiple sections of this chapter. However, the trustworthiness of the information only constitutes part of what determines the trustworthiness of a source. In simpler terms, a trustworthy source is likely to give trustworthy information, but giving trustworthy information does not mean the source is also trustworthy.

5.3.4.3 Disinformation and misinformation

Did people further disseminate information they were not certain was 100% trustworthy?

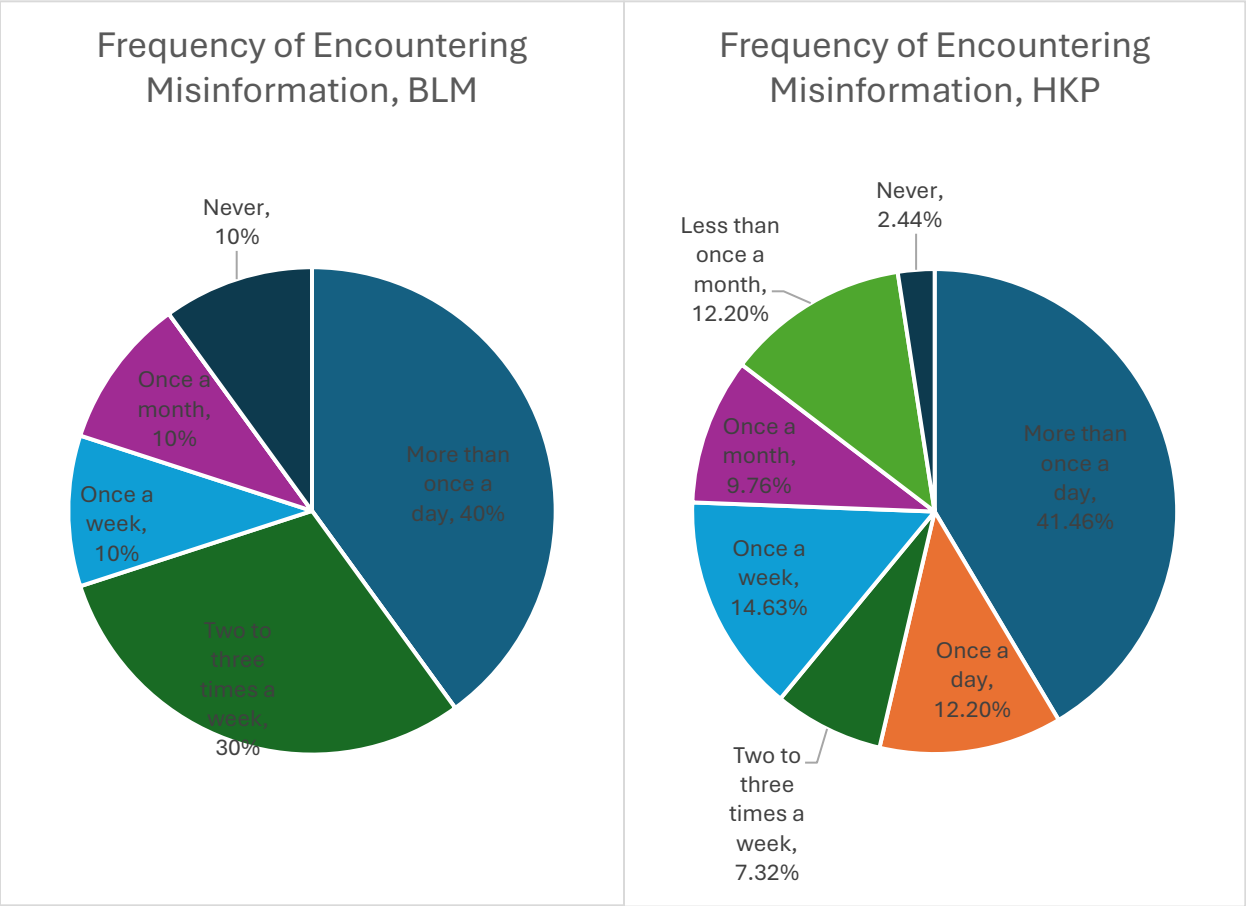


Figure 34 'How often have you encountered misinformation?' Responses. BLM (left) and HKP (right).

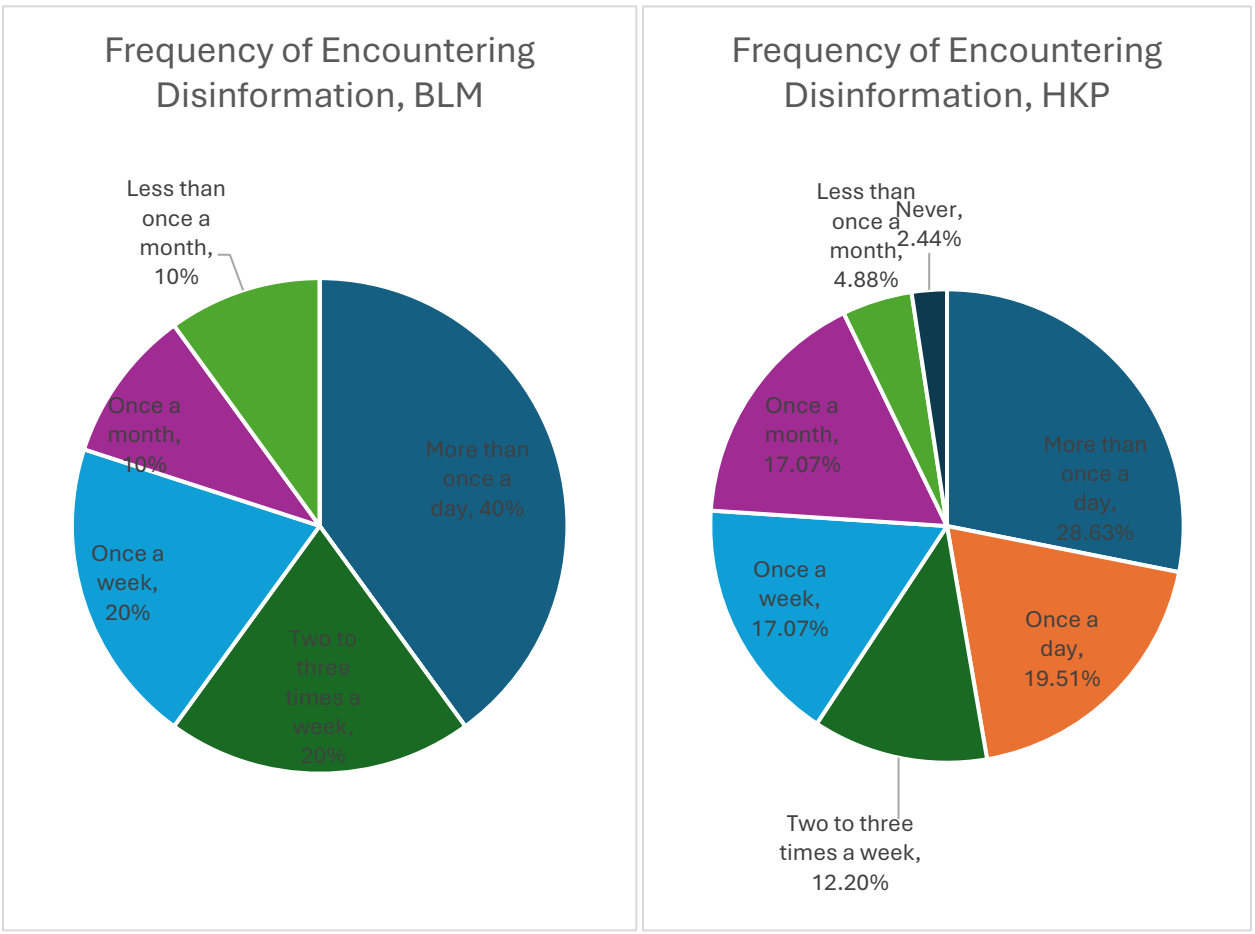


Figure 35 'How often do you encounter disinformation?' Responses. BLM (left) and HKP (right).

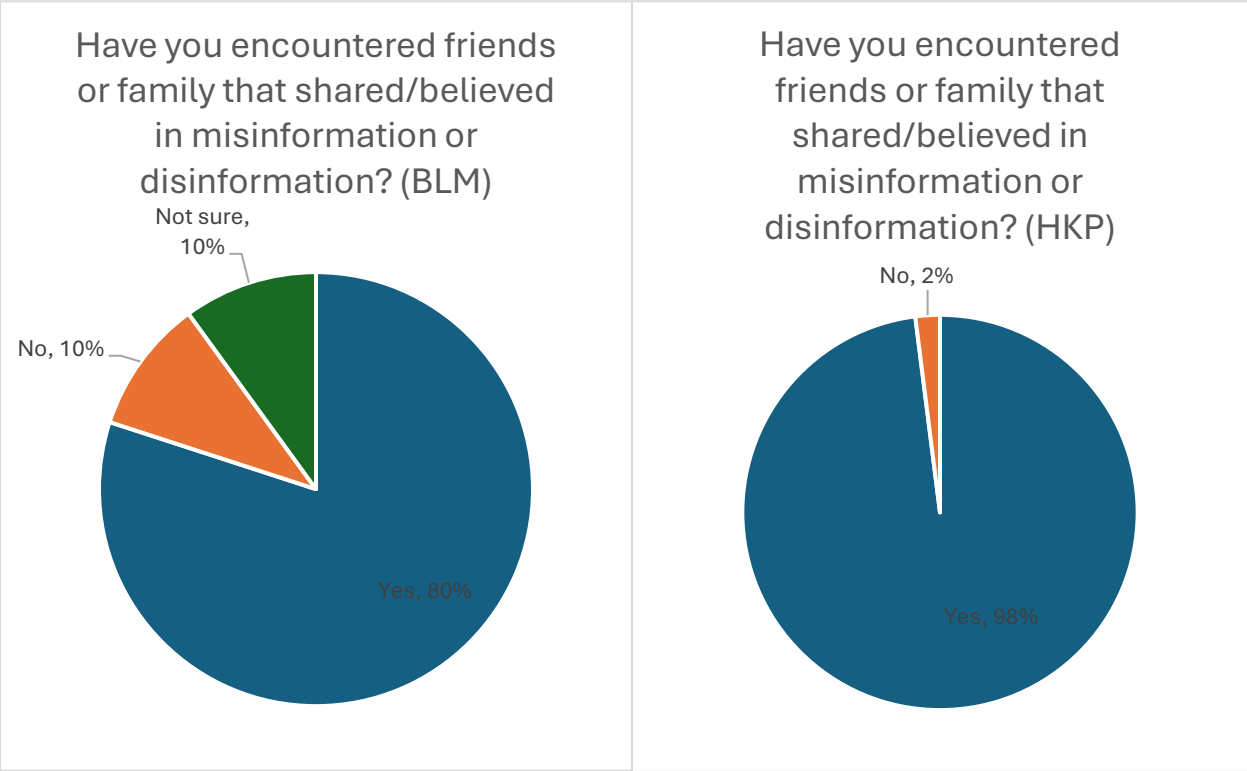


Figure 36 'Have you encountered friends or family that believed in, or shared, misinformation or disinformation?' Responses. BLM (left) and HKP (right).

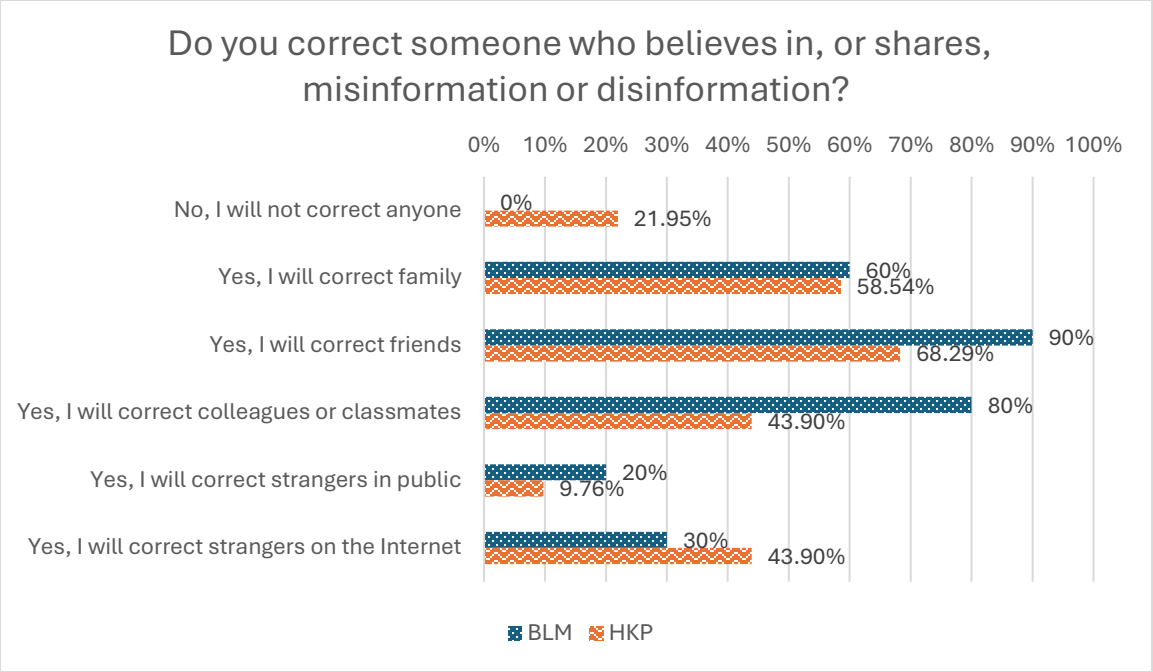


Figure 37 'Do you correct someone who believes in, or shares, misinformation or disinformation?' BLM and HKP responses.

Respondents were asked to describe how frequently they would encounter misinformation and disinformation. They were given the following guidance text on the definition of "misinformation" and "disinformation".

"'Misinformation' refers to information that is either unintentionally OR intentionally incorrect or misleading.

'Disinformation' also refers to information that is incorrect or misleading, but disinformation is always intentionally deceptive."

Figures 34 to 37 show the responses of those questions.

For BLM, they indicated that they would encounter misinformation more than once a day to once a week. The frequency of disinformation was slightly less. Most (80%) indicated that friends and family had accidentally shared misinformation or disinformation, yet earlier in this chapter it has been reflected that friends and family are considered as relatively trustworthy information disseminators. Most BLM respondents indicated a willingness to take the initiative to correct false information, although only a small percentage felt comfortable correcting outside their social circle.

HKP respondents indicated a similar frequency of encountering misinformation. They also encounter disinformation more than once a day, but the distribution of responses are not as

skewed and is generally spread across all options of frequencies, indicating a more diverse online experience. Similarly, friends and family were identified as sources of misinformation or disinformation. Most respondents were not sure as to whether or not they had shared false information, contradicting their professed diligence as proven in section 5.3.4.2, Figures 29 and 30.

5.3.5 Limitations/Anomalies

5.3.5.1 Respondent Group Bias

Respondent group bias is to be kept in mind while considering the results of this chapter. Survey biases are unavoidable, as respondents are self-selecting rather than targeted. In general, respondents who have answered my surveys can be assumed to be proficient in English and technologically literate. This may also imply a certain degree of educational attainment. Westland's 2022 paper details the difficulty of achieving fairness in using Likert scales, especially in polarising survey responses. Thus, when examining this chapter these biases must be kept in mind, as there are those who are not represented through the findings of this survey.

5.3.5.2 Demographic Connections

As discussed earlier in this chapter, I did not collect personal demographics from respondents beyond geographical location. Demographic information can reveal details about individuals and help draw inferences. Demographic surveys have long generated insightful research that help bring attention to particular communities and how they interact with wider society and the phenomenon under study (Brear et al, 2021). However, I decided not to collect any demographic data to minimise the collection of sensitive data, and reassure social movement participants of their safety in taking part in my survey.

5.3.5.3 Concerns about Methodology

There is also a reminder about the power held by a researcher over the population they are investigating. Especially in social movements with individuals being actively persecuted by governments and law enforcement, the image of the neutral researcher cannot be guaranteed. Instead, the researcher should be one that is actively safeguarding the privacy and data of the respondent. When disseminating the surveys, there were potential respondents that vocalised concerns over where the data was going, and what kind of project was being undertaken. In fact, a few days after the survey opened I received an email from MTA_Pirates, an anonymous activist group which claimed to "get asked from time to time to check out the research/privacy & security protocols of academics before our friends & allies participate in them." I was informed by them that they had been asked to check over my surveys by several individuals.

This demonstrates the general wariness of protestors – as a researcher, we should not be put off by the safeguards put in place by the communities we are hoping to learn from.

5.4 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have presented and discussed the findings from the survey, and drawn out several meaningful insights from the dataset.

Overall trusted disseminators are independent journalists, activists – people whose occupation is traditionally involved with social movements. Despite the idea that the Internet serves as an equal platform for everyone's voices (Gleason, 2013), the general consensus from respondents still favours these traditional roles as being more relied on sources of information. I am also able to summarise that sources that are perceived as more trustworthy are relied on – however, this does not necessarily mean they are considered trustworthy overall, they are simply most trustworthy out of the options available.

When asked to explain their trust decision-making processes, social movement participants are more inclined to explain through rational, cognitive bases. Trustworthiness perceptions are built up based on their own observations and experience with the source of the information, the frequency of which the source provides information, whether the information agrees with their own beliefs, and finally whether the information has evidence, most preferably visual evidence. It is easier for them to think about the measurement of trustworthiness through the lens of doubt, rather than the lens of trust. Or, in other words, it is easier to justify the decision to not trust something, rather than to explain fully what it means to trust a piece of information.

Knowing the source of the information helps eliminate doubt and strengthens the trustworthiness of the information. Similarly, a history of trustworthy information serves as evidence of the source's trustworthiness. Frequency and agreement affirm that more involved sources of information – activists and independent journalists – are assumed as more trustworthy. At the same time, politicians and traditional news media outlets are not considered as trustworthy, or are used as much as sources of information.

There is also an overall awareness of the need to practice information literacy and due diligence. Respondents are more critical about mere claims of trust, and both groups express a wariness as to the validity of the information that is available on the Internet. Yet, in practice, respondents also seem to indicate that the implementation of these fact-checking processes were not as rigid or methodical as described in their previous answers.

This chapter thus reveals the keywords or anchors through which trustworthiness can be discussed moving forward in this research. I have identified the key characteristics or key

indicators that social movement participants look for when making judgements on information trustworthiness. This section has also proven the importance of the trustworthiness of the source in forming the perception of trust for information. Thus, I prepared for the next phase of my study – the interview phase – based on the insights generated through this chapter and pose the following questions:

- In the own words of participants, what is information trustworthiness? What would be useful and meaningful to them?
- What are factors influencing the results observed here?
- Do the bases of trust identified here align with their own understanding of how they measure information trustworthiness?
- What are the dimensions of trust not captured in this survey?

It is no longer enough for those who seek to influence public opinion, whether for activism or other purposes, to assume that they would be automatically trusted. Instead, trustworthiness must be demonstrated – through prolonged experience and substantiated evidence.

6. Phase 3 - Interviews

6.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I describe the final phase of my data collection, the interviews, and discuss the qualitative output of both this phase and of the previous survey phase. I first describe the methodological process along with ethical considerations and other methodological observations. I then present the findings gathered from the interview data, supplemented with qualitative results from the survey phase, as described in the previous chapter.

The research question that runs through this thesis concerns how information trustworthiness is constructed. Building upon findings from the SNA and survey phases, the interview guide was crafted to confirm key insights and expand upon what has been uncovered about information behaviour and perceptions towards information behaviour. The interview guide, included in Appendix 5, was created with the previous phases in mind.

I present my codes through mind-maps, with a main theme branching off into smaller related sub-themes. Each theme highlights a particular aspect or finding that has significant influence on how my research question is answered, and serve as the basis for the next chapter, where I present my framework of information trustworthiness.

6.2 Data Collection

Eight interviews were conducted over Microsoft Teams, four for each case context. Although falling short from the intended target, after four successive interviews from both movements it was decided that there were sufficient data drawn for the scope of this research. Furthermore, true data saturation would have been impossible to achieve across two such large social movements, as explained in my methodology chapter. There is also something to be reflected upon in the difficulties encountered in finding interview candidates, which will be addressed in the end of this chapter.

Four individuals were interviewed for each movement respectively. To facilitate discussion, the interviewees for BLM are given the identifiers B1, B2, B3, and B4. Meanwhile, the interviewees for the Hong Kong protests are given the identifiers H1, H2, H3, and H4.

Interviewees were recruited through public advertisement as well as private recommendations through personal networks. The aim was to gather perspectives across various points within the information network. As such, each interviewee was also mapped to the following two positions: information broker, or common node, as laid out to the definitions established in Phase 1 of this study in Chapter 4. Depending on their position, the interview guide used was slightly altered. As the interviews were semi-structured, the interview guide was used to ensure that crucial information was captured, while still allowing space for ad-hoc questions.

Further, interviewees were asked to provide some basic information on an optional basis to facilitate analysis. This information included their pronouns, their age, their occupation, as well as their involvement with the social movement, as listed in Table 1 in the exact wording that they provided. This was also to ensure that a wide variety of perspectives were interviewed across gender, class, ethnicity, and position within the social movement and its information network. In line with anonymity, any information that could identify these individuals was removed from the dataset. In this case, H2 also declined to provide any additional information, which is noted below. Interestingly, interviewees that I presumed to occupy more important positions within information networks seem to understate their involvement within social movements.

Identifier	Pronouns	Age range	Ethnicity	Nationality	Occupation	Involvement with social movement	Assumed position within information network
B1	He/him		Black	USA			Common node
B2	She/her	20-29	Black	British	Information Governance Research Coordinator	I engaged in the movement by educating myself on current issues and shared resources via social media in order to raise awareness.	Common node
B3	She/her	30-39	Black	Canadian	Research Coordinator	Researcher-activist	Information broker
B4	She/her	20-29	White British	British	Archivist	No answer	Common node
H1	He/him	20-29	Asian	Hong Konger	Office worker	Supporter / Active participant	Common node
H2	No answer	No answer	No answer	No answer	No answer	No answer	Common node

H3	He/him	No answer	No answer	No answer	No answer	No answer	Information broker
H4	She/her	20-29	Chinese	Hong Kong	Student	Participant, advocate, organizer	Information broker

Table 7 Demographics of Interviewees

The transcripts of the interviews were then analysed using thematic analysis according to Braun and Clarke (2006), and the codebook was finally combined with the codebook generated from the open-ended answers of the survey. Thus, this section also contains findings based on data from the survey. The collection process of the survey is detailed in the previous chapter. The open-ended questions were taken separately and coded with NVivo, alongside the interviews, to identify any overlapping themes and uncover a more cohesive narrative about the detailed thoughts of respondents.

6.2.1 Further Ethical Considerations

The interviewees were reached out to privately. Each were given a participant information sheet (Appendix 3) to read, and a consent form to sign (Appendix 4). These documents were developed in line with UCL regulations. Informed consent was sought to record these interviews for transcription purposes, but the transcripts are not included publicly in this thesis for privacy and safety concerns.

