'We are all leaders': Building understanding of informal contemporary social movement leadership

Case study: The yellow vests movement in France

Mari Hämäläinen

University of Helsinki

Faculty of Social Sciences

Global Politics and Communication

Master's Thesis

November 2020

| Tiedekunta – Fakultet – Faculty | Koulutusohjelma – Utbildingsprogram – Degree Programme |
|---|---|
| Faculty of Social Sciences | Global Politics and Communication |

| Tekijä – Författare – Author |
|---|
| Mari Hämäläinen |

| Työn nimi – Arbetets titel – Title |
|---|
| 'We are all leaders': Building understanding of contemporary social movement leadership, Case study: The yellow vests movement in France |

| Oppiaine/Opintosuunta – Läroämne/Studieinriktning – Subject/Study track |
|---|
| Governance, Organizations and Communication |

| Työn laji – Arbetets art – Level | Aika – Datum – Month and year | Sivumäärä – Sidoantal – Number of pages |
|---|---|---|
| Master's Thesis | November 2020 | 72 |

Tiivistelmä – Referat – Abstract

Contemporary social movement leadership is a debated topic among social movement scholars. The social movements that organize action partly on digital platforms are often considered as leaderless and horizontal. However, recent research has revealed power dynamics and informal leadership within these movements. The scope of this master's thesis is to build understanding of this informal leadership that concerns different levels and layers in the online and offline contexts. As a case study, the master's thesis examines the yellow vests movement in France and seeks to discover what kind of similarities and differences emerge when comparing the dynamics of the yellow vests movement to other contemporary social movements.

The research method was digital media ethnography that enabled efficient tracing of the phenomenon in different digital media platforms. The fieldwork that lasted for over a year concentrated on key Facebook accounts and French and English digital news media. Three key events emerging from the social media accounts were analyzed more closely to understand the dynamics of the yellow vests movement.

The research findings reveal informal leadership within the yellow vests movement in France. This result supports recent research concerning the dynamics of contemporary social movements. However, informal leadership of the yellow vests movement is visible and thus differs from the leadership of anonymous social media administrators. Visibility enables new personalized communication tactics that are applied to strengthen emotional togetherness in the movement. The informal leadership of the yellow vests movement is also distributed between key figures and other participants in the movement network, highlighting collective action. Based on the research observations, it can be argued that the structure of the yellow vests movement is not horizontal, but key figures of the movement operate as central points or hubs in the network. Thus, it can be argued that the contribution and determination of the prominent figures in different contexts lay the foundation for the longevity of the yellow vests movement in France.

The results indicate that informal leadership cannot be ignored in the research of contemporary social movements. Based on the findings, it is suggested that future research should concentrate more closely on how informal leadership is channeled in various ways to achieve the goals of the movement.

| Avainsanat – Nyckelord – Keywords |
|---|
| social movements |
| informal leadership |
| the yellow vests movement |
| France |
| collective action |

| Ohjaaja tai ohjaajat – Handledare – Supervisor or supervisors |
|---|
| Professor Pertti Ahonen |

| Säilytyspaikka – Förvaringställe – Where deposited |
|---|
| Helsingin yliopiston kirjasto, Helsingfors universitets bibliotek, Helsinki University Library |

Tiivistelmä – Referat – Abstract

Johtajuus tämän hetken yhteiskunnallisissa liikkeissä on herättänyt paljon keskustelua tutkijoiden parissa. Yhteiskunnallisia liikkeitä, jotka organisoivat toimintaansa osittain sosiaalisen media alustoilla pidetään usein horisontaalisina rakenteina, jotka toimivat ilman johtajia. Kuitenkin tämänhetkinen tutkimus on paljastunut valtasuhteita ja epävirallista johtajuutta näiden liikkeiden sisällä. Tämän pro gradu- tutkielman tarkoituksena on tarkastella tätä epävirallista johtajuutta eri konteksteissa. Tapaustutkimuksena tutkielma tarkastelee keltaisten liivien liikettä Ranskassa ja pyrkii kartoittamaan dynamiikkaan liittyviä samankaltaisuuksia ja eroavaisuuksia verratessa toisiin tämän hetken yhteiskunnallisiin liikkeisiin.

Tutkimusmenetelmänä käytettiin digitaalista mediaetnografiaa, joka mahdollisti ilmiön tehokkaan seuraamisen digitaalisilla alustoilla. Yli vuoden kestänyt kenttätyö keskittyi liikkeelle keskeisiin Facebook tileihin sekä ranskan- ja englanninkieliseen digitaaliseen uutismediaan. Keltaisten liivien liikkeen dynamiikan ymmärtämiseksi analyysi keskittyi kolmeen keskeiseen tapahtumaan, jotka nousivat esille tarkastelluilta sosiaalisen median tileiltä.

Tutkimustulosten perusteella voidaan todeta, että Ranskan keltaisten liivien liike sisältää epävirallista johtajuutta. Tämä tulos tukee tämän hetken tutkimushavaintoja koskien yhteiskunnallisten liikkeiden dynamiikkaa. Keltaisten liivien liikkeen epävirallinen johtajuus on kuitenkin näkyvää erottaen sen anonyymien sosiaalisen median ylläpitäjien johtajuudesta. Näkyvyys mahdollistaa uusia henkilöityjä viestintätaktiikoita, joita käytetään vahvistamaan yhteisöllisyyden tunnetta liikkeessä. Keltaisten liivien liikkeen epävirallinen johtajuus on myös jaettua keskeisten henkilöiden ja muiden toimijoiden välillä tuoden esille liikkeen kollektiivisen luonteen. Tutkimushavaintoihin pohjautuen voidaan esittää, että Ranskan keltaisten liivien liikkeen rakenne ei ole horisontaalinen vaan avainhenkilöt toimivat liikeverkoston keskuspisteinä. Näin keskeisten henkilöiden panoksen ja määrätietoisuuden voidaan nähdä luovan pohjan Ranskan keltaisten liivien liikkeen pitkäikäisyydelle yhdessä eri konteksteissa tapahtuvan toiminnan kanssa.

Tulokset osoittavat, että epävirallista johtajuutta ei voida ohittaa nykyaikaisten yhteiskunnallisten liikkeiden tutkimuksessa. Tulosten perusteella ehdotetaan, että tulevaisuudessa tutkimus keskittyisi tarkemmin siihen, millä kaikilla tavoilla epävirallinen johtajuus kanavoidaan yhteiskunnallisen liikkeen tavoitteiden saavuttamiseksi.

**CONTENTS**

**FIGURES**

# 1 INTRODUCTION

Contemporary social movement leadership is a highly debated issue among social movement scholars. These movements that mobilize and organize action partly in social media arenas, for example, on Facebook and Twitter, are often considered as leaderless and horizontal (e.g., Castells, 2012). This assumption is based on the ideal of collective action that functions without representative power. The ideal of horizontality and leaderless action is strengthened by the techno-optimistic atmosphere of contemporary society.

However, recent research has revealed power dynamics and informal leadership also within contemporary social movements (e.g., Gerbaudo, 2012). This informal, soft leadership is often left unnoticed because of the anonymous social media administrators that organize and mobilize movement action online.

The scope of this master's thesis is to build understanding of informal contemporary social movement leadership by examining the yellow vests movement in France. The thesis discusses informal leadership as a dynamic and multi-layered form of action, stressing the importance of the online and offline contexts. It also examines how Facebook is utilized to strengthen the feeling of togetherness and emotionally loaded participation and how informal leadership is practiced in this digital arena. The thesis also discusses traditional media as an important part of the social movement ecosystem and utilizes network theory to describe the dynamics of contemporary social movements.

The yellow vests movement [les gilets jaunes] in France was chosen as a case study for the thesis because the movement was considered to provide an interesting and topical viewpoint on the phenomenon. The preliminary research revealed charismatic figures and new communication tactics that were regarded as a fruitful starting point for the research of movement dynamics.

The movement that began from the resistance to ecotax on diesel fuel is recognized by the yellow fluorescence jackets that are obligatory accessories in French vehicles and

thus, easily achievable by the French citizens. The yellow vests movement is not a movement of a certain social class or political orientation but gathers people with different political viewpoints and societal statuses (Chamorel, 2019). The movement does not only attract people in France but has become a worldwide phenomenon as the activists in several countries have used the yellow vest as a protest symbol of social and political injustices after the demonstrations in France began in November 2018.

Although the yellow vests movement has been regarded as the most powerful uprising in France since the student movement of May 1968 (Chamorel, 2019), it has not been studied exhaustively yet. Thus, the thesis is seeking to provide new insights concerning informal leadership and fill the gap between the visible formal leadership of the past decades and the anonymous informal leadership of the digital age.

Altogether, the thesis draws on the classification that separates 'the anti-globalization movement' and 'the movement of the squares' based on different organizational logics and communication processes. The anti-globalization movement that fought against capitalism and multinational corporations gathered citizens that were already active and organized parts of the society. The movement of the squares that utilizes new digital communication tactics emerged as an outcome from the 2008 economic crisis. It resists political elites and hierarchical structures, in this way introducing a populist turn in political contestation. (Gerbaudo, 2017, pp. 22-23.)

The thesis provides concrete examples concerning the Egyptian revolution, the Occupy Wall Street movement and the 15-M movement in Spain in 2011 to clarify the dynamics and informal leadership of contemporary social movements. Thus, the theoretical framework lays the foundation for the analysis of informal leadership of the yellow vests movement in France.

1.1 Research questions

The thesis follows the guideline provided by the following research question to build understanding of informal leadership of the yellow vests movement in France

> *1) How informal leadership emerges in the yellow vests movement in France?*

Also, the thesis seeks to answer the following research question to provide comparative data.

> *2) What kind of differences / similarities emerge when comparing informal leadership and dynamics of the yellow vests movement to other contemporary social movements?*

1.2 Research method

Digital media ethnography was considered a fruitful and effective research method for the data collection and analysis process of the phenomenon. In this research, digital media ethnography concentrates on the prominent Facebook accounts and groups and English and French digital news media. The observation period begins from the first yellow vests protest on the 17 November 2018 and ends on the 31 May 2020.

1.3 Structure of the thesis

In the next chapter, the thesis introduces the theoretical framework that forms the basis for the analysis of the dynamics of the yellow vests movement. The chapter discusses the concept of connective leadership (Della Ratta & Valeriani, 2016) and the importance of the online and offline context. The chapter also examines the role of traditional media in the social movement ecosystem and activist citizen journalism (Gerbaudo, 2016; Tufekci, 2013) as a form of individual leadership. Finally, the chapter discusses

contemporary social movements as network systems (Nunes, 2014) and approaches the concept of distributed leadership, providing a dynamic viewpoint on the issue.

In the third chapter, the thesis introduces digital media ethnography as a research method. The chapter discusses how the data was collected from Facebook and French and English digital news media and the procedures concerning the analysis. The methods section discusses the ethical issues and limitations of the research, also.

In the fourth chapter, the informal leadership of the yellow vests movement is analyzed based on digital media ethnography and collected data. The section highlights three key events that assist in explaining the dynamics of the movement.

In the fifth and sixth chapters, the thesis discusses the research findings and presents the conclusions. The chapter provides suggestions for future research, also.

## 2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The chapter aims to introduce a dynamic approach to informal social movement leadership, in this way, providing a theoretical framework as the background for the analysis of the empirical data. The chapter focuses on contemporary social movements that organize and mobilize action partly through social media platforms. Focusing on the importance of informal leadership, this chapter binds the concept of a leader to contemporary social movements and social change.

First, this chapter introduces different approaches to informal social movement leadership. Then the chapter discusses how social media enables new forms of leadership. It examines social movement leadership as a dynamic interaction between different levels and layers, emphasizing the importance of the online and offline contexts. Also, the chapter discusses the relationship between mainstream media and social movements. Finally, the chapter provides a dynamic approach to social movement leadership from the viewpoint of network theory and discusses the concept of distributed leadership.

## 2.1 Approaches to social movement leadership

Leaders have always had a critical role in social movements. They organize and mobilize action, set goals and introduce strategies and means to achieve these goals (Morris & Staggenborg, 2004; Aminzade, Goldstone & Perry, 2001; Melucci, 1996; DeCesare, 2013) thus, creating an ideology for the movement (McCarthy & Zald, 1973; Melucci, 1996). They are often considered as charismatic personalities that know how to appeal to emotions to attract attention and support for the cause (Gitlin 1980/2003). Social movement leaders are ready to make sacrifices and therefore inspire also others to take drastic action (Aminzade, Goldstone & Perry, 2001).

In previous decades, social movement leadership has been connected tightly to formal titles and centralized decision-making power (Robnett, 1996). However, social media and other digital tools have raised questions concerning leadership in contemporary

social movements. Contemporary social movement activists that organize and mobilize action partly in social media networks do not have official statuses as leaders of the movement but still perform actions that have been traditionally considered as leadership functions. These informal leaders provide a desired framework for the movement, connect separate groups and individuals and distribute information concerning the movement and its demands. (Poell, Abdulla, Rieder, Woltering & Zack, 2016, p. 997.)

The importance of informal leadership has been acknowledged in social movement research already before the invention of social media. However, this soft leadership has been examined mostly in the context of formal social movement organizations (DeCesare, 2013). For example, social movement research has concentrated on the unacknowledged role of women in the United States civil rights movement (Robnett, 1996; McNair Barnett, 1993). These studies reveal that women were a critical force in these formal organizations. Women that operated without formal leadership titles acted as 'bridge leaders' that connected the movement organization to the rest of the community (Robnett, 1996). These observations are important when examining contemporary social movement leadership as they show that leadership is not necessarily tied to formal titles or recognition but to personal qualities that enable an influential position in the movement network (Robnett, 1996, p. 1665).

Although research over the past decades has concentrated on leadership in formal social movement organizations, some studies have explored the leadership of informal organizations, also. In the famous work based on the women's liberation movement in the United States, Jo Freeman discusses how informal social movement structure limits the power to the elite, thus enabling hierarchy within the movement (Freeman, 1972/2013). On the other hand, Melucci (1996, p. 345) sees that contemporary social movement activists avoid power allocation by rotating different roles between groups and persons in the movement, turning leadership into a diffused function. Other research observations stress the interpretative approach to social movement leadership. From this viewpoint, leadership is considered a non-fixed position that often becomes acknowledged by the media, movement co-members, third parties or opponents (Bob & Nepstad, 2007, p. 1373).

