

# THE SOCIAL MEDIA ECOLOGY OF SPATIAL INEQUALITY IN CAPE TOWN: TWITTER AND INSTAGRAM

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## **Abstract**

*While the international community considers Cape Town a ‘modern city’, high levels of inequality persist as a consequence of post-independence apartheid practices. The legacy of apartheid spatial polarisation—gentrification, infrastructural inequalities and affordable housing, has sparked ongoing debate in mainstream media with Cape Town finding itself at the centre of the contention. Cape Town-based activists, organisations and campaigners have opted to use social media platforms to advertise and coordinate protest action for the desegregation of urban land. This paper identified Reclaim the City, Ndifuna Ukwazi and Future Cape Town as the key actors using social media to campaign for spatial equality in Cape Town. As Juris (2012) argues, social media has contributed to an emerging logic of aggregation involving the assembling of masses of individuals from diverse backgrounds to come together in physical spaces. Social media platforms, therefore, become a “temporary performative terrain,” a space for activists to make their struggles visible and to mobilise “crowds of individuals” through viral communication flows (Juris, 2012: 267). Over the past decade and a half, social media platforms like Twitter, Facebook and Instagram have become an integral part of contemporary communicative practices, providing personal, political, entertainment, sport, technological and scientific information to local communities, often before conventional media outlets like radio, television and print. “The quick rise of social media platforms in the first decade of this century was part of a more general networked culture where information and communication got increasingly defined by the affordances of web technologies” (Van Dijk & Poell, 2013: 5). Focusing on three of the most popular social networking sites in South Africa: Facebook, Twitter and Instagram, this paper explores how social media has been used to foster awareness, share information and initiate discourse around spatial inequality in Cape Town. Using a combination of quantitative data scraping approaches and qualitative content analysis, this paper explores the central question: What are the prevailing narratives on social media around spatial inequality (including issues related to affordable housing) in Cape Town? The paper argues that*

*the social media ecology of spatial inequality is complex and cosmopolitan due to the interconnectivity and global reach of social media platforms. In order to connect the local agenda to the immediate community and foster international awareness, activists, organisations and campaigners have choreographed their own cohesive narrative that they frequently promote in public social media spaces.*

## **Keywords**

Spatial inequality, social media, social movements, hashtags, activism, campaigns

## **Introduction**

Cape Town, South Africa, is considered a Global City, with Global Cities defined as those that “have become key nodes for headquarter functions, financial services, information processing, and other activities that have been undertaken to announce their influence as world leaders” (Gibb, 2007). However, as Lemanski (2007) argues, Global Cities also tend to suffer increased social and spatial polarisation, especially for developing world cities with limited resources and widespread poverty. “This is particularly the case in South Africa where apartheid legacies already provide a strong infrastructure of inequality” (Lemanski, 2007: 448). Social and spatial polarisation has persisted well beyond the end of apartheid, with levels of inequality amongst some of the highest in the world. The legacy of apartheid geography has meant that the African National Congress (ANC) government failed to realise their campaign promise of “housing for all”. Even though the post-1994 housing policy sets out a variety of programmes and mechanisms to assist low-income households with access to secure tenure, services and starter housing, swelling urbanisation and increasing levels of poverty have amplified the demand for housing (Landman and Napier, 2009).

Cape Town and Johannesburg have experienced a range of inner-city urban regeneration initiatives, the most controversial being the process of gentrification. Gentrification is defined as “a process by which working-class residential neighbourhoods [are] rehabilitated by middle-class home buyers, landlords and professional developers” (Visser and Kotze, 2008). Reminiscent of apartheid day race-based relocations, gentrification usually implies that low-income residents are

displaced by high-income residents and has, therefore, become a growing concern in the South African urban redevelopment discourse (Visser, 2002). Because these urban renewal practices push out the working-class black residents, these processes have been fiercely contested in Cape Town, triggering a call for the establishment of affordable housing in the inner city to accommodate people who work there,