Data was stored securely on UCL servers, and I as the researcher was the only one with access to the recordings, transcriptions, and any personal identifiers of the interviewees. All interviews were conducted in English. There were some uses of Cantonese phrases by the interviewees who are participants of the Hong Kong protests, and where relevant I have provided a translation in this thesis.

6.3 Findings

There are two main concepts drawn out from the interviews, which the discovered themes revolve around. The first of such is **use of information**, or in other words the information behaviour of social movement participants. The second concept is **information trustworthiness**, the subject of study of this thesis. Under these two concepts, there are various sub-themes, each of which is represented with a coding mind-map. The central sub-theme spiders out into the codes that fall under this sub-theme. The individual codes are loosely placed in groups that denote a relevancy to one another to enable discussion.

6.3.1 Use of information

6.3.1.1 Overview of information behaviour

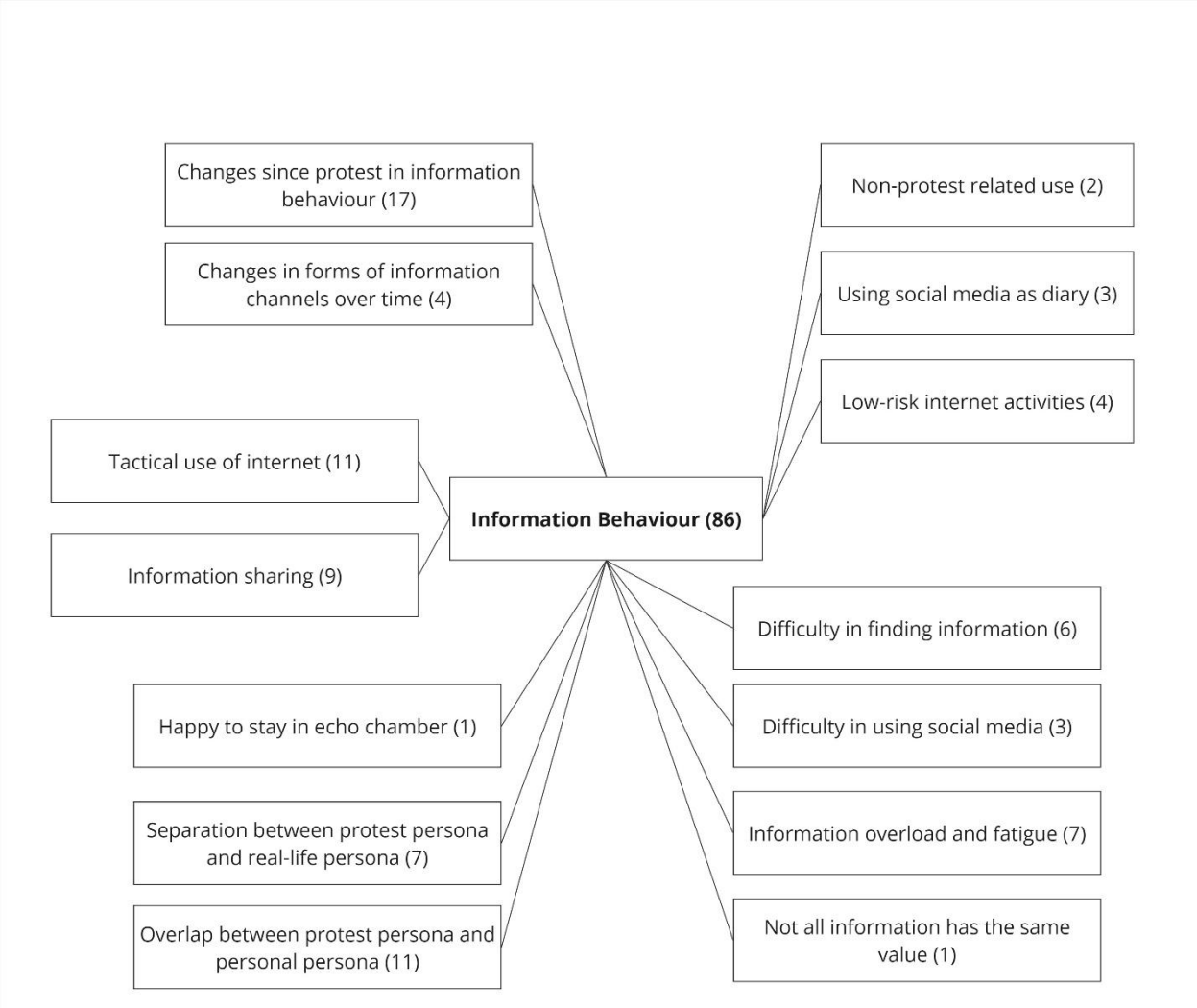


Figure 38 Coding Mind-Map on 'Information Behaviour'

Respondents' description of their information behaviour was coded and presented in Figure 38 above. The sub-themes are loosely clustered in the figure based on relevancy. Note that most of the data pertaining to information behaviour were collected using quantitative measures, as presented in the previous chapter, and in this chapter I supplement the findings from the previous chapter with further elaboration.

Protest-related information behaviour was captured from responses. The code of **"tactical use of the internet" (11)** captures the deliberate use of the Internet to further the cause of their social movement. This was especially relevant from interviewees who were in the capacity of

information brokers. This points to the important position social media and mass communication tools occupy in democratising activism. The use of such tools is deliberate, harnessing their powers and reach for their cause. For the Hong Kong protests in particular, the power of social media was a lesson learnt in the Occupy Central movement in 2014 (Lee and Ting, 2015).

HS5 detailed their use of YouTube: “Constantly listened to those YouTubers to support the protesters to help their YouTube algorithm and helped to boost their views/exposure.” They also explained their management of their YouTube channels to build up a following and thus achieve better results in spreading information. H2 made reference to the “Twitter battleline” (translation by myself), a protest activity where protestors would use Twitter to advocate and connect with international audiences. He “had no idea how Twitter works, so [he] was just RTing stuff”. Although he himself did not have a proficient use of social media at that point, it nonetheless points to participation in a deliberate protest campaign to use social media tactically. HS8 also brought up “engagement” as a factor when deciding whether or not to reveal personal information online: “it provide authenticity thus better engagement”.

More broadly, **“information sharing” (9)** was also one of the protest-related information activities that respondents described themselves as engaging in. Using social media and mass communication tools to share information deliberately was seen as part of the protest climate. H3, as a public figure and thus categorised as information broker, used social media as a general platform to provide updates to his following.H3 stated that: “But sometimes I would use social media or through Internet that I[…] film myself and try to do a brief speech in some festivals or very important moments[…] through this try always through different timing to keep the momentum of those people to keep their hope for pro-democracy movement.” This was also observed in BLM. B3 shared that “I also create a zine[…] that has works of some Black people[…] so just as a way to amplify voices that don’t often get that platform.”

Interestingly, some interviewees only brought up information sharing when further probed by myself, instead of including it in their description of their use of the Internet and social media. Perhaps pointing to that information sharing being so ingrained into regular habit that it is not a conscious action to respondents, or perhaps they use different vocabulary or descriptions to describe their information sharing behaviour. When asked about their specific behaviour, B1 shared: “Sharing different posts, different stories related to different topics, related to kind of like inequities that exist and whatnot, but yeah, that’s more or less it.” Meanwhile, H1 described it as such: “I think some that I think people need to know, I will share them.”

Respondents also reflected changes to their information behaviour over time. As the two case contexts took place in 2019 and 2020, with the dying down of interest and chatter in society, parallel changes are observed through the data in the creation and dissemination of information

on the Internet, as described by respondents. There were **"changes since protest in information behaviour" (17).**

HS12 stated that: "I used to [share personal anecdotes] in the past, when we were all more naïve about social media. Nowadays I don't share that type of information anymore because I became more aware of the risks of posting personal data online." HS23 also had a similar take, describing that their "friends list and posted/shared content [on a Facebook account has been] pruned since 2020."

Meanwhile, there were some who became more open with their information behaviour. HS30 said: "After moving [overseas], there are people I know that use Twitter so adding personal information made sense." While B4 described: "[BLM] got me into following the news more outside of Twitter. So it was really just things I saw on Twitter and then kind of followed up."

However, not all changes were positive. HS36 "moved on with daily life" and reduced information behaviour related to the protests. H1 also observed that: "Unlike previously we have an immediate update on Telegram or immediate update by Stand News. [Now] I usually get the news pretty late like 30 or 40 minutes later after I'm done with my stuff."

For BLM, B2 shared: "So I think there are probably more information resources, but I don't think they will be given the same amount of attention when it's like when they were during the protest and everything." B3 also echoed this sentiment: "As the months went by, there's just less people showing up. There's less people sharing information on social media who aren't kind of… I guess the people most directly affected and then even so I think I would say in the Black community too, there's also probably been a little less interest behind it."

B1 described acutely where they perceived the movement had gone to: "…I would say two years ago all conversations about race started and ended with BLM… [Now] they're not doing it through the lens of BLM specifically at that tagline. They're more doing it through a different language. And so it's not to say that I don't think it's important but I think you know our vernacular as a society kind of is always changing, always growing, always moving in different directions, and so what we use to describe kind of popular topics are always growing and changing because of that."

There were also **"changes in forms of information channels over time" (4)**. For BLM protestors, it was also noted that societal conversation around their movement had changed, forcing a shift in their information behaviours too.

These changes in information behaviour due to both internal interest and external factors are to be noted when trying to tactically reach such audiences. As trends change, it is necessary to adapt and shift in order to stay within the information network.

There were multiple respondents that indicated that some social media platforms' reputations changed over time. HS12 shared the rationale behind switching social media platforms from Telegram to Signal: "[Changed to] Signal for the encryption when Telegram was supposedly unsafe". HS13 also noted their departure from Telegram: "Though I've also heard Telegram isn't as secure as we've thought it to be."

While both social movement contexts reported a decline in interest and time spent dedicated to protest-related information behaviour, for the Hong Kong protests the change in forms of information channels was more prominent. However, interviewees also identified new information sources that they received information from in place of the ones that had disappeared. Instead of receiving protest information, the focus of information sources instead shifted towards pro-protest information, namely that of the court sentences of arrested activists and accounts of the Hong Kong diaspora overseas (H1).

H1 described this as: "Instead we have many fragmented media channels that we can find on the Internet… I think if you still want to stay updated about the impact or the consequence of the movement, there are still channels for you… People are now less caring about the news, but I think there are definitely people or reporters or journalists still doing their work. It's just up to you to see whether you want to know. If you want to know, there are definitely channels for you to know."

B3 also held that information sources and channels had not declined despite the time that had passed since the height of BLM. B3 stated that: "I actually think there's more types of information out there, but whether or not people actually accessing it to the same degree and no, but I think that here is actually more resources now."

There were also respondents struggling with the digital age and contemporary mass communication. **"Difficulty in using social media" (3)** specifically emerged as a code to point to respondents facing challenges in using particular social media platforms that are used by other protestors for information seeking or sharing purposes. H3 described that: "I'm not really good at those social media than the younger generation." While, H4 also commented on Telegram: "Telegram was not that easy for me because I'm still… not that familiar with that piece of technology."

Alongside respondents also reported **"difficulty in finding information" (6)**, so even if they did understand how to navigate specific social media platforms and use their functions, they still faced the obstacles in satisfying their information needs. HS14 shared that: "But there is not much info already since the crackdown began in 2020." This was echoed by H3: "…Lots of other pro-democracy or liberal media have been shut down… and you would [have] more reservation to those reports of [existing] media." Similarly, B3 stated that: "It took really like the big outrage

[events] for [information] to be easier to be found, maybe resources or groups that were doing the work that you're interested in."

Closely linked to this is the code **"information overload and fatigue" (7)**, where respondents indicated that the massive volume of information made available to them affected their ability to process the information and identify what could satisfy their information needs. HS27 described themselves as being: "Bored of social media these days, and you don't want to create so much online presence; it's tiring and a bit unsafe." while HS36 described it as: "fatigue from information overload". Meanwhile, B2 took a step back from the online space "because there are other things going on in the world and you have to be, you know, other things that you need to engage with at the same time."

H3, as a known public figure, stated that he didn't really check any messages on social media: "…There's so many and I'm a bit tired to categorise, you know, which is spam or which is not." He also didn't reply to comments, which is a common way of engagement on social media: "I don't [reply to comments] because there's so many comments and sometimes it would consume your energy… And if you [about] too many comments, that would consume [your energy], it would affect your mentality and your mental health."

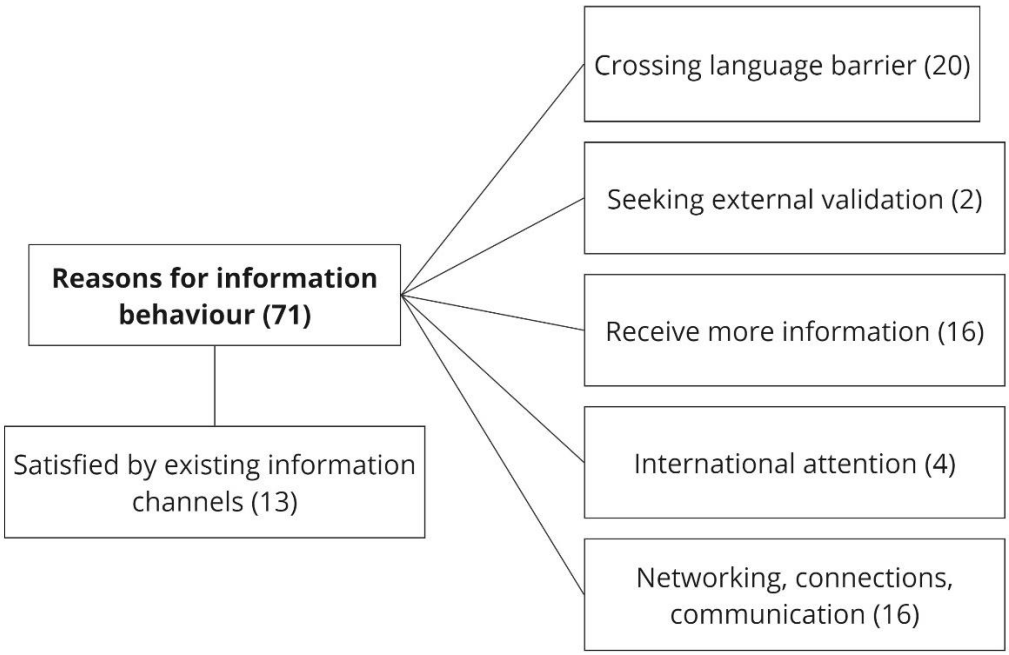


Figure 39 Coding Mind-Map of 'Reasons for Internet Behaviour'

Respondents were then asked for their main purpose of engaging in information behaviour on the internet with regards to the social movement they were involved in, presented in Figure 29 above. The reasons are summarised as **“crossing language barrier” (20), “receive more information” (16), “networking, connections, communications” (16)**, specifically hoping to attract **“international attention” (4)**, and **“seeking external validation” (2)** for the appropriateness of their social movement from overseas commenters.

The code “crossing language barrier” was especially relevant for respondents involved in the Hong Kong movement. HS14 stated that: “Sharing in English can let more people around the world know about it”. There were respondents involved in BLM who also used the same reason to explain why they were using the internet. BS2 noted that: “The Black diaspora is global and so too is racism and our resistance, so English isn’t the only language involved”

Overall, this establishes the general importance and reason behind the popularity of social media as a tool in contemporary social movements. Further, social movements cease to be confined to particular geographical or even language spaces, as participants take the initiative to both seek for and share information to international audiences. This speaks to the willingness of social movement participants in particular to venture into different avenues of mass communication, but also poses questions as to whether or not they have the necessary literacy skills to navigate those spaces.

6.3.1.2 Concerns about internet privacy and safety

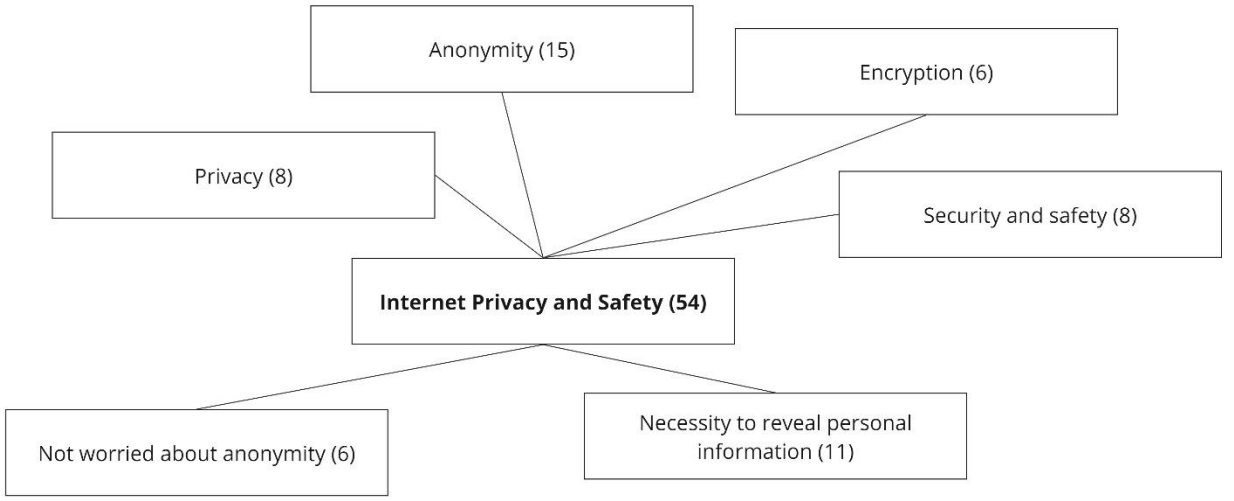


Figure 40 Coding Mind-Map for 'Internet Privacy and Safety'

Figure 40 captures codes related to Internet privacy and safety. **"Anonymity" (15)** as a recurring theme drove a lot of decisions behind information sharing and linking offline and online personas.

HS27 set up new social media profiles for the protest "for anonymity (fear of being found out by friends and the government). I don't want to always sound antagonistic in my real name profiles; but today (after passing of national security law) the main reason is political". H2 echoed the need for safety: "For safety, you never know who is on the other side of the screen".

While BLM had a less observable threat of legal repercussions, there was also cautious attitudes displayed. B4 described their decision to remain anonymous as: "It's a combination of kind of laziness and awareness that I'm not going to commit to this… Also I don't want career repercussions of saying something vaguely controversial."

Other codes very similar to this are **"security and safety" (8), "privacy" (8)**, and **"encryption" (6)**. All such terms emerged as keywords that respondents used to describe their concerns with mobilising on the internet. This aligns with data collected from the survey phase, as social movement participants use the internet space to circumvent censorship and oppression in the offline world.

Privacy and safety were picked out by some respondents. HS34 stated that: "There are too many snooping online presences where I reside, who enjoy making a fuss out of nothing or

purposely taking something out-of-context. All of which poses too much of a risk to personal safety."

The personal aspect was highlighted by BS11: "No, they don't really need to know these personal details and I don't feel comfortable sharing this." HS42 also stated that: "I only allow people I know personally and trust to follow me [on private social media accounts]. I am not comfortable with strangers having access to my private life."

However, on the contrary there were respondents who also highlighted that it was necessary for them to reveal personal information to present a genuine persona which other protesters could relate to. BS4 described this as necessity as: "…To humanize my tweet output". BS8 stated that: "I didn't feel the need to hide my identity and I wanted others to know this was an important issue for me." Meanwhile, H4 noted that: "If you just sort of disclosed your name, you would give a name to something, give a name to that cause. So you're not just sort of under this anonymous identity." Through demonstrating vulnerability, the persona becomes authentic and more trustworthy. This was coded as **"Necessity to reveal personal information" (11)**.

The high awareness of information literacy exhibited throughout the data explains fully why individuals are concerned with the internet safety and privacy. The ability to remain anonymous has empowered individuals to take part in social movements without fear of persecution, yet poses a contradictory challenge to the idea of an authentic persona, which can build trustworthiness and reputation.

6.3.1.3 Access to information

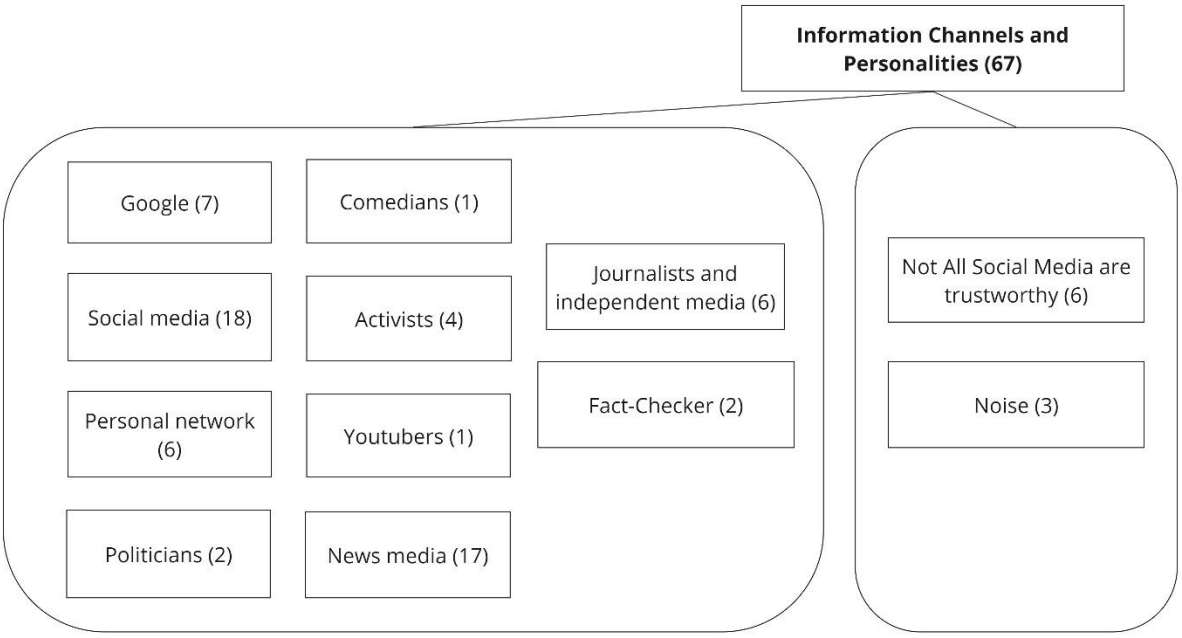


Figure 41 Coding Mind-Map of 'Information Channels and Personalities'

On top of preset categories of information disseminators, respondents of the survey were given free-text opportunities to identify specific channels they consider as trustworthy, as shown in Figure 41. Within that, "**Social media"** platforms were referenced the most (18). Respondents described their sources of information as just "Twitter", "Reddit", or other popular social media platforms.

"News media" was the second most popular information source that were listed specifically. Closely related to this is **"Journalists and Independent media" (6)**, which refers to specific independent media or journalists that activists identified with, as opposed to just saying "news media".

Google also emerged as a common mechanism used to fact-check.