These research findings show that informal leadership is regarded as a fundamental part of social movement research. The following sections examine how this soft leadership emerges in contemporary social movements that organize their action partly in digital platforms considering different levels and layers.

2.2 Techno-optimism and social change

Social media platforms, for example, Facebook and Twitter, enable new possibilities for collective action. These digital platforms provide an arena for communication connecting people from different backgrounds and social classes, thus strengthening the feeling of togetherness and emotionally loaded participation (Gerbaudo, 2017). Anyone with access to these digital platforms and tools can organize and mobilize collective action and share grievances concerning the social and political environment. Because of the new opportunities provided by social media, many contemporary social movements and uprisings have been referred to as 'Facebook and Twitter revolutions', emphasizing the power of these digital platforms in contemporary collective action. (Gerbaudo, 2012, p. 2.)

The techno-optimistic atmosphere of contemporary society is also one reason why contemporary social movements are often considered as horizontal and leaderless. Social media and digital tools have been considered as the main facilitators for social change. (Gerbaudo, 2012.) For example, Bennett and Segerberg (2013) argue that 'the logic of connective action' that is enabled by digital media forms protest networks that do not require strict organizational supervision. Similarly, Manuel Castells (2012, p. 4) states that contemporary social movements are horizontal networks that organize decision-making processes collectively on the internet and in local assemblies.

The other reason for the prevailing discourse that emphasizes the horizontal and leaderless character of contemporary social movements is the distrust of hierarchical structures and representative democracy. This distrust has characterized social movements from the 1960s as people began to consider personal identities as a source of

political power. It can be argued that individual self-expression has become even more important than the collective goals of the movement. (Kreiss & Tufekci, 2013, p. 164.)

However, many social movement scholars argue that leadership has not vanished despite the introduction of new technologies and social media, but it has changed its shape. Digitality and social media platforms have enabled a 'liquid' form of organizing that builds on informal, soft leadership (Gerbaudo, 2012). This informal leadership is not restricted to formal organizational structures but endorses the 'spontaneous philosophy' of contemporary social movements that is facilitated by new forms of communication (Nunes, 2014, p. 8). Leaders are considered, for example, as 'caretakers' that are not appointed or elected but still work hard online, and in the streets to achieve the objectives of the movement (Bakardjieva, Felt & Dumitrica, 2018, pp. 911-913). This activity can be considered as a more distributed, indirect and emotionally loaded 'choreographic leadership' (Gerbaudo, 2012) that 'sets the scene for participation' (p. 43).

2.3 Leaders as connectors

Della Ratta and Valeriani (2012, p. 53) argue that the internet should be considered as a cultural mixture of different values, practices, expertise and strategies that facilitate the actions of contemporary social movements. This web culture that does not have a clear division between active leaders and passive followers becomes dependent on 'connective leadership'. These connective leaders have a crucial role in framing the movement and its demands and in this way, providing international and national attention for its actions. (Della Ratta & Valeriani, 2012.)

In the Tunisian and Egyptian uprisings 2010-2011, connective leaders were technological experts in other words, 'tech-savvies' of the population. They played an important role in organizing, sorting and translating material that was distributed on Facebook by citizens and other participants in the movement. This material was used to build collective platforms that formed a preferred context for the movement. These curation platforms, for example, the Tunisian platform Nawaat emphasized successfully

the non-violent and peaceful character of these uprisings for the national and international audience. It is notable that these platforms were not only information sources for the citizens but were also used by the traditional media to build news stories. Thus, especially in countries in which the digital divide prevents equal distribution of information through the internet, these collectively organized and independent curation platforms have a significant influence on how citizens interpret the movement and its demands. (Della Ratta & Valeriani, 2012, pp. 62-63.)

Poell et al. (2016) argue that connective leadership differs in many ways from traditional social movement leadership. Compared to formal leaders that are visible and physically present, connective leadership functions in social media platforms relying on anonymity. The anonymous connective leaders do not have the power to command people, but they are capable of steering discussion to a preferred direction. For example, the initiators of the We are all Khaled Said [Kullena Khaled Said] Facebook page, the Egyptian activists Wael Ghonim and AbdelRahman Mansour, used marketing and branding strategies familiar to the business world to engage people in the activities of the movement through social media. These strategies determined the course of action and provided the framework for leadership. (Poell et al., 2016, p. 1004.)

Connective leaders of the social media age differ in other ways also from the traditional social movement leaders. Connective leaders do not usually become celebrities highlighted by mass media because they act anonymously (Poell et al. 2016, p. 1008). Anonymity can be considered as an advantage as the activist celebrity status has often harmed social movements as the attention focuses on the media person instead of the movement and its goals (Gitlin 1980/2003). Also, connective leaders are not striving for passive followers like traditional social movement leaders but are stressing the participatory character of the movement. They invite people to take an active part, for example, by contributing content on social media platforms. Therefore, the actions of contemporary social movements cannot be fit in 'the collective identity frames' that determine the role of the participants in the movement. (Poell et al., 2016, p. 1009.)

## 2.4 Anonymity and social movement leadership

As discussed above, Poell et al. (2016) state that the key to connective leadership is anonymity. Many social media accounts of contemporary social movements are anonymous, or the accounts have collective names, emphasizing the leaderless character of the movement (Gerbaudo, 2012, p. 144). Anonymity is an efficient way to emphasize the feeling of togetherness and the participatory character of the movement (Bakardjieva, Felt & Dumitrica, 2018, p. 912). For example, Wael Ghonim (2012), the creator of the most popular Facebook page in the Egyptian uprising in 2011, We are all Khaled Said, stated ' I want no public position or reward, and even if we are successful, I will never reveal my identity, because I wish for us all to carry this beautiful dream into our lives...' (p. 175).

There exist also other reasons for anonymity than creating a feeling of togetherness. Especially in repressive regimes, social media administrators act anonymously because of security reasons. In authoritarian countries, the fear of being prosecuted and tortured because of acting as a part of the movement is a constant threat (Gerbaudo, 2016). In the case of the Facebook page, We are all Khaled Said, Ghonim and Mansour used the pseudonym The Martyr [Elshaheeed] to hide their identities. It was not until Ghonim was arrested that he was identified as one of the administrators of the webpage. (Poell et al., 2016, p. 995.)

However, as discussed earlier anonymity enables power dynamics that are often left unnoticed. Anonymous social media administrators efficiently steer, direct and shape the discussion in social media platforms, in this way acting as informal leaders of the movement. For example, in the case of We are all Khaled Said, Ghonim and Mansour were entitled to post new content on the page as other participants and interest groups had only the right to comment, like or share the content. (Poell et al., 2016, p. 995.) This provided the agenda-setting power for Ghonim and Mansour and a privileged position compared to other participants in the movement.

2.5 Power asymmetries and social media teams

The anonymous social media administrators often form teams that Gerbaudo (2017) describes as 'digital vanguards.' These teams can operate in different organizations related to the movement but also under the supervision of the general assembly that is a typical decision-making body of contemporary social movements. Although these digital vanguards have a more powerful position in the movement compared to other participants, there also exist hierarchical structures within these teams that contradict the ideal of horizontality and leaderless action. (Gerbaudo, 2017, pp. 152-153.)

The power relations within these digital media teams appear in different ways. In the Occupy Wall Street movement and ¡Democracia Real Ya! that initiated the 15-M movement in Spain, a constant conflict existed between the ideal of horizontality and the actual division of the political work. Digital media team members had different rights to create, edit and produce text depending on their position in the team. The team administrators had the highest hierarchical status in the team and thus, access to the passwords of the accounts. They also had control over the site management, whereas the team moderators played a minor role. (Gerbaudo, 2017, p. 153.)

In the cases of Occupy Wall Street and ¡Democracia Real Ya!, the inability to handle the hierarchical team structure led to conflicts between the members of these social media teams. These conflicts often appeared as severe struggles over the ownership of social media accounts that had hundreds of thousands of followers and thus had become crucial hubs for the movement. This struggle was, for example, observed between the social media groups 'Refounding' [Refundación] and 'Restart' [Reinicia] that both had different opinions about the future of the network ¡Democracia Real Ya!. The conflicts between social media teams sometimes had severe effects on the reputation of the movement, also. (Gerbaudo, 2017, p. 154.)

2.6 The importance of the online and offline contexts

Despite the possibilities provided by the internet and social media also the offline
context needs to be recognized to understand the ecosystem of contemporary social
movements, its practices and culture (Della Ratta & Valeriani, 2012; Tufekci & Wilson,
2012). The line between the offline and online contexts has become blurred because of
technological developments. Many activists operate in the online and offline contexts
simultaneously, for example, as activist-citizen journalists. These activists use their
mobile devices for sending content to social media platforms while taking part in
demonstrations in the streets. (Tufekci, 2013.) Thus, referring to contemporary struggles
as 'digital activism' or 'cyberactivism' can be misleading.

The tight connection between the online and offline contexts becomes visible in the
actions of connective leaders discussed earlier in the master's thesis. For example,
communication tactics that were used in the Tunisian and Egyptian uprisings in 2010-
2011 were not only discussed by Arab 'techies' and Arab bloggers in social media, but
these ideas were shared during national and international meetings face-to-face between
these connective leaders (Della Ratta & Valeriani, 2012).

Besides emphasizing the importance of the offline and online contexts, these
observations demonstrate that contemporary social movements are not spontaneous, but
activist communities refine tactics, build trust and the feeling of togetherness online and
offline well before the action itself takes place (Tufekci & Wilson, 2012).

The significance of the offline context becomes evident in repressive regimes that are
strongly characterized by the digital divide. Face-to-face communication becomes a
crucial part of the mass mobilization process. However, the offline context has been
crucial in non-authoritarian countries, also. For example, in Spain, the grassroots
organization ¡Democracia Real Ya! that initiated the political movement 15-M or better
known as Los Indignados saw the importance of street work in distributing information
to people outside the digital arenas. (Gerbaudo, 2012, p. 89.) Bennet and Segerberg
(2013, p. 41) even argue that social media platforms are not as integral parts of

contemporary social movements as they are for formal political organizations that reach their audiences in social media to cut the expenses.

The interaction between the offline and online contexts becomes visible in different stages of social movement development. The processes concerning informal leadership are often most active in the early stages when the movement is not visible in social media nor the streets yet. (Gerbaudo, 2012, p. 141.)

Contemporary social movements are often launched online by a few active members. For example, Wael Ghonim initiated the Facebook page We are all Khaled Said that became the most popular social media arena in the Egyptian uprising in 2011. Similarly, Pablo Gallego and Fabio Gandara were persons that created the platform ¡Democracia Real Ya!, which became the initiation for the 15-M movement in Spain.

Despite the crucial role these activists have in launching the movement online, their influence often vanishes during the process because of their physical distance. For example, editors Kalle Lasn and Micah White of Adbusters were not able to conduct the Occupy Wall Street movement as it began to spread in the streets of New York partly because of their physical location in Vancouver and Berkeley. (Gerbaudo, 2012, pp. 141-142.)

In other cases, the influence of these social media administrators waned despite the physical closeness. For example, Ghonim as Gallego and Gandara influenced the movement in the initial stage. As the movement began to move from social media platforms into physical locations in the streets, these invisible choreographers lost their grip on the movement. When people found physical sites to rally and promote emotional togetherness, for example, the Tahrir Square in Egypt and Puerta del Sol in Spain, they often ceased to consider social media and its administrators important for collective action. (Gerbaudo, 2012, p. 142.)

It is notable that although the influence of social media administrators often wanes as the movement moves to physical locations, the power dynamics of contemporary social movements do not disappear in the streets. Various groups can take the leading position in these locations. For example, the 6th of April Movement and the Muslim Brotherhood

in Egypt or the direct-action activists in Spain played significant roles in distributing information within participants and directing the movement. Also, in countries where Twitter penetration is high, citizen-activist journalists have acted in important roles connecting people in the online and offline contexts. (Gerbaudo, 2012, pp. 142-143.)

2.7 The dynamic interaction between traditional media and social movements

Social media has provided new opportunities for contemporary social movements to frame their message. Therefore, contemporary social movements are not as much dependent on mainstream media attention as in the earlier decades. In other words, the relation between traditional media and social movements has become less asymmetrical. However, despite the possibilities that social media provides for contemporary social movements, traditional media continues to be an integral part of the social movement ecosystem. Thus, it cannot be ignored in the discussion concerning contemporary social movement leadership (Vliegenthart & Walgrave, 2012).

Traditional media and contemporary social movements have a complex relation. Rucht (2004, p. 26) argues that the internet cannot replace the mainstream media that is considered as a credible source of political information for most of the public. On the other hand, social movement activists often do not consider mainstream media as an independent and neutral source of information, but as an accomplice of the political authorities, they are fighting against (Gamson & Wolfsfeld, 1993, p. 119). Though contemporary social movement activists are skeptical towards traditional media, without media attention movements can have difficulties in gaining public support (Rucht, 2004).

The framing of mainstream media partly determines public support for the movement. Traditional media can present the movement negatively or positively, depending on its intentions. Journalists can ignore the movement because it does not represent their own set of values or the movement contradicts the financial interests of the media corporation. (Tufekci, 2017, p. 30.) Traditional media often becomes interested in the social movement when there are violence and conflict involved, in this way,

emphasizing a negative framing (Tufekci, 2017, p. 212). This negative framing and undesired media coverage can be damaging to the whole movement.

Contemporary social movements and mainstream media can also have a mutual relationship that benefits both sides. For example, social movement activists can have continuous relations with journalists. Movement activists can prepare press releases concerning the actions and demands of the movement. They can also introduce preferred spokespeople for traditional media. (Rucht, 2004, p. 28.) For example, the Arab tech-savvies that operated as connective leaders in the Tunisian and Egyptian uprisings co-operated with the Qatar-based television channel Al-Jazeera and its news media team long-before the demonstrations began (Della Ratta & Valeriani, 2012). Besides traditional media, contemporary social movements are cooperating with institutions, celebrities or journalist curators to raise more attention for their cause. Cooperation has become almost a necessity because of the fragmentation of public attention due to the internet. (Tufecki, 2013.)