This public contestation has resulted in a wide range of debates around gentrification, and issues related to class inclusion and exclusion, also playing out in the media. While the topic has been widely covered by mainstream media, social movements, local activists and private organisations working toward affordable housing, namely Reclaim the City, Ndifuna Ukwazi and Future Cape Town - are using social media to expand the debates surrounding spatial inequality in Cape Town and amplify the voices of affected communities. As Castells (2015) observes, historically, social movements have depended on the availability of specific communication mechanisms, including rumours, sermons, pamphlets, manifestos, word-of-mouth and the press. However, presently, multi-modal digital networks of horizontal communication are the fastest and most autonomous, interactive, reprogrammable and self-expanding means of communication in history. The consequence of this autonomy and sheer volume of a variety of social networking sites and applications (SNS/As) available online, is that social media debates pertinent to the issue of spatial inequality in Cape Town are becoming increasingly difficult to identify and measure. Thus, this paper opted to focus on SNS/As that primarily use a follower model and hashtags to catalogue content, specifically Twitter and Instagram.

## **Research Questions**

This paper utilised a combination of quantitative data scraping approaches and qualitative content analysis (detailed further below), to explore the central question: What are the prevailing narratives related to spatial inequality (including issues related to affordable housing) in Cape Town, circularised by the three key campaigners for spatial equality in Cape Town on Twitter and Instagram? Two further sub-questions guided the research:

- a) How is Twitter used to organise discussions around spatial equality in Cape Town? How are hashtags used to frame the discourse?
- b) How are digital identifiers (specifically hashtags, locations and tags) used on Instagram to shape the discourse surrounding spatial inequality in Cape Town?

### **South Africa's social media ecology**

With a population of over 55 million people, South Africa has 21-million internet users, the vast majority of which are using mobile—40% of the population will be online by the end of 2018 (Shapshak, 2017). There are over 29 million smartphones in use in South Africa and these mobile phone users can access the internet and connect via mobile social networking applications (SNS/As) via their network providers data bundles. Online social networking sites, Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram are growing in popularity in South Africa due to the increasing affordability of mobile handsets (SA Social Media Landscape Executive Summary 2017). Facebook (FB) is the biggest SNS/A in South Africa with 13 million users, almost double the number of users of its nearest competitor, Youtube (YT), which has 8 million users. Twitter (TW) rounds up the top three with 7.7 million users, with Instagram (IG) at fourth with 3.5 million users.

FB uses the 'Friend' model, meaning an entity can 'request' that another entity be its 'Friend'. The request can be denied. The number of Friends that an entity can accumulate is currently limited to five thousand, whereas the 'Follower' model used by TW and IG does not have such restrictions to the audience, influence and accessibility (however, there is a limit on the number of Followers or whom an entity chooses to follow). FB, on the other hand, has a third mechanism for interaction in the form of 'Groups' and 'Pages'. Entities on FB are also enabled to network within Groups. Groups have three levels of privacy: 'open', 'closed' and 'secret', enabling the administrator to limit the levels of interaction with the global FB community. Unlike Groups, Pages use the Follower model, which allows entities to 'recruit' followers (they do not need to have Friends). This absolves them from the responsibility of responding on a one-on-one basis expected of 'Friend'ships. On final analysis, the current model/s adopted by FB / YT and their privacy issues have been found to be restrictive and uncondusive for autonomous social media

campaigns, and the identification and extraction of data related to spatial inequality in Cape Town.

Therefore, this study opted to focus on other popular SNS/As in South Africa that uses the Follower model in conjunction with hashtag (#) cataloguing, especially TW and IG.

