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title:

The influence of social media on e-democracy in respect of governance and service delivery within eThekwini metropolitan municipality

FACULTY OF COMMERCE ADMIN AND LAW

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…….. ……

April 2025

DECLARATION

I, Siphelele Eugene Jiyane, hereby declare that this dissertation, titled "*The influence of social media on e-democracy in respect of governance and service delivery within eThekwini metropolitan municipality*," is a product of my own original research and intellectual engagement. I have diligently consulted a range of sources, ensuring that all information and ideas derived from them are appropriately acknowledged and referenced, thereby maintaining the integrity and scholarly standards of my work.

Jiyane S.E

April 2025

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DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to my late father Theophilus M Jiyane, my mother Thokozile T Jiyane, my late brothers Nqobizitha Shezi and Lwazi Jiyane.

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated the transformative role of social media in fostering e-democracy, focusing on governance and service delivery within the eThekwini Metropolitan Municipality. Anchored in theoretical frameworks such as Techno-Optimism, Filter Bubble Theory, Digital Citizenship, Decentralised Participatory Democracy (DPD), and Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI), the research critically evaluates the potential and limitations of social media as a tool for civic engagement, public accountability, and enhanced governance.

A mixed-methods approach, anchored on the pragmatism philosophy, was adopted, combining quantitative data from 414 social media users and qualitative insights from 20 municipal officials and 10 political party administrators. The quantitative analysis reveals that 76% of respondents believe social media improves transparency in governance, while 63% consider it an effective tool for holding officials accountable. Conversely, 58% identify misinformation as a major challenge, with 47% reporting exposure to disinformation during significant municipal events. The qualitative data, analysed thematically, underscores the dual role of social media in amplifying public advocacy and potentially exacerbating polarization and echo chambers.

The study also highlights the rapid adoption of digital platforms in eThekwini. For example, 52% of residents access the internet via mobile devices, and the municipality has implemented over 90 free public Wi-Fi sites to bridge digital divides. However, challenges persist, including algorithmic biases and limited digital literacy among marginalised groups. The findings emphasize the importance of algorithmic transparency, media literacy initiatives, and robust digital public infrastructure. By integrating participatory tools such as online forums and citizen-driven feedback systems, municipalities like eThekwini can enhance service delivery and strengthen democratic engagement. This research offers actionable recommendations to policymakers, contributing to a deeper understanding of the interplay between social media and governance in the digital age.

Keywords: E-democracy, governance, social media, Service delivery, eThekwini metropolitan municipality

ISIFINQO

Lolu cwaningo luphenya ngeqhaza lezinguquko ezinkundleni zokuxhumana ekukhuthazeni intando yeningi ye-elekthronikhi, kugxilwe ekubuseni nasekulethweni kwezidingongqangi kuMasipala weTheku. Igxile ezinhlelweni zethiyori ezifana ne-Techno-Optimism, I-Filter Bubble Theory, I-Digital Citizenship, I-Decentralized Participatory Democracy (DPD), kanye Nengqalasizinda Yomphakathi Yedijithali (DPI), ucwaningo luhlola ngokujulile amandla kanye nemikhawulo yenkundla yezokuxhumana njengethuluzi lokuzibandakanya komphakathi, ukuziphendulela komphakathi, kanye nokuthuthukiswa kokuphatha.

Kwamukelwa indlela yezindlela ezixubile, ehlanganisa idatha yobuningi evela kubasebenzisi benkundla yezokuxhumana abangama-414 kanye nemininingwane yekhwalithi evela ezikhulwini zikamasipala ezingama-20 kanye nabaphathi beqembu lezepolitiki abayi-10. Ukuhlaziywa kwezibalo kuveza ukuthi u-76% wabaphenduli bakholelwa ukuthi izinkundla zokuxhumana zithuthukisa obala ekubuseni, kanti u-63% uzibheka njengethuluzi elisebenzayo lokwenza izikhulu ziphendule. Ngakolunye uhlangothi, ama-58% ahlonza ulwazi olunganembile njengenselelo enkulu, kanti u-47% ubika ukuchayeka olwazini olungaqondile ngesikhathi semicimbi ebalulekile kamasipala. Idatha yekhwalithi, ehlaziywa ngokwengqikithi, igcizelela indima embaxambili yenkundla yezokuxhumana ekwandiseni ukukhulumela komphakathi futhi okungase kubhebhethekise i-polarization nama-echo chambers.

Lolu cwaningo luphinde luveze ukwamukelwa ngokushesha kwamapulatifomu edijithali eThekwini. Isibonelo, u-52% wezakhamizi zifinyelela i-inthanethi ngamadivaysi eselula, futhi umasipala usebenzise amasayithi we-Wi-Fi amahhala angaphezu kuka-90 ukuze avale ukuhlukana kwedijithali. Kodwa-ke, izinselele ziyaqhubeka, okuhlanganisa ukuchema kwe-algorithmic kanye nolwazi olulinganiselwe lwedijithali phakathi kwamaqembu abandlululwe. Okutholakele kugcizelela ukubaluleka kokucaca kwe-algorithmic, imizamo yokufundisa abezindaba, kanye nengqalasizinda eqinile yomphakathi yedijithali. Ngokuhlanganisa amathuluzi okubamba iqhaza afana nezinkundla ze-inthanethi kanye nezinhlelo zempendulo eziqhutshwa izakhamuzi, omasipala abafana neTheku bangathuthukisa ukulethwa kwezidingo futhi baqinise ukuxoxisana ngentando yeningi. Lolu cwaningo lunikeza izincomo ezisebenzayo kubenzi benqubomgomo, okunikela ekuqondeni okujulile kokusebenzelana phakathi kwenkundla yezokuxhumana kanye nokubusa enkathini yedijithali.

Amagama abalulekile: E-democracy, governance, social media, Ukulethwa kwezidingo, umasipala wedolobha laseThekwini

CHAPTER ONE

ORIENTATION OF THE STUDY

1.1 Introduction

The growth of social media platforms like X formerly known Twitter, Facebook, YouTube and others, has had a tremendous impact on the democratic discussion landscape. Therefore, some scholars, on the one hand, are of the view that social media has enabled new forms of political activity, allowing civil society groups to organise swiftly and on a wide scale and offering new pathways for public debate and interaction (Chadwick, 2013; Loader et al., 2014). On the other hand, social media has been reprimanded for promoting misinformation, fostering polarisation and echo chambers, and undermining traditional forms of journalism and media accountability (Woolley and Howard, 2016; Tufekci, 2017).

However, the evolution of democratic platforms used by civil society is intricately linked to the progression of industrial revolution (Sukowiyono, Awaliyah, Carey, Lane, and Fei, 2021). As each new technological advancement arises, it presents both opportunities and challenges for democratic discourse and civic engagement. Consequently, it is crucial for government and its people to carefully consider and reflect upon these challenges and concerns to ensure that democratic processes continue to evolve in a positive direction. Moreover, the literature on this topic provides valuable insights into the historical context of democratic platforms and the role that technology plays in shaping them. Thus, through taking these insights into consideration, municipalities can create a better and more effective strategy for promoting civic engagement and democratic discourse in the digital age.

In contrast, according to Internet Live Stats (2016), internet users increased from less than 1% of the world population in 1995 to one billion in 2005, two billion in 2010, and three billion in 2014. The International Telecommunication Union (ITU) estimates that by 2024, about 5.5 billion people, or 68% of the world's population, are online, up from 53%

in 2019. However, 2.6 billion people remain offline (International Telecommunication Union, 2024).

Thus, according to Dixon (2024) in Statista, the global number of social media users has surpassed five billion, with predictions indicating that this figure will rise to over six billion by 2028. This trend highlights the growing importance of social media in modern communication and social interaction. Additionally, social media has significantly impacted civil society worldwide. According to Vorderer and Kohring (2013) young adults can factually be on social media using their smartphones 24/7, permanently connected to the world and their peers. Boxman (1991) emphasized that as no one is an island, social networks are crucial. Consequently, to survive and flourish, everyone requires the help and support of others.

On the other hand, according to several studies including Carpini (2017), are showing that young adults tend to be less interested in traditional politics than older generations. Likewise, it was confirmed by Binder, Alice, Raffael Heiss, Jörg Matthes and Diana Sander (2021) that the youngest voters are less likely to vote, and generally less politically sophisticated.

As a result, technology has become an integral part of people's lives, as it is the cheapest way used to communicate, entertain, and to also take care of business as well as voice their opinion through it. Thus, social media platforms have created a space for possibilities for people to share their thoughts and feelings faster than ever before. Thus, according to Allcott and Gentzkow (2020) social media may be used to propagate disinformation and propaganda. Thus, the study established that false news items were shared more frequently on most social media platforms, than the actual traditional news channels and that these fake news pieces were more likely to be shared or retweeted in social media platform like Twitter.

However, Guess, Nyhan, and Reifler (2021), established that social media has the potential to radicalise people, therefore, their study assumes that people who use social media are more likely to be exposed to extremist information, which can lead to

radicalisation of society, for instance, violence instigation. According to Nkosi (2022), the unrest that erupted in KwaZulu-Natal in July 2021 was significantly driven by social media. A comprehensive report from an expert panel indicated that various online platforms, including Twitter, WhatsApp, and Facebook, were utilized not only to incite but also to strategically organize acts of violence, thereby intensifying tensions and chaos across the region (Nkosi, 2022).

Notably, social media corporations are not doing enough to prevent the spread of violent content on their platforms. Bessi, Ferrara, and De Meo (2023:45) contend that social media is a potent instrument that may be utilised for both good and harm.

Therefore, it is critical for people to be aware of the possible threats of social media and to utilise it appropriately. Thus, according to Howard, Kollanyi, and Woolley (2022) social media may be used to control individuals; for instance, social media e-commerce businesses utilise algorithms to target people with adverts aimed to affect their behaviours. Social media is also changing how companies interact with their workforce, enabling them to forge flexible partnerships, as well as afford employees the leverage to give staff training and development opportunities (Brown 2022:1). In other words, the world is currently in an information age, and everyday citizens are being overrun by vast amounts of information. As a result, social media transformation is partly ahead of the public and private sectors, and it is an integral and influential part of the fourth industrial revolution era on democracy and interaction.

This study investigated the influence of social media on electronic democracy, focusing on governance and service delivery within the eThekwini Metropolitan Municipality. It examined how the transformation of social media has been utilised as a democratic instrument to evaluate governance efficacy and accountability. Specifically, study addressed social media's role in advocacy, its function as a public monitoring and evaluation tool, and its capacity to foster social activism and public engagement. The study is structured around key areas: governance, methods of public accountability, and the dynamics of social activism.

This study explored the multidimensional impact of social media on governance and public engagement. Central to this investigation was an analysis of the democratic strategies employed on social media platforms to shape public opinion and scrutinize governance practices. It delved into the techniques and networking strategies citizens adopt to hold government institutions accountable and offered insights into the ways these platforms enhance civic participation. Another intent was to evaluate the role of social media in monitoring public services, ensuring accountability, and advocating for improved service delivery.

Additionally, the study examined the effectiveness of social media as an advocacy tool, particularly in advancing causes and influencing policy decisions. It highlighted the use of these platforms in political campaigns and as key channels for news dissemination, showcasing their influence on public awareness and mass mobilisation. Lastly, the study investigated the operationalisation of social media in accelerating service delivery, emphasizing its transformative role in addressing governance and service-related challenges.

1.2 Social Media Transforming Public Participation

Social media has fundamentally altered public participation in governance, enabling residents to directly communicate with their representatives without relying on intermediaries such as politicians or traditional media outlets. This transformation has allowed citizens to articulate basic needs, raise awareness, and mobilise mass protests through e-democratic processes. For instance, platforms like Twitter and Facebook have facilitated interactions that bridge generational divides, connecting traditional political actors with younger audiences and fostering discussions on political topics. This has enhanced political opinion expression, equalized engagement opportunities, and boosted voter turnout while contributing to broader social cohesion (Boulianne, 2011, 2015, 2020; Goh et al., 2019; Loader et al., 2014).

1.3 Opportunities and Challenges in eThekwini Municipality

Shirky (2008) highlights those opportunities presented by digital media, stressing that social media enables individuals to self-organise efficiently and address collective problems outside the constraints of traditional institutions. In the eThekwini Municipality, policymakers and political parties often utilise social media to engage with constituents, enhancing interaction and increasing their follower base. However, the effectiveness of this engagement varies.

A comprehensive report on the global internet landscape compiled by Hootsuite (2019) indicates that South Africa had an overall internet usage rate of 54%, representing just more than 31 million people who are online in the country. With the growth in social media activity, about 5 million more South Africans joined the ranks of active social media users, where the social media usage rate is 40% of the population (23 million people). Internationally, Facebook is the dominant and most used social media platform with about 2.27 billion active accounts.

Moreover, according to Census (2022), 13.3% of households had internet access at home, up from 8.6% in 2011. Fixed broadband subscriptions remained low at 3.4 per 100 people in 2023. Additionally, most households accessed the internet through mobile devices, reaching 60.5% in 2022, up from 16.3% in 2011. Meanwhile, mobile phone ownership increased to 92.1% in 2022, compared to 32.3% in 2001. Furthermore, mobile data usage surged to 2.6 exabytes in 2020, a 73% rise driven by COVID-19 lockdowns.

The remainder accesses the internet either at work or other sources. In addition, the Community Survey for 2016 indicates that the internet access as per the community of eThekwini metro is that 9% access the internet at home, 21.4% at the office, and 52% access the internet via mobile devices as well as 15% use internet cafes or educational facilities. Hereafter, eThekwini Municipality is one of 8 South African Metropolitan Municipalities that have taken a position of adapting to the changing demands of its community, through its Integrated Development Plan (IDP) 2018/19, 2016 the Municipality has committed itself to bridging the digital divides that exist within its

community. The municipality has been installing digital fibre cables for network in a phased approach in the eThekwini Municipal area for a few years now. Additionally, the municipality has also rolled out free Wi-Fi to 83 municipal libraries and initiated projects to provide free Wi-Fi to the public which has brought about the deployment of approximately 90 public Wi-Fi sites that offer free Wi-Fi internet access to residents (EThekwini Municipality IDP: 2018/19).

1.4 Case Studies of Political Activism

The transformative power of social media in fostering political activism is evident in global and regional movements. The 2010 Jasmine Revolution, or Arab Spring, across North Africa and the Middle East, demonstrated the critical role of social media in mobilising citizens and toppling regimes, coining the term "Twitter and Facebook revolutions" (Bhanye, Johannes, Shayamunda, and Tavirai, 2023). Similarly, movements such as #FeesMustFall and #RhodesMustFall in South Africa and the UK, as well as #ThisFlag activism against ZANU-PF and the #StopPoliceBrutality movement in Kenya, have effectively utilised social media to galvanise public participation. These movements exemplify how platforms like Facebook and Twitter have provided unprecedented avenues for collective action, amplifying voices that might otherwise remain unheard. By bridging geographical and cultural gaps, these platforms have not only connected activists across regions but also strengthened the capacity for coordinated campaigns (Bhanye et al., 2023).

1.5 Fostering Political Discourse and Democratic Engagement

The study examined how social media has reshaped the culture of political discourse, allowing individuals to express their opinions without fear of reprisal. Gil de Zúñiga et al. (2012) found that social media platforms are vital for opinion expression and political participation. These platforms indirectly promote democratic engagement by fostering opinion expression, which serves as a catalyst for participation. Through mechanisms like online petitions, political campaigns, and polls, social media empowers individuals to voice their views, stay informed about current events, and actively participate in

democratic processes. Furthermore, according to Chen et al. (2015) social media characterises civic attitudes, and "civic identity is a central factor that fosters civic engagement because it helps individuals to see society as a construction of human actors with political and moral goals". Similarly, Goh et al. (2019); Hwang and Kim (2015), argue that social media can be used as a tool of strengthening social relationships and increase social cohesion, which in turn may be the driver for collective action.

In addition, according to Hobbs (2001), the current methods of e-governance are responsible for transcending traditional organisational boundaries and provide customers with a true, one-stop shopping for government services online. For instance, electronic governance (e-governance) is an approach to governance that involves the use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) to improve government processes. Thus, e-governance aims to make government more efficient and effective by reducing the amount of paper used, making services available online or over the phone, as it allows for a reduction in the amount of paper used by replacing them with digital documents that can be easily shared between agencies (Hobbs 2001). Therefore, this would also reduce costs associated with printing and mailing these documents, for example, postage delivery. thereby, public service can now be delivered to businesses and on an 'anywhere - anytime' basis 24/7 without having to physically meet with the officials.

For instance, in 2016, the EThekwini Municipality introduced an innovative solution of WhatsApp messenger Water Reporting number: 073-148-3477, as one of the water crises reporting methods to address the rising demand for public service delivery (Govender, 2016). Accordingly, the announced use of messaging platforms enabled people to easily report their complaints and concerns regarding the water crisis at any given time during the day or night without having to physically meet with officials, thus would save both parties valuable time and effort.

Thus, this study underscores the transformative role of social media in modern governance and public participation. By providing a platform for direct communication, advocacy, and collective action, social media has reshaped how citizens and governments interact. It not only enhances democratic processes but also empowers

individuals to actively monitor and evaluate governance through transparent mechanisms. Furthermore, social media enables citizens to engage in meaningful dialogue, hold leaders accountable, and advocate for systemic changes in governance. By fostering transparency and ensuring accountability, it facilitates a participatory approach to addressing service delivery challenges, strengthening the trust and collaboration between governments and their constituents while bridging gaps in access to information and communication technologies.

1.6 Statement of the problem

In the heart of KwaZulu-Natal, the eThekwini Metropolitan Municipality embodies the paradox of modern digital governance. As a hub of rapid urbanization and stark socio-economic contrasts, the municipality has embraced social media platforms like WhatsApp and Facebook as tools to bridge gaps in service delivery and civic engagement. Hitherto, beneath this digital veneer lie entrenched institutional and systemic challenges that distort the promise of e-democracy.

The municipality's journey toward digital inclusion is fraught with bureaucratic inertia. Take, for instance, the WhatsApp Water Reporting system launched in 2016, a pioneering effort to empower residents to report leaks and shortages. While initially celebrated, the initiative now epitomizes institutional fragmentation. Complaints logged via WhatsApp often vanish into siloed departments, leaving residents in areas like Inanda and Umlazi waiting weeks for responses. This disconnect between policy and practice is mirrored in the municipality's digital infrastructure. Despite rolling out 90 public Wi-Fi zones, connectivity remains a mirage in informal settlements such as Cato Manor, where 42% of households grapple with erratic internet access. For many here, the IDP's promises of digital inclusion ring hollow, as budget priorities sideline critical digital literacy programs. Over half of eThekwini's low-income residents lack the skills to navigate online governance platforms, rendering them invisible in the digital public square.

Beyond institutional walls, the political terrain further complicates e-democracy. Consequently, social media, envisioned as a space for participatory dialogue, is increasingly weaponised. Thus, during the 2021 local elections, platforms like TikTok became battlegrounds for party propaganda, drowning out substantive debates on water shortages and housing backlogs. Meanwhile, economic austerity measures strain the municipality's aging e-services portal, which crashes under the weight of service requests, eroding public trust.

The social fabric of eThekwini tells its own story. On the other hand, digital divides map neatly onto historical inequities: in rural-urban fringe wards, only 23% of Black residents regularly engage with municipal social media channels, compared to 67% in affluent suburbs like Umhlanga. These disparities are not merely technological but rooted in decades of spatial apartheid and systemic neglect.

Therefore, by anchoring the research in eThekwini's streets, council chambers, and online spaces, this study moves beyond broad-stroke narratives of social media's "double-edged sword." Instead, it uncovers the gritty, often invisible, barriers that dictate whether digital tools empower or exclude and what it truly takes to build democracy in the age of algorithms.

1.7 Objectives of the study

(a) To assess the democratic strategies used on the social media, as tools for public opinion on governance.
(b) To determine techniques employed on social media, as well as the networking strategy used by the residents to hold the municipality accountable.
(c) To investigate the significance of social media in monitoring and holding municipal officials responsible for their performance.
(d) To examine the efficacy of how social media is used as an advocacy platform, for causes and policy decision-making.
(e) To establish the impact of social media as a platform used for political campaigns and as a news feeder.

(f) To investigate the operational usage of social media to aid in the acceleration of service delivery.

1.8 Research questions

(a) What are the democratic strategies used on the social media, as tools for public opinion on governance?
(b) What techniques are employed on social media, as well as the networking strategy used by the residents to hold the municipality accountable?
(c) How significant is social media in monitoring and holding municipal officials responsible for their performance?
(d) How efficient is social media as a digital civil society advocacy tool for causes and policy decision-making?
(e) What is the impact of social media platforms used for political campaigns and news feeder?
(f) How can social media aid in the acceleration of service delivery?

1.9 Intended contribution to the body of knowledge

The study explored the extent to which social media can be utilised within the eThekwini Municipality to facilitate key democratic functions, including advocacy, public opinion monitoring, and the organisation of civic interactions. Thus, it examined how these functions can promote government accountability and enhance service delivery.

The findings of this study are expected to benefit multiple communities by developing innovative models and responsive monitoring and evaluation systems. The findings of this study will significantly contribute to the enhancement of civil society's capacity for policy advocacy, promote increased public engagement in decision-making processes, and facilitate the creation of interactive spaces that foster solidarity at both local and global levels.

In addition, this study seeks to deepen the comprehension of social media's role in governance, facilitating long-term community transformation. It aims to inform strategic

approaches for attaining future developmental objectives within eThekwini Municipality and its neighbouring communities.

1.10 Demarcation of the Study

The structure of this thesis is as follows:

Chapter 1: Introduction

The introductory chapter lays the groundwork for the study by outlining its essential components. It begins by articulating the motivation for the research, emphasizing the significance of the problem and its relevance to the field. This is followed by a clear and succinct statement of the problem, which identifies the specific issue or gap in knowledge that the study addresses. The chapter then defines the objectives of the study, detailing the goals and intentions that guided the study process.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The second chapter lays a notional foundation for the study by conducting a critical review of relevant literature. It analyses key assumptions, patterns, and findings from previous research, emphasising significant trends, gaps, and ongoing debates within the field. This review situates the study within the broader academic context, illustrating how the research contributes to and enhances existing knowledge.

Chapter 3: Theoretical Frameworks

This chapter explores the conceptual frameworks and models that serve as the foundation for the study. It details the theoretical perspectives that inform the study's approach, providing a structured lens through which the phenomena under investigation are analysed and understood. By presenting these frameworks, the chapter establishes a solid groundwork for interpreting the findings of the study.

Chapter 4: Research Methodology

The fourth chapter is dedicated to the Research Methodology. This section details the research design, sampling methods, and research instruments used in the study. It begins with an explanation of the Research Design, outlining the overall strategy and structure of the study including whether it is experimental, correlational, and descriptive. The chapter then discusses the Method of Sampling, describing the techniques used to select the respondents or data sources and the rationale behind these choices. Finally, it details the Research Instruments employed, such as surveys, interviews, providing a comprehensive description of the empirical study.

Chapter 5: Quantitative Data Analysis, Interpretation, and Presentation of the Findings

Chapter five focuses on the Quantitative Data Analysis, Interpretation, and Presentation of the Findings. It presents the analysis and interpretation of the quantitative data collected during the study. This includes statistical analyses, the presentation of results in tables and graphs, and a discussion of the findings in relation to the study's objectives and hypotheses.

Chapter 6: Qualitative Data Analysis, Content Analysis, and Presentation of the Findings

The sixth chapter is dedicated to the Qualitative Data Analysis, Content Analysis, and Presentation of the Findings. It focuses on the analysis and interpretation of the qualitative data, including a content analysis of interviews, focus groups, semi structured interviews qualitative data sources. The findings are presented thematically, and the chapter discusses how these findings contribute to the understanding of the research problem.

Chapter 7: Triangulated Presentation of the Findings

In the seventh chapter, a Triangulated Presentation of the Findings is provided. This chapter integrates the quantitative and the qualitative findings and thus offers a comprehensive and corroborated understanding of the research problem. It discusses how different data sources complement each other, providing a more nuanced and complete picture of the study's outcomes.

Chapter 8: Conclusion and Recommendations

The final chapter, Conclusion and Recommendations, summarises the key findings of the study. It discusses the implications of these findings for theory and practice and provides recommendations for future research. Additionally, it reflects on the limitations of the study and suggests areas for further investigation. This chapter brings closure to the thesis while opening avenues for ongoing inquiry and exploration.

CHAPTER TWO

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

This chapter provides an insightful knowledge of the relevant literature for the study. Consequently, the researcher's discourse draws attention to how social media can be framed to link politics, culture, and civil society. Therefore, the research objectives guide the exploration of various facets related to electronic democratic engagement, accountability, public service monitoring, advocacy, political campaigns, and operational service delivery through social media. Additionally, it is generally distinctive how social media platforms contribute to being an instrumental and an influential tool into politics and public participation in communities as well as catalysing neighbourhood co-operation and activism.

The concept of e-democracy is also referred to as digital democracy or electronic democracy and is the utilisation of information and communication technologies (ICTs) to engage citizens in policy formulation and decision-making processes (Metallo, Agrifoglio, Romanelli and Fierro, 2022:1544). Likewise, this framework underscores a pivotal shift in democratic practices, wherein institutional functions and political proceedings across democratic nations are progressively transitioning to online platforms. Such momentum is propelled by the burgeoning presence of e-government initiatives, digital democracy endeavours, and open government programs (Metallo et al, 2022:3393). Furthermore, cultural mediums including literature, music, film, television, and radio have increasingly gravitated towards digital landscapes for creation and dissemination, indicative of a broader societal trend towards digitalisation. As a result, knowledge dissemination is predominantly occurring in digital formats, reflecting the pervasive influence of digital technologies in contemporary society.

E-democracy or digital democracy was predicted to transform political communication and systems by futurists and scholars in the 1960s due to the potential of new ICT. The

interdisciplinary discourse surrounding the subject has grown rapidly, and terms such as "Tele Democracy", "Virtual Democracy", and "Cyber Democracy" were commonly used in earlier stages of the debate. Thus today, umbrella terms such as electronic or e-democracy and digital democracy are commonly used (Muhammad, 2023:62). Hence, through this analysis of digital tools and systems for strengthening participatory and direct democracy, E-democracy and digital democracy is used interchangeably.

Moreover, Muhammad (2023:63) argue that E-Democracy, or Electronic Democracy, is a transformative concept that engages citizens, promotes civic participation, and enhances democratic processes using digital technology. It has emerged with the internet and digital tools, making democratic systems more accessible, transparent, and inclusive. For instance, by using online voting systems, digital platforms, and social media, E-Democracy aims to empower citizens and revolutionize democratic processes.

Van Dijk (2012:51) provides a comprehensive definition of digital democracy as the utilisation of digital media, both online and offline, to engage in and implement democracy in political communication. He indicates that it is important to note that digital democracy does not replace traditional communication media or face-to-face communication. According to Van Dijk, political activities can occur both online and offline, and the distinction between the two is essential because digital media may also be used in physical gatherings. Thus, digital democracy involves utilising digital media in both online and offline political communication to advocate for and implement democratic principles.

However, according to Statista (2023) 4.5 billion individuals used social media in 2022, with that figure expected to climb to over 6 billion by 2027. In the digital era of the fourth industrial revolution, social media platforms have become a vital component of people's lives (Smith 2023:1). Therefore, individuals can use these online platforms to connect and communicate with others through shared information as well as participate in various online communities (Jones, 2022:15). Indeed, social media is an integral part of people's lives. Its communicative characteristics helps build and maintain relationships, through dissemination of information, shared diverse content, and participation in online

communities. In other words, social media is a product of and contributor to the ongoing technological revolution.

Additionally, Smith (2023:45) study indicate that Social Networking Sites in short called SNS as a distinct type of social media, are an online platform that allow people to create their own profiles, as well as communicate with others and exchange material. As a result, social networking sites have grown in popularity in recent years, by opening new channels for contact, cooperation, and information sharing.

Furthermore, Social networking sites platforms have seen substantial development and have revolutionised the way individuals communicate and engage with each other, both personally and professionally (Johnson, Jone and Smith, 2022:67).

Moreover, according to Johnson et al. (2021:10) social networking sites have grown significantly over the last decade, with billions of active members worldwide. As a result, the researcher assumes to show that a match between people's interests and those projected by social media platform should result in a more powerful connection between the platform and the user. The researcher has anticipated to weigh the collaborative role of the social media and e-democracy literature and found that there several different factors that affect people's behaviours. In other words, stimulus conditions can drive a user to actively participate in a mass demonstration march, expressing their dissatisfaction about the way that they are governed.

However, social media networks platform content is user generated, of which according to The Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) 2022 report, there are three criteria for content to be classified as "*user generated*:" firstly, it should be available on a publicly accessible website or on a social networking site that is available to a select group, secondly, it must entail a minimum amount of creative effort, and thirdly, it is "*created outside of professional routines and practices*." This illustrates that social media platform can be an open-source information barrier that can open to public opinion on and can be used to stir public influence towards a certain agenda.

In examining how trust within a cycle of social media user can influence and establish some significant results, Wang and Benbasat's (2023) study findings, assume that higher levels of informational trust have a beneficial effect on the perceived relative advantage of electronic channels. In other words, this shows that when people trust the information, they receive through electronic channels, they are more inclined to see these channels as superior to traditional methods. Undeniably, trust is not only accomplished through an application or a digital site, but it is also created on the platform from user to another user, as a source of information, for example, having mutual friends who share common ideas on the social media networks.

Moreover, according to Kapoor et al. (2023:298) social media is made up of numerous user-driven platforms that promote the dissemination of interesting material, as well as the creation of conversation, and communication with a larger audience. It is essentially a digital place that is developed by and for the people, and it creates an atmosphere favourable to contacts and networking at many levels, for instance, personal, professional, business, marketing, political, and social.

According to a recent Pew Research Center survey (2022) most people agree that being informed about local and international events is part of being a good citizen, and it is evident that people view the internet and social media as making it easier to stay informed. Moreover, almost three-quarters view the internet and social media as having increased people's knowledge of current events in their own nation as well as abroad (Pew Research Center survey, 2022). Moreover, it is young individuals that are particularly prone to having these perceptions. In other words, online platforms may make individuals feel less helpless, since social media is the first to give them news updates.

In addition, social news sites and social bookmarking sites are created on websites, for instance Facebook feeds, Twitter, and Instagram, are similar, and are very much in the trend of online community. These allow the user to test the validity and open room to critic or respond to the information received. According to Schwaiger, Vogler and Eisenegger (2022: 612) the development of social network news sites in the year 2022, projected that there was a huge shift in the way people read news. Therefore, these social platforms

enabled people to find websites that had previously been examined and followed by many people. Moreover, this feature gave consumers an easy method to identify trustworthy sources of information that have previously achieved popularity and reputation in the internet community.

2.2 Social Media on Democratic Strategies and Local Government

The effectiveness of democratic strategies on social media is evident in its ability to shape public opinion and engage citizens in governance processes. The literature reveals that the collaborative nature of social media platforms allows for the collective creation of content, fostering high-quality information sharing (Bruns and Weller, 2021). Through collaborative projects like wikis and online forums, users can actively participate in discussions and contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of governance issues.

However, according to Hovik, Giannoumis, Reichborn, Ruano, McShane and Legard (2022:3) citizen participation refers to the voluntary contributions or involvement of citizens in public decision-making. Likewise, e-participation refers to the use of digital tools such as online forums, interactive web or mobile applications, and electronic polls. In contrast, digital tools can facilitate interaction among citizens, enable citizen self-organisations, reduce costs, promote equality and inclusion, and establish direct connections between citizens and policymakers.

Additionally, Hovik, et al (2022:3) put an understanding that cities with an established practice of citizen participation are adopting digital participatory tools. Likewise, digital participation can either continue existing practices or be part of participatory reform and expansion. Although various institutional factors impact the uptake of e-participation practices by local governments such as public administration style and cultural and structural characteristics of the political administrative system, yet little is known about how these macro-level institutional factors influence micro-level decisions regarding the adoption and implementation of different e-participation practices. (Steinbach et al., 2019:81).

In recent times, people have been using social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and WhatsApp to stay informed about current events and express their opinions on social and political issues. As a result, social media has transformed into a virtual public forum where people engage in debates and discussions. However, a new survey by the Pew Research Center (2022:5) across 19 advanced economies found that social media is seen as constructive and destructive for political life. According to the survey most people believe that social media has had a positive impact on democracy. For instance, around 57% of the people say that social media has had a positive impact on democracy, while 35% believe it has had a negative impact. Indeed, social media plays a complex role in politics. While social media can provide platforms for civic engagement, it can also spread misinformation, polarize, and manipulate public opinion. To promote democracy, the researcher assume that the negative effects of social media must be addressed by promoting digital literacy, enhancing platform regulation, and fostering responsible online behaviour.

However, the role of trust within social media cycles emerges as a significant factor influencing user behaviour (Wang and Benbasat, 2023). Likewise, higher levels of informational trust enhance the perceived advantage of electronic channels and reinforces the idea that trust is a crucial element in the successful implementation of democratic strategies on social media.

Based on a recent study by the Pew Research Center (2022) most citizens in various countries believe that staying informed about local and global news is essential for being a responsible citizen. The study also found that people believe that the internet and social media have made it easier to stay informed. Almost 75% of the respondents reported that these platforms have increased their awareness of current events in their own country and around the world. The study also noted that younger adults tend to have more positive attitudes towards the role of the internet and social media in staying informed.

However, Muhammad (2023:65) Indicates that e-democracy integrates modern technologies and strategies into the political process. In other words, involved democratic actors include citizens, political organisations, media, elected officials, and governments.

Though, governments implement policies that support online voting, digital public engagement, and online forums. Similarly, political parties connect with citizens, respect their rights, and promote political discourse. On the other hand, civil society organisations promote transparency, accountability, and citizen rights. Additionally, the media provides information, analysis, and commentary on political issues. Ultimately, citizens participate in the political process by utilising digital technologies to access information, participate in debates, and vote in elections.

However, views on the impact of social media on democracy differ significantly across the globe. According to a 2022 survey by the Pew Research Center, which included responses from 19 advanced economies, 57% of participants regarded social media as beneficial for democracy. Noteworthy optimism was observed in Singapore (68%), Malaysia (65%), and Poland (62%). In stark contrast, 64% of Americans perceived social media as detrimental, representing the highest level of negativity among the surveyed nations. This perception is largely influenced by partisan divides, with 74% of Republicans and 57% of Democrats expressing concerns about its effects. Furthermore, more than half of respondents in France (52%), Australia (49%), and the Netherlands (48%) linked social media to political division (Pew, 2022)

Indeed, social media has become an increasingly essential tool for local municipal administrations in recent years. From the above-mentioned literature, it is evident that social media enables governments to communicate information and services, as well as foster community involvement. However, there is still a lot of academic knowledge that needs to be prepared on the utilisation of social media in local government and its impact on governance. This derives from the fact that investigating social media in local government is a challenging task due to its multitude of uses.

Smith (2020:123) suggests that social media is used by local governments to achieve various objectives, including effective communication, which is essential for communicating information about government services, activities, and events. Therefore, according to Jones (2021:145) improved contact with citizens, receiving input, and creating connections are vital aspects of communication. Brown (2022:167) prioritizes

transparency as a goal for the government to make it more accessible and responsible to the people. Moreover, the use of social media can enhance transparency in local municipal government and lead to better services, as well as more efficient use of public resources. Yet, for local government to fully benefit from social media, it requires knowledge and expertise in best practices, as well as an awareness of potential risks and challenges.

Additionally, Chen (2023:189) emphasizes the need for the government to prioritize online and mobile-based services to foster efficient and effective service delivery.

However, local governments have adeptly employed social media tools like Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn, and YouTube, showcasing their early adoption of social networking advantages (Shark, 2010b). Over time, public administration has evolved with a greater emphasis on public service. This shift is reflected in the field's growing acceptance of a public service orientation. The International City/County Management Association (ICMA) has also recognized democratic advocacy and public involvement as crucial practices for effective leadership in local government.

Local governments use social media in different ways depending on their size, population demographics, and available resources. It is notable though that they tend to follow certain patterns, hence one such pattern is the growing use of social media by local governments to offer customer service and support. Additionally, according to Green (2021:233) social media is increasingly utilised by local governments to promote civic participation and engagement. In the article titled "*Social media and civic participation in local government*" written by Green in 2021, the author explores the relationship between social media and civic engagement in municipal government. The study suggests that social media can be used as a tool to enhance civic engagement and involvement in local government.

Green’s article also provides several examples of how social media has been utilised to improve public participation and engagement in local government. The author concludes that social media can be a valuable instrument in enhancing civic engagement.

On the other hand, Hovik, Giannoumis, Reichborn, Ruano, McShane and Legard (2022) examine three municipal cities: Madrid the capital of Spain, Melbourne capital of the state of Victoria, Australia, and Oslo capital of Norway, with different systems. Their study allude that citizen participation and participatory governance have long been integral to democratic societies. In this digital age, cities with established practices of citizen engagement are increasingly turning to digital participatory tools to enhance and modernize their existing frameworks. Digital participation, therefore, represents not only a continuation of traditional practices but also a vital step towards the digitalization of participatory opportunities.

However, Hovik et al (2022:4) adds that it is also essential to acknowledge the challenges posed by the digital realm, as evidenced by emerging research on online violence, abuse, and propaganda. Thus, the proliferation of hate speech, harassment, fake news, and security breaches online threatens to undermine the integrity of digital participation platforms and erode trust in the democratic process. Ultimately, by embracing digital participation to enhance democratic governance, cities can harness the collective wisdom and creativity of their citizens to address complex challenges and build more resilient and inclusive communities.

Although e-participation, facilitated by ICT, aims to involve citizens in policymaking, yet many initiatives have struggled to engage the public effectively. Despite the potential for increased transparency and inclusivity, challenges such as technological barriers and trust issues hinder success. To realize the transformative power of electronic participation, efforts to address these challenges and enhance initiatives are crucial for fostering responsive and inclusive governance in the digital era.

2.2.1 **City E-Participatory Strategies in Madrid, Melbourne, and Oslo**

An overview of the e-participation strategies employed in the three distinct cities, highlight their significance in contemporary governance. In essence Hovik et al (2022) study leverage digital platforms and technologies and that these strategies aim to actively engage citizens in civic processes, foster transparency, and uphold democratic principles.

Each city's approach represents a blend of policy frameworks and technological infrastructures tailored to address local contexts. Through an exploration of these strategies, we gain valuable insights into the dynamic evolution of civic engagement and the varied pathways toward building inclusive and responsive communities in the digital era.

2.2.1.1 The city of Madrid strategy

According to Hovik et al (2022) the city of Madrid has implemented a ground-breaking digital platform known as Decide Madrid which is aimed at revolutionizing democratic electronic decision-making. This platform is an alternative from the popular social media utilities and essentially serves as a comprehensive hub for major participatory processes across the city and thus enabling citizens to engage in various ways. Whether it is gathering signatures for initiative referendums, participating in budget allocations, voting on government proposals, or providing input on city plans and regulations, Decide Madrid facilitates meaningful citizen involvement.

Madrid has opted for a strategic overhaul by transitioning from its previous neighbourhood association-based participation model to one centred around digital platforms and individual engagement. Championed by a left-wing coalition following the 2015 municipal election, Decide Madrid aims to empower individual citizens, amplify mass democratic participation, and advance direct democracy while mitigating the influence of local neighbourhood associations (Hovik et al 2022).

According to a study conducted by Royo, Sonia, Vicente Pina, and Jaime Garcia-Rayado (2020), the Decide Madrid platform, launched in 2015, stands as a prime example of effective e-participation, earning acclaim through its recognition with the 2018 UN Public Service Award. This prestigious accolade underscores its excellence in innovation, inclusivity, adherence to legal frameworks, and the empowerment of citizens. Decide Madrid's comprehensive suite of e-participation tools, its commitment to equal access, and the establishment of a robust legal framework ensure transparency and legitimacy in the decision-making process, fostering a more equitable society.

Further validation of Decide Madrid's impact comes from the OECD Observatory of Public Sector Innovation, alongside its impressive user base of over 400,000 individuals, with participatory budgeting emerging as a preferred tool. Moreover, its influence extends globally, as evidenced by the platform software named Consul Democracy, which has been embraced by over 100 institutions across 33 countries. Notably, Porto Alegre's adoption of Consul in 2018 underscores Decide Madrid's role as a catalyst for global collaboration in the democratic e-participation initiatives (Royo, Sonia, Vicente Pina, and Jaime Garcia-Rayado, 2020:2)

Indeed, the award-winning Decide Madrid platform serves as a beacon of success in the realm of e-democracy e-participation, as it offers inspiration and guidance to practitioners worldwide. In addition, this reorganisation underscores the city's commitment to fostering inclusivity and democratizing decision-making processes at the grassroots level.

2.2.1.2 The City of Melbourne strategy

According to Hovik et al (2022:34) all 31 municipalities within the expansive metropolitan area of Melbourne have embraced the imperative of community engagement, either through the integration of interactive functionalities on their official websites or the establishment of dedicated community engagement platforms. A prime illustration of such proactive measures is exemplified by the Participate Melbourne platform, spearheaded by the City of Melbourne. Similarly, the City of Maribyrnong has implemented the My City, My Voice digital platform, both serving as multifaceted consultation arenas. These innovative platforms empower citizens by providing avenues to voice their perspectives on various plans and projects proposed by municipal authorities, leveraging online surveys and participatory budgeting mechanisms. Furthermore, the Melbourne citizens are equipped with the means to actively contribute to governmental initiatives through the utilisation of crowdsourcing tools available on these platforms (Hovik et al, 2022:34).

Furthermore, Community engagement managers across Melbourne and Maribyrnong emphasize that these electronic democratic platforms were strategically devised not as replacements for traditional modes of participation, but rather as complementary channels

that expand the spectrum of democratic involvement. Crucially, it is assumed that these platforms are inclusive, extending access to all residents, irrespective of demographic or socioeconomic backgrounds. Therefore, a pivotal impetus behind the adoption of digital technologies in this domain is the recognition of the contemporary lifestyle dynamics, particularly catering to the time constraints and preferences of the busy, middle-class populace who may find it challenging to engage in conventional, physical participatory processes (Hovik et al, 2022:34).

2.2.1.1 The city of Oslo strategy

In Oslo, the fusion of digitization and governance yields a landscape which is rich in citizen empowerment and participation. With 15 districts and 98 neighbourhoods, the city ensures Decentralised representation and responsiveness. Therefore, the hallmark of this system is the initiation of district meetings with an "open half hour," offering residents a platform to voice their concerns and shape community discourse.

According to Hovik et al (2022:34) the E-participation endeavours in Oslo are characterized by their comparatively smaller scale and fragmented nature when juxtaposed with those in cities like Madrid and Melbourne. Despite this, Oslo has embraced a diverse array of platforms tailored to address specific needs and objectives. These platforms exemplify e-consultation initiatives aimed at digitalizing pre-existing channels of participation, notably in areas such as urban planning consultations or facilitating citizens' right to petition local authorities. It is said that the introduction of digital participation tools in Oslo was not intended to disrupt or undermine existing avenues of engagement. Instead, its primary aim was to synergize with and enhance traditional participation frameworks by strengthening accessibility and amplifying the voices of otherwise overlooked segments of society, colloquially referred to as the 'silent voices.

Indeed, it is further articulated by McShane (2021:97) that Oslo's citizens wield considerable influence through petition submissions, facilitated by the digital Min Sak platform, underscoring the city's embrace of technological solutions for democratic

processes. Although Oslo lacks a dedicated digital participatory platform, its digital feedback mechanisms enable direct engagement on municipal service delivery.

In summary, Oslo's embrace of digitization fosters a dynamic environment where civic engagement thrives on paving the way for a more inclusive and responsive governance model. Moreover, analysing the three cities through a lens of divergence, each occupies a distinct position along Pierre's (2011) spectrum of governance paradigms. Yet, Melbourne emerges as a quintessential example of neoliberal influence, marked by a trajectory of rapid privatization and asset selloffs since the 1990s. This shift has led to a reduction in welfare services and an amplified role of developers in urban projects.

In other words, Oslo's urban development trajectory shows neoliberal characteristics, but with stable welfare levels, unlike Melbourne. However, Madrid's urban governance reflects a more collective ethos with lower welfare levels. Both cities exemplify the interplay between governance paradigms and urban development, showcasing the transformative potential of digital platforms in facilitating e-democracy and e-participation.

Additionally, a paradigm shift is underway as city governments, notably Oslo, Madrid, and Melbourne, embrace innovative approaches to engage citizens in participatory urban governance. Capitalizing on the transformative potential of digital information and communication technologies (ICTs), such as web-based portals, apps, and social media platforms, these cities are expanding the consultative repertoire of municipal governments (McShane, 2021:96).

2.3 Social media and Government Accountability

Social media platforms have played an important role in increasing government accountability by offering a forum for public conversation and critique. According to the Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA), transparency, facilitated by social media, exposes weaknesses in accountability, making it possible for the electorate to judge government spending and exercise oversight, which is critical for ensuring service delivery (IDEA, 2013: 70). In essence, these platforms contribute to the

accountability of government entities by providing an open-source information barrier accessible to public opinion (OECD).

Moreover, the user-generated content on these platforms allows for the critique and response to government actions, fostering a sense of transparency and accountability (Schwaiger et al., 2022).

According to Masiya and Lubinga (2023) South Africans use social media to learn about government programs, allowing for direct interaction with the government. Political parties also use social media to encourage voting and pledge accountability once in office.

Notably, Coleman and Gotze (2001) suggest that the collaborative nature of social media can be a powerful tool for citizens to demand information and explanations from their governments. Indeed, the researcher assumes that the growing alternative communicative utilities have the ability for people to make their governments accountable and that the government can also use them as accounting platforms for transparency operations.

In 2023, the South African government's Facebook page had 932,000 followers, according to data from various public entities. The Presidency of the Republic of South Africa had 1 million Facebook followers and 2,194,773 Twitter followers. They use social media to provide current information and promote transparency in governance. In the same year, the Department of Home Affairs had 12400 Facebook followers and 154,780 Twitter followers. Moreover, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Department of Health's Facebook and Twitter accounts gained 2.1 million and 373,315 followers, respectively (Masiya and Lubinga, 2023).

Moreover, that South African municipalities use social media to engage with the public. For instance, eThekwini Metropolitan Municipality has 327,285 followers; City of Tshwane has 231,321followers; City of Johannesburg has 176,047 followers; Ekurhuleni Metro has 180,282 followers; City of Cape Town - 269,300; Mangaung Metropolitan Municipality has 16,071; Nelson Mandela Metropolitan Municipality has 62,026 followers and and Buffalo City Metropolitan Municipality has 51,615. These municipalities use their Facebook pages

to share daily updates on service delivery, economic recovery programs, waste removal, COVID-19 updates, vaccination drives, oversight visits, warnings, appeals, city activities, council meetings, tourism promotions, and job vacancies. In addition, residents engage with these posts by providing immediate responses, including complaints and compliments.