2.7.1 Social movement spokespersons

Journalists often seek spokespersons to discuss the grievances and demands of the movement (Rucht, 2004, p. 25). Current research reveals that journalists are likely to approach activists that are in a central position in the movement. However, these movement actors do not have to possess a formal leadership position. Media acknowledges these actors because of their personal characteristics like charisma. (Malinick, Tindall & Diani, 2013; Gitlin 1980/2003.) This research result supports the observations of Bob and Nepstad (2007), suggesting that social movement activists often are acknowledged as movement leaders through mass media coverage. Also, it can be argued that in some cases, social movement actors are 'leaders' before the mass media acknowledgment. They know how to stand out from the movement, for example, by using powerful rhetoric. (Gitlin 1980/2003, p. 153.)

Traditionally, activists of contemporary social movements have been reluctant to choose spokespersons because of the fierce opposition to representatives and representative

power. However, this choice can have a negative impact on the movement. If the movement does not present official spokespersons, traditional media often chooses its representatives, providing a celebrity status for the activist. (Freeman 1972/2013, Gitlin 1980/2003.)

Celebrity status can be considered problematic in many ways. The position collides severely with horizontality and the leaderless ideal of contemporary social movements. Although these movement spokespersons or media persons can raise awareness towards the grievances and demands of the movement, the public backlash against the leader-like position can result in a total abdication concerning the responsibilities towards the movement. This abdication leaves room for persons that are less vulnerable for criticism but also less liable to the movement itself. In this way, the abdication can be damaging or even disastrous for the continuation of the movement. (Freeman 1972/2013, Gitlin 1980/2003.)

In addition to celebrity status, the movement spokespersons meet other kinds of challenges. For example, other activists in the movement can feel that the collectively chosen frame is not presented exhaustively enough by the spokespersons that are chosen by mainstream media. An internal conflict concerning the role of a spokesperson may even become the frame utilized by traditional media, in this way, obscuring the actual intentions of the movement. Therefore, Gamson and Wolfsfeld (1993, p. 123) argue that the movement frame and spokespeople should be decided collectively to avoid conflicts.

2.7.2 Activist citizen-journalism and individual leadership

The multifaced relation between contemporary social movements and traditional media becomes visible in the actions of activist citizen-journalists, also (Tufekci, 2013). These activists that operate in the offline and online contexts provide a new viewpoint on contemporary social movement leadership. Gerbaudo (2016, p. 19) argues that activist citizen-journalism is a form of individual leadership because of the influential position these media persons can have in the movement. Because of the attention these activists

can have in operating different levels and layers, Tufekci (2013) defines this form of action as 'networked microcelebrity activism'.

The politically inclined citizen-journalist activists attract attention for a cause with a personal approach through social media updates. Although these citizen journalists are not considered as official spokespersons of the movement nor ordinary social movement actors, they are still often acknowledged by a local, regional and international audience. Thus, they have a significant role in framing the message of the movement as their influence can be many times greater than the influence of the social movement organization itself. For example, in the Arab uprisings 2010-2011, the citizen journalist-activists that operated on the ground played an important role in drawing international attention to the demands of the movement by their emotionally loaded reporting style. (Tufekci, 2013, p. 857.)

Activist citizen- journalists often gain attention by attending events which are not accessible for traditional media. They seek these situations consciously that differ them from ordinary citizen journalists that act spontaneously and without planning to report the situation beforehand. The activist citizen-journalists use a charismatic and personal reporting style, they bring forward their ideas concerning the event and use emotionally loaded content mixed with personal issues to attract attention. (Tufekci, 2013, p. 858.)

The networked microcelebrity activism brings forward the intertwined relationship between contemporary social movements and mainstream media. The activist citizen-journalists often become followed and acknowledged first by traditional media. The media celebrity status is strengthened in the social media platforms, providing more followers and attention. For example, the Egyptian activist Gigi Ibrahim became one of the visible faces of the Egyptian uprising in the international media and on the social media platform Twitter. Even the fact that her political views represented a marginal group in Egypt did not prevent media attention because she was considered a charismatic personality through her activity in social media. The emergence of activist citizen-journalism reveals how traditional media does not have a monopoly position in choosing spokespersons for the movement like in the previous decades. (Tufekci 2013, pp. 858-859.)

The networked microcelebrity activism highlights the power dynamics within contemporary social movements. The activist citizen-journalists are visible at different levels and layers, thus separating them from the anonymous connective leaders. The visibility makes activist citizen-journalists easy targets for continuous observation and criticism, restricting the actions of these independent journalists. (Tufekci 2013, p. 859.)

The microcelebrity status can also provide a privileged position. Especially in repressive regimes, the activist citizen-journalists are often protected by the international attention that they have attracted with the personal reporting style. The activists recognize their privileged position that causes discomfort because movement activists without a celebrity status are forced to face the authorities. (Tufecki 2013, p. 866.)


2.8 Contemporary social movements as network-systems


Previous examples suggest that contemporary social movements contain informal leadership and power dynamics that have a significant part in the actions of these movements. To examine more closely informal leadership and dynamics of contemporary social movements Nunes (2014) argues that these movements should be considered as network-systems. These network-systems are partly horizontal but also include power dynamics and leadership. Thus, he argues that the main challenge for contemporary social movements is not to deny the existence of these dimensions but to find a balance between them. (p. 13.)

The network-systems consist of nodes, hubs and ties. Nodes can be, for example, Facebook accounts that are administrated by individuals or teams. Thus, ties are connections between these nodes. A node with a high number of ties becomes a hub that has more capacity to influence other nodes. In the network-system, the number of nodes, ties and hubs is continuously changing. (Nunes, 2014, pp. 17-18.)

The network-system reflects the different levels and layers of a social movement. These layers consist of, for example, informal or formal groups or individuals, social media platforms and physical locations. Thus, citizens that cannot participate in the actions of

contemporary social movements in the digital arenas can still be part of the network-system in other layers. The network-system becomes collective as the layers connects with each other. Also, different network-systems do not exist independently but are overlapping each other. (Nunes, 2014, p. 20.)

The idea to examine contemporary social movements as network-systems is based on network theory and the model of scale-free networks that were introduced by Albert-Lázló Barabási and Réka Albert in 1999 (Nunes, 2014, p. 31). These scale-free networks that function under power laws have two basic characters. The networks are continuously expanding, which means that the number of nodes is increasing steadily. Also, based on preferential attachment, new nodes most likely connect to nodes that already have a high number of connections, turning these powerful connection points into hubs. Thus, the networks are self-organizing structures. (Barabási & Albert, 1999, p. 509.)

Based on network theory, network-systems are not horizontal, but the amount of influence varies between nodes. However, network-systems are protected by 'continuous internal differentiation'. In other words, networks are constantly changing as new ties are developed between different nodes, preventing one hub from becoming critical for the continuity of the network. (Nunes, 2014, pp. 31-32.) On the other hand, Barabási states that the role of random nodes in the network is not crucial. However, if a hub as a highly connective node is attacked or removed, the network can be damaged permanently. (Science & Cocktails, 2016.)

What is interesting in the light of contemporary social movement leadership is that a hub does not have to possess an established position in the network. For example, it has been examined that in formal organizations, the hubs are not necessarily managers of the organization but people that act as reliable sources of information and thus enjoy the confidence of other employees. In this connection, Barabási discusses hidden networks that provide the possibility to influence the whole network through influential hubs. (Science & Cocktails, 2016.)

2.9 Distributed leadership

Based on dynamic and continuous internal differentiation, Nunes (2014) describes social movement networks as distributed network-systems. This viewpoint suggests that leadership is distributed among several nodes in different levels and layers in the network. Leadership positions can be occupied basically by anyone in the network-system and several persons at the same time. Thus, these social movement networks are not leaderless but can be considered as 'leaderful'. (p. 33.)

The importance of developing leadership among the people was already discussed by Ella Baker, one of the crucial figures of the United States civil rights movement (Baker, 1970). Also, many social movement scholars approach the concept of distributed leadership. It is considered that the success of a social movement is dependent on the dynamic interaction between its leaders. It is unusual that skills, including organizational and personal competence, are possessed by a single person, but several persons are needed to fulfill the conditions for a positive change. (Aminzade, Goldstone and Perry, 2001, p. 152.) Similarly, the research acknowledges the importance of leadership teams and interaction in changing conditions (Ganz, 2009; Gerbaudo, 2016).

In the distributed network-systems, leadership is examined as a network property. The influence of a node is dependent on the number of ties it possesses and the exercise of this potential. If a hub for some reason fails to interact with other nodes or becomes passive, it loses its connections, and the traffic in the network is re-routed. Also, if a hub faces mistrust, for example, because of delivering fake news, the situation can result in to decrease in the number of ties. In practice, this means reputational damage and loss of trust. (Nunes, 2014, p. 34.)

In addition to network property, distributed leadership can be evaluated in sudden events connected to the movement. These events reveal leadership as they are occasions that attract attention and participation. A sudden event can be, for example, a change of direction in an ongoing demonstration. The sudden events reveal that in contemporary social movements changes do not necessarily need extensive decision-making processes. Change can originate from anywhere that stresses the distributed form of leadership.

The observations concerning leadership in sudden events reduce, for example, the role of general assemblies as collective decision-making bodies in recent occupy movements. (Nunes, 2014, pp. 35-36.)

The number of ties does not solely determine the influence of a person or a group in the distributed network-system, but it is dependent on the quality of these ties. The quality of ties is determined by the personal abilities to influence and motivate others. (Nunes, 2014, p. 35.) Thus, for example, charisma can be considered as an ability to attract attention and form more influential ties. Charismatic leaders create togetherness with the emotional discourse and therefore influence the interpretations of interest groups. In social movements, these charismatic figures do not use professional rhetoric that could be connected to elitism and hierarchy but a discourse that appeals to social classes that have no voice in the society. (Aminzade, Goldstone & Perry, 2001, p. 130.)

Aminzade, Goldstone and Perry (2001, p. 142) argue that charisma can also be a collective activity in contrast to the Weberian masculine, heroic action that is seen separate from every-day life. Kathleen Jones (as cited in Aminzade, Goldstone & Perry 2001, p. 142) describes this collective activity as 'prudentialized charisma'. She states that 'charismatic leadership becomes not the isolated heroic action of the saint but the collective, creative, even mundane activity of an otherwise marginalized group to evidence grace under pressure as a way of securing dignity' (p. 142).

The scale-free network model by Albert and Barbási has encountered strong criticism because it does not explain why separate nodes that are not central for the network can still reach an influential position. With a new theory, Bianconi and Barabási (2001) explained that the ability to increase the number of ties in the network is dependent on the fitness of the node. Thus, nodes that are not highly connected can become influential in the network. Node fitness can be, for example, related to social skills or the content of a website (Bianconi & Barabási. 2001, p. 437). On the other hand, Nunes (2014) sees that the competitive power of a node and its fitness is tied to the ability to introduce something exceptional at the prevailing situation. The node can 'act as a vector of collective action', enabling 'a vanguard-function' that raises the node into an influential position for a certain time without turning it into a hub. (pp. 38-39.)

Altogether, these observations reveal that distributed network-systems are not static but are continuously changing and forming new nodes and hubs. Based on the network theory, it can be argued that the distributed network-systems are not horizontal, but hubs have a more influential position in the network. It does not mean that these networks are necessarily undemocratic. Democracy in these networks is dependent on the scale of distributed leadership. The level of democracy can be measured by examining how open these networks are for new ideas that form new hubs and nodes that act temporarily as 'leaders.' (Nunes, 2014, p. 39.)

3 METHODS

First, the chapter introduces digital media ethnography as a research method and explains why it was considered an efficient method for the research. Then the thesis discusses how digital media ethnography was applied in the research of the yellow vests movement in France. The section also looks at digital news media and the social media arena Facebook as research fields. Next, the chapter introduces procedures concerning the analysis of the collected data. Finally, the chapter discusses the ethical considerations and limitations of the research.

3.1 Digital media ethnography

Digital media ethnography is a qualitative approach in which the research field is constructed by the researcher that traces the specific event, phenomenon or activity in different digital media platforms (Sumiala, Tikka, Huhtamäki & Valaskivi, 2016, p. 103). Thus, the data collection method provides the researcher with a personal involvement through observation and a direct interpretation of the field (Hine, 2015, p. 19).

Ethnography is regarded as an effective method to provide new approaches to social movement dynamics that could be left unnoticed when using other methods (Balsiger and Lambelet, 2014, p. 4). The focus of ethnographic research is to discover unexpected phenomena (Kozinets, 2015, p. 170). An ethnographic research field often concerns multiple sites (Marcus, 1995). For example, Hine (2015, p. 87) argues that the digital research field is not a specified site on the internet but a fluid and expanding environment that often consists of the online and offline contexts.

It is important to note that digital media ethnography is based on the interpretations of the researcher and thus does not provide absolute truths. As Hine (2015, p. 4) argues, the researcher that is conducting ethnographic research needs to get used to the feeling of uncertainty when building interpretations based on the evidence she or he has gathered.

This also affects the reliability of the research. Because interpretations are based on personal experience, another researcher can have different outcomes in the same research setting. Thus, ethnographic research is not trying to provide unquestionable facts, but its strength is direct and intense involvement in the field that cannot be achieved with quantitative methods. (Hine 2015, p. 20.)

In this master's thesis, digital media ethnography was regarded as a multifaceted and dynamic method to examine informal leadership of the yellow vest movement that organized action in the online and offline sites. The method enabled moving from one website to another fluently that was considered important concerning the dynamic character of the topic. Besides text samples, the method also provided observations concerning audiovisual material, images, and other digital content (see Kozinets, 2015, p. 5).

3.2 Digital media ethnography of the yellow vests movement in France

The yellow vests movement was traced and observed in digital arenas from the beginning of the protests, the 17 November 2018 till the 31 May 2020. At first, the period for observations was settled to end at the anniversary of the movement on the 17 November 2019. However, unexpected events occurred along with the COVID-19 crisis and thus, the observation period was extended to collect additional data. The last months of the fieldwork turned out to be significant concerning the research of movement dynamics and informal leadership.

First, the yellow vests movement in France was examined through the internet search engines Google and YouTube to provide an overview of the topic. Google searches were conducted to discover links to web pages related to the topic, but also to find images and videos providing a visual and dynamic aspect of the phenomenon. YouTube searches concentrated on video material concerning the movement. This material included, for example, interviews and footage on demonstrations in Paris and other cities in France.

