Journal of Social Sciences Research & Policy (JSSRP)

GISSR Global Institute of Social Sciences Research

Understanding the Drivers of Social Movement Participation: A Multifaceted Approach

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Abstract: *Social movements have long been a powerful force for change, shaping society and challenging the existent status quo. Moreover, what motivates a person to take action and commit to a cause? The reasons behind participation in social movements stem from a mixture of multi-faceted personal, social, and structural factors. Knowing these drivers is essential to understanding the role of individuals in collective action and how movements can achieve their aims. People participate in social movements for a plethora of reasons in the form of personal ideology and morals, social circles, and even resources. Individual participation, even at a microscale, is very important in generating the activity and energy of a movement. Although scholars have examined the subject in detail, quite a bit remains to be discovered regarding the fundamental psychological and sociological factors of radicalization. This research concentrates on two relevant approaches: Resource Mobilization and Cultural Framing. Understanding these perspectives will allow us to better appreciate the diverse ways people are involved in sports and the reasons behind their continued participation. Additionally, there is a need to understand the impact of such changes on participation and effectiveness, particularly concerning the evolution of activism with the digital revolution and increasing globalization of movements.*

Introduction

Social movements are an important aspect of human history and are catalysts for profound social change and transformation. From local uprisings to internationally coordinated movements, they are an important means for people and organizations to question established institutions and norms. They are like persistent collective efforts in order to promote or resist social change (Staggenborg, 2016). Social movements often involve conflict, and when they succeed, they push society to adapt and find ways to coexist with their goals. These movements can take many different forms, varying in organization, resources, objectives, strategies, and the specific actions they take to create change. When a social movement begins, it is vague, unstructured, and formless; group behaviour is archaic, and interaction mechanisms are simple and unplanned. A social movement acquires the characteristics of a society as it progresses. It gains structure and shape, a collection of customs and traditions, a long-standing division of labor, established leadership, social norms and values, and, in other words, a new way of living (Blumer, 1995). The factors that drive individuals to participate in collective action have long fascinated sociologists and social scientists, leading to extensive research aimed at understanding this complex

phenomenon. This paper explores the key forces behind social movement participation, drawing from foundational sociological studies to provide a deeper understanding of this dynamic process. The historical history of sociological perspectives on social movement involvement will be outlined. First, following the progression of important ideas and theories from classical sociology to modern methods. The main forces behind social movement involvement will then be progressively examined, including characteristics at the individual level (demographics, values, emotions), structural impacts (political opportunities, financial resources), and cultural elements (ideologies, discourses). The study of social movement participation will conclude with a discussion of new developments and potential paths, highlighting the necessity of more interdisciplinary cooperation and innovative methodology. By the synthesis of existing knowledge and identification of gaps in our current understanding, this review aims to contribute to ongoing debates about the nature and causes of social movement participation while providing valuable insights for both academic researchers and practitioners working in the fields and areas of sociology, politics, social psychology, and social activism.