These platforms allow people to express their opinions and draw attention to problems within the government, increasing pressure on public authorities to be accountable. Therefore, according to Barbera, Jost, Nagler and Tucke (2023:14), social media platforms have become a tool for citizens to express their opinions, raise concerns, and participate in decision-making processes. Moveover, social media has enabled previously marginalised individuals to have their voices heard, which can hold governments accountable for issues that may have gone unnoticed through traditional channels (Al-Shibli et al., 2021:14). This greater scrutiny has been associated with improvements in government service delivery (IDEA, 2014:48). Moreover, social media simplifies the process of raising concerns with the official online accounts of institutions such as the public protector and non-governmental organisations (NGOs). These organisations can then use the data provided by the public to hold politicians accountable for their actions (IDEA, 2013: 9).

A notable example of social media driving government accountability in South Africa is the #FeesMustFall campaign (Tyanai et al (2023:28). This campaign opposed increased university fees and called for free tertiary education and gained significant attraction on social media, leading to public protests and government action. The widespread public outrage and increased monitoring forced the authorities to address the grievances, and as a result, the Minister of Education announced that there would be no fee increases for the year. According to Bosch (2019:75), this represents a form of hashtag activism as it facilitates the formation of ad hoc public issues.

Similarly, in 2020 the #BlackLivesMatter movement made effective use of Twitter to raise awareness about police brutality and racial injustice, leading to legislative reforms across the United States (Gillespie, 2020:12). This allowed people to hold government

accountable for their actions. Movements like #BlackLivesMatter, #MeToo and #IAMNext have used social media to amplify the voices of marginalised groups and promote legislative changes. Research shows that social media has played a significant role in empowering the public and increasing civic engagement.

However, the success of these initiatives depends largely on the government's commitment to maintaining an active and engaging presence on social media. It is important to provide regular updates, respond promptly to citizen inquiries, and be willing to address criticism to build and maintain public trust (Masiya and Lubinga, 2023). Additionally, providing training for government officials in effective social media communication and establishing clear guidelines for online engagement are crucial steps in maximizing the benefits of social media for governance (Masiya and Lubinga, 2023).

To summarize, although social media offers enormous prospects for improving government accountability and service delivery in eThekwini Metropolitan Municipality and other municipalities, it also needs careful management and strategic planning. The municipality's experience demonstrates the necessity of using digital platforms to increase transparency, engage residents, and create a more responsible and responsive local government. As technology advances, so must our ways of incorporating social media into government, ensuring that it serves as a vehicle for empowerment and democratic engagement.

2.4 Social Media in Monitoring and Evaluation Public services

Social media has become an essential tool for monitoring and evaluating public services, likewise, it has drastically changed how governments interact with citizens, improving openness and accountability in service delivery. According to Van Dijck (2013), social media provides real-time information, interactive features, and open debates that appeal to those seeking convenience and involvement in the digital age. Similarly, Akter, et al (2024:522) contend that social media offers a real-time mechanism for monitoring public services and thus allows both the citizens and the authorities to promptly report and respond to service delivery issues. Therefore, the immediate feedback loop is essential

for addressing problems efficiently and improving service quality. Moreover, the dynamic nature of social media platforms enables continuous monitoring, which is crucial for maintaining high standards in public services.

Likewise, some citizens and non-governmental organisations take the initiative to use social media technologies to create public services to monitor and evaluate. For example, in Cape Town, an operation called Lungisa was created as a community monitoring tool which allows the public to report service delivery issues to local government authorities (United Nations, 2014). According to Guzmán, 2019: 189) this is consistent with the growing trend of digital engagement in public service monitoring

Notably, social media's impact on monitoring public services is highlighted in its role as a platform for citizens to express opinions, engage in debates, and demand information from governments (Macnamara, 2012). The literature emphasizes that the collaborative initiatives enabled by social media facilitate learning, knowledge sharing, and the creation of common resources (Abd-Ellah and Ben Kheder, 2022). This collaborative approach fosters a sense of ownership over public services, enhancing the public's ability to monitor and hold accountable those responsible for service delivery.

On the contrary, Citizen-based monitoring (CBM) of government projects has emerged as an effective tool for ensuring transparency, accountability, and citizen-centric procedures (Fox, 2020) in (Matlala, 2024:1). CBM is a bottom-up method that incorporates active citizen participation in monitoring, assessing, and reporting on government actions, notably public projects and services (Matlala, 2024:2). Moreover, this approach is based on openness, accountability, and citizen-centric governance principles, allowing ordinary individuals, community groups, and civil society organisations to actively engage in decision-making processes (UNDP, 2019; Fox, 2020). Moreover, Citizen-based monitoring not only collects data but also promotes ownership and accountability for public services (Mishra, Akter and Basher 2021:29).

To overcome limitations, it was suggested to integrate government project monitoring tools with popular social media sites like WhatsApp and Facebook. These platforms

provide user-friendly interfaces and real-time interactions, allowing residents to quickly report concerns, get project updates, and engage in discussions with government officials (Garcia and Rodriguez 2017; Rodriguez and Lee 2019).

However, in South Africa, there is a need for a more organised and technologically driven approach to Community Based Monitoring (CBM). In other words, South Africa should explore traditional approaches and difficulties without relying solely on social media platforms (Mishra et al., 2021; Matlala, 2024:2). Although community-based monitoring (CBM) is seen as essential for improving transparency and accountability in public project management, there is a noticeable gap in the current literature. Specifically, Matlala, (2024:2) indicate that there is a lack of a structured and comprehensive model that fully utilises the potential of social media in this context.

In addition, according to Monkelbaan (2019) in Akter, et al. (2024:521) in addressing the global challenges using data-driven innovation capabilities, social media plays a significant role in civic engagement. Consequently, it enables increased interaction between citizens and government officials, fostering more inclusive and participatory governance. Thus, this interaction can result in improved policymaking by incorporating a diverse range of opinions and feedback from the community. Therefore, the participatory aspect of social media is vital in enhancing the e-democratic process within municipalities such as eThekwini.

Furthermore, the application of social media analytics gives useful information on public views and service performance. Government agencies may use social media data to establish trends, monitor public satisfaction, and make data-driven decisions to improve service delivery (Herman, Herman, Mathews and Vosloo, 2018:1354).

Moreover, the abilities mentioned are acquired gradually and are considered dynamic because they help companies create innovation by combining internal organisational knowledge with external industrial disruptions. Therefore, data-driven innovation capabilities (DDIC) can be defined as the organisation's capacity to utilise available data, digital technologies, analytical techniques, and other resources to develop innovative

products, processes, and techniques that add value for companies and relevant stakeholders (Akter, et al. (2024:515). In addition, the global economy has seen a rise in "*datafication*" across different sectors. For that reason, Data-Driven Innovation (DDI) uses Artificial Intelligence and advanced analytics to create value and address 21st century challenges and in essence DDI is linked with extracting meaning from data.

In addition, social media platforms are a valuable tool for public services in managing crises. Thus, during emergencies, social media can quickly disseminate critical information, coordinate response efforts, and keep the public informed about safety measures (Mehrotra, Qiu, Cao and Tate, 2013:6). The dissemination of information through social media ensures that timely actions can be taken to reduce the impact of crises (Hristidis, Chen, Li, Luis and Deng 2010).

The researcher suggests that integrating social media into monitoring and evaluating public services in the eThekwini Metropolitan Municipality could significantly impact e-democracy. This integration can improve real-time monitoring, transparency, civic engagement, data-driven decision-making, and crisis management, ultimately leading to more responsive and accountable governance and improving service delivery. Therefore, leveraging social media tools is crucial for effective public service management. Moreover, by enhancing transparency, accountability, and citizen engagement through social media can improve CBM practices, offering a promising avenue for more inclusive governance.

2.5 Social Media as an Advocacy Platform

Social media has altered communication and interaction, making it a critical platform for advocacy and political involvement, particularly in the context of e-democracy. The utilisation of mobile phones in Africa is witnessing a substantial increase, leading to a concurrent surge in the user base of prominent social media platforms including YouTube, Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, and various blogging platforms. The prevalence of WhatsApp users in Africa has exhibited consistent growth over recent years and is

anticipated to experience a further increment of 52.8 million users, constituting a 71.27% rise from 2022 to 2028 (Statistica, 2022).

Likewise, the projected escalation in the number of Twitter users in Africa amounts to 27.4 million (accounting for an 89.66% increase) within the aforementioned period, while the expansion of Instagram users is estimated at 128.1 million users, reflecting a 161.31% surge (Statistica, 2022). Additionally, a sustained trajectory of expansion is anticipated for WhatsApp, Twitter, and Instagram users in Africa from 2022 to 2028, underscoring the enduring significance of social media in the region.

Advocacy involves supporting, defending, or promoting a particular cause, independent of one's membership in the group being campaigned for. Kapoor et al (2023) suggests that social media serves as a powerful advocacy platform across various realms, including personal, professional, business, marketing, political, and social. Furthermore, through blogs, content-sharing sites, and social networking platforms, individuals and organisations can effectively advocate for causes and influence policy decisions (Tuten and Solomon, 2017). For instance, according to Ezeilo et al (2023:1), Twitter (rebranded as X Corp in 2023) may be a powerful lobbying medium for a variety of objectives, including health promotion.

However, a recent study emphasized the process of mobilising social media platforms for health advocacy, stressing the potential influence of platforms such as Twitter. In addition, Johns Hopkins School of Nursing's Center for Community Programs, Innovation and Scholarship provides health education and wellness services like blood pressure screening and flu vaccination to promote health among individuals with limited resources in neighbourhoods, selected Twitter for its low cost and high potential reach to bridge the communication gap (Archibald and Clark, 2014:1). According to Ventola (2014: 493) Twitter's features, including post text, images, and 160-character tweets, make it ideal for promoting health messages. With over 140 healthcare applications, including community outreach and health advocacy, Twitter is the most popular microblogging site.

According to Bhanye, Shayamunda, and Tavirai (2023:12), the power of social media became clear during the 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine when it shed light on the neglect of African students and families seeking refuge. This led to positive action, with African governments intervening to ensure the safe return of their citizens. In contrast, the awareness raised about racial profiling and the perception of African people in a foreign land has sparked important conversations and reshaped the support provided by African governments.

In Zimbabwe and other African countries, social media platforms such as Twitter and Facebook are used for programs like Constituency Talk and Zimbabwe Broadcasting Corporation (ZBC) Current Affairs. These programs allow citizens to ask questions of their elected leaders and policymakers, preventing conflicts. Hence, social media has enabled African adolescents to engage in regional politics through competitions such as the Uongozi Institute, African Union, and Africa Matters. Thus, it has facilitated successful problem-solving among underprivileged Africans (Bhanye et al, 2023:17).

Based on Bhanye et al (2023:18), various protests have utilised social media tools for the so called ‘Twitter and Facebook revolutions. For instance, social media has been used in protests about public service delivery, the #FeesMustFall movement in South Africa, the #RhodesMustFall movement spreading from South Africa to the United Kingdom, digital activism surrounding #ThisFlag which criticized ZANUPF’s track record in the final years of President Robert Mugabe, and the #41YearsLater hashtag aiming to spotlight current alleged corruption and governance failings in Zimbabwe.

Likewise, in Kenya, the #StopPoliceBrutality movement in 2016 saw many people participating in protests due to information shared through social media platforms. Social media also played a crucial role in the Jasmine Revolution, also known as the Arab Spring, which occurred in Egypt and Morocco in 2010, resulting in the downfall of regimes and presidents. Additionally, the popular Zimbabwean pastor initiated the #ThisFlag movement, leading to a series of protests across the country that eventually led to the ousting of former Zimbabwean president, Robert Mugabe, through a military coup (Bhanye et al (2023:18).

In summary, social media has emerged as an influential tool for advocacy, significantly contributing to the enhancement of e-democracy by broadening public engagement, facilitating real-time communication, and promoting transparency and accountability. Case studies from Kenya, Nigeria, and South Africa aptly demonstrate the substantial impact of social media on government operations and service delivery. Nonetheless, addressing the challenges associated with social media usage is essential to fully realize its potential for enacting positive change.

2.6 Social Media in Political Campaigns and News dissemination

The role of social media in political campaigns and news dissemination is crucial, as highlighted by the literature. Social media's user-driven content platforms allow for the dissemination of information, contributing to increased knowledge of current events (Pew Research Center, 2022). The emergence of social network news sites has transformed the way people consume news, providing a platform for identifying trustworthy sources of information (Schwaiger et al., 2022).

According to Granillo (2020) and Peter (2020) The recent #BlackLivesMatter movement, which garnered global solidarity following the killing of George Floyd due to police brutality, was facilitated by social media, as were the 2011 Arab Spring in the Middle East and the 2017 #MeToo movement against sexual harassment and abuse.

Indeed, social media is a potent tool for activism as it enables the rapid spread of information and the mobilisation of supporters, fostering global solidarity. Therefore, the America #BlackLivesMatter, Arab Spring in the Middle East and North Africa (Tunisia, Egypt, Yemen, Bahrain, Libya, and Syria) from 2010 to 2013 and #MeToo campaign launched in America gained popularity in nations including India, France, China, Japan, Italy, and Israel. These movements leveraged social media to advocate for social and political change by fostering connections among people, sharing ideas, and amplifying marginalised voices. However, it has limitations such as spreading disinformation and misinformation, online abuse, and algorithmic biases. The recent studies by Granillo and Peter explore how social media has magnified movements such as #BlackLivesMatter,

the Arab Spring, and #MeToo. The ongoing debate demonstrates the intricate ways in which digital platforms can influence the socio-political environment.

According to the World Economic Forum Global Risk report (2013:2) the frequency and impact of digital wildfires have increased in the past five years since they first studied them. Even though there are potential social, political, and geopolitical threats growth, the mechanisms through which wide disseminated misinformation influences human behaviour remain poorly understood. Moreover, as social media becomes increasingly integrated into people's daily life, addressing its negative consequences will require ongoing efforts from policymakers and technology leaders. This will involve striking a careful balance between regulation and safeguarding individual liberties to prevent infringements.

Furthermore, the Global Risk Report also indicate that, in some of the initiatives to combat internet misinformation are underway, for instance, Facebook's efforts include the News Integrity Initiative Facebook's 2017 program promotes quality journalism and enhances news literacy. It provides tools to assist users in making informed decisions about the news, and Google is blocking AdSense ads on deceptive sites. Facebook also prohibits deceptive advertising, but it is still possible for inaccurate information to be created or shared. Google AdSense allows publishers to display ads on their websites and earn money. To prevent AdSense advertising on fraudulent websites, Google prohibits ads on misleading sites.

Moreover, Syed (2017) indicates that online platforms like Google, YouTube, and Facebook have implemented measures to combat fake news. For instance, Google has updated its search engine to exclude conspiracy and hoax websites from its top search results. Yet, YouTube has decided to restrict the reach of flagged videos containing controversial, religious, or supremacist content. Consequently, these videos will not be suggested to other users, monetised, or allowed to receive comments or likes. Similarly, Facebook has partnered with fact-checkers to identify and flag fake news, conspiracies,

and hoaxes. Such measures have the potential to influence the algorithmic filters that determine the information to which users are exposed.

Furthermore, Facebook has acknowledged that the rapid dissemination and amplification of content can contribute to the spread of misinformation. Therefore, to tackle this issue, Facebook now reduces the priority of links that are aggressively shared by suspected spammers. According to Syed (2017:354), this is because such links often contain low-quality content, such as clickbait, sensationalism, and misinformation. Additionally, Facebook is introducing features that encourage users to consider their actions before sharing a story by displaying other "Related Articles" that may provide a different perspective.

Studies have revealed that people struggle to differentiate between real and fake news headlines. Hence, the Global Risk Report (2016:49) feature a survey that found that 75% of the respondents rated false headlines as "somewhat accurate" or "very accurate," while 83% rated real news headlines as accurate.

A study in 2017 revealed that although 55% of the people get their news from Facebook, only 18% trust news from Facebook most or all the time. Hereafter, according to a study by Allcott and Gentzkow (2017), social media platforms accounted for 40% of online traffic to fake news websites, while the top mainstream news websites only received 10%.

In a nutshell, according to Muhammed and Mathew (2020), misinformation and disinformation are often confusedly used synonymously. Notably, the World Economic Forum listed "misinformation" as one of the top global risks. Nevertheless, Muhammed et al, indicate that misinformation is false information spread unintentionally, while disinformation is intentionally misleading information used for political purposes. For instance, India experienced a surge in disinformation linking the COVID-19 outbreak to a religious group, leading to physical violence and discrimination in the country.

The literature advances the view that social media has profoundly transformed how people connect, access information, and engage politically. However, while it facilitates the sharing of political information and expression of opinions, it also contributes to the

spread of disinformation and the exacerbation of political divisions. The next section of this study explores the harmful political discourse perpetuated through social media algorithms and echo chambers, further elucidating the complex influence of digital platforms on the socio-political environment.

2.7 Social media in Accelerating Service Delivery

The literature emphasizes that social media plays a significant role in enhancing service delivery by providing real-time information exchange and cooperation (Gil-Garcia, 2012). In emergency circumstances, social media facilitates quick identification and resolution of public issues (Kim, 2015). However, challenges such as the quality and reliability of information provided on social media necessitate clear norms and procedures for responsible usage (Gil-Garcia, 2012).

2.7.1 Global use during emergency and health crisis communication

According to Ihechu et al (2022: 259) social media plays a crucial role during natural disasters such as floods, wars, pandemics, and epidemics. For example: The COVID-19 pandemic has affected the world and tested national health systems. In other words, the governments utilised traditional methods as well as social media to raise awareness and personalise information. And so, the goal was to ensure that everyone was informed in the battle against the pandemic.

However, in reference to Indonesia, Amiruddin Setiawan's study aligns with the idea that public service delivery is part of a co-production strategy. Therefore, Indonesia has the potential to enhance digital government interaction and services, and local governments in West Java should promptly embrace these changes. Consequently, local governments play a crucial role in delivering public services and are increasingly adopting social media innovations to improve public service delivery (Setiawan, 2021:412). His study presents research on the utilisation of social media by local governments in West Java Province to enhance public service delivery. As a result, some of his study analysis show that local governments primarily use social media for two main purposes, that it is to provide

institutional information (41% of tweets) and to engage citizens interactively (48% of tweets). Therefore, some local governments are using Twitter to complement offline efforts to enhance public service delivery. In summary, the study emphasizes the importance of communities educating residents about protective actions and highlights the potential for co-producing public safety and community resilience. Additional to that, variances in local governments' inclination toward citizen participation and public service delivery were considered, as well as challenging assumptions that advanced social media platforms in facilitating public engagements.

Social media is important for government and service delivery as it facilitates political participation, enhances transparency and accountability, supports peacebuilding, and fosters collaboration between government and the public. Nevertheless, it is subject to controversial regulations, with some countries shutting down internet access to regulate social media.

2.7.2 Disaster Response in the United States

In 2012, when Hurricane Sandy struck the East Coast of the United States, both government agencies and civilians actively participated in Twitter chats, exchanging a total of 132,922 tweets. This case study emphasizes the importance of citizens sharing information with government entities and their engagement in disseminating information to their Twitter followers. This type of collaborative production of public information services during times of crisis is considered crucial for effective disaster response. Therefore, it also highlights the potential benefits of the government's use of social media (Chatfield and Reddick (2018:259).

2.7.3 Utilisation in Indonesia (Asia)

Setiawan (2021:412) highlights that public service delivery in Indonesia is part of a co-production strategy. Local governments in West Java are embracing social media innovations to improve public service delivery. Setiawan’s study found that local governments primarily use social media to provide institutional information (41% of

tweets) and engage citizens interactively (48% of tweets). This approach underscores the importance of educating residents about protective actions and the potential for co-producing public safety and community resilience.

2.7.4 Public Sector Communication in Nigeria (Africa)

According to Ihechu, Innocent and Onwuzuruigbo (2022:258) social media has become an essential tool for the public sector to disseminate information, interact with residents, and deliver services. In other words, these platforms are designed for creating, sharing, collaborating, engaging, participating, and providing feedback. Ihechu et al, continue to elaborate that social media plays a crucial role in public sector communication by allowing individuals to generate and distribute content, engage with others, and offer feedback. It is not limited to consuming information on websites; however, it empowers users to develop and share their own content while establishing connections with a broader network of contacts.

Nevertheless, utilising social media platforms is justified because they have the potential to enhance accountability, citizen participation, and collaboration among stakeholders (Picazo-Vela et al., 2016). Indeed, the researcher believes that social media facilitates instant connections between people, thereby enhancing accountability and public discourse. It can enable eThekwini local residence to engage in an informed discussions and contribute to decision-making while ensuring that diverse voices can collaborate more effectively. Moreover, while social media has the potential to improve accountability, citizen participation, and collaboration, however, there is more research that needs to be conducted as well as thoughtful implementation to ethically sustain and achieve these benefits.

The proposed actions by Ihechu et al. (2022:263) provide a wide-ranging framework for government social media accounts to effectively achieve their goals of building trust and engaging citizens. Indeed, the researcher assumes that adopting these strategies can help improve the e-democracy of transparency, responsiveness, and connectivity of

government-community interaction. Moreover, further study and more practical application can help refine these tactics for maximum impact as indicated by Ihechu et al.

Overall, social media plays a significant role in enhancing public service delivery across various contexts, from emergency response and health crises to everyday government communication and engagement. While there are challenges related to information quality and security, the potential benefits in terms of transparency, accountability, and citizen participation are substantial. Further research and thoughtful implementation are necessary to maximize these benefits ethically and sustainably.

2.8 Type of Social media and Their Impact on Governance and Service Delivery

The use of social media is vital for effective governance and service delivery as it enables direct and open communication between governments and the citizens. Moreover, it fosters transparency through the dissemination of official information and encourages public engagement in governance, allowing citizens to have an impact on policies and decisions. Hence, during crises, social media platforms play a crucial role in emergency response and communication. Furthermore, advocacy and awareness campaigns on social media can sway public opinion and improve service delivery. Additionally, analysing social media data aids governments in understanding public sentiment, identifying issues, and making informed decisions to enhance governance and service delivery. The researcher identified various types of social media networks, such as collaborative projects, virtual worlds, blogs, content communities, and social networking:

2.8.1 Collaborative Projects

Collaborative projects, also known as user-generated content (UGC) platforms, are social media networks that enable multiple users to concurrently create knowledge-related content (Miller and Franco, 2023:123). These platforms are characterized by their openness and democratic nature, allowing anyone to contribute to content creation. Examples include wikis, social bookmarking sites, online forums, and review sites (Piskorski and Garfield, 2020:145).

According to Bruns and Weller (2021:167), collaborative projects offer a significant advantage by harnessing the collective expertise of a community to produce high-quality content. By combining multiple perspectives and knowledge, these initiatives generate more comprehensive and well-rounded information than any single individual could achieve alone.

Furthermore, collaborative initiatives significantly impact online community participation and learning. Abd-Ellah and Ben Kheder (2022:123) note that individuals can learn from each other, share knowledge and skills, and contribute to developing a common resource by engaging in these initiatives. This approach fosters a sense of belonging and community, as well as a feeling of ownership over the project itself.

In governance, collaborative projects can be used to engage citizens, gather public opinions, and develop policies (Kohler and Parker, 2010:123). Governments can utilise platforms like wikis and online forums to crowdsource ideas for policymaking, thereby enhancing transparency and public engagement. This process not only democratises decision-making but also ensures that diverse viewpoints are considered, leading to more inclusive and effective governance.

2.8.2 Online Collaboration

Online collaboration platforms enable people from different locations to collectively edit and share documents, making it beneficial for individuals with similar political or developmental goals to collaborate on strategy documents. For instance, David Wolman (2011) notes that Google Docs was used to convey protest tactics and demands during the Egyptian uprising in early 2011.

Moreover, the active participation and collaborations of users heavily influence social media technology. According to Kaplan and Haenlein (2010:61), social media can be defined as a series of internet-based applications that leverage Web 2.0 principles and technologies to enable users to create and exchange content.

Therefore, governments can utilise online collaboration tools such as Google Docs or Trello to improve internal coordination and project management, leading to timely and coordinated responses to public needs and crises.

2.8.3 Blogging Platforms

Blogging platforms allow individuals or businesses to create and share content on a blog, and individuals may interact with a blog by commenting on its content. For instance, include WordPress, Tumblr, and Blogger.

On the other hand, Video blogs (vlogs) are gaining popularity. For instance, Mohammad “Mo” Nabbous ran a “television station” in Benghazi, Libya, which could be classified as a vlog through which he reported events in his city to the world via a live video stream during the Arab uprise.

In summary, for governance and service delivery, blogging platforms provide a space for governments to communicate directly with citizens, share updates, and solicit feedback. Furthermore, government officials can use blogs to explain policies, address public concerns, and foster a transparent dialogue with constituents, thereby building trust and ensuring government responsiveness to the needs of the people. Moreover, according to Tuten and Solomon (2017)'s book "Social Media Marketing," there are many sorts of social media networks, which include the following:

2.8.4 Other types of social media networks

(a) Social Networking Sites (SNS): Platforms like Facebook, LinkedIn, and Twitter, allow users to establish profiles, communicate, and exchange content. These platforms can be used for public announcements, engaging citizens in discussions, and mobilising communities for civic activities.
(b) Microblogging Sites (e.g., Twitter, Tumblr): Governments can use these for real-time updates and emergency notifications, ensuring that important information is disseminated quickly.

(c) Content-Sharing Sites: Platforms like YouTube, Instagram, and Pinterest can be used for public service announcements, educational content, and promoting cultural initiatives.
(d) Discussion Forums: Sites like Reddit and Quora allow users to engage in discussions, and governments can use these platforms to address citizen concerns, clarify policies, and gather public input on various issues.
(e) Photo Sharing Sites: Platforms like Instagram and Flickr can be utilised for visual updates on projects, community events, and tourism promotion.
(f) Professional Networking Sites: Platforms such as LinkedIn and Xing can be used by governments for professional development, recruiting, and sharing best practices in public administration.

In summary, the various types of social media networks offer unique advantages for enhancing governance and service delivery. Therefore, from collaborative projects to transparent communication, these tools can significantly improve how governments interact with and serve their citizens.

2.9 The Effect of Social Media in Local Government

Taylor (2016: 2-3) acknowledges municipal governance as the governing of a municipality or local government. Hence, local government is the main provider of basic services and plays a key role in local development (Reddy, 2016: 4). Reddy (2016:1) emphasizes the significance of local government by stating that it is 'closest to the people'. Embracing social media can improve transparency, accountability, and effectiveness in local governance. Social media's effect on local governance is significant as it enables local governments to engage with citizens, gather feedback, and make informed decisions.

According to Miller et al. (2019:184), Facebook initially had a reputation for being a platform for young people. However, it evolved into a space occupied primarily by family members as more people, including mothers, started using it. This transformation blurred the line between peers and family, and later, coworkers and neighbours also began to connect on Facebook. Scholars such as Miller et al. (2019:283) have found evidence that

social media may improve government. However, Miller (2016:5) identified three common errors associated with social media: assuming a causal relationship between the platform and its content, overlooking the local nature of social media content, and viewing social media as separate from everyday life.

In a small UK town, Miller conducted an ethnographic study in 2016 and found that most local councillors were middle-aged with grown-up children, which affected their expertise and confidence in using social media. Despite this, they recognized its potential to address low youth involvement in local politics. Municipal councillors mostly received emails from residents, while journalists monitored Twitter for inappropriate posts. Primary concerns included privacy, intrusion, and social media etiquette. Locals were generally distrustful of politicians but were more receptive when councillors presented themselves as locals facing similar challenges. In the UK, part of the municipal councillor competency requires that a councillor must reside in the area and have a personal connection, such as children attending a local school, to represent a constituency.

Politics is experienced differently across various socioeconomic classes in the UK, and low-income minority groups may encounter more anti-immigrant content on social media platforms (Miller, 2016). For example, a group of friends on Facebook unfriended several classmates after they posted racist content. French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu observed that expressing political opinions has become a way for people to showcase their personal preferences, like the clothes they wear and the food they enjoy. According to Miller (2016: 164), social media is more of a tool for individuals to express their likes and dislikes rather than a platform for policy debates. Miller et al. (2019:182) argue that people's interactions with social media platforms are shaped by their unique circumstances and experiences, a concept referred to as "cyber-localism."

2.9.1 Challenges and Opportunities in Implementing E-Government

The South African government established a commission to create a national response strategy for the fourth industrial revolution (RSA, 2018b:5). According to South Africa's President, embracing rapid technological advancements is crucial for national success,

emphasizing the need to enhance capabilities in science, technology, and innovation (RSA 2018b: 10). Consequently, the South African government should establish a national data policy to offer digital services and content to its citizens (RSA 2018b:10). Government agencies need to adapt their approach to public involvement and policy formulation to keep pace with changing times (RSA 2018b: 15-16). Collaboration between civil society and industry is essential for developing the digital economy, and new digital platforms will empower citizens to engage and express their opinions (RSA 2018b: 1516).

Despite these advancements, most South African municipalities still handle building permit applications using manual paper-based processes, with only a few switching to digital solutions. The City of Cape Town is the only metropolitan municipality that has implemented an electronic system. Other metropolitan municipalities, such as eThekwini, have deployed online clearance certificates and electronic billing systems but face challenges like system failures, slow data migration, implementation delays, and staff training issues (World Bank, 2018). The absence of a structured approach to technology development within municipalities and government agencies hinders the establishment of e-government in South Africa (Mzekandaba, 2018).

Uwizeyimana (2015) defines electronic governance as the transformation of government operations, citizen engagement, and service delivery through electronic channels. E-Services hold particular significance in underdeveloped rural regions where inhabitants face challenges such as inadequate transportation infrastructure (Uwizeyimana, 2015). South African municipalities can implement e-government initiatives to enable citizens and businesses to engage with the government through electronic platforms like WhatsApp, Facebook, and Twitter (Mawela et al., 2017). Chen, Dawes, and Chen (2017) define e-Government as the use of ICTs to provide efficient and effective services to citizens and stakeholders, forming electronic networks such as Government-to-Citizen (G2C), Government-to-Government (G2G) as well as Government-to-Business (G2B).

The South African government's "*Stay Home, Stay Safe"* campaign provided COVID-19 information to all mobile phone users and encouraged participation through WhatsApp and other social media platforms (Blom and Uwizeyimana, 2020:212). Furthermore, the

City of Johannesburg Metropolitan Municipality (COJ) implemented an e-Learning system to engage residents and promote educational empowerment. The portal offering e-Learning resources saw a significant increase in users from 14,000 in 2017 to 56,320 in 2018/2019 (City of Johannesburg IDP, 2019). E-Government facilitates citizens' access to public services through mobile devices, with 34.93 million utilising mobile internet services as of January 2020 (Blom et al., 2020).

Local governments that adopt multilevel engagement technologies can empower individuals within their communities. Hence, these technologies provide interactive platforms for self-organisation and community improvement projects. Citizen organisations have established social media networks to engage with public administration, increasing their influence in governmental decision-making processes (Bernstein, 2010). According to Pillay (2012), e-Services such as e-Natis enhance work performance and productivity, promoting transparency and improving government-citizen interaction (Corruption Watch, 2019). Bertot, Jaeger, and Hansen (2012) in Masiya and Lubinga (2023) highlight that social media enables many-to-many interaction among geographically dispersed users, resulting in valuable information resources and problem-solving opportunities.

Despite technological advancements, South Africa faces issues of false information, hate speech, and online bullying on social media platforms. Legislation like the Electronic Communications and Privacy Bill in 2017 (RSA, 2017) and cyber protection laws in 2020 aim to address these challenges. However, social media-related violence, such as the Operation Dudula campaign, has had tragic consequences (Masiya et al., 2023).

In summary, the integration of social media and e-government initiatives in local governance has the potential to enhance transparency, accountability, and citizen engagement. While challenges such as system failures and inadequate training persist, the adoption of digital solutions and multilevel engagement technologies can significantly improve public service delivery and empower citizens. Studies by Reddy (2016), Miller et al. (2019), and Blom et al. (2020) underscore the importance of leveraging social media and ICTs to foster effective governance and community participation. Nonetheless,

addressing issues like misinformation and online bullying remains crucial for maximizing the benefits of these digital platforms.

2.10 Openness and Transparency Tool on Electronic Governance (E-Governance) and Social Media

Local governments, as highlighted by Mossberger, Wu, and Crawford (2013) have been in the forefront of providing e-government services as well as implementing social media. Openness and transparency are essential tools in promoting accountability and participation in electronic governance. According to Fung (2015), transparency is the process of making information available and accessible to citizens, while openness involves the willingness of the government to engage citizens in decision-making processes. This can be achieved by using social media, which has become a critical platform for public discourse and engagement (Bimber, Flanagin, and Stohl, 2012).

Social media provides a unique opportunity for citizens to express their opinions and engage in public debates (Delli Carpini and Keeter, 1996). This can lead to increased transparency and accountability in e- governance as citizens can demand information and explanations from their governments (Coleman and Gotze, 2001). In addition, social media can help to promote a culture of openness and collaboration between citizens and their governments (Macnamara, 2012).

However, the use of social media in e-governance can also be problematic. For instance, the spread of misinformation and fake news on social media can undermine the credibility of government institutions and policies (Woolley and Howard, 2016). Therefore, it is essential for governments to develop effective strategies for managing social media and ensuring the accuracy and validity of information shared on these platforms.

Moreover, openness and transparency are an important tool of Government, which limits corruption on government operations. Piotrowski, (2007) indicates that; transparency generally occurs through one of four primary channels.

(a) Proactive dissemination by the government.

(b) Release of requested materials by the government.

(c) Public meetings; and

(d) Leaks from whistleblowers.

Therefore, countries such as India, putting rural property records online has worked for them by greatly increasing the speed at which the property records are accessed and updated, while concurrently eliminating opportunities for local officials to take bribes as had previously been rampant (Bhatnagar, 2003). According to Chadwick (2016) ICTs in government make it easier for private corporates and public persons to work with government; enable government to offer services and information through new media like the internet; improve communication between different parts and levels of government so that people do not have to be asked repetitively for the same information by different service providers; provide staff in offices better access to information so that they can deal with members of the public more efficiently and more helpfully; and make it easier for different parts of government to work in partnership with central government.

In the twenty-first century, e-governance and social media have become key components of open and transparent administration (Gil-Garcia, 2012). These tools enable governments to directly contact with their people, increasing public involvement and participation in decision-making processes (Kim, 2015). As a result, they could boost public trust in government institutions (Linders, 2012).

The potential of electronic governance and social media to promote real-time information exchange and cooperation is a big benefit (Gil-Garcia, 2012). This is especially important in emergency circumstances where time is crucial and reliable information is required (Bonsón, Torres, and Royo, 2012). Additionally, these tools can assist governments in promptly identifying and addressing public issues (Kim, 2015).

Yet, the usage of electronic governance and social media poses several difficulties. Concerns may be raised, for example, concerning the security and privacy of data exchanged on these platforms (Bonsón, et al, 2012). Furthermore, there may be problems with the quality and dependability of information provided on social media (Linders, 2012).

To overcome these issues, governments must develop clear norms and procedures for using electronic governance and social media. They must also guarantee that adequate security measures are in place to safeguard sensitive data (Gil-Garcia, 2012). Lastly, they must teach government officials and staff on how to utilise these technologies properly (Kim, 2015).

To summarize, openness and transparency are important strategies for increasing accountability and involvement in electronic governance. Citizens may use social media to engage in public conversation and demand information from their governments. Yet, the usage of social media can pose difficulties, and governments must devise efficient measures for governing these platforms.

2.10 Chapter Summary

The influence of social media on e-democracy in governance and service delivery within the eThekwini Metropolitan Municipality is multifaceted. Existing research underscores that social media platforms play a pivotal role in promoting civic engagement, transparency, and participatory governance, fundamentally transforming traditional methods of public administration. These digital tools are shown to enhance citizen interaction, strengthen government accountability, and foster a more responsive and inclusive political environment.

Furthermore, the integration of social media into municipal operations facilitates real-time dissemination of information and efficient collection of public feedback, bridging the gap between constituents and their representatives. Studies emphasize that the widespread use of such platforms democratizes access to information, empowering citizens and improving the effectiveness of public service delivery. To advance e-democracy, it is critical to address challenges such as digital divides, misinformation risks, and institutional resistance to adopting participatory technologies. Ultimately, this synthesis highlights the need for policymakers to prioritise equitable digital access and adaptive governance frameworks to harness social media’s potential for strengthening democratic processes.

CHAPTER THREE

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS

3 Introduction

The theoretical framework for this study draws on theories of Techno-optimism, Filter Bubble theory and Digital citizenship theory. According to Techno-optimism, social media platforms may raise political knowledge and interest, leading to increased public involvement and participation (Groshek and Tandoc Jr., 2018: 314).

However, according to Eli Pariser in his 2011 book, The Filter Bubble theory proposes that tailored algorithms employed by social media and search engines form a virtual "bubble" around individuals, restricting their exposure to various viewpoints and reinforcing their current ideas and attitudes. However, Smith and Jones (2023) define digital citizenship theory as a set of norms, attitudes, and abilities that enable humans to use technology responsibly and ethically.

Therefore, the theoretical framework for this thesis illustrates the ways in which social media use and influence might affect civilians' democratic patterns. The concept makes use of such to describe how social media may be used to influence individuals, policymakers, and impact political dynamics.

As a result, the phrase "democracy of social media" refers to the notion that social media platforms could advance democratic values including freedom of expression, inclusivity, and democratic decision-making. There are numerous views and viewpoints on how social media affect democracy, for instance:

3.1 Techno-Optimism Theory

The theory of techno-optimism thoroughly explores the positive effects that technology can bring to governance, especially in the context of e-democracy and service delivery in metropolitan municipalities. However, according to John Danaher (2022:3) techno-

optimism is not confined to a single point of view; instead, it encompasses a constellation of interrelated perspectives that vary across several dimensions. Specifically, perspectives within techno-optimism vary in terms of the degree of optimism (including the evaluation of how favourable circumstances can be), the temporal focus of optimism (whether it is directed towards the past, present, or future), and the epistemic robustness of optimism, including the role of technology in sustaining an optimistic outlook. Scholars such as West (2004:15) have acknowledged electronic governance as a valuable tool for increasing citizen engagement and enhancing responsiveness in the long term. The argument suggests that, to a certain extent, the e-government revolution has not fully realized its potential to transform service delivery and foster public trust in government. However, it holds promise for promoting democratic responsiveness and instilling confidence in the effectiveness of governmental functions.

According to Lindner and Aichholzer (2020) while early high expectations must be adjusted, the fields of e-democracy and e-participation have successfully revolutionized communication between individuals and governments, yielding several beneficial effects. Notably, these developments are reflected in increased and accelerated citizen access to various public information, as well as the facilitation of e-consultation and e-budgeting procedures. Without a doubt, the thoughtful implementation of e-democracy, coupled with ongoing political dedication, has the potential to improve traditional representative democratic processes by incorporating positive participatory or deliberative elements (Lindner et al, 2020:3).

According to techno-optimism theory, social media platforms can significantly increase democratic involvement and citizen engagement (Zhang, 2019: 5). Within the context of the study this point of view contends that social media sites offer a potent tool for democratic involvement and public engagement, as according to proponents of this theory, social media can improve information access, magnify the voices of those who are often silenced, and could help the people of eThekwini municipality organise themselves to voice their opinion on service delivery concerns. In enabling users to voice

their thoughts and interact with other users, policymakers and officials, social media platforms can be a potent tool for democratic participation (Groshek and Al-Rawi, 2018).

In contrast, according to a United Nations report (2016), the progress of e-participation is currently being primarily propelled by civic engagement among individuals who are seeking greater control over their lives.

Techno-optimists such as Bimber and Flanagin (2019) contend that social media can increase political engagement by facilitating easy access to political information and communication between citizens and their elected officials. Particularly among young people who might feel excluded from more traditional forms of political participation, using social media platforms can increase political engagement (Lee and Lim, 2018). Social media platforms, according to techno-optimism thinkers, can be a potent instrument for citizens to hold their governments responsible and advance transparency (Chadwick, 2017). Moreover, the use of social media platforms can increase political awareness and interest, resulting in greater citizen engagement and participation (Groshek and Tandoc Jr, 2018).

In his extensive exploration of the concept of technology, Eric Schatzberg (2018) posits the existence of a predominant perspective that defines what technology is. The prevailing viewpoint is instrumentalism, which asserts that technology embodies instrumental (means-end) reasoning. Consequently, technology is perceived as an array of tools used by humans to solve problems and achieve objectives. While individual technologies may have single or multi-use functionalities and can acquire broader cultural meanings, they are fundamentally considered tools to achieve specific goals. Schatzberg contrasts the instrumentalist perspective with his own preferred cultural viewpoint. According to this alternative perspective, technology is not merely a means to an end but also a manifestation of creative or expressive agency. It emerges as a cultural product laden with meaning and value. Schatzberg argues that the cultural interpretation of technology is superior, as the instrumentalist approach tends to underestimate the influence of values on shaping the content and form of technology. Furthermore, it has a tendency towards techno-determinism.

It is notable, therefore, that through the lens of Techno-optimism theory, social media may assist bridge the gap between citizens and government by offering channels for information exchange, discourse, and feedback. Moreover, the application of techno-optimism theory in the context of the eThekwini Metropolitan Municipality would entail investigating how social media platforms are being used to improve e-democracy.

This might involve researching the extent to which social media is used in the municipality to promote citizen engagement, public participation, and collaborative governance. The theory would also investigate the effects of social media on the delivery of public services, such as determining if it improves responsiveness, accessibility, and efficacy. In the context of the eThekwini metropolitan municipality, techno-optimism could be used to improve governance and service delivery in several ways. For instance, social media might, be used to increase public engagement in government by creating a forum for citizens to voice their thoughts and opinions on government policies and decisions. Secondly social media can be used to make government more transparent and accessible to residents towards increased transparency and accountability as well as make the government more responsive to residents' needs by allowing citizens to directly connect with government officials and express their concerns.

3.1.1 Critics of Techno-optimism theory

Techno-optimism theory detractors contend that the idea that social media platforms can be an effective tool for promoting citizen engagement and democratic participation is overly simplistic and ignores crucial social, economic, and political realities (Bimber, Flanagin and Stohl, 2012). These critics claim that although social media may make some forms of engagement easier, like information exchange and protest planning, it also has significant drawbacks that limit its potential for participatory democracy (Bennett and Segerberg, 2012). For instance, according to Gillespie (2018), some academics have noticed that social media often amplifies some voices while marginalising others, perpetuating political systems and inequalities that already exist. According to Woolley and Howard (2016), among other scholars, social media can be manipulated and used to spread propaganda, hate speech, and misinformation, all of which have a negative impact

on democratic institutions and public discourse. Furthermore, the widespread use of social media may undermine established civic activities like voting and community organising by encouraging "slacktivism," or the appearance of engagement without actual effort or commitment (Morozov, 2011).

Nevertheless, it is fundamental to draw attention to the fact that techno-optimism is not an adequate remedy for all the issues confronting the eThekwini Metropolitan Municipality. Additionally, as previously stated, social media may be used to promote disinformation and propaganda, though, it can be difficult to ensure that all individuals have equitable access to social media. Furthermore, e-government may be costly to establish and maintain, and it can be difficult to verify whether e-government systems are safe and trustworthy.

Considering these obstacles, the researcher assumes that techno-optimism may be a potent instrument for enhancing governance and service delivery in the eThekwini metropolitan municipality. However, a combination of social media and e-democracy, with proper design and implementation, may be utilised to make government to be more responsive and responsible to residents' demands.

3.2 The Filter Bubble theory

According to this theory, social media platforms can create "echo chambers" in which users are only exposed to information and viewpoints that support their existing beliefs (Philips, Richardson, Thompson 2024:1). This has the potential of reinforcing existing biases and make it more difficult for users to engage with diverse viewpoints.

In line with Pariser (2011) in respect of the filter bubble idea, it is argued that tailored algorithms employed by search engines and social media platforms create a virtual bubble around users, restricting their exposure to various perspectives and reinforcing their current opinions and prejudices. As a result, this can lead to a divided society in which people lack a shared knowledge of crucial topics and are open to disinformation (Sunstein, 2001). Indeed, the notion of a filter bubble theory internet algorithms creation of a customized content environment of restricting interaction with competing

perspectives may ultimately result to people becoming dissatisfied in their own thoughts and perspectives, making effective talks about important topics difficult.

Filter bubbles have been found to occur across a variety of internet venues, with important consequences for political polarization and civic engagement (Flaxman, Goel, and Rao, 2021; Bakshy, Messing and Adamic, 2015). Therefore, those who are ignorant of the filter bubble phenomena may be more vulnerable to its impacts (Dubois and Blank, 2018). The researcher assume that Filter bubbles can have several negative repercussions for governance and service delivery in the context of eThekwini Metropolitan Municipality residence, for example, the theory may be less likely to hold their elected representatives accountable for bad performance since they are only exposed to information that validates their pre-existing ideas. Furthermore, if residents are separated from competing opinions, they may be less open to new ideas and issue solutions.

3.2.1 Democratic Strategies on Social Media for Public Opinion on Governance

Social media has emerged as an essential tool for democratic participation, enabling citizens to express their views on governance and policy issues. Nevertheless, the impact of social media algorithms, as described by the Filter Bubble Theory, poses serious questions regarding the diversity and quality of public discourse. Eli Pariser's idea of the filter bubble indicates that tailored content restricts users' access to a wide range of information, which can distort public opinion and jeopardize democratic processes (Pariser, 2011, 45).

3.2.1.1 Engagement through Polls and Surveys

Social media platforms offer tools for conducting polls and surveys, enabling governments to gauge public opinion on various issues. These tools are effective in engaging a broad audience quickly. However, the filter bubble effect can mean that only certain demographics or opinion groups are reached, potentially biasing the results. Therefore, Pariser (2011:8) points out, a user computer monitor is a kind of one-way mirror, reflecting

your own interests while algorithmic observers watch what you click. This can result in feedback that is not fully representative of the broader population.

3.2.1.2 Town Halls and Live Q&A sessions

Virtual town halls and live Q&A sessions on platforms such as Facebook Live and Twitter Space allow direct interaction between government officials and residents. These events promote transparency and answerability. However, because of customized content feeds, the participants may mainly consist of individuals who already support or criticize the government, rather than a diverse representation of the population. According to Pariser (2011: 7), the information one receives from Google's algorithm is tailored to one's specific preferences, while others may see something completely different. This can create an echo chamber effect and thus reinforce existing biases.

3.2.1.3 Social Media Campaigns for Awareness and Education

Governments leverage social media campaigns to inform the public about policies and governance issues, effectively raising awareness. Nonetheless, the filter bubble restricts the audience reach, often excluding those who stand to benefit the most from such information. According to Pariser (2011:9), research suggests that the race to know as much as possible about you have become the central battle of the era for internet giants, underscoring how content tailored to user profiles can limit diverse audience exposure.

3.2.1.4 Crowdsourcing Ideas and Feedback

Platforms such as Twitter and Reddit enable governments to gather ideas and feedback from citizens through crowdsourcing. This participatory method can bolster democratic engagement and foster innovative policymaking. However, the filter bubble effect might restrict contributions to individuals within specific ideological or social circles, potentially biasing the input collected. Pariser (2011:8) notes that content personalisation can lead to the creation of parallel but isolated universes, thereby hindering the exchange of ideas across diverse groups.