Search engine keywords in Google and YouTube included a wide variety of terms related to the topic and the research questions. The intention was to keep these terms simple and consistent (see Kozinets, 2015). These terms included words and combinations of words in English and French, for example, 'the yellow vests, leadership', 'les gilets jaunes, leaders', 'the yellow vests, spokesperson', 'les gilets jaunes, porte-parole'.

Based on the findings of the first phase of the research, the observations concentrated on social media and digital news media. Facebook was regarded as the primary social media source concerning the topic. Digital news media sources consisted of French and English publications. These sources together were considered to provide an extensive viewpoint on the research topic. However, other digital sources, for example, Twitter, were checked regularly in case of essential information. The examination of multiple sources was regarded as a clear advantage to avoid biased interpretations of this complex phenomenon. Thus, this triangulation (Ayoub, Wallace & Zepeda-Millán, 2014, p. 2) provided a more holistic approach to informal leadership and movement dynamics, validating the research findings. As the research was theory-driven it guided the observations from the beginning and assisted in defining the area of the research.

The data was collected by writing field notes, taking screenshots, archiving digital news articles and links to websites. This material also contained images and audiovisual material that were stored, for example, in separate folders on Facebook. The collected data was organized in different thematic folders during the fieldwork. After the fieldwork, the folders were revised for relevant data concerning the analysis of the movement dynamics and informal leadership. The field notes were gathered and saved on separate documents.

3.2.1 French and English digital news media

The yellow vests movement in France was covered daily in several digital news media publications. Therefore, digital news media was considered as an important source of information concerning the phenomenon. During the research, the French digital news

media became a critical source of data because of the lack of international media attention apart from the early stages of the yellow vests movement. Thus, limiting the research to English digital news media would have affected the interpretation of the phenomenon.

A wide variety of English and French digital news media sources was traced to avoid biased research observations. It was considered essential in the case of France because of the low autonomous position of the French media compared to other European democracies. This position that enables the agenda-setting power of the political elite on the executive level could have provided a biased-view on the phenomenon. (Kuhn, 2013.)

Digital news media publications included, for example, The New York Times, The Guardian, Le Monde, Le Figaro, Libération. France24 and Le Parisien. Sources included independent French digital news media, for example, Mediapart and Quartier Général, also. Digital news media sources were discovered through searches conducted in the Google search engine. Also, the search engines of digital news media webpages were used to have a viewpoint on the phenomenon.

It was noted that a clear difference existed between the English and the French digital news media coverage. As the French media introduced active members of the movement, the international news media provided more of a general view on the phenomenon. Thus, the French digital news media provided links to Facebook groups and accounts that proved to be essential sources of information for the research.

3.2.2 Facebook

As mentioned above, digital news media provided trails to social media, in this case, to Facebook. Though the movement was also active in other social media platforms, for example, on Twitter, based on the observations, Facebook was considered as the primary platform for the yellow vests movement in France.

The statistics concerning social media usage in France supported the observations that Facebook is the primary social media platform for French citizens. According to the 2019 statistics, in January, 74 percent of internet users aged between 16-64 years in France reported that they used Facebook during the past month, turning Facebook the second most popular social media platform in France. Twitter percentage during the same period was 28 percent. However, the most used social media platform was YouTube by 78 percent. (Kemp, 2019.) Thus, YouTube was also actively observed during the research. It was noted that the audiovisual material between Facebook and YouTube was partly overlapping because the same content was shared with these digital arenas.

The observations concerning the yellow vests movement did not support previous findings that Twitter is used as a primary communication tool by the core activist community (e.g., Gerbaudo, 2012, p. 135). It seemed that the yellow vests movement was organized by citizens that were not representing the tech-savvy elite of the population. The social media arena Twitter was mainly used to raise awareness of the French minority that uses Twitter as a primary tool for communication. Thus, Twitter was considered an additional tool for mobilizing and organizing action and therefore, it was not the focus of the research. It was also considered more efficient to concentrate on a single social media platform. A comparative analysis between Twitter and Facebook would have been demanding because of the operational differences of these platforms.

Based on activity and centrality in the movement, Facebook observations concentrated on four key accounts that were administrated by prominent figures in the movement. Three key events emerging from these accounts were chosen for closer analysis.

3.3 Data analysis

It is notable that in ethnographic research, the analysis intertwines with the data collection process. This means that the analysis of the phenomenon takes place already during the fieldwork. The 'reflective fieldnotes' (Kozinets, 2015, p. 189) that are personal interpretations of the researcher are in a central position in this process

providing new questions and directions for the research. Thus, the researcher must be open to unexpected events. Usually, the research scope changes during the fieldwork as observations provide new relevant data. (Balsiger & Lambelet, 2014, p. 19.) Therefore, the role of an interpreter that connects the empirical data to the interpretation becomes crucial (Kozinets, 2015, p. 199).

Thus, the first step of the analysis of the informal leadership of the yellow vests movement was conducted already during the fieldwork. The movement dynamics and leadership were continuously analyzed by writing reflective field notes. The reflective and personal observations that were based on theoretical interpretations of different phenomena were accompanied by descriptive and methodological fieldnotes. Descriptive fieldnotes provided more detailed information on the events and actors. Methodological fieldnotes included remarks on how to continue with the research in practice, for example, which sites or actors would be worthwhile to examine further. (Balsiger & Lambelet, 2014, p. 18.)

During the fieldwork, descriptive fieldnotes were arranged in chronological order to provide a timeline for the actions of the movement. These descriptive fieldnotes consisted mainly of data from French and English digital news media concerning weekly demonstrations and other events related to the movement. The timeline that was based on the descriptive data helped to position the reflective interpretations of the phenomenon that formed the basis for the in-depth analysis after the observation period ended.

Digital media ethnography enables different technical approaches to in-depth data analysis. The analysis can be computer-assisted or done manually, depending on the orientation of the researcher (Kozinets, 2015). This analyzing process is often partly hidden and guided by former experience. It consists of coding fieldnotes, finding answers to emerging questions, and providing citations and reflective field notes as the base for argumentation. (Balsiger & Lambelet, 2014, p. 19.)

In this research, the data was collected and coded manually to enable a creative and open approach to the dynamic phenomenon. Computational methods could have brought additional value for the research but also could have converted research findings into

constrained categories. Thus, it was a conscious decision to abandon computer-assisted data analysis techniques in this research to avoid too rigid interpretations (see Kozinets, 2015, p. 220).

Three Facebook updates were chosen for the in-depth analysis. These updates were considered key events that highlighted the dynamics and informal leadership of the movement. The updates were coded by examining how movement dynamics were approached and discussed in the actual update. After the coding process, the data was decoded to find common patterns and meanings.

In the analysis, direct quotations were used to validate the research findings concerning the three Facebook updates. These quotations were translated from French into English. The original quotations were left in footnotes of the thesis to validate the research findings. To secure authenticity, the spelling and form, including spelling mistakes of these direct quotations, were kept unchanged.

In addition to direct quotations, a free online textual analysis tool Wordclouds (https://wordclouds.com) was used to assist with the in-depth analysis of two of the Facebook updates. These updates were chosen because they dealt with the same issue in a different time frame and thus were assumed to provide important information concerning the interaction within the movement. The textual analysis tool helped effectively with the analysis of over a thousand comments.

The word cloud was created by copying the comments related to the Facebook updates and pasting them to the Wordclouds platform to provide a simple text sample. All extraneous words were removed, for example, Facebook 'Likes' and 'Shares'. Also, the names of the commentators were removed because they did not bring additional value to the analysis. Next, the text was entered into the word cloud generator program and once again checked for unnecessary words, for example, conjunctions. In the final stage, the French words were translated into English.

After the creation of the word cloud from the two Facebook updates, a comparative analysis was conducted between the two sets of posts, including the initial updates and

their content. These findings assisted with the interpretations concerning the dynamics and informal leadership of the movement.

3.4 Ethical considerations

Ethnographic research on digital platforms has provided new ethical challenges, for example, concerning direct quotations that are retrieved from social media accounts to validate interpretations. Although direct quotations provide a fruitful basis for the analysis, they can also be traced to their sources through the internet search engines thus, revealing information concerning the participants (Robson, 2017, p. 196). Researchers have introduced different ways to protect participant data. For example, participant anonymity can be protected by presenting findings in a narrative form instead of direct quotations (Jones, 2011).

In this master's thesis, Facebook research was conducted in public groups and accounts that did not involve sensitive topics nor stigmatized communities. Thus, it was considered acceptable to provide direct quotations to validate interpretations and findings. The key persons that participated in the discussions were public figures, and therefore identification was not considered harmful to these persons. (Kozinets, 2015, p. 157.) The public role of these persons became evident as Facebook content was also shared in traditional media. These persons also appeared in television programs and were interviewed frequently by the media. The names and images of other participants on Facebook were not published in the research. Also, part of the analysis of social media data was in narrative form to protect participant anonymity.

Besides participant anonymity, researcher anonymity is part of the ethical considerations in the digital field. In this research, data were collected through observations and without researcher identification because it was regarded as a suitable method for building understanding of informal leadership of the movement without harming the community. Lurking in online discussion groups without actively participating in the discussion is considered a typical research method for digital ethnography (Hine, 2015, p. 57).

3.5 Limitations of the research

A few issues emerged during the process concerning the limitations of the research. As discussed above, the research findings were based on observations. However, active participation in the field is often considered as a condition for a well-founded argumentation concerning ethnographic research (Hine, 2015). Thus applying, for example, interviews as a data collection method would assist in confirming interpretations. In this case, the time frame of the master's thesis limited the research method to observations.

It can be argued that observations concerning private Facebook groups would have provided essential information for the research. However, it became evident during the research that the actions of the movement were based on visibility and openness in different contexts to gain trust and emotional togetherness. In this regard, private Facebook groups would not have necessarily provided additional information concerning the topic of the thesis.

The amount of research data was vast because of the timeframe. Computational methods could have helped to analyze the content more systematically. Also, for example, charts based on quantitative data could have assisted in visualizing the interpretations. For example, Facebook account activity could have been visualized based on the number of comments that an update received on Facebook.

The limitations regarding the command of the French language has been acknowledged in the research. However, the research focused on events and phenomena at a general level and did not include, for example, a discourse analysis that would have required a high proficiency in French.

Finally, it should be noted that the chosen timeframe influenced the analysis and interpretations of the movement dynamics and informal leadership. Because the yellow vests movement in France is still active, and thus the network is changing and developing continuously, later findings can differ from the ones presented in this master's thesis.

4 ANALYSIS

This chapter focuses on the analysis of informal leadership and the dynamics of the yellow vests movement in France. As discussed earlier in the methods section, the analysis is based on observations concerning four Facebook key accounts and English and French digital news media.

Digital media ethnography enabled a fluid and continuous analysis already during the fieldwork and provided new directions for the research. The analysis is not seeking to be an exhaustive description of the phenomenon but provides new insights and directions for the research of informal contemporary social movement leadership.

First, the chapter describes the formation of movement dynamics and examines how informal leadership emerges in the movement concentrating on four prominent movement figures. To deepen the analysis, the chapter discusses three key events that provide concrete examples of the dynamics and informal leadership of the movement through different decision-making processes.

4.1 Formation of movement dynamics

The visible formation of the yellow vests movement in France began three weeks after the first demonstration on the 17 November 2018 as the movement announced eight official spokespersons. These spokespersons were selected by some of the movement activists and represented different departments of the country. The group members, Priscillia Ludosky, Éric Drouet, Matthieu Blavier, Marine Charrette-Labadie, Julien Terrier, Maxime Nicolle, Jason Herbert and Thomas Miralles were entrepreneurs aged between 20-33 years and presented the middle class of the French population. (Libération, 2018.)

Besides the official spokespersons, other figures were seeking attention to form political parties to further the demands of the movement. Ingrid Levavasseur was leading the process to form a group of ten yellow vests candidates for the European Parliament

elections in May 2019. The other controversial figure in the movement, Jacline Mouraud formed a political party, the Arisen [Les Émergents]. Jacline Mouraud became a public figure in the movement as she published a protest video addressed to President Macron on Facebook. The video that protested the eco-tax on fuel went viral and thus has been considered as the beginning of the movement. (Willsher, 2019a.)

The politically inclined actions of Levavasseur and Mouraud were criticized by other activists because the intentions contradicted the horizontal and leaderless character of the movement. Levavasseur and Mouraud were considered widely as opportunists boosting their position. They were threatened by some of the movement participants, and thus were forced to abandon their position in the yellow vests movement.

The yellow vests movement stressed its horizontal and leaderless character from the beginning despite the announcement of official spokespersons. For example, one of the spokespersons, Maxime Nicolle, discussed the announcement in a video conference broadcasted on the Facebook group Fly Rider infos blocages. This broadcast raised wide attention and was watched by 388 000 people, gathering 13 183 comments. In this Facebook live video conference, Nicolle emphasized several times during the transmission that there were no leaders, representatives or leadership in the movement. He stressed that the main task for the official spokespersons was to act as messengers between the government and the movement to achieve direct democracy in the form of Citizen's Initiative Referendum (RIC). (Fly Rider infos blocages, 2018.)

As the weekly Saturday demonstrations continued, the traditional French media began to highlight some of the official spokespersons. These persons were not only inventions of mass media, but they were visible figures in the streets and social media arena, Facebook, also. Some of the official spokespersons left the movement for different reasons during the process, but three of them, Priscillia Ludosky, Éric Drouet and Maxime Nicolle became central figures of the movement. Later, one of the movement activists, Jérôme Rodrigues attained an important position in the movement, also.

4.2 Visible and informal leadership of the yellow vests movement

These four movement members had thousands of followers on Facebook. The visibility and abandonment of anonymity enabled Facebook live video conferencing that became an indistinguishable part of the interaction between the prominent movement members and other participants. The Facebook accounts contained lively discussions on the political situation in France, the movement actions and its demands. According to the statistics of 16 February 2020, the Fly Rider infos blocages by Maxime Nicolle had 161 504 members, la france enervée by Éric Drouet had 79 304 followers, the personal Facebook page of Priscillia Ludosky 38 981 followers and Jérôme Rodrigues Officiel by Jérôme Rodrigues had 79 490 followers.