6.3.1.4 Reflection of reality

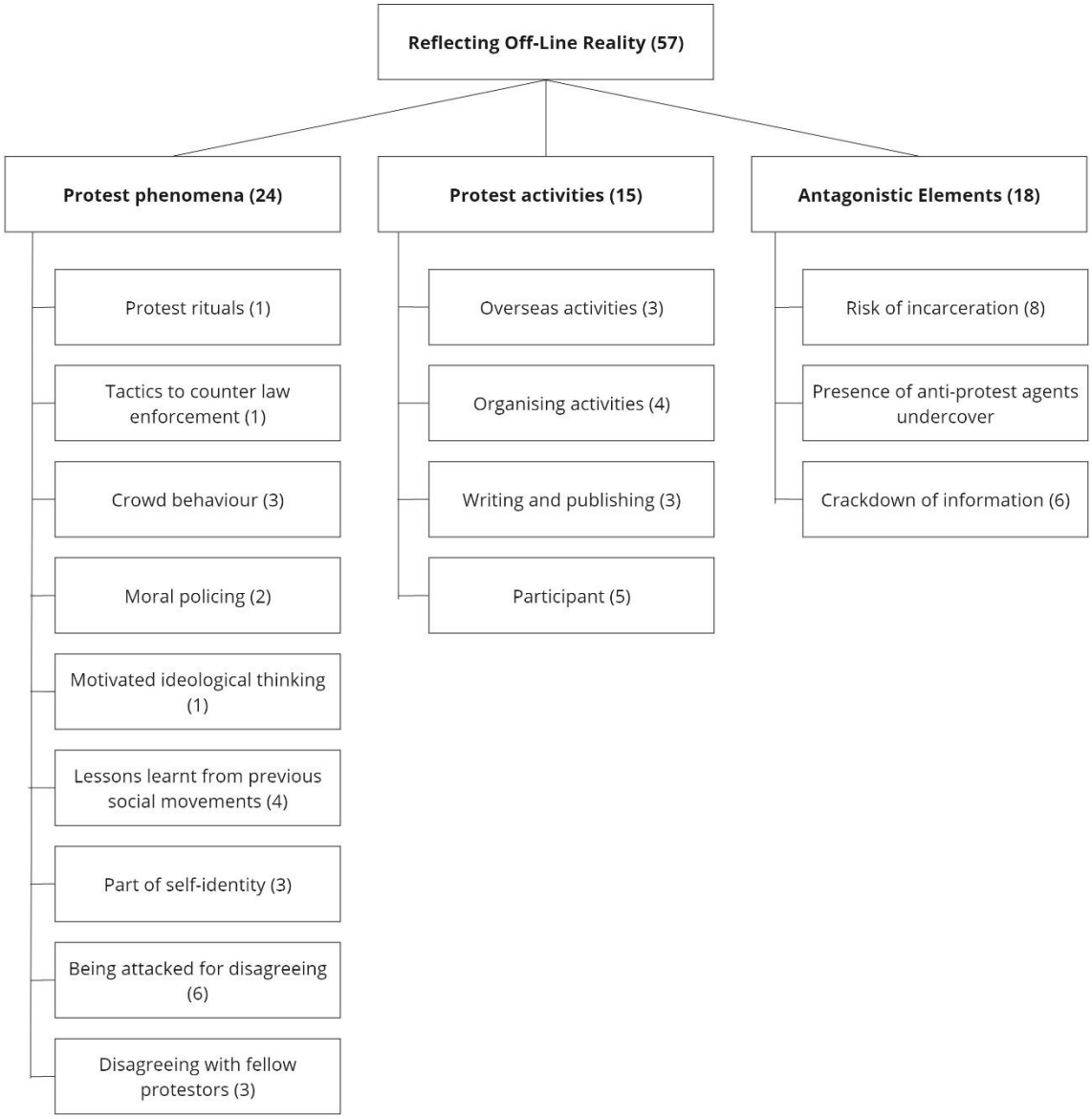


Figure 42 Coding Mind-Map of 'Reflecting Off-Line Reality'

Further, although the discussion remains around the digital space, survey and interview respondents both made reference to how their behaviours online reflected the offline reality they were situated in, as seen in Figure 42. The symbolic and practical importance of offline

protest activities remain poignant and part of the conversation. Three aspects off offline behaviours were captured. The first was **"protest phenomena" (24)**. Descriptions or aspects that reflected broader protest behaviours were coded here. These phenomena could also have impact on online information behaviour, but should not be solely attributed to only happening in the digital realm.

"Protest activities" (15) contains references to any protest activities respondents would describe themselves as doing. Finally, **"Antagonistic elements" (18)** contained mentions of any belief of persons or parties who were deliberately acting against the interests of the movement.

This section hints to future avenues of research, as the offline and online reality is very much intertwined. To expand this research beyond the digital space is a logical next step.

6.3.1.5 Emotional labour

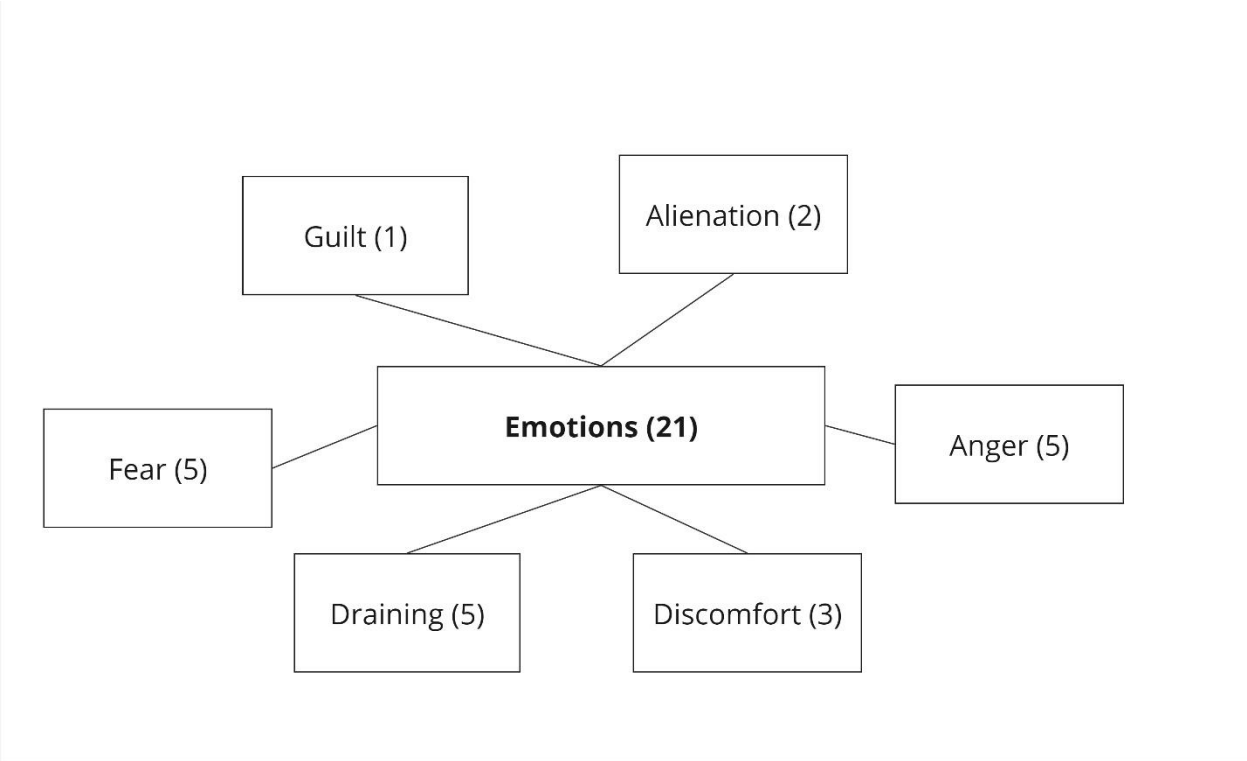


Figure 43 Coding Mind-map of 'Emotions'

Particular emotions were captured during the course of this research, seen in Figure 43 above. Notably all of those either explicitly stated or inferred by myself were negative emotions. **"Fear" (5)** and **"anger" (5)** emerged mostly in correlation to the wider societal context and opposition.

H4 shared that: “This sort of fear is still sort of ongoing, so you really have to just, I don’t know, live with it.” While B4 noted that: “I tried getting angry in comments and people just kept replying, and it just made me angry and I was like, why am I doing this to myself? So I stopped.”

“Draining” (5) appeared specifically in reference to information overload, which was also coded in Figure 1. B1 described himself as not having the “emotional space” to give at the time of the protests due to personal circumstances, which affected his capacity to participate in BLM. Draining was also used to describe communicating information with non-protestors. He stated: “[…] It got to the point where I got off social media because it was just like, you’re trying to put it off, put out all these fire. And that’s kind of what it feels like. It’s like you’re trying to fight forest fires. […] It was really frustrating.”

B2 also echoed his sentiment: “[…] It was quite intense at the same time, like I did have to step back and just be, like there’s only so much you can engage with, because it is very emotionally draining like with any of these other things.”

Further, there were no positive emotions that were particularly expressed through the surveys or interviews. Notably, with social movements and activism there is a degree of empowerment and sense of belonging that could generate positive emotions, but it was not observed here. It could also be inferred that concepts of information trustworthiness, especially that of the lack thereof, inspires negative connotations.

The previous chapter touched on the prominence of rational factors in forming trustworthiness perceptions, at least when respondents were asked to describe the process. This theme of emotions, however, proves that affective factors are still at play. Emotions arise due to information flow and behaviour, and cyclically impact on how people choose to receive or share information.

6.3.2 Definitions of information trustworthiness

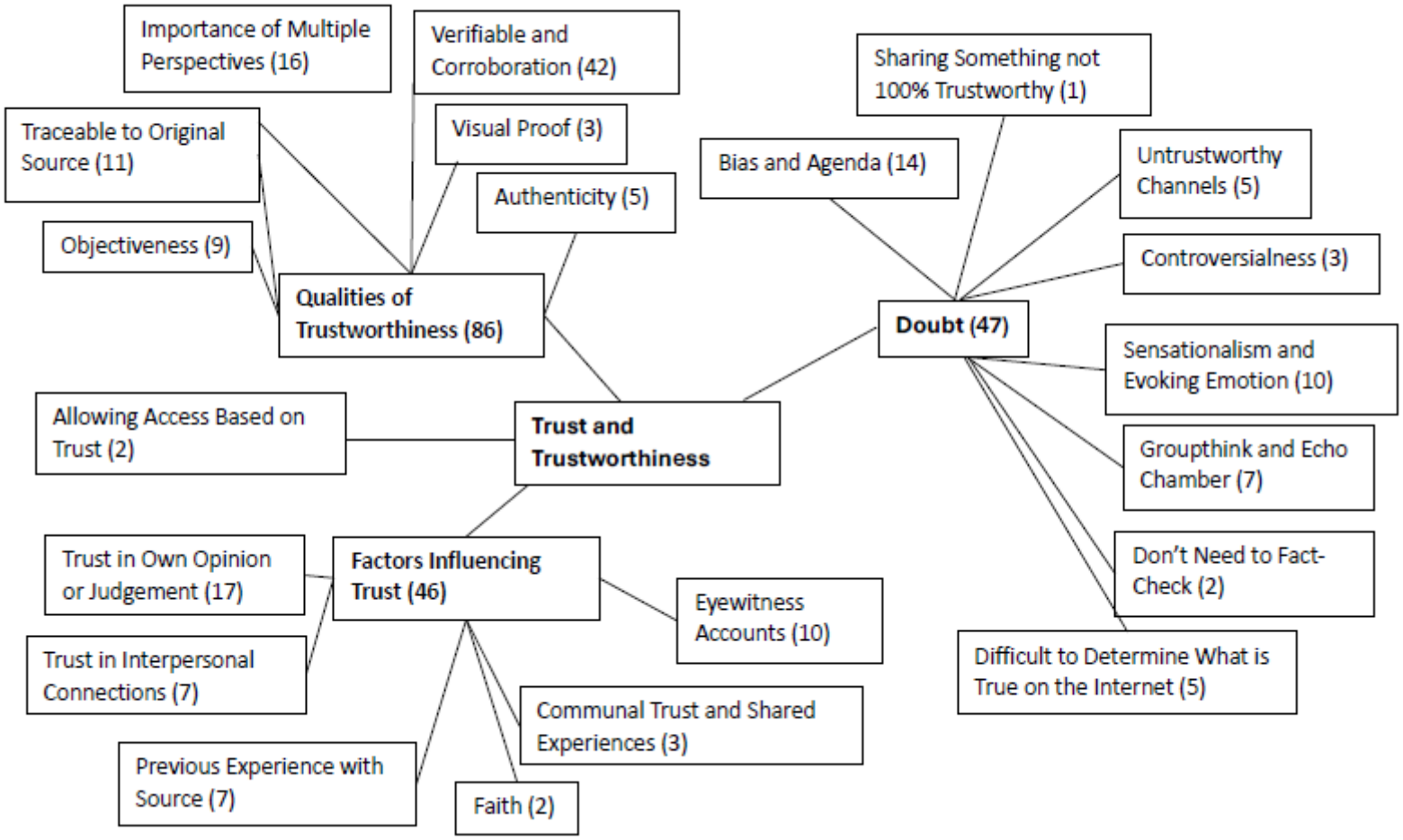


Figure 44 Coding Mind-Map on 'Trust and Trustworthiness'

Figure 44 shows three subthemes that makes up the large theme of "Trust and Trustworthiness". **"Qualities of trustworthiness" (86)** includes traits that respondents attribute to a trustworthy piece of information. **"Factors affecting trust" (46)**, in turn, are the active elements that can affect their perception of trust, thus affecting their decision to trust. The final subtheme **"Doubt" (47)** includes codes that carry the opposite connotation to the previous two subthemes – those that denote why individuals choose not to trust, or consider why information is untrustworthy.

6.3.2.1 Qualities of trustworthiness

"Verification and corroboration" (42) emerged as the strongest marker of a trustworthy piece of information. Multiple respondents described trustworthy information as verifiable against other sources.

BS1 described verification as: "By looking up multiple different accounts of what is said, and matching it up with multiple different photos/videos/firsthand accounts." BS9 also described their information behaviour as: "I think I do [factcheck]. I read something from multiple sources not just one. HS31 go into more detail on how they actively verify: "Check across other information sources that I expect to disseminate the information – could be journalists, traditional news outlets, interest pages etc." This approach is also seen from HS8: "Cross check w/ multiple sources; subscribe to media outlet that I knowingly have different political orientation".

H1 gave a more explicit example of when they verified information: "Someone would say [in Telegram groups], 'in Admiralty, we saw a lot of people on a specific street. They might be coming.' But we don't really believe those. We would rather just head over there to see if that's true. Or we will just go to social media to search if it is really [true]."

Verification and corroboration also appeared as part of respondents' process of decision-making as to whether to trust. Thus, the ability to be corroborated and verified by a third-party source has a significant impact on perception of trustworthiness. In this case, trustworthiness appears to not be a 'quality' so to speak, but rather a bestowed status through the existence of others.

A code similar to this is **"importance of multiple perspectives" (16)**. Not just simply verifying it against another source, but deliberately seeking out contrarian information to further weigh and evaluate the validity of either information. Together, both codes point to a high level of information literacy or at least awareness among respondents, as the information that is accepted as truth is not reliant on one singular source of perspective. Instead, respondents go through an active process of fact-checking to determine trust.

HS5 stated that: "I listen to multiple people to see different points of view and I never 100% trust just one person, I know that no one person is going to be totally right and unbiased. So I try to get a balanced view by getting information from different sources[…]"

As part of information literacy, respondents also indicated that they would deliberately seek out contrarian sources, that is, information from political opponents.

HS8, as quoted earlier, stated that they: "subscribe to media outlet that I knowingly have different political orientation." This is echoed by H3: "Sometime I even would read and watch those state media, and because no matter how the information could be manipulated, but some of those would be authoritative, and like, kind of the perspective of the authority, no matter how absurd it is. But that is also the fact that giving you to analyse what they're up to and what's their perspective, or what's their usual tactics of the propaganda."

BLM respondents also expressed similar sentiments. B4 mentioned that: "[On a podcast I listen to] they'll get people on with like opposing views, and they'll have discussions where they try and kind of… it helps you get a better understanding of where the different ideas are and it helps me understand what I think better." Meanwhile, B3 described their behaviour as: "I'm always trying to see how different spaces are talking about a thing."

Respondents also indicated that trustworthy information would be **"traceable to original source" (11)** and would contain **"visual proof" (3)**. Both of these codes denote the accountability of information – that it can be traced back to its original form, for the reader to make judgements upon. As information spreads across the internet, it can be taken by different individuals to disseminate in their own way. However, it was important for respondents make the judgement based on the most original information, rather than in an indirect form from other disseminators.

H1 said that: "I definitely go through the comment session and then you would definitely see someone arguing with each other. And I will just read those who provided a link, and I just click in it and to check further like to make sure that what I know is correct."

H4, who verified videos of protests actively during the protest, stated: "Sometimes a person anonymously posted something and I would like to ask for clarification. I would like to ask if there's a longer version of the clip just to show me more context, or is there another angle so that I could actually verify the address? Or like the time? And also whether there are more people involved in that kind of situation."

B3 also described the need to trace information to original sources: "[…] I have to know what the source was and I want to know what, like the intent, 'cause like it's very easy on both sides. Like I'm obviously associated more with like very left leaning politics, but it's very easy to kind of take information and package in a certain way. So I want to know what's your original source and what the intent behind it is? And then I can make the call for myself. […] Definitely being able to take information in my own hands and trace backwards from."

Meanwhile, the importance of visual proof has already been discussed in Chapter 5, in the survey chapter. There were also evidence provided by interviewees, as H1 previously stated that Stand News, a Hong Kong news outlet, as a trustworthy source, and added this explanation regarding visual proof: "So if we have a video, or even a video shared by Stand

News, I will share them. Just to let people know that this is true. I think that's more convincing rather than just written words."

However, that is not to say that the method of communicating or delivering information is unimportant to creating a trustworthy piece of information. Respondents indicated that **"objectiveness" (9)** was also important. Vice versa, if the way the information is presented is seen to be lacking in objectivity, the information appears to be less trustworthy based on that observation. Used interchangeably with objectiveness are descriptions such as transparency and neutrality.

Various respondents provided examples of what they considered as objective information sources.

B1 pointed out traditional news outlets: "I subscribe to The Economist and then BBC. Those are the two that I think are both like hits my interest as far as like international and economics, and also is nonpartisan and they tend to take journalism, like objective journalism as the [standard]."

While HS24 provided information sources beyond news outlets: "There's only a few accounts I trust in HK, one is a straightforward court reporter who reports what happened in court. No commentary. It's obvious to me which side he is on from what he choose to write about but you wouldn't know his side from his actual reporting."

Objectiveness was referenced by B2 as neutrality: "I think in order for information to be trustworthy it has to be very neutral. It has to be able to examine what the creator of the information has to gain in sort of disseminating this, or creating and disseminating this information.

Meanwhile H4 described objective information sources as independent: "[Trustworthy information/sources would be] independent. Sort of neutral or present themselves as neutral. What else? That are not sensational, not biased, these will be the words that I would use."

Some respondents highlighted that the lack of objectiveness would hinder trust. HS36 said that: "Subjective opinions and biased/selective information likely to be used among individuals with group think"

6.3.2.2 Doubt

The subtheme "doubt" is contrary to the above section, denoting the lack of trust and trustworthiness. Questions about what participants do not place trust in was not asked directly during the interviews, and only touched on briefly in the survey. Nonetheless, respondents identified some exclusionary criteria – qualities that automatically decreased trustworthiness if identified. This included **"bias and agenda" (14), sensationalism and evoking emotion" (10)**, and **"controversialness" (10)**.

“Bias and agenda” exist as antithesis to the code of “objectiveness” detailed in the previous section – untrustworthy sources have an agenda or standpoint that is conflicting against the respondents’ own.

BS11 describes these source as: “[Untrustworthy sources] may have a hidden agenda or some other motivation to be untruthful” while HS22 describes them as: “exhibit strong bias and do not change their viewpoints when they encounter new information”

B2 provided a description of untrustworthy source in more detail: “But I think when you look at the majority of big pundits like in today’s culture[…] they all have their personal agendas and they’re all kind of… I think a lot of pundits in particular are relying on the fact that a lot of their kind of user base or their audience are quite susceptible. And it does make you call into question, because if they have certain views, they will try and present those views as being like a truth.”

While bias and agenda does not necessarily mean a source is untrustworthy – as respondents have highlighted, neutrality or objectiveness is difficult to achieve. This is seen in H1’s response: “I also did a [research project on] something like ‘can newspaper be neutral’, after that I think it is totally impossible. There are definitely some stance.”

B2 also stated that: “I think one of those important things I’ve realised is that everything has nuance. Everything has nuances and I think it’s very, very important to kind of, if you’re gonna be absorbing information from a certain person, you need to kind of look at them and think and think and sort of analyse what they kind of represent, when they’re about, what they have going on in essence.”

“Sensationalisation and evoking emotion” was clearly labelled as an identifier of an untrustworthy source. This was closely linked to the commercialisation of information, as information sources deliberately exaggerate or appeal to certain emotions to draw attention quickly. HS11 noted that: “Their method of delivery is often emotional and dramatic, which undermines their trustworthiness.”

HS24 shared this particular observation: “I’ve learned that angry stuff gets shared much more wildly[…] I don’t think it’s really about information anymore. Personally I don’t succumb to that pressure as I don’t care about likes or clicks, it’s easy to see how publishers that need clicks can polarise very quickly.”

B1 stated that: “I don’t wanna say that it’s because [media] want to paint BLM as being an extremist organisation always, but that may be the case for some interest. But like to sell news just in general, like you need things that are interesting and it’s more interesting to talk about the minority if they result in violence.” B2 echoed this sentiment: “I think certain tabloids and the way they wrote about things to try and make it out like, you know, the protestors were kind of violent and deliberately disruptive kind of thing or all of those issues, and needless to say it had kind of the effect that you’d expect in the sense that people lapped it up and it was just kind of ‘oh dear’ sort of thing.”

Interviewee H1 shared this comment regarding a local newspaper that was generally seen as pro-protest: “Sometimes Apple Daily, I think they are more like want to grab attention, draw attention to some very interesting title to grab your mind, which I think is fine. Because, you know, we are on the same side but definitely not… I mean, even for those that are on my side, I can say that some of their news are not correct.”

Rather than ascertaining whether to trust based on looking for qualities of trustworthiness, respondents found it easier to make a judgement based on identifying qualities of untrustworthiness. This also ties back to the code “objectiveness”, which was a quality of trustworthiness identified in the dataset.

Respondents also identified various elements within untrustworthy information, which is presented in Figure 7 below.