The filter bubble theory underscores significant challenges for democratic strategies on social media. while these platforms enable broad engagement and facilitate real-time feedback, the inherent personalisation algorithms can lead to fragmented public discourse. Liu, Shivaram, Culotta, Shapiro, Bilgic, (2021); Philips, Richardson, Thompson (2024); Kaluza (2022) argue that the echo chambers created by filter bubbles mean that individuals are less likely to encounter differing viewpoints, which is crucial for a healthy democracy. According to Jhaver, Vora and Bruckman, (2017) this limitation can result in a polarized public opinion, where consensus on governance issues is harder to achieve.

Therefore, governments must recognize and address these challenges to harness the full potential of social media for democratic engagement and strategies could include using multiple platforms to reach diverse audiences, promoting cross-group dialogues, and ensuring transparency in how content is curated and presented. Moreover, citizens expect government initiatives to focus on prioritizing online transactions, openness, and engagement to instil confidence, in line with democratic principles (Graham, 2014:368). For instance, during the COVID 19 pandemic, the interactive, conversational, communal, and collaborative nature of social media not only empowered enterprises to engage in two-way symmetrical communication and nurturing relationships, but also fostered communication and interaction between organisations and the public.

3.2.2 Filter Bubble Theory for Government Accountability on Social Media

Eli Pariser's filter bubble theory offers an insightful framework for examining how citizens utilise social media tools and networking strategies to ensure government accountability. According to this theory, social media' platforms customization algorithms construct a "bubble" around users, presenting content that aligns with their existing beliefs and preferences. This serves to reinforce their viewpoints while limiting exposure to diverse perspectives (Pariser, 2011: 51). As a result, the quality and diversity of information will deteriorate, and civic conversation will be weakened (Bozdag and Hoven, 2015:249)

3.2.2.1 Echo Chambers and Confirmation Bias

Eli Pariser's Filter Bubble theory posits that social media platforms craft personalised environments that strengthen users' preexisting beliefs, leading to greater confirmation bias and the creation of echo chambers (Pariser, 2011: 9; Ray and George, 2019:2742). While this can aid in targeted mobilisation and amplify social movements aimed at government accountability (Pariser, 2011:51), it also brings about challenges like the dissemination of misinformation and heightened polarization. Consequently, social media platforms play a crucial role in either mitigating or exacerbating these effects.

In contrast, the filter bubble effect significantly enhances confirmation bias, aiding unity in social movements but also risking misinformation and polarization, depending on social media platform actions (Luuk Van den Bosch, 2019:5). Thus, there is a mounting worry about the proliferation of disinformation on various social media platforms. For instance, this includes the dissemination of fake news stories about US political candidates, misleading reports on Brexit, and the manipulation of photographs during the Indian national elections (Acemoglu, Ozdaglar and Siderius,2023:1).

According to Geschke, Lorenz, and Holtz (2018:129) observers have recently connected filter bubbles and echo chambers to the rapid societal changes seen during events like Brexit and the polarization of American society under Donald Trump's presidency. Certainly, they are of the view that, this connection highlights the need for a better understanding of how these factors influence public discourse and decision-making.

Moreover, examples of the rise of populist parties and anti-immigrant rallies in Europe, Donald Trump's presidential campaign, and the British public's decision to vote for Brexit are notable. The influence of modern communication technologies on these events has been studied by academics, media, and political commentators (Geschke et al, 2018:130).

Researchers found that between 2009 and 2016, there was a noticeable increase in the number of US Twitter users following politicians and media outlets who shared their

political beliefs. This trend may have been influenced by Donald Trump's controversial election campaign (Garimella and Weber, 2017).

3.2.2.2 Algorithmic Curation and Selective Exposure

Social media platforms utilise algorithmic curation to present users with content that they are likely to engage with, which can include news about government actions and public services. This selective exposure means that users receive a steady stream of information about government accountability and performance, often from sources that share their viewpoint, (Pariser, 2011,8). Filter bubbles, however, prioritize algorithmic curation, such as that found in social media feeds or search results pages. As a result, this involves tailoring information based on a viewer's previous behaviours, which can create a feedback loop that limits exposure to diverse content (Robertson, Green, Ruck, Ognyanova, Wilson and Lazer, 2021:2)

In their work, Thorson and Wells (2016:310) describe curating as *"the fundamental action of our media environment.*" They identify different groups of influencers beyond journalists who shape the news received in personalised environments, such as social media. These groups include a) strategic curators (for instance, companies or politicians) who can directly reach specific audiences, b) social curators (such as contacts on the platform) who make news accessible by sharing, commenting, or rating content within their digital social circles, and c) algorithmic curation, which utilises user behaviour to customize content. According to Merten (2020:1020) in today's information-rich environment, efficient content selection has become a key business model for digital journalism. Both search engines and human-led activities such as aggregation, sharing, rating, labelling, and critiquing content have been vital in boosting legacy media's internet economic potential.

3.2.2.3 Mobilisation through personalised content

The filter bubble facilitates the mobilisation of individuals by delivering tailored content that can spur action. Therefore, social media campaigns that are designed to hold the

government accountable can leverage these algorithms to target specific demographics with messages that resonate deeply with them, thus increasing engagement and participation, (Pariser, 2011:12). However, in global health crises like COVID-19, government communication should actively engage the public and be transparent. If citizens do not participate and comply with government responses, it can be considered a failure, leading to further challenges in emergency management (Zhang, Yuan, Zhu, Chen, Q, Evans, 2022:2).

3.2.1 Critics of the Filter Bubble Theory

According to critics of the Filter Bubble theory, individuals have agency and may deliberately seek out varied viewpoints, and tailored algorithms can also expose users to fresh ideas and perspectives (Barbera et al., 2015; Tufekci, 2015). Nevertheless, proponents of the idea argue that, while people may have agency, the architecture of online platforms and algorithms limits users' ability to explore multiple points of view (Fletcher and Nielsen, 2017).

One critique levelled against the filter bubble hypothesis by Grieve et al. (2023) is that it implies that people are passive consumers of information and do not actively seek out other opinions. Moreover, Karpf (2023) argue that the filter bubble hypothesis is oversimplified and fails to account for the complexities of the online information environment. Ultimately, Sunstein (2023) contend that actual data does not support the filter bubble theory and that the extent to which individuals are separated from various viewpoints is restricted.

Moreover, several scholars disagree with the filter bubble notion. Similarly, Tufekci (2022) argues that the filter bubble hypothesis is overly focused on individual behaviour and fails to account for the impact of algorithms and platform design in shaping online information flow. Opponents of the filter bubble idea assert that it is not as widespread as some may assume. According to Flaxman et al. (2021), while the filter bubble exists in some circumstances, it is not as common as many imagine. Nevertheless, Bakshy et al. (2021) suggest that the filter bubble is less of a worry than the echo chamber, which arises when

individuals are exposed primarily to like-minded others and their opinions are reinforced without questioning.

The researcher agrees with scholars that recommend that a variety of measures must be put in place to reduce the negative consequences of filter bubbles, that includes, enhancing transparency and user control over algorithms (Napoli, 2018), encouraging media literacy (Van Dijck and Poell, 2018), and fostering cross-cutting debates and varied opinions (Karpf, 2012). The researcher undeniably assumes that they could be a variety of measures that may be taken into consideration to alleviate the detrimental consequences of filter bubbles. The government and social media platforms may take an initiative to encourage people to engage with opposing ideas and promote diversity of opinion. This would contribute to guaranteeing that social media is utilised to promote civic involvement and good governance, rather than to isolate individuals and propagate misinformation by adopting these actions.

3.3 Digital Citizenship Theory

This theory emphasizes the need of increasing digital literacy as well as responsible internet engagement. Instead of relying simply on interaction statistics and user attention, supporters of this theory argue that social media businesses should encourage users to engage in respectful conversation and promote accurate information. It includes the ethical, legal, social, and cultural standards that affect interactions and involvement in digital realms.

Digital citizenship stresses the importance of how people interact and behave in digital domains, rather than their official legal position as citizens of a certain country. This notion emphasizes people' obligations and rights in the digital sphere, independent of their national citizenship. It emphasizes that being a good digital citizen include ethical behaviour, courteous communication, and active involvement in online communities, which mirror the larger values of citizenship but are applied to the digital world (Hintz, Dencik, and Wahl-Jorgensen, 2017).

According to a recent study by Smith and Jones (2023) digital citizenship theory may be characterized as a collection of norms, beliefs, and abilities that enable humans to utilise technology responsibly and ethically, as a result this notion is critical in orienting individuals toward appropriate conduct while engaging with technology, particularly in online places.

In the context of the role of social media on e-democracy within the eThekwini Metropolitan Municipality, digital citizenship theory provides an analytical tool for understanding the interactions between online platforms, democratic processes, and the delivery of government and services. Therefore, due to the rising usage of technology, digital citizenship theory has become increasingly significant today (Johnson, 2022). In other words, this idea highlights the significance of teaching people how to use digital platforms responsibly and ethically, as well as how people can safeguard themselves and others from potential damage. The researcher envisages that within this paradigm, digital citizenship theory investigates how people and groups use social media platforms to participate actively in democratic processes. It investigates how social media platforms may improve civic engagement, increase transparency, and encourage active public participation in decision-making and service delivery. It also analyses the possible problems and hazards of using social media in e-democracy, such as disinformation propagation, privacy issues, and the digital divide.

Furthermore, multiple studies have demonstrated that digital citizenship theory is an important component of technology education, particularly in the K-12 school system (Kreuger and Schneider, 2021). This idea provides a framework for teaching students how to utilise technology responsibly and correctly, equipping them to be responsible digital citizens.

Contrary to that, according to Calzada (2022:4) Citizenship studies often combine birth right citizenship (jus soli) with right-of-blood citizenship (jus sanguinis). Jus sanguinis grants citizenship if one or both parents are citizens, while jus soli determine citizenship based on birthplace. However, the recent post-COVID-19 shows that, there is a need for interdisciplinary research on algorithmic transparency, borderless residency, digital rights

and privacy, data cooperatives, donation and altruism, data sovereignty (jus nexum), and democratic city-regional accountability (jus algoritmi) (Calzada, 2022:4). These concepts provide insight into how the restructuring of nation-states gives rise to new models of citizenship.

The eThekwini metropolitan municipality, like numerous other regions worldwide, has witnessed substantial transformations in governance and service delivery following the emergence of social media. This influence is part of a broader trend in which digital technologies reshape citizens' engagement with the state, fostering participatory democracy and e-governance. A study by Kaunda and Mukunda (2021:264) reveal that all of South Africa's metropolitan municipalities have an official social media Facebook page. For instance, eThekwini Metropolitan Municipality has the largest following, with 354,980 followers, followed by the City of Tshwane with 247,761 followers, City of Johannesburg with 180,485 followers, and City of Ekurhuleni with 185,747 followers. Additionally, the City of Cape Town boasts 275,295 followers, while Mangaung Metropolitan Municipality has 16,590 followers. However, follower counts for Nelson Mandela Metropolitan Municipality and Buffalo City Metropolitan Municipality were not provided. Furthermore, most municipalities post daily information on their pages, but engagement with the public is limited (Kaunda and Mukonza, 2021:264).

However, the digital citizenship theory provides a comprehensive framework for understanding the roles, responsibilities, and practices of citizens in the digital age, particularly in the context of e-democracy and governance. According to Hintz, Dencik and Wahl-Jorgensen (2017) digital citizenship is generally characterized by individuals' actions, instead of their official membership in a nation-state and the associated rights and responsibilities. Thus, embracing digital citizenship means embodying responsible and ethical conduct in technology usage. It encompasses digital literacy, ethical values, and active participation in the digital realm (Thompson, 2021).

The above mentioned, definition underscores the complex and diverse aspects of digital citizenship, stressing that it encompasses more than just access to digital resources. It also highlights the importance of using digital technologies responsibly and ethically.

Moreover, a study by Vromen (2017) argues that contemporary political engagement has changed, emphasizing individualization, everyday nature of politics, and the emergence of new citizen norms. Vromen argues that social media and online hybrid organisations play significant roles in challenging established political organisations. Furthermore, established political organisations are increasingly using digital forms of citizen engagement to re-engage citizens in the political process.

Nonetheless, digital citizens within the virtual community actively contribute to the democratisation of political life, corporate organisation, and relationship structures without solely relying on periodic elections to determine government representation (Dursun 2001 in Isikli, 2015:24). Therefore, within the context of the study, this theory emphasizes the active participation of citizens in digital spaces, focusing on the ethical, responsible, and effective use of technology to engage in civic activities and influence on governance and service delivery.

3.3.1 Corporate Globalisation through Democracy, Citizenship, and Corporate Governance Reform

Thompson's (2021) study delves into the changing role of corporations as governance agents alongside public authorities. The study explores "corporate citizenship" and the incorporation of multinational corporations (MNCs) into democratic governance structures despite their global operations. According to Thompson (2021:46), a new issue arises with what are often referred to as ‘platform companies such as, Google, Facebook and others, which are inherently internationalized from the outset. Moreover, the study questions how these companies could be subject to some form of ‘democratic corporate governance.

I. Corporate Forms as Parallel Governance Mechanisms

Thompson posits that commercial enterprises now occupy a significant role in governance, blurring the lines between private and public sectors. He emphasizes the dual role of corporations, referring to them as “parallel governance mechanisms”

functioning alongside public authorities (Thompson, 2021:43). This dual role underscores their increasing influence in governance structures traditionally dominated by state actors.

II. Global Corporate Citizenship (GCC)

The concept of Global Corporate Citizenship (GCC) challenges traditional notions of citizenship and sovereignty by proposing that corporations can transcend national boundaries and assume a form of global citizenship. Thompson (2021:43) argues that companies assert this new form of citizenship through their environmental, employment, and social/ethical responsibilities. Accordingly, he argues that the legal and quasi-constitutional frameworks governing the international commercial sphere, are often driven by private rather than public law.

III. Democratic Governance of Internationalized Firms

Thompson (2021:43) addresses the formidable challenge of integrating MNCs into democratic systems confined within national borders. He provocatively questions, “How do you democratise the corporate form, and in particular the private commercial company, other than via the mechanism of extending limited liability?” This inquiry delves into the complexities of subjecting MNCs to democratic governance given their intricate international structures, raising crucial questions about democratizing firms that operate across multiple jurisdictions.

IV. Corporate Reproduction

In the contemporary business environment, companies are increasingly compelled to align with political agendas to gain legitimacy, necessitating active involvement in political activities and decision-making processes. Thompson (2021:46) introduces the concept of political reproduction, where companies must legitimize themselves as political actors by adapting organisationally, financially, and legally to survive. This underscores the evolving role of corporations in political arenas, where they must navigate new forms of transparency and accountability.

V. Corporate Citizenship vs. Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)

Thompson delineates a clear distinction between corporate social responsibility (CSR) and corporate citizenship, suggesting that corporate citizenship represents a more profound acknowledgment of civic virtues and responsibilities akin to those borne by traditional citizens. Corporate citizenship extends beyond CSR, embodying a deep-seated commitment to civic values and active participation in initiatives that benefit the community and society at large (Thompson, 2021:47). This distinction emphasizes the broad range of ethical, social, and environmental responsibilities inherent in corporate citizenship, surpassing the traditional scope of CSR practices.

VI. Challenges in Democratic Corporate Governance

Platform companies and blockchain-based organisations present unique challenges for democratic corporate governance. Operating internationally from inception, these companies elude traditional regulatory mechanisms. Thompson highlights emerging issues with platform companies like Google and Facebook, noting their inherently international operations which complicate the application of democratic governance (Thompson, 2021:46). This underscores the complexities of applying democratic governance to modern digital and platform-based corporations that operate beyond conventional regulatory frameworks.

In summary, Thompson's work provides a comprehensive analysis of the theoretical framework concerning digital citizenship and corporate governance in the context of international corporate operations. By examining the evolving role of corporations as governance entities and their claims to global citizenship, study challenges traditional notions of sovereignty and democratic governance. It underscores the necessity for new regulatory approaches in an increasingly globalized world.

3.3.2 E-State and E-Learning

The concept of e-state applications involves recognizing citizens based on their virtual identities rather than their physical presence (Armagan 2013:18 in Isikli, 2015:31). This digital identity is also influenced by the devices and internet service provider used by the citizen. When interacting online, citizens experience a level playing field where their

dignity, wealth, and physical abilities do not give them an advantage or disadvantage Isikli (2015:31).

According to Isikli (2015) e-state applications identify citizens by their virtual identities and promote digital equality. In the online world, physical barriers disappear, allowing equal access to public services. Moreover, the digitalization of the state enables government-citizen interactions in the virtual realm, where individuals are assessed based on their virtual identity rather than physical attributes. Therefore, this fosters a sense of equality, as characteristics like disability, poverty, or education level are invisible online, allowing all citizens to appear equal in the digital world (Isikli; 2015:31.

Moreover, e-learning allows the expanding and diversifying online teaching and learning activities presents an opportunity to address multiple challenges related to time and space planning. Additionally, this strategy can help enhance equality of opportunity in education and facilitate greater international interaction (Isikli; 2015:31).

Isikli contends that the digital realm offers a level playing field where individuals are judged solely by their virtual identities, irrespective of physical characteristics. This, in turn, can contribute to a more equitable society, particularly in the realms of governance and education.

Furthermore, e-state applications remove physical barriers to accessing public services, allowing the state to reach its citizens in the virtual world and adapt to this digital reality. Therefore, in the digital world, citizens interact with virtual or corporate characters, and the obstacles they face in the physical world become less relevant. Instead, citizens establish relationships based on ethical considerations (Isikli, 2015:31).

Additionally, in the virtual world, citizens do not act based on their observable attributes, but with their invisible and equal gadget IP address and ID (citizenship identification number (Isikli, 2015:31). In other words, this means that a disabled, poor, or uneducated citizen can engage on an equal footing with other citizens in the virtual world.

3.3.3 Digital Citizenship and E-Democracy

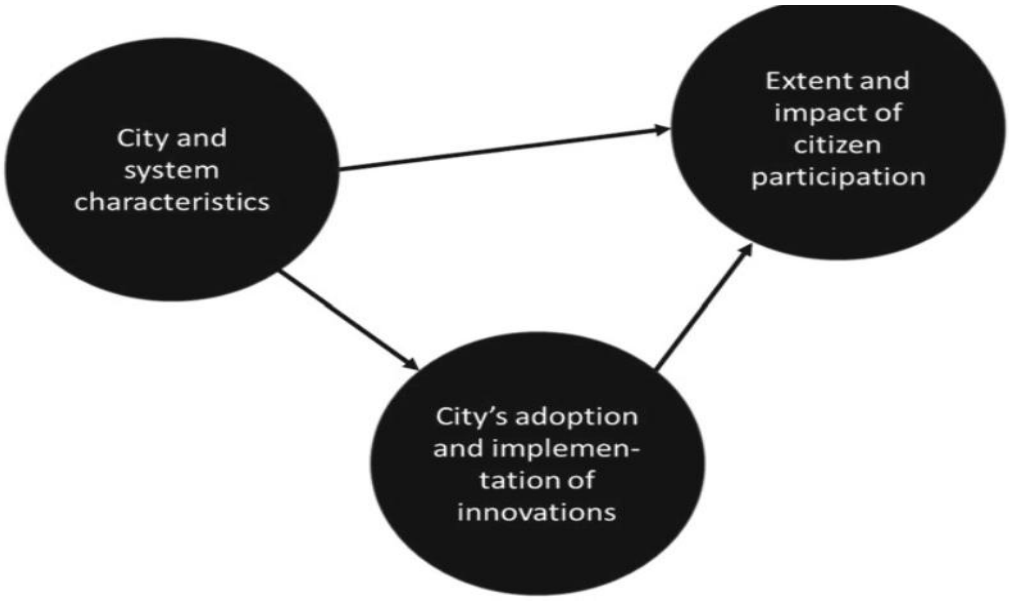
Digital citizenship has redefined the traditional notion of democracy, allowing for increased citizen engagement in governance through digital channels. Isikli (2015:31) suggests that engaging in digital participation and governance within a digital society necessitates moving away from the traditional notion of modern democracy, where power is conferred upon leaders through elections and those leaders are held accountable only during election periods. This paradigm shift is crucial in understanding how social media can impact governance and public service delivery, fostering continuous interaction between the government and its citizens.

3.3.4 Digital Citizenship and Participatory Democracy

Digital citizenship encompasses the ability of individuals to participate in online society, engaging in various forms of interaction ranging from social media to more structured participatory platforms. According to Ngai, Singh, Lu, Yao and Koon (2022:1) during crises, social media serves as a critical source of information and support. Moreover, the heightened use of social media during COVID-19 has been well-documented, and the Chinese government has effectively utilised it for public communication. Therefore, it is imperative to investigate how the government's trust-enhancing strategies in media are linked to public engagement during the COVID-19 crisis in China on social media.

This concept underscores a problem-based approach to democracy, positing that citizen involvement beyond elections can effectively tackle governance issues through inclusiveness, deliberation, and public control (Fung, 2006, 2015; Warren, 2017 in Hovik, 2022, et al).

Paradigm. 1: is Illustrative of Hovik and Giannoumis' model of the key concepts and relationships for citizen participation



The assessments predominantly revolve around inclusiveness, deliberation, and public control, although alternative terminologies are occasionally utilised (Fung, 2015; Smith, 2009; Warren, 2017). Moreover, Fung, 2015; Newig, Challies, Jager, Kochskaemper and Adzerzen, 2018: 273) interpret citizen participation as a multi-dimensional concept, comprising of:

(a) The extent of involvement of affected citizen groups - To what degree do various affected citizen groups participate?
(b) The nature of information exchange and communication - To what extent is communication a one-way flow of information or a two-way dialogue?
(c) The impact or influence on urban development - To what extent do the information and expressions presented by citizens in participatory forums and channels inform the content or the foundations of decisions made by city authorities?

According to Hovik et al (2022) the degree to which e-participation enhances these dimensions decisively influences its effect on inclusiveness, deliberation, and public control. Furthermore, Fung (2015) posit that enhancing citizen participation is widely recognized to improve the efficacy of regulations, enhance the delivery of public goods and services, and elevate outcomes in vital sectors such as health and education.

Moreover, should young people persist in seeking greater engagement with the institutions that impact them as digital technologies continue to enhance the accessibility of information, this is perceived as a pathway to fortifying the democratic legitimacy of governance processes (Fung,2015:521).

3.3.5 E-Government and Service Delivery

E-government frameworks enhance public sector service delivery through strategic use of information systems. E-government involves the electronic provision of all public sector services, while e-governance enables other government activities through ICT (Idzi and Gomes, 2022:429). Furthermore, digital governance involves transitioning services to new digital formats and collecting data about citizens' activities to shape services and encourage citizen participation.

Williamson (2016: 40) suggests that *"Digital governance involves moving services to new digital formats that will allow governments to continually collect huge reservoirs of data about citizens' everyday activities, interactions, and transactions - data that can be extracted, analysed, and used as insights to shape services, while encouraging citizens to become responsible participants in the co-production and delivery of these digital services*."

On the contrary, local activists may prefer traditional analogue channels over digital platforms. Though, digitalisation may limit participation and impact policy outcomes. Moreover, institutional contexts are likely to influence e-participation strategies and resident activists' involvement in decision-making processes and an understanding of this impact is limited (Spada and Allegretti, 2020; Steinbach et al., 2019).

According to Idzi and Gomes (2022) in our ever-evolving society and technology, new models and paradigms constantly emerge. Hence, Pereira and Ckagnazarof (2020) argue that the New Public Management (NPM) has not adequately addressed the challenges of providing public services in the digital economy. Idzi and Gomes (2022) study delves into the strategies of digital governance in governments and addresses the following questions:

(a) How does Digital Era Governance (DEG) influence governments?
(b) What social contracts should be considered in a digital governance model?
(c) What are the primary barriers to public policy design focused on digital government?

According to Pollitt and Bouckaert (2011) in Idzi and Gomes (2022: 528), the key elements of Digital Era Governance (DEG) include: firstly, Reintegration: utilising digital technologies to bring together fragmented and isolated government structures left behind by New Public Management and traditional bureaucracies. Secondly, Needs-based holism: simplifying the relationship between government agencies and citizens by leveraging digital technologies and reengineering processes to streamline operations and interactions. Thirdly, Digitization: replacing traditional channels with electronic ones, consolidating all services on a single platform, for instance the government's website.

3.3.6 Models of E-Democracy

Muhammad (2023) delineates several conceptual models of e-democracy, each describing distinct ways in which digital technologies can enhance the democratic process. Some of the most prominent models include:

a) Representation Model

This model focuses on how digital technologies can increase citizen representation and participation in the political process. It emphasizes the use of online voting systems, digital platforms for public engagement and consultation, and online forums for political discourse (Muhammad, 2023)

Indeed, the representation model uses social media to enhance e-democracy by providing citizens with platforms to voice their opinions and participate in political discourse and this could improve governance and service delivery in the eThekwini Metropolitan Municipality. However, the complete impact of citizen engagement and influence remains not fully understood. Specifically, it is uncertain whether digital channels effectively engage previously inactive resident groups or simply cater to those

who are already active, potentially creating a group of *'super participants'* (Spada & Allegretti, 2020:46). In addition, citizens may prefer participating through channels they control, rather than those initiated by local government or third parties (Loader, Vromen and Xenos, 2014 in Hovik and Giannoumis, 2022).

b) Deliberation Model

This model emphasizes the role of digital technologies in facilitating informed public discourse and deliberation. It focuses on the use of online forums, social media platforms, and other digital tools to foster public discussion of political issues and promote a more inclusive and participatory democratic process. (Muhammad, 2023)

However, there are concerns that digitalisation might encourage individualized and 'thin' participation, potentially leading to echo chambers, rather than productive dialogue and deliberation (Sunstine, 2007; Urbinati, 2014 in Hovik and Giannoumis, 2022). On the other hand, there are also worries that e-decision-making could be dominated by an uninformed majority of participants, who may not be affected by the issues at hand, possibly sidelining a deeply concerned and well-informed minority (Spada and Allegretti, 2020:). Contrary to that, Warren (2017) contends that various forms of deliberation such as advocacy, argument, persuasion, negotiation, and bargaining influence the collective agenda and the formation of a collective will. Moreover, the deliberation model utilises social media to foster inclusive public discourse, enabling a broader spectrum of voices to participate in policy discussions. For eThekwini, social media can democratise access to political dialogue, ensuring that marginalised communities are heard, thus enhancing the municipality's responsiveness and accountability.

c) Collaborative Model

This model emphasizes the role of digital technologies in enabling collaborative decision-making and problem-solving. It focuses on the use of online collaboration tools and platforms, such as crowdsourcing and collaborative decision-making platforms, to foster more democratic and participatory governance Muhammad (2023).

Therefore, the Collaborative Model promotes co-creation and collective problem-solving through digital platforms. In eThekwini, such collaborative tools can facilitate community-driven initiatives and participatory budgeting, leading to more effective and citizen-centric governance. Understanding the diverse participants in crowdsourcing projects is critical for success, hence, different individuals bring unique capabilities, talents, and motivations to the table. Additionally, crowdsourcing projects also benefit from engaging stakeholders with specific interests in a jurisdiction, such as in collaborative policymaking or urban-planning initiatives (Brabham, 2013).

d) Information Model

This model emphasizes the role of digital technologies in increasing access to information and promoting transparency and accountability in government. It focuses on the use of digital platforms for disseminating information about government activities, policies, and decisions, as well as for monitoring government performance (Muhammad: 2023).

Therefore, the significance of social media in contemporary society cannot be overlooked as a result, platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, and WhatsApp offer a space for open communication at a relatively low cost, enabling the expression of diverse views. Consequently, social media plays a role in promoting transparency and accountability in the South African public sphere (Masiya and Lubinga, 2023)

Therefore, the information model underscores the importance of transparency and informed citizenry. However, social media in eThekwini can act as a conduit for disseminating vital information, thus enhancing governmental transparency and enabling citizens to hold their leaders accountable (Bertot, Jaeger, and Grimes, 2010).

e) Direct e-Democracy Model

This model involves using digital technologies to allow citizens to directly participate in the democratic process, such as through online voting and referendums. The emphasis is on giving citizens more direct control over the democratic process and reducing the role of elected representatives (Muhammad, 2023).

Van Dijk (2013:5) discusses different views of democracy, focusing on the methods (representative versus direct democracy) and the role of digital media in political communication. The views are categorized into government-centric and citizen-centric perspectives, creating a third dimension of democracy views. These six ideal types are often combined in practice.

Government-centric views:

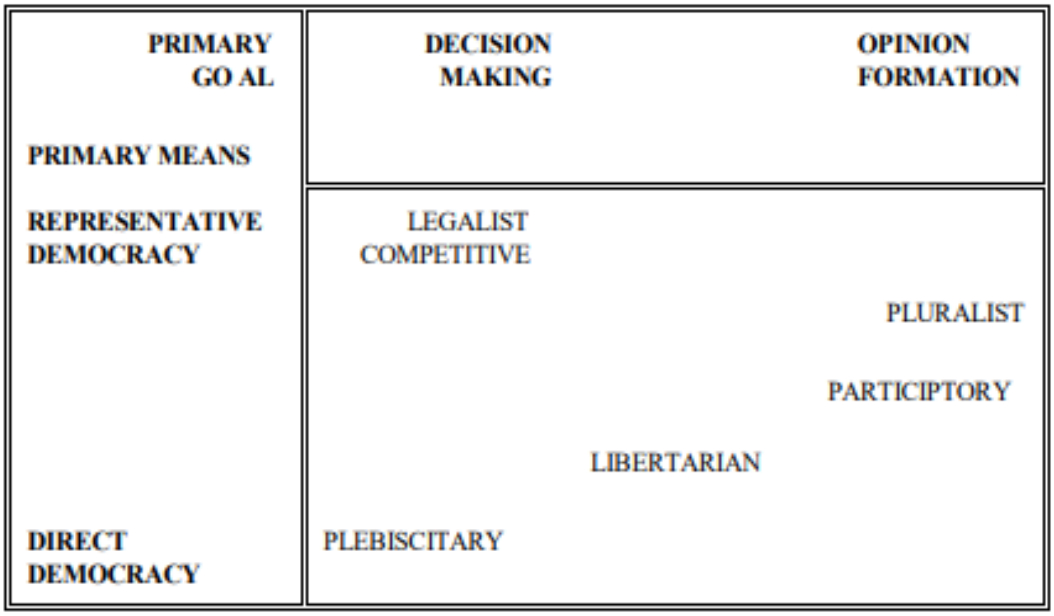
(a) Legalist Democracy: Emphasizes procedural aspects like the constitution, separation of powers, checks and balances, and representation. Digital media is used for information campaigns and gathering data to enhance state efficiency.
(b) Competitive Democracy: Common in two-party or presidential systems, it focuses on competition between parties and leaders for electoral support. Digital media is primarily used for election campaigns.

Citizen-centric views:

(a) Plebiscitary Democracy: Advocates for direct democracy through referenda and online polls, appealing to populism and bypassing institutional politics.
(b) Pluralist Democracy: Focuses on opinion formation within societal organisations and emphasizes pluralism in social and political discourse. It combines direct and representative democracy and values public debates.
(c) Participatory Democracy: Encourages active citizenship and broad opinion formation, using digital media for public debates and citizen participation. Ensuring access to digital media is crucial.
(d) Libertarian Democracy: Like pluralist and plebiscitary views but emphasizes autonomous politics by citizens through horizontal communication via the Internet. It supports user-generated content and Web 2.0 tools to bypass institutional politics.

Paradigm. 2: Six models in two dimensions of political democracy

Source: van Dijk (2000:39; van Dijk, 2013:5)



It is notable that these views highlight the varied applications of digital media in enhancing democratic processes and emphasize different aspects of political participation and governance. Contrary to that, according to Coleman and Blumler (2009) direct e-democracy empowers citizens by providing direct channels for participation, such as online voting. Therefore, in eThekwini, implementing such tools can streamline democratic participation, making it easier for citizens to engage in decision-making processes directly.

f) Hybrid E-Democracy Model

This model combines elements of both representational and direct e-democracy and seeks to find a balance between the two. It focuses on using digital technologies to enhance communication between elected representatives and citizens and to provide citizens with more opportunities to directly participate in the democratic process (Muhammad, 2023:73).

According to Chadwick (2017) though television remains an important tool for political communication, the emergence of online media activities, some of which are aided by broadcasters, is contributing to a quickly changing landscape of mediated politics, impacted by a wide range of players. As a result, several countries' media systems now incorporate elements of historic, modern, and "renewed" media. While traditional media such as television, radio, and newspapers remain important, they are developing, and other media are gaining traction in the public (Chadwick, 2017).

However, the hybrid e-democracy model seeks to balance representational and direct participation (Chadwick, 2011). Therefore, social media can serve as a hybrid platform in eThekwini, facilitating both representative interactions and direct citizen inputs, thereby fostering a more integrated democratic process

g) Participatory E-Democracy Model

This model involves using digital technologies to facilitate more active participation by citizens in the democratic process, including online forums for discussion and debate, online petitions, and crowdsourcing initiatives. The emphasis is on empowering citizens to take an active role in shaping policy and decision-making (Muhammad, 2023:73).

Hence, for more than 30 years, internet users have actively engaged in discussions of societal issues through Usenet groups. While online forums offer flexibility for discussions, they may lack representation of diverse populations. Nevertheless, due to their widespread popularity and participation, online forums are likely to significantly impact citizens' awareness of policy issues (van Dijk, 2013:5).

Hitherto, in the field of e-petitions, successful modernisation is observed with the introduction of e-petition systems. While online petitions show high public acceptance, they do not necessarily increase the overall amount of petition activity. Internet use alone does not automatically enhance transparency and participation opportunities. Cooperation for institutional reform, technological modernization, and civic knowledge or skills are needed for successful petitions Hennen et al. 2020;127).

However, according to Brabham (2013:2) crowdsourcing is an online participative activity where diverse individuals or organisations propose tasks to a group of people who voluntarily undertake them via an open call. The tasks can vary in complexity, and the crowd contributes their work, money, knowledge, and/or experience. This arrangement benefits both the user and the organisation. The key elements of crowdsourcing are: 1) an organisation with a task, 2) a willing community, 3) an online platform, and 4) mutual benefit for both the organisation and the community (Brabham, 2013:3)

Participatory e-democracy emphasizes active citizen involvement through digital means. In eThekwini, social media can empower citizens to engage in policy formulation and service delivery monitoring, thus enhancing the overall democratic process and responsiveness of the municipality (Janssen and Kies, 2005).

These models are not mutually exclusive, and many e-democracy initiatives may incorporate elements of several models. The model of e-democracy best suited to a particular context will depend on factors such as the political and cultural context, the technological infrastructure, and the specific needs and priorities of the citizens.

In summary, according to Muhammad (2023:73) the conceptual models of e-democracy outline various ways in which digital technologies can enhance democratic processes by promoting greater representation, deliberation, collaboration, and access to information. These models offer a framework for understanding the potential benefits and challenges of e-democracy and can help guide the development of effective e-democracy strategies and initiatives (Muhammad, 2023:73). However, social media plays a crucial role in facilitating these models, especially within the context of eThekwini Metropolitan Municipality, by improving governance and service delivery through enhanced citizen engagement and accountability.

3.3.7 Decentralised Participatory Democracy (DPD) and Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI) theory and projects

Decentralised Participatory Democracy (DPD) emphasizes local decision-making and citizen participation and aligns with a focus on empowering communities and using digital technologies for collective action. According to Fischli and Muldoon (2024:8) from a Decentralised participatory democracy perspective, the D-CENT (Decentralised Citizens Engagement Technologies) project unequivocally met its political aims. Citizens utilised the platform to unite around shared issues, desires, and concerns and paved the way for collective empowerment.

According to Fischli and Muldoon, DPD is characterized by three main political aims: organising political communities to build collective power, empowering citizens through direct participation in decision-making, and transforming political institutions (Fischli & Muldoon, 2024:1). These aims are achieved through platforms like D-CENT and DECODE, which facilitate citizen engagement and promote democratic innovations.

Key Components of DPD

(a) Collective Power Building: DPD seeks to mobilise citizens by organising political communities. This involves creating digital platforms where citizens can collaborate, deliberate, and influence political outcomes.

(b) Direct Participation: The framework emphasizes the importance of direct citizen participation in governance. Digital tools enable citizens to engage in decision-making processes, thus democratizing political power.

(c) Institutional Transformation: DPD aims to transform traditional political institutions by integrating digital technologies that support participatory practices. This involves shifting decision-making from national to local levels, thereby empowering municipal associations and citizen networks (Fischli & Muldoon, 2024:2).

Notably, the Consul software enabled citizens to directly influence decision-making, participate in budgeting, and contribute to the policy cycle, leading to a transformative impact on political institutions (Fischli and Muldoon, 2024:8).

It is also notable that the Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI) refers to the technological frameworks and platforms that support public services and democratic engagement. Hence, these infrastructures are designed to be inclusive, transparent, and accessible, thus facilitating citizen participation and enhancing governance.

Fischli and Muldoon emphasize that Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI) involves creating systems to counteract corporate power and democratise the digital economy. This includes developing community-owned and operated platforms to ensure that digital tools serve the public interest rather than private interests (Fischli and Muldoon, 2024:2). Examples of such entities include Facebook, Twitter, and Google.

Through the Digital Public Infrastructure, a project called DECODE (Decentralised Citizen-Owned Data Ecosystems) aims to establish digital public infrastructure to challenge the dominance of Big Tech firms and develop public and cooperative alternatives in data governance. For instance, this project was running from January 2017 to December 2019 in Amsterdam and Barcelona and sought to create a robust framework for managing citizens' data through various initiatives, including integrating new mechanisms into digital democracy software and using citizen-placed sensors for gathering data on social and environmental issues (Fischli and Muldoon, 2024:9).

Key Components of DPI

(a) Inclusivity: DPI aims to create digital environments that are accessible to all citizens, regardless of their socio-economic status. This ensures broad participation in democratic processes.

(b) Transparency: Transparency is a critical aspect of DPI. By making governmental processes and decisions transparent, digital infrastructures build trust and accountability in public institutions.

(c) Accessibility: DPI ensures that digital tools and platforms are easily accessible to citizens. This involves designing user-friendly interfaces and providing support to those who may be less familiar with technology.

In the eThekwini Metropolitan Municipality, social media platforms play a crucial role in influencing e-democracy, therefore, aligning with the principles of both DPD and DPI. These platforms enable direct communication between citizens and government officials, facilitating immediate feedback and engagement, allowing citizens to actively contribute to decision-making processes and hold officials accountable, and organising political communities and mobilising citizens around common causes. Additionally, social media enhances transparency by providing a public forum where governmental actions and decisions are scrutinized, ensuring that citizens are informed and can hold their government accountable.

However, the emergence of digital technology has profoundly transformed the landscape of democratic governance, bringing forth ideas like Decentralised Participatory Democracy and Digital Public Infrastructure. For instance, in their exploration of "The Future of Democracy," Jumani, Yujie, and Khan (2023:221) underscore the critical role of election transparency in modern governance. They advocate for a Decentralised electronic voting system powered by blockchain technology, aiming to address concerns about the lack of transparency in traditional and computerized voting systems. This approach seeks to elevate transparency, mitigate risks associated with conventional election procedures, and bolster voter confidence.

According to Fischli and Muldoon (2024), the Decentralised Participatory Democracy (DPD) model leverages digital platforms to mobilise citizens, thereby enabling collective decision-making and political empowerment. Moreover, they note that the utilisation of digital technology has been a predominant factor in recent endeavours aimed at reinvigorating democratic governance (Fischli and Muldoon, 2024:1).

On the other hand, Digital Public Infrastructure encompasses the technological structures and tools that bolster public administration and civic engagement. Hence, Fischli and Muldoon (2024) highlight projects like D-CENT and DECODE, which developed platforms for citizen engagement and data ownership, respectively. They argue that these projects advanced three political aims: organising political communities to build collective power, empowering citizens through direct participation in decision making, and transforming political institutions (Fischli & Muldoon, 2024:2).

In conclusion, the impact of social media on e-democracy within the eThekwini Metropolitan Municipality is intricate, presenting both opportunities and challenges. The theoretical frameworks of Decentralised Participatory Democracy and Digital Public Infrastructure provide valuable insights into how digital tools can enhance governance and service delivery. However, the risks highlighted by the Filter Bubble theory and the importance of fostering Digital Citizenship underscore the need for a balanced approach. Therefore, by leveraging the potential of digital technologies while addressing their limitations, eThekwini can utilise social media to establish a more inclusive, participatory, and effective democratic governance model.

Techno-optimism presents an optimistic viewpoint, proposing that with effective strategies, social media can improve democratic governance and service delivery. For instance, platforms like Facebook and Twitter can be utilised to crowdsource policy ideas, as demonstrated by the Spanish Podemos party, which employed digital tools to establish legislative priorities (Gastil, 2021:2). However, it is imperative for the authorities to also address challenges such as misinformation and polarization to fully realize these benefits.

The theoretical frameworks in this study suggest that social media can empower communities in governance, but the impact of filter bubbles highlights the need for digital literacy initiatives.

Conversely, the theoretical framework of Decentralised Participatory Democracy underscores the significance of citizen involvement at the grassroots level. For eThekwini, this would entail utilising social media platforms to enable direct interaction between

citizens and municipal officials. Therefore, practical measures could involve hosting regular online forums where citizens can express their concerns and propose enhancements, as well as conducting social media campaigns to highlight local issues and promote community engagement.

For example, Fischli and Muldoon (2024:6) advocate for the use of digital platforms to facilitate direct citizen participation in political decision-making processes. Therefore, by implementing such platforms in eThekwini, the municipality can empower citizens, fostering a governance structure that is more transparent and accountable.

Furthermore, a healthy Digital Public Infrastructure is vital for effective e-democracy. This encompasses not only the necessary technological tools, but also the policies and practices that ensure accessibility and user-friendliness. eThekwini might consider investing in developing or adopting platforms like D-CENT or DECODE, as suggested by Fischli and Muldoon (2024), to facilitate secure and transparent citizen participation.

In addition, it is essential to ensure digital equity by providing digital literacy programs that bridge the digital divide. This will ensure that all citizens, regardless of their socio-economic status, have the skills and access necessary to participate in e-democracy. According to Cohen and Fung (2021), improving digital literacy can significantly enhance democratic engagement. They argue that a well-functioning public sphere offers a locally informed, widespread platform for identifying and addressing issues (Cohen and Fung 2021:28).

3.3.8 Critiques of Digital Citizenship

Critiques levelled against the digital citizenship theory are that it prioritizes human agency and responsibility over structural characteristics that influence online involvement (Johnson, 2023), and that the concept of digital citizenship is frequently overly broad and can be construed in a variety of ways, making it difficult to put into reality (Bolton, 2022).

Furthermore, some academics contend that digital citizenship theory might amplify existing power dynamics and inequalities, because individuals who are already

disadvantaged in society may encounter extra challenges to accessing and participating in digital environments (Hernandez, 2021).

The impact of social media on e-democracy in eThekwini Metropolitan Municipality administration and service delivery has been mixed. On the one hand, social media has been used to increase openness and accountability, as well as to improve communication and engagement and to encourage involvement and cooperation. On the other hand, social media has been used to disseminate disinformation, promote violence, and harass and intimidate residents.

In general, social media has had a good impact on e-democracy in terms of governance and service delivery within the eThekwini metropolitan municipality. However, there are still issues that must be dealt with, such as disinformation, encouragement to violence, and public harassment and intimidation.

3.3.8 Theoretical Integration

The researchers aim to integrate the beneficial aspects of the Techno-optimism, Filter Bubble Theory, Digital Citizenship Theory and Decentralised Participatory Democracy (DPD) as well as Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI) theory and other models. This study endeavoured to establish comprehensive frameworks for understanding and improving electronic democratic engagement and governance.

(a) Techno-optimism Theory suggests that technology, particularly social media, can enhance political knowledge, public involvement, and government responsiveness (Groshek and Tandoc Jr., 2018). It proposes that social media platforms can improve e-democracy by facilitating information access and civic engagement (Zhang, 2019). However, critics argue that this viewpoint may overlook social, economic, and political realities that could limit its effectiveness (Bimber, et al, 2012).

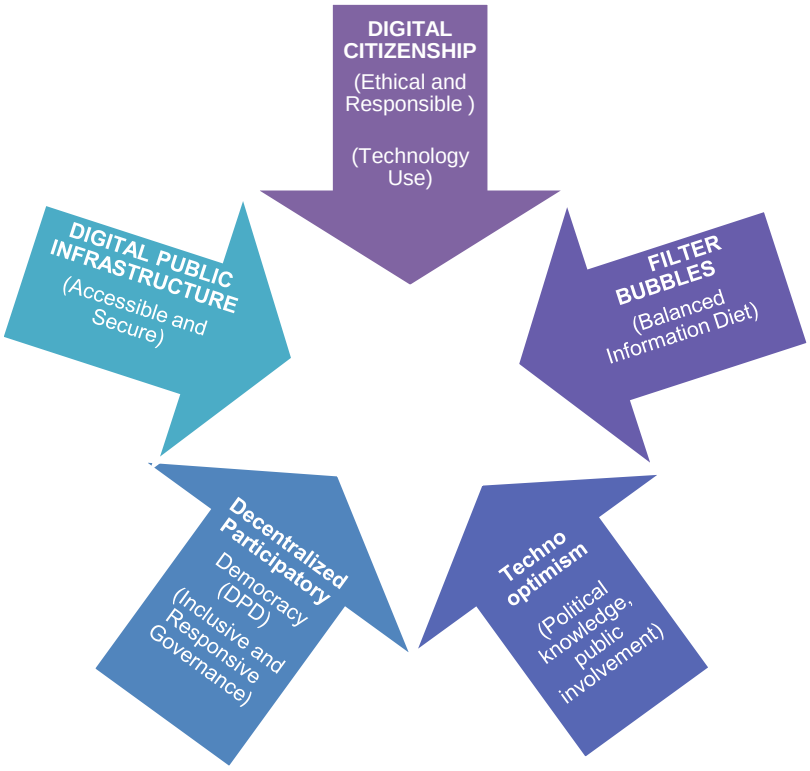
(b) The Filter Bubble Theory (Pariser, 2011) suggests that social media algorithms create personalised information environments, potentially limiting exposure to diverse viewpoints and thus reinforce existing biases. While this phenomenon has been criticized for creating echo chambers, it can also be utilised positively by incorporating diverse and critical information within these "bubbles," promoting a more balanced information diet.

(c) Digital Citizenship Theory (Smith and Jones, 2023) emphasizes the importance of ethical and responsible technology use. Integrating this theory ensures that users are not only aware of their digital rights and responsibilities but are also equipped to engage constructively in digital platforms.

(d) Decentralised Participatory Democracy (DPD) (Pateman, 2012 in Fischli and Muldoon, 2024) advocates for distributed decision-making power, encouraging local and direct citizen involvement in governance. By integrating DPD with digital platforms, the study envisions enhanced participatory mechanisms that empower individuals at the grassroots level, making governance more inclusive and responsive.

(e) Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI) (Noveck, 2015) refers to the foundational digital systems that support public services and civic engagement. Effective DPI ensures that the technological infrastructure is accessible, secure, and capable of supporting large-scale participatory initiatives.