Fly Rider infos blocages that was formed in October 2018 by Maxime Nicolle became quickly one of the most visited Facebook pages concerning the movement. In the first month of the protests, it gathered 43 000 members and the number increased steadily, crossing the line of 160 000 members at the beginning of 2019. The Facebook page provided a platform for activists to send, share, like and comment on topics concerning the movement.

Visibility and transparency of the Fly Rider infos blocages Facebook page was promoted by publishing the administrators and moderators of the webpage. Maxime Nicolle operated as one of the two administrators of the Facebook page by using the pseudonym 'Fly Rider' that indicated his interest in aviation and motor vehicles (Girard, 2019). This pseudonym that became an inseparable part of his identity in the movement could be considered also as a marketing tactic strengthening his charismatic personality. His open approach was strengthened later as Nicolle turned his personal Facebook account into a public one that enabled activists to watch and comment on Facebook live video conferences. This account, Fly Rider Nicolle Maxime had 146 485 followers on 12 April 2020 (Fly Rider Nicolle Maxime, n.d.).

The weekly live video conferences held by Maxime Nicolle on Facebook gathered tens of thousands of views and thousands of comments. They enabled an interactive situation in which participants were able to comment on the issues in real-time. As an

administrator, Maxime Nicolle was able to steer the conversation by setting the agenda. In the video conferences, Nicolle discussed the concrete actions of the movement, the political situation in France mixed with personal issues strengthening the feeling of emotional togetherness within participants.

From the initial stages of the movement, traditional media highlighted Nicolle as one of the key figures of the movement. It became evident in the images and news stories published by the left-wing French media, for example, Libération. He was considered a charismatic personality and had reputation as a conspiracy theorist. His position was strengthened by his relations to other interest groups. In lawsuits concerning the movement, Nicolle was presented by politically active lawyer Juan Branco that had worked as a legal adviser, for example, to Julian Assange. Also, Nicolle was hired as a reporter for the independent media Quartier Général by Aude Lancelin that provided him a position to attract national attention (Girard, 2019).

The other key figure and an official spokesperson of the movement, Priscillia Ludosky is regarded as the founder of the yellow vests movement. She launched the petition for lower gas prices that was signed by over a million French citizens and thus marked the beginning of the movement. She had a public Facebook page which membership grew steadily, reaching over 40 000 members in May 2020.  In April 2020, she also launched a new petition to stop inequalities after the COVID-19 pandemic that proved her determination to strive for social change in France. In April 2020, this petition was already signed by 35 696 persons (Ludosky, 2020a).

Compared to Maxime Nicolle, Priscillia Ludosky was considered a calm and rational figure of the movement by traditional media (Berthelier, 2019). This feature became evident also in television interviews and other public appearances. Unlike Nicolle and other key figures of the movement, Priscillia Ludosky did not use live video conferencing to discuss the actions of the movement. She published Facebook updates that concerned movement actions, police violence and climate change. She also published actively updates connected to the position of immigrants and women in French society, in this way stressing the importance of issues concerning minority groups.

La france enervée was a public Facebook group initiated by one of the official spokespersons of the movement, Éric Drouet. In the beginning, he collaborated with Priscillia Ludosky and launched the Facebook event for the 17 November manifestation that became the concrete starting point for the yellow vests movement in France. As Maxime Nicolle, Drouet utilized live video conferences to discuss issues concerning the movement and the political climate in France, mixing his personal experiences with the discussion. Like Maxime Nicolle and Priscillia Ludosky, Éric Drouet appeared in several television programs, also. In addition to La france enervée, Éric Drouet was also administrating a private Facebook group, la france en colere!!! created in October 2018. In May 2020, this group had 280 653 members (la france en colere !!!, n.d.).

The public appearance of Eric Drouet attracted both left- and right-wing parties in France. Jean-Luc Mélenchon of the left-wing party, Unbowed France [La France Insoumise] and Marine Le Pen of the right-wing party, the National Rally [Le Rassemblement National] expressed their support for Éric Drouet (BBC, 2019).

Despite his calm appearance on his Facebook channel, Éric Drouet was characterized by traditional media as a more unpredictable figure in the movement. He was sued by the French government for arranging unauthorized demonstrations and for possession of an illegal weapon (BBC, 2019). His more aggressive tactics also caused a rift between him and Priscillia Ludosky in the initial stage of the movement (Aublanc, 2019). Despite these issues, Drouet had a devoted group of followers on Facebook.

The Facebook page Jérôme Rodrigues Officiel created in January 2019 was administrated by activist Jérôme Rodrigues. He was also a prominent figure in the movement though he was not selected as an official spokesperson in the initial stage. He became a public figure in the movement when he was hit severely in the eye by a French police rubber bullet (Willsher, 2019b). His injured eye covered with bandage became a symbol of police violence in France, appearing in different connections.

Jérôme Rodrigues used the same live video conference tactic as Maxime Nicolle and Éric Drouet to gain attention for the movement. His verbal communication on Facebook and in the streets was often very aggressive and emotionally loaded. In Facebook live

sessions and other occasions, he referred to other participants of the movement as The Family [La Famille], in this way strengthening the feeling of emotional togetherness.

All these key figures were not only visible in social media but appeared on different levels and layers of the movement. They took an active part in the demonstrations in the streets in Paris and other cities and thus became publicly identified figures. They had a close relationship with the mainstream media and appeared in television and radio programs regularly. Mainstream media often referred to these figures as leaders or media persons of the movement.

Although these key members had separate social media accounts and partly personalized agendas, they were in close collaboration with each other. They were participating together in the actions of the movement in the streets, for example, by giving speeches on occasions related to the movement. They also participated in the Facebook live video conferences on each other's Facebook channels by commenting on issues or concerns of the participants. Although disagreements concerning movement tactics appeared from time to time, the key members were promoting collective action. On Facebook, besides shared live video conferences, this collective and supportive action became visible as critical information concerning the movement was distributed between the key accounts.

4.3 Collective or centralized decision-making?

Next, the analysis concentrates on three key events on Facebook, building understanding of the dynamics of the yellow vests movement and revealing how informal leadership emerges in this social movement network. The analysis is based on three Facebook updates and discussion that followed these updates.

The first key event concerns an update that was published on the Facebook page of Priscillia Ludosky on the 28 October 2019. The Facebook update gathered 780 likes, 480 comments and 568 shares.

The update announced that Priscillia Ludosky, Jérôme Rodrigues, Faouzi Sevran and Fabrice Grimal had demanded a meeting with President Macron.

> With Jerome Rodrigues Faouzi Sevran & Fabrice Grimal we have demanded a meeting with E. Macron. The media has received the info...[1] (Ludosky, 2019).

An open letter signed by these movement members had been sent to the president to discuss the claims of the movement before the movement's anniversary on the 16 November 2019 (Libération, 2019). The initiative to meet President Macron came as a surprise for many movement activists who learned about the demand through Facebook or traditional media channels.

In the discussion that followed the update, participants had divided opinions concerning the demand to meet the president. Some of the activists felt that negotiations with President Macron or the representatives of the government were useless. These opinions reflected the outcome of the meeting that Priscillia Ludosky and Éric Drouet had with the Ecology Minister at the time, François de Rugy in November 2018 to negotiate the demands of the movement (Le Parisien, 2018). This meeting did not bring any results and was regarded as a great disappointment within the movement.

From the viewpoint of movement dynamics, it is notable that from the signatories of the letter, Priscillia Ludosky was the only official spokesperson of the movement. Besides Priscillia Ludosky, Jérôme Rodrigues participated in the discussion followed by the update. He was known already by many of the activists of the movement. However, Faouzi Sevran and Fabrice Grimal were unfamiliar to many participants and their role as spokespersons for the movement was questioned. Neither Sevran nor Grimal participated in the actual discussion.

The publication received a positive and approving reaction. Still, a closer examination of the content of the messages reveals also dissatisfaction and frustration, questioning the horizontal structure of the movement. Priscillia Ludosky was accused of having a

---

[1]Avec Jerome Rodrigues Faouzi Sevran & Fabrice Grimal nous avons demandé à rencontrer E. Macron. Ts les médias ont reçu l'info...

political motive that questioned her reliability as a spokesperson for the movement. The lack of collective decision-making was stressed by several participants and discussed lively concerning the Facebook update.

> And why you? I am also part of the yellow vests.[2]

> unbelievable! This lady moves closer to party politics, divides us and believes that she is still justified to represent the movement.[3]'

> I want to know why these things are done behind people's backs without consulting anyone? As they say we are striving for a more vigorous democracy and not for a pyramidal structure. […][4]

The Facebook update can be considered notable when examining informal leadership and the dynamics of the movement. It reveals that all action in the movement was not agreed collectively or between the official spokespersons, thus contradicting the ideal of horizontality. The update also caused confusion concerning the role of official spokespersons. Some people that participated in the conversation were uncertain about the identities of the signatories and were confused why the official spokespersons, Èric Drouet and Maxime Nicolle were not part of the delegation. Their questions concerning the absence of these movement figures were not answered in the discussion that caused astonishment.

> Hello Priscilla. I am surprised that the two gentlemen Drouet and Nicolle are not among the signatories. Why is that? Do you know anything about it? Looking forward to your reply. Yours sincerely[5]

---

[2] Et pourquoi vous ? Je suis aussi citoyen gilets jaunes.
[3] c'est incroyable ! Madame se rapproche des parties politiques, nous divise et croit qu'elle a encore de légitimité à nous représenter.
[4] Je peux savoir pourquoi ce genre d choses se fais dans le dos du peuple sans en demander l'avis ? On est sois disant a la conquête dune démocratie plus juste et pas pyramidal. [...]
[5] Bonjour Priscilla. Je suis surpris que messieurs Drouet et Nicolle ne sont pas signataires. Pourquoi ? Connais tu le pourquoi ? A te lire. Amitiés

On the other hand, other participants felt confident because they had met the signatories of the letter personally during demonstrations. They were convinced that these persons provide visibility for the movement and that they will fight with the rest of the movement for social justice and democracy. Some participants felt that the initiative to meet the president did not contradict the horizontal character of the movement. It was considered that in a movement without a formal organization and structure anyone is free to act as they please.

The discussion highlighted other movement members that were considered important figures of the movement, also. Many participants felt that the young yellow vests advocate François Boulo should be part of the delegation because of his argumentation skills.

François Boulo operated as the spokesperson of Rouen in northern France and was presented by the traditional French media as a calm and rational force in the movement compared to Maxime Nicolle and Éric Drouet who had more radical viewpoints concerning the movement and its actions. Although François Boulu was not as visible and charismatic figure in the movement as Nicolle and Drouet he had solid support within the movement. It is demonstrated later in this chapter with the visual aid of a world cloud.

The discussion provided an interesting viewpoint on the Citizens' Initiative Referendum [Référendum d'Initiative Citoyenne, RIC] that was considered the primary demand of the yellow vests movement in France. The RIC would allow a national referendum for all policy proposals that collect 700 000 signatures and, in this way would provide the citizens more possibilities to influence political decision-making in France (France 24, 2019).

Some participants felt that the main idea of the initiative was not carried out by the four signatories because of the lack of collective decision-making and unwillingness to find out opinions concerning the meeting with the president. The issue concerning the RIC was not approached by Priscillia Ludosky nor Jérôme Rodrigues in the Facebook discussion. However, it revealed an important issue that contradicted the collective ideal of the movement.

4.4 A leaderful network

The second key event continued the discussion concerning the meeting with the President of the French Republic, Emmanuel Macron. The chain of events began as a gilet jaune, a citizen named Sandrine approached President Macron in the Paris International Agricultural show [Salon International de l'Agriculture, SIA], one of the world's largest agricultural shows, demanding a meeting with the president. The initiative was approved by President Macron and led Sandrine to contact three yellow vests, Priscillia Ludosky, Jérome Rôdrigues and François Boulo to accompany her in the meeting.

Priscillia Ludosky published a Facebook update on her page on the 27 February 2020 stating that on the 22nd February 2020 President Macron had declared to be ready to meet a group of yellow vests in the Elysée Palace in Paris (Ludosky, 2020b).

This time the update that was published on Facebook had a very different approach compared to the previous message that had raised criticism concerning the lack of collective decision-making. The update was liked by 2350 persons, commented by 1100 persons and shared by 1000 persons, providing a wider audience for the message compared to the first one. Priscillia Ludosky and Maxime Nicolle were the only official spokespersons of the movement that participated in the discussion that followed the update.

The Facebook update was sent in the name of Priscillia Ludosky, François Boulo and Jérome Rodrigues that were the choices of citizen Sandrine for the meeting and whom she had approached beforehand. Altogether, the message in the update was planned and structured in a manner that stressed the importance of togetherness and collective action. The reasons to choose a delegation for the meeting were well-argued compared to the first Facebook update concerning the meeting with the president.

The message by Ludosky, Boulo and Rodrigues provided two reasons why a delegation would be important for the future of the yellow vests movement in France. First, the message stated that Emmanuel Macron had promised to meet the yellow vests if they were able to form a delegation. It was emphasized that presumably, President Macron

believes that the movement is not able to choose delegates because of its assumed violent tactics and disagreements. Thus, it was argued that the president trusts that the meeting will not take place, but his approval to meet the yellow vests would still provide him good publicity before the upcoming presidential elections in 2022. (Ludosky, 2020b.)

Secondly, the message stressed that if the yellow vests are not able to form a delegation, it could be that Macron invites his own choice of 'yellow vests' in the meeting. According to the Facebook update, this would only support his prestige and would not benefit the movement in any way. (Ludosky, 2020b.)

This time the Facebook update stressed the importance of collective decision-making. The update stated that President Macron had been informed that the chosen delegation needs to be acknowledged by the yellow vests. In the case of positive response from the Elysée, the movement members, Ludosky, Boulo and Rodrigues would be collecting opinions concerning the meeting and the delegation. The message ended with the strong and emotionally loaded slogan of the yellow vests movement, 'We do not give up' [On lache rien]. (Ludosky, 2020b.)

The feeling of togetherness was emphasized in several comments following the Facebook update. It demonstrated the increasing confidence for the planned delegation and approval of representative power. It can be argued that the suggested delegation was regarded as satisfactory because the choice was made by a citizen that was not regarded as a key figure in the movement. It reflects a more common assumption that the key figures or media persons Ludosky, Rodrigues and Boulo were considered to have a different position in the movement compared to other activists.