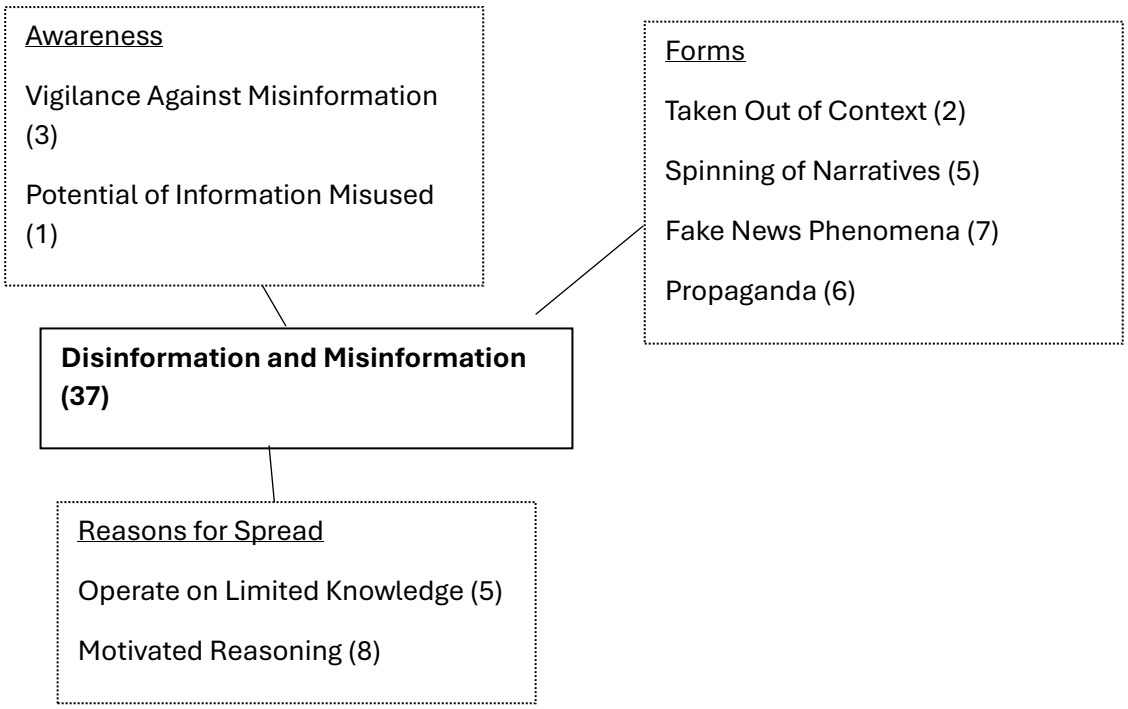


Figure 45 Coding Mind-Map of 'Disinformation and Misinformation'

Respondents identified various forms in which untrustworthy information can be presented. The codes resulting are presented in Figure 45. **"Fake news" (7)** was used frequently as a terminology to summarise disinformation and misinformation shared on the Internet.

When asked about fake news, Interviewee H4 responded: "There's always like a lot of videos circulating in social media at the height of the protests, and then obviously because a lot of the accounts are anonymous, a lot of the videos can be fake or even if they're not like, falsified or fake, they can be like taken out of context."

The politically charged term of **"propaganda" (6)** was also used by a respondent, largely referring to state-dispersed information. H3, the respondent in question, stated: "But what [Chinese state media] report is in the opposite and they fabricate something. And until that point, I know, I understand. Some kind of news would be with a strong sense of propaganda rather than merely reflecting the fact[…] they control the media and the party officials can give a direct instruction to the media on what to report or not to report, how the news is, and this is ruining the credibility. And if somehow the people have been affected by this kind of misled information or manipulated information, and definitely it would shape their ideology and opinion on the social issues."

"Taken out of context" (2) and **"spinning of narratives" (5)** were also forms of how untrustworthy information could be created. Both of these refer to originally trustworthy pieces of information being either taken out of context, or reframed to present a different picture or belief to serve another's agenda. HS24 advocated for the importance of going to

the original source, stating that through doing so: “you get a more accurate view but you quickly learn how each media spins an event or particular politician, such that in some cases now I can pretty much predict what was actually said just by reading the twisted version.”

B1 expressed that: “It’s frustrating to see that because it’s all about narratives and you automatically kind of see, you know, people going through and like change their narrative based off what suits their specific situation [when dealing with BLM].” To this, Interviewee B3 also shared their thoughts on how corrections of misinformation are not promoted to the same degree as the misinformation itself: “You’re not seeing people posting the correction [of news falsely reported] in the same way that they’re posting the misinformation, right, because that fed into a certain agenda. So you’ll see kind of things like that, like maybe it’s not even like very cold, overtly created fake information. But people are kind of taking their liberties when they can to create an agenda. And then when evidence is shown on the contrary, they’re not showcasing them the same way.”

To that, respondents also offered their own explanations of why disinformation and misinformation is spread. Kunda’s theory of motivated reasoning (1995) could be used to summarise some of these explanations, which were thus coded as well (8). One interviewee (H2) answered “Yes, I am way more sceptical of media/person who are pro govt, even when they are not talking about politics.” HS14 commented that “For politician, it depends on that person. For instance, I would never trust any pro-gov politician while a pro-democracy is trustworthy in a certain extent.” Interviewee B4 said: “I feel like I avoid the things that I would identify as fake news about Black Lives Matter just because I don’t want to engage with it. But that doesn’t mean I’m not seeing fake news, because like the bubble that I’m in, could just mean that I don’t notice all the positive things. Maybe they are a lie, I hope they’re not a lie.”

Respondents also used **“operating on limited knowledge” (5)** as a reason – where individuals trust in disinformation or misinformation due to not having enough knowledge to make an accurate judgement, and thus share misinformation or disinformation further as a result. B1 shared that: “People tend to just take kind of what is on the Internet kind of verbatim and just don't really fact check that too often or don't really necessarily care[…] oftentimes it was based off anecdotal evidence and that was for me, that someone like, you know, loves data analytics and loves like diving into where this information is coming from, it’s always been a bit frustrating, both with and without those BLM to see, kind of reliance on that anecdotal evidence as opposed to more verified kind of stuff.

H1 mentioned after the interview that he didn’t use LIGHK because he thought there was a lot of noise on LIGHK, and a lot of unreliable posts. However, some protestors he knows used it as a source of on-the-ground news while taking part in protests. He also brought up HK MAGA-ers and cited how they were an example of protestors who blindly put their trust with a limited knowledge and that he really didn’t agree with their politics.

6.3.2.3 Factors influencing trust

The question shifts from "what is trustworthy" to "why do you trust". In this, **"trust in own opinion or judgement" (17)** emerged. Respondents' trust in their ability to discern what is trustworthy, believing that their information literacy skills are sufficient in doing so. Instead of describing the process of trust as relying on external factors, respondents ascribe the decision-making process to their own judgement.

Interviewee B1 was asked about whether they believed in the anti-BLM coverage: "I don't know that BLM just generally was as violent as some people necessarily would believe it to be. That said, I haven't done my own, again, holding myself to a high standard, like I haven't done my own [research]. I didn't look at like property damage. I didn't look at like arrest numbers. I didn't look at a lot of different things related to it that would actually quantify my opinion or qualify my opinion. And so like, I would just make sure to point out is that like I'm kind of going off that feeling, but my hunch is that it wasn't as violent as people generally tended to paint it out to be."

H1, in describing how he decides which activist organisations to donate to: "I don't know how to say, how to describe, why I have a gut feeling that those are all reliable. I'm not sure if you get what I mean. Yeah, it's just vibes." He uses the term "gut feeling" again when explaining why he finds some information sources trustworthy. "Let's say Mr A is a very notable figure in the pro-democracy side, and he also follows that organisation or that page even if he didn't share any posts or story about them. I also kind of think that the page is reliable. Just a gut feeling, yeah. Yeah, but that sometimes it misses."

H2, when asked how he makes judgements on whether some things are true or not: "I do not think it makes sense to say HK protests are sponsored by foreign countries, how do anyone pay 2 millions ppl to protest without leaving any evidence?" Meanwhile, B2 stated that: "I still do think it is very difficult for people to find genuine sources because a lot of the time people are governed by their personal experience above everything else."

Rather than seeing the process of verification and corroboration (or other methods of fact-checking) as merely borrowing the trustworthiness of another to make judgement on the current information, respondents view it as their own judgement and ability.

It is also interesting to note that the nomenclature of **"faith" (2)** was explicitly used. As one of the more common explanations for general trust, respondents had the following comments. HS2 stated: "We hold faith in each other. Misinformation is merely noise." Similarly, when asked whether he was ever worried that he would show up to a fake protest, H1 responded: "We didn't got [lied to]. We would just think that why people are not showing up instead of thinking, 'oh, I think those are false news'. Like we have that mentality that people will just come up."

"Trust in interpersonal connections" (7) and **"communal trust and shared experiences" (3)** emerged. The former code points to when respondents trust based on their close social circles, such as family or friends. They put trust in the other person's judgement and

intention. “Communal trust and shared experiences” takes this a step further, as respondents describe trusting beyond their close social circles to the wider protest community. This study does not aim to uncover the extent of this community, but is instead focused on respondents’ own interpretation of what they perceive as their own community of protesters.

BS2 explained: “[I would fact check] by conversing in my community because we’re living this reality.” Similarly, HS5 noted: “I trust my parents as they’re retired and have lots more time to fact check and listen to even more HK sources of info than I do. I rely on them to understand what’s happening.” H2 added to this sentiment: “I tend to trust ppl whom I have followed for a long time and interacted a lot with, e.g. those I follow since 2019 on Twitter.” Survey respondent HS22 reflected on the broader communal dynamic: “In HK in 2019, there was a very high level of community trust fostered very quickly, and it was not just because of online activities. Each community showed up in real life, in actual spaces, and took over public spaces to disseminate and receive information. There was some misinformation and exaggeration, but people were pretty discerning about that and where the rage was coming from to drive these types of statements or rhetorical questions.”

Tying into the idea of communal trust is **“eyewitness accounts” (10)**, where protesters expressed a likelihood to trust fellow protestors’ experiences, even if they did not witness it themselves.

BS12 specifically referred to witnesses by stating: “By using reliable sources of those involved.” HS22 also used the term eyewitnesses: “They are eyewitnesses, have deep knowledge of recent history, and have special insight into what is happening.” Similarly, HS25 remarked: “During the protests it was a matter of eye witnessing events.”

The final code to highlight in this section is **“previous experience with source” (7)**. Much like “trust in interpersonal connections, trust is already established previously to this decision-making point. Instead, respondents rely on previous interactions and a preconceived trust as a basis for their decision as to whether or not they trust them in this particular occasion.

H3 described trustworthy media as: “Should be with track record, long history.” Interviewee B3 stated: “Of course, I’m sure there’s many times where, maybe there’s somebody who’s always kind of giving me trusted information, so maybe I’m not always checking it as much because that trust has been established.”

Respondents also dived into factors that serve as obstacles in this process, as described in Table 8 below. These were elements that hinder their ability to make accurate trust judgements. **“Time” (11)** was the overwhelming commonality discovered, as respondents expressed that too much time was required to go through a fact-checking process for everything they see on the Internet. Two respondents cited **“socio-economic circumstances”** as obstacles as well. One interviewee specifically brought up the **“loss of information channels”** over time as a reason for why it became harder and harder for them to engage in fact-checking behaviour.

Obstacles Stopping Fact-checking	14
Socio-Economic Circumstances	2
Investing Time	11
Loss of Information Channels	1

Table 8 'Obstacles Stopping Fact-checking' codes

HS2 commented on the factor of time: "You could [fact-check] but by the time you've fact checked the story has evolved." While H1 shared about the amount of activity happening during the height of the movement: "Sometimes there are a lot of news popping up in Telegram, but because just too many of them like, you know, back in the days there are multiple protests on the same day. So I can hardly verify those news." B2 summarised: "And if people are not particularly engaged, people don't have time or resources to look at things they are gonna absorb that and take it as fact and take it at its value."

6.3.3 Application outside of case contexts

One of the objectives of this research was to consider whether there were generalisable lessons around information trust that can be applied to other social movements. As such, respondents of the survey were asked to identify if they had participated in other social movements and whether there were differences in their information behaviour. Interviewees were asked a more general question at the end of whether they had applied the same information literacy and behaviour on other contexts, such as their daily life. This was captured in the code **"Shared information trust approaches to other social movements" (4)**.

Overall, interviewee respondents all indicated that they had a larger awareness of the importance of information literacy, and were able to understand that information trustworthiness was important in other facets of their life. There were four responses that specifically referenced other social movements.

B2 stated that: "I think it's like when there's always some kind of big event in the news, it suddenly sparks so many conversations and people start talking about how they relate to it and all the things that have happened to them in sort of in line with this, like it was a bit like when there was the murder of Sarah Everard back in 2021 and suddenly like you had loads of women talking about some experiences of harassment. Both sexual harassment on the streets, sexual harassment at work, all those kind of things, assault, it was, so I'd say it was, yeah, a similar experience to that."

B3 described linking her work on BLM to the experiences of First Nations and indigenous people in Canada, while HS13 stated: "Myanmar. More or less the same approaches."

These are small pieces of evidence that hint that a model of trust developed from two specific cases can be generalised across other social movements and even other contexts. Further, throughout this research it is clear that respondents have shown a high degree of awareness

6.4 Limitations and Anomalies

6.4.1 Difficulty in finding interviewees

I noted nervousness from interviewees, who see online interviews that are recorded as being more a more formal occasion compared to if it was in person with a recording device in front. As such, although I would describe this to them as a casual conversation, most interviewees were not as relaxed. Most interviewees also were unwilling to turn on their cameras, which to some extent does affect the rapport I could develop with them.

The rationale behind the decision to conduct online interviewing has been detailed in this chapter. Fan et al (2023) has laid out the growing adoption of online interviewing within academic research, especially after the COVID-19 pandemic. Online interviewing has enabled me to reach interviewees in other geographic locales, especially given the context of my study. Anthony et al (2025) evidence that there were no statistically significant differences between face-to-face and Zoom interviews.

6.4.2 Mismatch between researcher and participant understandings

Respondents also tend to not think of information activities such as ‘sharing tweets’ or ‘sending things into family group chats’ as significant protest activities. The layman’s understanding of “information behaviour” is detached from an academic standing. It tends to be more surface-level, and respondents often needed me to list examples or do more prompting to think of specific information behaviours they may exhibit. I had to be careful not to feed them answers and lead to a confirmation bias.

6.5 Conclusion

In this chapter, I dissected my qualitative dataset and extrapolated themes that can enrich our understanding of information trustworthiness within social movements.

Firstly, there is the necessary recognition that information behaviours, and by extension understanding and perceptions of information trustworthiness, will change. Shifts in protest activity, both online and offline, have been documented, and there is a need to adapt to reach relevant audiences with relevant information. To that, the deliberate use of social media has been normalised in my two case contexts, and have been used effectively to enable information flow and ultimately further their respective causes.

However, at the same time not every population will be able to use digital communication tools to the same degree. Even though this research collected data for largely digitally literate participants, they still reported difficulties in fully using social media platforms and mass communication tools, let alone all the other obstacles like time and energy coming into play. Further, new challenges such as the balance between anonymity and authenticity

arises. While anonymity gives social movement participants safety, honesty gives authenticity and strengthens the veracity of what is being said.

Secondly, I have reaped deep insights about trust perceptions which enables the discussion and development of a useful framework of trust. Key words that emerged from discussions with respondents include **verifiable** and **objective**. This chapter also affirms observations from the survey, where it is easier for respondents to identify markers of untrustworthiness and express doubt, then it is to come up with a clear definition or criteria for trustworthiness. Elements like bias, agenda, and sensationalisation in relaying information all cause such doubt. Emotions has emerged as a theme among the findings, but the impact of negative emotions on the trust building process has to be examined further. **Communal trust** – in this research context, trust in fellow social movement participants - is also observed through the interviews, revealing its importance in forming perceptions of trustworthiness.

Respondents are also exhibiting high levels of awareness for a need for information literacy, which also affirms the survey findings. “Fake news” was a buzz word used across the respondents and they exhibited an alertness towards the potential of disinformation and misinformation to disrupt activism and social change. At the same time, they trust in their own beliefs and ability to discern truth.

Many of the findings summarised in this chapter are affirming and enriching what has been noted in the previous two phases. I thus proceed to synthesise all three phases fully in the next chapter.

7. Discussion and Framework Development

7.1 Introduction

The culmination of this research has always been to understand how the concept of information trustworthiness is constructed, and how that influences decisions to trust and take action, or, to a lesser extent influence changes in beliefs.

This chapter summarises the findings of this research. At this stage, it is perhaps made even more apparent that it is not a simple task to summarise how individuals perceive the concept of information trustworthiness. What my research does is first establish that it is indeed the imminence of this research question – how is the perception of information trustworthiness constructed and influenced within social movements? The role of "information" is becoming more and more prominent within society and social movements. As access to information becomes wider than ever, it becomes more imperative to address the importance of determining information trustworthiness.

The objective of this doctoral research has never just been to investigate what is information trustworthiness, but also to communicate it in a way that is understood by the laymen, and thus has practical applicability. The pragmatic approach and mixed methods paradigm serves to evaluate information trustworthiness from the perspective of social movement participants, and to situate it within academic thought without detracting from the specific context in which information trustworthiness is constructed. In the course of this research, the emergent findings have resulted in me realising that I needed a framework of my own to properly bring together the varied findings on how information trustworthiness is perceived.

This thesis has dedicated itself to thus developing a framework of information trustworthiness, which is presented in this chapter. I then identify the impact of this study on academia and wider society, offering how information is used within contemporary social movements, and why it is imperative for both researchers and activists to be paying attention to the use and misuses of information in activist spaces. Finally, I identify avenues for future research.

7.2 Framework of Trust

Mayer et al (1995) introduces a model to explain trust, which is presented below in Figure 46. Seminally, this work establishes a distinction between trustworthiness, trust, and outcomes of having trust, a definition of which this paper also takes. Mayer et al focuses on interpersonal trust in organisational contexts – trust between two parties, as in their definition of trust – and explains the relationship between having trust and translating it into outcomes.

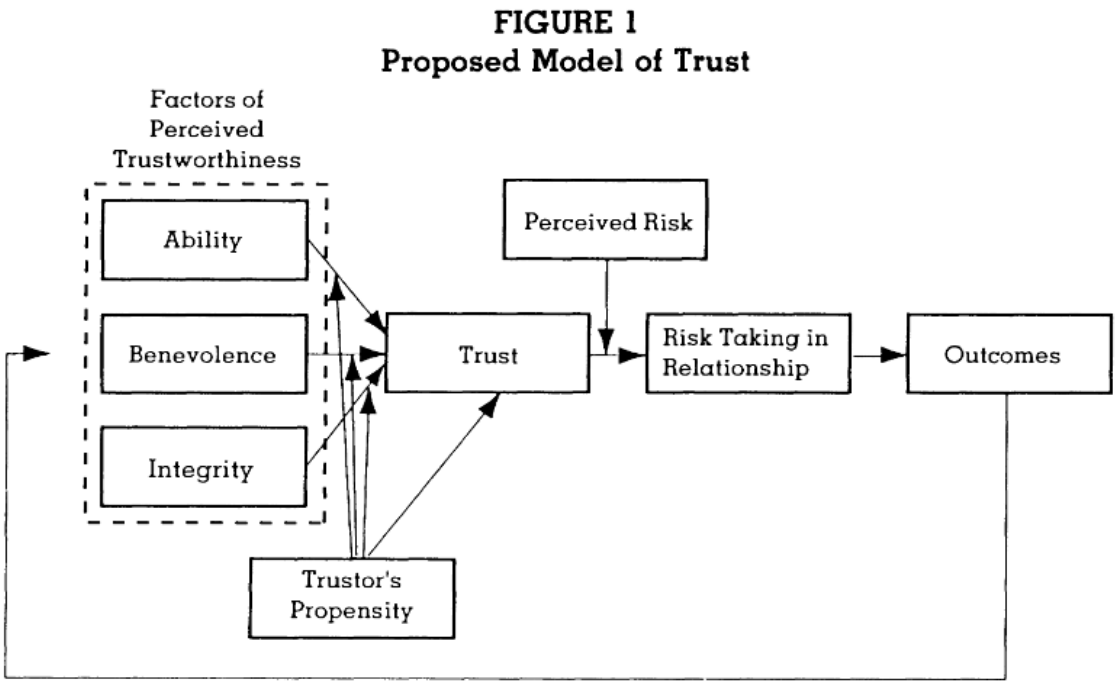


Figure 46 Proposed model of trust as shown in Mayer et al (1995)

This framework has thus inspired me to distil my findings in a similar manner, and provide a comprehensive and contemporary framework upon which trustworthiness can be understood. While trust research often centres within organisations, such as workplaces, I take a much broader case context with much looser interactions. Within the digital space, 'who' gives out the information is no longer as impactful, as anyone can share anything and have the possibility to be seen by the entire world. Thus, trust is not established between two visible and well-defined parties, but instead is between one party and a faceless, unknown entity. Information cannot be easily known about the faceless entity.