### *Twitter: South Africa's social activist medium*

Unlike FB, which was designed primarily for use by individual 'entities', TW only uses the Follower model, meaning users accounts are either set to 'public' by default and anyone can follow any user or they are set to 'private' and users have to send a request to follow, which can be denied. The Friend model is a bidirectional relationship whereas the Follower model, a unidirectional relationship allowing users inordinate access to other user's content without their consent. This unidirectional relationship between users has made TW useful to companies, organisations and public figures in South Africa. Despite having the slowest growth in South Africa (7.4 million to 7.7 million users between 2015 and 2016), Twitter is increasing in popularity, this could be due to its ability to influence public opinion. According to the 2017 edition of the SA Social Media Landscape report, conducted by World Wide Worx and Ornico, "the role of social media in the public debate has moved from the periphery to the heart of activism," as signified by some of the most high-profile campaigns from 2015 – 2018, namely, #RhodesMustFall, #FeesMustFall, #FillUpTheDome, #FillUpOrlandoStadium , #Zexit, #ZumaMustFall and #TotalShutdown.

These campaigns are partly defined by their use of specific TW hashtags, reflecting a kind of hashtag activism. Although some debates dismiss social media campaigns as "armchair activism or "clicktivism", one cannot neglect the awareness that TW hashtags generate in the public and private media spaces. According to Herman (2014: 14 -15), TW hashtags enable "the general public to explore a situation more deeply and to approach it in a new way". He also cautions that awareness alone cannot achieve anything but opening up a politicized space is a good start." However, given the large number of tweets on the platform, the use of hashtags facilitates the grouping of conversations around specific topics, allowing for easier tracking of these online discussions. Yang et al (2012) argue that hashtags bring convenience to users: apart from

grouping together relevant topics and events, they also “serve as a symbol of the community” by bringing like-minded people together. In South Africa, hashtags like #ReclaimTheCity and #Tafelberg, not only categorise the discourse on spatial inequality in Cape Town, they express the ‘attitude’ of specific geographic communities affected by the current housing issues.

*Instagram: The fastest growing social media application in South Africa*

Although it is outside the top three SNS/As, IG is the fastest-growing social network in South Africa according to the Fin24 and Business Tech websites (2016). Instagram.com describes IG as a free image and video sharing smartphone application originally developed for the IOS (iPhone) operating system) in 2010. It was acquired by FB in 2012 and an Android version was launched along with a limited-features website— turning IG from a mobile application to a social networking site. IG uses a 'follower' model, meaning all accounts are either public or private and any IG users can subscribe to any user’s accounts. IG currently allows users to create up to five accounts from one primary mobile number. All images are public by default, but users can choose to make their accounts private, making their images and videos visible only to their approved followers.

However, if a private account holder shares the image/video by connecting to other social networks (such as FB or TW), the privacy settings for the shared network take precedence. This is because IG’s API (Application Program Interface/ rules/protocols/ routines) functions more like a bridging application linking IG content with third-party applications such as FB, TW, Tumblr, Swarm, WhatsApp, and Flickr.<sup>i</sup> This bridging function is not limited to third-party applications, users can add hashtags to frame their interest/subject matter beyond their caption, making the post visible on a corresponding hashtag page. The corresponding hashtag page is effectively a public forum displaying all images and videos users have shared with that accompanying hashtag. Users can choose to follow only hashtags on IG. By following specific hashtags (#reclaimthecity, #stopthesale, #capetown and so forth), this paper identified Reclaim the City, Ndifuna Ukwazi and Future Cape Town as the key actors using social media to campaign for spatial equality in Cape Town on IG and TW.

## **Methodology**

The social media ecology approach considered that users often use multiple SNS/As simultaneously, therefore we selected TW and IG SNS/AS as our primary data collection sources because a) their API's allows them to interact with each other, b) are commonly used in conjunction with one another, c) they use the Follower Model, d) hashtags used on these SNS/As are public, and e) out of the 21 million internet users at least 30%<sup>ii</sup> of them use TW and IG. Using the three key actors who have led the social media campaigns on spatial inequality in Cape Town, we identified as a sample; namely Reclaim The City, Ndifuna Ukwazi and Future Capetown. This study used a mixed method approach (both qualitative and quantitative research) to conduct a cumulative analysis of these (3) actors' activities and content in relation to the public discourse on Cape Town's housing issues. These methods are outlined in greater detail below.