> As I have written to François and Jérôme you know how to speak for all of us and you have all my trust.. And also, I wish you courage because Macron will not give up as we won't either for sure.[6]

---

[6] Comme je l'ai écrit à François et Jérôme vous saurez bien parler pour nous tous et vous avez tous ma confiance..Et aussi, je vous souhaite bon courage car Macron ne lâchera rien comme nous bien sûr

> Go go go...complete trust in you three (as in others) but if you have been invited it suits me...let's stop quibbling about who should be added, if the group is qualified it must go period![7]

Many participants in the discussion were satisfied with the delegation that had been validated by a third person but on condition that the meeting will be recorded. Some participants stressed that the condition did not reflect a lack of trust towards the delegation but distrust towards the French media that was assumed to frame the meeting serving the governmental agenda. The lack of trust for traditional media was emphasized in the conversation and commonly in all communication within the movement by using a pejorative expression 'merdia' that is a blend of words shit [merde] and media [média].

Despite the growing confidence, the Facebook update also raised opposed opinions concerning the representation of the movement. A chosen delegation was considered to contradict the ideal of direct democracy.

> This group that should meet Macron should above all state that they speak only in their name and no one in this little committee is chosen by the yellow vests to speak in their name.

> The truth is, though I appreciate Boulo, Rodriguez and the others, no one has the right to speak in my name or the name of another yellow vest, because the majority of the yellow vests fight for the right for individual decision making and do not want to be represented (real democracy).[8]

In her response to this comment, Priscillia Ludosky affirmed that everyone has the right to speak, in this way emphasizing collective decision-making and the aim for direct democracy.

---

[7] Go go go ... entière confiance en vous trois (comme en d'autres) mais si c'est vous qui avez été sollicités cela me va.. arrêtons de chipoter de rajouter celui ci ou celle là, si le groupe est validé il faut y aller point!

[8] Le groupe qui devrait rencontrer Macron devrait surtout dire qu'il ne parle qu'en leur nom propre et que nullement les individus de ce petit comité n'ont été choisi par les GJs pour parler en leur nom.
La vérité est que même si j'apprécie Boulo, Rodriguez et bien d'autres, aucun n'a le droit de parler en mon nom ou au nom d'un autre GJ, car la majorité des GJs se battent pour avoir enfin seul le pouvoir décisionnel et ne veulent pas être représentés ( une vraie démocratie)

In the following, the master's thesis presents a simple textual analysis in a form of word clouds to support the interpretations. The analysis was conducted from both Facebook updates discussed above. Word clouds were created by using the comments of these updates. Though the content of the word clouds is based on two different key events the topic of the discussion in both cases concerns a meeting with President Macron and the representatives of the delegation. The occasions occurred temporally close together and were published on the same Facebook page, enabling a comparative analysis and examination of movement dynamics and informal leadership.

Both of the word clouds demonstrated the importance of the role of the yellow vests advocate François Boulo in the delegation. In the Facebook discussions, his participation was seen as crucial for the success of the negotiations with the president. It can be argued that his participation strengthened the approval and confidence towards the delegation and included the citizens into the decision-making process, forming a leaderful network.

**Figure 1** Word cloud of the first Facebook update dataset

Altogether a change in opinions was perceived when comparing the word clouds of the first and second Facebook updates. It was notable that the word 'confidence' dominated the second Facebook update and emerged clearly from the word cloud image. In this context, confidence was considered as a strong word that reflects the feeling of emotional togetherness and trust. The word did not appear in the first discussion that implies a change in attitudes towards the meeting and the delegation. A closer examination of the context in which the word appeared in the discussion confirmed the growing trust towards the planned delegation.

It is also interesting to note that the significance of the word 'Macron' diminished in the second discussion as the confidence towards the movement and the planned delegation grew. Also, the word 'government' that was strong and visible in the first discussion presenting the state authority did not appear in the second discussion. Positive expressions 'Thank you', 'Hooray' and 'okay' confirmed the approving atmosphere that emerged in the second discussion concerning the delegation and the meeting.

**Figure 2** World cloud of the second Facebook key event dataset

In the second Facebook update the words 'filmed' and 'direct' stressed the importance of direct broadcast from the meeting. The demand for live broadcast was connected to the notion of transparency that was considered an inseparable part of democracy.

4.5 Movement dynamics

The second key event revealed power dynamics within the yellow vests movement. Many participants in the discussion felt that Maxime Nicolle should be part of the delegation. They considered his role as a representative and as a reporter for the independent media crucial for the movement. This emphasized Nicolle's role as an influential figure in the movement. People felt that they were able to trust his word and that he had skills that could advance the movement and its demands.

> For me, yes...let's add fly in the group. Simply because I agree with his arguments and his way of seeing things from the start...As his way of doing things.[9]

Maxime Nicolle took part in the discussion generating a lively debate concerning his role in the movement. His comment gathered 364 likes and 156 responses that emphasized his position as a central figure in the movement. However, in his message, he did not consider himself as an important part of a delegation nor took a stand on the planned delegation.

> To avoid slander, I don't care who is going to take part in this and where as long as it [the meeting] is broadcasted live without worries! and before the municipal elections!![10]

Instead of stressing his role in the movement, Nicolle emphasized the importance of live broadcast and correct timing. The timing of the meeting was discussed in several comments. It was considered crucial that the meeting would be held before the municipal elections, which were scheduled on the 15 Mars 2020. The aim of this action

---

[9] Pour moi, oui... A rajouter fly sur le gpe. Simplement parce que je suis en accord avec ses paroles et sa façon de voir les choses depuis le début... Ainsi que sa manière de faire.
[10] Pour ne pas permettre la naissance de médisance, je me fou de qui y va ou de faire parti de ça ou non tant que c'est diffuser en direct aucun souci ! et aprés les municipales !!

would have been to reduce the popularity of president Macron and his party, The Republic on the Move! [LREM, La République en Marche!] among the French citizens.

Another interesting point that brings forward the movement dynamics in this discussion is the relationship between the key figures and the unofficial assembly of the movement, the Assembly of Assemblies of the Yellow Vests [ l'Assemblée des Assemblées des Gilets Jaunes, l'ADA]. At this point, the ADA had arranged four assemblies in different cities to decide on the future of the movement. The assemblies consisted of delegates that had been pointed by roundabouts or departmental and regional general assemblies (Goanec, 2019).

Notably, different assembly structures have represented the unofficial organizational structure in many contemporary social movements, for example, in the Occupy Wall Street movement discussed earlier in the thesis. However, in the yellow vests movement, the ADA only succeeded in bringing together a minor part of the activists in the movement. For example, the Facebook page of the ADA was followed only by 7706 persons in May 2020 (L'Assemblée des Assemblées des Gilets Jaunes, n.d.). The representatives of the ADA were not visible parts of the movement in social media arenas or traditional media. Thus, the ADA did not gain wider influence or support among different interest groups. Also, the attitudes between the assembly members and the prominent figures in the movement were negative in this way, reflecting power struggles within the movement network.

In the second Facebook update concerning the meeting with President Macron, one of the spokespersons of the ADA approached the notion of democracy and referred to the prominent figures in the movement as 'media characters' [personnages médiatiques] undermining their importance in the movement and stressing the celebrity status provided by traditional French media.

> […] There is a democratic structure within the yellow vests, it's the Assembly of Assemblies of the Yellow Vests. You, media persons above all, do not ever participate in the assembly. You must be chosen democratically to be able to speak in our name. Your role does not authorize anything else than to follow democracy that is forged in the Assembly of Assemblies.[11]

In her reply concerning the criticism, Priscillia Ludosky stated that a more democratic option compared to the ADA would be the citizen consultation, the Real Debate [le Vrai Débat].

> yes, a really democratic one..only excluding 'the media persons' as you want to say...so much for democracy..
> A more presentable democracy is the citizen consultation that was launched by the REAL DEBATE. 25000 propositions, 1 million votes. A synthesis of 59 demands that were most voted by the citizens. There is no need to be elected to present these results to the members of parliament and the president. Even my grandmother could do that..[12]

In her response, Priscillia Ludosky criticized the decision-making processes of the ADA that was based on representative politics. The Real Debate platform organized by some of the active members of the yellow vests provided an opportunity for all citizens to post their proposals and grievances without a bias. The initiative was developed by the yellow vests activists to challenge the Great Debate [ le Grand Débat] launched by president Macron to silence the yellow vests movement. The Great Debate that consisted of two months of discussions concerning the grievances of French citizens, took place in January 2019 but did not bring up any results to resolve the conflict between the French government and the movement. (Collyer, 2019.) Thus, it was widely

---

[11] [ **…**] Il existe une structure vraiment démocratique au sein des GJ, c'est l'Assemblée des Assemblées des GJ. Vous, personnages médiatiques avant tout, n'y participez jamais. Faites vous élire de façon démocratique pour pouvoir parler en notre nom. Votre antériorité ne vous autorise à rien d'autre que d'accompagner la démocratie qui se forge dans l'AG des AG.
[12] oui vraiment démocratique.. Mais excluant dès le départ les personnes "médiatiques" comme vous aimez dire.. Pr la démocratie faudra repasser..
Le projet démocratique le plus représentatif est la consultation Citoyenne lancée par le VRAI DÉBAT. 25000 propositions, 1 million de vote. Synthèse des 59 revendications les plus plébiscitées. Pas besoin d'être élus par qui que ce soit pr remettre les résultats de cette consultation aux élus et au président. Ma grand mère peut le faire..

considered in social media as a stunt to repair the damaged reputation of President Macron.

Altogether, the second Facebook update provided an attempt for concrete means to build a dialog with the head of the state. It emphasized the viewpoint that without official representatives, the movement was going to struggle to achieve its goals. What is significant in this context is that the reasons were explained carefully in the second Facebook update, and the power of the citizens as 'leaders' was emphasized strongly.


4.6 Leaders or not? The COVID-19 crisis and its effects on informal leadership of the yellow vests movement


The third key event concerned informal leadership of the movement during the coronavirus pandemic in the spring of 2020. On the weekend of 13 and 14 Mars 2020, several groups had planned major demonstrations in Paris. On the 13 Mars, there were plans for demonstrations concerning climate change and police violence and on the 14 Mars the weekly Saturday protest of the yellow vests. These events were discussed and organized by the participants well-before the occasion and thousands of people were expected to gather in the streets of Paris and all over the country. However, due to the coronavirus crisis, the demonstrations were canceled.

President Macron stated that gatherings of more than a hundred people were prohibited during the coronavirus crisis in France. Despite this announcement, many of the yellow vests activists decided to follow through with the original plan. Thus, Maxime Nicolle and Jérôme Rodrigues both published a live video message on their Facebook page, appealing to people not to participate in the demonstrations because of the risk of contamination. They both announced that they were not taking part in the demonstrations because they wanted to protect their families. The announcements caused a fierce debate on the role of Maxime Nicolle and Jérôme Rodrigues in the movement.

In the coronavirus crisis, the movement that was first considered horizontal was now regarded by some of the activists as a hierarchical structure in which Jérôme Rodrigues and Maxime Nicolle had an important position and influence over other participants. Jérôme Rodrigues received a lot of criticism and threats from people who considered that he had abused his position. These activists considered him responsible for destroying the whole movement because many of the yellow vests would stay at home and away from the demonstrations.

In response to the criticism, Jérôme Rodrigues published a Facebook update in a form of a live video conference in which he clearly stated that he should not be regarded as the leader of the movement, stressing the importance of personal choice (Rodrigues, 2020). The live video conference gained a lot of attention. At the time, the video update gathered 2700 likes, 2000 comments, 842 shares and 69 000 views.

In the discussion that followed the Facebook update, many participants felt that the appeal by Jérôme Rodrigues and Maxime Nicolle showed courage that would benefit the whole movement in building the feeling of togetherness.

> You are magnificent Jèrôme people are horrible you are right and smart Thanks to people like you we are going to make it courage take care of yourself and once again hooray[13]

> Congratulations Jérôme for a responsible and remarkable speech one again, do not change anything, I'm with you best wishes[14]

Others felt strongly that the prominent figures had betrayed the movement because the appeal to cancel the demonstration was presented at short notice. They also questioned the role of Maxime Nicolle and Jérôme Rodrigues in the movement.

---

[13] Vous êtes formidable Jérôme les gens sont épouvantables vous avez raison et avez du bon sens C'est grâce à des gens comme vous que nous allons nous en sortir courage prenez soin de vous et encore bravo

[14] Félicitations Jérôme pour ce discours responsable et remarquable encore une fois, ne change rien, je suis avec toi amicalement

> Ok you say that you are not a leader!!! why have you invited people to come for a month and even then, 24 hours before you tell not to come??? I must be hallucinating ! !! The coronavirus has been in France already 15 days....[15]

The feeling of betrayal was visualized in an image that circulated on Facebook. The pictures of Nicolle and Rodrigues were attached to a template that is used to provide information on kidnapped children in France (Alerte Enlèvement). The text with the pictures of Nicolle and Rodriguez made an indirect allusion to the lacking courage of these characters to carry out the planned demonstration.

Although Maxime Nicolle and Jérôme Rodrigues were not seen as formal leaders, they were considered to have a more influential position compared to other participants in the movement. Thus, they were expected to take the leading role concerning the occasion.

> No leaders that's for sure but you are influential persons...Like it or not...I think you are aware of that right ???

> Thus, it's logical that people who need focal points are influenced by you. At some point one should call a spade a spade...The most serious problem is that people are needing you to know what to do...[16]

> I have respect for you and fly...but now I don't understand your stance is unjustified and incomprehensible...you blow up the movement and destroy your credibility, that's sad and hilarious[17]

Some of the commentators stressed the importance of Maxime Nicolle and Jérôme Rodrigues for the movement. The key figures were considered as contact points, thus emphasizing the networked character of the yellow vests movement. The conversation also highlighted negative attitudes towards traditional media corporation BFMTV that

---

[15] Ok t'est pas un leader alors!!!pk vous invite à les gens à venir pendant 1 mois aux gens et là même pas 24h avant vous dit de ne pas venir??? J'hallucine ! !! Le coronavirus il est en France depuis déjà 15jours.....