Literature Review

The study of social movements has caught attention of sociologists across the globe, with a focus on understanding the reasons behind the launch of such movements and their historical and social context. The popularity of comparative-historical sociology has influenced the use of historical research methods in sociology, especially in the specialty area of social movement research, and resulted in discussions on the boundaries between history and sociology. Scholars suggest that by integrating various perspectives to study social movements as collective actors and action systems, focusing on the evolving meaning of the term "social movement" over time. (Hanna, 2022). The historical development of sociological perspectives on social movement participation can be traced through various key concepts and theories. Initially, social movements received little scholarly attention in the United States, but with the rise of social activism in the 1960s and the resurgence of the conflict perspective, scholars began to give social movements more serious consideration (Peoples, 2018). The study of social movements has attracted sociologists around the globe, who have shown keen interest in the area with a focus on understanding the reasons behind the launch of social movements and their historical and social context. They want to understand why these movements start and how they are influenced by history and society. The exact definition of "social movement" is debated, but the basic idea is that it is a group of people working together for a social or political change (Gentile & Rohlinger, 2016). Definitions are often contentious, and social movements have been the subject of one such contention, whose meaning has transformed through time. Using the frameworks of resource mobilization theory and political process theory, sociologists have analyzed the phenomena of movements, particularly why people engage in them. Emotions, framing, and collective identity are also important factors that research has recently focused on due to the cultural shift. The 1970s and 80s social movements were particularly active, and have drawn the attention of classic social theory. For example, in social movements, it becomes relevant to utilize what is called "collective consciousness" to explain how groups foster identity and purpose among their constituents. Meanwhile how class conflict alongside economic disparities creates social turmoil is the emphasis in the Marxist account. An alternative perspective, proposed by Max Weber, focuses on authority, power, and rationalization, examining how movements question or adapt to existing power structures. Finally, the tradition of comparative historical analysis has contributed a broader perspective by pushing scholars to compare and study social movements in different historical contexts. Although their influence is often unrecognized, these traditional approaches continue to influence research today (McAdam & Tarrow, 2020). This influence was not always explicit, but scholars

found these theories helped explain how movements emerged, functioned, and achieved or failed to achieve their goals. Even today, most of the literature on social movements can be loosely connected to one or more of these classical traditions. However, the way scholars utilize these ideas continues to evolve, reflecting the changing nature of social movements themselves. In other words, the conversation around social movements is constantly adapting, building upon the foundation laid by these earlier thinkers.

When we tend to examine the reasons behind participation in social movements, we witness that it is a complex interplay of individual-level variables structural influences and some cultural factors. Individual-level variables such as demographics, values, and emotions play a role in motivating individuals to participate in social movements Studies suggest that one's frequent involvement in social movements can inspire others to participate more actively, creating a reinforcing cycle of engagement (Smith, González, & Frigolett, 2021). Age, race, gender, and socioeconomic status can also influence someone's experiences with injustice and their sense of belonging to a cause. Shared values and beliefs can create a sense of solidarity and purpose within a movement. People's anger, frustration, and optimism are emotions that often encourage people to take part in social movements. Meanwhile, other aspects including political factors and economic wealth of a region are also important since they make mobilization possible. These larger social and political phenomena indicate the timing and manner in which movements are formed and strengthened. For instance, poor governance or phases of social turbulence may provide the conditions that enable social movements to emerge. In the same way, having funding and media attention helps the public to mobilize and support the cause. Besides the primary social determinants, individual culture also motivates the people in a certain way. People's understanding shaped by certain ideologies, stories, and common beliefs will have an impact on their decision to engage in social movements. In short, movements arise from the people and people who are actively seeking to transform the physical and social world around them politically and socially are the ones driving it (Stekelenburg & Klandermans, 2013). The need to participate in a movement to express one's opinions and beliefs is another motivation. In addition to, if people feel that they belong to a particular group, they may be inspired to participate in a movement as a way to express a shared identity. Participation in social movements is affected by emotions. Anger and pride are examples of emotions that can trigger and enhance participation in a movement. In addition, people may be inspired to join a social movement through passion. (Travaglino, 2014). Ideologies answer the question of why a movement exists as well as provide a means through which a movement can express its goals. Moving a discourse on a certain issue can affect how a particular audience views a specific movement or its aims and goals. For instance, either a campaign targeting for environmental protection can aim for the consequences of climate change, or the beauty of nature that needs saving, depending on which one suits the audience better.