**Twitter data collection and methods:** The key tool used to collect the data on TW was open source website, Twitonomy. Twitonomy (<http://www.twitonomy.com>) is a commercial service that calls on TW's API to return a range of information from selected TW accounts or hashtags and displays some data graphically. The search allowed retrieval of original posts in addition to metadata such as links to the post, the platform from which it was posted, the type of post, and re-tweet and favourite counts. Twitonomy also provides information indicating which users were most replied to, mentioned and re-tweeted by each of the user accounts we studied, indicating the levels of public engagement.

A major limitation of Twitonomy is that it only retrieves posts from the previous 10 days and it does not show the content of replies made by other users to posts. Nonetheless, we created a dataset using Twitonomy to search for tweets using the following hashtags: #reclaimthecity, #occupyitall and #Tafelberg. Other key hashtags that were analysed include: #ReclaimtheCity, #OccupyitAll, #OccupyWoodStockHospital, #OccupyHelenBowden, #Tafelberg270, #StoptheSale, #Tafelberg, #BromwellStreet/#Bromwell. Tweets were coded using the following codes: Activism speech, Hate speech, Call to action, Live updates, News articles/media publications, Text, Photographs, Videos and Internet Links /URL. From these tweets, posts from ordinary citizens and professional journalists at the same event were analysed for content and

differences. In terms of the Tweeters, we eventually focused on the 3 key actors that were identified: @ReclaimtheCity, @NdifunaUkwazi and @FutureCapeTown.

**Instagram data collection and methods:** IG is a visual social media application; therefore, it immediately presented three major challenges. Firstly, how to conduct discourse research on a predominantly visual medium. The next two major challenges can be attributed to two dominant characteristics of the IG application. IG users generate and own their published content on the SNS/A, therefore you cannot use an open source software to crawl the application or store users' media without their express consent. In this instance, we did not use individuals' data in the research, and only focused on the accounts of public organisations, minimising ethical harm. Secondly, searching for a specific 'kind' of image using keywords is not an option because IG's API provides a search hook dedicated solely to public tags (user, location or hashtags), not private descriptive meta-data assigned by the application.

However, searching for an image using tags in IG reveals other useful meta-data that can be utilised for a mixed methods analysis; specifically, user accounts names, captions, dates, location, tags, reactions (likes) and comments. Highfield and Leaver (2015) support this approach to collecting data on IG stating, “such data allows for quantitative and qualitative analyses, whether counting the amount of content over time, users, or tags, mapping media based on location data, or looking at the content of the media and their captions, for example.” Therefore, regarding IG, this study initially collected quantitative data focused on identifying the hashtags used by the three social actors the paper identified. Once the hashtags were retrieved, their impact in the larger discourse (corresponding hashtag page) was measured, considering the social engagement (likes and comments) of the post. Lastly, this study gauged how effectively these key actors contextualised their post by using supporting meta-data such as tags (did they tag other activists, individuals or organisations?) and locations (did they geographically locate their image in Cape Town?).

## **Findings**

**Twitter results:** The key organisations in the Twittersphere, tweeting on issues of spatial inequality in Cape Town are Reclaim the City (RTC), Ndifuna Ukwazi (NU), and Future Capetown (FCT); and these three key actors are also most often re-tweeted by other users. See table 1 below.

**Table 1. Twitter re-tweets**

	<b>No. of followers</b>	<b>No. of tweets</b>	<b>No. of re-tweets</b>	<b>Users most re-tweeted</b>	<b>Users most mentioned</b>
Reclaim the City	1, 327	2, 443 5.40 tweets per day	1, 137	@ZackieAchmat, @NdifunaUkwazi	@helenzille, @CityofCT
Ndifuna Ukwazi	1, 802	5, 207 3.17 per day	1, 847	@ReclaimCT, @ZackieAchmat	@CityofCT, @sjcoalition
Future Cape Town	87, 848	3, 196 14.99 per day	911	@RashiqFataar, @HorbachBonnie	@CityofCT, @guardiancities

RTC and NU are quite similar in terms of the number of followers and Tweets, but FCT has a much larger number of followers and greater activity. While the first two organisations are in conversation – they re-tweet (and respond) to each other, FCT is not part of this conversation and mostly tweets Rashiq Fataar – the founder of the organisation. All three often mention the City of CT in their tweets – but there is rarely/never any reply. They attempt to engage official administration but are largely unsuccessful. While the City of Cape Town runs a very active Twitter account (58 tweets per day), they are refusing to actively engage on the topic of spatial inequality by not joining the Twitter conversation with these two key actors. Mainstream news also features quite widely here, specifically Eye Witness News.