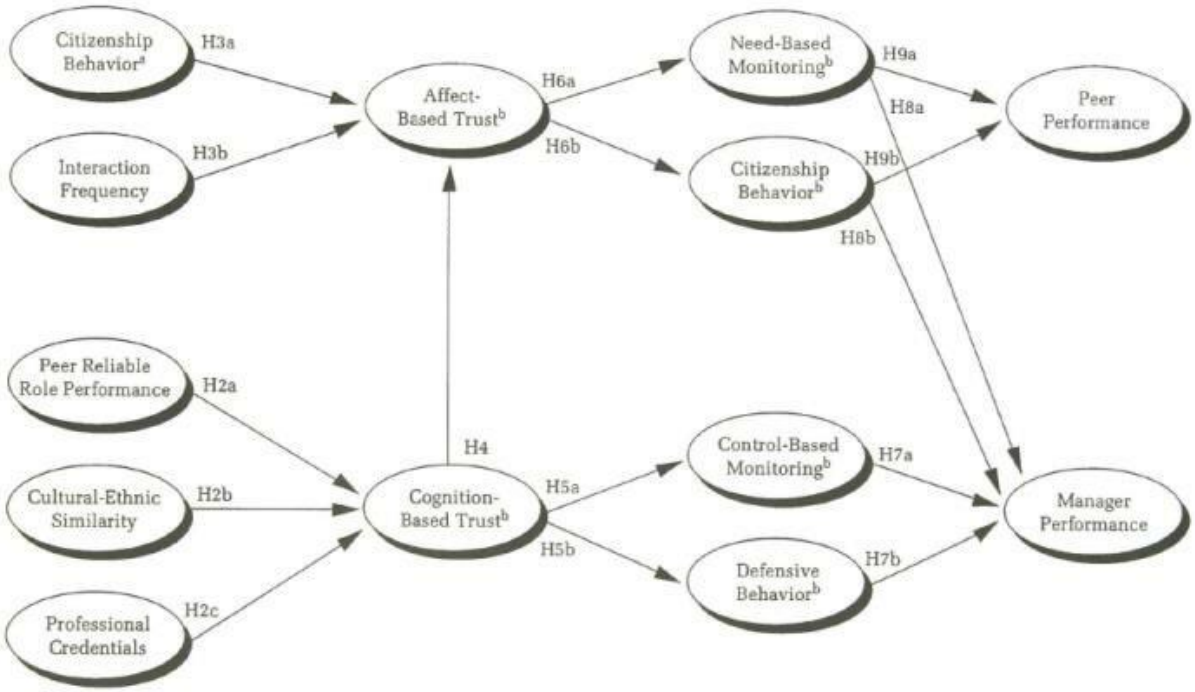
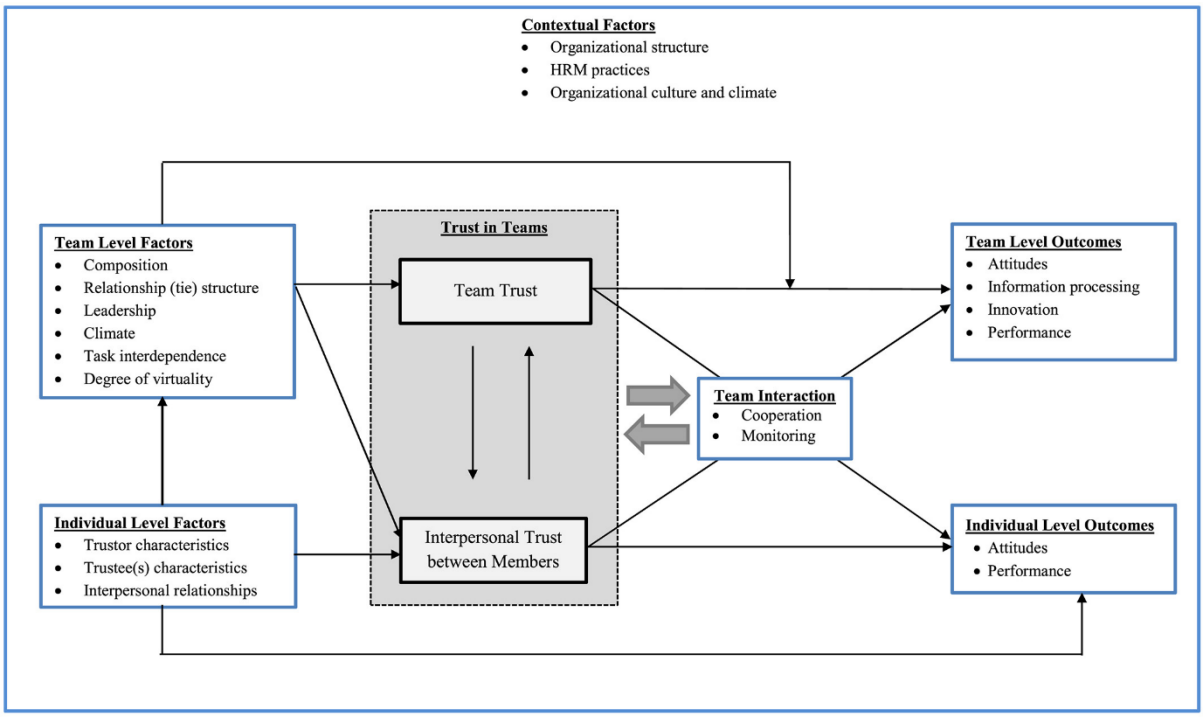


Figure 47 Model of Affect- and Cognition-based trust, as shown in McAllister (1995).

In the same year of Mayer et al's model, McAllister (1995) produced a model of trust that considers the dimensions of affect and cognition in developing interpersonal cooperation, as seen in Figure 47. Cognition-based trust is formed from external factors and predictable behaviours, and affect-based trust is formed from the motives and manner of the party one is cooperating with. The conclusion of McAllister's research describes that some cognition-based trust is still necessary for the development of affect-based trust, but both influence the trust relationship and behaviour in these interdependent interactions.

As this chapter will demonstrate, affect-based trust is noted through this research, but cognition-based trust still occupies a more prominent space, especially as respondents self-reported on their rationales to trust. Instead of using cognition and affect as the nomenclature of division, I have decided to use the terms objective and subjective instead.



Note. Variable lists in each box are illustrative rather than comprehensive.

Figure 48 Multilevel model of trust as shown in Costa et al (2018)

Costa et al (2018) developed a multilevel model of trust (Figure 48), albeit also focusing on organisational trust, specifically within teams. Their model brings attention to the cross-level relationships and interactions that take place in such relationship, which affects how trust manifests and thus influences team dynamics and outcome. At its core, the model considers trust at both the individual and team levels, highlighting how interpersonal trust initially shapes team trust, which then reciprocally influences team member interactions over time. This involves both "bottom-up" and "top-down" processes, where individual members influence the team and vice versa. Drawing on the integrative model of trust and social exchange theory, this framework suggests that trust develops through behaviours like co-operation and monitoring, creating reinforcing cycles that impact trust at both levels. Costa et al's model draws attention to the multi-faceted dimensions of trust that exist in the real world, where trusting behaviours and exchanges do not take place in a vacuum.

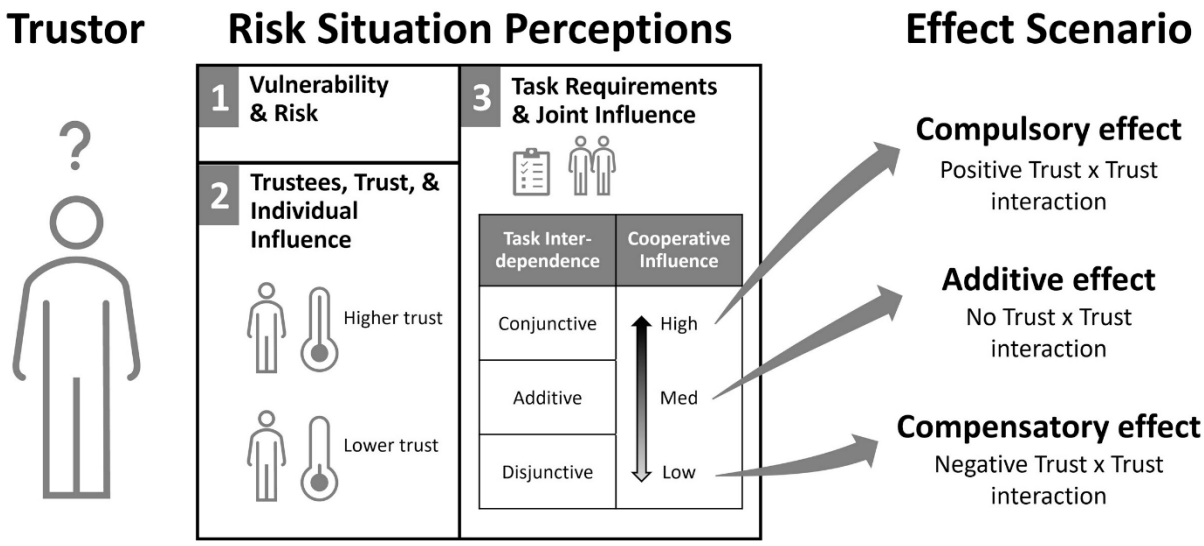


Figure 49 Perceived Influence model as shown in PytlikZillig et al (2024)

Finally, I looked at more recent modelling work, such as PytlikZillig et al's Perceived Influence (PI) model (Figure 49). The PI model advances theoretical understanding by extending trust research beyond dyadic relationships to scenarios involving multiple actors. It highlights the importance of perceived trustee influence and task requirements as moderators of the trust-outcome relationship, demonstrating their application in one- and two-trustee models. The model suggests that in situations with multiple trustees, a trustor evaluates their vulnerability and risk, which is tied to their preference for a specific goal. Trust becomes relevant when there is risk, as the trustor's desired outcome may be threatened. A key characteristic of the PI model is its focus on perceived influence, defined as the trustor's perception of how trustee actions can affect their risk in the situation.

Risk was not one of the themes that emerged from this research, which is present through so many of these models. While I agree that risk-taking is involved and certainly has a place in the trust-making process, the purpose of this paper is to provide a definition that is applicable to the context of study. It could also be argued that risk does not hold as much of a direct input into information trust, which is more detached than interpersonal trust. The cost of trusting (without action) is less.

However, what the PI model highlights is the influence of the nature of the task where trust has to take place. In an information trust setting, this is similar to the contents of the information. As the trustor may not have adequate information about the trustee, or the source of the information, the content of the information and how it is presented thus carries a heavier weight in the trust making process. Thus, I believe it is important to distinguish between the inherent trustworthiness of information, and the trust behaviour of the trustor.

7.2 A Framework of Trust

One of the aims of this research project is to develop a working definition of information trustworthiness. What criteria or qualities must information meet in order to be considered generally trustworthy by audience? How can this definition be developed in a practical manner, such as that general audience can understand, agree, and make use of it?

My belief on the concept of trust has not changed. Trust is inherently a decision that is subjective and context-dependent, and a working definition of information trustworthiness thus is necessarily practical and flexible. This is a framework that can be used to understand why some pieces of information are better trusted than others, and how individuals develop their applied definition of information trustworthiness.

Broadly, I propose a framework for information trustworthiness that has an objective dimension, and a subjective dimension. The objective dimension includes criteria and qualities that are in a sense measurable – there can be a judgement or consensus made upon these qualities, or so as perceived by its audience. The subjective dimension, however, differs upon individual experiences and values. In particular pertaining to my case contexts, I have drawn out some key characteristics, both objective and subjective, that can be used to define trustworthy information. Viewed through such a lens, we can have a better understanding of how social movement participants decide what is trustworthy and what is not.

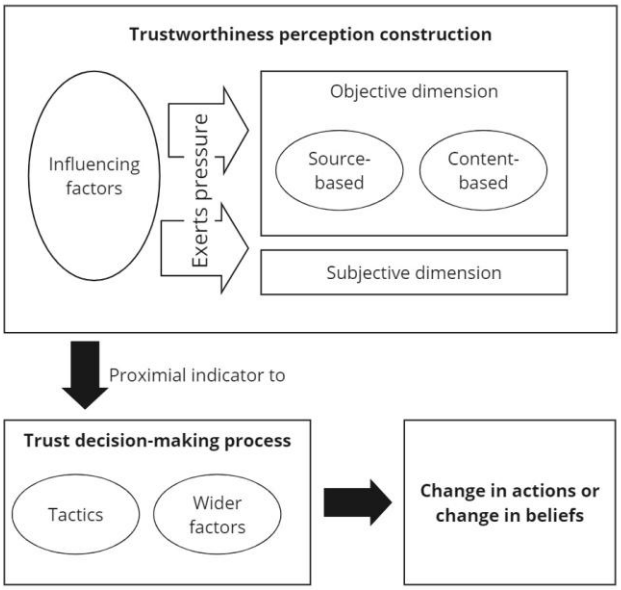


Figure 50 Proposed Information Trustworthiness Perception Construction framework.

The above figure is my proposed framework of trust. Individuals construct their own perceptions of trustworthiness through an objective and subjective dimension. Meanwhile, other influencing factors exert pressure onto these dimensions. Once a perceived

trustworthiness is constructed by this individual, it then serves as a proximal indicator for their trust decision-making process, as according to Mayer et al's 1995 paper, which this thesis owes its foundation to. Whether or not individuals decide to trust this piece of information based on its perceived trustworthiness, or if they decide to not trust it, it will lead to a change in actions or change in beliefs to varying degrees.

However, the above framework is very high-level. To supplement, I provide a more detailed version of the same framework that breaks down the elements within in Figure 51.

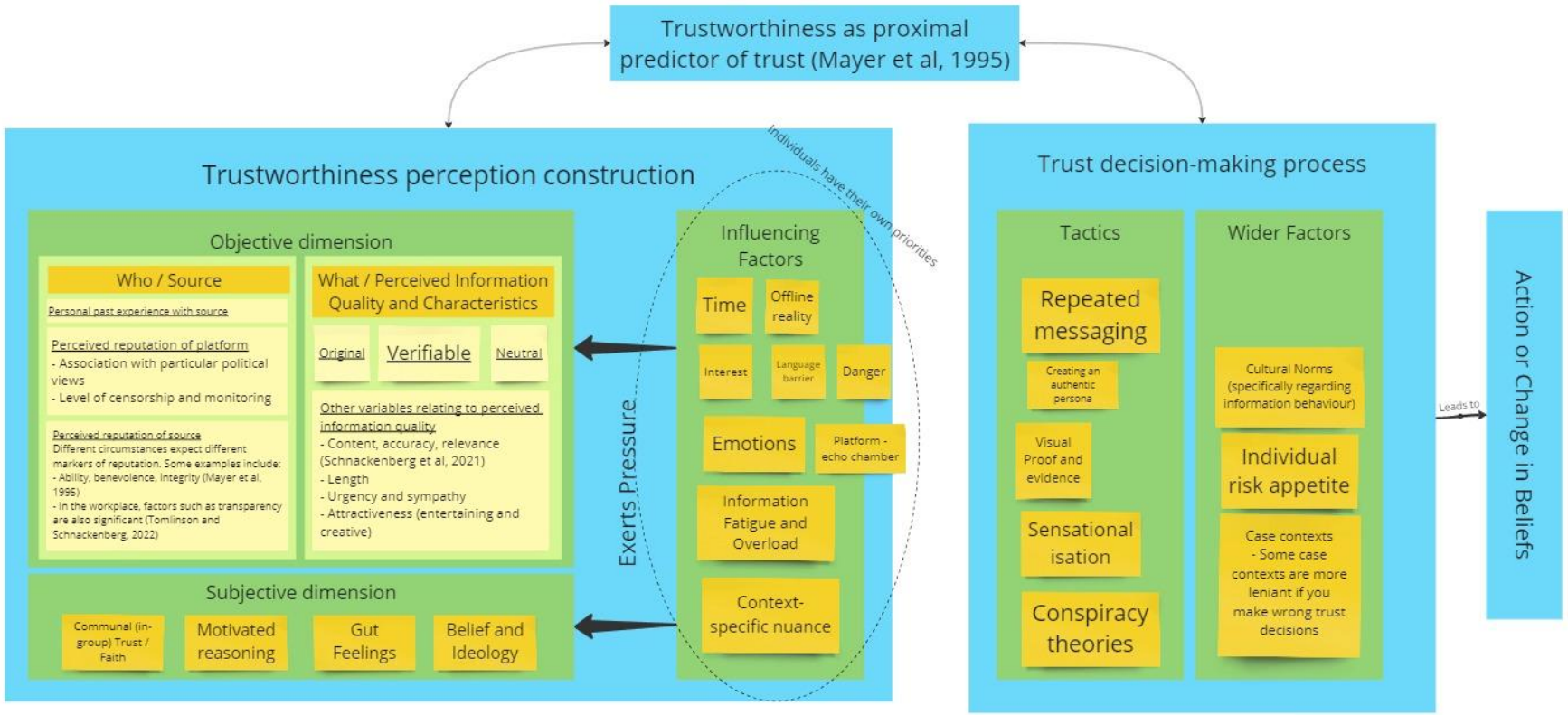


Figure 51 Proposed Information Trustworthiness Perception Construction framework, with lower level details.

In the remainder of this chapter, I will elaborate on each of the elements that make up this framework.

7.2.1 Trustworthiness perception construction

7.2.1.1 Objective dimension

Trustworthiness perceptions can be generally understood through an objective and subjective dimension. This section focuses on the objective dimension. This generally covers factors that are considered to be about the information under consideration. These are trustworthiness qualities that are generally seen as independent to the individual that is conducting the trustworthiness evaluation.

This dimension is further divided into source-based judgement and content-based judgement. Source-based judgement concerns trustworthiness perceptions constructed based on qualities of the source of the information. This can be the person or organisation that created the information, or the information broker that relays the information. This can also be the platform or vessel through which the information is put on to be delivered.

Content-based judgement concerns trustworthiness perceptions constructed based on the information itself. I have summarised some universal criteria from my research findings on qualities that contribute to trustworthiness perceptions. These are original, verifiable, and neutral.

Stadtler and Bromme (2014) proposes the content-source integration model which shares similar comparison to how I have divided the two dimensions. In their paper, they argue that information seekers have a “credibility judgement” on the knowledge itself, and “trustworthiness judgement” which is conducted on the information source. In their paper, they argue that both processes are intertwined and the distinction is merely theoretical.

My framework also echoes this viewpoint. In reality, individuals do not tend to evaluate both the source and the content independently.

7.2.1.1.1 Source-based judgement

Source-based judgement speaks to the disseminator and the dissemination platform. It is thus not based on the information itself, but the context in which the information is encountered. The author of the information, the disseminator of the information, and the method the information has been shared all play into building this judgement. This is summarised as **past experience with source, perceived reputation of platform**, and **perceived reputation of source.**

7.2.1.1.1.1 Past experience with source

The assumption made by social movement participants is that trustworthy sources are going to put out trustworthy information. Inversely, sources who have been untrustworthy are unlikely to put out trustworthy information. This judgement is made based on past experiences that individuals have of the information source, either through direct or indirect interactions. By already establishing a trustworthy profile, the decision-making process is simplified. Thus, individuals are more likely to naturally trust someone whom has established themselves as trustworthy, and is less likely to actively doubt and fact-check what they say. This is also echoed in Chapter 6, where B3 described explicitly that "Of course, I'm sure there's many times where, maybe there's somebody who's always kind of giving me trusted information, so maybe I'm not always checking it as much because that trust has been established."

The more time a person can spend with the information and/or the source, the more capacity there is to build a trustworthy perception of them. Thus, a more established information source – for instance, someone who is an established journalist, or has been an activist for a long time – is generally perceived as more trustworthy than a newcomer in this regard. The established information source is also often considered a form of expert, be it in practical knowledge or in experience of participation.

This is strongly evidenced in Section 5.3.4.1 and 5.3.4.2, where I conducted in-depth analyses on source-based and content-based trust. For both case contexts, respondents reacted strongly for the accuracy of content and overall credibility of the information source. However, both movements reacted differently towards certain aspects that played a part in creating the persona of a trustworthy information source. For instance, HKP valued the accuracy of information in the past from the information source, while BLM viewed trustworthiness of an information source more from the lens of doubt, by identifying aspects that would disqualify an information source as trustworthy. Both groups placed varying importance on different factors, thus creating different evaluation standards for the trustworthiness of information sources.

On the other hand, positive past experiences may not link to previous information behaviours of the sharer, but simply their reputation and integrity. For instance, friends and family were considered as trusted sources from both movements. Assuming that most people are not experts in the field, individuals nonetheless still are inclined to trust friends and family based on what they know of the integrity and personalities of these people. Similar, celebrities also share a similar position. Outside of social movements, celebrities are chosen to endorse commercial products, and those that trust the celebrities' recommendations are then more inclined to believe those products are suitable for them. Even within social movements, celebrities have some sort of sway depending on their persona.

7.2.1.1.1.2 Perceived reputation of platform

The reputation of the platform, on which the information is created and shared, have a certain degree of importance in forming perceptions of trustworthiness. Of course, the

unique qualities of the digital space means it is very easy to transfer information from one platform to another.

For instance, creators on more left-leaning platforms may have a different bias and agenda as compared to right-leaning platforms. Individuals may choose to be on platforms that they think they will find information that is relevant and appealing to them. Thus, platforms naturally gather like-minded individuals and create silos of information and echo chambers.

This is also echoed in wider news outlets. Kull et al (2003) prove that the individuals believe that news outlets they don't prefer have a higher level of misinformation, and vice versa. This creates an echo chamber where individuals only receive information from platforms that they prefer, and thus narrows their access to information that might prove otherwise. The selective exposure means people are biased to only choose like-minded media sources, ignoring other options (Messing and Westwood, 2012). The term echo chamber is now often used to illustrate how individuals become trapped in only receiving information that agrees with their views, rather than objective truth.

7.2.1.1.1.3 Perceived reputation of source

Through the survey findings as displayed in chapter 5, it is observed that there are groups of information sources that are considered more trustworthy than others. Friends and family, independent journalists, and activists ranked more highly in terms of levels of trustworthiness, while government bodies were overwhelmingly considered least trustworthy.

Communications literature has long proven the importance of the sociability of information sources. Speakers who are more charismatic are more well-perceived. Politicians who are more gregariousness receive more followers. This communication activity is applicable to online leaders as well (Huffaker, 2010). Huffaker also demonstrates the importance of reputation systems in constructing the trustworthiness of information sources, and draws attention to the relationship between credibility and the individual's ability to stimulate communication and yield influence in online groups. Such social capital allows individuals to appear as more authoritative – thus the information they share are automatically more trustworthy.

There are also context-specific variables. For instance, in a health information context the source's professional affiliation – the background of the source – is important in informing trustworthiness perceptions (König and Jucks 2020). In learning, students may measure the trustworthiness of the teaching they receive through their perceived learning gains. In this particular social movement context, context-specific variables included the source's political affiliation.

Context-specific measuring tools exist to help assess the reputation of sources. The Muenster Epistemic Trustworthiness Inventory, for example, is used to research laypeople's judgements of the trustworthiness of science communication (Hendricks, Kienhues, and

Bromme 2015), and lays out three general aspects of trustworthiness: expertise (competence); integrity (honesty); and benevolence (considerateness). Within the activism space, it is perhaps harder to develop a precise measuring tool, considering that each social movement comprise of different populations and have different driving forces in play. As such, each social movement warrants its own in-depth investigation.

7.2.1.1.2 Content-based judgement

Content-based judgement is made based on the qualities that the information is seen to possess. Respondents were asked throughout this research to describe qualities trustworthy information would have. These answers have been summarised into four key areas: **original, verifiable,** and **neutral.**

7.2.1.1.2.1 Original

"Original" encompasses two dimensions: how recent the information is, and whether it is conveyed by the source of the information itself, as compared to being relayed by someone else.

Relevance of the information is determined by how recent it is. Time and date are essential contexts to consider when understanding the accurate framing of a social movement. For example, one may use a dated incident of police violence to incite outrage. The incident itself may not have relevance to the social movement, but would be falsely attributed as being evidence of police violence against protesters and cause direct impact on protester sentiments and actions.

However, this information should also not be exclusive, as has been expanded upon when discussing the criteria of "verifiable". For instance, multiple eyewitness accounts of the same event would be both original and verifiable. However, if these eyewitness accounts are indirect (e.g. A friend of a friend witnessed the event) then its credibility as "original" would be lowered. Respondents who do engage in fact-checking also tend to trace the information to its source, instead of relying on indirect reporting. Through ascertaining its provenance, individuals are reassured of the authenticity of the information they have received.

7.2.1.1.2.2 Verifiable

Trustworthy information should also be "verifiable". Or, in other words, it cannot exist in isolation. Instead, trustworthy information should exist in many forms and come from many different sources, which are accessible to the information recipient. Information receivers expect to be able to see the same information repeated by other people, for them to consider that the information is trustworthy. Rather than favouring the more tabloid-like approach of an exclusive scoop, social movement participants prefer information that is repeated continuously. In Chapter 6, "verification and corroboration" was frequently brought up by respondents of both the survey and the interviews.

This is also a direct act of opposition against state-controlled media that parrots out state narratives. The democratisation of media (Carroll and Hackett, 2006) creates a method for the ordinary person to receive information beyond state actors. State actors and state-controlled media no longer occupy the sole authoritative position in disseminating news and information. While a singular source can spin a narrative that suits their needs, social movement participants are now actively diversifying their information channels to circumvent such monopoly. In practice, respondents indicated that they would often look for multiple sources that report on the same information or message. Some may even consider information that share contrasting views or messages. This was discussed in Chapter 6 in detail.