Research into social movements' participation tends to be lagging in change with the pace, which new research tools are appearing, and their corresponding developments. Movements today are virtually impossible without the existence and proper use of social media and the internet as these greatly aid in the mobilization and participation of individuals in the movement. Researchers today are interested in the impact of online networks on participation and impacts of any digital activity in the movement, like online petitions or calls to protest or boycott. There is increasing evidence that social media, especially Twitter, plays a big role in not only facilitating movements, but in predicting actual participation in future protests, and there is an urgent need to understand the effects of social movement engagement (Choudhury, Jhaver, Sugar, & Weber, 2016). Social movements are increasingly transnational, with

participants and actions spanning geographic boundaries. Future research may focus on how movements leverage global communication tools, address cultural differences, and address global justice issues. The large datasets available from social media and other online sources offer new opportunities to study patterns of participation, identify key players in movements, and understand the spread of movement ideas. Research suggests that participation in social movements can improve health behaviours, making it a potential invisible form of intervention to promote health. (Bozarth & Budak, 2017). Additionally, research on social movement organizations (SMOs) in online protest movements shows that SMOs play an important role in knowledge sharing, community building, and recruiting new participants. It is becoming increasingly important to recognize the intersection of various social identities such as race, gender, and class in movements. In social movement theory, there is a growing trend to integrate protest with institutional politics. This shift focuses on mechanisms and processes rather than simple causality, leading to a more comprehensive understanding of how social movements interact with institutional structures (Oliver, Cadena-Roa, & Strawn, 2003). An important perspective that is becoming increasingly popular among scholars and researchers is to combine social psychology and cultural social construction theories with Structuralist Movement theory. This combination seeks to capture the complex interplay of individual motivations, cultural context, and structural influences in shaping participation in social movements.

Theoretical Framework

Going through the studies about why people participate in social movements, we observe that the domain is dominated by a variety of theoretical perspectives. In today's interconnected world, sociological insights such as Resource Mobilization theory and Cultural Framing theory provide valuable insights on how and why movements are formed. Resource Mobilization theory rose to prominence in the 1970s and focused on the role of resources such as money, organizational networks, and media access in determining the success of movements. This challenges early notions of movement participants as outsiders or disconnected from society. It also counters the assumption that all groups have equal opportunities to speak out their concerns and affect change. Instead, it emphasizes how access to resources determines a movement's ability to gain support and go on to achieve its goals (Schmidt, Hancock, Frederick, Hums, & Alagaraja, 2020). The theory concentrates on the ways in which marginalized individuals form and mobilize in order to foster interpersonal adaptation. Rather, in contrast to the view of the motion members as irrational or strictly reactionary, the current position stresses their ability to draw up, coordinate, and use available resources to advance their cause. The position of the operator of the movement, the leader or organizer of the movement, is an essential element in this method. They present challenges in tactics that are compatible with the support of the capabilities, mobilize citizens for action, and develop corporate approaches to maintain the pace. In a couple of cases, they may even magnify or construct concerns in order to encourage the movement. The theory also links these self-starters to the professionalization of activism, showing how the movement develops more structured and planned over a longer period. Supply mobilization theory sheds light on the motivations for sharing in interpersonal movements and on the major role played by management and supply supervision in successful mobilization. The argument is persuasive that the ability to access and effectively use the provisions plays an important role in deciding whether an individual chooses to join and continue the action. This theory goes beyond simple numbers, recognizing various resources that movements need to thrive and how access to these resources shapes participation. It tends to explain that social movements emerge when individuals with grievances can mobilize sufficient resources to take action. Resources, in this context, include knowledge, money, media, labour,

solidarity, legitimacy, and support from powerful elites. When we go deeper to understand what the cynosure of the theory in the context we see it puts aside and rejects both the previously dominant functionalist view that social movement actors were deviant or anomic, and the pluralist assumption that all parties willing to engage in the political process have a reasonable chance that their grievances will be heard and addressed, resource mobilization scholars sought to understand how rational and often marginalized social actors mobilized effectively to pursue their desired social change goals (The Wiley-Blackwell Encyclopedia of Social and Political Movements, 2022). Further, it goes on to explain that the success of social movements is closely tied to their ability to access and effectively utilize various resources. While financial resources are often emphasized, the theory acknowledges that the success of movements can also depend on factors like time and labour contributed by members. Critics of Resource Mobilization Theory argue that it places excessive emphasis on financial resources and may overlook the significance of other factors like member commitment and grassroots support in driving movement success.