Diagram 1: Integrating the Theories for Enhanced Digital Democracy



Source: Researcher Own Data

Diagram 1.2: Comparative Analysis of Theories

Theory	Key Concept	Positive Integration Approach	References
Techno optimism	Political knowledge, public involvement	Enhances civic engagement and government responsiveness	Groshek and Tandoc Jr., 2018
Filter Bubble Theory	Personalised information environments	Inclusion of diverse, critical information	Pariser, 2011
Digital Citizenship Theory	Ethical technology use	Education on digital rights and responsibilities	Smith and Jones, 2023
Decentralised Participatory Democracy (DPD)	Local involvement in governance	Enhanced participatory mechanisms	Fischli and Muldoon, 2024
Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI)	Foundational digital systems	Accessible and secure infrastructure	Noveck, 2015

Source: Researcher own data

This research synthesizes multiple theoretical frameworks to present a holistic perspective on digital democratic participation. Techno-optimism is recognised for promoting greater civic involvement and enhancing governmental accountability and responsiveness. Conversely, Filter Bubbles are noted for both their potential drawbacks and their ability to create targeted areas of engagement. Ensuring these areas encompass diverse and critical content can mitigate the risks of misinformation and polarisation. Digital Citizenship theory ensures that users possess the requisite skills and norms for responsible participation.

In addition, the integration of Decentralised Participatory Democracy ensures that digital platforms facilitate genuine participatory governance, empowering citizens to engage directly with decision-making processes at all levels. Finally, robust Digital Public Infrastructure ensures that these participatory mechanisms are supported by secure, accessible, and scalable technological foundations.

In conclusion, this integrated theoretical framework provides a comprehensive approach to strengthening digital democracy. It leverages the strengths of each theory and addresses their limitations through intentional design and implementation strategies. This holistic approach aims to create a more inclusive, responsive, and resilient democratic environment in the digital age.

3.4 Chapter Summary

This chapter delved into the theoretical frameworks underpinning the study and examined how social media influences democratic governance and service delivery. The chapter employed three primary theories: Techno-optimism, Filter Bubble Theory, and Digital Citizenship Theory, while incorporating concepts like Decentralised Participatory Democracy (DPD) and Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI) to provide a nuanced analysis of digital democracy in governance.

Therefore, Techno-optimism suggests that technology, particularly social media, enhances democratic participation by facilitating access to information and fostering engagement. In the context of eThekwini Metropolitan Municipality, the theory posits that social media platforms can bridge the gap between citizens and government by enabling feedback mechanisms and amplifying marginalised voices. Advocates like Bimber and Flanagin argue for the potential of these platforms to bolster transparency and accountability. However, critics highlight challenges such as misinformation, polarisation, and the risk of "slacktivism," which undermines meaningful civic participation.

However, introduced by Eli Pariser, the Filter bubble theory argues that social media algorithms create personalised content ecosystems, or "bubbles," which reinforce users' biases and limit exposure to diverse perspectives. Moreover, the study discusses the implications of this phenomenon for governance in eThekwini. For instance, echo chambers may reduce accountability by isolating citizens from critical viewpoints. Therefore, strategies such as promoting media literacy and enhancing algorithmic transparency are proposed to mitigate the negative effects.

Furthermore, the Digital Citizenship Theory emphasizes ethical, responsible technology use and active digital participation. It frames social media as a tool for fostering civic engagement, increasing transparency, and enhancing governance. The study highlights its relevance to the eThekwini Metropolitan Municipality, noting the transformative role of digital citizenship in participatory democracy. However, challenges such as digital inequality and the spread of disinformation are acknowledged.

Moreover, the study integrates concepts of Decentralised Participatory Democracy and Digital Public Infrastructure as well as models to expand on how digital tools can empower citizens. DPD emphasizes grassroots participation, while DPI focuses on creating inclusive and transparent digital ecosystems. Projects like D-CENT and DECODE illustrate how digital platforms can enhance citizen involvement in governance by fostering transparency and direct engagement.

However, while these theories and models provide robust frameworks, they are not without limitations. Critics of Techno-optimism and Filter Bubble Theory caution against oversimplified views of social media's role in democracy. Digital Citizenship Theory is critiqued for its broad scope and potential to amplify existing inequalities. The chapter underscores the importance of addressing these challenges through measures like media literacy, equitable access to technology, and fostering diverse online dialogues.

In summary, this chapter presented a comprehensive theoretical foundation for analysing the role of social media in e-democracy and governance. By integrating diverse frameworks and addressing their limitations, the chapter offered a nuanced perspective on how eThekwini can leverage digital tools to foster a more inclusive, participatory, and effective democratic system

CHAPTER FOUR

4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

4.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines the research methodology employed to examine the role of social media in shaping e-democracy, governance, and service delivery within the eThekwini Metropolitan Municipality. Guided by a pragmatic paradigm, the study adopts a mixed methods design to reconcile objective quantitative measurements of social media usage with qualitative insights into governance challenges. This approach aligns with the research questions, which demand both statistical generalizability and contextual depth (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). By integrating quantitative and qualitative methods, the study mitigates the limitations of either approach in isolation, leveraging their complementary strengths while minimizing potential weaknesses (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004). As Lincoln and Guba (cited in Johnson & Christensen, 2004) emphasize, mixed methods reduce interpretive risks, ensuring a more robust and holistic understanding of the research problem.

The chapter begins by detailing the sequential explanatory strategy, which involves collecting and analysing quantitative data first, followed by qualitative data to explicate statistical findings. It then discusses the purposive sampling techniques used to capture diverse perspectives from social media users, municipal officials, and stakeholders. The reliability and validity of research instruments, including surveys, interviews, and document analysis, are critically examined to establish methodological rigor. Ethical considerations, such as informed consent, confidentiality, and data anonymization, are also addressed to underscore the study's adherence to ethical standards.

Ultimately, the chapter describes the data analysis framework, combining statistical techniques, (for instance regression analysis) with thematic analysis of qualitative narratives. This dual approach enables a nuanced exploration of how social media

influences democratic engagement, governance practices, and service delivery outcomes. By transparently documenting the methodology, this chapter ensures reproducibility and reinforces the credibility of the study's findings, setting the stage for the presentation and discussion of results in subsequent chapters.

4.2 Research philosophy

The sampling frame included eThekwini's 3.8 million residents, with an estimated 1.2 million active social media users (Stats SA, 2022). This research focused on pragmatism and empiricism as philosophical perspectives in this research project. Pragmatism is a research philosophy that stresses the practical implications and utility of research results. Therefore, it acknowledges the dynamic and context-dependent character of knowledge and encourages academics to explore diverse viewpoints as well as real-world ramifications (Creswell, 2021). Using a pragmatic approach, the researcher bridged the gap between theory and practice, striving for research outputs that are relevant and practical to the unique context of e-democracy and governance in the eThekwini metropolitan municipality. Empiricism, on the other hand, is a research philosophy that stresses the significance of sensory experience and observation as the foundation of knowledge. It implies that in contrast to depending primarily on theoretical or abstract thinking, knowledge should be acquired from facts and practical data (Babbie, 2020). Using an empirical approach in the mix methodology convergence allowed the researcher to collect and analyse data from social media platforms, government records, and other relevant sources to investigate the influence of social media on e-democracy and service delivery within the eThekwini metropolitan municipality. In particular, research methods are described with reference to the target population, sample, sampling method, data collection and the instrument used (Burns and Grove, 2007). The main data collection instruments in this study were questionnaires and interviews.

4.2 Research approach

The method of investigation was both deductive and inductive. Deductive reasoning is drawing logical conclusions from pre-existing ideas or hypotheses. It is often used in

research to test hypotheses and ideas by collecting empirical data. According to Creswell (2014), deductive reasoning is an important component of quantitative research in which hypotheses are evaluated statistically. In contrast, inductive thinking includes generalising based on observations and evidence. In qualitative research, it is frequently used to develop new ideas and hypotheses. Inductive reasoning, according to Denzin and Lincoln (2017), is founded on the premise that the researcher is open to new ideas and perspectives that may arise from the data.

As a result, employing both deductive and inductive reasoning in this study offered a thorough grasp of the study topic. Hence, according to Bryman (2016), integrating both methodologies can result in a more robust and thorough data analysis since it allows for the testing of current hypotheses as well as the generation of new insights. As a result, the researcher employed a balanced approach that combines theory testing and theory development by incorporating both deductive and inductive reasoning within the mix methodology convergence, resulting in a comprehensive understanding of the influence of social media on e-democracy, governance, and service delivery within the eThekwini metropolitan municipality.

4.2.1 Ontology of Pragmatism

Pragmatism dismisses the concept of a singular, fixed reality, proposing instead that reality is dynamic and shaped by human experiences and interactions (Leavy, 2017). This perspective aligns with the study's examination of the evolving role of social media in e-democracy, where the reality of governance and citizen engagement is context-dependent and influenced by the actions of various stakeholders. As Leavy highlights, pragmatism prioritises utility, therefore, proves effective in a specific context, over abstract truths. Therefore, this ontological stance underpins the study's acknowledgment of social media's varying impact across political parties, public officials, and residents in eThekwini.

4.3.1 Epistemology of Pragmatism

Moreover, according to Leavy (2017), pragmatism places a strong emphasis on knowledge derived from practical outcomes, validating this knowledge through its relevance to real-world issues. Equally, this study employs a mixed-methods approach, which combines quantitative surveys to test hypotheses with qualitative interviews that explore contextual nuances, reflecting this epistemological stance.

Furthermore, Leavy (2017:13) notes that pragmatists *"focus on the outcomes of action,"* which aligns with the study's objective of generating actionable insights aimed at enhancing governance. For instance, integrating empirical data, such as assessments of service delivery perceptions, with qualitative themes like residents' narratives illustrates pragmatism's commitment to producing useful knowledge that effectively bridges theory and practice.

4.3.2 Axiology of Pragmatism

Ultimately, pragmatism acknowledges that research is fundamentally value-laden, with ethical considerations significantly shaping the choice of methods and interpretations (Leavy, 2017). Thus, the study's commitment to tackling societal issues, such as enhancing democratic participation, underscores pragmatism's emphasis on social relevance. Leavy (2017:28) asserts that ethical research necessitates principles of "*cultural sensitivity"* and "*participant collaboration,"* which are reflected in this study's approach to informed consent, confidentiality, and prioritising the well-being of residents. Moreover, the pragmatic focus on practical solutions further emphasizes the study's aim to adapt findings to the specific needs of the eThekwini Municipality.

4.3 Research design

The study research design was a sequential explanatory design in a mixed methodology convergence known as triangulation design. This design includes using quantitative research to collect preliminary data, followed by qualitative research to give a more in-

depth understanding and explanation of the quantitative findings (Creswell, 2014; Creswell and Creswell, 2018). This convergent strategy entailed gathering both quantitative and qualitative data at the same time and then have them merged during the analysis phase.

Due to an unknown number of social media users in eThekwini municipality, a survey targeting 348 respondents who are residents of the eThekwini metropolitan municipality during the quantitative phase to assess their use of social media platforms as well as their perceptions of e-democracy, governance, and service delivery was conducted. However, the researcher obtained 414 quantitative respondents. Hence, according to Babbie, (2020); Field, (2018) statistical approaches such as descriptive statistics, correlation analysis, and regression analysis can be used to examine this data.

Furthermore, according to Teddlie and Tashakkori (2018), concurrent triangulation design can be very beneficial in mixed methods research. The researcher used this method to gather both quantitative and qualitative data at the same time, then analysed the data individually before combining the results. When the research issue is difficult and necessitates a more in-depth analysis, this approach came in handy. Furthermore, semi-structured interviews with important stakeholders were done in a qualitative phase, like Denzin and Lincoln (2018), Patton (2015). Qualitatively, 20 participants from eThekwini municipality government officials and 10 political parties were utilised to gather insights into their opinions on the impact of social media on e-democracy and its impact on governance and service delivery. Thematic analysis may be used to establish recurring themes and patterns in qualitative data (Braun and Clarke, 2019; Nowell et al., 2017). Thus, the research problem determined the methods and procedures: the types of measurement, the sampling, the data collection, and the data analysis was employed for the study in question. Furthermore, a concurrent triangulation approach enables researchers to cross-validate their findings and detect patterns and linkages amongst data sets (Creswell and Creswell, 2018). This method resulted in a more solid and dependable judgments and suggestions.

In a nutshell the sequential explanatory design provided a thorough understanding of the interaction between social media, e-democracy, governance, and service delivery within the eThekwini metropolitan municipality. This strategy offers a more comprehensive picture of the study issue by mixing quantitative and qualitative methodologies (Creswell and Plano Clark, 2018; Johnson and Onwuegbuzie, 2004). These respondents were chosen on the bases of providing a wide representation of the Residents of eThekwini Metropolitan Municipality, Local Government Officials and Community Leaders. The layout below is worth noting.

Paradigm. 3: Unit of analysis

Population type	Research Method	Sample Size	Respondent Type and Reason for Selection	Type of Data	Data Collection Instrument	Data Analysis Technique
Social media users	Quantitative and Survey	414 respondents	Random Sampling ensured representativeness across demographic groups (age, gender, education level)	Survey responses on social media engagement, perceptions, and impact on e-democracy, governance, and service delivery	Online Survey Questionnaire and self-administrated	Descriptive statistics, inferential analysis And Thematic analysis, content analysis
Public officials	Qualitative Interviews/Focus Groups	20 participants	Purposive Sampling to obtain diverse perspectives and experiences related to social media's influence on e-democracy	In-depth insights, experiences, and perceptions regarding social media and its impact on e-democracy, governance,	Semi-structured interview guide and focus group protocol	Thematic analysis, content analysis

				and service delivery		
Political Parties	Qualitative Interviews	10 participants	Purposive Sampling to obtain diverse perspectives and experiences related to social media's influence on e-democracy	In-depth insights, experiences, and perceptions how political parties use social media as a tool for political campaigning and advocacy.	Semi-structured Interview Guide	Thematic analysis, content analysis
Quantitative and Qualitative Data Merging	Convergent Analysis	444	Integration of quantitative and qualitative findings to provide a comprehensive understanding of the influence of social media on e-democracy, governance, and service delivery	Combined quantitative and qualitative data	Comparative analysis, triangulation, data interpretation	Synthesis of findings, identification of patterns

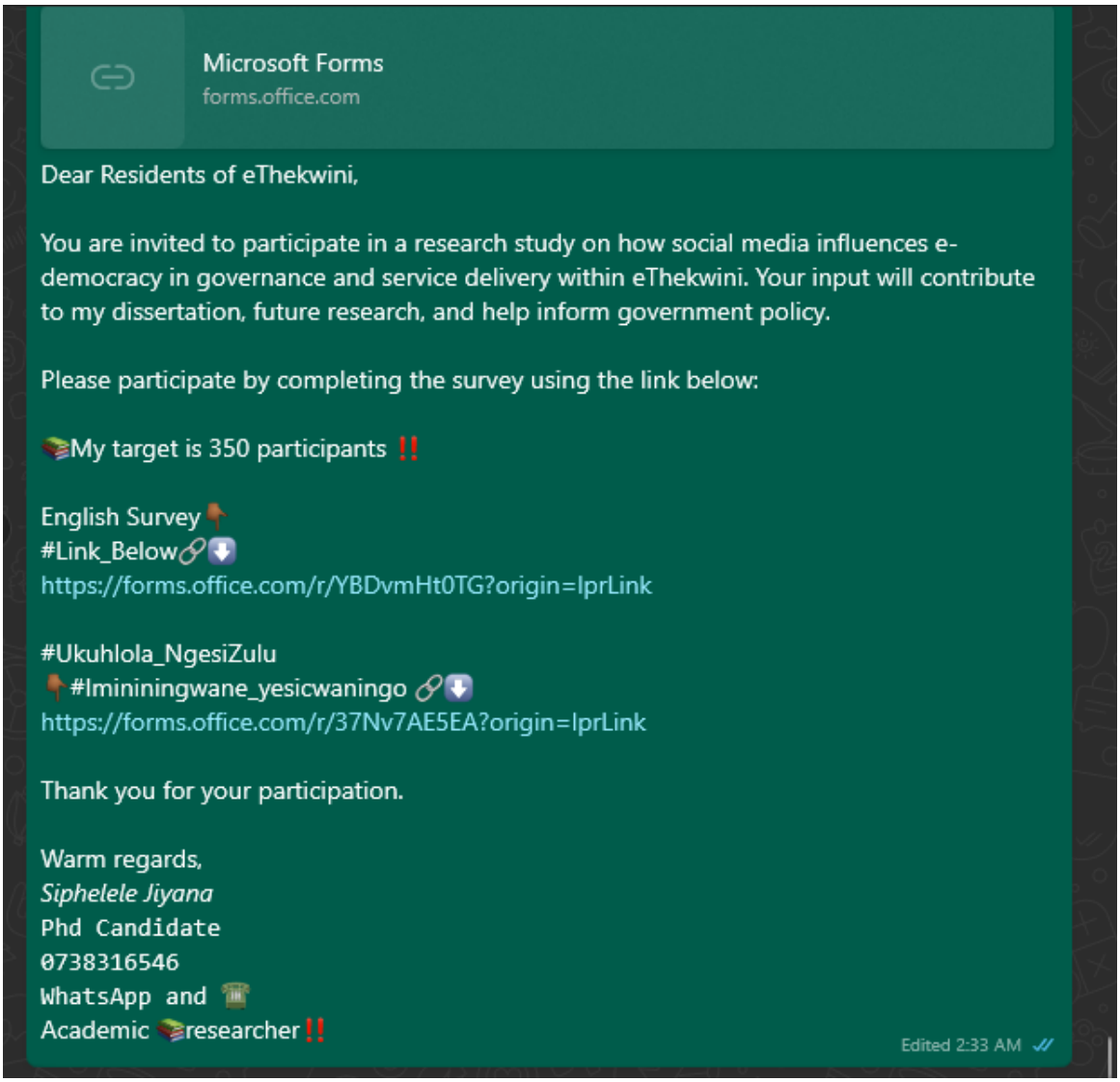
I. Social media users

The social media users of eThekwini Metropolitan Municipality are an intriguing and essential group to investigate. Hence, according to Field (2020) researchers use descriptive statistics to offer a clear and succinct overview of the data, as a result helps them to comprehend the essential characteristics and patterns contained in the dataset. Hence, this aided in the understanding and sharing of the study findings by arranging and presenting data in a relevant manner. In contrast to that, according to Agresti and Finlay (2020) inferential analysis is drawing conclusions or making assumptions about a population based on a sample of data and it employs statistical tools to evaluate sample data to draw generalisations or predictions about the wider population. Thus, it entails

estimating population parameters, testing hypotheses, determining associations, and making predictions based on sample data.

In a nutshell, a survey using descriptive statistics and inferential analysis work hand in hand to create a formidable toolset for the researcher to investigate, summarise, and derive relevant insights from their data. Additionally, online random sampling was employed by the researcher. According to Bethlehem et al (2021) random sample techniques are usually used in online random surveys to guarantee that participants were chosen in an impartial and representative manner from the target population. The researcher assumes that randomisation reduces the possibility of selection bias and enhances the generalisability of the survey results. However, even though the digital population was randomised, it was focused on eThekwini digital user [resident] and divided to local social network groups and pages. For instance, WhatsApp, Facebook and LinkedIn were used to share research questionnaires.

Illustration 1: Survey invitation



Above is the Survey invitation that was shared to the abovementioned social media platforms.

Hence, the survey results were statistically evaluated, thematic analysed and content analysed to offer a description of the information gathered. This survey data was used by the researcher to acquire a better understanding on social media engagement, perceptions, and impact on e-democracy, governance, and service delivery by the digital resident users of eThekwini Metropolitan Municipality.

II. Public officials

The inclusion of a focus group of eThekwini Metropolitan Municipality public official's social media administrators enabled for an in-depth investigation of their experiences, views, and attitudes concerning the role of social media on e-democracy, particularly in respect of governance and service delivery. Hence, their participation assisted in capturing a variety of perspectives, providing a more comprehensive knowledge of the research issues. Moreover, their contributions enriched the data obtained and thereby increase the validity and robustness of the research findings. The researcher was interested in studying the municipality official's perspectives and experiences related to social media's influence on e-democracy. It was against this backdrop that the researcher assumed a purposive sampling method that was suitable for obtaining diverse perspectives and experiences related to social media's influence on e-democracy.

Moreover, the descriptive qualitative research method proved to be an effective way for examining textual data using content analysis and that this strategy entailed analysing and interpreting data gathered from interviewing 30 respondents (20 employed officials and 10 political parties), and other sources to establish patterns, themes, and professional dashboard insights of the social media platforms that they use. Consequently, according to Mackey and Gass (2015) in a qualitative research, content analysis is a technique for analysing textual data and entails looking for reoccurring themes, patterns, and meanings in the text. As a result, this method was used to examine social media posts, including hashtags and other types of content utilised by eThekwini municipal government officials to interact with the people of eThekwini to promote their government programs and interacting with their respective audience as well as their experience about content and negative online commentary that is in contradiction to the municipality service delivery matters.

III. Political parties

Social media is frequently used by political party's social media administrators to interact with potential voters and promote their programs. As a researcher interested in studying

how political party activists use social media in their campaigns and to advocate public accountability, a semi-structured interview guide was done effectively in gathering data from research respondents. According to Braun and Clarke (2013) interview analysis was used to acquire more detailed information about the respondents' experiences and opinions. Hence, a semi-structured interview guide was used by the researcher to acquire more specific information from the research respondents for interview analysis.

Subsequently, the descriptive qualitative research approach was a useful tool for examining textual data through content analysis. The researcher assumed, an open-ended question in the semi-structured interview guide that allowed the respondents to provide more thorough comments and insights regarding their use of social media in their political campaigns. For example, the researcher inquired on social media platforms that respondents use, as well as how they utilise social media to communicate with potential voters, and the problems they have when using social media in their campaigns, service delivery and holding the government accountable in matters of governance. With reference to Creswell (2014:188) semi-structured interviews allowed the researcher to have a fluid discourse the respondents while ensuring that specific subjects were and resulted in a comprehensive understanding of the respondents' experiences and opinions.

The overall use of a semi-structured interview guide was intended to provide significant insights into how political party activists use social media in their campaigns and as an advocacy utility tool. Additionally, the semi-structured interview guide by the researcher, provided a more specific and informed insights with reference to respondents' experiences and viewpoints.

Furthermore, the researcher utilised hashtag# analysis, survey analysis, and interview analysis to improve the effectiveness of textual content analysis. According to Hampton et al. (2013), qualitative hashtag# research can uncover collective identities and cultural themes that emerge from the use of hashtags on social media platforms. Similarly,

Kozinets et al. (2015) contends that researching hashtags can provide insight into the social networks and communities that arise around specific themes or issues.

As a result, the researcher made use of the hashtag analysis to establish the most used hashtags #, which could assist in understanding the themes that are most relevant by digital participants. Rambukkana's (2015:26) book "Hashtag Publics: The power and politics of discursive networks" is another useful resource. The author contends that hashtags have evolved into crucial instruments for social, political action as well as public officials, and that qualitative hashtag research provided light on how social movements and political campaigns utilise hashtags to organise support and impact public debate. The researcher explored how qualitative hashtag research might give insights into how social movements and political campaigns utilise hashtags to organise support and impact public debate. This method is particularly beneficial for examining the neutrality of the social media activists into holding the government accountable and service delivery agenda echoed by municipal officials on the social media in communicating to the eThekwini residents as well as the biasness of political party's agenda setting on their campaigns and manifestos.

d) Convergent analysis

An integration of quantitative and qualitative findings in a joint display provides a thorough picture of the study issue and provides a comprehensive understanding of the influence of social media on e-democracy, governance, and service delivery. This method entails merging data, quotations, or visual representations to produce a coherent presentation of the findings (Creswell and Clark, 2017). Therefore, the comparative analysis, triangulation, data interpretation and collaborative display have all for comparisons, contrasts, and synthesis of the data and allowed for a more in-depth knowledge of the impact of social media on e-democracy within the eThekwini Metropolitan Municipality. This has resulted into synthesised findings and the identification of patterns.

4.4 Data collection method

The following are the research instruments that were used to collect information for this study:

4.4.1 Primary sources

4.4.1.1 Design of instrument

The focus of this study project looked at the influence of social media on e-democracy in relation to governance and service delivery within the eThekwini Metropolitan Municipality. A combination of quantitative and qualitative research tools was used to conduct a thorough examination. This section examined the selection of acceptable research tools and justifies their usage. To collect the quantitative and the qualitative data, the online survey included both closed-ended and open-ended questions.

Moreover, the interview guide included semi-structured questions. The survey questions were aimed at assessing the social media use for e-democracy, attitudes about social media, and the influence of social media on democratic participation. The interview questions were open-ended, with the goal of gathering detailed information on respondents' experiences and viewpoints on social media and e-democracy.

4.4.1.2 Questionnaires

In this study, online survey questionnaires and self-administrated methods were issued to local resident in the eThekwini Metropolitan Municipality to analyse their perspectives and experiences about the effects of social media on e-democracy. According to Dillman, Smyth, and Christian (2014:25) online survey questionnaires provide various benefits, including efficiency, cost-effectiveness, and the capacity to reach a geographically scattered community. The researcher was able to gather a significant amount of data, with a total of 414 respondents. This included 356 online questionnaires and 58 self-administered questionnaires. This approach proved to be effective in obtaining numerical data from a substantial sample size.

De Vos, Strydom, Fouche and Delport (2011:187) adds that the basic objective of a questionnaire is perspective to obtain facts and opinions about a phenomenon from people who are informed on the issues. Hence, consultation with research experts was done at all levels of the questionnaire design.

Moreover, to control the administration of questionnaires, Neuman (2006:299) asserts that the advantage of self-administrated questionnaires in a survey is by far the cheapest, and it can be conducted by a single researcher. As a result, the researcher decided to personally distribute the questionnaires to provide a detailed explanation of the study's objectives to the respondents. Specifically, the questionnaires were distributed to carefully selected focus groups consisting of active social media users in eThekwini.

These focus groups included users of WhatsApp groups, various Facebook groups and pages, Instagram, and LinkedIn. This approach aimed to gather comprehensive insights from individuals who actively engage with different social media platforms within the eThekwini area.

The researcher structured the questionnaires in two sections; Section A consisted of personal data or rather the profile of the respondents and Section B consisted of questions that listed the knowledge of the respondent’s involvement on status on social media, and thus focused on the views, and the attitudes of the respondents. It was also clear to the researcher that one section would not achieve the entire researcher’s goal. Thus, the researcher also used relevant literature study as basis for the content of the questionnaire.

Furthermore, the targeted population for data collection was random social media users. Therefore, the researcher made use of research-approved methods such as a Likert scale that required the respondents to score their agreement with a statement on a range of 1 to 5, with 1 extremely effective and 5 very ineffective.

Additionally, mixed with ranked questions assessment was prompted to request respondents to rate a series of things in order of their preference. The researcher utilised ranking questions to evaluate preferences and priorities, enabling the administration of

414 questionnaires in a quantitative manner. Notably, within these questionnaires, 15 optional questions allowed the respondents to provide explanations for their choices. Each of the 414 quantitative questionnaires was meticulously recorded, including the qualitative responses. On average, the respondents took 16 minutes and 49 seconds to complete the questionnaire, with several individuals taking more than 63 minutes and 12 seconds to finish. Moreover, the researcher used the Microsoft online form for research survey arrangement as well as fifty-eight (58) self-administered questionnaires, that were randomly selected from EThekwini municipality residents, in churches, taxi rank and in public community gatherings.

4.4.1.3 Qualitative focus group interviews

The study accepted that qualitative focus groups are an effective research tool for gathering detailed ideas and opinions from participants. Therefore, focus groups enable members to engage in participatory conversations, resulting in rich and nuanced data (Krueger and Casey, 2015:61). Moreover, focus groups were held in this study, with persons with expertise in e-democracy, governance, and service delivery within the eThekwini Metropolitan Municipality. This method provided for a more in-depth knowledge of the study topic's subjective experiences, attitudes, and opinions. The purpose of a focus group was to promote self-disclosure among the respondents. Its purpose is to know what people think and feel (Krueger and Casey, 2000:7). The researcher interviewed groups through interaction to produce and gather more information. Additionally, focus groups can generate complex information at a low cost in a minimum amount of time (Kroll, Barbour and Harris 2007: 691). Consequently, this was prepared to examine, in detail, how the group members think and feel about a subject matter.

In the case of this study the researcher purposefully chose twenty [20] eThekwini municipality public officials from the different communications units that are entrusted with the digital communication to the public. These officials administer the eThekwini municipality social media platforms as one of their public engagement strategy, for different purposes involved in different platforms. This was done to establish the kind of

advantages and disadvantages that they were or are experiencing in their respective mobilisation participation and engagements outcomes.

The researcher carefully selected eThekwini municipality officials from various communications departments based on their availability and extensive experience in managing the municipality's digital communications. These officials, who handle both public engagement and broadcasting through online social media platforms, were chosen to provide valuable insights into their professional involvement and experiences.

Furthermore, the researcher made a deliberate decision to collect information from a carefully selected focus group consisting of individuals who hold key communication roles within the municipality. The aim was to gain in-depth insights and a thorough understanding from the first-hand experiences and expertise of these individuals, ensuring that the gathered information is comprehensive and valuable for the study.

The abovementioned was heterogeneous groups composed of dissimilar kinds of people with different skills. After using this method of data gathering the researcher used more than one focus group, in order not to rely on a single focus group's information. Focus group interviews was repeated to a second group, in line with Schurink and Schurink, (1998:317) argument in De Vos, Strydom, Fouche and Delport (2011) in respect of information saturation. During the interviews the researcher avoided using structured interviews because he did not want to lead the respondents to a specific direction. The respondents responded to open-ended questions as indicated by Schurink and Schurink. (1998:314). The researcher also created themes, topics and patterns emerging from the interviews' transcripts and avoided simply trying to confirm his own ideas. Additionally, for ease of capturing the interviews the researcher requested permission to record the interview sessions through Microsoft teams. Therefore, the researcher carried a WIFI route connector for all the respondents to download Microsoft teams and connect throughout the interview session. However, not all interview groups consented to recording, since some of the information they share, could compromise their position, hence, the agreement was on the bases of anonymity.

4.4.1.4 Semi-structured interviews

After completing an intensive analysis of the themes and issues emerging from the focus group interviews, the researcher proceeded to conduct detailed face-to-face interviews with the administrators from 10 political parties' social media platforms. The selection of these 10 political parties was based on their performance in the most recent local elections in the eThekwini Municipality. Specifically, the parties included in the interviews were the African National Congress with 96 seats (42.14%), Democratic Alliance with 59 seats (25.95%), Economic Freedom Fighters with 24 seats (10.48%), Inkatha Freedom Party with 16 seats (7.06%), ACTION South Africa with 4 seats (1.93%), Active Citizen Coalition with 2 seats (0.92%), African Christian Democratic Party with 2 seats (0.77%), Abantu Betho Congress with 2 seats (0.71%), African Independent Congress with 2 seats (0.67%), and the African Transformation Movement with 1 seat (0.62%), according to the independent elections commission on 2021 local elections results in eThekwini municipal elections.

While some parties initially showed resistance to participation, the researcher opted for semi-structured interviews, recognizing that such interviews are time-consuming and may be influenced by the passion and involvement of the respondents. Through these semi-structured interviews, the researcher aimed to collect comprehensive perspectives from key informants, including government officials, social media managers, and other significant stakeholders in the political landscape. These interviews allowed for a more in-depth examination of individuals' viewpoints, experiences, and motivations, giving rich and contextualized data (Rubin and Rubin, 2012:56).

Moreover, the researcher also made use of an online streaming interviews through, WhatsApp voice notes information exchange, and telephonic communication for distanced respondents.

4.4.1.5 Procedures

The survey questionnaire was distributed by reaching out to potential respondents online through various social media platforms such as Facebook, LinkedIn, and WhatsApp, as well as through personal networks. As a result, some individuals chose to complete physical, printed copies of the questionnaires. Furthermore, the researcher maintained direct communication with online respondents via mobile phone, WhatsApp, Facebook, and LinkedIn, ensuring prompt responses. Moreover, the researcher consistently carried hard copy questionnaires to facilitate in-person completion and collection of responses from potential respondents. It is important to note that some of the respondents opted to fill out the questionnaire on paper, scanning or photographing their responses and transmitting them to the researcher through WhatsApp for further review and analysis.

Furthermore, the interviews took place through online conferencing, face-to-face meetings and follow up question was done over the phone and via WhatsApp voice note to and from interview respondents at their convenience. Willing respondents were interviewed physically and remotely using video conferencing software called Microsoft teams and some were recorded through the respondents' consent.

4.4.1.6 Piloting

The survey and interview guide underwent a rigorous piloting process with a carefully selected group of the respondents to ensure the clarity and accuracy of the research instruments. This phase aimed to identify any potential concerns and thus refine the questions accordingly. During the piloted interviews, it became apparent that some of the respondents were hesitant to respond, particularly when questions were posed in English. Furthermore, the respondents frequently sought clarification on the survey questions. In response to these challenges, the researcher adapted the approach by providing both online and hard copy questionnaires in both English and IsiZulu and utilised a combination of both languages in the interview schedule. This decision aimed to create a comfortable and accessible environment to facilitate efficient communication between the researcher and the respondents.

Therefore, piloting data collecting techniques and instruments can help researchers optimize their data collection methods and equipment for use, identify attainable difficulties, and assess the feasibility of their processes (Creswell, 2014; Graham, 2012).

4.4.2 Secondary sources

The researcher utilised a variety of sources to gather information, including answered questionnaires, data from the library, the internet, as well as published and unpublished sources such as textbooks, legislation, policies, articles, journals, dissertations, and community profiles. This comprehensive approach ensured a thorough and multifaceted exploration of the subject matter.

4.5 Reliability and validity of the data collection

The survey questionnaire went through a pre-testing phase to ensure its reliability and validity. This phase involved a thorough examination of the questions to establish internal consistency and reliability. Multiple statistical tests were employed, such as Cronbach's alpha, item-total correlation, and Spearman's rank-order correlation, to thoroughly evaluate the internal consistency of the questionnaire. Additionally, the questionnaire's validity was assessed through content validity, which scrutinized how well the questions measured their intended concepts, and construct validity, which delved into the underlying constructs and concepts being measured by the questionnaire.

4.6 Data trustworthiness

The data gathered from the interviews was carefully analysed using a thematic analysis approach to ensure its reliability. Therefore, to confirm the trustworthiness of the qualitative data obtained, a credibility assessment was conducted. Moreover, for the interviews, several measures were taken to guarantee data trustworthiness, that included establishing credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

Furthermore, credibility was established through member checks, which involved verifying the accuracy of the information provided by the respondents. Transferability was ensured by providing a detailed description of the research context and methods. Hence, dependability was upheld by ensuring consistency and replicability in the data collection and analysis procedures. In addition, confirmability was maintained by keeping an audit trail of the research process.

4.7 Data analysis method and procedures

The quantitative data was analysed using descriptive statistics and inferential statistics, such as regression analysis. On the other hand, the qualitative data was examined using thematic analysis to identify common themes and patterns. Therefore, the quantitative data was analysed using descriptive statistics and inferential statistics, while the qualitative data was analysed using thematic analysis.

The administration of interviews was done after the respondents were interviewed. Creswell (2014:155) refers to this kind of survey as cross-sectional which means that the data will be collected at one specific point in time and not over a period. Therefore, all respondents were requested to allocate a time and a date which they were comfortable with to be interviewed as well as a place of their convenience. The interview sessions did not take a long time to be completed.

Furthermore, through the summary, Cronbach's co-efficient alpha was used to determine the intimal consistency reliability for items 1 - 414. According to De Vos, Strydom, Fouche and Delport (2013:177) Cronbach's co-efficient alpha is the commonly used reliability measurement technique. Hence, it is a measure of the extent to which a scale score that allows the researcher to reconstruct accurately the specific data that went into the construction of the scale (Babbie and Mouton, 2004:700). Therefore, after collection of the data, the results were analysed manually, interpreted meaningfully, and presented in the tables and graphs. To evaluate the data acquired through the Likert scale and ranking questions and multiple choice of options in addition a statistical analysis tools such as of Microsoft Excel was used. Hence, according to Field (2018:128) these tools include

statistical operations as well as data visualization capabilities, allowing researchers to investigate response patterns, calculate frequencies, and run statistical tests in quantitative research and statistical software is frequently used to extract relevant insights from the survey data.

4.7.1 Study population and context

The study was concentrated on the context of the influence of e-democratic involvement and service delivery via social media platforms. According to Hulbert, Scott, and Sanders (2020), the study population is the group of persons and entities that match the inclusion criteria and are chosen for investigation in a research project. As Souza and Gomes (2023:193-214) point out, identifying the research population necessitates considering a variety of characteristics such as geographic location, demography, and organisational structure. Therefore, for this study the population was concentrated on residents in the geographical region of the province of Kwa Zulu Natal at eThekwini region metropolitan area, that are using social media platforms for service delivery communication and advocacy as well as having a demonstrated commitment to promoting democratic values and participation on social media. The sample technique and recruiting procedure was carefully devised to guarantee that the research population is representative and reflected a range of local municipality social media groups and pages in addition to actives social media individual influencers operating in the municipality.

However, the unit of analysis is not limited to eThekwini rather it is more aimed at tracking down 3 types of identified social media active user groups of residents who demonstrate democratic characteristics on social media. The unit of analysis was separated on the bases of the following:

(a) Social media users – civic organisations, policy influencer, interest group and general residents.
(b) Public officials – communication and public relations personnel.
(c) Political Parties – social media administrators

This was done by the researcher to identify the gap as well as the difference with regards to their perceptions.

4.7.2 Sampling and sampling procedures

The study used purposive sampling and selected individuals with prior expertise in social media e-democracy activities. Data saturation was used to determine the sample size. Most of the respondents were invited through online social media platforms to complete an online survey, while in-depth interviews were requested via telephone and scheduled for face-to-face meetings. The non-probability sampling technique used a purposive style, selecting subjects based on their convenient accessibility and proximity to the researcher.

In the context of this case study, the researcher accurately assembled a comprehensive sample of 444 social media users from EThekwini who willingly took part in the study. To achieve this, the researcher employed qualitative methods to specifically select ten (10) social media administrators from various political parties and an additional twenty (20) public officials.

On the quantitative side, the researcher initially targeted 384 social media users for the survey but was able to obtain responses from 414 individuals. The sampling strategy involved selecting individuals who met specific criteria or propositions linked to the study's objectives, as described by Bryman (2016:215). The overarching goal was to ensure a representative sample that captured a diverse range of perspectives and experiences related to the influence of social media on e-democracy in governance and service delivery within the eThekwini Metropolitan Municipality.

As Martin (2011:113) asserts, sampling involves the selection of research respondents from a larger population and necessitates decisions about which people, settings, event behaviours, and social processes to observe. Hence, the primary concern with sampling is to achieve representativeness, aiming to select a sample that accurately reflects the population from which the researcher intends to draw conclusions.

4.7.3 Purposive sampling

Purposive sampling was used, as Martin (2011:138) outlines that purposive sampling is not dependent only on the available and willingness to participate, but also on cases where a population is typically selected.

In this study, the researcher deliberately identified certain local social media users who are active on social media platforms. These users were chosen because of their knowledge about which platforms to use and why. Additionally, the researcher specifically sought out political party administrators who are well-informed about how social media can contribute to mobilisation and campaigns. They were able to explain their target audiences and reasons for targeting them. Lastly, the researcher also included public officials from the eThekwini municipality who have the knowledge and capacity to use social media professionally. They were able to provide insight into the type of engagement and audience they attract through their social media presence. The selected sample of respondents provided valuable answers to the researcher's questions due to their strategic positioning in relation to social media operations.

Babbie and Mouton (2004:166) aver that sometimes it is appropriate for the researcher to select their sample because of their own knowledge of the population, its elements and the nature of their research aims. In other words, the sample should be based on the researcher’s judgement and purpose of his or her study.

4.7.4 Limitation of the study

In this study, it is crucial to recognize a limitation related to language accessibility. The researcher encountered difficulties with the slow completion of questionnaires, prompting them to verbally translate the questionnaire into isiZulu, the predominant language in the EThekwini municipality. This decision aimed to ensure that the survey reached individuals proficient in both English and isiZulu, including those who are active on social media platforms.

The researcher acknowledged that the limitation of a represented broader population was caused by a language barrier. To mitigate this limitation, the researcher had the questionnaire translated into isiZulu. Moreover, the researcher is multilingual with isiZulu, isiXhosa, and English, which also assisted with the translation and administration of the questionnaire. Additionally, the researcher would conduct focus groups or interviews with social media administrators who were not proficient in expressing themselves in English to gather their feedback on the study.

4.8 Ethical considerations and safety in the study

The respondents were not misled on the questionnaires with regards to dishonest motives of the study conducted. Therefore, the research was conducted without giving any false promises to the respondents. It is thus arguable that the study has the potential of benefitting society in its entirety as opposed to benefitting only the individual respondent to the exclusion of significant others. Mouton (2001:238) is of the view that the researcher should have knowledge of the ethics of research which concerns what is wrong and what is right in conducting research, because scientific research is a form of human conduct, and it follows that such conduct must conform to accepted norms and values. Other important ethical issues according to Welman (2005) include competence whereby researchers embark on the use of skill in which they have not been adequately trained. Such conduct is risky as it has the potential of causing not only harm to the subjects but also of abusing the subject's goodwill and thus damage the reputation of the research organisation. Given that the research project involved humans, the basic ethical issues that the university has specified was applied through discussions and demonstrations, for instance; the researcher completed the following:

4.8.1 Informed consent

The researcher had a consent form filled by all the respondents. They were alerted that they were voluntarily participating in the study and if they felt that they no longer wished to participate, they could withdraw from participation at any given time. Informed consent is a phrase often used in law to indicate that the consent a person gives meets certain

minimum standards. Martin (2011:72) clearly states that the researcher must provide potential participants with clear, detailed, and information about the study, its methods, its risks, and benefits, along with assurance of the voluntary nature of participation, and the freedom to refuse or withdraw without penalties. Indeed, an informed consent was given based upon a clear appreciation and understanding of the facts, implications, and future consequences of an action. Upon giving an informed consent, the individuals concerned had adequate reasoning faculties and were in possession of all relevant facts at the time consent was given.

4.8.2 Debriefing

The researcher debriefed the respondents through written or verbal communication. According to Yan and Li (2020), debriefing sessions can be documented and documented for subsequent research. They contend that the use of digital technology, such as audio or video recording, can ease data collecting while also improving the accuracy and completeness of the data gathered. As result, on the attachment is ANNEXTURE B, a debriefing letter, that informed the respondents of the debriefing, and later when the research is executed.

4.8.3 Withdrawal from investigation

The respondents were explicitly informed in writing that they were free to leave the study at any time without penalty. For example, in ANNEXURE B, the researcher remarked thus: "Before we begin, I would like to remind you that your participation was entirely optional, and you can opt out of the research at any time." Your information will be kept confidential and used solely for research purposes." This information was provided in the written informed consent form and was reaffirmed during the debriefing of the oral transcript. The respondents guaranteed that withdrawing their data will have no impact on their connection with the researcher. This entailed contacting the researcher directly using the contact information supplied or sending a formal request via an email. Thus, any requests for data withdrawal were handled immediately by the researcher.

It is notable, however, that there was a point beyond which respondents would be unable to withdraw their data. That moment was usually reached after the data has been evaluated and disseminated. In other words, after the data has been anonymized and aggregated with the data of other respondents since it may be hard to extract individual data points. Furthermore, the researcher properly conveyed this deadline to the respondents and ensured that they understood the timeframe during which they could withdraw their data.

4.8.4 Protection of the respondents

The research respondents were not to be subjected to any harm, be it physical, psychological, or emotional greater than encountered in ordinary life. As a result, the respondents would be made aware that they were not obligated or not forced to take part or answer any questions that they were not comfortable to answer. De Vos, Strydom, Fouche, and Delport (2005:57) argue that the "*subjects can be harmed in a physical or emotional manner*" and Babbie (2004:522) adds that "*the subject can be harmed psychologically in the course of a study.*" Therefore, the researcher was very cautious and in dealing with the respondents.

4.8.5 Confidentiality and Anonymity

The researcher respected the confidentiality of the respondents and others that were involved in the study. Therefore, confidentiality was guaranteed and impartially maintained. Hence, the respondents were informed of this before the study commenced. Confidentiality was that the respondents did not have to disclose their names (Nelson, 2005). According to Babbie (2004), protecting the well-being and interests of the participants is of utmost importance, with a focus on safeguarding their identity. Thus, it was essential to refrain from revealing any survey responses that could potentially cause harm to the respondents. Adhering to this standard was paramount, and the implementation of techniques like anonymity and confidentiality has been instrumental in achieving this objective.

The researcher assured all the respondents that no names of persons would be mentioned in the study and that the information obtained would be treated confidentially and would be used only for the purposes of the study.

4.8.6 Data Protection

To protect the data collected during the research study and ensure its confidentiality, for instance some measures were put in place. The researcher collected data from the respondents which included their demographic information and social media handles. The researcher stored the data on a password-protected computer and in a secure cloud storage system. Additionally, the researcher also obtained data access agreement in place with the respondents which outlines how the data will be used and shared.

The POPI Act requires that the researcher collect, store, and use personal information in a lawful, fair, and transparent manner. Hence the Act also requires that researchers take reasonable steps to protect the security and confidentiality of personal information. By including storage provisions and abiding by the POPI Act requirements, the researchers ensured that the personal information of their participants was protected.

For instance, the researchers in this study complied with the POPI Act as follows:

(a) Identified the purpose for collecting personal information. The researcher was clear about why he was collecting personal information and what he intended do with it.
(b) Obtain consent from participants. The respondents were given the opportunity to consent to the collection and use of their personal information.
(c) Store personal information securely. Personal information was stored in a secure location, such as a password-protected computer and a secure cloud storage system. Therefore, only authorized people have access to the data, and access was limited to the researcher for analysis or processing reasons.
(d) Protect the confidentiality of personal information. Only authorized personnel should have access to personal information. Hence, to access to the data will be required to sign confidentiality agreements, pledging to keep the data secret and to use it solely for the objectives of the research project.

(e) Dispose of personal information securely. Personal information will be disposed of securely when it is no longer needed. For instance, the collected data will only be kept for as long as is required to meet the study goals. When the research project is finished, the data will be safely deleted, and any residual data will be de-identified and saved for future research.

(f) Anonymisation: To protect the participants' privacy, all personally identifying information will be deleted from the data before it is kept or processed. Names, contact information, and any other identifying information that might be used to link the data to an individual participant will be included.

(g) Data sharing: Only approved persons or organisations with a genuine interest in the data will be permitted to share data. Any data given will be de-identified and devoid of any personally identifiable information. The process of exchanging data shall be recorded, and any data sharing agreements will be signed and securely archived.

To summarize, securing the data produced during the research project necessitates a complete set of steps to assure confidentiality, data integrity, and data availability.

4.9 Intellectual property

The researcher acknowledged where the information was extracted. Other than the usual copyright issues, the researcher does not expect any special intellectual property rights to emanate from this research.