The introduction of fact-checking as a good practice for considering information on the internet also aligns with the notion of trustworthy information as "verifiable". If something is true, then there has to be proof provided from other information sources. Further, there must be a starting point – an original source of information, which can be located even through the complicated network of information flow. Trustworthy information thus cannot exist in an independent bubble. It must be connected or linked to other available sources of information for its trustworthiness to be perceived as valid.

7.2.1.1.2.3 Neutral

The keyword that stood out the most throughout this research was "neutral". Neutrality also covers descriptors such as objective, impartial, and free from bias. To be neutral is to be perceived as not having any agenda – to be a simple relayer of information without adding anything to the objective truth. Neutral information is thus meant to be conveyed in an impartial way, exhibiting no political leanings or other biases, nor should it be sensationalised in any way. Neutral information thus only contains facts and does not inherently guide the information recipient into thinking one way or another.

In Chapter 6, the code "Objectiveness" was used for responses that denoted neutrality as one of their key characteristics for information trustworthiness. However, the term neutrality is used here to avoid confusion with the objective dimension that this term sits under.

This is most comparable to the traditional role of media, and the lack of perceived neutrality also can explain why traditional media has increasingly lost its authoritative voice among social movements. As traditional media exhibit a bias towards government agencies – as often they are government funded to some degree – social movement participants then perceive those traditional media platforms as no longer neutral, and thus is not likely to present information in a neutral manner. Or, in other words they cease to become trustworthy, and the information they disseminate also cannot be trustworthy. Also in Chapter 6, the code "bias and agenda" was the most commonly mentioned criteria that caused doubt. As argued in that chapter, the perceived existence of bias and agenda negatively impacts trustworthiness perceptions.

7.2.1.1.2.4 Other variables relating to perceived information quality

There are various existing frameworks that conceptualise trustworthiness through describing information quality. While these were not explored in detail in this study, they nonetheless describe other facets of information quality which are significant. Schnackenberg et al (2021) proposed the keywords of content, accuracy, and relevance in determining perceived information quality, which the paper applies to a managerial and business context. Archival theory uses terms such as provenance, authenticity and reliability (Sexton et al, 2017). The same paper argues for transparency as the starting point from which trustworthiness can develop.

Through this research, other variables observed are length, urgency and sympathy of the message, as well as attractiveness in terms of entertainment value and creativity.

Length, and by extension the difficulty of comprehension, plays a subtle part. Respondents indicated clearly that they would be less inclined to read longer (and thus potentially more complex) information. Topolinski (2012) argues that materials that are easy to process means individuals are more inclined to think of it as more coherent. Information that is more complex, then, is automatically excluded from comprehension as individuals immediately judge that as taking too much effort.

7.2.1.2 Subjective dimension

Three main criteria are summarised as subjective qualities of information trustworthiness - "motivated reasoning", "communal trust", and "gut feelings". The first two are well-established terms within theories of trust, while the last quality is a rather informal and colloquial terminology. All three are present and observable from the participants of this study, and are inferred rather than explicitly being stated among responses. Finally, "belief and ideology" is threaded through all three of these qualities, as one's political inclination and belief system influences how they perceive the world around them and thus what is accurate to them.

Thus, I conclude that respondents themselves are not aware that they are also using these three criteria to judge the trustworthiness of information. If asked in concrete terms whether or not a piece of information is real, they might not describe themselves as employing these subjective qualities in the decision making process. However, in their daily information behaviour, they are subconsciously using these subjective criteria to form their trustworthiness perceptions.

Such subjective criteria are innate to each individual. These are factors that stem from their own experiences and beliefs. I believe a closer examination of individual's information behaviour would reap even more insight into the process and reveal even more subjective factors that influence individual's decisions to trust. My research findings evidence that subjective judgements should not be overlooked, and play a strong role in influencing how individuals perceive information trustworthiness.

7.2.1.2.1 Communal (in-group) trust / Faith

Communal trust as a concept is inflated with faith. With both case contexts chosen for this thesis, neither of them have heavy religious influences. While religious faith can certainly contribute to perceptions of trustworthiness, it can also be explained as trust in the community. The community, religious or not, is what the individual places their trust by. What is trusted by the community is thus naturally trusted by the individual. Similarly, those within the community are more likely to be trustworthy in the information they share.

Each social situation creates its own community. In the social movement context, this is rather simple – the community is those who are perceived to be standing for the same movement, who share the same beliefs. Each protester may have their own perception of how large or how exclusive this community may be. Of course, there can be sub-factions and different strands of the same movement that may not be viewed in the same way throughout the entire movement, but the common cause shared is usually enough for the entire community to be viewed as a friendly whole.

In Chapter 4, social network analysis was used to capture a glimpse into the communities formed by the two social movements. The information behaviour of actors in those social networks indicate how the wider social movement groups coalesce and gather information from sources. For BLM, this was across geographical boundaries. For HKP, individuals from different professional groups were joined together in a wider information network. The establishment of these communities allow communal trust to build and thus influencing what information is considered trustworthy.

Throughout Chapter 5 and 6, respondents also displayed a general sense of familiarity and, to an extent, trust towards fellow social movement participants. However, it should be emphasised that this trust is more so of the character or intention of other protestors – that they will not try to lie or share false information deliberately. Yet, respondents indicated that other protestors can also be fallible and make wrong judgements on what is truthful information. Thus, there is not blind faith where it comes to accepting information shared by other protestors.

7.2.1.2.2 Motivated reasoning

The theory of 'motivated reasoning' is affirmed as still very relevant and applicable throughout this thesis. The propensity to trust things that align with your own beliefs is visible in many situations, and social movements are no different. If anything, the natural establishment of a community, or in-group – as argued in the previous sub-section – lends itself greatly to foster an environment where motivated reasoning is encouraged. As individuals in this group all share very similar if not identical beliefs, they are also sharing information that affirm and align with each other's beliefs.

In Chapter 5, survey results reaffirm motivated reasoning as an indirect, hidden factor in determining information trustworthiness. When asked explicitly, respondents did not consider alignment with own beliefs as a way of determining whether or not information was trustworthy. Yet throughout Chapter 5 and 6 we can see evidence of respondents inclined to believe in information shared by fellow social movement participants, or at least

believe that they have good intentions. In fact, interview respondent B4 described that she was happy to stay in an echo chamber of information that agreed with her views.

Lewandowsky et al (2012) argue that once individuals have agreed with information, they cannot recognise it as incorrect until they receive a correction or retraction. Their paper argues that to actively doubt information they agree with, individuals must suspend their belief, which is difficult to achieve. Information that is consistent with their own beliefs are easily accepted and becomes highly resistant to change. That then enforces their belief, creating a cycle of knowledge built upon that specific belief. Should they encounter information that goes against something they know, they must then reject that entire cycle of knowledge or else their knowledge becomes inconsistent.

Instead, it should then be considered natural that individuals will always be predisposed to believe things that align with their beliefs, and doubt things that do not. Schwartz et al (2007) describes such doubt stemming from the impression that something doesn't feel right, which prompts closer scrutiny of the message, which we now coin as fact-checking.

7.2.1.2.3 Gut feelings

The last quality, "gut feelings", are simply what feels right. The reasons for which cannot be clearly identified, it just simply "feels right" in the moment. The decision to trust thus has a more abstract reasoning behind it, instead of being able to be succinctly explained by individual factors or qualities. This gut feeling goes beyond impulsivity or instinct, but instead is a belief, a trust that does not need to be ground in reason. Perhaps the most vague of all the qualities presented in this thesis, gut feelings nonetheless greatly simplifies the decision-making process in what to trust. Used explicitly by H1 in his interview, the term is used to describe his decision to trust activist organisations to donate to, and trust information sources that are trusted by others that he trusts. As an umbrella term, gut feelings can be used as a broad catch-all for unexplainable and perhaps even irrational factors that lead to trust.

Simmel (1950) describes the act of trusting as a leap of faith. In Simmel's writing, the act of trusting is only necessary when individuals have no total knowledge of the situation ahead. If the individuals had total and complete knowledge, there would be no need to trust (as there is no risk-taking involved), and if individuals were completely ignorant, they would have no reasoning to base that trust upon. Simmel states that "good reasons" and available knowledge both serve as the foundations for trust decisions, for individuals to make leaps of faith.

7.2.1.2.4 Belief and Ideology

Given that my case contexts are social movements, belief and ideology plays a far more obvious role. Political belief and ideology influence how individuals perceive the community, or in-group, around them, thus determining what aligns with who they perceive as their in-

group, which thus builds communal trust. Further, motivated reasoning is also informed by their prior beliefs and ideology.

7.2.1.3 Influencing factors

There are other factors to be taken into account which can influence the construction of trustworthiness perceptions. Time, fear, and fatigue all exert unignorable impact on information behaviour and perceptions of information trustworthiness, and were elements highlighted throughout this research. What sets it apart from subjective criterion is that these influencing factors are external and subject to regular change. For instance, an individual's available time to assess information trustworthiness changes based on what they are doing or their circumstances. Thus, these factors can also be added on or subtracted to, such as in a laboratory setting or through deliberate manipulation.

Time is a recurring obstacle highlighted from participant responses. The lack of time hinders the ability for individuals to properly form accurate trustworthiness perceptions. Prabha et al (2007) argues that the factor of time affects the thoroughness of information seeking, the sources accessed, and the mode of inquiry. For example, they cannot spend as much time fact-checking to ensure that information they receive is verifiable or original. Instead, they will have to move on to the trust decision making stage before being able to thoroughly examine and form a more precise trustworthiness perception. Thus, their trustworthiness perceptions are incomplete – or at least, not to the extent that they could have achieved – and thus their decisions to trust may be subsequently impaired, as they make that decision with incomplete knowledge. Connaway et al (2011) have written that convenience is a critical factor in information-seeking behaviours, which also proves the significance of time.

Negative emotions such as fear are influencing individual information behaviour, which again subsequently impacts how they may view certain information and information sources. The internet was meant to be a safe, place where individuals could voice their own opinions with little repercussions. Yet, we can see that negative emotions are growing in this space as censorship and other mechanisms become more and more effective. Emotions such as anger and guilt are also spread through the internet, potentially fostering a toxic space that could encourage more violent and irrational behaviour (González-Bailón and Wang, 2016). Moreover, censorship and other oppressive measures mean individuals are more hesitant to share or even receive information.

Finally, information overload and information fatigue also have an impact on the process of constructing trustworthiness perceptions. As highlighted throughout this research, the digital space has fostered numerous opportunities and networks for information to flow freely across geographical boundaries. At the same time, this has created an information overload, where there is more information available than individuals can process. Individuals report becoming overwhelmed by the sheer volume of information they are given access to. Individuals thus suffer greater emotional strain, have less time for each piece of information, and may become mentally fatigued in the process. This impacts their information behaviour.

There are other factors that may play into this, depending on the context and the individual. Socio-economic circumstances, for instance, may influence access to information. Strict censorship laws will affect what information can be easily disseminated, and what information may be inaccessible to the regular individual. Danger, such as the risk of incarceration, sharply increase the individual's unwillingness to take part in the information network. Language barriers mean information widely known to one language group may be inaccessible to another. Personal interest as a factor heavily influences the information behaviour of sports fans according to Boehmer and Tandoc's 2015 study. Individuals all have their own priorities among these factors which will influence their trustworthiness perceptions, and will be affected to different degrees. Although there are generalisable observations, it would be a disservice to treat any population as a homogeneous whole and neglect the intersectionality and diversity of any group.

7.2.2 Trust decision-making process

7.2.2.1 Tactics

Often information disseminators hope to convince others of the trustworthiness of their information. While they cannot directly influence the trustworthiness perception construction process, they can certainly employ various tactics to influence the trust decision-making process. Some of these that emerged through this research are: repeated messaging; creating an authentic persona; visual proof and evidence; sensationalisation; and conspiracy theories.

Research has proven that repeated messaging will increase the acceptance of information as true (Begg, Anas, and Farinacci 1992; Hasher, Goldstein, Toppino 1997; Lewandowsky et al 2012). This applies for both correct information and incorrect information. In fact, Lewandowsky et al (2012) argues that the repetition of initial misinformation has a stronger and more reliable negative impact than the repetition of any subsequent retractions. That is, once misinformation is repeated and ingrained, it is more difficult to correct it, even if the same tactics are employed.

The idea of an authentic persona emerged through this research through the code "necessity to reveal personal information", as explored in Section 6.3.1.2. Respondents viewed that they had to sacrifice privacy and anonymity in order to be relatable to respondents. Within the social movement context, there is a marked emphasis on protecting oneself through prioritising privacy and safety, especially in the digital space. It is very likely that in a different context that it will be easier for information disseminators to have an authentic and open persona online.

In Section 5.3.4.2 this research has proven that various forms of evidence elicit different degrees of trust. Some forms of evidence are more well-received, and others will instead garner more doubt. Thus, the effective provision of convincing evidence is necessary. Of the four forms of evidence tested in the survey (confidentiality claims; hearsay; external links; visual proof) only visual proof would be trusted more than doubted.

Sensationalisation as a tactic was not well-received by respondents in this research, but nonetheless there is evidence of its effectiveness in manipulating trust behaviour. Berger (2011) argues that emotional arousal in general increases people's willingness to pass on information. Emotional arousal comes from creating content that evoke extreme emotions, such as disgust, fear, or happiness.

Conspiracy theories and propaganda both point to the deliberate manufacturing of content to change truth. Bedford (2010) terms this as agnogenesis, or the process of the wilful manufacture of mistaken beliefs. Through engineering misinformation, information creators thus influence recipients to believe their version of the truth.

7.2.2.2 Wider factors

The wider context also affects information behaviour. These are pre-existing factors that serve as the contextual backdrop against which individuals are situated. These can be cultural norms, specifically regarding information behaviour; individual risk appetite; and case context.

The differences between different socio-cultural groups must also be acknowledged. Some elements of this framework will be a lot more impactful for some groups, while other qualities might not be as prominent. For instance, appealing to communal trust is repeated throughout responses from HKP participants, which was not highlighted in BLM responses.

While there are general trends that can be observed – as captured through my proposed definition of information trustworthiness – different socio-cultural groups exhibit different trusting behaviours. To understand what appeals to participants, we must approach the activist space with goodwill and genuine interest. For instance, in section 5.3.4.1.1.2 various affective elements also influence trustworthiness perceptions to certain degrees.

Individual risk appetite has to do with the risk-averse behaviours of individuals. Individuals naturally have different risk appetites related to what they do – not just in information behaviour, but also in daily life such as investing money. Someone who is more risk-averse may be more cautious to trust, whereas someone who is less risk-averse are more likely to trust. Mayer et al (1995) defines trusting as an action that incurs vulnerability – less risk-averse individuals will accept a higher degree of vulnerability. This risk appetite is also applicable to their information behaviours.

The case context also matters. Not just the specific society individuals are situated in, but in which scenario they are receiving and sharing information. For instance, BLM users tend to share information publicly in order to reach individuals that do not know of the cause of the movement. However, HKP users would share things more privately. This is reflected in the different communication platforms they use. At the same time, the context also affects what they share and how they share. Anonymity is a contested tactic by both movements – to

HKP, anonymity is the norm given their fear of prosecution. However, various respondents have also stressed the importance of presenting a genuine and relatable persona to be believable, which contradicts anonymity. Tomlinson and Schnackenberg (2021) for instance argue the importance of transparency in influencing trustworthiness perceptions.

7.2.3 Summarising a model of information trustworthiness

Through this research, I have produced a framework of the concept of information trustworthiness, a way to conceptualise it to facilitate both theoretical and practical discussion. The framework illustrates how individuals in social movements make trustworthiness perception judgements regarding the information they are exposed to, which leads to their trust decision-making, which finally leads to change in action or change in beliefs. By differentiating between information trustworthiness, and the decision to trust, as two separate steps, this thesis establishes how information in itself can change and alter what individuals choose to believe in.

There are objective qualities that can be understood universally and serve as a marker for differentiating trustworthy information. These concern the perceptions of the source, as well as perceived quality and characteristics of how the information is presented. At the same time, there are subjective qualities that need to be taken into account while understanding information receiving and sharing behaviour of social movement participants. Together, objective and subjective qualities form the basis of perceived information trustworthiness, and thus construct truth within its context.

This framework serves as a reminder that individuals make their own judgements on information trustworthiness. There are factors and tactics that can be employed to influence perceptions of trustworthiness, but ultimately it is a combination of factors, both external and internal, as well as objective and subjective, that contribute to the perception of information trustworthiness.

7.3 Impact

This thesis has always set out to address the issue of information trust as it is happening in the real world. This section summarises the potential impact of this study.

In the modern era of the Internet and mass communication tools, individuals are receiving and sharing information to a high degree. Information brokers, those who control and disseminate information, also wield more power than they perceive. At the same time, it is also easier for individuals to become information brokers. Even passive receiving behaviours, such as reading news articles or scrolling through social media feeds, can have significant impact on deciding what information ultimately forms discourse and influences the wider context.

There is a growing awareness of the power information has in social movements. This has led to a deliberate attempt to wield it, both for and against the movement. As digital and mass communication tools continue to be developed and gain popularity, so should both activists and academics adapt to and be alerted to how that impacts on information flow and information use.

Online networks and offline networks reflect one another – thus, information happening in one space will impact the other. Instead of replacing offline networks and activity, the digital space only adds to the opportunities that are available to social movement participants, allowing them to circumvent obstacles and create resistance. There is space for both traditional and more contemporary methods of activism to spread in both online and offline spaces. Individuals are making an effort to cross those language, geographical, and cultural backgrounds actively to share information – networking and communicating emerged as important factors driving information sharing decisions.

Individuals are increasingly relying on information from social media platforms, rather than traditional news platforms, which aligns with the democratisation of media as written by Carroll and Hackett (2006). If anything the trend is intensifying as traditional news media are no longer trusted, let alone relied on. Traditional activist, government, and news organisations no longer have the same sway, unless they can reimagine themselves as trustworthy individuals in competition with new media. Instead, journalists and individual activists are the ones looked to, perhaps explained by the nature of social media platform that has become more personal and interactive. Instead of interacting with faceless institutions and groups, social movement participants now value interpersonal connections.

Since the commencement of this doctorate research in 2020, disinformation and misinformation has acquired an even larger spotlight among the global stage. The COVID-19 pandemic, the various elections happening in Western governments, and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, just to mention some examples, have been a breeding ground for the manipulation of information. Unlike social movements, which largely have a unified cause that participants are happy to stand behind – not all political events have such clear-cut distinctions. The phenomena of misinformation and disinformation during COVID-19, for instance, has been researched extensively in the last few years, illustrating how easy it is for inaccurate information to impact societal patterns and beliefs (e.g. Yang et al, 2021; Loomba et al, 2021; Roozenbeek et al, 2020).

Fortunately, there seems to also be a growing awareness of information literacy skills that can help combat misinformation and disinformation. Respondents from both social movements addressed in this study seem to exhibit a rather high awareness of information literacy. Both groups have skepticism towards internet information, and believe that there are counter-agents actively creating disinformation to influence the social movement. This awareness has led them to practice fact-checking and other literacy skills when reading information about the social movement. Respondents all showed a high initiative to fact-checking, and such fact-checking would impact their behaviour to a certain extent. Both populations are also set in relatively well-developed countries, where they have a high enough education level and access to digital technologies, which enable them to develop critical literacy skills and use them when desired.

However, whether or not this is applicable towards the entire movement requires further examination. Respondents of both groups expressed strong agreement that the spread of misinformation and disinformation has caused significant hindrance to their social movement. At the same time, individuals report higher confidence in their own ability to discern truth, than in others' ability to do the same.

Often times, individuals are less rational in their information behaviour than they proclaim. Despite an awareness of information literacy as argued previously, in practice it is not always performed in every occasion. It is also not realistic to presume that every individual will have the time and energy to conduct thorough fact-checking of every information they see, let alone combat information fatigue and information overload. Now that there is so much information, the problem is now to determine what information is most effective and most useful. Moreover, how long can this vigilance be sustained? Information fatigue and overload aside, as individuals lose interest in the movement their capacity to absorb related information reduces as well.

For activists, sometimes transforming, instead of sustaining the same action repeatedly, is the right answer. The HKP conversation shifted to court cases, BLM shifted to critical race theory. The same information is now recycled and sustains an extension of its original cause. The impact of the information cycle persists and adapts for the longevity of the movement – just as the movement persists and adapts through different forms as long as the underlying grievances are not addressed.

Trust is ultimately an ephemeral quality. While there are shifts in trusted disseminators and groups over the decades with the rise of the internet, trust perceptions can also change in a short period of time, as seen by the position of Telegram through HKP. Twitter, which was a popular platform for both movements, may also be replaced given the concerns about censorship after Elon Musk's takeover.

Finally, we have to recognise that participants come from all kinds of backgrounds (survey) and have different experiences with the same movement (interviews), and thus have different information behaviour. Even in a populace of a specified context, we cannot treat them as homogeneous – thus, we must necessarily accept that there are different perceptions of the truth. Through the framework of trust perception construction I have presented in this chapter, we can perhaps predict how individuals develop perceptions of trust and thus anticipate best ways to communicate accurate information and dispel misinformation.

In conclusion, this thesis delivers the following impacts. Firstly, I have developed a conceptual framework of information trustworthiness perception, which will significantly enrich academic research in the fields of trust and information behaviour. Secondly, this thesis can inform activists about the importance of understanding how individuals perceive trustworthy information, and how this perception serves as a foundation for their trust decision making. This thus allows activists to anticipate and develop strategies to further social causes. Lastly, this thesis aids both activists and governments in navigating the increasingly complex information landscape. Opportunities and challenges alike will continue to emerge – especially that around information and digital literacy. To move forward is to raise awareness of its importance and combat untrustworthy information.

7.4 Future research

In this chapter, I presented an initial framework for understanding how information trustworthiness is constructed and influences trust. Future research would be able to test this framework against different contexts and social groups so to better understand trustworthiness perceptions.

As a first step, it would be beneficial to examine trustworthiness perceptions of other social movement and activist groups, especially groups with different levels of access to online communication tools or digital literacy. After all, much of this research focused on internet communication with the shifting trends of contemporary social movement. Yet, there are still political struggles that do not benefit from equal access to the world wide web.

Other avenues of study include stepping away entirely from social movements. Given that social movements are largely unified movements, it is easy for trust (communal trust in particular) to build given the common cause and sense of kinships. The question is then whether or not my framework would hold outside of such an environment. Should a context be fraught of conflict and risk, would my proposed framework hold up? What other factors would become significant?

Intersections of gender, class, and age is also not addressed in this research. As reiterated throughout this paper, contextual factors affect each individual. While we can certainly generalise overall trends from social movement populations, it would be careless to consider them as a homogenous whole. Factors such as gender, class, age, and sexuality affect individual risk appetites of individuals, and can influence behaviours such as access to resources and social networks. A microscopic view of these intersectionalities would further enrich our understanding of trustworthiness perceptions and information behaviour.