[16] Pas leaders c'est certain mais vous êtes des influenceurs... Que vous le vouliez ou non... Je pense que vous en êtes bien conscients non ???
Donc c'est logique que les les gens qui ont besoin de repères soient influencés par ce que vous dites. A un moment donné faut appelé un chat un chat...Le plus gros des problèmes c'est que les gens aient besoin de vous pour savoir ce qu'ils ont à faire...

[17] J'avais du respect pour vous et fly... mais là je ne vous comprends pas votre position est injustifiable et incompréhensible...vous dynamitez le mouvement et vous vous decridibilez tous les deux, c'est bien triste et désopilant

was considered by many of the yellow vests activists as a mouthpiece for the French government. In this respect, Nicolle and Rodrigues were considered as reliable mouthpieces of the movement.

> Don't you think that Maxime likewise Jérôme is important for the movement? Personally, I feel that they have helped enormously in spreading the information together with things that we do not necessarily think of ! In a sense, they form a point of contact but also act as a mouthpiece [for the movement]. But maybe you prefer the mouthpieces of the bfm...[18]

The collaboration and mutual understanding between the key figures became evident as Maxime Nicolle participated in the discussion. Once again, his influential role in the movement was discussed between participants. However, against some expectations, he also denied his role as movement leader and appealed to the activists for taking personal responsibility, as Jérôme Rodrigues had done in the video message. This caused fierce debate on the topic, and some of the comments revealed feelings of betrayal. The discussion highlighted how the leader position is not necessarily chosen by the activists themselves.

> Fly Rider Nicolle Maxime but you are a powerful media person, want it or not. Everyone has their responsibilities. As far as I am concerned, a person who decides to take part in the demonstration needs to be responsible for protecting himself/herself to avoid contamination and not to contaminate anyone, and after that take the necessary measures to return home without infection. It is also wise.[19]

> Followed by 146 760 pers...no I am not a leader LOL...![20]

---

[18] vous ne trouvez pas que Maxime ainsi que Jérôme ne sont pas importants pour le mouvement? Personnellement, je trouve qu'ils aident énormément au relais des infos ainsi qu'à la réflexion sur des choses auxquelles nous ne penserons pas forcément !Ils font une sorte de lien mais aussi de haut parleur. Mais peut être préférez vous les hauts parleurs de bfm...

[19] Fly Rider Nicolle Maxime mais tu as un pouvoir médiatique, que tu le veuilles ou non. Et donc chacun prendra ses responsabilités. Pour ma part, celui qui décide de manifester doit être responsable, se protéger pour ne pas être contaminé, et ne contaminer personne, puis prendre les mesures nécessaires pour rentrer chez soi désinfecté. C'est aussi de l'intelligence.

[20] suivi par 146 760 pers..non je suis pas leader mdr ...!

Fly Rider Nicolle Maxime I know very well that you are not a leader, but you are however a person that has a vision and knowledge in the movement.[21]

Now you are being the victimizer no I am not a leader LOL stop everything then take off your yellow vest you do not deserve it[22]

Luckily...!! ...only a 'self-proclaimed guru'...[23]

Later in the discussion, Maxime Nicolle stressed that everyone has the right to decide themselves. Thus, influence became once again a discussed topic in the conversation. The actions of Nicolle were considered comparable with the actions of a leader.

yes it is an advice but you know very well that some people follow all that you say and do ! Only because it is you that say so ![24]

you do not have to make an appeal and let the people do what they feel is right, because of your influence you have raised doubts in the minds of a lot of people and influenced their choice...I am sorry but unconsciously you have acted like a leader[25]

---

[21] Fly Rider Nicolle Maxime je sais bien que tu n'ai pas un leader mais tu est qd même une personne qui a qd même beaucoup de vue et connu ds le mouvement.

[22] maintenant vous faîtes les victimes non je suis pas leader mdr arrêter tous alor enlevé votre gillets jaunes vous le mérité meme pas

[23] Heureusement...!!...juste un "gourou autoproclamé"…

[24] oui c'est un conseil mais vous savez très bien que certains suivent tout ce que vous dites et faites ! Juste parce que c'est vous qui le dites !

[25] vous n'aviez pas à faire d'appel et laisser les gens faire comme bon leur semble, étant donner votre influence vous avez mis le doute dans la tête de plein de gens et influencer leur choix... je suis désoler mais inconsciemment vous avez agit comme un leader

5 DISCUSSION

The yellow vests movement in France can be considered as a continuation of the global wave of protests that began from the Arab uprisings in 2010-2011. In the same way as other contemporary social movements, the yellow vests movement that was triggered by the rise of ecotax on diesel fuel fights against elitism and representative power.

The research concerning the dynamics of the yellow vests movement can be considered significant as the movement has been regarded as the most widespread and powerful political and social protest since the 1968 student movement in France. In the same way, as the 1968 student movement challenged the incumbent President Charles de Gaulle, the yellow vests have demonstrated their discontent with President Emmanuel Macron and the elitism he represents in the eyes of the French working class, retirees, and students. (Chamorel, 2019.)

The yellow vests movement differs from many other contemporary social movements because it is organized and led by citizens that do not have former experience in political activism and are not considered as part of privileged classes as, for example, the students of the 68' movement (Chamorel, 2019). Also, according to the observations of this research, the key activists of the yellow vests movement do not represent the tech-savvy elite of the French society as many connective leaders of recent social movements.

The observations of this master's thesis strengthen the current research results that contemporary social movements that organize and mobilize their action partly on digital platforms are not horizontal and leaderless networks but contain power dynamics and informal, soft leadership. The prominent figures of the yellow vests movement are not formal leaders, but they still have a significant influence on the social movement. From the viewpoint of network theory, they can be considered as the hubs or central points of the network. The observations also confirm recent research findings that contemporary social movement networks are not spontaneous, but actions are organized by the activists continuously in the online and offline contexts.

5.1 Visible and distributed informal leadership

The dynamics of the yellow vests movement are based on a strong feeling of togetherness. The roundabouts and the yellow fluorescence vests are concrete symbols of solidarity. The togetherness that bounds the nation and its citizens together is visible in social media discussions, also. For example, people emphasized solidarity by stating, for example, 'supporter 69' [soutien 69], referring to their department number. Also, the slogan 'We do not give up!' [On lâche rien!] became a statement of the unified opposition towards the French government and especially the President Emmanuel Macron.

Based on the observations, it can be suggested that the informal leadership of the yellow vests movement in France is founded on visibility and transparency. Contrary to recent social movements that have resisted official representatives or spokespeople, the yellow vests provided physical figures that were able to create emotional togetherness among French citizens. These official spokespersons act visibly in different arenas, mixing their identities to the discussion on the goals of the movement and thus provide a strong emotional context for the discussion. Some of the official spokespersons announced in the initial stage left for different reasons during the process. However, a few of them raised attention in traditional media and in social media arenas that made them the central figures of the movement. Visibility and active presence of these key figures enabled consistent communication, connecting different levels and layers, also.

Informal leadership of the yellow vests movement is distributed between the key figures and other participants in the movement providing a leaderful network. The key figures of the movement promote the ideal of collective action by appearing together in demonstrations but also on social media. They support each other and, in this way, enable a tighter connection between activists and other interest groups in the network. It can be argued that because of distributed informal leadership, for example, the general assembly of the movement has not been able to centralize its power and thus has a minor role in this social struggle. Based on the theoretical background concerning distributed leadership, it can be suggested that different skills and qualities of the prominent figures

in the movement have enabled informal leadership that has attracted a wider audience and resulted in the longevity of the movement, also.

The research shows that Facebook provides an ideal platform for emotionally loaded interactive and dialogical leadership in the yellow vests movement. Each of the key Facebook accounts provided an arena for personalized messages and thus prevented clashes between partly different agendas. Facebook and visibility of the movement enabled new communication tactics that emphasized the feeling of emotional togetherness, also. The daily live video conferences became the trademark of the movement, enabling interactive communication between the key figures and other participants. Although these live sessions promoted collective action, they also efficiently provided more attention for the prominent figures strengthening their position in the movement network.

5.2 Interaction between the movement and traditional media

Visibility enabled activist- citizen journalism (Tufekci, 2013) that was also a crucial part of the tactical repertoire of the movement. It revealed the dynamic interaction between the yellow vests movement and mainstream media, but also asymmetrical power. It is notable that the networked microcelebrity activism was not a separate part of the movement as in some of the recent social movements but constituted a significant part of its action. The key figures operated as activist-citizen journalists tightly in connection with the informal movement organization in different levels of the process.

However, the international media attention concerning the movement remained low apart from the initial stage despite activist citizen-journalism. It can be considered that the decision to use French as the language for communicating movement demands and action complicated the fluid distribution of information for the international audience.

Altogether, the observations confirm the continuing importance of mainstream media in the social movement ecosystem. Traditional media plays an important role in providing attention to the movement and its spokespersons. In the yellow vests movement, the

official spokespersons were participating in several media events to raise attention for the demands of the movement despite the negative attitudes concerning media within the movement. In the Facebook discussions and digital news stories, the spokespersons were referred to as media figures [figure médiatique] or media spokespersons [porte-parole médiatique] that stressed the multi-faceted relation with mainstream media.

5.3 Network dynamics and informal leadership

Although the yellow vests movement is not in a traditional sense leader-centric but relies on collective action that is unified with symbols and practices (Gerbaudo 2017, p. 18), the discussion concerning movement leadership and representation was continuous on Facebook accounts and groups. Many participants felt that delegations and official representatives are needed to achieve the goals of the movement. The need for leadership became especially evident in the COVID-19 crisis when people felt frustration towards the situation. Also, the research shows how leader position is not necessarily chosen by the activists themselves. The prominent figures were publicly accused of abandoning and destroying the movement because they refused to act as expected by some of the movement activists. Although, visibility enabled a more transparent social movement network, it also laid central figures more open to attacks.

These struggles concerning leadership imply that the yellow vests movement is not publicly seen as a horizontal social movement, but the prominent figures are considered to have a more influential position compared to other participants. In this regard, they can be considered as the hubs of the network. However, in contrast to the 'continuous internal differentiation' (Nunes, 2014), these influential hubs were not replaced by other nodes with a high number of ties. The central hubs remained their position in the movement during the whole observation period. This network character became evident in occasions in which some of the center figures left the movement because of the pressure caused by the celebrity status. They were not replaced with new figures but were put in the same position after returning to the movement. This suggests that the quality of ties between the hubs and nodes in the network was high, and thus the hubs

were not easily replaced by new nodes. However, the observations also showed that new hubs emerged within the movement emphasizing a more democratic structure.

The research shows how leadership and representative power is a discussed topic in contemporary social movements that do not have a formal organizational structure or leaders. Prominent figures of the movement are considered as leaders because of their influence, charisma and active participation in the movement. They often become responsible for the movement actions regardless of their choice. On the other hand, the research shows how the introduction of social media has blurred the line between formal and informal leadership.

5.4 Comments on the research method

Digital media ethnography was considered a suitable method for the research. As a research method, digital media ethnography provided a dynamic and multi-faceted viewpoint on the phenomenon. It enabled an analysis already during the data collection period that assisted with directing the research. For future research, interviews and fieldwork in offline sites could provide relevant data concerning the dynamics and informal leadership of the yellow vests movement.

It should be noted that the findings of this qualitative research are based on the interpretations of the researcher and are not trying to be exhaustive descriptions of the phenomenon. Also, the findings are related to the yellow vests movement and not necessarily generalizable as a whole to other contemporary social movements.

# 6 CONCLUSIONS

The scope of this master's thesis was to examine how informal leadership emerges in the yellow vests movement in France. Also, the thesis examined what kind of differences and similarities emerge when comparing the informal leadership and dynamics of the yellow vests movement to other contemporary social movements. The research findings were based on data collected from key Facebook accounts and French and English digital news media. The thesis analyzed three key events central to the research topic.

The observations revealed informal leadership within the yellow vests movement. The findings showed that the informal leadership of contemporary social movements that use social media arenas to organize and mobilize action is not necessarily anonymous but can be visible and identifiable without fulfilling the conditions of formal social movement leadership. This visible informal leadership of the yellow vests movement was also distributed between the key figures and other participants, providing a leaderful and dynamic social movement network. The research showed that the structure of the yellow vests movement was not horizontal but contained central points or hubs that had a more influential position in the movement network, also.

The discussion concerning leadership was continuous in the yellow vests movement, highlighting the significance and complexity of representative power and leadership in contemporary social movements. Despite the ideal of leaderless action, the visible and active figures of the movement were considered to have a more influential position efficiently reinforced by traditional media. The prominent figures were constantly forced to deal with expectations concerning their role in the movement.

It can be argued that the contribution and determination of the key figures in the online and offline contexts provided the ground for the longevity of the yellow vests movement. Thus, the question that should be approached in future research is not whether there exists leadership in contemporary social movements but how this informal leadership is channeled in the online and offline contexts to achieve the goals of the movement, and in this way, social change.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Aminzade, R.R., Goldstone, J.A., & Perry, E.J. (2001). Leadership dynamics and dynamics of contention. In R.R. Aminzade, D. McAdam, S. Tarrow & C. Tilly (Eds.), *Silence and voice in the study of contentious politics,* pp. 126-154. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Aublanc, M. (2019, January 15). Video. 'Gilets jaunes: Priscillia Ludosky et Eric Drouet annonce la fin de leur collaboration' [Video. 'Yellow vests: Priscillia Ludosky and Eric Drouet announce to end their collaboration]. *20minutes*. https://www.20minutes.fr/societe/2423639-20190115-video-gilets-jaunes-priscillia-ludosky-eric-drouet-annoncent-fin-collaboration

Ayoub, P.M., Wallace, S.J. & Zepeda-Millán, C. (2014). Triangulation in social movement research. In D. Della Porta (Ed.), *Methodological practices in social movement research.* Oxford: Oxford University Press. https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780198719571.001.0001

Bakardjieva, M., Felt, M. & Dumitrica, D. (2018). The mediatization of leadership: Grassroots digital facilitators as organic intellectuals, sociometric stars and caretakers. *Information, Communication & Society*, 21 (6), pp. 899-914. https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118X.2018.1434556

Baker, E. (1970). *Developing community leadership*. An interview with Gerda Lerner. https://americanstudies.yale.edu/sites/default/files/files/baker_leadership.pdf

Balsiger, P. & Lambelet, A. (2014). Participant observation. In D. Della Porta (Ed.), *Methodological practices in social movement research.* Oxford: Oxford University Press. https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780198719571.001.0001

Barabási, A-L. & Albert, R. (1999). Emergence of scaling in random networks. *Science*, 286, pp. 509-512. https://barabasi.com/publications/22/ten-most-cited

BBC (2019, January 3). *French gilets jaunes: Who is protest leader Eric Drouet?* https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-46745656

Bennet, W.L., & Segerberg, A. (2013). *The logic of connective action. Digital media and the personalization of contentious politics*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.