4.10 Resources

The researcher, being self-funded, was unable to apply for funding to conduct the study due to age-related restrictions imposed by funding sources. Despite this limitation, all available infrastructure and financial resources were carefully allocated to ensure the success of the research project. A comprehensive approach was taken to gather information, utilising resources such as library archives, online databases, and conducting interviews with a diverse range of organisations. These efforts were instrumental in

acquiring a substantial amount of reliable and pertinent data, contributing to the overall quality and depth of the research findings.

This section outlines the nature of the resources acquired to evaluate the adequacy of the university resources, and steps taken to overcome any identified inadequacies.

Human Resources:

(a) Principal Investigator: The researcher responsible for overseeing and conducting the study.
(b) Research Assistants: The research self-administered, literature review, data collection, analysis, and as well as transcription of interviews.
(c) Participants: classified online active members of the civil society in eThekwini Metropolitan Municipality who were involved in the interviews, surveys, and focus groups. Hence, this includes resident social media users, government officials, and political organisations in eThekwini metropolitan municipality who volunteered to participate in the research.

Technology and Software:

(a) Computer Systems: Access to reliable computing equipment capable of handling data analysis and literature review.
(b) Statistical Software: Tools such as Microsoft excel for data analysis and interpretation as well as Microsoft online forms.
(c) Online Survey Platforms: To design and distribute surveys to the targeted participants.

Data Collection:

(a) Interviews**:** Arrangements for conducting interviews with key stakeholders and representatives from digital online community.
(b) Surveys**:** Development, distribution, and collection of online surveys to gather quantitative data.

(c) Focus Groups: Organisation and facilitation of focus group discussions explored qualitative aspects.

Access to Literature and Research Materials:

Access to relevant literature and databases: This includes access to online academic journals, books, and other publications on e-democracy, social media influence and service delivery.

(a) Academic Databases**:** Subscription to relevant academic databases for access to peer-reviewed articles and research papers.
(b) Online Libraries: Access to e-books, theses, and dissertations related to the topic.
(c) Relevant Reports: Access to reports from government agencies, NGOs, and other relevant organisations.

University Resource Assessment:

The university resources are expected to provide a solid foundation for conducting the research. However, there may be some inadequacies that need to be addressed, including:

(a) Limited Funding: Additional funding may be required to cover expenses related to participant incentives, software licenses, and access to external resources.
(b) Expertise and Guidance: The researcher may need guidance and mentorship from faculty members with expertise in the field of e-democracy, social media, and the fourth industrial revolution.

Steps to Overcome Inadequacies:

To overcome the identified inadequacies, the researcher had to self-fund the research project without any funding.

4.11 Chapter summary

This chapter outlines the comprehensive research methodology employed to investigate the influence of social media on e-democracy, governance, and service delivery within the eThekwini Metropolitan Municipality. By adopting a mixed-methods research approach, the study sought to leverage the complementary strengths of both qualitative and quantitative methodologies to provide a nuanced understanding of the research phenomenon.

The study was underpinned by the philosophical perspectives of pragmatism and empiricism. This philosophy allowed the researcher to bridge the gap between theoretical constructs and practical realities in the context of e-democracy. Complementing this, empiricism advocates for knowledge acquisition through sensory experiences and observation, emphasizing the collection and analysis of data from verifiable sources. These philosophical underpinnings ensured that the study was both theoretically grounded and empirically robust.

The study employed both deductive and inductive reasoning to provide a comprehensive framework for addressing its objectives. A sequential explanatory design, supported by a triangulation strategy, combined quantitative surveys with 414 respondents and qualitative interviews with 30 participants, including municipal officials and political party representatives. These methods offered broad statistical insights and in-depth qualitative exploration.

Moreover, the data collection included online surveys, focus groups with municipal officials, and semi-structured interviews with political representatives. Secondary data from academic literature, government reports, and policy documents provided contextual support. Hence, piloting ensured clarity and inclusivity through bilingual options in English and IsiZulu.

However, purposive sampling targeted social media users, officials, and political representatives, ensuring diverse perspectives. Thus, quantitative data were analysed using descriptive and inferential statistics, while thematic analysis uncovered qualitative

patterns. Therefore, the findings were integrated for a holistic understanding of the research questions.

In contrast, ethical considerations included informed consent, confidentiality, and adherence to the POPI Act. thus, language barriers were mitigated by bilingual tools, while resource constraints were addressed through strategic planning.

In summary, the methodological framework outlined in this chapter underscores the rigor and comprehensiveness of the research design. By means of integrating quantitative and qualitative approaches within a mixed-methods paradigm, the study effectively addressed its objectives and contributed valuable insights into the interplay between social media, e-democracy, governance, and service delivery in eThekwini Metropolitan Municipality.

CHAPTER FIVE

5 QUANTITATIVE DATA ANALYSIS, INTERPRETATION, AND PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS

5.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the findings based on data collected from 414 respondents through questionnaires. The analysis encompasses quantitative approaches, which have been examined, interpreted, and presented to yield new insights.

In this section, the researcher outlines the data analysis derived from the quantitative approach, where insights were gathered using a questionnaire. This analysis is then followed by an exploration of qualitative data offered by the survey respondents, who provided additional insights beyond the multiple-choice selection questions.

According to Saratakos (2005), data preparation comprises checking and editing collected data and ultimately coding them. Coding means systematically recognizing raw data into the format that is machining readable (Kruger and Neuman 2006) in (De Vos, Strydom, Fouche and Delport, 2011). The data which were obtained from this research procedure was analysed as follows:

(a) Firstly, the analysis of the questionnaire information involved coding of four hundred and fourteen (414) questionnaires that were received,
(b) Secondly, the coded data was transferred into a spread sheet of a computer program.
(c) Thirdly, the data was also subjected to computerised statistical analysis called Microsoft Excel to test the correlation between the specific variables in their subdivisions as well as graphs presentation.

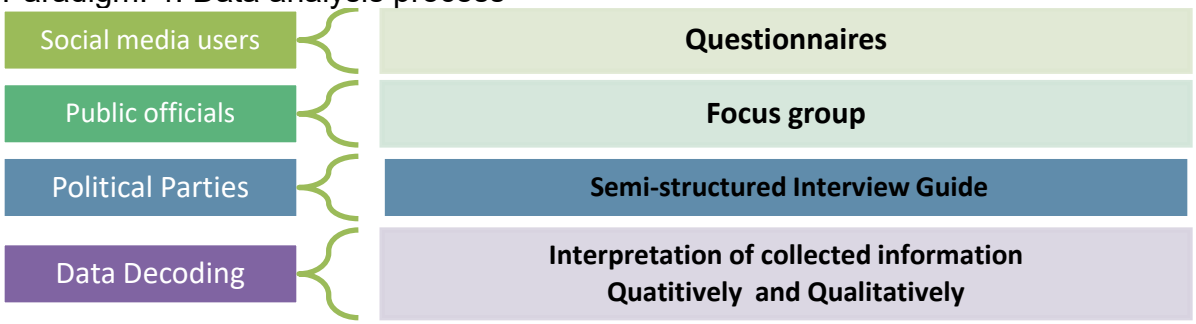
Presentations of the data in simple tables and figures were converted into simple forms of frequency and percentages and interpretation process. To maintain focus on specific research questions as derived from the objectives of the study, the researcher presented the data under different sub-headings.

Furthermore, the research questions were answered in detail using systematic methods of analysing data. The systematic method assisted the researcher to define the themes one-by-one as they emerged from the study.

5.2 Presentation of the data and descriptive statistics

In mixed methods research (MMR), presenting qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods findings is influenced by research purpose, questions, design, and dataset linking goals. The researcher may describe findings in separate subsections or create side-by-side displays of data using tables, graphs, or charts, followed by a mixed methods discussion (Leavy, 2017). Moreover, according to Leedy (2001), statistic procedures basically deal with the handling of quantitative information in a way that renders the information meaningful. Therefore, descriptive research methods were used to report on the distributions of the samples across a wide range of variables in line with Fouche, 2011 in De Vos, (2011). This study, isolated variables to put control over extraneous variables and use statistical procedure to analyse and draw conclusions. In addition, descriptive research was employed with the aim of describing the views of the resident of EThekwini Municipality.

Paradigm. 4: Data analysis process



Source: Researcher own data

Paradigm 4 explores the interactions among social media users, public officials, and political parties, concentrating on their behaviors and strategies as well as the societal impacts of digital communication. The research method had the following objectives:

(a) To understand how social media users engage with political content.
(b) To assess how public officials, utilise social media for governance and communication.
(c) To analyse the outreach strategies of political parties.
(d) To interpret the findings through both qualitative and quantitative analyses.

Chapter 5 employed questionnaires to investigate social media users' perceptions, while Chapter 6 utilised focus groups and semi-structured interviews to explore the experiences of public officials and political parties. Chapter 7 applied thematic analysis and statistical methods to identify patterns within the data.

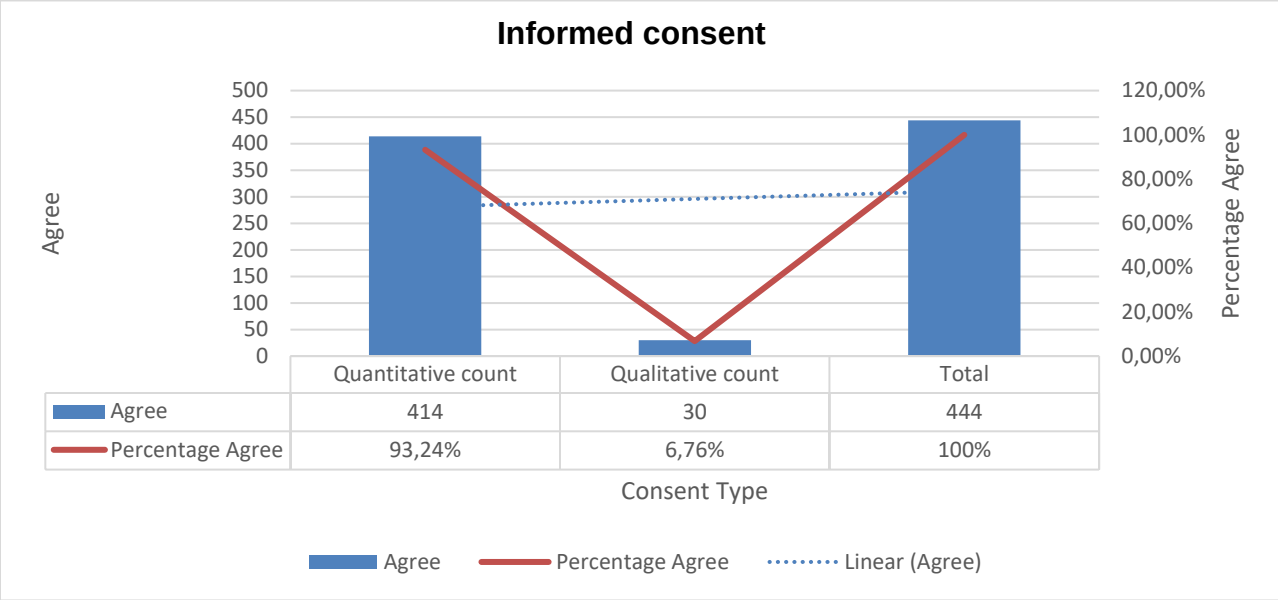
The study sought to deliver valuable insights into effective social media engagement, offering actionable recommendations for the ethical use of social media by individuals, officials, and political parties. Ultimately, it contributes to a deeper understanding of how social media shapes governance and public discourse in contemporary society.

5.3 Consent agreement

5.3.1 Analysis of consent agreements

An analysis of the consent agreement provides valuable insights into the willingness of the respondents to engage in the study. The data indicates that most of the respondents have agreed to provide their consent, which is crucial for upholding the validity and ethical standards of the research.

Figure 1: Informed consent



Source: Researcher own data

Figure 1 demonstrates that all four hundred and forty-four (444) respondents provided consent, resulting in a complete 100% consent rate for the research on the impact of social media on e-democracy in the eThekwini Metropolitan Municipality.

Among these respondents, four hundred and fourteen (414) were part of the quantitative group, representing 93.24% of the total, which highlights the significance of quantitative data. The qualitative group consisted of thirty (30) respondents, accounting for 6.76%, and while smaller in size, it provides valuable insights into the topic.

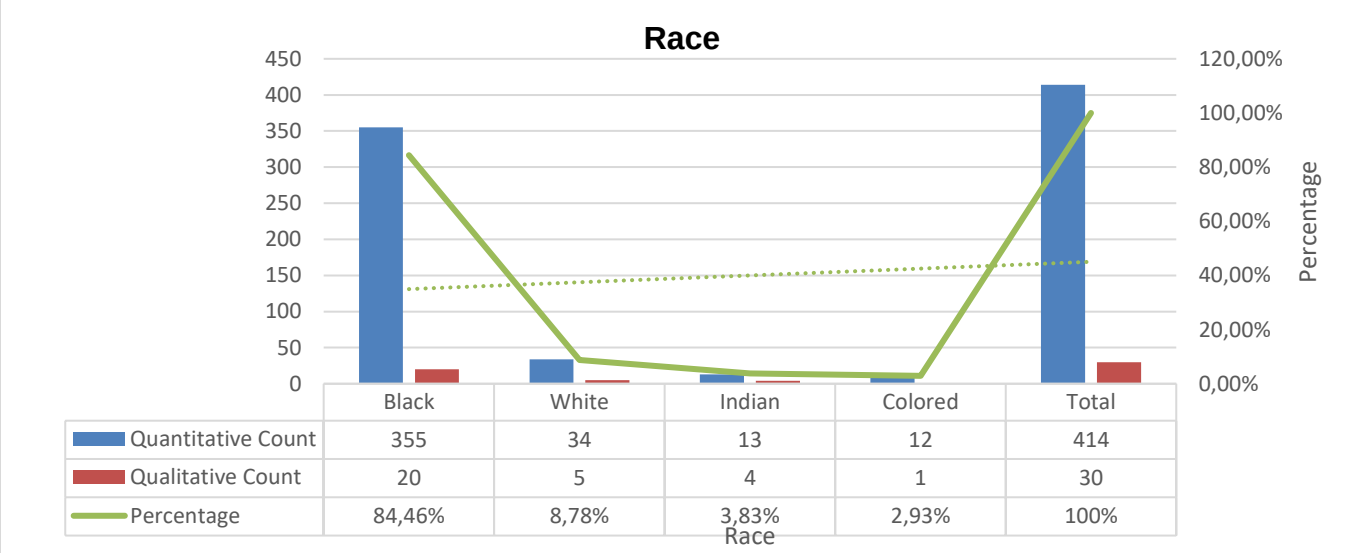
Therefore, the role of social media in improving governance and service delivery within eThekwini Metropolitan Municipality is crucial, as evidenced by the high engagement rate. As a result, public officials and other respondents may view social media as a vital tool for enhancing transparency, accountability, and interaction between the government and citizens in democratic processes.

5.4 Part I: Quantitative survey demographics

Section A [Social media users' responses]

5.4.2 Distribution for social media users' respondents according to race

Figure 2: Race of Social media users



Source: Researcher own data

The illustration in figure 2 emphasizes the engagement of different racial groups in the research, which included three hundred and seventy-five (375) respondents. The Black respondents constituted eighty-four-point six percent (84.46%) of the total, making them the predominant group represented. This substantial presence reflects the demographic makeup of eThekwini and indicates a strong interest in the influence of social media on governance and service delivery.

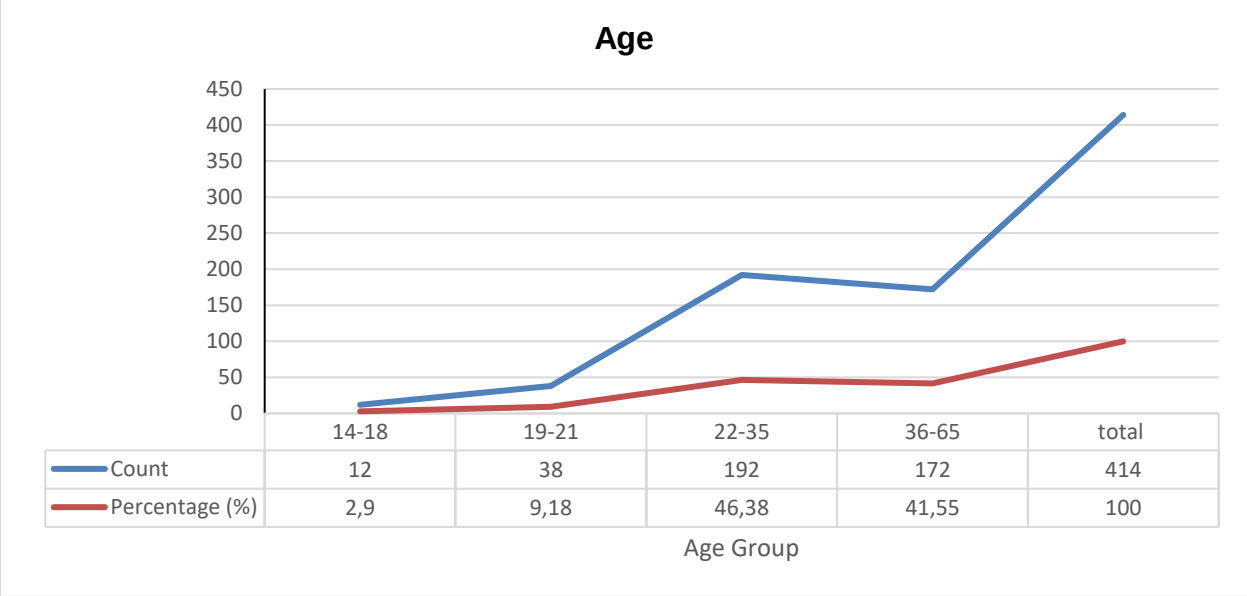
Conversely, thirty-nine (39) White respondents, representing eight-point seventy-eight percent (8.78%), provided valuable qualitative insights into perceptions of governance. Additionally, seventeen (17) Indian respondents comprised three-point eighty-three percent (3.83%) of the sample, contributing perspectives on the role of social media in

promoting inclusive e-governance. Thirteen (13) Coloured respondents accounted for two-point ninety-three percent (2.93%).

While engagement levels varied across these racial groups, the significant participation of the Black respondents suggests that social media may enhance public involvement. This diversity enriches the study, offering a nuanced understanding of how different communities interact with digital platforms for civic engagement.

5.4.3 Distribution for the of social media users' respondents according to age

Figure 3: Age of social media users



Source: Researcher own data

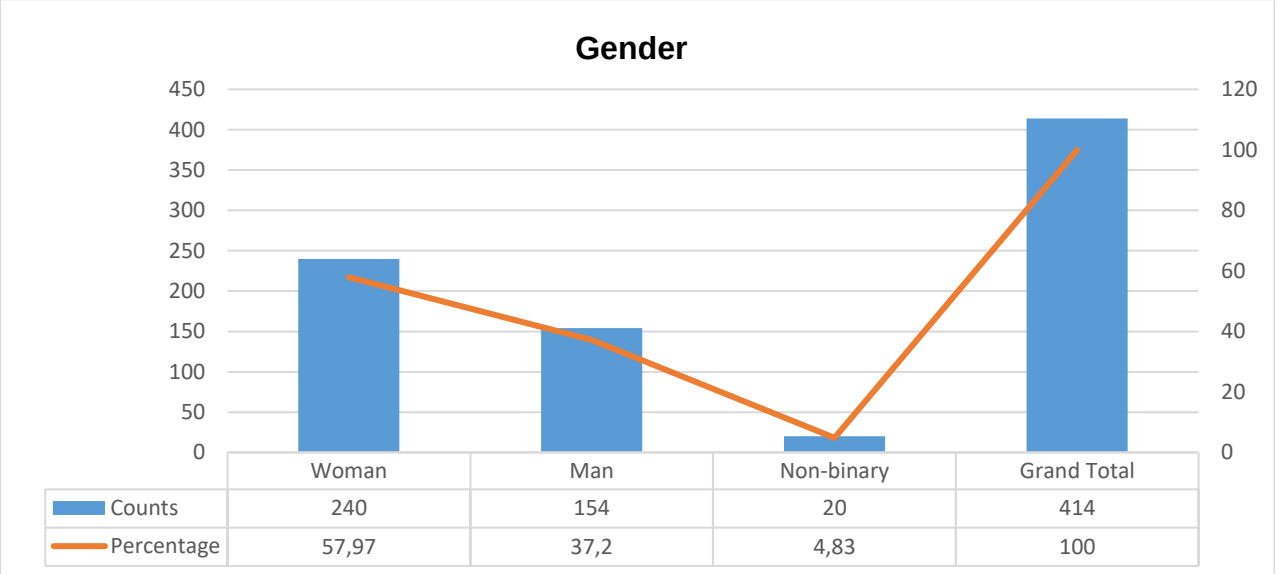
The illustration in Figure 3 shows the distribution of the respondents by age group based on the quantitative data collected. The age group 22-35 makes up the largest percentage of the respondents, representing 46.38% (forty-six-point thirty eight percent) representing one hundred and ninety-two (192) respondents of the total respondents. This is followed by the age group 36-65, which makes up about forty-one-point fifty five percent (41.55%) representing one hundred seventy-two (172) respondents. The younger age groups, of 19-21 indicate a nine-point one eight percent (9.18%) representing thirty-eight (38) of the

respondents and 14-18, represent smaller proportions of the sample, with an approximate of two-point ninety percent (2.90%) representing twelve (12) of the respondents.

Overall, the data indicates that the primary users of social media for e-democracy and governance within the eThekwini metropolitan municipality are predominantly young adults and middle-aged individuals. The lower participation rates among those aged 19-21 may suggest variations in interest or access to social media platforms for civic engagement.

5.4.4 Distribution for social media users' respondents according to gender

Figure 4: Gender of social media users



Source: Researcher own data

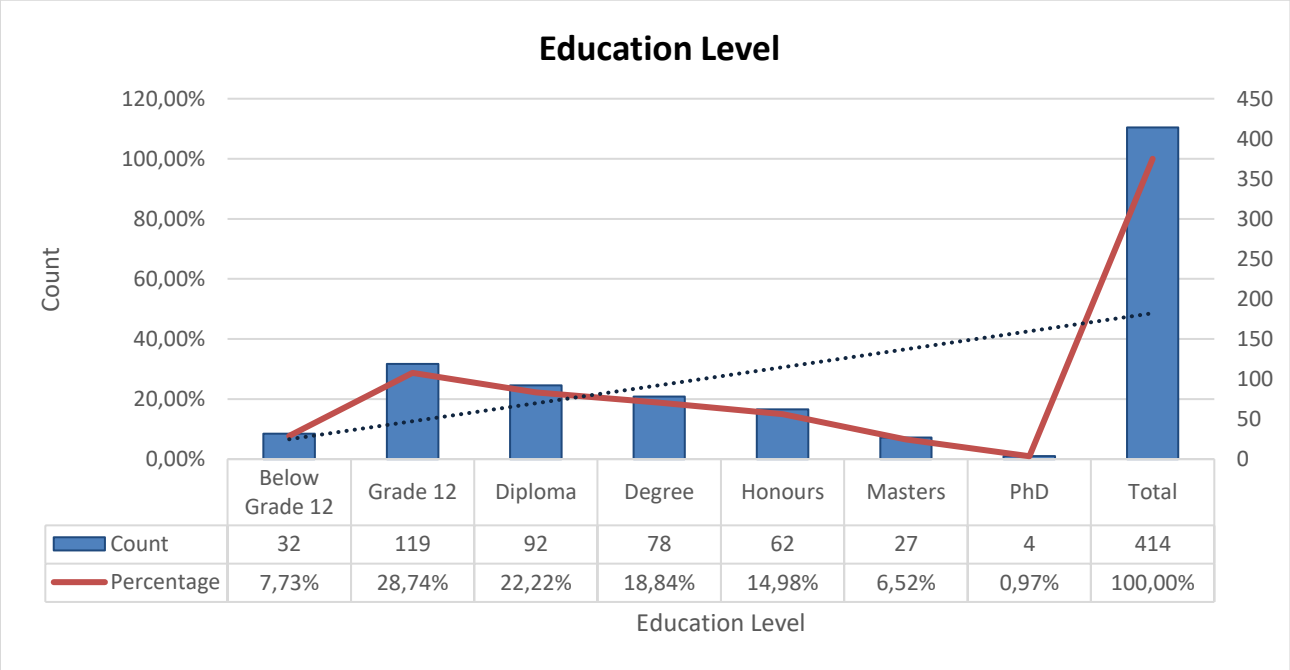
The illustration in figure 4 provided above displays the distribution of the respondents by gender. The data indicates that most of the respondents are women, totalling two hundred and forty (240) out of the total respondents of four hundred and fourteen (414) representing fifty-seven-point ninety-seven percent (57.97%) of the total respondents. This is followed by Men, who make up about one hundred and fifty-four (154) representing thirty-seven-point twenty percent (37.20%) of the respondents. Moreover, non-binary

individuals represent a smaller proportion of the sample, with twenty (20) representing four-point eighty-three percent (4.83%) of the respondents.

The data suggests that women are more engaged in the survey, indicating their higher interest in e-democracy issues. However, Men also show significant presence in social media discussions. The lower participation rate among non-binary individuals may reflect varying levels of interest or access to social media platforms for civic engagement.

5.4.5 Distribution for social media users' respondents according to level of education

Figure 5: Educational level of social media users



Source: Researcher own data

The education level distribution presented by figure 5. Gender Column chart includes the education levels, counts, and percentages of each group relative to the total population. Thereof, it is evident that the education level of Grade 12 has the highest count with one hundred and nineteen (119) individuals, representing twenty-eight-point seventy four percent (28.74%) of the total population. This is followed by Diploma holders with ninety-two (92) individuals (22.22%), moreover, Degree holders with seventy-eight (78)

individuals representing eighteen-point eighty four percent (18.84%), as well as Honours degree holders with sixty-two (62) representing fourteen-point ninety eight percent (14.98%) individuals.

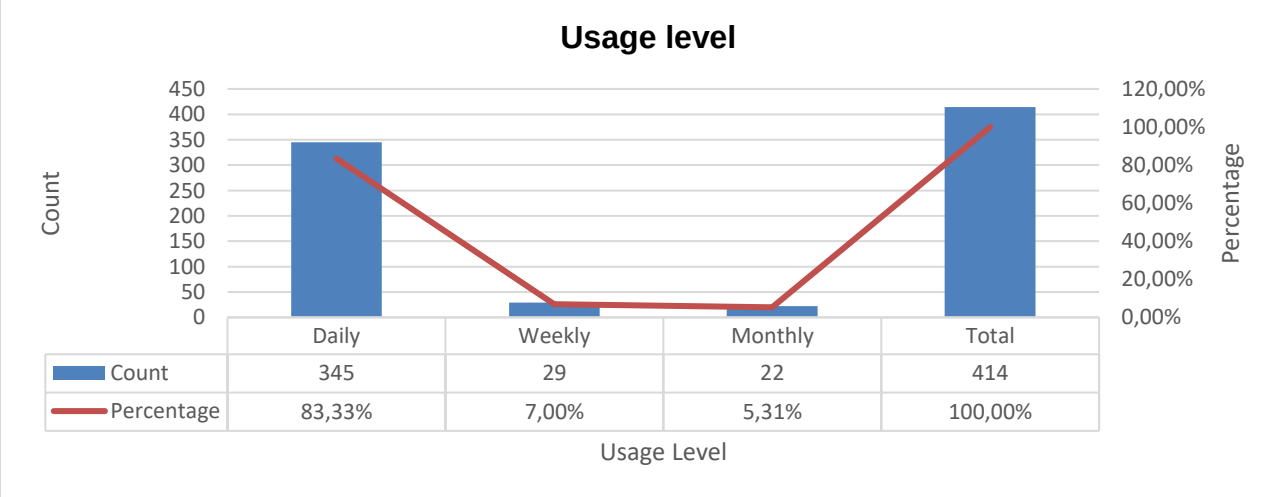
Moreover, the education levels Below indicate that Grade 12 has counts of thirty-two (32) representing seven-point seven three percent (7.73%) as well as twenty-seven (27) representing six-point fifty two percent (6.52%) master's degree individuals. However, the lowest count is for the education level is PhD with only four (4) individuals, representing zero-point ninety seven percent (0.97%) of the total population.

The data suggests that most of the respondents have completed at least Grade 12 education, with a smaller number holding advanced degrees. Moreover, understanding the education levels is crucial for analysing their perspectives on social media's influence on e-democracy and governance in eThekwini.

5.5 Section B: Background

5.5.1 Distribution for social media users' respondents according to amount of social media platform usage

Figure 6: Usage of social media platform



Source: Researcher own data

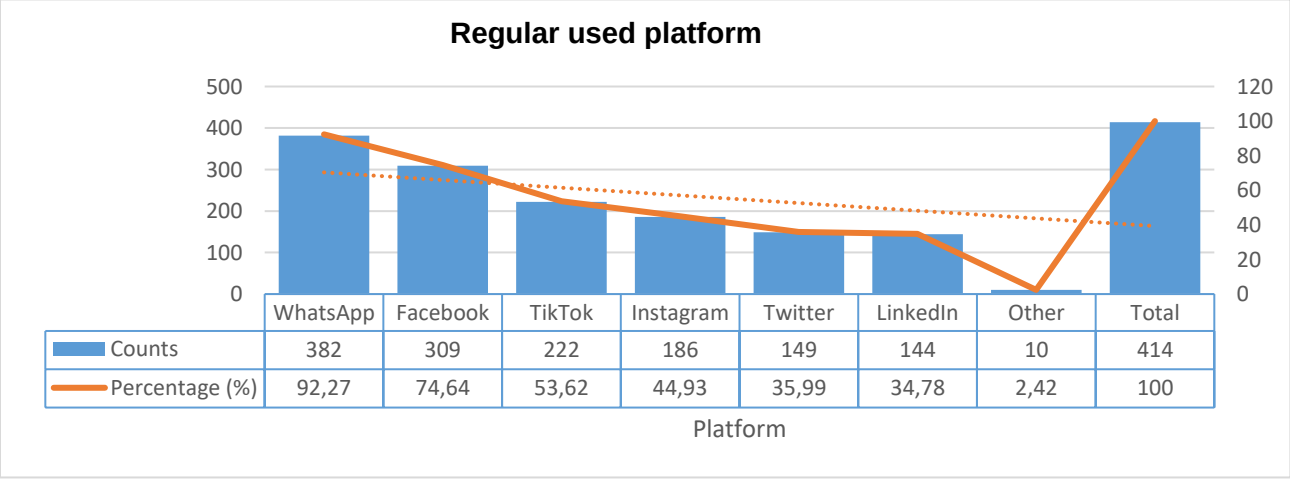
The data on figure 6 above indicates that the usage level “Daily” has the highest count with three hundred and forty-five (345) individuals, representing eighty three-point thirty three percent (83.33%) of the total population. This is followed by “Weekly” with twenty-nine (29) individuals presenting seven percent (7.00%). On the contrary there is a moderate usage of “Monthly” users with twenty-two (22) individuals representing five-point thirty one percent (5.31%), and “Once a week” with fourteen (14) individuals representing three-point thirty eight percent (3.38%). The lowest count is for the usage level “Never” with only four (4) individuals, representing zero point ninety-seven (0.97%) of the total population.

Consequently, most of the respondents engage daily, highlighting the platform's significance in their lives and its potential impact on e-democracy and governance. However, the small number of infrequent users may limit analysis.

Overall, the data is essential for understanding social media's role in e-democracy and governance in eThekwini.

5.5.2 Distribution for social media users’ respondents according to regular used social media platforms

Figure 7: Regular used platform



Source: Researcher own data

The data presented in figure 7 was obtained through a multiple-choice survey question. Hence, the respondents were given the opportunity to select more than one social media platform. The results indicate that if a respondent selected one platform, there is a high probability that they are using two or more in addition to their frequently used platform. This suggests a pattern of multiple social media platform usage among the respondents.

Therefore, the chart provides an insightful overview of the usage of various social media platforms among the respondents; thus, of the total number of the respondents which is four hundred and fourteen (414) that represent hundred percent (100%) of the respondents. Therefore, WhatsApp emerges as the most popular platform, with three hundred and eighty-two (382) of the respondents representing ninety-two-point twenty seven percent (92.27%) indicating regular use. Therefore, WhatsApp's high user rate highlights its importance for communication and community engagement in governance discussions.

Furthermore, Facebook follows closely with three hundred and nine (309) of the respondents representing seventy-four-point sixty four percent (74.64%) using it regularly. In addition, Facebook's popularity comes from features that keep users informed and engaged in local governance.

However, TikTok and Instagram are also significant platforms, with two hundred and twenty-two (222) presenting fifty-three-point sixty two percent (53.62%) for TikTok as well as one hundred and eighty-six (186) presenting forty-four-point ninety-three percent (44.93%) Instagram respondents using these platforms respectively. Indeed, it is evident that these platforms are particularly popular among younger demographics and are known for their visual content, which can be leveraged to engage citizens in governance through creative and interactive means.

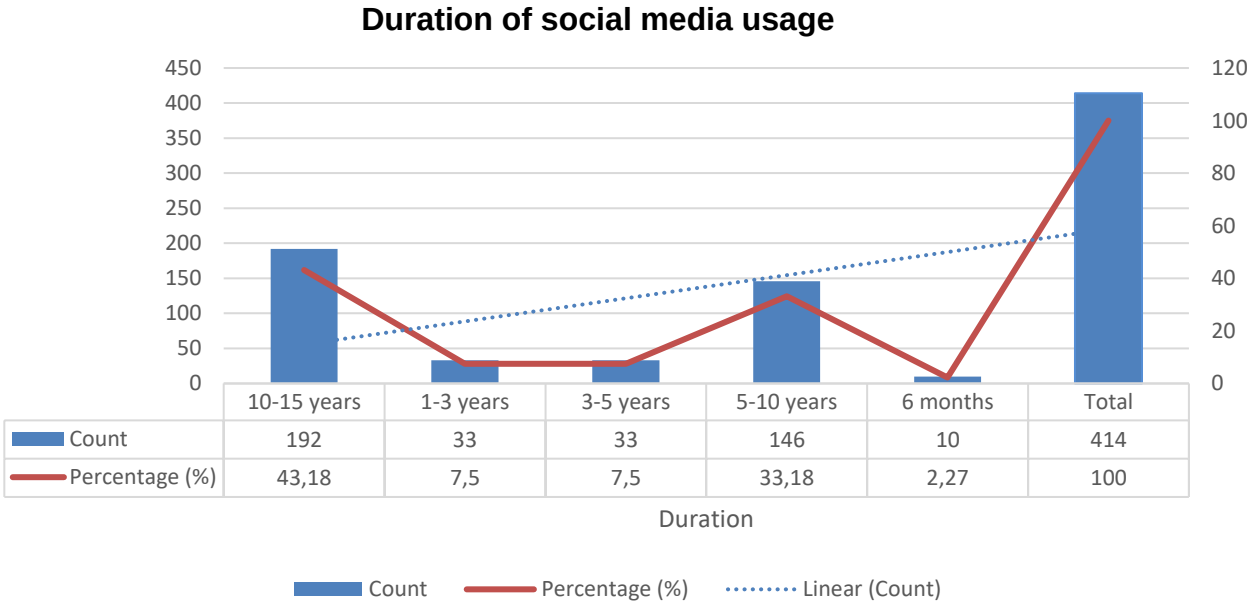
On the contrary, Twitter and LinkedIn have relatively lower usage rates, with one hundred and forty-nine (149) representing thirty-five-point ninety nine percent (35.99%) for Twitter

as well as one hundred forty-four (144) presenting thirty-four-point seventy eight percent (34.78%) respondents respectively. Hence, Twitter's real-time information sharing, and LinkedIn's professional networking capabilities offer unique opportunities for e-democracy initiatives, albeit to a smaller audience compared to WhatsApp and Facebook.
Lastly, the 'Other' category accounts for only ten (10) respondents representing two-point forty two percent (2.42%), indicating minimal use of other social media platforms outside the major ones listed.

In summary, the data indicates that WhatsApp and Facebook are the primary social media platforms for engaging citizens in e-democracy and governance in eThekwini. The significant usage of TikTok and Instagram among younger users also presents an opportunity to target this demographic for increased participation in governance processes.

5.5.3 Distribution for social media users' respondents according to duration of social media platforms usage

Figure 8: Duration of social media usage



Source: Researcher own data

The data presented in figure 8 provides an insightful overview of the duration of social media usage among the respondents in the context of e-democracy and governance in eThekwini. The total number of the respondents is four hundred and fourteen (414).

Most of the respondents have been using social media for an extended period. The largest group consists of those who have been using social media for 10-15 years, accounting for one hundred and ninety-two (192) respondents representing forty-six points thirty-eight (46.38%). This indicates that social media has been a significant part of their lives for over a decade, suggesting a high level of familiarity and integration into their daily routines.

Hence, the second-largest group includes respondents who have been using social media for 5-10 years, with one hundred and forty-six (146) of the respondents representing thirty-five-point twenty seven percent (35.27%). This group also represents a substantial proportion of the population, highlighting the long-term engagement with social media platforms.

Moreover, the respondents who have been using social media for 3-5 years account for ninety-seven (97) individuals presenting twenty-three-point forty three percent (23.43%). Hence, this group represents those who have adopted social media more recently but still have several years of experience.

However, a smaller proportion of the respondents, of thirty three (33) individuals representing seven-point ninety seven percent (7.97%), have been using social media for 1-3 years. This group may include younger individuals or late adopters who have only recently started engaging with social media platforms.

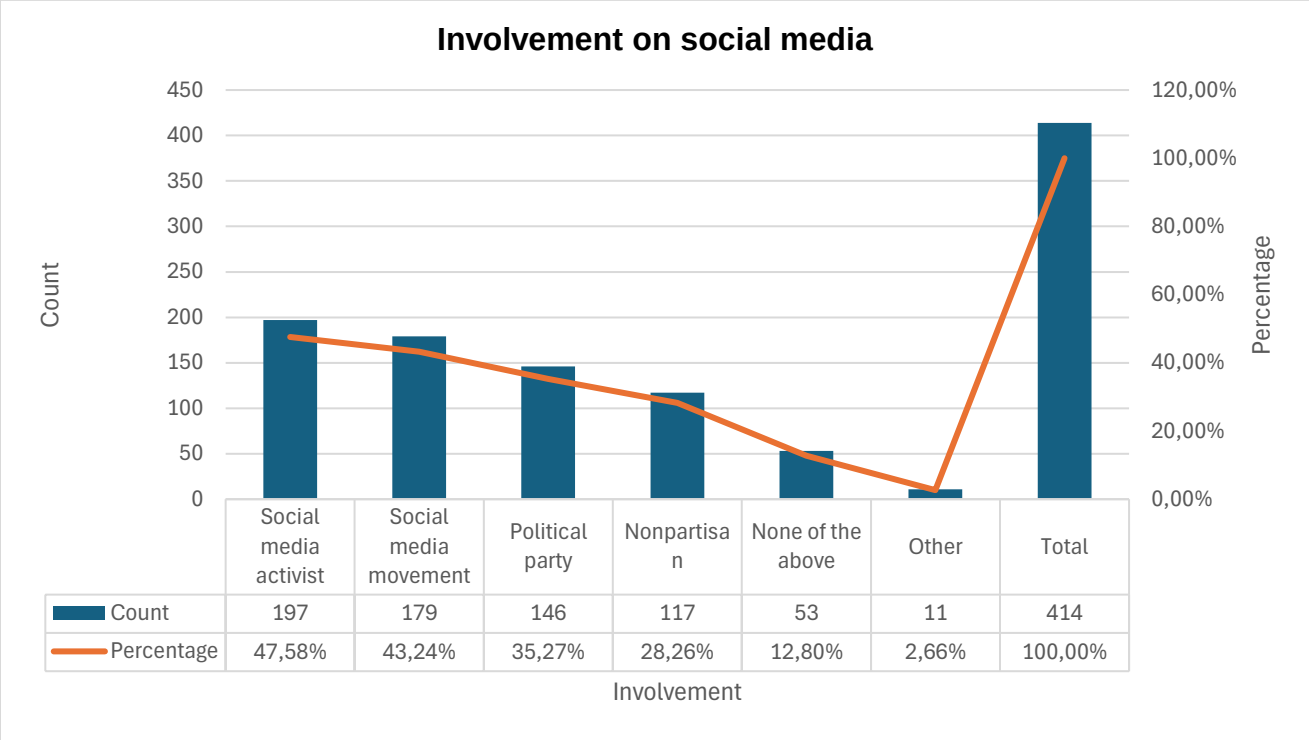
Lastly, the smallest group consists of respondents who have been using social media for 6 months, with only ten (10) individuals representing two point forty two percent (2.42%).

This group represents the newest users who are still in the early stages of integrating social media into their lives.

In summary, the data highlights that most of the respondents have been using social media for a significant period, with a substantial proportion having over a decade of experience. This long-term engagement suggests that social media plays a crucial role in their daily lives and can be effectively leveraged for e-democracy and governance initiatives in eThekwini.

5.5.4 Distribution for social media users' respondents according to their involvement on social media

Figure 9: Involvement on social media



	Social media activist	Social media movement	Political party	Nonpartisan	None of the above	Other	Total
Count	197	179	146	117	53	11	414
Percentage	47,58%	43,24%	35,27%	28,26%	12,80%	2,66%	100,00%

Source: Researcher own data

The data presented in figure 9, on involvement on social media, provides an insightful overview of how the respondents describe their involvement on social media in the context of e-democracy and governance in eThekwini. The total number of the

respondents is four hundred and fourteen (414) respondents representing a total of hundred percent (100%) to this quantitative study.

The largest group consists of social media activists, accounting for one hundred and ninety-seven (197) of the respondents that represent a total of forty-seven-point fifty-eight percent (47.58%). This indicates that nearly half of the respondents actively engage in social media activism, advocating for various causes and participating in online campaigns to influence public opinion and policy.

The second-largest group includes respondents involved in social media movements, with one hundred and seventy-nine (179) of the respondents constituting forty-three -point twenty-four percent (43.24%). This group represents individuals who participate in organised efforts to bring about social or political change through social media platforms. Moreover, the respondents who identify as nonpartisan account for one hundred and seventeen (117) individuals that represent twenty-eight-point twenty-six percent) (28.26%). This group represents those who engage with social media without aligning themselves with any specific political party or movement, focusing instead on general civic engagement and information sharing.

A significant proportion of one hundred and forty-six 146 of the respondents, representing thirty-five-point twenty seven percent (35.27%), individuals describe their involvement as being part of a political party. This group actively supports and promotes the agenda of a specific political party through social media.

Moreover, a smaller proportion of the respondents, of fifty-three (53) respondents represent twelve-point eight percent (12.80%), and indicate that they are none of the above. This group may include casual users who do not engage in any specific type of social media involvement related to e-democracy or governance.

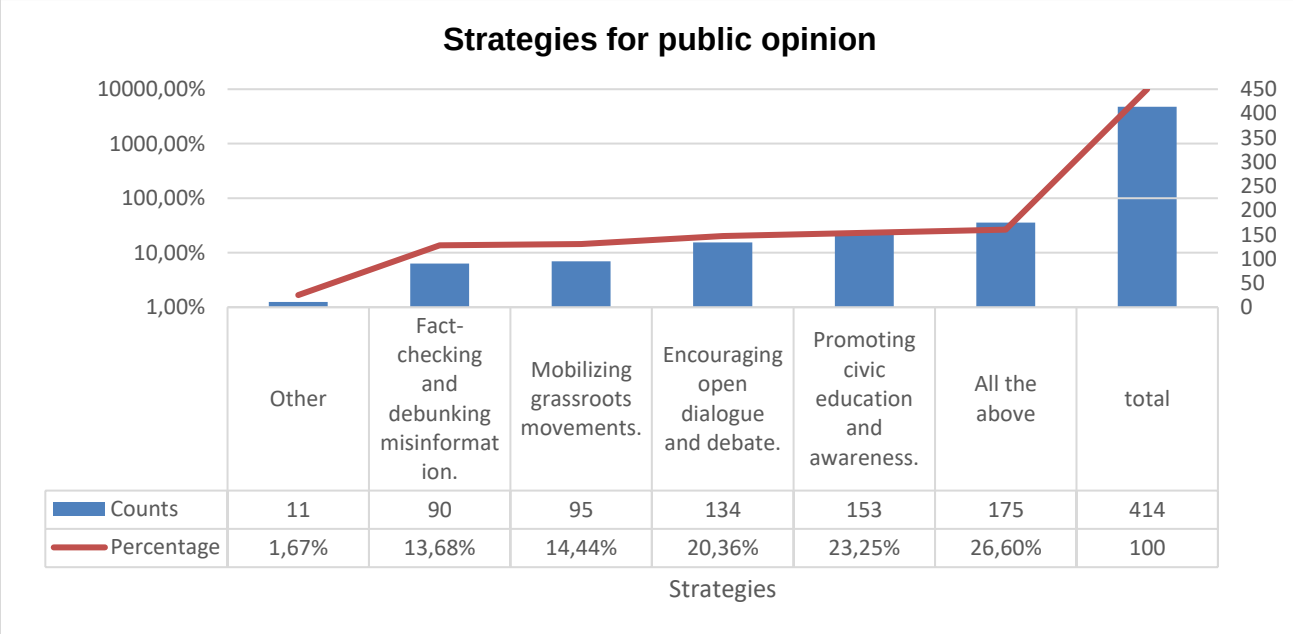
Lastly, the smallest group consists of respondents who selected other, with only eleven (11) of the respondents that represent two-point sixty six percent (2.66%) individuals. This group represents those whose involvement on social media does not fit into the predefined categories of this research.

In summary, the data highlights that a significant proportion of the respondents is actively involved in social media activism and movements, indicating a high level of engagement in e-democracy and governance-related activities. The presence of nonpartisan users and political party supporters also suggests diverse approaches to social media involvement among the population in eThekwini.

5.6 Part II: Democratic strategies on social media

5.6.1 Distribution for social media users' respondents according to democratic strategies employed on social media to shape public opinion on governance

Figure 10: Strategies for public opinion



Source: Researcher own data

In figure 10, data is presented in descending order of the strategies' usage, as reflected by the number of the respondents. Therefore, [All the above] account for one hundred seventy-five counts (125) represented by twenty-six-point sixty percent (26.60%), and shows that the respondents prefer a holistic approach to influence public opinion on governance, highlighting the importance of comprehensive engagement.

Moreover, one hundred and fifty-three (153) counts selected promoting civic education and awareness twenty-three-point twenty five percent (23.25%), ranking second. This strategy highlights that the educated citizens know their rights and well as the responsibilities to enhance democratic participation and accountability.

Furthermore, one hundred and thirty-four (134) counts, selected, encouraging open dialogue and debate and represent twenty-point thirty six percent (20.36%) of the respondents. Therefore, this third-ranked approach emphasizes the importance of fostering discussions and citizen engagement in governance to ensure that diverse perspectives are represented.

On the contrary, ninety-five counts (95) mobilise grassroots movements (14.44%). This fourth ranking strategy underscores the effective use of social media in rallying community support and coordinating local activism within eThekwini.