Moreover, it would enrich the framework to tie it back theoretically to other domains of trust, such as institutional trust and interpersonal trust. While this thesis looks at generalised trust, there have been extensive literature and ongoing new research evidencing the importance of such concepts (e.g. Zhang 2021; Wildman et al 2025; Carlsson et al, 2024). Future research could look at combining these theoretical dimensions. Further, throughout this study I have relied extensively on literature from trust research and information behaviour research. There is capacity to pull both together in discussions of information literacy, especially with the encroaching presence of disinformation and misinformation in information spaces. This paper contributes to a complex space which merits dedicated research and investigation.

Finally, this research also leads to significant avenues of inquiry on the topic of disinformation and misinformation in general. I have chosen contexts where involved populations exhibit high digital and information literacy. However, this is not always the case. As digital technologies involve in a rapid pace, the priority for academics, policy-makers, and the regular individual moving forward is to catch-up with the growing ramifications and implications of the use of such tools and information. To what extent are individuals responsible for their own safe consumption of information on the internet? To what extent should intervention exist?

7.5 Conclusion

As the definition of information trustworthiness is established, so should we cast a new light on who holds the influence on information sharing in the digital age. While the information itself is discussed independently of its information disseminator, nonetheless the value of information can also be impacted by its source, its disseminator, and its platform. This thesis has offered an in-depth examination of current perceptions towards disseminators and platforms. Certain groups were considered more trustworthy than others. Some platforms are also now under scrutiny.

In this chapter, I have presented a dissection of a framework of information trustworthiness. This framework is the informed by three data collection phases, presented in Chapters 4 to 6, and fits into the academic legacy of trust research. Through this research, I have conceptualised the construction of trustworthiness perceptions and presented it in a broad framework in this chapter. I have identified the factors influencing trustworthiness perception, and the factors influencing trust-making. Understanding how individuals in social movements develop trust in information is critical to understanding how they develop, as we increasingly enter a digitally-motivated networked society.

8. Conclusion

In the beginning of this thesis, I posed the following research question:

How is information trustworthiness constructed within social movements, and how does its subsequent disseminations and comprehensions influence perceptions of trust and trustworthiness among social movement actors?

Along with the following sub-questions:

How is the concept of information trustworthiness understood by social movement participants?

How do the concepts of trust and trustworthiness influence information creation, consumption, and dissemination?

Finally, I set out to establish:

A high-level framework that captures the concept of generalised information trustworthiness.

Throughout this thesis, I have thoroughly answered the above. In this chapter, I offer a concise conclusion of my research and invite future avenues of thinking.

8.1 Research Outcomes

In this thesis, I have first established the importance of studying information trustworthiness within the social movement context. Using a pragmatic lens and a mixed methods approach, I have captured various key facets of information behaviour and trustworthiness perceptions of my two case studies, Black Lives Matter and the Hong Kong protests. With my findings, I have developed a model of generalised trust and trustworthiness to explain how information trustworthiness perceptions are developed. This model encompasses the process of trustworthiness perception development, and how it thus serves as a major driving force for individuals to make decisions on what to trust and not trust.

Through focusing on two specific contexts, I am able to compare theoretical perspectives against real world situations, and use actual on the ground developments to inform my theoretical arguments. As iterated throughout this thesis, I believe discussing the concept of trust is meaningless without taking into account the actual practice of trust. By drawing on traits and behaviours from the specific populations, I am able to explain their trustworthiness perceptions in a useful manner that applies to their situations and information behaviours.

This thesis adds to a long history of trust research. Trust research cannot be divorced from the social world, and this thesis seeks to extrapolate a theoretical discussion of trust from a social setting. As emphasised in the introduction of the thesis, a concept of trust is not

meaningful if it cannot be understood and related to by the very group of people they are meant to apply to. This thesis sits in the intersection between trust, politics, and technology.

I also provide a summarised answer of my research questions. The first sub-question I posed was: “How is the concept of information trustworthiness understood by social movement participants?”

This thesis has answered this thoroughly, especially in Chapter 7 which presents a triangulation and discussion of the data. Social movement participants who participate exhibited a strong awareness of the importance of information trustworthiness, and generally have skepticism about the information made available to them through digital networks. There are objective and subjective dimensions to their information trustworthiness perception construction, which interact with external pressures and wider factors. This research also highlights that while generalisable insights can be captured and conceptualised into a framework, it is important to note that each individual will build their independent judgements and should not be treated as a homogeneous group.

The second sub-question was: “How do the concepts of trust and trustworthiness influence information creation, consumption, and dissemination?”

This thesis has also captured insights into how social movement participants interact with perceived truth, and elements of misinformation and disinformation. In my data chapters, I have presented how social movement participants now interact with information flow, and how they have learnt lessons from their involvement in social movements when it comes to information trustworthiness. Information trustworthiness perceptions have a significant impact on information flows – what is considered trustworthy is thus considered worthy of being further disseminated, which can play a part in swaying the trajectory of social movements.

With my proposed framework of information trustworthiness perception construction, I thus also attempt to answer my overarching research question: “How is information trustworthiness constructed within social movements, and how does its subsequent disseminations and comprehensions influence perceptions of trust and trustworthiness among social movement actors?” However, it is imperative that this model be tested against other contexts and disciplines, to ascertain its generalisability, and so it can be truly reflective of how trust and trustworthiness is constructed.

I have drawn out overarching conclusions from my chosen case contexts, and also revealed context-specific factors which should not be overlooked. My framework provides an approach as to how we can further conceptualise information trustworthiness, and understand the relationship between trustworthiness perception construction, trust decisions, and subsequent changes in actions or belief based on information individuals receive.

As such, I have addressed my research questions sufficiently. It is apparent throughout this thesis information trust is context and time specific. Further, with the advancements in

digital technology and tools of mass communication, so has there been more opportunities for disinformation and misinformation to become embedded into general discourse.

8.2 Future research and Limitations

This research also creates future avenues of research that should be pursued. The model of information trustworthiness should be tested against other contexts, so to enrich and refine the way we can conceptualise the discussion of information trustworthiness. Thus, its testing grounds need to be expanded to other social movements and other settings. Further, this research also illuminates the potential of combining trust research and information behaviour research. Pursuing an interdisciplinary approach when querying such topic areas not only facilitates a more holistic view, but also aids in developing something which our research subjects can understand and relate to. Further, this research has limitations which can also be compensated for in future research. The scope is limited to two social movements and only in the digital space. Pivotal areas such as offline information behaviour need to be addressed as well.

Further, this doctoral research heavily revolved around the social media platform Twitter, now rebranded as X. Upon the acquisition of Twitter by Elon Musk in 2023, there have been radical changes in policy about content and access. For example, changes around profile visibility were introduced, with a subscription system introduced where subscribed members were more likely to be visible on the platform. Members could also edit their posts and exceed the 280 character limit, the extent of which is based on how much they paid. There have also been changes in content moderation, where journalists and academics have noted that there has been a rise in hate speech on the platform (CNN, 2022). Thus, the information networks and behaviours of Twitter as captured in this thesis may soon become dated as Twitter users adapt to these new changes and circumstances.

The unique context of activist spaces add complexity to this otherwise already layered concept. Having a common cause unites individuals together, but also invites opposition to intervene in said spaces. In our networked age (Castells, 2012), information is created and spread rapidly, permeating those barriers between groups in an uncontrolled manner. Trust has become less about interpersonal relationships, but instead of unknown entities interacting with one another. New vulnerabilities arise, and there must be new strategies to address the proliferation of misinformation and disinformation. A healthy society must necessarily be built on the back of trustworthy information networks and flows.

How does trust and distrust interact with one another in this increasingly digital age? How do activist spaces and relationships adapt and evolve, or collapse, in light of this? Mayer et al (1985)'s widely quoted theory of trust and trustworthiness continues to inspire conceptual development in trust research. My research builds on such legacy and history, hoping to define generalised trust and information trustworthiness in a digital age.

I have also proven the benefits, if not necessity, of adopting mixed methods research in investigating social movements. As this thesis establishes, I believe that adopting multiple data collection methods is essential to investigate contemporary social movements. To achieve mixed methods, however, requires the extra step of synthesising the methods to ensure that they interact with one another, instead of running parallel. In the course of conducting research for this thesis, it was extremely easy for me to lose focus on how the grand narrative flowed through all of my data collection phases.

As such, I made use of Miro, an online whiteboard software and created the following table to keep track of how the threads of my thesis linked together. To illustrate the complexity, I provide a screenshot of the board near the end of my data collection journey below in Figure 52.

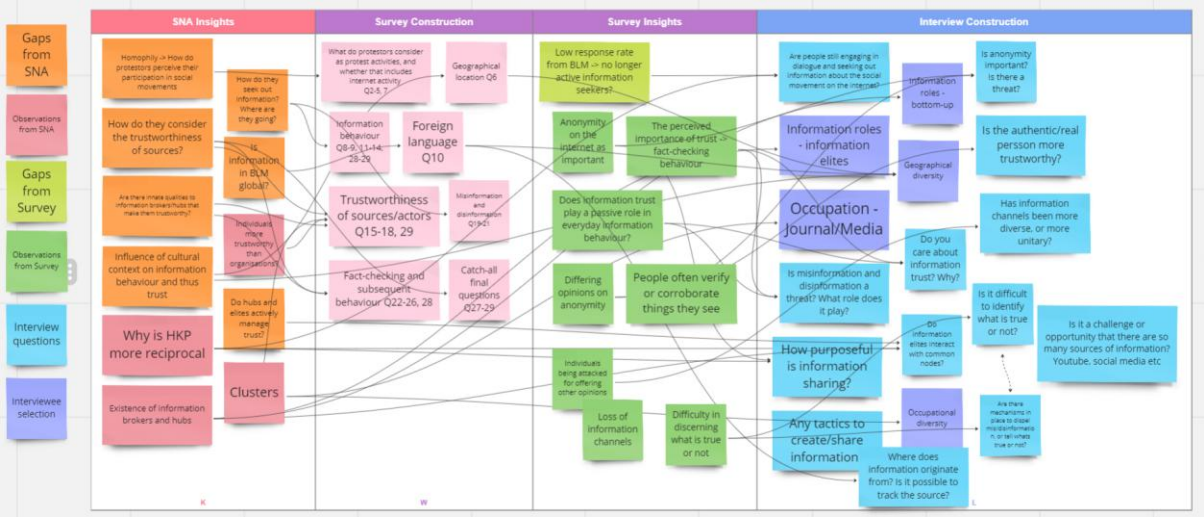


Figure 52 Mixed methods research design presented in Miro.

While the process of developing the research design was complicated, I have become even more determined that mixed methods designs are necessary to investigate information behaviours and trustworthiness perceptions. While single method studies have their merits and can achieve depth, it is through the mixing of perspectives and methods that allow for a holistic view of the social world.

8.3 Practical recommendations

As such, I pose the following recommendations:

To activists and information brokers:

- While social movements become increasingly decentralised, the responsibility of activists and information brokers to spread information becomes increasingly

significant. It is thus imperative that this group recognises this power they wield and thus pay attention to what they share and disseminate. They are in the position to act as gatekeepers against fake information – not to limit access to information to the individuals who rely on them for information, but to help filter out disinformation and misinformation.

- Information brokers should also perform due diligence in using information platforms that are secure and safe for information receivers. Internet safety and privacy have emerged as major concerns within social movements, and it would be expected for information brokers to also respect these concerns.

To the individual social movement participant:

- There is much to gain from manipulating narratives to try and change public discourse during social movements. It is thus necessary to be more vigilant in surveying the information they receive and further share along, even if the information is coming from people they trust and know very well. They should also be encouraged to actively take effort in dispelling disinformation and misinformation.
- This thesis has also revealed that individuals tend to trust their own judgement and opinion, and believe they have the ability to discern what is true from what is false. However, in political contexts where false information can lead to detrimental consequences, it is recommended that individuals take more caution in what information they receive and actively fact-check, instead of solely relying on their independent judgement.

To governments:

- Social movements should not be viewed as the antithesis of governments, but as an integral part of democratic government and healthy society. The role of the government and relevant governing bodies is to ensure that social movements and social change are built on accurate and sufficient information, so to promote effective social change. This may take the form of information literacy campaigns and enshrining literacy and critical thinking skills in schools.
- While governments should not intrude into activist space, it should be the government's responsibility to build a relationship with the general populace that is built with trust. By providing citizens with access to transparent and accurate information, so citizens can be empowered to effect positive social change.

To all, when thinking about the ongoing use of social media and mass communications technology:

- The lack of trustworthy information, or disinformation and misinformation, is a social phenomenon that will only become more and more rampant with the rise of new technologies and Artificial Intelligence. There is a responsibility to be vigilant against

disinformation and misinformation, and avoid becoming part of the network that enables the spread of false information.

- Due to the above, caution must be practised when engaging with information both online and offline. Digital literacy and information literacy skills are desperately needed to be embedded and internalised for all.

8.4 Summary

I offered a comprehensive framework of information trustworthiness and sincerely invite discussion and application. A framework of generalised trust, especially generalised information trust, helps us make sense of the digitised and networked reality we live in. Combining such a model with other threads of trust research – for instance, organisational trust or interpersonal trust – is a logical next step for which to embark upon.

In Chapter 2 of this thesis, I have adopted Möllering's (2001) argument that there is no encompassing theory of trust. My conception of trust is based upon such argument, which inspired my research question and attempt to ground trust specifically in the domain of social movements and activism spaces. At the end of this thesis, I re-assert the validity of this argument. My paper has proven that trust is constructed independently and changes based on circumstance. However, we are still able to conceptualise it and thus study it further and enrich our understanding on why and how people trust.

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Appendices

Appendix 1 Participant Information Sheet (Survey)

Participant Information Sheet For Social Media Users
UCL Research Ethics Committee Approval ID Number: 20105/001

YOU CAN RETAIN A COPY OF THIS INFORMATION SHEET

Title of Study: The construction and influence of information trustworthiness in social movements
Department: Department of Information Studies
Name and Contact Details of the Researcher(s): Charlotte Im, men.im.19@ucl.ac.uk
Name and Contact Details of the Principal Supervisor: Elizabeth Lomas, e.lomas@ucl.ac.uk

This information sheet provides some background information about this doctoral research project, as well as what your participation in this study will entail. Your participation is entirely voluntary. Please read through this document carefully and feel free to ask any questions about any aspect of this project. Thank you for reading.

1. **What is the project's purpose?**

This study aims to investigate how internet users decide whether pieces of information relating to social movements are "true", and what determines that information's validity. The Hong Kong protests of 2019 and Black Lives Matter of 2020 serve as the case contexts for the study. The global and, relatively, accessible nature of the internet means that the spreading of information is easy, especially when concerning social movements and social changes, resulting in the internet becoming a mobilising tool. It also allows for the examination of the power misinformation and the consequences that derive from that.

This study looks to broaden how we understand the flow and centring of information, especially as more social movements make use of the internet and gain global traction because of it. Concepts of "trust" and, subsequently, the "trustworthiness" of pieces of information regarding and within social movements, will be explored as major elements of the research. This will create a framework which will enable an understanding of how validity and authenticity is constructed and developed, as well as the impact on the wider society, with the emergence and spread of different social movements.

2. **Why have I been chosen?**

This survey is open to anyone who knows of either the Hong Kong protests from 2019 onwards, or Black Live Matter from 2020 onwards, and who has engaged with information about either movement online. This includes being avid participants in either movement, or simply reading about it on the internet.

3. **Do I have to take part?**

Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. If you do agree to take part, you can keepthis information sheet and will be asked to consent to your participation online at the start of the survey. You may withdraw

at any time without giving a reason. Once you have submitted the survey, we will not be able to identify and delete your response as it is entirely anonymous.

4. **What will happen to me if I take part?**

This survey contains three sections, and will take approximately 15 minutes to complete. All questions are optional. Questions include subjects such as your use of social media in relation to social movements, your engagement with social movements, and your use of information.

5. **What are the possible risks and benefits of taking part?**

There are no immediate personal benefits for those participating in the project, however, by participating in this study, you will be contributing towards a better understanding as to how information is spread through social movements, and this will help future efforts to limit the spread of misinformation and disinformation. You will contribute to establishing a framework that others can use for determining information trustworthiness, both within social movements and perhaps even beyond. This study hopes to contribute towards a better understanding of social movements within the digital age and comprehend their lasting impact on society and the world. Furthermore it encourages the fostering of information literacy and nurtures critical thinking in an age of information abundance. At the end of this study, I intend to publish and present the findings of this research.

6. **Will my taking part in this project be kept confidential?**

All information collected about you during the course of the research will be kept strictly confidential. You will not be able to be identified in any ensuing reports or publications. This survey does not collect any personal information, nor will your IP address be collected. Any personal identifiers that you may input into this survey will not be shared in my thesis or elsewhere. Any quotations used will not contain any personal information. The information you provide will be retained securely and anonymously and will be kept in line with UCL research data management and retention policies.

I understand that safety of your identity is of utmost importance. Any data collected will only be kept by myself on secure UCL servers, and any response that may lead to you being identified will be excluded from my data and deleted. I am not planning on sharing any identifiable information with any others, either during, or after the completing of this study.

7. **Limits to confidentiality**

Confidentiality will be maintained as far as possible, unless there are compelling and legitimate reasons for this to be breached, such as if I have cause to be worried that someone might be in danger of harm.

8. What will happen to the results of the research project?

This study is intended to be presented within a PhD thesis, and may be used for publication or presentation in articles or conferences. Anonymous quotes may be used. Your data will not be archived or shared beyond the immediate purposes of this study. The data will be retained for the period of the research and will be deleted/purged in due course in line with UCL policies.

9. Local Data Protection Privacy Notice

Notice:
The controller for this project will be University College London (UCL). The UCL Data Protection Officer provides oversight of UCL activities involving the processing of personal data, and can be contacted at data-protection@ucl.ac.uk

This 'local' privacy notice sets out the information that applies to this particular study. Further information on how UCL uses participant information can be found in our 'general' privacy notice:

For participants in research studies, click here

The information that is required to be provided to participants under data protection legislation (GDPR and DPA 2018) is provided across both the 'local' and 'general' privacy notices.

The categories of personal data used will be as follows:

- Political opinion
- Age range

The lawful basis that will be used to process your personal data are: 'Public task' for personal data and 'Research purposes' for special category data.

Your personal data will be processed so long as it is required for the research project. If we are able to anonymise or pseudonymise the personal data you provide we will undertake this, and will endeavour to minimise the processing of personal data wherever possible.

If you are concerned about how your personal data is being processed, or if you would like to contact us about your rights, please contact UCL in the first instance at data-protection@ucl.ac.uk.

11. Contact for further information

I hope this information sheet has answered any questions you may have about this study. You can save a copy of this participant information sheet by saving the webpage or by retaining a screenshot.

For any questions before or during this study, please do not hesitate to contact us.

PhD student and researcher: Charlotte Im – men.im.19@ucl.ac.uk
Principal supervisor: Dr Elizabeth Lomas – e.lomas@ucl.ac.uk

If you have any serious complaints during the research process, please contact the principal advisor. However, if your complaint has not been handled to your satisfaction, you can contact the Chair of the UCL Research Ethics Committee at ethics@ucl.ac.uk.

Thank you for reading this information sheet and for considering taking part in this research study.

Appendix 2 Survey Questions

As both surveys are identical, except for replacing “Black Lives Matter” with “Hong Kong protests”, only the BLM survey is included in this appendix.

Introduction

I am a doctoral candidate at UCL Department of Information Studies, and I am conducting research into the construction and influence of information trustworthiness within social movements. I am currently inviting responses to a survey that will help investigate how social movement participants engage with information through a range of channels and how they develop trust in information. All data collected in this survey is anonymous, no IP addresses are collected and your answers cannot be tracked back to you.

This survey is open to anyone who participated in or followed news of the Black Lives Matter movement from 2020 onwards, be it during its peak, or if it is no longer a subject of interest. This includes being avid participants in the movement, or simply reading about it on the internet. You don’t have to have a particular political stance or activist persuasion in order to participate in this survey. **All questions are optional.** If you answer all questions, it will take you about 20-30 minutes depending on any the length of any text answers provided. Do note that you may exit out of the survey and return at a later date.

Through my research, I hope to investigate how information flows and develops within social movements. At the end of my project, I intend to

publish and present findings of my study, which will hopefully shed light on how the construction and reception of information influences trust-building in my chosen contexts.

A longer participant information sheet provides information in more detail. This study has been approved by the UCL Research Ethics Committee. Information on UCL's data protection processes is in the research privacy notice. If you do have questions then please do not hesitate to contact me: Charlotte Im (PhD researcher) at men.im.19@ucl.ac.uk.

Q1. I have read the information provided and understand how my data will be used in this research.

Yes

Context

Q2. Since the beginning of your participation in the Black Lives Matter movement, how have you been involved with or connected to it in terms of physical activities?
(Please select all that apply)

Organised physical protests, rallies etc.
Created art, visual media, or other creative works for physical protests

Documented, recorded, or photographed physical protest-related activities in-person

Participated as a protester in physical protests, rallies etc.

Undertook violent physical activities, e.g. attacking buildings

Participated as first aid member/volunteer or in other healthcare related role

Provided protesters with support, such as providing food supplies, car rides, information etc.

Other (Please specify or comment on any of the above)

Q3. Since the beginning of your participation in the Black Lives Matter movement, how have you been involved with or connected to it in terms of virtual/online activities?

(Please select all that apply)

Organised virtual activities, such as online petitions, hashtags etc.

Created art, visual media, or other creative works for virtual activities

Participated in virtual events

Participated in discussions by posting comments online

Shared information you read online with friends and family

Read about the protest

Monitored law enforcement activity and relayed it to protesters

Documented or archived protest-related activities for long-term use

Other (please specify or comment on any of the above)

Q4. Since the beginning of your participation in the Black Lives Matter movement, how have you been involved with or connected to it in terms of wider forms of support?

(Please select all that apply)

- Supported arrested protesters financially or legally (i.e. through bar pro bono work, sending supplies or letters)
- Donated monetarily to activists, protesters, or other organisations related to the social movement
- Participated in other peripherally related activities, such as participating in academic forums, buying protest-related merchandise, or viewing documentaries about the protest
- Other (please specify or comment on any of the above)

Q5. Are you currently still involved with the Black Lives Matter movement? If yes, in what ways?

(Please select all that apply)

- I am not currently involved with the social movement
- Organising physical protests, rallies etc.
- Creating art, visual media, or other creative works for physical protests
- Documented, recorded, or photographed physical protest-related activities in-person
- Participating as a protester in physical protests, rallies etc.
- Undertaking violent physical acts, e.g. attacking buildings

Participating as first aid member/volunteer or in other healthcare related role

Providing protesters with support, such as providing food supplies, car rides, information etc.

Organising virtual activities, such as online petitions, hashtags etc

Created art, visual media, or other creative works for virtual activities

Participating in virtual events

Participating in discussions by posting comments online

Shared information you read online with friends and family

Reading about the protest

Monitored law enforcement activity and relayed it to protesters

Documented or archived protest-related activities for long-term use

Supporting arrested protesters financially or legally (i.e. through bar pro bono work)

Donating monetarily to activists, protesters, or other organisations related to the social movement

Participated in other peripherally related activities, such as academic forums, buying protest-related merchandise, or viewing documentaries about the protest

Other (Please specify)

Q6. Where are you currently physically located?