Hashtags used: While RTC mostly uses hashtags related to spatial inequality e.g. #stopthesale and #standwithBromwell were the most used; NU campaigns more widely, also using the hashtags #feesmustfall and #justiceforall quite prominently. NU’s most re-tweeted tweet for example was:



Meanwhile, RTC’s most re-tweeted tweet was more directly linked to issues of spatial inequality:



On the other hand, FCT uses more generic hashtags e.g. #cities and #placemaking – in this sense, they are much less political, but this may also be related to their larger base of followers. They are campaigning more generally – for example, “Sustainable parks and why they work”; “What to do with an abandoned waterpark”; rather than directly engaging with working-class issues such as housing or local #Occupy protests. FCT tweeted most from Tweet Deck, with Twitter for iPhone, being the second most popular platform; while both NU (see below) and RTC tweeted most from the TW for iPhone platform.

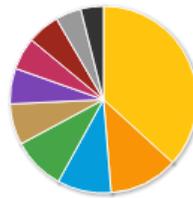


a) FCT uses more generic hashtags e.g. #cities and #placemaking – in this sense, they are much less political, but this may also be due to their larger base of followers. RTC uses TW to raise awareness about specific campaigns/ specific activism, for example occupying physical spaces, whereas NU sparks more general conversations/ more general awareness raising about social issues (also often beyond just housing). FCTs more generic hashtags are more 'inclusive' and probably generated a larger audience. Below is a summary of the hashtags most used by RCT and NU:

a) Reclaim the City:

**# Hashtags most used**

#stopthesale	197	#standwithbromwell	64
#reclaimthecity	50	#tafelberg	49
#occupyhelenbowden	38	#occupyital	33
#steenvillas	30	#tafelbergchallenge	30
#tafelberg270	24	#bromwellstreet	21



Tweet

b) Ndifuna Ukwazi

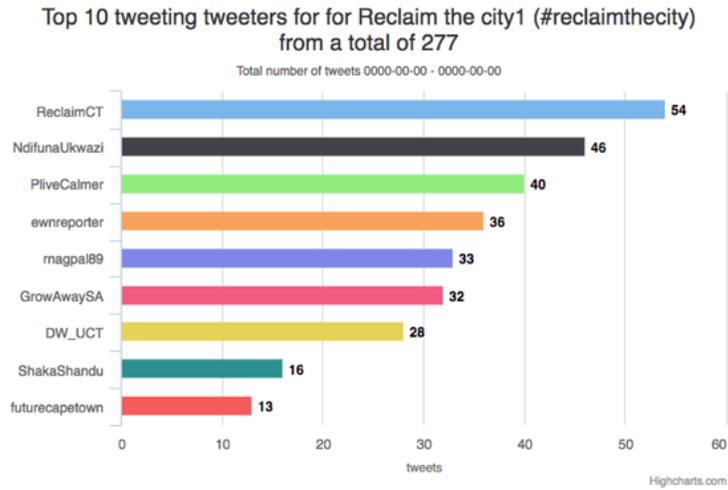
**# Hashtags most used**

#reclaimthecity	51	#justiceforall	50
#feesmustfall	48	#dirtytoilets	47
#wolwerivier	45	#ulj2016	40
#marikanaconvening	38	#fixctbudget	35
#stopthesale	27	#budgetjustice	23



Tweet

While the #reclaimthecity hashtag yielded tweets beyond Cape Town, RTC was still the organisation that used this hashtag the most (Table below). Mainstream news also features quite widely here (Eye Witness News) with FCT at the bottom of the list.