Likewise, fact-checking and debunking misinformation is selected by ninety (90) of the respondents, representing thirteen-point sixty eight percent (13.68%), as the fifth most important strategy. This approach is vital for verifying information, countering false claims, and upholding the integrity of public opinion on social media. However, eleven counts (11) representing one point sixty seven percent (1.67%) of respondents is the smallest category that represents strategies that are not explicitly listed in the survey. Hence, the low count indicates that most of the respondents identified more with the specific strategies provided.

In summary, the data highlights the critical role of social media in influencing public opinion on governance in eThekwini. Hence, a multifaceted approach, promoting civic education, encouraging dialogue, and organising grassroots movements are shown to be the key components in ensuring that citizens are well-informed and are actively participating in governance.

5.6.2 Distribution for social media users' respondents according to examples of how social media is used to engage citizens in political discussions and decision-making

This interpretation from an open-ended question provides a thematic analysis from respondent 1 to 161 (R1–R161) out of a total of 414. The question focused on how social media is used to engage citizens in political discussions, decision-making, e-democracy, governance, and service delivery. The following categories summarize the keyways in which the respondents highlighted social media's role in engagement:

Table 1: Examples of how social media is used to engage citizens

Category	Number of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Information sharing and updates	45	28%
Group creation and citizen organisation	30	19%
Polling, petitions, and decision-making	25	16%
Misinformation and manipulation	21	13%
Citizen education and political awareness	20	12%
Media alternative and fact-checking issues	12	7%
Limited engagement outside elections	8	5%

Source: Researcher own data

I. Information sharing and political updates

A significant proportion of forty-five (45) of the respondents represented by twenty eight percent (28%) pointed to social media as a tool for disseminating political information and

updates. As stated by R100, "*Informing the public about new policies and discussing economic issues*" highlights the role of platforms like Facebook and Twitter in keeping citizens updated on government actions.

II. Group creation and citizen organisation

Thirty (30) of the respondents represented by nineteen percent (19%) noted that social media helps create groups for political discussions and this highlights its role in connecting people with shared interests.

III. Polling, petitions, and decision-making

Twenty-five (25) of the respondents represented by sixteen percent (16%) emphasized that polling, petitions, and surveys are the ways by means of which social media engages citizens in decision-making. For example, R122 highlighted that, social media facilitates online petitions and campaigns, thereby empowering citizens to articulate their perspectives on significant policy decisions.

IV. Misinformation and manipulation

Misinformation remains a concern, with 21 of the respondents represented by thirteen percent (13%) noting that social media can spread false or manipulated information. R109 mentioned, that social media spreads false information, which can negatively influence public opinion and political engagement.

V. Citizen Education and political awareness

Twenty (20) of the respondents represented by twelve percent (12%) underscored the importance of social media in educating citizens about political processes and governance. R94 stated, *"It is used to make citizens understand more about politics," demonstrating social media's role in enhancing political literacy among users*.

VI. Media Alternative and fact-checking issues

Twelve (12) of the respondents (7%) discussed social media as an alternative to traditional media, highlighting issues around fact-checking. R137 noted, that "*Citizens used social media to help and keep society informed*," especially when traditional media failed to cover certain events, showing social media's unique role in empowering citizens with real-time updates.

VII. Limited engagement outside elections

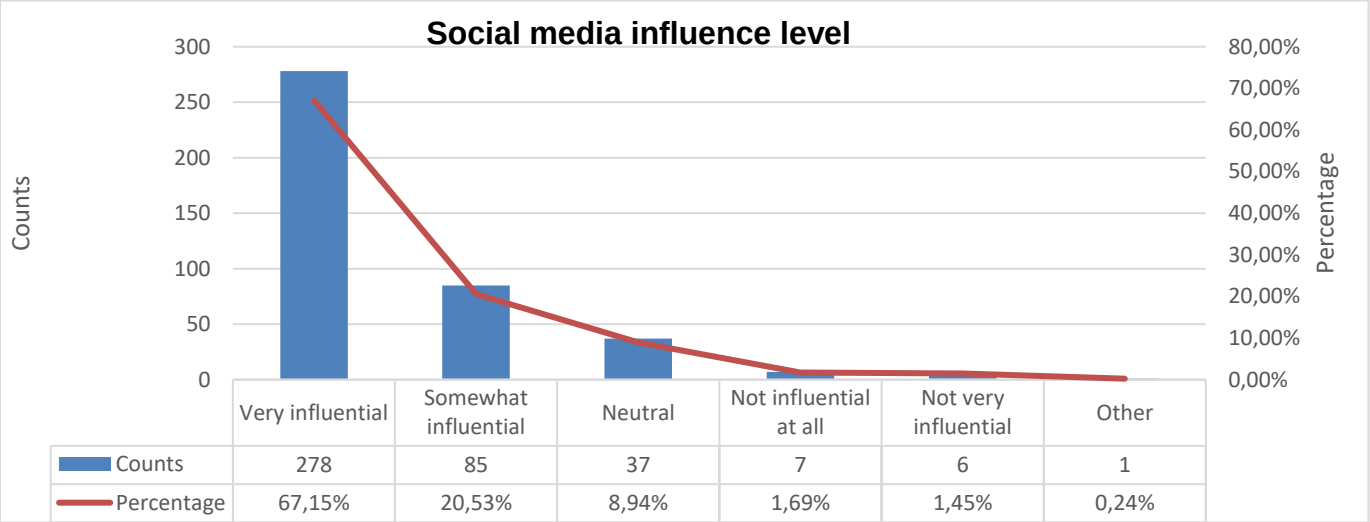
A smaller subset of the respondents (8) represented by five percent (5%) expressed concerns about limited political engagement outside election periods. R160 mentioned, that "*It is not used; citizens are only engaged towards elections*," and this highlights a challenge in maintaining consistent public participation in governance throughout non-election periods.

The data from the 161 respondents illustrates that social media plays a pivotal role in engaging citizens in political discussions and decision-making within eThekwini. The most significant uses include information sharing (28%), group organisation (19%), and polling and petitions (16%), which foster democratic engagement.

However, challenges such as misinformation (13%) and limited engagement outside elections (5%) pose threats to the effective use of social media as a tool for e-democracy. The research suggests that while social media facilitates increased political participation, its potential can only be fully realised if efforts are made to address misinformation and encourage consistent engagement beyond election cycles.

5.6.3 Distribution for social media users' respondents according to influence of social media on political campaign and policy making processes

Figure 11: Social media influence level



Source: Researcher own data

The following analysis breaks down the respondents' perspectives regarding the influence of social media on political campaigns and policy-making processes, as depicted in figure 11 (Social media influence level). The responses are categorized according to varying levels of influence, and the findings are presented in descending order based on the count of the responses.

Therefore, the largest group, illustrates that sixty-seven-point seven percent (67.15%) of two hundred seventy-eight (278) out of four hundred fourteen of the respondents are of the view that social media is very influential in political campaigns and policy-making processes. This dominant perception underscores social media's powerful ability to shape political discourse, promote real-time engagement with voters, and provide an effective platform for targeted communication.

However, the second-largest group, comprising of eighty-five (85) of the respondents represent twenty-point fifty three percent (20.53%), considers social media to be somewhat influential. These respondents acknowledge the role of social media in fostering public dialogue, raising awareness, and supporting political causes, but see it as having a moderate impact compared to those who deem it very influential. This group's

recognition highlights how social media facilitates policy debates and brings political issues closer to the citizens, even if its effect is perceived as less direct or forceful.

On the contrary a smaller proportion of thirty-seven (37) of the respondents which represents eight points ninety-four (8.94%), maintain a neutral stance. These individuals neither fully embrace nor dismiss the influence of social media on political campaigns and policy-making processes. They may believe that the benefits and drawbacks of social media balance each other out, or they might feel that other elements, such as traditional media or direct community engagement, play equally important roles.

Furthermore, only seven (7) of the respondents presenting one point sixty nine percent (1.69%) assert that social media is not influential at all in political campaigns and policymaking. This perspective, though in the minority, suggests that some individuals perceive social media as a secondary or negligible force compared to other channels of political communication and influence. These respondents likely view traditional media or face-to-face interactions as the primary drivers of political change.

Moreover, close to the previous category, six (6) of the respondents represent one point forty five percent (1.45%) are of the view that social media is not very influential. These individuals recognize some influence, but they consider it minimal, reflecting the notion that social media's role is marginal compared to other forms of political engagement, such as television, radio, or community-based forums.

In addition, a single respondent, accounting for one (1) individual of zero-point twenty four percent (0.24%), selected the "Other" category, indicating an alternative view that was not explicitly captured by the main options. This suggests that there may be nuanced or specific opinions regarding social media's influence that lie outside the predefined categories.

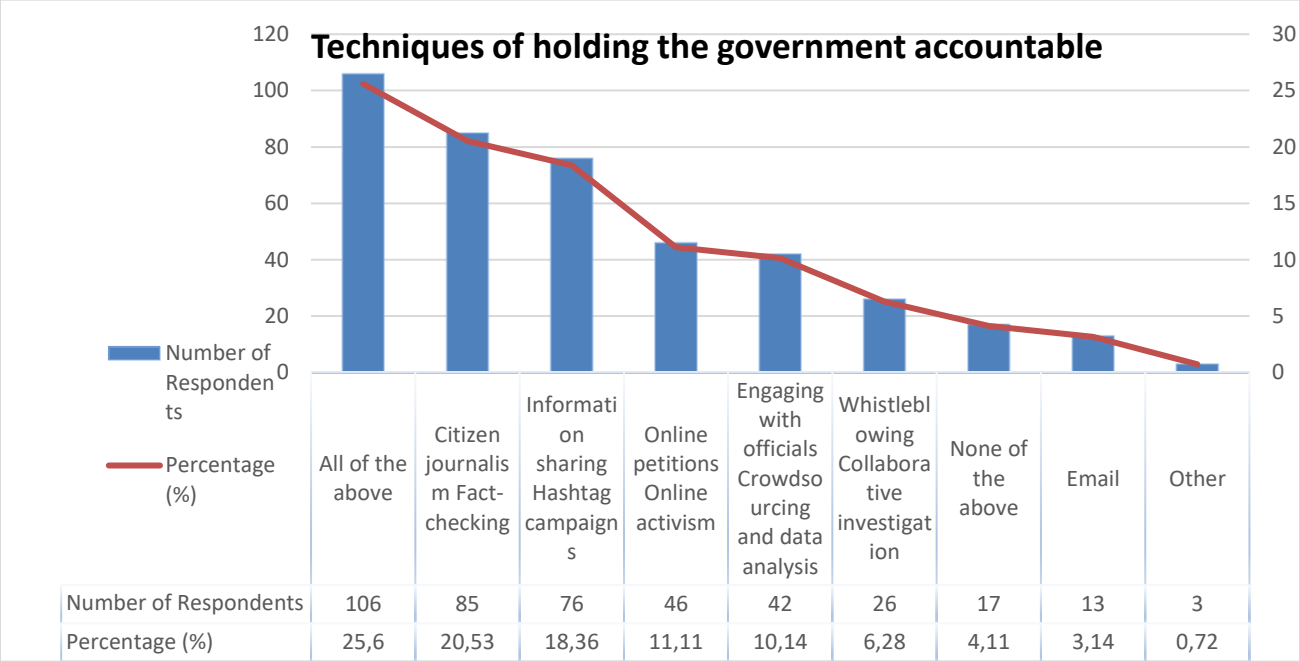
In summary, the data clearly demonstrates that most of the respondents view social media as a critical and transformative tool in the political sphere. With sixty-seven-point fifteen percent (67.15%) represented by two hundred seventy-eight individuals (278) of the respondents identifying it as "very influential," it is evident that social media has carved out a significant space in shaping political campaigns and the policy-making process. In addition, the combination of eighty-seven-point sixty eight percent (87.68%) of three hundred sixty-three (363) of the respondents who perceive it as either very or somewhat influential underscores its undeniable impact.

On the other hand, the minimal counts for "Not influential at all" one point sixty-nine (1.69%) of seven (7) of the respondents) and "Not very influential" one point forty-five (1.45%) of six (6) of the respondents) reflect that only a small proportion of the population dismisses its role. The researcher assumes that in today's digital age, the social media tools individuals wield are pivotal in determining the direction of political campaigns and the creation of policy.

5.7 Part III: Holding the government accountable

5.7.1 Distribution for social media users' respondents according to techniques employed social media to hold the government accountable

Figure 12: Techniques of holding the government accountable



	All of the above	Citizen journalism Fact-checking	Information sharing Hashtag campaigns	Online petitions Online activism	Engaging with officials Crowdsourcing and data analysis	Whistleblowing Collaborative investigation	None of the above	Email	Other
Number of Respondents	106	85	76	46	42	26	17	13	3
Percentage (%)	25,6	20,53	18,36	11,11	10,14	6,28	4,11	3,14	0,72

Source: Researcher own data

The data presented in figure 12 on techniques of holding the government accountable, illustrate that twenty-five-point six percent (25.6%) represented by one hundred six (106) of the respondents is the most prominent method utilised, which involves engaging in multiple techniques simultaneously. These respondents use various methods, such as online petitions and crowdsourcing, to actively engage in digital activism. This indicates a commitment to promoting transparency and government accountability through social media tools.

Furthermore, citizen journalism and fact-checking represent the second most common technique, practiced by twenty-point fifty three percent (20.53%) represented by eighty-five (85) of the respondents. This engagement highlights social media's vital role in sharing accurate information, challenging misinformation, and offering alternative

narratives to government communications. Fact-checking and citizen reporting are crucial in promoting informed and accountable governance.

In addition, eighteen-point thirty six percent (18.36%) or seventy-six (76) respondents rely on information sharing and hashtag campaigns. These methods enable quick information sharing and mobilise public opinion, helping raise awareness and amplify social media voices. Hashtag campaigns are particularly effective in supporting governance-related causes and sparking discussions on government transparency and service delivery.

Online petitions and online activism are used by eleven-point eleven percent (11.11%) represented by forty-six (46) of the respondents. This method shows how social media can gather public support through petitions, enabling citizens to voice grievances and demand government reforms. Although less common than other approaches, it remains a valuable tool for digital activism.

A smaller proportion of the respondents, ten-point one four percent (10.14%) represented forty-two (42) of the respondents, engage in direct interactions with government officials and employ crowdsourcing to analyse data. They leverage social media for dialogue and problem-solving, including public consultations and data collection partnerships, and reflect a trend toward cooperative governance supported by digital tools.

Another group, six-point twenty eight percent (6.28%) represented by twenty-six (26) of the respondents, engages in whistleblowing and collaborative investigations to expose government corruption and misconduct. While less common, these methods are crucial for ensuring accountability and transparency in governance.

A minority of the respondents, four-point eleven percent (4.11%) represented by seventeen (17) of the respondents, reported that they do not use any techniques to hold the government accountable. This indicates that some social media users are less engaged in governance-related activities and remain passive in activism. Similarly, three-

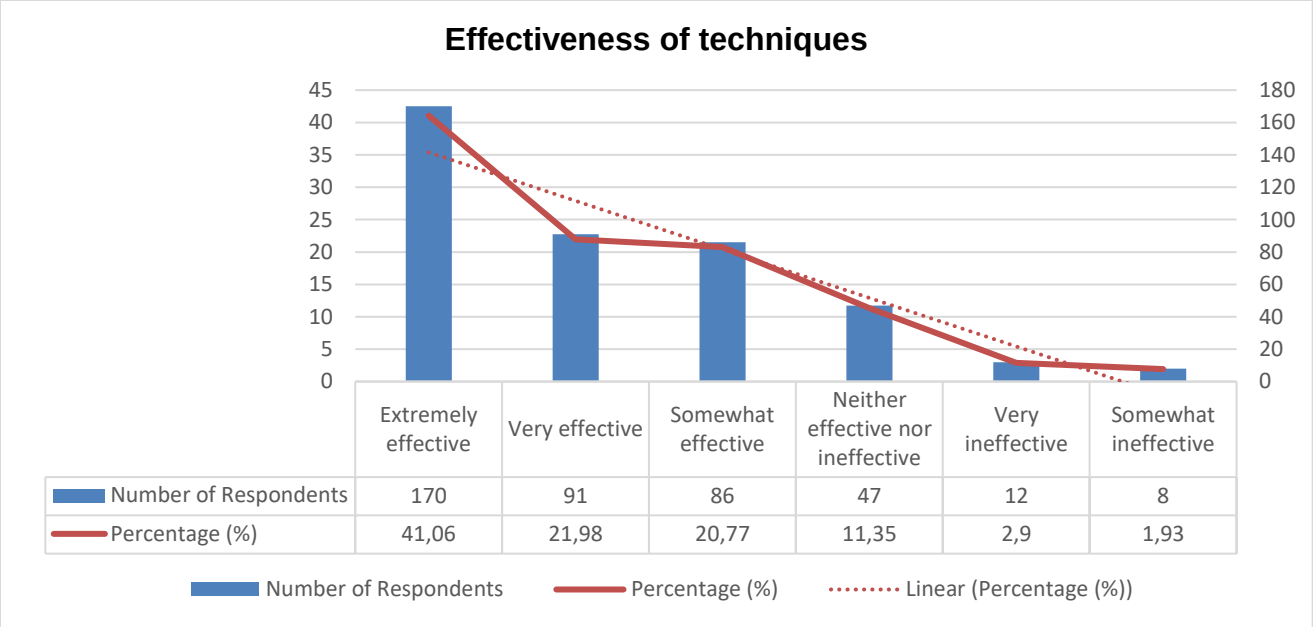
point one four percent (3.14%) or thirteen (13) of the respondents reported that they use email to hold the government accountable. Although less immediate than other methods, email provides a formal way to communicate with officials.

Finally, a very small group, comprising zero-point seventy two percent (0.72%) represented by three (3) of the respondents, reported using unspecified methods to influence governance, suggesting some social media users may be exploring new approaches not covered in the survey.

In summary, the data demonstrates that most social media users within eThekwini employ a variety of techniques to hold the government accountable, with a significant emphasis on citizen journalism, information sharing, and engaging in multiple forms of digital activism. These techniques reflect the evolving role of social media as a powerful platform for promoting e-democracy, governance transparency, and public participation in the decision-making processes of the eThekwini Metropolitan Municipality.

5.7.2. Distribution for social media users' respondents according to effectiveness of techniques in promoting government transparency and accountability

Figure 13: Effectiveness of techniques



Source: Researcher own data

The data in figure 13 presents the effectiveness of techniques used on social media to promote government transparency and accountability, as the majority of one hundred seventy (170) of the respondents, represented by forty one percent point zero six percent (41.06%) view social media techniques as extremely effective in promoting government transparency and accountability. This highlights a strong confidence among users in the positive influence these platforms can have on governance.

Moreover, ranking second, ninety-one (91) of the respondents represented by twenty-one-point ninety eight percent (21.98%) consider the techniques to be very effective. This group acknowledges the positive impact of social media, though they are slightly less enthusiastic than those who rated the techniques as extremely effective.

Furthermore, a considerable number of eighty-six (86) of the respondents accounting for twenty-point seventy seven percent (20.77%) perceive the techniques as somewhat effective. Therefore, this group indicates that, while they recognize the contribution of social media to government transparency, they see the techniques as moderately impactful rather than highly effective.

On the contrary, a smaller group, forty-seven (47) of the respondents represented by eleven-point thirty five percent (11.35%), maintains a neutral stance, viewing the techniques as neither effective nor ineffective. This suggests that these respondents are uncertain or indifferent regarding the effectiveness of social media in promoting transparency and accountability in governance.

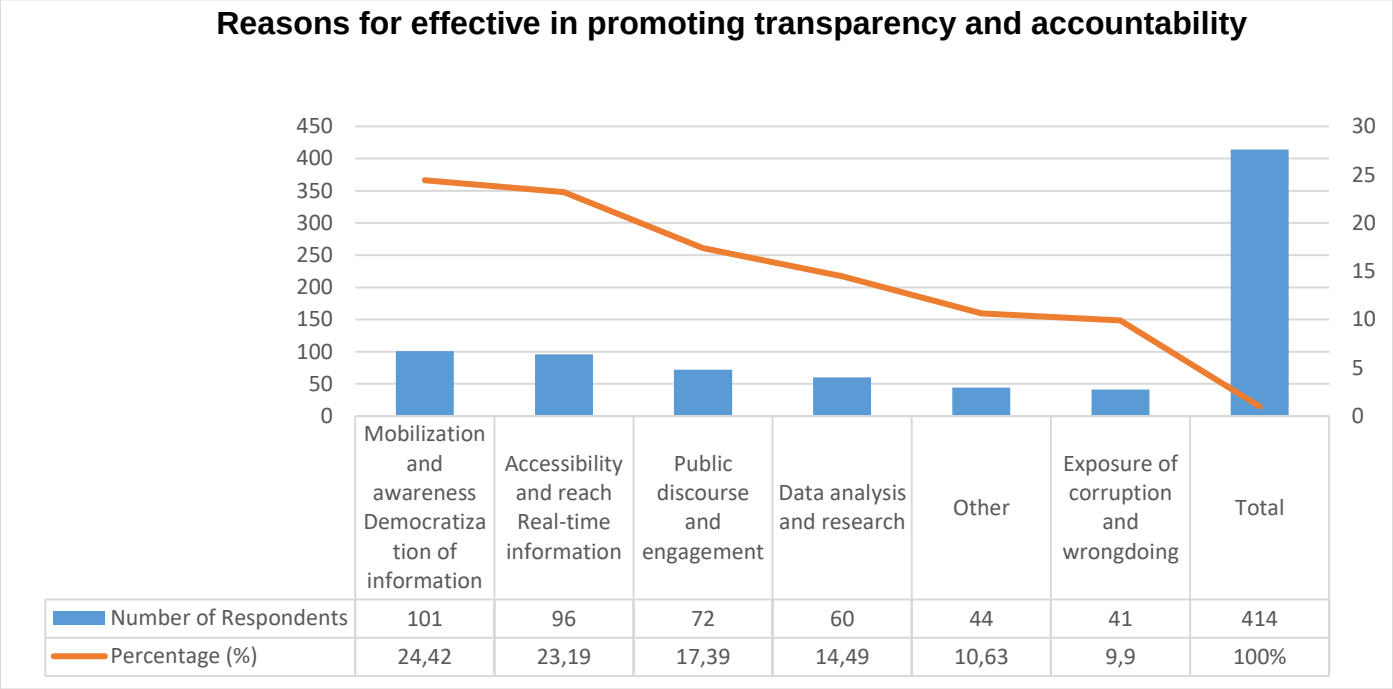
However, a minority of twelve (12) of the respondents representing two-point nine percent (2.9%), are of the view that the techniques are very ineffective. This group indicates that a small proportion of the population perceives social media efforts to promote transparency and accountability as failing to produce the desired outcomes. Likewise, the smallest proportion of eight (8) of the respondents representing one point ninety three percent (1.93%) find the techniques somewhat ineffective. Hence, this group reflects a limited degree of dissatisfaction with the impact of social media, suggesting that while some are discontented, it is not a widespread opinion.

In summary, the data demonstrates that social media serves as a crucial tool for fostering transparency and accountability in governance, with 63.04% of 261 of the respondents rating its effectiveness as either extremely or very effective. This reinforces the role of digital platforms in enhancing e-democracy and encouraging public engagement. However, 4.83% of the respondents (20 individuals) expressed dissatisfaction, suggesting that there is potential for improvements to further boost social media's impact on governance.

Additionally, social media's influence on governance and service delivery in eThekwini Metropolitan Municipality is largely positive, with most of the respondents recognizing its effectiveness in fostering accountability and transparency.

5.7.3 Distribution for social media users' respondents according to reasons for effectiveness in promoting transparency and accountability

Figure 14: Reasons for effective in promoting transparency and accountability



Source: Researcher own data

The analysis of the reasons social media users are of the views that these platforms are effective in promoting transparency and accountability in figure 14, highlights several key factors. The data reveals that twenty-four-point forty two percent (24.42%), equivalent to one hundred one (101) of the respondents, emphasized the role of social media in mobilisation and raising awareness. This group argues that social media democratises information and helps in holding the government accountable by enabling quick awareness and engagement.

Closely following this, twenty-three-point nineteen percent (23.19%) represented by ninety-six (96) of the respondents pointed to the accessibility and real-time nature of information shared on social media. This feature allows users to access current government actions and decisions, promoting transparency and enabling quick responses to emerging issues in public discussions. Further, seventeen-point thirty nine percent (17.39%) represented by seventy-two (72) of the respondents noted that social

media fosters public discourse on government policies and enhances accountability and responsiveness.

Moreover, data analysis and research were noted by fourteen-point forty nine percent (14.49%) represented by sixty (60) of the respondents as reasons for the efficacy of social media. The collection, analysis, and sharing of data through crowdsourcing enhance public oversight of government actions, and facilitates accountability of the officials. This also promotes fact-checking and cultivates a more informed public.

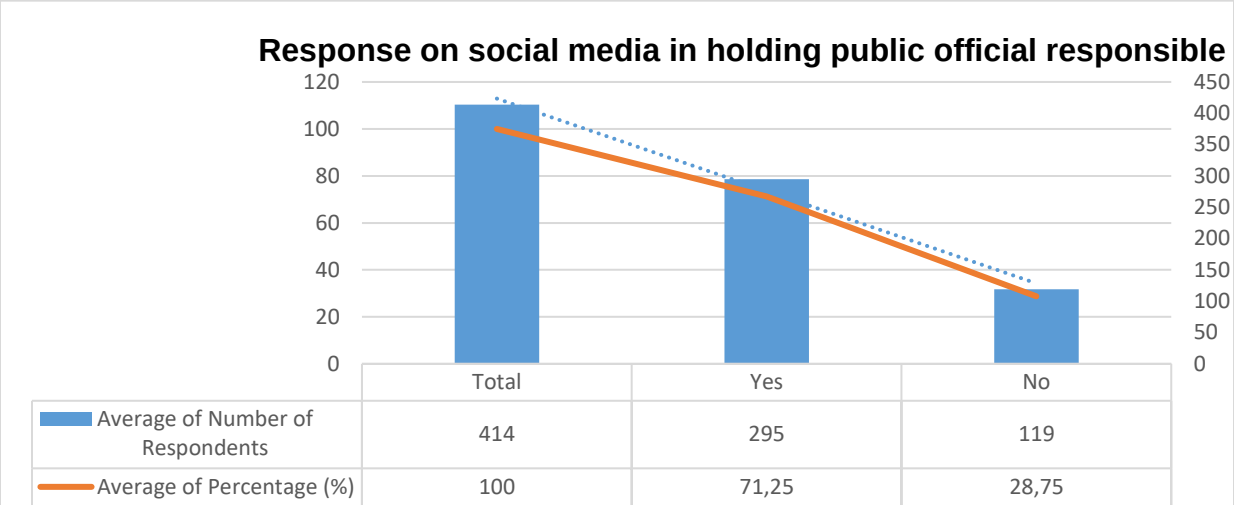
In addition, other reasons for social media's effectiveness, cited by ten-point sixty three percent (10.63%) represented by forty-four (44) of the respondents, encompass various unspecified factors. This group suggests that there may be overlooked benefits of social media not categorised in the data, including innovative uses beyond traditional advocacy methods.

Finally, nine-point nine percent (9.9%) represented by forty-one (41) of the respondents emphasized the role of social media in exposing corruption and wrongdoing. This illustrates how platforms reveal government misconduct, creating public pressure for change. The transparency from these exposures makes social media a powerful tool for accountability.

In total, the data reflects that four hundred fourteen respondents (414 respondents or 100%) recognise various reasons for the effectiveness of social media in promoting transparency and accountability. These results demonstrate that the combination of real-time information, public engagement, data analysis, and the exposure of wrongdoing has positioned social media as a powerful tool in strengthening democratic governance and improving service delivery within the eThekwini Metropolitan Municipality.

5.7.4. Distribution for social media users' respondents according to whether are they examples of how social media has been successful in holding public officials responsible for their performance

Figure 15: Response on social media in holding public official responsible



Source: Researcher own data

The distribution of the survey responses from the social media users on whether they believe social media has been successful in holding public officials' accountable offers significant insights. Figure 15 presents the total number of the respondents surveyed which stands at four hundred fourteen (414), representing one hundred percent (100%) of the sample. Of these, a considerable proportion of two hundred and ninety-five (295), equating to seventy-one-point twenty five percent (71.25%) affirm that social media has indeed been an effective tool in ensuring public officials are held responsible for their performance.

This large majority, on the one hand, suggests that the public perceives social media as a powerful platform that not only allows for the dissemination of information but also fosters accountability by enabling real-time feedback and public scrutiny. Social media users may feel empowered to voice their concerns and hold officials accountable through

mechanisms such as public campaigns, viral posts, and online discussions, which can lead to tangible outcomes in governance.

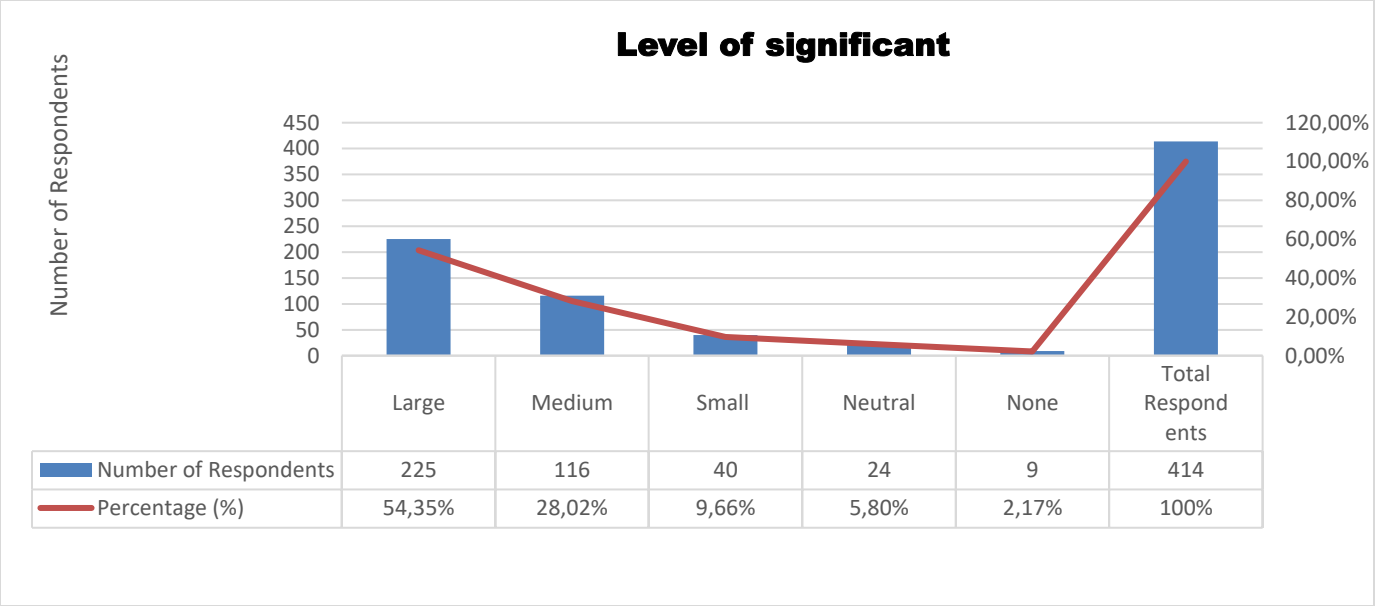
On the other hand, a notable minority of one hundred and nineteen (119) of the respondents, representing twenty-eight-point seventy five percent (28.75%), expressed scepticism regarding the success of social media in this role. This group may highlight the limitations of digital platforms in translating online activism into actual governmental change or point to instances where accountability efforts through social media have failed to yield meaningful results.

The overall findings reflect a significant belief in the potential of social media to drive accountability among public officials, with over seventy percent of the respondents recognizing its positive impact. However, the dissenting views also underscore that, while effective, social media may not always be sufficient in ensuring public officials are held responsible for their actions. These results provide valuable context for understanding the role of social media in enhancing e-democracy within the governance structures of eThekwini Metropolitan Municipality.

5.8 Part IV: Social media and public services

5.8.1 Distribution for social media users' respondents according to the significant social media in monitoring public services and ensuring their accountability

Figure 16: Level of significant



Source: Researcher own data

The analysis of the data in figure 16, on the level of significance reveals that a significant majority of the respondents believe that social media plays a large role in monitoring public services and ensuring their accountability. Specifically, two hundred and twenty-five (225) of the respondents represented by fifty-four-point thirty five percent (54.35%) indicated that social media is highly significant in this regard. This is followed by one hundred and sixteen (116) of the respondents (28.02%) who believe that social media has a medium significance.

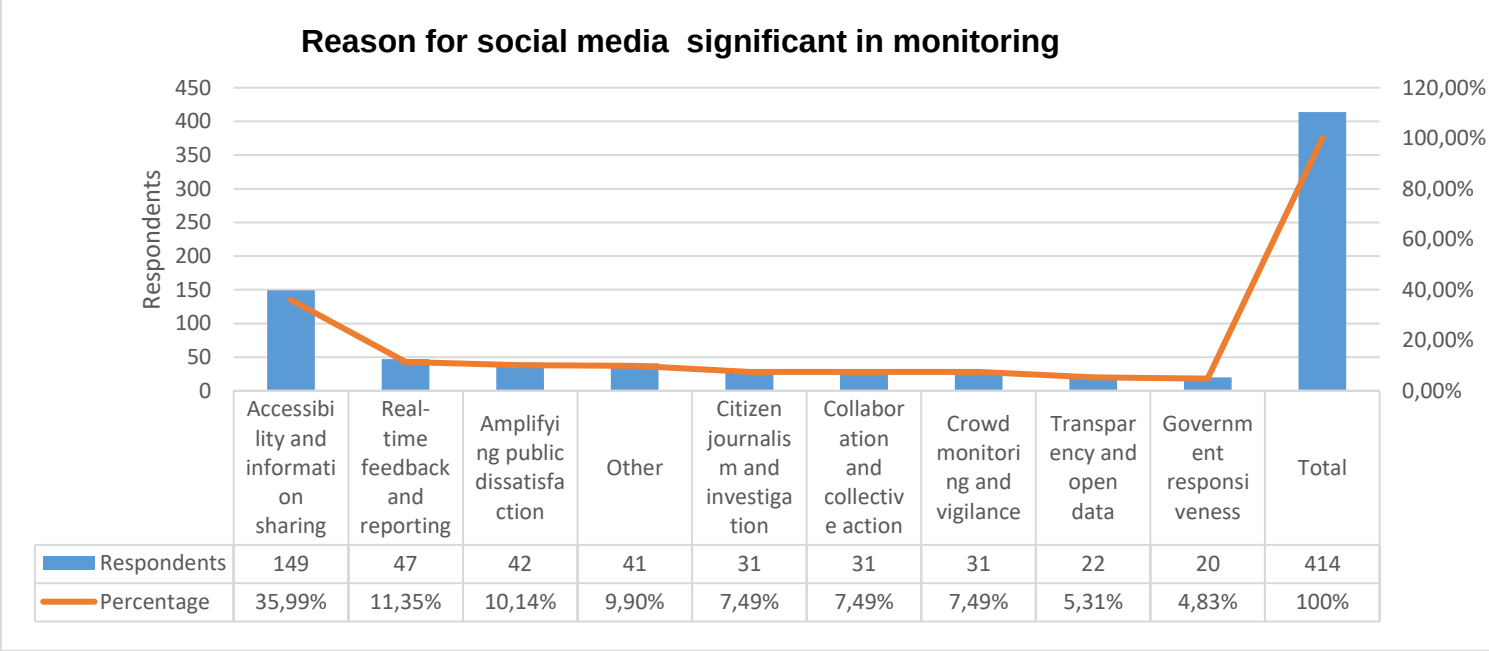
A smaller proportion of forty (40) of the respondents, represented by nine-point sixty six percent (9.66%), consider social media to have a small significance in monitoring public services. Twenty-four (24) of the respondents representing five-point eighty percent (5.80%) remain neutral on the matter, while only nine (9) of the respondents represented by two point seventeen (2.17%) believe that social media has no significance at all.

Overall, the data suggests that a substantial majority of the respondents recognize the importance of social media in holding public services accountable. The combined percentage of the respondents who view social media as having large or medium

significance amounts to eighty-two-point thirty seven percent (82.37%), indicating a strong consensus on the positive impact of social media in this context.

5.8.2 Distribution for social media users' respondents according to reason for believing in social media's significant in monitoring services

Figure 17: Reason for social media significant in monitoring



	Accessibility and information sharing	Real-time feedback and reporting	Amplifying public dissatisfaction	Other	Citizen journalism and investigation	Collaboration and collective action	Crowd monitoring and vigilance	Transparency and open data	Government responsiveness	Total
Respondents	149	47	42	41	31	31	31	22	20	414
Percentage	35,99%	11,35%	10,14%	9,90%	7,49%	7,49%	7,49%	5,31%	4,83%	100%

Source: Researcher own data

Figure 17, on the reason for social media' significance in monitoring services illustrates the diverse reasons cited by the respondents for their belief in social media's significant role in monitoring public services. This analysis, situated within the context of e-democracy and governance in eThekwini Metropolitan Municipality, reveals the multifaceted contributions of social media to enhancing public accountability and transparency.

The most prominent reason, cited by one hundred and forty-nine (149) of the respondents representing thirty-five-point ninety nine percent (35.99%), is the accessibility and ease of information sharing on social media platforms. This reflects the view that social media provides a readily available medium through which citizens can disseminate information and highlight issues relating to public services, and thus bypass traditional communication barriers.

A smaller but notable group, forty-seven (47) of the respondents representing eleven-point thirty five percent (11.35%), emphasizes real-time feedback and reporting as a key reason for social media's significance. These respondents recognize social media's capacity to facilitate instant communication between the public and officials, enabling rapid responses to public concerns. Closely related to this is the belief in amplifying public dissatisfaction, with forty-two (42) of the respondents, representing ten-point fourteen percent (10.14%) viewing social media as a tool to magnify the collective frustrations of the public, and drive officials to take corrective measures.

Thirty-one (31) of the respondents representing seven-point forty nine percent (7.49%) identified other reasons that include citizen journalism and investigation as well as thirty-one (31) of the respondents representing seven point forty nine percent of collaboration and collective action (7.49% or thirty-one respondents), and crowd monitoring and vigilance that is thirty-one (31) respondents representing seven point forty nine percent (7.49%) highlighting the role of social media in grassroots activism and the collective oversight of public services. Therefore, these functions align with the broader goals of e-democracy, where citizens actively participate in governance through information sharing, collective action, and the digital monitoring of public officials.

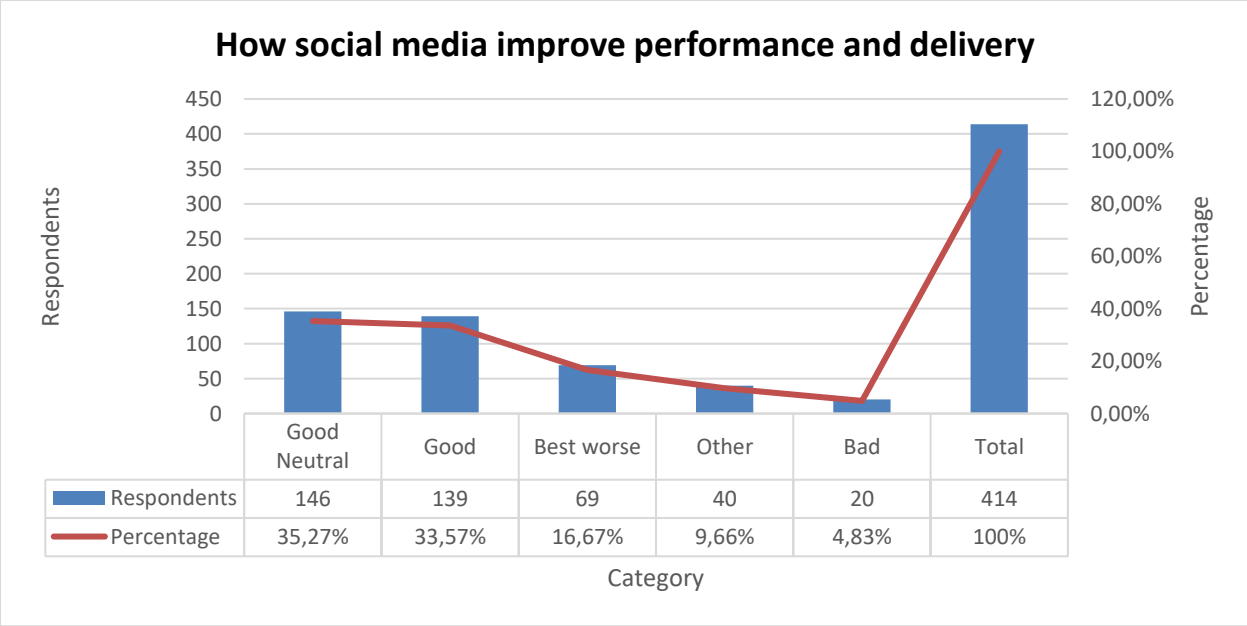
Furthermore, a smaller proportion of the respondents of twenty-two (22) individuals representing five-point thirty one percent (5.31%) point to transparency and open data as a significant reason, while twenty (20) of the respondents presenting four-point eighty three percent (4.83%) view governmental responsiveness as a critical factor enhanced

by social media. These responses reflect a recognition of social media's potential in increasing openness and fostering a more accountable government.

Overall, the distribution of the responses reveals that most of the respondents view social media as a powerful tool in the democratic process, with various functions contributing to its effectiveness in monitoring public services and ensuring that officials are held accountable for their actions. The data underscores the critical role that social media plays in enabling citizen participation, facilitating real-time engagement, and fostering greater transparency within public service delivery.

5.8.3 Distribution for social media users' respondents according to how social media can improve performance and delivery of public services

Figure 18: How social media improve performance and delivery



Source: Researcher own data

The analysis of the data collected in figure 18, on how social media improve performance and delivery, reveals that most of the respondents believe that social media can improve the performance and delivery of public services in a neutral or good manner. Specifically,

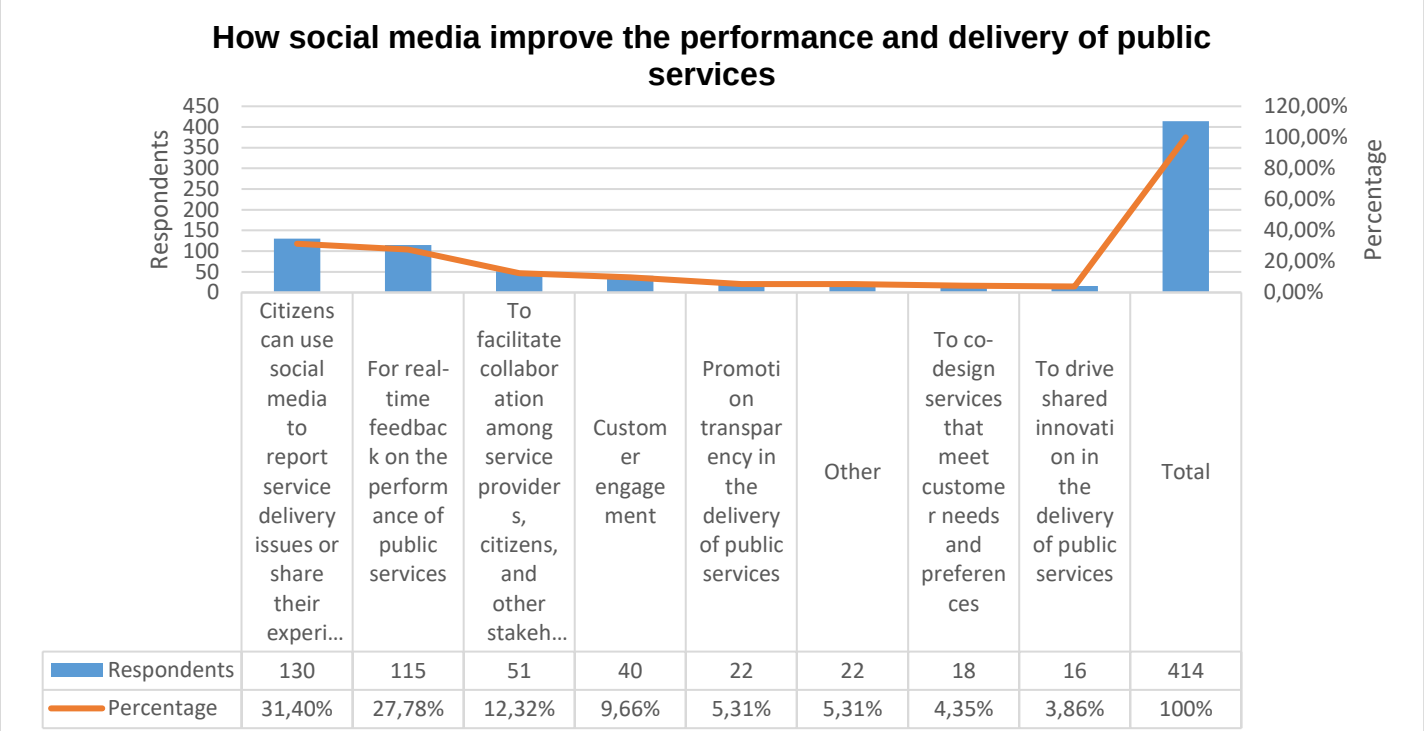
one hundred and forty-six (146) of the respondents representing thirty-five points twenty-seven percent (35.27%) indicated a good neutral response. This is followed by one hundred and thirty-nine (139) of the respondents representing thirty-three-point fifty seven percent (33.57%) who believe that social media can improve public services in a good manner.

Other notable responses include sixty-nine (69) of the respondents representing sixteen-point sixty seven percent (16.67%) who believe that social media can have a best worse impact, forty respondents (9.66%) who indicated other responses, and twenty (20) respondents representing four-point eighty three percent (4.83%) who believe that social media can have a bad impact.

Overall, the data suggests that a substantial majority of the respondents recognize the potential of social media to improve the performance and delivery of public services in a positive manner. The combined percentage of the respondents who view social media as having a good neutral or good impact amounts to sixty-eight-point eighty percent (68.80%), indicating a strong consensus on its positive impact.

5.8.4 Distribution for social media users' respondents according to reasons why social media can be used to improve the performance and delivery of public services

Figure 19: How social media improve the performance and delivery of public services



Source: Researcher own data

The analysis of the data on figure 19 reveals that the most significant reason for believing that social media can improve the performance and delivery of public services is that citizens can use social media to report service delivery issues or share their experiences. Specifically, one hundred and thirty (130) of the respondents representing thirty-one-point forty percent (31.40%) indicated this reason. This is followed by real-time feedback on the performance of public services with one hundred and fifteen (115) respondents representing twenty-seven-point seventy eight percent (27.78%).

Other notable reasons include facilitating collaboration among service providers, citizens, and other stakeholders with fifty-one (51) of respondents representing twelve-point thirty two percent (12.32%), customer engagement with forty (40) of the respondents representing nine point sixty six (9.66%), the promotion of transparency in the delivery of public services with twenty-two of the respondents presenting five point thirty one percent (5.31%), and other reasons with twenty-two (22) of the respondents presenting five point thirty one (5.31%).

