

## Abstract

This research proposal examines the intricate dynamics of leaderless organising within the context of social movements, with a specific focus on the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement. By carrying out an ethnographic research into the emergence, structure, and strategic approaches of leaderless organising in BLM, this study seeks to unravel how the movement has successfully mobilised and sustained its momentum without relying on conventional hierarchical leadership structures. Through a comprehensive analysis of the role of social media, collective decision-making processes, and decentralised coordination mechanisms, this research sheds light on the distinct characteristics and inherent challenges of leaderless movements. Ultimately, the findings contribute to a nuanced understanding of the dynamics of leaderless organising in contemporary social movements, providing valuable insights into the potential for collective action and transformative social change beyond traditional leadership paradigms.

## Introduction

The dynamics of leaderless organising in social movements have garnered significant attention in recent years. Leaderless movements, characterised by the absence of identifiable leaders or formal hierarchical structures, have emerged as powerful forces of social change (McCarthy & Zald, 1977; Graeber, 2013). One prominent example is the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement, which gained global recognition for its efforts to address systemic racial injustice and police violence.

Understanding the dynamics of leaderless organising is crucial for understanding the strategies, mobilisation patterns, and overall effectiveness of such movements. This doctoral research aims to investigate the Black Lives Matter movement, exploring how it effectively mobilises resources and exhibits autonomous leadership strategies. By examining the interplay between RMT and ALT in the context of BLM, this study seeks to shed more light on the underlying factors that contribute to the movement's resilience, impact, and long-term sustainability. By examining the implications and obstacles faced by leaderless structures, it will contribute to a deeper understanding of how leaderless organising and distributed leadership can enhance the leadership capacity of decision-makers within social movements.



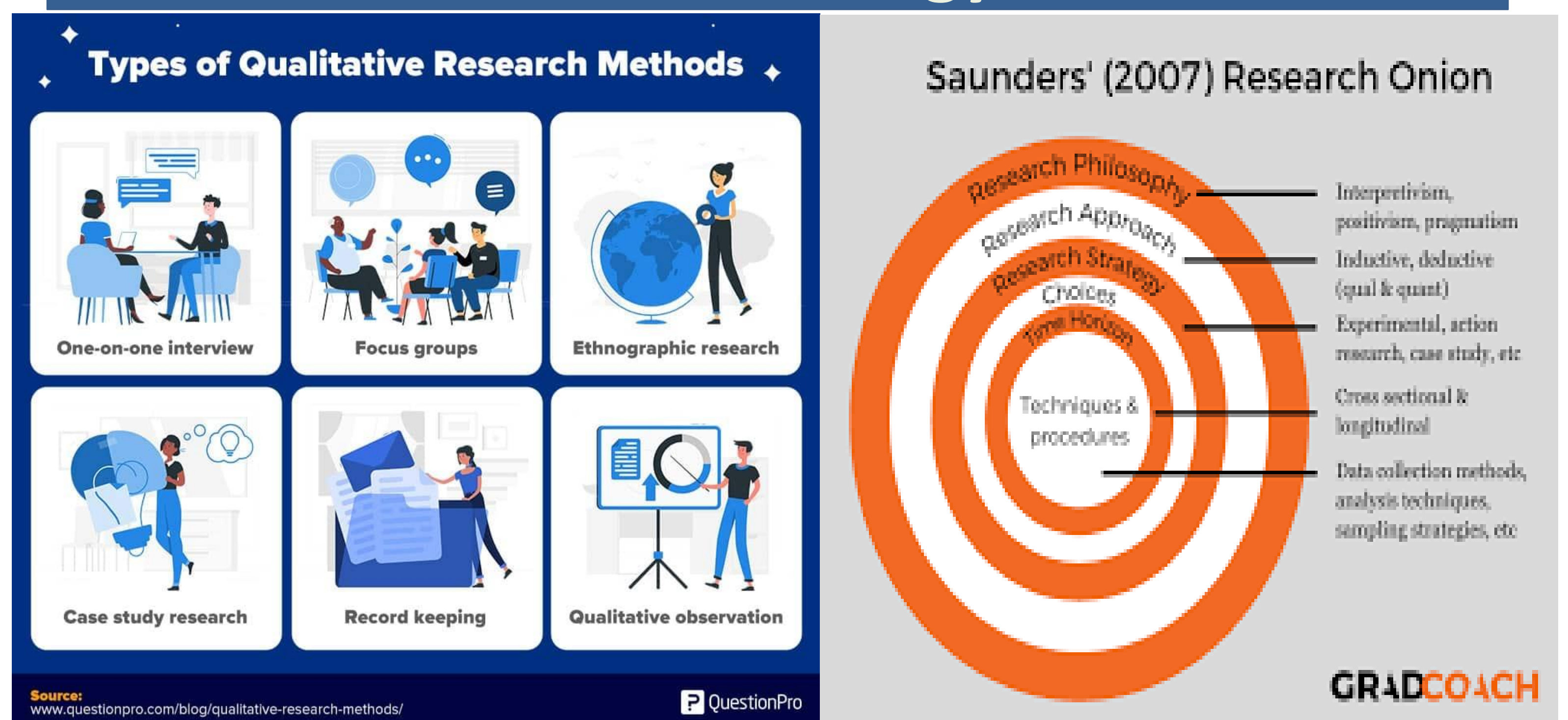
## Research Questions

1. In what ways has resource mobilisation facilitated the effectiveness of leaderless organising in social movements; with a focus on Black Lives Matter UK.
2. How has trust influenced and shaped the decision-making processes within leaderless social movements; specifically examining the context of Black Lives Matter UK?
3. What has been the impact of social media and digital platforms on enabling leaderless organising in social movements, particularly Black Lives Matter UK?

## Theoretical Background

Resource Mobilisation Theory (RMT) and Autonomous Leadership Theory (ALT) offer valuable frameworks for understanding the dynamics of leaderless organising in social movements like Black Lives Matter (BLM) (McCarthy & Zald, 1977; Graeber, 2013). RMT emphasises the importance of mobilising and leveraging resources to sustain and advance a social movement (McCarthy & Zald, 1977). It highlights the role of collective action, strategic alliances, and resource acquisition in achieving movement goals. ALT, on the other hand, focuses on the emergence of autonomous leadership within leaderless movements, highlighting the capacity of individuals to assume leadership roles and foster decentralised decision-making (Graeber, 2013). By integrating these theories, this study seeks to illuminate how BLM effectively mobilises resources and exhibits autonomous leadership to drive its transformative agenda.

## Methodology



## Limitations

- First, due to the complex and dynamic nature of leaderless organising, there may be limitations in capturing the full range of factors and dynamics that influence these social movements. The research relies on available literature, case studies, and existing research, which may have inherent biases and limitations.
- Second, the limitations of the research include the potential difficulty in obtaining primary data from Black Lives Matter UK participants due to concerns over privacy or security, as well as the potential for researcher bias in interpreting qualitative data (Maxwell, 2012).



Figure 1. BLACK LIVES MATTER UK.



Figure 2. EXTINCTION REBELLION UK



Figure 3. OCCUPY LONDON

## Conclusions & Expected Findings

The findings of the research aims to uncover the impact of leaderless organising on the BLM movement's ability to achieve its social change agenda. The study expects to provide insights into the complexities and opportunities associated with leaderless organising within social movements, contributing to a deeper understanding of decentralised leadership and its implications for social change efforts.

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