**Instagram results:** FCT have the most followers, 4,700+ and tag other users in 45% of their posts compared to RTC which has 140+ followers and tag other users 25% of the time. NU is the least active of the key actors and has 20+ followers, yet they have not posted any content on their official page, however, they are posting content through @mandz\_shandu's personal account (She is currently the co-director of NU). FCT was the most active key actor, posting 300% more images related to spatial inequality in Cape town in a 30 days period than Reclaim the City posted in 365 days - NU had no posts. However, in the time period reviewed, all 20 images posted by RTC were related to spatial inequality compared to FCT's 30%<sup>iii</sup>. Table 2 below shows the three actors most used hashtags and highest social engagement (likes).

**Table 2. Instagram hashtags**

	No. of followers	Post reviewed related to CPT spatial issues	No. of users tagged in CPT related posts	Locations / geo-tags used	Frequently used hashtags	Highest Social Engagement
<b>Reclaim the City</b>	146	20/20	5/20	creative nestings, michealas galleries, seapoint promenade, uct, uct upper campus	#reclaimthecity, #stopthesale, #art, #reclaimct, #equaleducation, #seapointpromenade.	20
<b>Ndifuna Ukwazi</b>	24	0	0	0	0	0
<b>Future Cape Town</b>	4,765	20/64	9/20	cape institute for architecture, century city cape town, green point park, guga s'thebe centre langa, khayelitsha site b cape town, philippi, western cape, south africa, southern sun hotel, strand street, st. george's cathedral cape town.	#capetown, #southafrica, #urban, #architecture, #publicspace, #urbanism.	77

FCT used (79) hashtags in (20) images, therefore they averaged (4) hashtags per image. RTC used a total of (16) hashtags in 20 images, averaging slightly under (1) hashtag per post. The most popular hashtag used by FCT was #capetown and RTC used #reclaimthecity most often. The following (8) hashtags have been used by both actors at some stage during their social media campaigns, #art, #southafrica, #capetown, #cities, #housing, #reclaimthecity, #ndifunaukwazi and #reclaimct. Interestingly, FCT rarely used #futurecapetown, which is closely related to their brand in their posts - opting to employ it in 10% of posts that were reviewed. However, RTC used #reclaimthecity in 60% of their posts - it garnered an average of (6) interactions per post. When FCT used the #futurecapetown they accumulated an average of (46) interactions per post. RTC typically used (1) non-descriptive and general hashtag per post, for example, #housing, #cities and #art, whereas FCT used (4) hashtags per post that were a combination of general,

descriptive and specific statement-like hashtags; for example, #bridge, #innovation, #publicspace and #forwardtothefuture.

Locations or geo-tags used: FCT used geo-tags to locate themselves within the Cape Town municipality in 45% of their posts, RTC used geo-tags in 25% of the posts reviewed. FCT predominately located themselves either in the city centre or township areas. RTC positioned themselves either near or inside tertiary institutions, specifically in the University of Cape Town’s campuses.

Captions used: RTC uses more ‘personal’ and opinionated language in their captions using words like double standards, join us, and campaign compared to RTC’s more diplomatic tone, opting to use terms such as spatial inequality, active citizenship, and report. Table 3 below shows the content of the images posted by the three key actors and the captions they assigned to the images.

**Table 3. Image content descriptions**

	<b>General captions used</b>	<b>General image content</b>
<b>Reclaim the City</b>	disruption, the city, sold land,	people (protesting or working).
	private owners, homes,	text (posters
	double standards, join us	newspapers,
	government, objective, handover	buildings,
	supporters, equalisers, movement,	banners,
	vision, activation, peaceful,	grafitti.
	campaign, apartheid, geography,	
	Intervention.	
<b>Ndifuna Ukwazi</b>	N/A	N/A
<b>Future Cape Town</b>	spatial inequality, revenue,	buildings,
	projects, imperfect public,	newspapers
	active citizenship,	protesters,
	development, design,	text,
	parking bays, public funds,	banners,
	precinct, report, residents,	bulidings
	spaces, city, unplanned	peformers.
	dynamics, manifesto,	drone/birds eye viewof suburbs
community, forward,diverse groups	cityscape	
	workers	