However, less significant reasons include co-designing services that meet customer needs and preferences with eighteen (18) of the respondents representing four-point thirty five percent (4.35%) and driving shared innovation in the delivery of public services with sixteen (16) of the respondents representing three-point eighty six percent (3.86%).

Therefore, overall, the data suggests that using social media to report service delivery issues or share experiences is the most recognized reason for its significance in improving public services. The combined percentage of the respondents who view social media as significant in this regard amounts to thirty-one-point forty percent (31.40%), indicating a strong consensus on its importance.

5.8.6 Distribution for social media users' respondents according to successful instances of social media usage in issues public services

This section examines respondents' views from 122 responses out of 414 gathered from various respondents regarding the use of social media in addressing public service issues. Therefore, the data from 122 respondents highlights key areas where social media is utilised to facilitate governance and public service delivery. Major themes that emerged from the data include service delivery complaints, government responsiveness, community mobilisation, disaster management, and political accountability.

Table 2: Successful instances of social media usage

Thematic categories	Respondents Involved	Percentage (%)
Service Delivery Complaints	35	28.7%
Government Responsiveness	28	23.0%
Community Mobilisation	15	12.3%
Disaster Management	10	8.2%
Political Accountability	12	9.8%
Social media as Awareness Tool	22	18.0%

Other	10	8.2%

Source: Researcher own data

(a) Service delivery complaints

This theme had the highest number of (28.7%) responses, with 35 of the respondents highlighting social media's role in escalating service delivery issues such as water shortages, load shedding, and damaged infrastructure. The respondents noted that platforms like Facebook and WhatsApp allowed them to report these issues directly to authorities, often resulting in quicker action (R33, R40, R55). For example, R74 mentioned how water issues were addressed once exposed on social media, showcasing its effectiveness in promoting citizen action.

(b) Government responsiveness

The second most frequent theme involved 28 respondents represented by (23.0%) discussing how government departments and officials used social media to communicate service updates and respond to public complaints (R95, R106). R91 reported that the municipality used platforms to keep citizens informed about maintenance work and service disruptions, while R79 praised government updates on upcoming projects. However, some of the respondents (R104) criticised the lack of responsiveness to individual comments, suggesting a gap between providing information and engaging with citizens.

(c) Community mobilisation

Furthermore, (12.3%) 15 of 122 respondents illustrate that, social media's role in organising communities and creating awareness around shared concerns was a recurring theme, cited by 15 of the respondents. For example, R117 mentioned a WhatsApp group formed in Umlazi to facilitate communication between residents and officials, thus avoiding protests and enhancing accountability. The respondents (R52, R68) highlighted how communities used social media to organise and share updates on service delivery

protests and public transportation issues, and pointed to social media's importance in grassroots mobilisation.

(d) Disaster management

In 10 instances, (8.2%) of the respondents noted the crucial role social media played in disaster management and recovery efforts, particularly during floods in eThekwini and the July 2021 unrest (R80, R114). For example, R114 shared how posts on TikTok during the Tongaat disaster mobilised quick relief from local organisations, emphasizing social media's ability to provide real-time support in emergency situations.

(e) Political accountability

However, twelve (12) of the respondents represented by (9.8%) used social media to hold political figures accountable and expose issues related to corruption and mismanagement. Respondent R72, for example, noted how social media was instrumental in exposing government misuse of taxpayer funds for personal holidays. The platform has also been used to address larger-scale corruption issues, such as the VBS scandal and local governance failures (R48, R120).

(f) Social media as an awareness tool

Lastly, 22 of the respondents constituting frequently pointed out the use of social media in raising awareness about health issues, public safety, and social justice. R50 referred to the Department of Health's Twitter page, which effectively disseminated public health campaigns, while others (R65, R88) focused on its use during the COVID-19 pandemic and GBV campaigns. Social media is shown to be effective not only in raising awareness but also in creating a broader reach for critical issues that would otherwise receive limited attention.

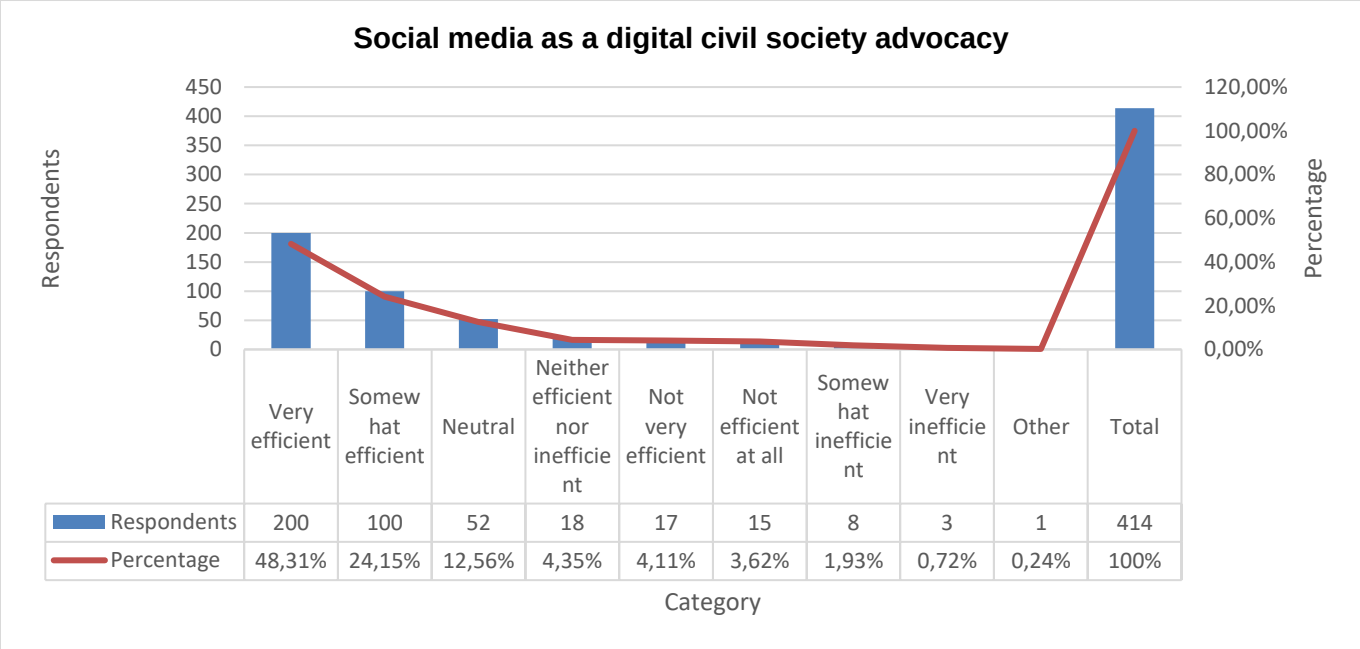
In summary, the analysis of 122 of the respondents' sheds light on the impact of social media on e-democracy and public service delivery within the eThekwini Metropolitan Municipality. However, it also uncovers challenges, particularly the inconsistent

responsiveness of government officials to public complaints. While departments are prompt in providing general updates (R104), they often fall short in addressing individual grievances, leading to frustration among citizens. Furthermore, some respondents expressed concerns that the government uses social media primarily for publicity rather than as a genuine platform for engagement (R94, R103).

5.9. Part V: Social media as an advocacy tool

5.9.1 Distribution for social media users' respondents according to efficiency of social media as digital civil society advocacy tool

Figure 20: Social media as a digital civil society advocacy



Source: Researcher own data

The data on figure 20 reveals that social media is widely perceived as an effective tool for digital civil society advocacy, with varying degrees of perceived efficiency among the respondents. Notably, nearly half of the respondents (48.31%, or 200 out of 414) consider

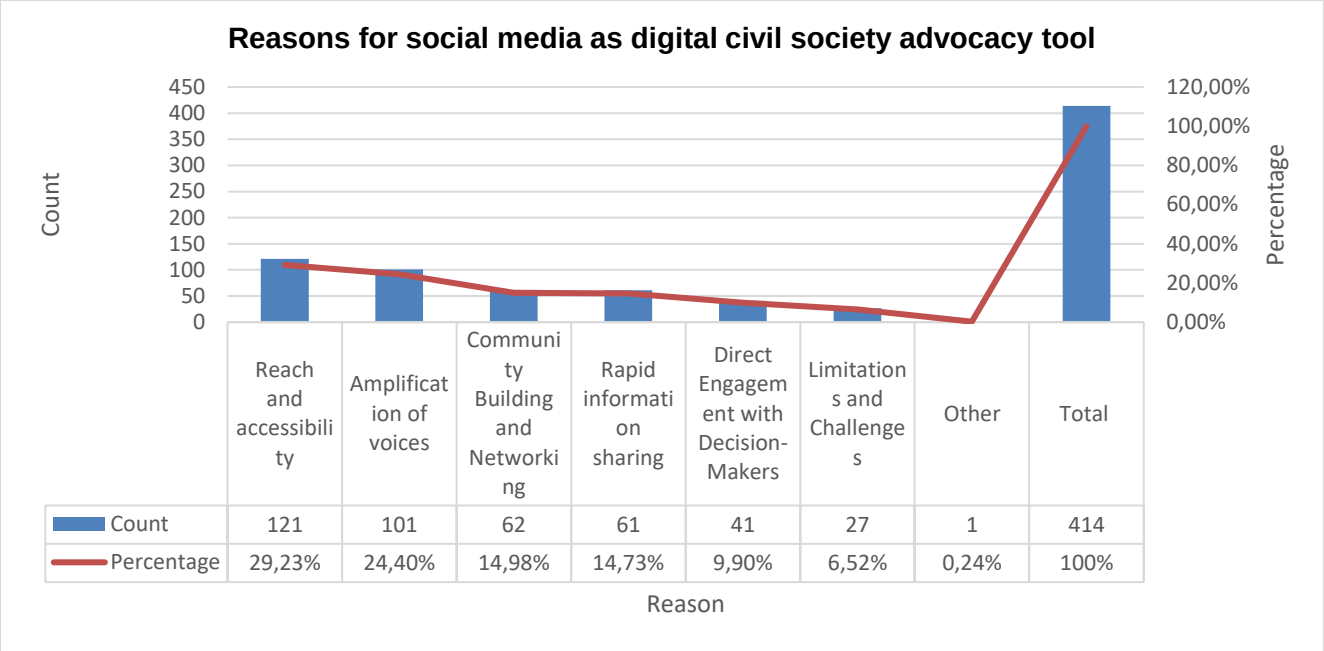
social media to be highly efficient in promoting causes and influencing policy decision-making, indicating strong confidence in its capacity to drive meaningful change.
A further 24.15% of the respondents (100 out of 414) perceive social media as somewhat efficient, recognizing its effectiveness while acknowledging possible limitations in certain contexts.

Approximately 12.56% of the respondents (52 out of 414) maintain a neutral stance, neither endorsing nor dismissing the efficacy of social media. This neutrality may result from limited direct experience or varying outcomes observed in specific cases. In contrast, a smaller proportion of the respondent's express reservations about the effectiveness of social media. For instance, 4.35% (18 respondents) deem it neither efficient nor inefficient, 4.11% (17 respondents) consider it not very efficient, and 3.62% (15 respondents) regard it as not efficient at all. Additionally, 1.93% (8 respondents) find social media somewhat inefficient, and 0.72% (3 respondents) view it as very inefficient. Lastly, only one respondent (0.24%) selected the 'Other' category, reflecting minimal divergence from the predefined response options.

In summary, most the respondents (72.46%, or 300 out of 414) regard social media as either very efficient or somewhat efficient for advocacy, underscoring its pivotal role in contemporary advocacy efforts. Social media's broad reach and capacity for engagement are key factors in its ability to influence public opinion and policy. Nonetheless, the presence of neutral and critical responses suggests that its effectiveness is not universal and may vary depending on factors such as audience, messaging, and contextual dynamics. To enhance advocacy outcomes, ongoing assessment and refinement of social media strategies are necessary.

5.9.2 Distribution for social media users' respondents according to reasons for social media as digital civil society advocacy tool

Figure 21: Reasons for social media as digital civil society advocacy tool



Source: Researcher own data

The analysis on figure 21 of the reasons for social media's role as a digital civil society advocacy tool reveals a diverse array of perspectives among the respondents in the eThekwini Metropolitan Municipality. These insights align with the broader discourse on the influence of social media in fostering e-democracy and improving governance and service delivery.

A significant proportion of the respondents, one hundred and twenty-one (121 or 29.23%), identify the reach and accessibility of social media as the primary reason for its effectiveness in civil society advocacy. This underscores the idea that social media offers a wide-reaching platform that allows messages to be shared quickly and broadly, making it an essential tool for raising awareness and mobilising public support.

Additionally, one hundred and one of the respondents (101 or 24.40%) highlight the amplification of voices as a key feature of social media. This suggests that social media empowers marginalised groups and individuals by providing a space where their concerns can be heard and echoed by a wider audience, thus increasing pressure on decision-makers to act on public demands.

Community building and networking emerge as another critical reason, cited by sixty-two respondents (62 or 14.98%). Social media facilitates the creation of digital communities that foster solidarity and collaboration around common causes. This function is instrumental in organising collective action and sustaining civil society movements.

Similarly, rapid information sharing, acknowledged by sixty-one of the respondents (14.73%), is seen as a valuable aspect of social media advocacy. In the fast-paced digital world with its timely dissemination of information that allows for quick responses to emerging issues and thus enhance the agility of civil society organisations and their ability to react to governance challenges.

Direct engagement with decision-makers, cited by forty-one of the respondents (41 or 9.90%), indicates that social media provides a channel through which civil society can directly interact with government officials and thus increase the likelihood of policy change. However, this function remains less prominent compared to the broader reach and accessibility offered by social media.

On the other hand, twenty-seven of the respondents (6.52%) mention the limitations and challenges of social media in this context, suggesting that while social media has substantial potential as an advocacy tool, there are still barriers to its full effectiveness, such as misinformation or digital divide issues. On the contrary, a negligible proportion of responses (1 count, 0.24%) fell outside the predefined categories selecting ‘‘Other’’.

5.9.3 Distribution for social media users’ respondents according to personal participation in social media campaigns and movements related to socio-political issues

This section presents the analysis of data gathered from the respondents who participated in social media campaigns or movements related to social or political issues.

Out of 414 potential respondents, 82 individuals answered the question, which allowed them the option to opt-out.

The researcher uncovered patterns of participation and the impact of social media on the respondents' activism. The 82 respondents who answered the question showed varying degrees of involvement in social media campaigns and movements. Therefore, the table below summarizes the main themes that emerged.

Table 3:Participation in social media campaigns and movements

Personal participation	**Frequency**	**Percentage**
Participation in Political Campaigns	24	29.3%
Grassroots Community Activism	18	22%
Participation in Educational and Social Justice Movements	17	20.7%
Online Petition and Awareness Campaigns	12	14.6%
Sharing Campaign Information via social media	8	9.8%
Mobilising Public Officials for Local Governance Issues	3	3.6%
Total	82	100%

Source: Researcher own data

Table 3 illustrate that, the most common form of social media engagement reported by the respondents (29.3%) was participation in political campaigns, with grassroots community activism (22%) being the second most prevalent. A significant proportion of the respondents (20.7%) also engaged in educational and social justice movements, while 14.6% reported involvement in online petitions and awareness campaigns. These responses reveal key themes related to social and political engagement through social media, highlighting the various ways in which the respondents used these platforms to raise awareness, mobilise resources, and promote activism.

(a) Participation in political campaigns

Social media serves as a powerful tool for political mobilisation, as evidenced by the 29.3% of the respondents who participated in political campaigns. These respondents utilised social media to share political content, mobilise voters, and advocate for political candidates. For instance, one respondent noted thus: *"I campaigned for the ANC in South Africa using social media platforms"* (R11). Similarly, another respondent stated, *"I campaigned for Zweli Mkhize for president"* (R77), and *"I was involved in canvassing for the ANC*" (R78).

(b) Grassroots community activism

Grassroots activism, which accounted for 22% of the responses, was largely centred around leveraging social media for collective action within local communities. The respondents used social media to address pressing local issues and support community members. One respondent shared, *"We were donating R10 each person to build a house for an old woman in Umlazi"* (R27). Another explained, "*We mobilised youth to register to vote and found job opportunities for them"* (R8). Additionally, a respondent highlighted their involvement in local crime prevention initiatives, stating, "*As a community, we help one another report crimes within our area"* (R19).

(c) Participation in educational and social justice movements

Approximately 20.7% of the respondents were involved in social media movements related to education, social justice, and human rights. The #FeesMustFall movement was frequently cited, showcasing the role of social media in mobilising youth and advocating for policy reform. One respondent emphasized thus: "*I played a crucial role in the #FeesMustFall movement" (Rt 51). Others shared their advocacy efforts, with one stating, "I advocated for GBV, #BlackLivesMatter, and the free education movement"* (Respondent 65), while another indicated participation in international movements such as the "Bring Back Our Girls hashtag and Free Palestine" (Respondent 64).

(d) Online petition and awareness campaigns

A notable 14.6% of the respondents were involved in signing online petitions or spreading awareness on social issues through social media. These platforms made petitioning more accessible and facilitated large-scale participation. For instance, one respondent explained, "*We won a rape case through signing petitions"* (R46). Another participant noted, "*I signed petitions related to the Miss South Africa controversy*" (R42). Additionally, a respondent remarked, *"I have signed petitions for causes that I am passionate about"* (R15).

(e) Sharing campaign information via social media

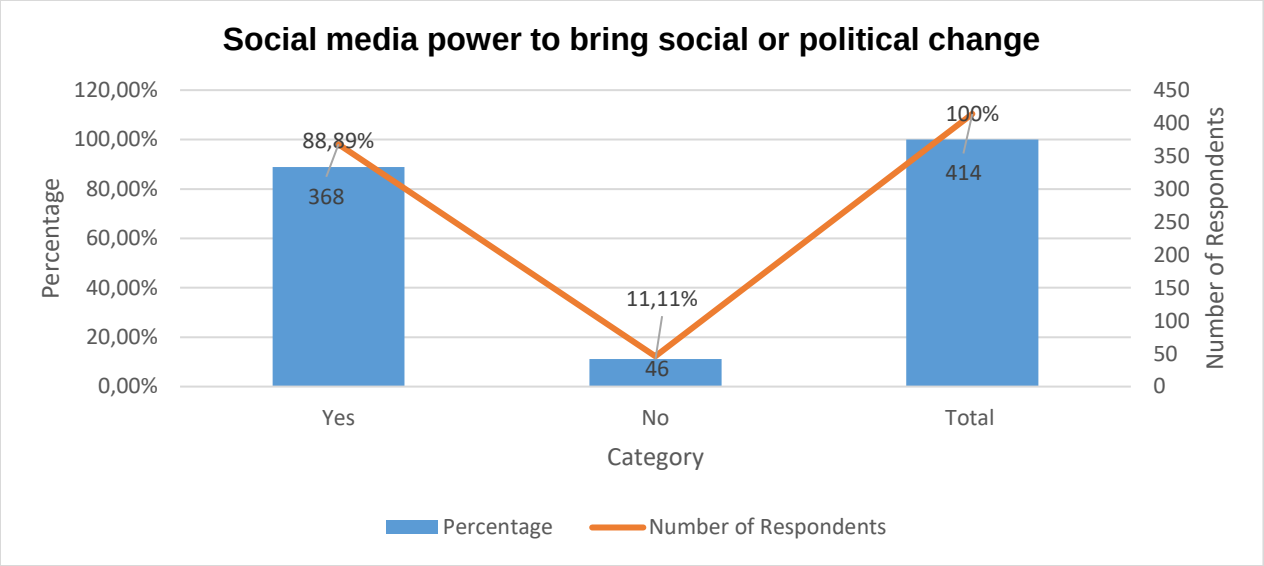
Some of the respondents (9.8%) contributed to various campaigns by sharing information and raising awareness. This form of engagement helped amplify the reach of social and political movements. As one respondent noted, *"I contributed to political programme awareness by sharing information*" (R6), while another stated, "*I shared the campaign posts on social media"* (10).

(f) Mobilising public officials for local governance issues

A smaller percentage of the respondents (3.6%) used social media to put pressure on local government officials to address specific governance issues within their communities. This highlights the growing role of social media in local governance efforts. For example, one respondent mentioned, *"I mobilised public officials to attend to sewerage leakages that affected tourism in eThekwini beaches"* (R81).

5.9.4 Distribution for social media users' respondents according to belief that social media has power to bring about significant socio-political change

Figure 22: Social media power to bring social or political change



Source: Researcher own data

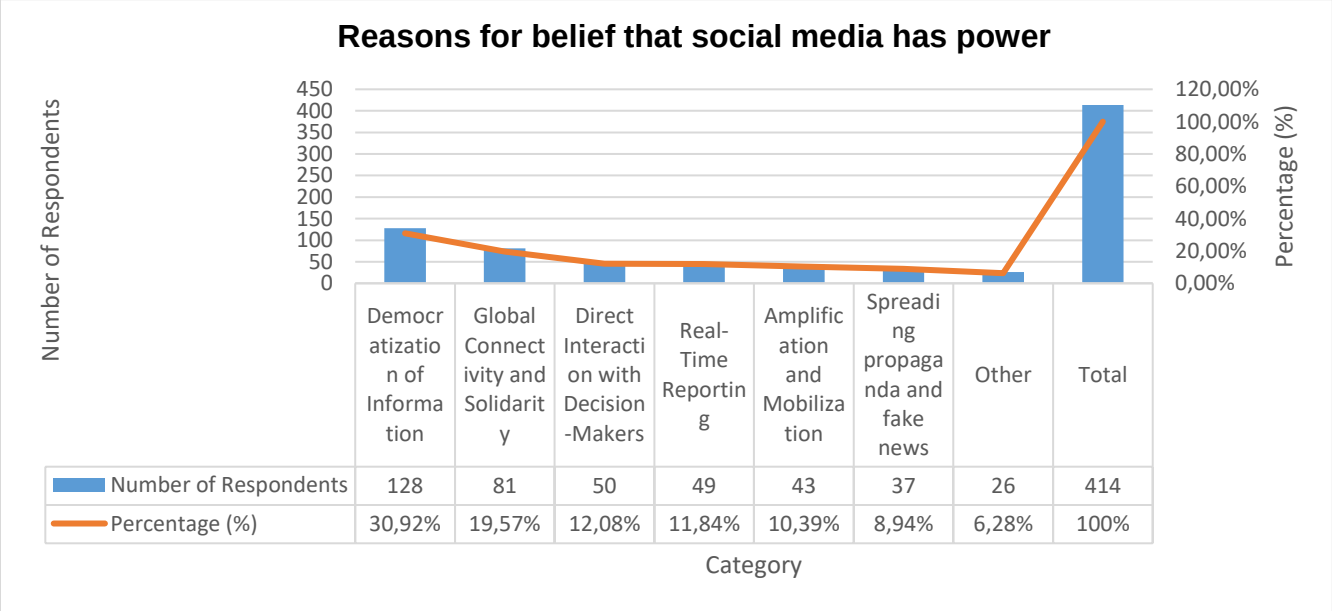
The analysis of figure 22 data respondents' belief regarding the capacity of social media to facilitate significant social or political change reveals a striking consensus within the eThekwini Metropolitan Municipality. Therefore, a substantial majority of three hundred and sixty-eight of the respondents (368) represented by eighty-eight-point eighty nine percent (88.89%) express confidence in the ability of social media to drive transformative changes in society and governance. This strong endorsement highlights the perceived importance of digital platforms in mobilising public opinion, fostering activism, and influencing policy decisions. This belief may be attributed to the widespread use of social media platforms for sharing information, engaging in discussions, and connecting with like-minded individuals.

Conversely, a smaller proportion of the population, consisting of forty-six of the respondents (46 or 11.11%), does not believe that social media holds the power to effect such changes. This relatively minor proportion indicates some scepticism about the efficacy of social media as a tool for political engagement and social advocacy. Additionally, concerns about misinformation, echo chambers, and the potential for online harassment may contribute to this perspective.

Overall, most of respondents believe that social media plays a vital role in facilitating social and political change, especially in promoting public participation and accountability within the eThekwini Metropolitan Municipality. This underscores the increasing acknowledgment of social media as an essential tool for change, empowering individuals and communities to influence decision-makers. Among the 414 respondents, 368 answered "Yes," while 46 answered "No."

5.9.4.1 Distribution for social media users' respondents according to reasons for belief that social media has power to bring about significant social or political change

Figure 23: Reasons for belief that social media has power



Source: Researcher own data

In the survey data on figure 23 of the respondents' reasons for believing in social media's power to effect significant social or political change within the eThekwini Metropolitan Municipality, a diverse set of views emerges. The data shows that social media is

perceived as a powerful instrument for democratising information, as indicated by one hundred and twenty-eight respondents (128), representing thirty-one percent ninety two percent (30.92%) of the total. This underscores the view that the accessibility and broad reach of information provided by social media is essential in fostering transparency and accountability in governance.

In addition, global connectivity and solidarity are also highly regarded, with eighty-one (81) of the respondents represented by nineteen-point fifty seven percent (19.57%), affirming social media's role in connecting individuals and communities on a global scale. This suggests that many believe in its capacity to build transnational coalitions and solidarity, amplifying local governance issues on the international stage.

Moreover, fifty (50) of the respondents comprising twelve-point eight percent (12.08%), highlighted the significance of direct interaction with decision-makers via social media platforms. This indicates that social media is seen as a critical channel for fostering citizen-government engagement, which help to close the gap between the public and policymakers, thereby enhancing responsiveness in governance.

Other reasons, including real-time reporting, highlighted by eleven-point eighty four percent (11.84%) of forty-nine (49) respondents, as well as amplification and mobilisation efforts, mentioned by about ten-point thirty nine percent (10.39%) of the respondents represented by forty-three (43) individuals, show that social media is valued for its ability to disseminate information quickly and mobilise groups for collective action. However, a smaller group of thirty-seven (37) respondents represented by eight-point ninety four percent (8.94%) raised concerns about social media's potential for spreading propaganda and fake news, thus illustrating awareness of its negative implications.

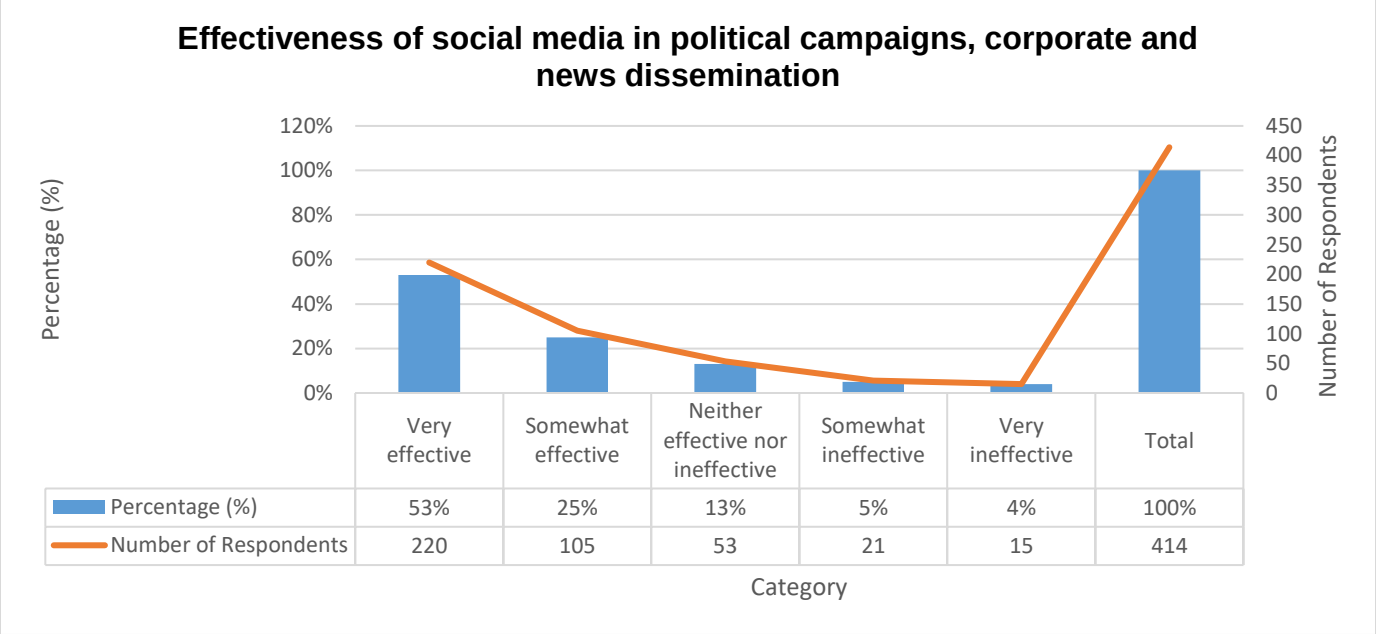
Overall, this analysis reflects that most of the respondents view social media as a powerful tool for influencing governance and service delivery by promoting transparency, fostering participation, and encouraging civic activism. Nonetheless, there is an acknowledgment

of the potential risks associated with misinformation, suggesting the need for responsible social media use in the realm of e-democracy.

5.10 Part VI: Social media and political campaigns

5.10.1 Distribution for social media users' respondents according to effectiveness of social media in political campaigns, corporate and news dissemination

Figure 24: Effectiveness of social media in political campaigns, corporate and news dissemination



Source: Researcher own data

The data presented on figure 24 reveals a diverse range of opinions regarding the effectiveness of social media in political campaigns, corporate communication, and news dissemination. Therefore, a majority, fifty-three percent (53%) represented by two hundred and twenty (220) of the respondents, consider social media to be very effective in these domains. This suggests a strong belief in social media's capacity to significantly influence these sectors. Another substantial portion, twenty-five percent (25%) represented by one hundred and five (105) of the respondents, view social media as

somewhat effective. These figures highlight the perception that, while effective, the platform may have limitations.

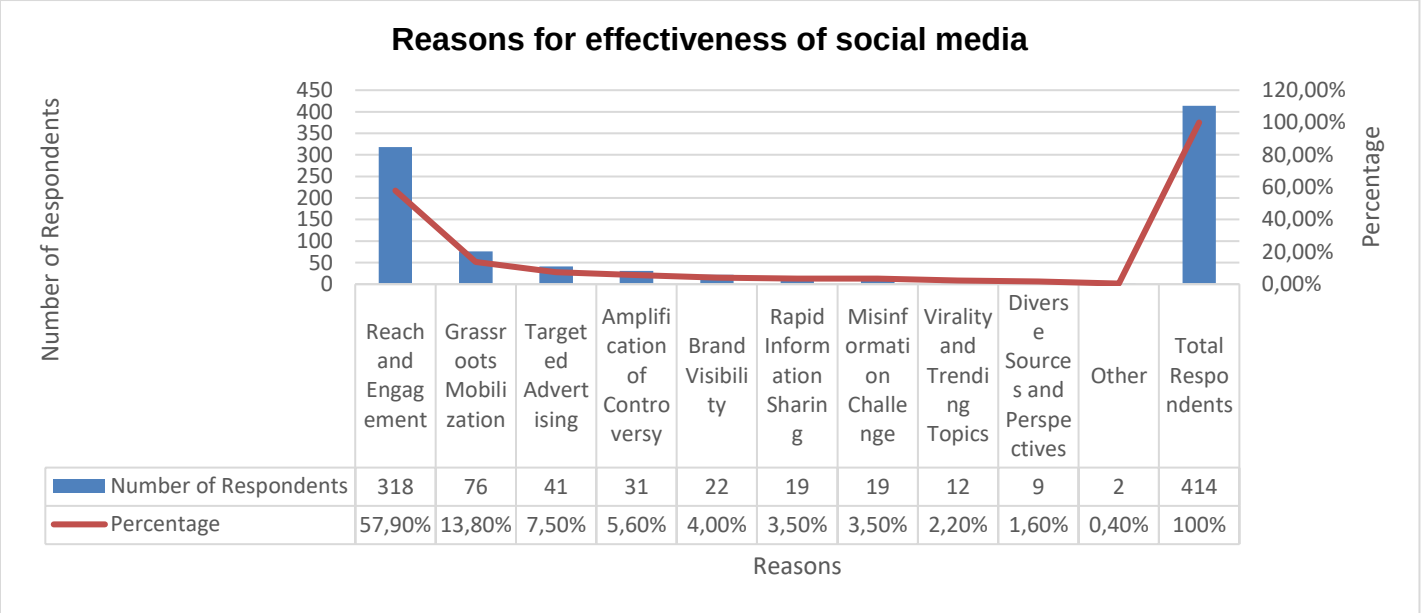
In contrast, a smaller group, thirteen percent (13%) representing fifty-three (53) of the respondents, remains neutral, stating that social media is neither effective nor ineffective. This neutrality points to a balanced view or uncertainty regarding its true impact. Fewer respondents hold a negative view, with five percent (5%) representing twenty-one (21) of the respondents perceiving social media as somewhat ineffective, and only four percent (4%) representing fifteen (15) of the respondents deeming it very ineffective. These minority perspectives indicate scepticism about the efficacy of social media in achieving desired results in political, corporate, and news spheres.

The total number of the respondents is four hundred and fourteen (414), providing a comprehensive insight into public sentiment on the matter. This data emphasizes the strong perception of social media as an influential tool in the political and corporate spheres, with a clear majority acknowledging its effectiveness, despite the existence of a minority that questions its overall impact.

In summary, at the eThekwini metropolitan municipality, a substantial number of users consider social media an essential tool for e-democracy, particularly in promoting transparency, engagement, and accountability. With a significant proportion of the respondents affirming its effectiveness, the municipality could effectively utilise social media to strengthen governance and enhance citizen participation. However, the existence of a sceptical minority highlights ongoing challenges, such as misinformation, accessibility, and the digital divide. Ultimately, while social media holds considerable promise for improving service delivery, its success relies on addressing these critical issues.

5.10.1.1 Distribution for social media users' respondents according to reasons for effectiveness of social media in political campaigns, corporate and news dissemination

Figure 25: Reasons for effectiveness of social media



Source: Researcher own data

The data presented on figure 25 of the survey responses reveals that social media platforms are perceived as critical tools in modern political campaigns, with varying degrees of effectiveness across different aspects. The most significant finding is the role of reach and engagement, which was identified by fifty seven percent (57.9%) of the three hundred and eighteen (318) respondents as the primary advantage of social media. These platforms allow candidates to communicate their messages, policies, and updates efficiently to a broad audience, while also fostering real-time interaction with supporters and addressing any concerns that arise. This interactive engagement helps to solidify a candidate's presence and resonance within the public sphere.

The second most prominent function of social media is its ability to facilitate grassroots mobilisation, as indicated by thirteen point eight (13.8%) represented by seventy-six (76)

of respondents. Through social media, supporters can coordinate events, rallies, and volunteer activities, allowing political campaigns to build strong, community-based support. This function highlights the platform's effectiveness in decentralising campaign efforts and enabling active participation from the public at large.

Subsequent to that, targeted advertising on social media was noted by seven-point five percent (7.5%) represented by forty-one (41) of respondents) as a valuable tool for reaching specific voter segments and demographics. Social media's data-driven advertising capabilities allow campaigns to tailor their messages to resonate with targeted groups, increasing the efficiency and impact of political communication. However, social media can also serve as a double-edged sword, as five-point six percent (5.6%) represented by thirty-one (31) of respondents emphasized its role in the amplification of controversy. The viral nature of these platforms can lead to the rapid dissemination of scandals or controversial information, which may harm a candidate’s public perception.

In terms of visibility, four percent (4%) represented by twenty-two (22) of respondents pointed out that social media enhances brand visibility for candidates. By maintaining a continuous presence and engaging with their audience, candidates can ensure that their messages remain at the forefront of public attention. Similarly, the platforms enable rapid information sharing, as highlighted by three-point five percent (3.5%) represented by nineteen (19) respondents, allowing campaigns to respond swiftly to emerging events and communicate updates in real time. However, the challenge of misinformation was also acknowledged by another three-point five percent (3.5%) represented by nineteen (19) of respondents who noted that false or misleading information can distort public opinion and mislead voters, presenting a significant obstacle for campaigns.

Furthermore, viral incidence and trending topics, as cited by two-point two percent (2.2%) of the respondents, can significantly boost a campaign’s visibility. When campaign content goes viral or becomes part of trending discussions, it gains broader reach, further amplifying the candidate’s message. Social media also provides access to diverse

sources and perspectives, as noted by one point six percent (1.6%) represented by nine (9) of the respondents, which enriches public discourse by exposing audiences to a wider range of viewpoints and discussions.

Lastly, a small percentage of zero point four (0.4%) representing 2 of the respondents pointed out other factors that contribute to the effectiveness of social media in political campaigns. These aspects, though minor, illustrate the multi-faceted nature of social media as a political tool. In total, the survey gathered responses from 414 individuals, providing a comprehensive overview of the perceived benefits and challenges of social media in the context of political campaigning.

5.10.1.2 Distribution for social media users' respondents according to examples of successful political campaigns and movements that heavily relied on social media platforms

Out of the 414 respondents only 115 responded to the open-ended question concerning the influence of social media on e-democracy and governance within eThekwini metropolitan municipality, and three distinct themes emerged. Therefore, each theme highlights a different aspect of how social media has shaped political campaigns and movements, particularly in the context of governance and service delivery.

Table 4: Examples of successful political campaigns and movements

Successful examples	Number of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Political Campaign Effectiveness	50	43.5
Mobilisation and Awareness	38	33.0
Criticism and Propaganda	27	23.5
Total Respondents	115	100

Source: Researcher own data

I. Political campaign effectiveness

A significant number of 50 respondents representing 43.5% emphasized the effectiveness of social media in political campaigns. This illustrates how various political parties successfully utilised social media platforms for marketing their agendas and engaging with potential voters. Hence, respondents R92 and R38 respectively observed that political parties, especially the uMkhonto weSizwe (MK) party, effectively communicated their messages and garnered support through social media channels, which allowed them to connect with a broader audience in a shorter time frame. The ability to disseminate information rapidly and engage directly with voters was highlighted as a key factor in their success.

II. Mobilisation and awareness

This category indicates that 38 responses representing 33.0% address how social media campaigns have mobilised communities and raised awareness on various political and social issues. Social media platforms have served as tools for organising protests, sharing information, and encouraging civic participation. Therefore, respondents R90 and R50 indicated that movements such as the #FeesMustFall and Black Lives Matter harnessed social media to create awareness about critical social issues, illustrating the platform's role in facilitating grassroots movements. This mobilisation has implications for governance and service delivery, as increased public engagement can lead to more responsive governance.

III. Criticism and propaganda

A proportion of 27 respondents representing 23.5% expressed concerns about the use of social media for propaganda and the dissemination of fake news. This theme captures the negative aspect of social media's influence, particularly in how it can be used to undermine trust in political institutions and spread misinformation.

The above-mentioned responses highlighted that while social media can foster democratic engagement, it can also be weaponised to promote divisive narratives, which complicates the relationship between governance and public perception.

5.10.2 Distribution for social media users' respondents according to opinion, on the advantages and disadvantages of using social media for political purposes

The qualitative data has been categorised into distinct themes based on the responses from R1-R146. The table below summarizes the main themes, including the number of the respondents expressing each viewpoint, and the percentage of the total respondents (146).

Table 5: Opinions on the advantages and disadvantages

Theme	Number of Respondents	Percentage of Responses
Advantages of social media		
Information Sharing	29	19.9%
Real-time Engagement	25	17.1%
Mobilisation and Crowdsourcing	20	13.7%
Transparency and Openness	21	14.4%
Increased Political Awareness	15	10.3%
Access to a Wider Audience	18	12.3%
Disadvantages of social media		
Misinformation and Fake News	32	21.9%
Propaganda	23	15.8%
Cyberbullying	10	6.8%
Defamation and Libel	12	8.2%

Illiteracy and Digital Divide	15	10.3%
Polarization and Confusion	14	9.6%

Advantages of Social Media

I. Information Sharing (19.9%): The respondents highlight the ease of accessing and sharing information through social media. This suggests that social media is a vital tool for disseminating political information rapidly.

II. Real-time Engagement (17.1%): The capability for immediate interaction with the public was emphasized. R140 noted, "*Real-time information can be easily shared,"* indicating that social media platforms facilitate timely communication between citizens and political entities.

III. Mobilisation and Crowdsourcing (13.7%): The respondents mentioned social media's effectiveness in mobilising citizens for various political initiatives. R93 remarked on its advantage in "*mobilising, crowdsourcing and organising*."

IV. Transparency and Openness (14.4%): Several respondents indicated that social media promotes transparency in governance. R128 affirmed, "*It promotes transparency, openness and provides real-time data*," underscoring its role in enhancing democratic accountability.

V. Increased Political Awareness (10.3%): The respondents noted that social media helps citizens stay informed about political developments.

VI. Access to a Wider Audience (12.3%): The ability to reach diverse demographics was a significant advantage, as indicated by R143: *"Advantages are that it can reach a wider audience."*

Disadvantages of Social Media

a. Misinformation and Fake News (21.9%): The prevalence of inaccurate information was a major concern among the respondents. R124 highlighted that social media presents "*different views and easily get misinformation*," and thus emphasized the challenges it poses to informed political engagement.

b. Propaganda (15.8%): The risk of propaganda undermining political discourse was noted. R102 remarked, "*it has the disadvantage of spreading false propaganda*," suggesting that social media can be manipulated for political gain.
c. Cyberbullying (6.8%): Some of the respondents pointed out the negative impacts of social media, including cyberbullying. R95 mentioned that social media's disadvantages include "*cyberbullying*."
d. Defamation and Libel (8.2%): The respondents expressed concerns about the potential for defamation through social media. R129 highlighted the risk of *"possible defamation of characters, leading to libel."*
e. Illiteracy and Digital Divide (10.3%): The challenges faced by certain demographics in utilising social media were discussed. R133 noted, "mostly in rural areas they have a challenge with network," pointing to barriers in access.
f. Polarisation and Confusion (9.6%): The impact of misinformation leading to societal division was mentioned. R137 indicated that "*people are sharing different things about politics, so other people are getting confused*."

The analysis reveals a complex landscape regarding the influence of social media on e-democracy within the eThekwini Metropolitan Municipality. While social media presents several advantages, such as improved information sharing, real-time engagement, and enhanced transparency, it also poses significant challenges, notably the spread of misinformation and propaganda.

5.11 Chapter summary

Chapter five of the study delved into the multifaceted role of social media in governance and public service delivery, aligning its findings with the research objectives to provide a nuanced understanding of its implications for e-democracy. Using quantitative methodologies, the chapter examined data from 414 survey respondents, offering statistics and detailed narratives on how social media influences public opinion, fosters accountability, monitors public services, supports advocacy, impacts political campaigns, and accelerates service delivery.

Table 6: Summary of the quantitative analysis

Section	Category	Dominant Percentage	Description
Part I: Quantitative Survey Demographics	Race Representation	84.46% Black	The majority of the respondents (84.46%) were Black, reflecting the demographic makeup of eThekwini, with smaller percentages from the White, Indian, and Coloured groups.
	Age Distribution	46.38% 22-35 years	Most of the respondents were young adults (22-35 years), with lower participation from teens and older groups, indicating a youthful demographic engaging in e-democracy.
	Gender	57.97% Female	More women participated in the survey (57.97%), highlighting their higher engagement in social media discussions related to governance.
	Education Level	28.74% Grade 12	A significant proportion (28.74%) had completed Grade 12, with fewer holding advanced degrees, suggesting varying levels of awareness and engagement with social media on governance issues.
	Social Media Usage Frequency	83.33% Daily use	A large majority (83.33%) of the respondents use social media daily, indicating its integral role in

			their daily life and a potential tool for e-democracy.
	Regularly Used Platforms	92.27% WhatsApp	WhatsApp was the most frequently used platform (92.27%), followed by Facebook (74.64%), showing their importance in social media engagement for governance and service delivery.
	Duration of Social Media Use	46.38% 10-15 years	Most of the respondents have been using social media for over 10 years, indicating a deep integration of social media in their lives and potential influence in governance processes.
Part II: Democratic Strategies	Social Media Strategies to Influence Governance	26.60% All strategies	The majority preferred a combination of strategies (26.60%) to influence public opinion, including promoting civic education, encouraging dialogue, and mobilising grassroots movements.
	Engagement in Political Discussions	28% Information sharing	Information sharing (28%) was the most common method for using social media in political engagement, with a focus on transparency, awareness, and political discourse.
	Influence on Political Campaigns & Policy	67.15% Very influential	A strong majority (67.15%) viewed social media as very influential in political campaigns and policymaking, underscoring its transformative role in modern governance.
Part III: Holding the Government Accountable	Techniques to Hold Government Accountable	25.6% Multiple techniques	A significant portion (25.6%) employed a variety of techniques, including citizen journalism, online petitions, and information sharing, to hold the government accountable.
	Effectiveness of Techniques	41.06% Extremely effective	Most of the respondents (41.06%) believed that the techniques used on social media were extremely effective in promoting government transparency and accountability.

	Reasons for Effectiveness	24.42% Mobilisation	The most cited reason for the effectiveness of social media was its role in mobilising and raising awareness, making it an essential tool for public participation.
Part IV: Social media and Public Services	Significance in Monitoring Public Services	54.35% Highly significant	A majority (54.35%) recognized social media as highly significant in monitoring public services and ensuring accountability.
	Reasons for Effectiveness	35.99% Accessibility	Social media's accessibility and ease of information sharing were the most common reasons for its perceived effectiveness in monitoring public services.
	Improvement of Public Service Delivery	31.40% Reporting issues	A significant portion (31.40%) believed that using social media to report service delivery issues was the most impactful way to improve public service performance.
Part V: Social media as an Advocacy Tool	Efficiency in Advocacy	48.31% Highly efficient	Nearly half (48.31%) of the respondents viewed social media as highly efficient for advocacy, demonstrating its effectiveness in driving public opinion and influencing policy.
	Reasons for Advocacy Efficiency	29.23% Reach and accessibility	The main reason for social media's effectiveness in advocacy was its wide reach and accessibility, making it a crucial tool for raising awareness and mobilising support.

I. Democratic strategies on social media

The study underscores the growing significance of social media as a tool for shaping public opinion on governance. Platforms like WhatsApp (used by 92.27% of the respondents) and Facebook (74.64%) have become central to public discourse, enabling citizens to engage in civic dialogue and influence decision-making processes.

The respondents reported using a variety of democratic strategies to express their views, with a strong emphasis on promoting civic education and awareness (23.25%) and encouraging open dialogue and debate (20.36%). These strategies reflect the public's

desire for an informed and participatory approach to governance, where citizens are empowered to contribute to democratic processes. The ability of social media to facilitate real-time interactions and foster collective action illustrates its transformative potential in reshaping public engagement.

However, upon cross referencing, the study demographic analysis reveals significant insights into the engagement patterns on social media platforms. A substantial majority of the respondents identified as Black, comprising 84.46% of the sample. This high percentage underscores the effectiveness of social media strategies within this demographic, suggesting a strong resonance and engagement with these platforms.