Berthelier, A. (2019, March 9). Priscillia Ludosky, tête chercheuse des gilets jaunes qui appelle à un 'acte décisif' ce week-end [Priscillia Ludosky, the thinker of the yellow vests invites to join the 'decisive act' this weekend]. *Huffpost.* https://www.huffingtonpost.fr/2019/03/08/priscillia-ludosky-tete-chercheuse-des-gilets-jaunes-qui-appelle-a-un-acte-decisif-ce-week-end_a_23686793/

Bianconi, G. & Barabási, A-L. (2001). Competition and multiscaling in evolving networks. *Europhysics Letters*, 54 (4), pp. 436-442. https://barabasi.com/f/90.pdf

Bob, C. & Nepstad, S. (2007). Kill a leader, murder a movement. Leadership and assassination in social movements. *American Behavioral Scientist*, 50 (10), pp. 1370-1394. https://doi.org/10.1177/0002764207300162

Castells, M. (2012). *Networks of outrage and hope. Social movements in the internet age.* Cambridge: Polity Press.

Chamorel, P. (2019). Macron versus the yellow vests. *Journal of Democracy*, 30 (4), pp. 48-62. https://doi.org/10.1353/jod.2019.0068

Collyer, R. (2019, November 15). A year in the life of yellow vest protest leader Priscillia Ludosky. *Rfi.fr.* http://www.rfi.fr/en/france/20191115-year-life-yellow-vests-protest-leader-priscillia-ludosky

DeCesare, M. (2013). Towards an interpretive approach to social movement leadership. *International Review of Modern Sociology*, 39 (2), pp. 239-257. http://scholarworks.merrimack.edu/soc_facpub/4

Della Ratta, D., & Valeriani, A. (2012). Remixing the spring! Connective leadership and read-write practices in the 2011 Arab uprisings. *CyberOrient: Online Journal of the Virtual Middle East*, 6 (1), pp. 52-76. http://www.cyberorient.net/article.do?articleId=7763

Fly Rider infos blocages (2018, November 26). Live communiqué officiel [Live official announcement] [Video attached] [Status update]. Facebook. https://www.facebook.com/maxime.nicolle/videos/10217637193458980/

Fly rider infos blocages (n.d.). *Home* [Facebook page]. Facebook. Retrieved July 30, 2020 from https://www.facebook.com/groups/113011902965556

Fly Rider Nicolle Maxime (n.d.). *Home* [Facebook page]. Facebook. Retrieved August 13, 2020 from https://www.facebook.com/maxime.nicolle

Freeman, J. (2013). The tyranny of structurelessness. *Women's Studies Quarterly,* 41 (3&4), pp. 231-246. https://doi.org/10.1353/wsq.2013.0072 . (Originally work published 1972)

France 24. (2018, December 17). 'Yellow Vests' open a new front in the battle: Popular referendums. https://www.france24.com/en/20181217-france-yellow-vests-battle-popular-referendum-RIC-citizens-initiative-macron-philippe

Gamson, W. & Wolfsfeld, G. (1993). Movements and media as interacting systems. *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 528, pp. 114-125. https://doi.org/10.1177/0002716293528001009

Ganz, M. (2009). *Why David sometimes wins. Leadership, organization and strategy in the California farm worker movement*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, Inc.

Gerbaudo, P. (2017). *The mask and the flag*. Populism, citizenism and global protest. London: Hurst & Company.

Gerbaudo, P. (2016). Social media teams as digital vanguards: the question of leadership in the management of key Facebook and Twitter accounts of Occupy Wall Street, Indignados and UK Uncut, *Information Communication & Society,* 20 (2), pp. 185-202 https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118X.2016.1161817

Gerbaudo, P. (2012). *Tweets and the streets. Social media and contemporary activism*. London: Pluto Press. https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt183pdzs

Ghonim, W. (2012). *Revolution 2.0. The power of the people is greater than the people in power. A memoir.* London: Fourth Estate.

Girard, Q. (2019, November 11). Maxime Nicolle: des paroles et des actes [Maxime Nicolle: about words and action]. *Libération.* https://www.liberation.fr/france/2019/11/11/maxime-nicolle-des-paroles-et-des-actes_1762763

Gitlin, T. (2003). *The whole world is watching. Mass media in the making and unmaking of the new left.* Berkeley, CA: University of California Press. (Originally work published 1980)

Goanec, M. (2019, July 31). Gilets jaunes gather for third 'Assembly of Assemblies' (J. Richeson, Trans.). *ROAR Magazine*. https://roarmag.org/essays/gilets-jaunes-third-assembly-assemblies/

Hine, C. (2015). *Ethnography for the internet. Embedded, embodied and everyday.* London: Bloomsbury Publishing Plc.

Jérôme Rodrigues Officiel (n.d.). *Home* [Facebook]. Facebook. Retrieved July 30, 2020 from https://www.facebook.com/lafamillejerome

Jones, C. (2011, March 31). *Ethical issues in online research*. British Educational Research Association on-line resource. https://www.bera.ac.uk/publication/ethical-issues-in-online-research

Jones, K.B. (1993). *Compassionate authority: Democracy and the representation of women.* London: Routledge.

Kemp, S. (2019). Digital 2019: France. https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2019-france

Kozinets, R.V. (2015). *Netnography: redefined* (2nd ed.). London: Sage.

Kreiss, D. & Tufekci, Z. (2013). Occupying the political: Occupy Wall Street, collective action, and the rediscovery of pragmatic politics. *Cultural Studies <-> Critical Methodologies,* 13 (3), pp. 163-167. https://doi.org/10.1177/1532708613477367

Kuhn, R. (2013). The media and the executive in France: An unequal power relationship. *European Journal of Communication*, 28 (2), pp. 122-135. https://doi.org/10.1177/0267323113477081

la france en colere !!! (n.d.). *Home* [Facebook page]. Facebook. Retrieved August 13, 2020 from https://www.facebook.com/groups/262974177695789

La france enervée (n.d.). *Home* [Facebook page]. Facebook. Retrieved July 30, 2020 from https://www.facebook.com/Gilet.jaune.france.fr

L'Assemblée des Assemblées des Gilets Jaunes (n.d.). *Home.* [Facebook page]. Facebook. Retrieved August 5, 2020 from https://www.facebook.com/assembleedesassemblees

Le Parisien. (2018, November 27). Rencontre avec de Rugy: déçus, les Gilets jaunes appellent à manifester samedi [Meeting with de Rugy: disappointed, the Yellow vests call to demonstrate on Saturday]. http://www.leparisien.fr/politique/francois-de-rugy-recoit-deux-porte-parole-des-gilets-jaunes-27-11-2018-7955391.php

Libération. (2019, October 28). Des figures des gilets jaunes réclament une rencontre avec Emmanuel Macron [The yellow vest movement figures demand a meeting with Emmanuel Macron]. https://www.liberation.fr/direct/element/des-figures-des-gilets-jaunes-reclament-une-rencontre-avec-emmanuel-macron_104557/?fbclid=IwAR3sx5Gem-_uEgrvlSoyRWl8vx67n8vFBT6geZOwfTXBsL2QEB_UH1h0H-A

Libération (2018, November 26). Qui a choisi les huit porte-parole des gilets jaunes? Que veulent-ils? [Who has chosen the eight spokespersons of the yellow vests? What do they want?]. *CheckNews.fr.* https://www.liberation.fr/checknews/2018/11/26/qui-a-choisi-les-huit-porte-parole-des-gilets-jaunes-que-veulent-ils_1694360

Ludosky, P. (2020a, 16 April). *Apres Covid-19: Stop aux inegalites sociales* [After Covid-19: Stop social inequalities]. Change.org. https://www.change.org/p/emmanuel-macron-apres-covid-19-un-pacte-international-contre-les-inegalite-sociales?recruiter=229790286&utm_source=share_petition&utm_medium=facebook&u

tm_campaign=psf_combo_share_initial&recruited_by_id=541bbb80-b257-11e4-818c-b7f07a457f34&utm_content=mit-21540979-10%3Av6

Ludosky, P. (n.d.). *Home* [Facebook page]. Facebook. Retrieved July 30, 2020 from https://www.facebook.com/priscillia.ludosky

Ludosky, P. (2020b, February 27). TRÈS IMPORTANT - Communiqué de Priscillia Ludosky, François Boulo et Jérôme Rodrigues. Le 22 février dernier, Emmanuel Macron a déclaré être prêt à recevoir un groupe de gilets jaunes à l'Elysée. [VERY IMPORTANT- Communiqué by Priscillia Ludosky, François Boulo and Jérôme Rodrigues. On the 22 February, Emmanuel Macron has declared to be ready to meet a group of yellow vests in the Elysée.] [Status update]. Facebook. https://www.facebook.com/priscillia.ludosky/posts/10219048095651367

Ludosky, P. (2019, October 28). Avec Jerome Rodrigues Faouzi Sevran & Fabrice Grimal nous avons demandé à rencontrer E. Macron. Ts les médias ont reçu l'info.. [With Jerome Rodrigues Faouzi Sevran & Fabrice Grimal we have demanded a meeting with E. Macron. The media has received the info...] [Status update]. Facebook. https://www.facebook.com/priscillia.ludosky/posts/10217978381429180

Malinick, T.E., Tindall, D.B. & Diani, M. (2013). Network centrality and social movement media coverage: A two-mode network analytic approach. *Social Networks*, 35, pp. 148-158. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.socnet.2011.10.005

Marcus, G.E. (1995). Ethnography in / of the world system: The emergence of multi-sited ethnography. *Annual Review of Anthropology,* 24, pp. 95-117. https://www.jstor.org/stable/2155931

McCarthy, J.D. & Zald, M.N. (1973). *The trend of social movements in America: Professionalization and resource mobilization.* Retrieved from https://deepblue.lib.umich.edu/bitstream/handle/2027.42/50939/164.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y

McNair Barnett, B. (1993). Invisible southern black women leaders in the civil rights movement: the triple constraints of gender, race and class. *Gender and Society*, 7 (2), pp. 162-182. Retrieved from https://www.jstor.org/stable/189576

Melucci, A. (1996). *Challenging codes*. *Collective action in the information age*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511520891

Morris, A.D. & Staggenborg, S. (2004). Leadership in social movements. In D.A. Snow, S.A. Soule & H. Kriesi (Eds.), *The Blackwell companion to social movements,* pp. 171-196. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing.

Nunes, R. (2014). *Organisation of the organisationless: Collective action after networks*. https://www.metamute.org/sites/www.metamute.org/files/pml/Organisation-of-the-Organisationless.pdf

Poell, T., Abdulla, R., Rieder, B., Woltering, R. & Zack, L. (2016). Protest leadership in the age of social media. *Information, Communication & Society*, 19 (7), pp. 994-1014. https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118X.2015.1088049

Robnett, B. (1996). African-American women in the civil rights movement, 1954-1965: gender, leadership, and micromobilization. *American Journal of Sociology,* 101 (6), pp. 1661-1693.  https://doi.org/10.1086/230870

Robson, J. (2017). Participant anonymity and participant observations. Situating the researcher within digital ethnography. In M. Zimmer & K. Kinder-Kurlanda (Eds.), *Internet research ethics for the social age*, pp. 195-202. New York, NY: Peter Lang Publishing.

Rucht, D. (2004). The quadruple 'A': media strategies of protest movements since the 1960's. In W. Van de Donk, B.D. Loader, P.G. Nixon & D. Rucht (Eds.), *Cyberprotest: new media, citizens, and social movements*, pp. 25-48. London: Routledge.

Rodrigues, J. (2020, Mars 13). A CEUX QUI PAS COMPRENDRE !
on prétend être des objecteurs de conscience et dès qu'on se met à réfléchir ça plaît à personne bref paradoxe ! Trouvez vous un leader ! [TO THOSE WHO DO NOT UNDERSTAND ! We pretend to be conscientious objectors and as soon as we start to

think about it, it does not please anyone in summary a paradoxe! Find yourself a leader !]. [Status update, video]. Facebook.

https://www.facebook.com/lafamillejerome/videos/540960096521651/

Science & Cocktails (2016, November 22). *Networks are everywhere with Albert-László Barabási* [Video]. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c867FlzxZ9Y

Sumiala, J., Tikka, M., Huhtamäki, J. & Valaskivi, K. (2016). #JeSuisCharlie: Towards a multi-method study of hybrid media events. *Media and Communication*, 4 (4), pp. 97-108. https://doi.org/10.17645/mac.v4i4.593

Tufekci, Z. (2017). *Twitter and tear gas. The power and fragility of networked protest.* New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

Tufekci, Z. (2013). 'Not this one': Social movements, the attention economy and microcelebrity networked activism. *American Behavioral Scientist*, 57 (7), pp. 848-870. https://doi.org/10.1177/0002764213479369

Tufekci, Z. & Wilson, C. (2012). Social media and the decision to participate in political protest: Observations from Tahrir square. *Journal of Communication*, 62 (2), pp. 363-379. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1460-2466.2012.01629.x

Willsher, K. (2019a, January 28). Second gilets jaunes protester launches political party. Jacline Mouraud says Les Émergents will work towards better distribution of wealth. *The Guardian.* https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/jan/28/second-gilets-jaunes-protestor-founds-political-party-jacline-mouraud

Willsher, K. (2019b, January 27). Gilets jaunes leader hit in eye during protest 'will be disabled for life.' *The Guardian.* https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/jan/27/gilets-jaunes-leader-hit-in-eye-during-protest-will-be-disabled-for-life

Vliegenthart, R. & Walgrave, S. (2012). The interdependency of mass media and social movements. In H.A. Semetko and M. Scammell (Eds.), *SAGE handbook of political communication*, pp. 387-397. London: Sage http://dx.doi.org.libproxy.helsinki.fi/10.4135/9781446201015.n31