**Social media engagement:** FCT has the highest social media engagement, their highest rated post related to spatial inequality in Cape Town: (77) reactions compared to RTC's (20). However, we cannot determine whether all these actors' reactions came from their existing followers, but we can determine each actor's audience reception based on their current audience. RTC's most engaged post would have catered to 14% of their current audience compared to FCT 2%. Nonetheless, neither actor's posts fostered a significant amount of comments, the average interaction with the posts was reactionary (likes) and the threaded conversations were limited to information.

### **Discussing the conversations on spatial inequality in Cape Town**

There is a vast range of opinions amongst scholars about the effectiveness and the role played by social media in activism. Even though Castells (2009, 2011, 2015) argues that the occupation of 'public spaces' is essential for all social movements, he prioritises the role of the Internet and social media; as for him, it provides 'free spaces' which are the origin and backbone of any movement. Castell's argument is exemplified by one of the key actors we identified, Future Capetown (FCT). According to their website ([futurecapetown.com](http://futurecapetown.com)), FCT is a non-profit organisation (NPO) established by Rashiq Fataar in July 2010 as social media account on TW. The goal of the organisation is to challenge the status quo by prompting citizens to ask questions about the ways in which their city is progressing - as a means of stimulating broader debates about the future direction of urban space development. This objective of debating and questioning the status-quo is evidenced by the hashtags they employed on TW and IG and the images they posted.

FCT used more inclusive/generic hashtags like #cities, #urban, #architecture, #publicspaces, and #placemaking on TW and IG to spread awareness about an 'imagined future'. These hashtags do not align themselves with a point of view opinion or cause, they are adjectives and nouns that serve to express attributes of 'spaces' or refer to an actual space or quality of the space. Rather than spreading a message or creating awareness of a specific campaign, FCT seems to be more concerned with adding 'alternatives' to the dominant narrative on spatial inequality in Cape Town and making suggestions directly to the public and Cape Town town planner. The images posted on their IG account supports this narrative, as they tend to post designs, buildings and

banners for events. FCT is about creating awareness of innovative solutions to Cape Town's housing issues by adding other global voices to the conversation. Their narrative is 'future-orientated' as stated on the FCT website is "our cities can be more equitable, socially inclusive and progressive through innovative urban development which includes architecture, planning, public spaces, non-motorised transport and digital media." However, their posts are not personal and reflect no personality, therefore despite having the largest following, the posts they publish do not connect with their audience or generate more social interactions and engagement with their immediate group of followers. Information alone does not foster discourse - this is not the case for RTC, who remain opinionated about the present.

Reclaim the City (RTC) is a Cape Town based campaign for the desegregation of urban residential areas. Launched in February 2016, the campaign lends its resources and support to local initiatives that focus on affordable housing developments for marginalised communities and low-income earners in the inner city - in an effort to address and reverse spatial apartheid in Cape Town. On their website ([reclaimthecity.org.za](http://reclaimthecity.org.za)), they describe themselves as "a movement of tenants and workers campaigning to stop our displacement from well-located areas and secure access to decent affordable housing". Their #ReclaimtheCity was one of the top two hashtags used by most social activists when discussing spatial inequality in Cape Town. #ReclaimtheCity seems to garner more posts of news articles, live updates /analysis from media publications and journalists in addition to updates and opinions from the campaign, supporters and citizens.