The other theory that induces very well into the context of urgency of participation in social movements is that of cultural Framing theory. It emphasizes the role of interpretative processes in mediating the relationship between meaning and mobilization within social movements. The concept of framing in relation to social and object interaction finds its roots from Erving Goffman's Frame Analysis (1974), which is beholden in part to the earlier work of Gregory Bateson (1972) and is rooted in the symbolic interactionist and constructionist principle that meanings, as noted above, arise through interpretive processes mediated by culture. For Bateson and Goffman, as well as for other scholars who use the concept analytically, frames provide answers to such questions: How social movements are tend to be explored, specifically how movements attract and mobilize supporters. The idea is that activists and movement leaders do not just act randomly—they carefully shape their goals and messages to align with larger cultural narratives, ideologies, and emotions. By doing this, they increase their chances of gaining support and encouraging people to take part. So, what does this mean for us? It shows that the way movements present their causes is just as important as the causes themselves. Understanding these strategies allows us to think critically about the messages we encounter, recognize the emotional and ideological appeals at play, and make informed choices about how we engage. Though we tend to support, question out, or analyze a movement, being aware of these framing techniques helps us to respond thoughtfully (Snow, Vliegenthart, & Ketelaars, 2019). Cultural Framing theory highlights the importance of narrative, ideology, sense of collective identity, and emotions shape social movement participation. Cultural frames are belief systems used by social movement organizations to motivate individuals to support their cause. These frames focus attention, tie together different elements, and transform the ways objects are viewed or understood. By framing issues in a way that resonates with people's values and identities, social movements can mobilize collective action. For example, the Never Again Action (NAA) movement that utilizes the Holocaust Framework, drawing parallels between the plight of immigrants and the experiences of Jews during the Holocaust regime (Hospita, Zetra, & Afrizal, 2018). People may join social movement organizations not necessarily, because they fully agree with the collective action frames, but because it provides an opportunity for publicly performing and enacting a collective identity. Putting together what makes this theory so soaked into relevance is its strands of shared meanings, constructing narratives that resonate with their target audience, emotional appeals and effectively framing an issue or concern. However, critique to this framework suggests that there is a plethora of factors behind any social phenomenon and it overlooks all other factors. Thus, also making its scope shallow to draw bigger generalizations. Drawing comparison between the two frameworks, we

grasp that resource mobilization theory focuses on material resources, while cultural framing theory delves into the power of ideas and narratives.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the study of social movements highlights the complex mix of factors that drive people to take part in collective action. Broadly speaking, individuals are motivated through three key reasons: instrumentality, identity, and ideology. Instrumentality reflects the desire to create change in the social and political landscape, while identity mixes up with a sense of belonging and connection with a group. Ideology, on the other hand, represents the expression of one's personal beliefs and values. These motivations are not fixed—they evolve over time, influenced by political shifts and individual experiences. The success and longevity of social movements ultimately depend on the participation of individuals, as their involvement shapes the momentum and impact of campaigns. Recent developments in social movement research show a growing emphasis on a more dynamic, inclusive, and interdisciplinary approach, allowing for a deeper understanding of the complexities of collective action. The urges and motives for joining social movements can vary, and explanations often include a combination of ideology, social support, and ecological factors but passing through and seeing through the layers, lies the motive of satisfaction, turning participation into a fulling experience. Looking up to the future, the study of social movement participation continues to evolve. New trends like the rise of online activism and the globalized nature of movements posits exciting and contemporary opportunities for research. Through the deeper exploration into these areas and exploring the interplay of resources, cultural framing, and other factors, we can gain a richer and a holistic understanding of the ever-changing and dynamic landscape of social change and the people who power it. By embracing these trends, researchers can develop more nuanced theories that address the diverse nature of social movements across different regions and contexts.

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