

## “Facebook made themselves irrelevant for us”: Social movement actors’ perspectives on social media affordances

Social movement actors working to hold businesses accountable for misconduct face challenges as they operate in a digital media environment characterized by unequal power relations. Previous work has provided insights into media practices and campaigning, but little is known about how social movement actors perceive their opportunities for action on the platforms that enable much if not most of their work. It is also unclear how these perceptions shape their activism. Filling this gap, this article takes its starting point in the interplay between materiality and practices that make up affordances. It examines how social movement actors’ understand the affordances offered by the social media platforms they operate on. In doing so, it sheds light on differences between anti-systemic and reformist civil society actors’ relation to these affordances. Thus, it considers opportunities and challenges, and, ultimately, power, as becomes clear how action-possibilities on social media platforms are not equal to all.

Theoretically, I draw on affordance theory and mobilise the distinction between low-level and high-level affordances. I consider media as ecologies, thereby avoiding the tendency to pursue a too narrow lens of platform-specific affordance theory that encourages research on only one platform at the time. This theoretical approach helps highlight the distinctive particularities of the opportunities and struggles faced by anti-systemic and reformist social movement society actors despite them operating within similar political and cultural contexts. Empirically, I draw on interviews with communication experts from anti-systemic and reformist climate organisations. 20 communication experts have participated in in-depth qualitative interviews from organisations such as: WWF, Greenpeace, Extinction Rebellion, and Danish Society for Nature Conservation.

The article finds differences in opportunities to use and access to affordances between anti-systemic and reformist social movement actors. At a low-level affordance perspective, while both generally reject Facebook as a productive site for communication, anti-systemic actors tend to favour Twitter and Instagram and their possibilities to reach the wider public while reformist actors prefer taking advantage of the access to companies which LinkedIn offers. At a high-level affordance perspective, in addition to the climate organisations’ selection of these platforms marking a strategic communicative choice, this further signals an understanding of how to navigate the wider power relations these commercial platforms are embedded within. Such a consideration of power further hints that while some platforms may die and others become popular, what remains is the profit-driven infrastructure. While different actors have different conditions and goals for successful communication, some actors will still find that some infrastructures limit them while others may not. In short, this article shows the inequality of seemingly set action-possibilities for different social movement actors working to hold businesses accountable for unsustainable practices. It critically engages with the particularities of platforms and their relation to social movement actors while accounting for ecologies as well, thereby responding to an emerging point of view in this research.