The conversations around #ReclaimTheCity tend to be more opinionated and 'emotional', compared to FTC's democratic/ 'bureaucratic' outlook. The conversations generated from the hashtag range from, live updates (videos, photographs, text) on occupation events around Cape Town (Woodstock Hospital and Helen Bowden), calls to action, activism speech, opinion pieces and lists of demands. The social actors often intermingle with each other, mixing voices of citizens, activists, politicians, journalists covering the events and media publications which push out links to published articles. Other hashtags often used in conjunction with #ReclaimTheCity such as #Tafelberg, #BromwellStreet/ #Bromwell, #Blikkiesdorp and #Wolwerivier locate the issue to a specific physical space, but due to their association with the cause, these areas have also become significant "symbols" in the fight against gentrification and for affordable housing.

Unlike FTC, which has a more inclusive cosmopolitan message issue, RTC has a hands-on, personal and sentimental narrative reflected by the images of people in their IG posts unlike FTC's images of buildings. This could be the reason RTC is supported by NGO Ndifuna Ukwazi (NU).

NU is an activist organisation/ law centre that focuses on civil rights violations, social justice, urban land justice, education and constitutional rights. They “work to compel government to build new affordable rental housing and bring poor and working-class people back into the city.” (Nu.org, 2018). Apart from tweets / re-tweets from the choreographed RTC events, NU tends to draw voices from key players such as Equal Education and various supporters/activists, journalists, civilians and news publications. They function more like a civil society, rather than political cause. Chatterjee (2004) makes a useful distinction between 'civil society' and 'political society' in post-colonial countries. The former are organisations of the elite in these countries – they have the resources and education to hold ‘town hall’ meetings, and conduct court interventions. Those who constitute ‘political society’ are members of the subaltern classes who do not have the resources and education of the elite. Consequently, their tactics characteristically involve physical occupation of significant geographical venues, protest marches, blockading streets and often, destruction of (private and government) property. However, in this instance, NU uses SNS/As as a “temporary performative terrain” as a space for activists to make their struggles visible and to mobilise “crowds of individuals” through viral communication flows (Juris, 2012: 267).

## **Conclusion**

In South Africa, more people are accessing the internet via mobile connectivity; so, despite the so-called digital divide, social media use is growing exponentially year after year. In a geographically segregated/dispersed society – particularly in apartheid Cape Town – social media has played a role as a virtual public sphere in which geographically dispersed individuals and communities have come together to discuss and debate several narratives. In this study, we saw the role of social media in raising awareness on the plight of communities affected by housing issues in Cape Town, and the capacity for SNS/As to archive and categorise<sup>iv</sup> digital stories, as exemplified by our 3 key social actors. Unlike journalists, these social media activists

can be ‘emotional’, opinionated, supportive and speculative when discussing spatial inequality online.

From the data, it can be concluded that the main purpose of hashtags is to organise conversations and make certain narratives public. Using four/ five hashtags per post as FTC does, can frame a specific context and garner a larger audience through associated meaning. Consequently, mainstream media often picks up on frequently used hashtags and in turn, the hashtag is further exposed to offline audiences. Therefore, social media activists should create their own original hashtags to avoid cross-pollination and capitalise on hashtags already associated with their organisation, for example, #ndifunaukwazi, #reclaimthecity and #futurecapetown.

TW seems to be the best platform to engage in hashtag activism, however, Morozov (2011) disparages the role of TW as nothing but “a ‘self-indulgent medium that promotes slacktivism.” Nonetheless, we observe how social media plays a role in choreographing protest – giving information about where to go – crowd formation – and documenting the activities of the participants. However, we also detected the possibility that some of these conversations take place within what Smith et al (2014) termed “walled gardens.” Therefore, for social media to be a useful tool for any form of activism, social actors need to personally engage their audience offline, in addition to frequently posting content online.

## Notes

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<sup>i</sup> All the information related to Instagram’s API was retrieved from the support page:

<https://help.instagram.com/>

<sup>ii</sup> Twitter’s 7.7 million users plus Instagram 3.5 million users.

<sup>iii</sup> Please note researchers had to review 64 images on Future Cape Town’s page in order to find 20 images related to spatial inequality in Cape Town.

<sup>iv</sup> Instagram is the best application to create a digital archive and one can post directly from Instagram to the other two platforms, and assigning other digital identifiers makes the content easier to locate.

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