Hong Kong

United States

United Kingdom

Canada

Australia

Other (Please specify)

Q7. To what extent do you agree that the following internet activities are protest activities?

	Strongly disagree	Somewhat disagree	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree	Unsure
Sharing news articles about the protests	○	○	○	○	○
Sharing information about physical activities	○	○	○	○	○
Thanking activists or politicians for their support	○	○	○	○	○
Making friends with other protesters	○	○	○	○	○
Sharing art, photos, or articles about the protest among friends and family	○	○	○	○	○

	Strongly disagree	Somewhat disagree	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree	Unsure
Communicating with foreigners about the protests	○	○	○	○	○

What

The following questions will ask you about your behaviour on **receiving** and **sharing** information on the internet. Please answer the questions about how you would act **now**, regardless of your current level of involvement with the social movement.

To receive information refers to any occasion where you are given or come across information. This includes information that you have actively searched for, and things you have come across passively. E.g. Searching on Google; Seeing an advertisement; Seeing it on your social media feed.

To share information refers to any occasion where you disperse information to other people. This includes information that you have created yourself, and those that you have not created yourself. E.g, Making a Facebook post; Copying a link to someone else's Facebook post and sending it to a friend; Downloading an image and posting it on Twitter.

Q8. Which platforms do you **receive** information about the Black Lives Matter movement from?

(Please select all that apply)

- Facebook
- Twitter
- Telegram
- Whatsapp
- Instagram
- LIGHK
- Snapchat
- Tiktok/Douyin
- Clubhouse
- Weibo
- Wechat
- QQ
- News media applications
- Youtube
- Signal
- Patreon
- Other (Such as blogs, news websites etc. Please specify)

Q9. Which platforms do you **share** information about the Black Lives Matter movement from?

(Please select all that apply)

- Facebook
- Twitter
- Telegram
- Whatsapp
- Instagram
- LIGHK
- Snapchat
- Tiktok/Douyin
- Clubhouse
- Weibo
- Wechat
- QQ
- News media applications
- Youtube
- Signal
- Patreon
- Other (Such as blogs, news websites etc. Please specify)

Q10. Do you receive or share information in a language that you do not normally communicate in?

- Yes
- No

Q10a. If you received or shared information in a language that you do not normally communicate in, why?

Q11. Currently, in a typical day, how much time do you spend on engaging with protest-related activities online?

None
Less than 30 minutes
30 minutes to 1 hour
1 hour to 2 hours
2 hours to 5 hours
5 hours to 8 hours
8 hours to 12 hours
12 hours or more

Q12. Did you create new social media profiles or register for new messaging applications for the Black Lives Matter movement?

Yes
No

Q12a. On which platforms did you create new social media profiles or register for new messaging applications? Why did you do so?

Q12b. Why didn't you create social media profiles or register for new messaging applications?

Q13. Do you include any real information (such as your age, address, school, name, or appearance) on your online profiles? If yes, on which platforms and why?

Q14. Do you share personal anecdotes (such as stories about your day, about people around you) on your online profiles? If yes, on which

platforms and why?

Why and Trust

The following section uses the terms **'disseminators', 'misinformation', and 'disinformation'**.

'Disseminators' refers to anyone who actively shares information, either privately or publicly.

'Misinformation' refers to information that is either unintentionally OR intentionally incorrect or misleading.

'Disinformation' also refers to information that is incorrect or misleading, but disinformation is always intentionally deceptive.

Q15. Do you receive or share information from the following categories of information disseminators?

Please select all that apply

Politicians

Activists

Independent journalists

Celebrities (e.g. Musicians, actors, comedians)

Friends and family

Traditional newspaper outlets or TV stations

Government bodies, including law enforcement

Others (Please specify)

Q16. How trustworthy do you find the following categories of information disseminators?

	Very untrustworthy	Somewhat untrustworthy	Somewhat trustworthy	Very trustworthy
Politicians	○	○	○	○
Activists	○	○	○	○
Independent journalists	○	○	○	○
Celebrities (e.g. Musicians, actors, comedians)	○	○	○	○

	Very untrustworthy	Somewhat untrustworthy	Somewhat trustworthy	Very trustworthy
Friends and family	○	○	○	○
Traditional newspaper outlets or TV stations	○	○	○	○
Government bodies, including law enforcement	○	○	○	○
Other categories (Please specify) ☐	○	○	○	○

Q17. With the source you trust the most in mind, for example a certain Twitter account, or a particular politician, why do you consider them more trustworthy than others?

(Please select all that apply)

- They have usually delivered accurate information in the past
- They are able to provide proof for their information
- They have been fact checked by myself or others

They deliver accurate information that is unrelated to the protests

They frequently deliver information

They have organised a lot of protest events

They are highly respected within the protest community

They are recommended by friends or family

They are recommended by popular activists or influencers

They share the same opinions as me

I enjoy reading/watching their content

I know them personally

They are entertaining or creative in delivering information

I don't consider them trustworthy, but they deliver information that I trust

I don't consider them trustworthy, nor do I trust their information

Other reason (please specify)

Q18. With the source you trust the least in mind, for example a certain Twitter account, or a particular politician, why do you consider them less trustworthy than others?

(Please select all that apply)

They have usually delivered inaccurate information in the past

They have been proven to lie by myself or others

They don't normally share a lot of information on the social movement

They have a bad reputation within the protest community

I believe they are paid by someone else to spread false information about the social movement, either to discredit it or paint it in a better light

Friends or family say that they are untrustworthy

Other popular activists or influencers say that they are untrustworthy

They don't share the same opinions as me

I don't enjoy reading/watching their content

I know them personally

Their content is boring and unentertaining

I consider them trustworthy, but I don't trust the information they deliver

I consider them trustworthy and I trust the information they deliver

Other (please specify)

Q19. How often have you encountered **misinformation** about the Black Lives Matter movement?

Never

Once a day

More than once a day

Once a week

Two to three times a week

Once a month

Less than once a month

Q20. How often have you encountered **disinformation** about the the Black Lives Matter movement?

Never

Once a day

More than once a day

Once a week

Two to three times a week

Once a month

Less than once a month

Q21. Have you encountered friends or family that believed in, or shared, misinformation or disinformation?

Yes

No

Not sure

Q22. Do you correct someone who believes in, or shares, misinformation or disinformation?

(Please select all that apply)

Yes, I will correct strangers on the internet

Yes, I will correct strangers in public

Yes, I will correct colleagues or classmates

Yes, I will correct friends

Yes, I will correct family

No, I will not correct anyone

Q23. Have you ever shared misinformation or disinformation?

Yes, knowingly

Yes, unknowingly

No

Not sure

Q24. Do you fact check the information you read on the internet about the Black Lives Matter movement? If yes, how?

Q25. Would you share something that you haven't fact checked?

Yes

No

Not sure

Q26. The following scenarios all describe a social media post that contains information about the Black Lives Matter movement. From your experience, how likely are you to fact check the following posts?

	Extremely unlikely	Somewhat unlikely	Neither likely nor unlikely	Somewhat likely	Extremely likely
This post has been shared multiple times before	○	○	○	○	○
This post has been shared by many people	○	○	○	○	○
This is a very long post	○	○	○	○	○
This is a very short post	○	○	○	○	○
This post says it leaks or contains confidential information	○	○	○	○	○
This post says it is based on rumours and hearsay	○	○	○	○	○

	Extremely unlikely	Somewhat unlikely	Neither likely nor unlikely	Somewhat likely	Extremely likely
This post contains a link to another website	○	○	○	○	○
This post contains multimedia elements, such as videos or images	○	○	○	○	○
This post expresses an opinion that I agree with	○	○	○	○	○
This post expresses an opinion that I disagree with	○	○	○	○	○
This post says that it is telling the truth	○	○	○	○	○

	Extremely unlikely	Somewhat unlikely	Neither likely nor unlikely	Somewhat likely	Extremely likely
This post is an urgent appeal for my help in something, such as donating money, signing petitions, or sharing the post among my friends and family	○	○	○	○	○
This post is written by someone who I consider to be trustworthy	○	○	○	○	○
I am unfamiliar with the author of the post	○	○	○	○	○

	Extremely unlikely	Somewhat unlikely	Neither likely nor unlikely	Somewhat likely	Extremely likely
This post is on a social media platform I consider to be trustworthy	○	○	○	○	○
I am unfamiliar with the platform this post is available on	○	○	○	○	○

Q27. To what extent do you agree with the following statements?

	Strongly disagree	Somewhat disagree	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree	Unsu
I generally trust what I see on the Internet if it is information shared by fellow protesters	○	○	○	○	○

	Strongly disagree	Somewhat disagree	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree	Unsu
I mostly see things that are true on the Internet	○	○	○	○	○
There are public accounts/influencers that I trust to give me accurate information	○	○	○	○	○
I can make judgements on what is trustworthy on the Internet	○	○	○	○	○
Most protesters can make judgements on what is trustworthy on the Internet	○	○	○	○	○
I fact check things I see	○	○	○	○	○
Whether or not someone gives trustworthy information is unrelated to who they are as a person	○	○	○	○	○
There are many protesters who believe misinformation or disinformation	○	○	○	○	○

	Strongly disagree	Somewhat disagree	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree	Unsu
The spread of misinformation or disinformation has caused significant hindrance to the social movement	○	○	○	○	○
There should be mechanisms to stop misinformation or disinformation	○	○	○	○	○

Q28. Are you involved with other social movements? If yes, do you have other approaches towards information receiving and sharing?

Q29. Do you have any further comments to add regarding information trust, social movements and/or information sharing?

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Appendix 3 Participant Information Sheet (Interview)

Participant Information Sheet For Adults

UCL Research Ethics Committee Approval ID Number: _20105/001___

YOU WILL BE GIVEN A COPY OF THIS INFORMATION SHEET

Title of Study: The construction and influence of information trustworthiness in social movements
Department: _Department of Information Studies
Name and Contact Details of the Researcher(s): _Charlotte Im, men.im.19@ucl.ac.uk
Name and Contact Details of the Principal Researcher: _Elizabeth Lomas, e.lomas@ucl.ac.uk

This information sheet provides some background information about this doctoral research project, as well as what your participation in this study will entail. Your participation is entirely voluntary and you may withdraw anytime. Please read through this document carefully and feel free to ask any questions about any aspect of this project. Thank you for reading.

1. **What is the project's purpose?**

This study aims to investigate how internet users determine pieces of information relating to social movements as being "true", and what determines the information's validity, with the Hong Kong protests of 2019 and Black Lives Matter of 2020 serving as case contexts. The global and, relatively, accessible nature of the internet means that the spreading of information is easy, especially when concerning social movements and social changes, resulting in the internet becoming a mobilising tool. It also allows for examination of the power misinformation has, and the consequences that derive from that.

This study looks to broaden how we understand the flow and centring of information, especially as more social movements make use of the internet and gain global traction because of it. Concepts of "trust" and, subsequently, the "trustworthiness" of pieces of information regarding and within social movements, will be explored as major elements of the research. This will create a framework which will enable an understanding of how validity and authenticity is constructed and developed, as well as the impact on the wider society, with the emergence and spread of different social movements.

2. **Why have I been chosen?**

You are invited to take part in the third and final phase of this study as someone who shares and receives information on the internet regarding the [insert relevant movement].

3. **Do I have to take part?**

Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. If you do agree to take part, you will be given this information sheet to keep and will be asked to sign a consent form. You may withdraw at any time without giving a reason, and we will able to delete your data unless it has already been aggregated into the research, which will approximately take place twelve weeks after the interview takes place.

4. What will happen to me if I take part?

You will be invited to a semi-structured one-to-one interview that will take approximately an hour. Microsoft Teams will be the primary method used to carry out the interview remotely, although alternatives may be adopted with legitimate reason and consideration. You will be asked questions related to your use of social media when regarding social movements, and your views towards information flow in social movements, perceptions of trustworthiness, and misinformation.

5. Will I be recorded and how will the recorded media be used?

To ease analysis, it would be appreciated if you would consent to your interview being recorded. However, if you do not want to be recorded, the interview will proceed without any recording taking place. Should the interview be conducted over video conferencing, a video recording will be made using Microsoft Teams. However, should you have any legitimate concerns over the use of Microsoft Teams, a reasonable alternative may be suggested by yourself. Should the interview be conducted face to face, a digital voice recorder will be used to capture an audio recording. The recordings of your activities during this research will be used solely for analysis purposes. Any recordings will be destroyed after transcription, which will take place within twelve weeks after the interview takes place. The transcription will be done by myself. The transcription will be used for analysis, and extracts may be quoted in publication, conferences, or presentations anonymously. Extracts used will be anodyne or paraphrased, and care will be taken to ensure that any quotes used cannot be linked back to you. Your recordings or transcripts will not be passed onto anyone else without your permission.

6. What are the possible risks and benefits of taking part?

There are no immediate benefits for those participating in the project, however, by participating in this study, you will be contributing towards better understanding how information is spread through social movements, and help future efforts into dispelling the spread of information. You will contribute to establishing a framework that others can use for determining information trustworthiness, both within social movements and perhaps even beyond. This study hopes to contribute towards properly understanding social movements of the digital age and comprehend their lasting impact on society and the world, and encourage the fostering of information literacy and nurturing critical thinking in an age of information abundance. At the end of this study, I intend to publish and present the findings of this research.

During the course of the interviews, there may be a slight likelihood for the possibility for emotional distress as we discuss your involvement with social movements. You may pause, decline to answer, or stop the interview at any point.

7. Will my taking part in this project be kept confidential?

All information collected about you during the course of the research will be kept strictly confidential. You will not be able to be identified in any ensuing reports or publications, and your contact details will not be passed to anyone else without your permission.

I understand that safety of your identity is of utmost importance. Any recordings will be made through Microsoft Teams or through password-protected or encrypted recording devices. Any personal identifiers will be anonymised or pseudonymised to the best of my abilities, and any contact information will only be kept by myself on secure UCL servers. I am not planning on sharing any identifiable information with any others, either during, or after the completing of this study. Data will not be presented at any point with real names. The information you provide will be retained securely and anonymously and will be kept in line with UCL research data management and retention policies.

8. Limits to confidentiality

Confidentiality will be maintained as far as possible, unless there are compelling and legitimate reasons for this to be breached, such as if I have cause to be worried that someone might be in danger of harm. If this was the case, I will inform you of any decisions that might limit your confidentiality.

9. What will happen to the results of the research project?

This study is intended to be presented within a PhD thesis, and may be used for publication or presentation in articles or conferences. Anonymous quotes may be used. Your data, including your personal details or any transcripts, will not be archived or shared without your explicit permission, and will not be kept after this project is completed.

10. Local Data Protection Privacy Notice

Notice:
The controller for this project will be University College London (UCL). The UCL Data Protection Officer provides oversight of UCL activities involving the processing of personal data, and can be contacted at data-protection@ucl.ac.uk

This 'local' privacy notice sets out the information that applies to this particular study. Further information on how UCL uses participant information can be found in our 'general' privacy notice:

For participants in research studies, click here

The information that is required to be provided to participants under data protection legislation (GDPR and DPA 2018) is provided across both the 'local' and 'general' privacy notices.

The categories of personal data used will be as follows:

- Name
- Political opinion

The lawful basis that will be used to process your personal data are: 'Public task' for personal data and' Research purposes' for special category data.

Your personal data will be processed so long as it is required for the research project. If we are able to anonymise or pseudonymise the personal data you provide we will undertake this, and will endeavour to minimise the processing of personal data wherever possible.

If you are concerned about how your personal data is being processed, or if you would like to contact us about your rights, please contact UCL in the first instance at data-protection@ucl.ac.uk.

11. Contact for further information

I hope this information sheet has answered any questions you may have about this study. You will be given a copy of the information sheet to retain along with your signed consent form.

For any questions before or during this study, please do not hesitate to contact us.

PhD student and researcher: Charlotte Im – men.im.19@ucl.ac.uk
Principal supervisor: Dr Elizabeth Lomas – e.lomas@ucl.ac.uk

If you have any serious complaints during the research process, please contact the principal advisor. However, if your complaint has not been handled to your satisfaction, you can contact the Chair of the UCL Research Ethics Committee at ethics@ucl.ac.uk.

Thank you for reading this information sheet and for considering to take part in this research study.

Appendix 4 Consent Form (Interview)

CONSENT FORM FOR ADULTS IN RESEARCH STUDIES

Please complete this form after you have read the Information Sheet and/or listened to an explanation about the research.

Title of Study: _The construction and influence of information trustworthiness within social movements
Department: __Department of Information Studies
Name and Contact Details of the Researcher(s):_Charlotte Im, men.im.19@ucl.ac.uk
Name and Contact Details of the Principal Researcher: _Elizabeth Lomas, e.lomas@ucl.ac.uk
Name and Contact Details of the UCL Data Protection Officer: Alexandra Potts data-protection@ucl.ac.uk
This study has been approved by the UCL Research Ethics Committee: Project ID number: __20105/001__

Thank you for considering taking part in this research. The person organising the research must explain the project to you before you agree to take part. If you have any questions arising from the Information Sheet or explanation already given to you, please ask the researcher before you decide whether to join in. You will be given a copy of this Consent Form to keep and refer to at any time.

I confirm that I understand that by ticking/initialling each box below I am consenting to this element of the study. I understand that it will be assumed that unticked/initialled boxes means that I DO NOT consent to that part of the study. I understand that by not giving consent for any one element that I may be deemed ineligible for the study.

		Tick Box
1.	I confirm that I have read and understood the Information Sheet for the above study. I have had an opportunity to consider the information and what will be expected of me. I have also had the opportunity to ask questions which have been answered to my satisfaction and would like to take part in an individual interview.	
2.	I understand that I will be able to withdraw my data until it has been aggregated into the research, which will be approximately twelve weeks after the interview takes place.	
3.	I consent to participate in the study. I understand that my personal information, including name and political opinion, will be used for the purposes explained to me. I understand that according to data protection legislation, 'public task' will be the lawful basis for processing and 'research purposes' will be the lawful basis for processing special category data.	
4.	I understand that I can choose not to answer any questions asked as part of the above study.	
5.	**Use of the information for this project only** I understand that all personal information will remain confidential and that all efforts will be made to ensure I cannot be identified. I understand that my data gathered in this study will be pseudonymised and stored securely. It will not be possible to identify me in any publications.	
6.	I understand that my information may be subject to review by responsible individuals from the University for monitoring and audit purposes.	
7.	I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving a reason. I understand that if I decide to withdraw, any personal data I have provided up to that point will be deleted as much as possible unless I agree otherwise.	

8.	I understand the potential risks of participating should I become distressed during the course of the research.	
9.	I understand that no promise or guarantee of benefits have been made to encourage me to participate.	
10.	I understand that the data will not be made available to any commercial organisations but is solely the responsibility of the researcher(s) undertaking this study.	
11.	I agree to the use of contributions made in the course of this study, including permission to use extracts from transcripts in publications, presentations and other outputs. No one will be able to identify you when this data is shared.	
12.	I consent to my interview being audio/video recorded and understand that the recordings will be destroyed immediately following transcription. I understand that the transcripts will not be shared with me. To note: If you do not want your participation recorded you can still take part in the study.	
13.	I hereby confirm that I understand the inclusion criteria as detailed in the Information Sheet and explained to me by the researcher.	
14.	I am aware of who I should contact if I wish to lodge a complaint.	

Name of participant	Date	Signature

The following section is OPTIONAL. The following demographic data may be used as a description of you in the research output. Only fill in the sections that you feel comfortable with.

Preferred Pronouns:
Occupation:
Age:
Ethnicity:
Nationality:

Appendix 5 Interview Guide

Common nodes

Thank you for agreeing to the interview, first off before we begin, just to confirm, you've read through the participation information sheet and have signed the consent form, and agree to this interview being recorded, right? This interview will take roughly an hour, but if you need to leave early or whatsoever do feel free to just let me know.
How are or were you involved in the social movement?
- Has your participation changed over time?
What ways or platforms have you used to communicate with other protesters?
- What kind of things are protestors talking about on these platforms?
- Did the methods change over time?
- Were other people active in interacting and communicating with you?
- Were they easy to use?
- Why did you use them?
Are your internet profiles public?
- Yes: Are you afraid of getting recognised in public, or worse case scenario, doxed?
- No: Why?
Do you have a different internet persona to your public persona? Why?
Were you active in creating original information, or did you more often shared from other people?
Do you think there's been more sources of information on the internet, or less?
- For example?
- Is that a good thing?
So as you might know this project is investigating perceptions of information trust and trustworthiness. How would you define information trust?
How do you tell what is true on the internet?
- *Do you trust fellow protestors you meet on the internet?*
How do you decide which information sources are more trustworthy?
- *Is it easier to trust someone who reveals more information about themselves on the internet?*
- *Does it affect the trustworthiness of something you see if you know the person who shared it in person?*
Is your approach different for telling what is true, offline compared to online?
- Has that changed over the course of the movement?
In recent years fake news has been kind of a new buzzword. Do you think misinformation or disinformation is a threat to the movement?
- Do you think that has increased?
- Have you seen anyone act on or share any incorrect information?
- *Do you feel comfortable pointing it out if family or friends share fake news?*
- Do you have any tactics to combat fake news?

Has your experience in this movement impacted how you trust and/or interact in other social movements, or in daily life?	
Is there anything you would like to talk about around information trust that hasn't been covered in our conversation?	

Information brokers/elites

Thank you for agreeing to the interview, first off before we begin, just to confirm, you've read through the participation information sheet and have signed the consent form, and agree to this interview being recorded, right? This interview will take roughly an hour, but if you need to leave early or whatsoever do feel free to just let me know.	
How are or were you involved in the social movement?	
- Has your participation changed over time?	
What ways or platforms have you used to communicate with other protesters?	
- What kind of things are protestors talking about on these platforms?	
- Did the methods change over time?	
- Were other people active in interacting and communicating with you?	
- Were they easy to use?	
- Why did you use them?	
- *It's been a few years since the peak of the movement. Are people still engaging with the movement or looking for information?*	
Are your internet profiles public?	
- Yes: Are you afraid of getting recognised in public, or worse case scenario, doxed?	
- No: Why?	
Do you have a different internet persona to your public persona? Why?	
Were you active in creating original information, or did you more often shared from other people?	
Do you have any particular methods or tactics used for engagement?	
Do you think there's been more sources of information on the internet, or less?	
- For example?	
- Is that a good thing?	
So as you might know this project is investigating perceptions of information trust and trustworthiness. How would you define information trust?	
How do you tell what is true on the internet?	
How do you decide which information sources are more trustworthy?	
- *Do you think people consider you trustworthy?*	
Is your approach different for telling what is true, offline compared to online?	
- Has that changed over the course of the movement?	
In recent years fake news has been kind of a new buzzword. Do you think misinformation or disinformation is a threat to the movement?	
- Do you think that has increased?	
- Have you seen anyone act on or share any incorrect information?	

- *Do you think protesters are easily misled by fake news?*	
- Do you have any tactics to combat fake news?	
Has your experience in this movement impacted how you trust and/or interact in other social movements, or in daily life?	
Is there anything you would like to talk about around information trust that hasn't been covered in our conversation?	