In terms of age distribution, young adults aged 22-35 represented the largest cohort, accounting for 46.38% of the respondents. This finding indicates that younger generations are at the forefront of utilising social media for democratic engagement, driving the discourse and participation in civic activities through these digital channels.

Gender analysis shows that women were the most active participants, making up 57.97% of the respondents. This highlights the pivotal role women play in leveraging social media for civic purposes, demonstrating their significant contribution to democratic engagement and community involvement through these platforms.

II. Holding the government accountable

Aligned with the objective of examining accountability mechanisms, the study reveals that social media has emerged as a vital tool for holding governments to account. Techniques such as citizen journalism (20.53%), information sharing, and hashtag campaigns (18.36%) were frequently employed by the respondents to spotlight issues of governance and service delivery.

Nearly half of the respondents (47.58%) described themselves as activists, leveraging social media to amplify their voices and demand accountability from public officials.

Examples of success include exposing corruption cases and putting pressure on officials to address public grievances, demonstrating social media's role as a catalyst for transparency and reform.

The demographic analysis provides valuable insights into the educational background and social media usage patterns of the respondents. A significant proportion of the respondents, 28.74%, had completed at least Grade 12. This indicates a basic level of education that equips individuals with the necessary skills to understand and effectively utilise social media platforms for purposes of accountability and civic engagement.

Furthermore, the data on usage frequency reveals that a vast majority of the respondents, 83.33%, engage with social media on a daily basis. This high level of consistent engagement suggests that these individuals are well-positioned to monitor and respond to governance issues in real-time, leveraging the immediacy and reach of social media to enhance their civic participation and oversight.

III. Monitoring public services and ensuring accountability

A key focus of the chapter is the use of social media in monitoring public services and holding them accountable for their performance. Over 54% of the respondents affirmed its significance in ensuring transparency and responsiveness in service delivery. Social media's accessibility and ease of information dissemination emerged as central themes, with the respondents recognizing its capacity to highlight service gaps and mobilise community action.

Social media platforms facilitated real-time feedback and thus allowed citizens to report issues such as water shortages and infrastructure failures. Challenges such as limited government responsiveness and concerns about misinformation were noted, highlighting the need for more structured and consistent engagement from officials to maximize the potential of social media in governance.

In contrast, the analysis of social media usage duration reveals that a significant proportion of the respondents, 46.38%, have been using these platforms for over 10 years. This long-term engagement indicates a deep familiarity and comfort with social media, suggesting that these individuals are well-versed in navigating and utilising these tools for various purposes, including civic engagement and accountability.

In terms of platform preference, the widespread use of WhatsApp and Facebook among the respondents highlights their effectiveness in monitoring and reporting public service issues. These platforms' extensive reach and user-friendly interfaces make them ideal for real-time communication and information dissemination, thereby enhancing the ability of users to stay informed and actively participate in governance processes.

IV. Advocacy and policy decision-making

Social media's role as an advocacy tool was another critical aspect explored in the study. Nearly half of the respondents (48.31%) rated it as highly effective in promoting causes and influencing policy decisions. Its ability to amplify marginalised voices and foster community building was frequently cited as a key strength.

The study found that platforms are increasingly being used to create digital communities, enabling individuals to rally around common causes and sustain advocacy efforts. Rapid information sharing and direct engagement with decision-makers were identified as important mechanisms for driving awareness and pushing for policy changes.

In contrast, the demographic analysis highlights the pivotal roles of young adults and women in social media advocacy. These groups, as primary users, leverage social media platforms to address and advocate for issues pertinent to their communities. Their active participation underscores the importance of these demographics in driving social change and community engagement through digital means.

In addition, the data indicates that the respondents with higher education levels are more likely to engage in and influence policy decision-making via social media. This correlation

suggests that a higher educational background equips individuals with the critical thinking and analytical skills necessary to effectively participate in and shape policy discussions, and thereby enhance their impact on governance and public affairs.

V. Social media's impact on political campaigns and news dissemination

The study further examined the impact of social media on political campaigns and its role as a news feeder. A significant majority (67.15%) of the respondents viewed social media as highly influential in shaping political discourse and campaigns. Platforms provided real-time engagement opportunities, and allowed politicians to connect with constituents and address issues directly.

The respondents highlighted social media's ability to serve as an alternative news source, offering timely updates and fostering a more informed citizenry. However, the prevalence of misinformation was identified as a persistent challenge, and emphasized the need for robust fact-checking mechanisms to safeguard the integrity of information shared online.

In addition, the demographic analysis underscores the significant engagement of Black respondents and young adults in political discussions on social media. Their high level of participation suggests that social media platforms are crucial tools for these groups, enabling them to influence political processes and access news. The active involvement of these demographics highlights the role of social media in democratizing information and providing a voice to traditionally underrepresented communities, thereby fostering greater inclusivity in political discourse.

V. Acceleration of service delivery

The operational usage of social media to accelerate service delivery was another area of focus. The respondents recognized its potential to enhance communication between citizens and service providers, with 31.40% emphasising its effectiveness in reporting service delivery issues. Platforms enabled real-time feedback loops, facilitating quicker responses to public concerns and improving overall service efficiency.

Social media was also seen as a valuable tool for collaboration among stakeholders, promoting transparency in service delivery processes. However, the study noted that inconsistent government engagement and the spread of misinformation could undermine these efforts, and called for strategic interventions to address these barriers.

The analysis of social media usage patterns reveals that the respondents exhibit both high daily usage and long-term engagement with these platforms. This consistent and prolonged interaction underscores the potential of social media to significantly enhance service delivery. The ability to provide constant and immediate feedback through social media channels allows for real-time communication between service providers and the community. This dynamic interaction facilitates prompt responses to issues, continuous improvement of services, and greater accountability, ultimately leading to more effective and responsive governance.

Overall, chapter five presented a comprehensive examination of the transformative role of social media in shaping governance and enhancing public service delivery within the eThekwini Metropolitan Municipality. By aligning its findings with the study's research questions and objectives, this chapter demonstrates how social media functions as a vital platform for fostering democratic participation, accountability, advocacy, and efficient service delivery.

In spite of the persistence of challenges such as misinformation and inconsistent government responsiveness, the evidence suggests that social media has significant potential to reshape governance processes and empower citizens. To fully realize this potential, it is essential to implement strategic initiatives that enhance the effectiveness of social media. Such efforts will ensure that social media continues to play an integral role in advancing e-democracy and improving the quality of public services.

CHAPTER SIX

6. QUALITATIVE DATA ANALYSIS AND PRESENTATION OF THE FINDINGS

6.1 Introduction

This chapter explored the impact of social media on governance and service delivery in the eThekwini Metropolitan Municipality, and emphasized the role of digital communication platforms. Insights from 20 participants involved in municipal digital communication and 10 social media administrators from various political parties reveal key applications of social media, such as content creation, public engagement, sentiment monitoring, and coordination.

Thus, the participants noted social media's power in enhancing transparency, accountability, and public participation, while also addressing challenges like managing public expectations and combating misinformation. Qualitative data analysis is essential for understanding human experiences; as Miles, Huberman, and Saldana (2014) indicate, it helps identify patterns in data. Braun and Clarke (2006) highlight thematic analysis as effective for exploring narratives.

Through rigorous qualitative methods, this chapter offers a clear understanding of the dynamics influencing governance and service delivery in eThekwini, showcasing social media's role in facilitating e-democracy and tackling governance challenges.

Gloss: Participants [E.g. P1-P10-P20]

A. Focused Group Interview Analysis for eThekwini Municipality Communication Units

6.2. Section 1: General experience with social media

6.2.1 Distribution for social media public officials' participants according to their frequent use of social media platforms as an official duty in the eThekwini Metropolitan municipality

The following participants demonstrated how they use platforms to create engaging content, communicate interactively, and manage public feedback. They employ tools like live streaming and multimedia posts to enhance transparency and inform residents about service delivery. Structured content management and internal coordination ensure consistency, while professional networking and event promotion further strengthen public outreach and trust in governance.

I. Content creation and public engagement

The participants underscored their role in producing and sharing engaging content related to the municipality's service delivery initiatives. For example, P1 emphasized the significance of leveraging videos and social media for effective communication. Likewise, P14 highlighted the value of sharing visual content from community events and infrastructure projects. This illustrates a dedication to engaging the public through diverse multimedia platforms.

II. Interactive and timely communication with the participants

This passage highlights the significance of timely and interactive communication. P16 noted, "*I engage with the community by promptly responding to comments and messages on Facebook and WhatsApp*," underlining the necessity of real-time interaction in fostering trust. Additionally, P11 emphasized the crucial role of social media in delivering updates on municipal services and addressing public inquiries, illustrating the advantages of direct communication with residents.

III. Managing public feedback and sentiment monitoring

Monitoring public sentiment is a crucial aspect of the participants' responsibilities. As P17 mentioned, "*I track feedback on Facebook and Twitter to gather insights for enhancing our communication strategies*." This highlights the municipality's commitment to adapting its communication based on public reactions and evaluating the effectiveness of its social media content.

IV. Coordination and internal communication

Numerous participants underscored the significance of social media in facilitating internal communication. For instance, P12 remarked, "*I use WhatsApp to coordinate with team members and stakeholders, ensuring everyone is aligned on upcoming events.*" This illustrates how platforms like WhatsApp enhance internal collaboration, ultimately supporting the success of external engagements.

V. Structured and regulated content management

The participants underscored the importance of a structured approach to content management. P3 remarked that the digital team adheres to a well-organised schedule overseen by the head of communications, ensuring that all content undergoes thorough analysis and approval prior to posting or removal. Similarly, P5 emphasized that content should only be shared after receiving approval, ensuring the maintenance of quality control and message consistency in the municipality's communications.

VI. Transparency and accessibility through live streaming

A considerable number of the participants highlighted the potential of live streaming in enhancing transparency. P8 expressed, "*We are tasked with live streaming the eThekwini municipality's full council meetings to ensure transparency and accessibility for all stakeholders*." This exemplifies a firm commitment to rendering governance processes more open and inclusive to the public through the utilisation of social media platforms.

VII. Professional networking and event promotion beyond

P18 and P19 effectively leveraged LinkedIn and Facebook to broaden their professional networks and promote events. P19 remarked, *"I manage event promotions by sharing posts about upcoming activities on Facebook and Instagram."* This highlights the significance of social media in public relations and outreach, enhancing the municipality's ability to engage with various audiences and potential collaborators.

In summary, the focus group participants emphasized the crucial role that social media plays in both external communications with the public and internal coordination among team members. Their responsibilities include creating and managing content, engaging with the public, monitoring feedback, and ensuring transparency through live streaming. Hence, this showcases a comprehensive approach to using social media for e-democracy, governance, and service delivery within the eThekwini Metropolitan Municipality.

6.2.2. Distribution for social media public officials' participants according to types of activities and engagements they do on platforms

The following participants described a variety of activities that they perform on social media as part of their roles within the eThekwini Metropolitan Municipality. These activities highlight the use of social media as a tool for public engagement, content creation, event promotion, and internal coordination. Therefore, several themes emerged from the responses, particularly around communication, content management, community engagement, and transparency.

I. Communication and content sharing

A significant number of the participants emphasized the value of social media for sharing important updates about municipal services, such as service disruptions and event information. P11 stated, "*I primarily post updates about water and electricity outages and engage with residents by addressing their inquiries."* This direct communication keeps residents informed and provides real-time information.

Several participants also highlighted their role in sharing visual content. For example, P14 mentioned, *“I create and share photos and videos of community events and public announcements on Instagram and Facebook*.” Similarly, P1 noted their focus on “*engaging video content and impactful social media posts*.” These efforts are vital for maintaining an active presence and fostering greater engagement with residents.

II. Community engagement and real-time interaction

The participants emphasized the vital role of engaging with the community through direct responses to comments and messages on platforms such as Facebook and WhatsApp. P16 noted that this direct interaction enhances trust and transparency as it makes officials more accessible.

Furthermore, the participants identified live events, podcasts, and video streaming as effective methods for fostering engagement. For instance, P7 highlighted the production of podcasts and live streams for monthly events, while P8 underscored the importance of live streaming the EThekwini municipality’s full council meetings to promote transparency. These real-time interactions reflect the municipality's commitment to accessible and responsive governance.

III. Monitoring public sentiment

Numerous participants emphasized their role in monitoring and addressing public sentiment and feedback. For instance, P17 expressed, "*I actively monitor public sentiment and feedback on social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter to gather valuable insights for enhancing our communication strategies."* This crucial task empowers the municipality to remain attuned to public opinions on a range of issues, enabling them to adapt their strategies to better align with the needs and expectations of the residents.

IV. Content management and internal coordination

Several participants underscored the well-structured nature of their social media activities. For instance, P3 highlighted that the digital team adheres to a carefully organised schedule overseen by the communications head who facilitates thorough content approval. P4 added that specific roles are assigned for tasks such as commenting and publishing, which helps maintain a consistent online presence.

Additionally, internal coordination plays a vital role, with platforms like WhatsApp serving as key tools for daily operations. As P12 remarked, "I *use WhatsApp to coordinate with team members, ensuring everyone is aligned for upcoming events*." This emphasizes the significance of effective communication in successfully executing planned activities.

V. Event promotion and professional networking

The participants actively engage in event promotion and networking efforts. P19 remarked, "*I handle event promotions by sharing posts about upcoming events on Facebook and Instagram."* This strategy effectively allows the municipality to reach a broader audience and fosters public participation.

Networking on platforms such as LinkedIn is also crucial. P13 noted, "*I share success stories and achievements of the municipality to expand our professional network and attract potential partners.*" This underscores LinkedIn's importance in cultivating professional relationships and highlighting the municipality's accomplishments.

In summary, the officials of the eThekwini Metropolitan Municipality carry out a wide range of activities on social media platforms. These activities are not only geared towards communication and information dissemination but also focus on community engagement, sentiment monitoring, internal coordination, and event promotion. Platforms like WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and LinkedIn serve various functions, from sharing service delivery updates and managing public sentiment to fostering professional connections and promoting events. Social media plays a critical role in enhancing transparency, accountability, and public participation in governance and service delivery.

6.2.3. Distribution for participants' (social media users) on attitudes of social media platform administrators'

The focus group highlighted a significant shift in the eThekwini Metropolitan Municipality's approach to social media communication following an incident early in 2024, where the administrator of the official Facebook page responded to rude comments with an attitude that sparked mixed reactions. The municipality's response to this issue underscores the importance of maintaining professionalism and positively shaping the public's perception.

I. Maintaining professionalism

The participants discussed the municipality's commitment to maintaining a professional image on its social media platforms. P1 emphasized the importance of blocking disruptive individuals and removing inappropriate comments, thus highlighting the need for effective moderation. Likewise, P11 noted that the administrator responsible for inappropriate responses received a warning and underwent training in professional communication, which demonstrates the municipality's proactive approach to such issues.

In light of this incident, the municipality took steps to enhance professionalism in its social media interactions. P12 explained that the administrator was reassigned to a position with no direct public contact, while P16 remarked that this move better aligned with the administrator's skill set. These actions reflect the municipality's dedication to fostering a respectful online presence, even in the face of negativity.

II. Balancing public perception

The participants underscored the challenge of balancing professionalism with responding to negative public feedback. P2 remarked that "cultivating a positive perception of the municipality takes precedence over addressing negative feedback," which highlights a focus on reputation rather than engaging with dissatisfied individuals. Likewise, P13 emphasized the importance of maintaining professionalism and respect in responses, despite mixed community feedback.

This strategic shift demonstrates an understanding that municipal social media must reflect the institution's values, regardless of the nature of public comments. P15 noted, "*The administrator's responses were entertaining, but they didn't align with our values,"* further reinforcing the necessity for consistent messaging in social media interactions.

III. Managing negative feedback

The participants recognised that negative comments frequently arise from unresolved service delivery issues, particularly concerning essential services such as water and electricity. P5 remarked, "*Negative comments often stem from subpar service,"* while P6 highlighted the Facebook page named 27 Demit Place, which persistently raised concerns about service allocation until the issues were addressed. P7 added, "*It's unavoidable to receive negative comments when municipal departments fail to promptly resolve community issues."*

In light of this, the municipality has taken steps to strengthen its guidelines and enhance monitoring of social media interactions. P14 shared, "*We have implemented stricter guidelines for social media engagement*," while P18 noted an increase in monitoring efforts to *"ensure that all responses are professional and appropriate*." These initiatives aim to reduce future negative feedback while promoting constructive engagement with the public.

IV. Learning and improving communication skills

The incident involving the administrator became a significant learning opportunity for the communications team. P20 remarked, "*It was a learning experience for the whole team. We now hold regular training sessions to enhance our communication skills*." This underscores the municipality's dedication to improving the team's professional engagement with the public.

The reassignment of the administrator enabled the municipality to redirect its efforts toward providing courteous and helpful responses on social media. P19 noted, "*The*

reassignment helped us focus on delivering helpful and courteous responses to all residents," emphasising the commitment to enhancing the municipality's public image.

In summary, the municipality's handling of social media interactions has evolved significantly since the incident in early 2024. The administrator responsible for unprofessional responses was reassigned, and the team now prioritises maintaining a professional and courteous tone in all interactions. Moreover, the municipality has also implemented stricter guidelines, increased monitoring, and introduced regular training sessions to enhance the communication skills of its staff. This shift underscores the importance of professionalism in managing the municipality's public image while also recognizing the need to engage with the residents constructively, even when addressing negative feedback.

6.2.4. Distribution for social media public officials' participants according to shared experience on how social media has impacted their role within the municipality

The focus group item revealed how social media has significantly influenced the roles of municipal employees across various positions, as the participants described how social media platforms have transformed their responsibilities, ranging from communication efficiency to community engagement, service delivery, and public sentiment monitoring.

I. Increased community engagement

A prominent theme is the enhanced interaction between municipal employees and the community, leading to a transformation in their roles. P1 observed that social media enables residents to raise various issues, including employment concerns, as exemplified by a resident's comment, "anisiqhashi Ngani," which translates to "why aren't you hiring us?" P4 remarked that individuals now openly voice their concerns, highlighting the unmet basic needs of many.

P16 emphasized that engaging with the community through platforms like Facebook fosters trust and transparency, as residents appreciate prompt responses. This level of engagement has made municipal employees' roles more dynamic and demanding as it requires them to address a broader array of public concerns.

II. Addressing service delivery and social needs

The participants highlighted the transformative role of social media in identifying and addressing service delivery gaps. P5 expressed a strong sense of responsibility for tackling societal issues, stating, "*I feel a deep responsibility to address these issues by going above and beyond to assist."* P6 mentioned proactive efforts, such as returning calls, offering counselling, and implementing the Batho-Pele principles, which emphasize a people-first approach and high-quality service.

Additionally, P17 underscored the importance of monitoring public sentiment, remarking, "*It provides invaluable insights into community concerns, enabling more effective issue resolution.*" This proactive engagement with social media has empowered the municipality to better understand and prioritize residents' needs, establishing it as an essential tool for enhancing service delivery.

III. Real-time information sharing and efficiency

The municipality has leveraged social media to enhance communication, making processes more dynamic and efficient. According to P11, social media has facilitated instant sharing of updates and improved community engagement. This has proven especially valuable during emergencies, as highlighted by P15, who emphasized the real-time communication benefits of Twitter. Additionally, internal coordination has significantly improved with the use of WhatsApp, as mentioned by P12. Overall, the integration of social media platforms has become vital in ensuring that municipal staff remain well-informed and connected, ultimately boosting the municipality’s responsiveness.

IV. Professional networking and collaboration

Several participants emphasized the importance of social media in expanding professional networks and fostering collaborations. Hence, P13 stated that LinkedIn has enabled connections with other municipalities and organisations, which has positively impacted their collaborative efforts.

P18 added that promoting municipal achievements on LinkedIn has enhanced their municipality's reputation and drawn the attention of potential partners and investors. Therefore, this highlights how social media is strategically leveraged to increase visibility and secure external support for local initiatives.

V. Increased visibility and public participation

Social media has significantly enhanced the visibility and engagement of municipal events. Thus, P14, a visual content creator, remarked that "*the visual content I create now reaches a wider audience*," which has led to positive feedback from the community. P19 noted that promoting events on social media has "*significantly increased attendance and participation.*"

Moreover, this increased visibility has improved the municipality's reputation, with P18 mentioning that sharing achievements on LinkedIn has favourably shaped the perceptions of external stakeholders.

In summary, the impact of social media on the roles of municipal employees within eThekwini has been transformative, leading to more effective community engagement, service delivery, and communication. Platforms like Facebook, WhatsApp, Twitter, and LinkedIn have not only streamlined communication but have also provided valuable insights into residents' needs, facilitated professional networking, and increased public participation in municipal activities. Through these platforms, employees have fostered a deeper connection with the community, strengthening trust and transparency, and ultimately contributed to enhanced governance and service delivery.

6.2.5 Distribution for social media public officials' participants according to posting on behalf of other departments and responding

The discussion emphasized the collaborative efforts within the eThekwini Metropolitan Municipality to ensure accurate and effective representation of each department on social media. The participants highlighted the positive collaboration between the communications team (Coms) and various municipal departments, particularly the Department of Water, in maintaining a professional and well-coordinated approach to social media communication.

I. Specialised representation for departments

A significant point emphasized is the role of officials, referred to as "Coms," who act as representatives for different departments. As P8 stated, "C*oms are on hand to provide clarification after posts are shared, as they are well-versed in their respective areas."* This system ensures that inquiries related to specific departments are addressed by knowledgeable individuals, thereby enhancing the credibility and accuracy of the information provided.

II. Pre-Scheduled posts and pre-approved responses

During the discussion, the participants underscored the importance of scheduling posts and preparing pre-approved responses for common inquiries. P10 pointed out that following a predetermined schedule enables the communications team to anticipate and organise social media posts, ensuring accurate responses and alleviating the main administrator's workload.

P13 emphasized the significance of having pre-approved replies for frequently asked questions, allowing the social media team to address inquiries promptly while maintaining consistency. For more complex questions, the team collaborates with the relevant department before providing a response, ensuring clarity in communication.

III. Verification and approval process

The participants underscored the importance of verifying information with the relevant department prior to making public posts. P11 stated, "*We always ensure that the Department of Water is informed before anything is posted on their behalf,*" which helps maintain accurate and timely content on social media. Participant 12 added, "*We have a protocol to secure department approval before publishing any post to uphold accuracy and consistency."*

Moreover, P16 explained that this verification process also extends to responses: "*We often draft a reply and seek approval before posting, particularly for complex issues."* This careful approach ensures that all communications align with departmental policies.

IV. Ensuring timely updates

Timeliness was another critical element discussed, particularly for urgent updates such as water outages. Hence, P15 mentioned, "If there's an urgent update, like a water outage, we make sure to get the information verified quickly so we can post it as soon as possible." This reflects the municipality's commitment to keeping the public informed in real time, particularly in cases that directly affect residents' daily lives.

V. Maintaining public trust and managing expectations

The participants emphasized the importance of collaboration in fostering public trust. Thus, P17 remarked, "*This ensures our communication aligns with policies, which is essential for building trust."* Therefore, accurate representation helps to reduce misinformation and strengthen relationships with the public.

In addition, P19 highlighted the necessity of clear communication with the Department of Water to manage expectations and provide timely updates. This illustrates that social media functions not only as a broadcasting tool but also as a platform for engaging the public.

VI. Professional and coordinated approach

Overall, the participants emphasized the professionalism and coordination involved in the municipality's social media communication. P20 summarized this well, stating, "This process helps us maintain a professional and coordinated approach, ensuring that all departments are represented accurately on our social media platforms." This reflects the municipality's efforts to uphold a unified, clear, and professional image across all its social media interactions.

In summary, the focus group revealed a well-organised and collaborative effort within the eThekwini Metropolitan Municipality to ensure that social media posts and responses are accurate, timely, and professional. By having designated Coms officials, adhering to a pre-scheduled posting system, using pre-approved responses, and verifying information with relevant departments, the municipality ensures that its communication on social media aligns with the policies and expertise of each department. This collaborative process plays a crucial role in maintaining public trust, managing expectations, and providing effective governance through social media platforms.

6.3 Section 2: Social Media and Public Opinion

6.3.1. Distribution for social media public officials' participant according to effective of social media in capturing public opinion on governance and service delivery

The focus group item discussion unveiled key insights into the effectiveness of social media in gauging public opinion on governance and service delivery in eThekwini Metropolitan Municipality. Hence, the participants delved into the ways social media can enhance public engagement, while also recognizing the areas where it falls short in terms of inclusivity and outreach.

I. Shift from traditional to digital communication

One of the primary observations is the shift from traditional forms of communication to digital platforms. P1 highlighted this shift, stating, "*In today's society, there is a shift away from traditional face-to-face interactions, with social media emerging as the primary platform for electronic communication.*" This comment reflects how social media has become the dominant mode for the public to express their views on governance and service delivery.

II. Inclusive but limited reach

While social media has enabled more people to engage with the municipality, the participants pointed out that it does not capture the full spectrum of public opinion. P2 noted that, "*Despite the substantial number of individuals present on social media, there is still a larger population that remains disconnected from online platforms."* This indicates that while social media is a valuable tool, it has limitations in reaching populations without access to these platforms, thus potentially excluding certain voices from the discourse.

III. Engagement through live streaming and public feedback

The municipality has introduced innovative initiatives to enhance public engagement through social media, including live streaming full council meetings. P3 emphasized that, "*The local municipality has introduced a policy mandating the live streaming of all municipal full council meetings on the municipality's social media channels. This forward-thinking initiative aims to facilitate meaningful public engagement.*" The participant further highlighted that individuals actively engage with this platform by expressing their views and submitting proposals, illustrating how social media enables real-time interaction between the public and government officials.

IV. Impact of positive and negative feedback

This text explores the role of social media in conveying both positive and negative feedback, which serve as valuable insights for municipalities to understand public opinion. P4 emphasized the significance of all feedback in assessing public sentiment and enhancing services.

Nonetheless, it is essential to recognize the limitations of social media. P6 pointed out that the selective curation of content can hinder diverse perspectives, and create gaps in the understanding of the public's viewpoints.

VII. Challenges in effectively capturing sentiment

Several participants indicate that the current social media strategy is not fully effective in capturing public sentiment. For instance, P7 remarked that, "*Our current social media strategy falls short in effectively capturing public sentiment.*" This reflects a need to reassess the social media approach to ensure that it is more inclusive and representative of the entire community's views.

VIII. Immediate feedback and real-time responses

A number of the participants commended social media for its ability to offer immediate feedback, which in turn enhances the municipality's responsiveness to public concerns. P11 mentioned that "*We receive immediate feedback on our posts, which helps us grasp the community's concerns and needs*." This immediacy enables the municipality to swiftly address issues, and thus improve public trust and satisfaction. P15 further emphasized that, "Real-time updates and responses on social media assist us in promptly addressing issues." This highlights the municipality's capacity to take quick action based on public input, contributing to the establishment of trust.

IX. Diverse voices and inclusive governance

Social media has also been recognized as a platform for elevating diverse voices. P13 highlighted, "*Social media provides a platform for more diverse voices to be heard, which is crucial for inclusive governance."* This suggests that social media democratises public discourse, allowing a wider range of people to express their opinions, which can contribute to more equitable governance.

X. Building trust and transparency

The participants consistently mentioned that social media enhances transparency and accountability between the municipality and the residents. P16 noted that, *“Engaging with residents on social media helps us build a more transparent and accountable relationship with the community.”* By addressing concerns and providing real-time updates, the municipality is able to foster trust and demonstrate its commitment to addressing public needs.

XI. Data for improving services and policies

Monitoring public sentiment on social media is a valuable tool for the municipality to enhance services and develop policies. P17 emphasized, "*By monitoring public sentiment on social media, we gain valuable insights that can be used to enhance our services and policies."* This underscores the multifaceted role of social media, not just as a communication platform, but as a source of valuable insights that can inform better decision-making and service provision

XII. Clarifying misinformation

Social media serves a crucial role in addressing and rectifying misinformation. According to Participant 18, "*Social media enables us to promptly clarify any misinformation, which is essential for upholding public trust*." This swift clarification helps to avert misunderstandings and guarantees that residents receive precise information regarding governance and service delivery.

XIII. Public engagement for better planning

The participants noted that feedback received from social media is also valuable for planning future events and improving public engagement strategies. For instance, P19 stated that, “*The feedback we receive on event promotions and public announcements helps us plan better and cater to the community’s preferences*.” Therefore, this demonstrates that social media is a useful tool for understanding the public’s expectations and improving service delivery.

In summary, the focus group findings highlighted that social media serves as a valuable tool for capturing public opinion on governance and service delivery. Moreover, it offers immediacy, diverse perspectives, and a platform for direct engagement. However, there are limitations in terms of inclusivity and the ability to capture a comprehensive range of public sentiment. While real-time feedback enhances responsiveness, it's crucial for the municipality to continuously refine its social media strategy to ensure it genuinely represents the voices of the broader community. Social media has a pivotal role in promoting transparency, trust, and accountability, and it provides valuable data for service improvement, making it a powerful medium for e-democracy.

6.3.2 Distribution for social media public officials' participants according to observation of trends and patterns on voicing opinions and concerns about municipal services

The focus group discussions revealed important trends and patterns in how the public utilises social media to voice their opinions and concerns about municipal services in the eThekwini Metropolitan Municipality. These insights offer valuable perspectives on the diverse and dynamic ways in which different platforms are employed to engage with the municipality.

I. Tagging and direct engagement with municipal pages

Residents commonly tag the municipality's official social media pages to raise awareness about local issues and events. P1 remarked, "*When residents tag us while posting about a concern or an event, we are able to see it*." This practice effectively brings attention to their concerns from both municipal authorities and the broader community.

P2 emphasized the importance of visual evidence, stating, "*Residents use social media to report local issues by sharing photos and tagging the municipality's page, seeking prompt resolutions*." This underscores the effectiveness of visual documentation and tagging as key strategies for prompting action from municipal officials.

II. Use of comment sections for public advocacy

Another pattern discussed was the use of comment sections on the municipality's posts to voice concerns. According to P3, "*Residents utilise the comment sections of the municipality's posts to bring attention to their concerns*." This demonstrates how social media provides a public forum for residents to advocate for the resolution of their issues, amplifying their voices in a more visible and direct manner.

III. Private messaging for reporting local issues

In addition to public tagging and comments, some residents opt for private messaging to report specific issues. P4 shared, "*Individuals go to great lengths by using private messaging on social media to report specific issues within their respective areas.*" This proactive approach highlights the personalised engagement between the public and the municipality, allowing for more direct and confidential communication regarding local problems.

IV. Platform-specific trends

The participants identified distinct trends in how various social media platforms are utilised, with each catering to specific communication needs. Hence, Facebook emerged as a platform for detailed complaints and suggestions, where users frequently tag the municipality to draw attention to their concerns, as noted by P11. In contrast, WhatsApp, according to P12, stood out for its immediacy, making it particularly effective for quick updates and addressing urgent issues like leaks or outages.

On the other hand, LinkedIn, as P13 remarked, serves a more professional audience, where residents share thoughtful feedback on municipal projects and policies. Meanwhile, Instagram focuses on visual storytelling, as explained by P14, with users often posting images of issues such as potholes or uncollected trash and tagging municipalities to highlight these problems. Lastly, Twitter, described by P15, excels during emergencies by fostering real-time feedback and fast-paced public dialogue that spans both praise and

criticism. Together, these platforms demonstrate how social media enables diverse forms of civic engagement tailored to different needs.

V. Active community groups and hashtags

Community groups on Facebook have become another prominent trend in social media use. P16 stated, "*Community groups on Facebook are very active. Residents discuss municipal services and often come up with collective suggestions or complaints."* These groups provide a space for residents to collaborate, share their concerns, and collectively raise issues to the municipality.

In addition, the use of hashtags to rally support for specific causes has become popular. Participant 17 provided an example, "*There's a trend of using hashtags to rally support for specific issues. For example, #FixOurBridge has been used to highlight broken bridge maintenance problems at Ntuzuma E.*" Hashtags not only create awareness but also organise public sentiment around specific topics, making it easier for the municipality to track and address recurring issues.

VI. Increased engagement during events

The participants also observed that public engagement on social media spikes during events hosted by the municipality. P19 noted that, *"During events, we see a spike in engagement on all platforms. Therefore, people share their experiences and provide immediate feedback."* This immediate feedback is valuable for municipal planning and helps improve future events based on public input.

VII. Consistency in public engagement across platforms

Despite the varied use of different platforms, social media engagement remains strong across various platforms. As P20 observed, "*social media has become a vital tool for residents to voice their opinions and concerns. While the patterns may vary by platform, the engagement is consistent and valuable.*" Thus, the municipality relies on this interaction to gauge public sentiment and enhance service delivery.

In summary, the focus group discussion revealed how the public communicates with the eThekwini Metropolitan Municipality through tagging municipal pages, commenting, private messaging, and participating in community groups. Residents utilise Facebook, WhatsApp, LinkedIn, Instagram, and Twitter in ways that align with the unique features of each platform. Ultimately, social media serves as a crucial means of capturing public concerns, though its effectiveness hinges on the municipality's ability to manage and respond to these interactions effectively.

6.3.2.1 Distribution for social media public officials' participants according to follow up on the social media reported issues

In the focus group discussion, the participants emphasized the municipality's effective use of social media for communication and issue resolution. The conversation provided valuable insights into the municipality's proactive approach to addressing and managing residents' concerns. Additionally, the participants shared successful experiences and obstacles encountered when utilising social media to engage the public on governance and service delivery matters.

I. Utilising WhatsApp and OPS groups for issue resolution

A notable trend is the use of WhatsApp and "Ops groups" to address concerns raised on social media. P1 explained, "*I take a screenshot and send it to a WhatsApp group called 'Ops group,' created by the eThekwini city manager and including all department heads. This method is effective, and we typically receive a timely response."* This approach demonstrates a more efficient way to manage reported issues.

However, P9 pointed out that some frequently reported problems may be more complex than they initially appear. For example, a "*malfunctioning robot in Cato Manor, Ward 101," and a persistent "sewage overflow*" have gone unresolved despite numerous reports. This complexity presents a challenge in maintaining transparency with the public.

II. Expanding social media agent roles

While social media agents primarily focus on sharing municipal updates, their roles often encompass much more. As P10 remarked, "*Although we were hired as social media agents, we often find ourselves addressing residents' issues, similar to a call centre."* This highlights a shift in their responsibilities, as they engage directly with the community to address service delivery concerns.

This trend underscores that social media has become a vital component of the municipality's service delivery system, transforming agents into problem-solvers and community liaisons.

III. Tracking and assigning issues to departments

Several participants underscored the municipality's systematic approach to handling issues from social media. P12 stated, "*We have a system to track reported issues. Once flagged, it's assigned to the relevant department*." This reflects a structured process for monitoring concerns.

Likewise, P13 added that when a water leak is reported, they notify the Department of Water and follow up to ensure resolution. This coordination ensures community concerns are addressed by the appropriate teams.

IV. Updating residents on progress

A significant theme that emerged was the importance of keeping residents informed throughout the issue resolution process. Therefore, P14 shared, "*We also keep the resident updated on the progress and regress. This helps build trust and shows that we are responsive to their needs."* Regular updates not only show the municipality's responsiveness but also build transparency and accountability in the eyes of the public.
Similarly, P17 added, *"Follow-ups are crucial for maintaining a positive relationship with the community. We make sure to close the loop by updating the resident once the issue is resolved.*" Ensuring the completion of the process by informing the resident of the final outcome is an important part of the municipality's communication strategy.

XIV. Collaboration with other departments

Effective service delivery on social media often involves collaboration between different municipal departments. P15 mentioned, *"For Metro Police-related issues, we coordinate with the police department to ensure they are aware and can take appropriate action."* This highlights how different sectors within the municipality must work together to address the concerns reported on social media efficiently.

In addition, P16 noted the use of *"social media monitoring tools to track and manage these reports efficiently,"* ensuring that no issues go unaddressed. These tools are crucial for managing the large volume of information that flows in through the municipality's social media platforms.

XV. Analysing reports and addressing recurring issues

The focus group also discussed the importance of analysing the data collected from social media reports. Hence, P19 explained that "*We analyse the data from these reports to identify recurring issues and address them proactively."* This approach helps the municipality detect patterns in the problems reported by the community and take steps to prevent them from recurring.

This proactive approach allows the municipality to address systemic issues and improve service delivery in the long term by identifying key areas of concern through social media engagement.

XVI. Event management and follow-up

Social media is not only used to address service-related complaints but also to manage feedback from events. P18 mentioned, *"For events at the Durban ICC, we address any feedback or issues reported during or after the event to improve future experiences."* This demonstrates how social media is used for continuous improvement, with feedback collected and analysed to enhance future municipal events and initiatives.

XVII. Social media as a strategic communication tool

Finally, the group agreed that following up on social media reports is an essential part of the municipality's broader communication strategy. Hence, P20 summarized this sentiment, saying, "*Our follow-up process is a key part of our strategy to ensure effective communication and service delivery across all municipal accounts."* Social media has clearly become more than a tool for posting updates; it is a key channel for service delivery and community engagement.

In summary, the focus group discussion brought to light the significant role played by social media in the governance and service delivery processes of eThekwini Metropolitan Municipality. The municipality effectively utilises platforms such as WhatsApp for internal coordination, issue tracking, and communication of progress to residents. However, challenges persist in effectively communicating complex issues and prolonged resolution timelines to the public.

Encouragingly, social media agents are increasingly assuming the role of problem-solvers, with their efforts bolstered by collaborative work with other municipal departments and the use of monitoring tools. Furthermore, through careful analysis of feedback and reports from social media, the municipality can address recurring issues and enhance both service delivery and event management, thereby elevating overall governance.

6.3.2.2 Distribution for social media public officials' participants according to definition coms' role and technical understanding of all the matters

The focus group participants shared valuable insights into the term "Coms," which refers to the communications unit within the eThekwini municipality. This technical unit comprises representatives from various departments who are responsible for managing social media interactions, enabling effective engagement with residents on a wide range of issues.

I. Definition of COMs

P3 explained, “The term ‘Coms’ stands for communications in its entirety. ‘Com’ is a segment within the communication group that falls under the digital communications unit, consisting of individuals from various eThekwini municipality departments.” This statement underscores the collaborative nature of the team, which is crucial for addressing municipal service-related concerns. Similarly, P11 further clarified, stating that the term is comprehensive hence, “The term ‘Coms’ is short for communications. It encompasses all our communication efforts within the municipality.” This emphasizes the broad scope of the unit’s responsibilities.

II. Role and responsibilities

The participants described the primary responsibilities of the Coms team, which include engaging with the public and providing accurate information related to municipal services. This requires the team to actively manage social media interactions.

Furthermore, P14 highlighted the importance of public engagement, particularly in areas relevant to their expertise: “*One of our key responsibilities is to actively engage with the public on social media, especially under posts related to our areas of expertise.”* This engagement is critical for ensuring residents feel heard and valued.

Moreover, P20 noted the significance of the Coms team in the municipality’s digital presence: “*The Coms team plays a crucial role in managing our municipality’s digital presence and ensuring effective public engagement.”* This underscores their function in maintaining transparency and accessibility.

III. Technical understanding and collaboration

The participants discussed the Coms team's technical knowledge. While they have a good grasp of general departmental information, more complex issues often require consulting relevant departments. Hence, P9 noted that, “*They have a lot of information, but for technical issues, they reach out directly to the relevant department for clarity.*” This shows the team's proactive approach to seeking specialised knowledge.

Likewise, P12 highlighted that for highly technical issues, they maintain direct communication with these departments to ensure accurate information. P15 added, "*This partnership makes our responses more effective and reliable by allowing us to clarify technical aspects with experts*."

IV. Building trust and efficiency

The ability of the Coms team builds trust among residents by providing accurate information and addressing concerns effectively. Hence, P18 highlighted the need for direct communication with other departments to resolve issues quickly: "*Direct communication is essential for swiftly addressing specific concerns."*

Likewise, P19 pointed out the value of using departmental expertise, attesting that, "*By leveraging various departments, we can manage a range of social media issues effectively.*" Thus, this approach enhances the municipality's responsiveness.

In summary, the Coms team within the eThekwini municipality is structured to facilitate effective communication and engagement with the residents. Their collaborative approach ensures that, while they possess a solid understanding of departmental information, they can also address complex technical issues accurately through direct consultation with relevant departments. This strategy not only enhances service delivery but also builds trust within the community, demonstrating the municipality's commitment to transparency and responsiveness.

6.4 Section 3: Accountability and Public Participation

6.4.1 Distribution for social media public officials' participants according to their experience in facilitating public participation and accountability in governance

The eThekwini municipality participants emphasized the crucial role of social media in promoting public participation, and enhancing accountability in governance, gathering feedback, managing crises, and addressing misinformation. They highlighted the effectiveness of social media in fostering dialogue, improving services, and maintaining public trust. Despite the challenges of managing high engagement volumes, they emphasized strategies for effective handling, which include prioritizing urgent issues and using social media management tools.

I. Enhancing Public Participation

The participants highlighted the significant role social media plays in facilitating public participation within the eThekwini municipality. As P2 remarked, "*In terms of participation, social media plays a huge role,"* illustrating the platforms' power in engaging residents. This sentiment was echoed by P8, who noted, "*Social media platforms are great for facilitating public participation. They provide a space where residents can voice their opinions and concerns directly to us.*" By providing these spaces for dialogue, social media has become an essential avenue for residents to engage with their local government.

II. Promoting accountability

Social media not only allows for public participation but also enhances accountability in governance. According to P15, "*Accountability is a big part of it. When we post updates and respond to queries, we are publicly accountable for our actions and decisions*." This statement underscores the notion that social media platforms serve as a medium through which municipal actions are scrutinized and evaluated by the public. Moreover, P16 added, "*It also helps us address misinformation quickly*," suggesting that social media

enables officials to clarify misunderstandings and maintain a transparent dialogue with the community.

III. Public feedback and trust

The ability to gather feedback through social media further strengthens public trust in governance. P14 stated, *"social media also makes it easier for us to gather feedback on various initiatives and projects. This feedback is invaluable for improving our services*." Moreover, the participants emphasized that acknowledging public comments fosters a sense of being heard, as P13 explained: "*Public participation is enhanced because people feel heard. When they see their comments and suggestions being acknowledged, it encourages more engagement."* This reciprocal relationship between the municipality and residents cultivates trust and promotes continued participation.

IV. Handling crises and misinformation

Social media platforms also provide a crucial tool for managing crises and addressing misinformation. P4 recounted a tragic incident involving a bridge collapse that led to public outrage: "*This incident sparked public outrage on social media, with residents criticizing the municipality for failing to repair the bridge*." However, through effective communication, the municipality clarified the situation: "*The municipality issued a sympathetic statement to the family of the victim, clarifying that they were not responsible for the bridge's repair and maintenance."* This example illustrates the importance of swift and transparent communication during crises to maintain public trust and address potential misinformation.

V. Utilising technology for efficiency

The participants acknowledged the challenges of managing social media interactions due to high volumes of engagement but emphasized their strategies for effective handling. Therefore, P5 noted, "*The volume can be overwhelming, but we try our best to manage it by prioritizing urgent issues*." P7 added that, "*We also use social media management tools to streamline our responses and ensure we don't miss any important comments*."

This highlights the municipality's commitment to utilising technology to enhance their responsiveness and ensure efficient communication.

In summary, social media has become an indispensable tool for the eThekwini municipality in enhancing public participation and accountability in governance. Through platforms that enable two-way communication, officials can engage with the residents, address concerns, and provide timely information. The ability to gather feedback and correct misinformation fosters a transparent and trustworthy environment, ultimately leading to improved service delivery. As P20 aptly stated, "*Social media has become a vital tool for enhancing public participation and accountability in our governance processes.*" The ongoing commitment to leveraging these platforms will be essential in building a more responsive and inclusive governance framework.

6.4.2 Distribution for social media public officials' participants according to challenges they face in managing public expectations through social media

The focus group discussion revealed several challenges faced by the eThekwini municipality's digital media unit in managing public expectations via social media platforms. These challenges stem from misunderstandings of the municipality's role, the volume of public inquiries, misinformation, and the complexities of communication.

I. Public misunderstandings and expectations

The participants emphasized that the public often holds high expectations of the municipality's social media unit, hoping that it would possess comprehensive knowledge of all municipal departments. P4 expressed the challenge, stating, "*As the digital media unit, we have seen a lot of expectations from the public on the eThekwini municipality's social media account... the public expects us to be knowledgeable about and able to address everything."* This sentiment was shared by P6, who provided a specific incident as an example: *"For instance, there was an issue on the municipal Facebook page where a resident complained about an electricity issue... it was found out that the household was*

connected to illegal electricity." This example underscores the public's misunderstanding of municipal responsibilities, which indicates a need for improved public education and communication about the roles and limitations of the municipality's social media unit.

II. High volume of inquiries and misinformation

The high volume of inquiries and the rapid spread of misinformation were significant challenges mentioned by the participants. P11 acknowledged that, *"One of the biggest challenges is managing the high volume of comments and messages. It can be overwhelming to keep up with everything.*" Additionally, P13 pointed out, "*We often have to correct false information that spreads quickly on social media,*" indicating that misinformation complicates the unit's efforts to maintain accurate communication.

III. Balancing transparency and confidentiality

The participants also highlighted the difficulty of balancing transparency with confidentiality. P14 noted, *"Balancing transparency with confidentiality can be tricky. We need to be open, but some information can't be shared publicly.*" This challenge is compounded by the public's demand for immediate and detailed information regarding municipal operations.

IV. Consistency in communication

Maintaining a consistent tone and message across various platforms is another challenge emphasized in the discussion. P16 stated, "*It's also challenging to maintain a consistent tone and message across all platforms, especially when multiple people are managing the accounts.*" This inconsistency can lead to confusion and frustration among the public.

V. Positive engagement and diverse audience

Despite these challenges, the participants acknowledged the benefits of social media in fostering direct engagement with the community. P17 remarked, *"On the positive side, social media allows us to engage directly with the community and gather valuable feedback."* However, P18 pointed out the potential for critical feedback, stating, *"Sometimes the feedback can be very critical, which can be tough to handle."* This

highlights the dual nature of social media as a platform for both praise and critique, necessitating a careful approach to communication.

In summary, the eThekwini municipality's digital media unit faces multifaceted challenges in managing public expectations through social media. Misunderstandings regarding the unit's role, high volumes of inquiries, misinformation, the need for consistent communication, and the balance between transparency and confidentiality all contribute to a complex environment. However, the potential for direct engagement and community feedback remains a valuable aspect of utilising social media in governance. By addressing these challenges, the municipality can enhance its service delivery and foster a more informed and engaged citizenry.

6.4.3 Distribution for social media public officials' participants according to examples of instances where public engagement on social media led to changes or responses from the municipality

The focus group discussion highlighted numerous instances where public engagement on social media directly influenced governance and service delivery within the eThekwini metropolitan municipality. These examples illustrate the power of social media as a tool for fostering community involvement and prompting actionable responses from municipal authorities.

I. Positive community initiatives

Several participants noted how public engagement can enhance community initiatives. R10 remarked on a successful clean-up campaign, "*In eThekwini, there is a campaign to clean up the area, and the eThekwini municipality has been receiving numerous positive comments from residents who are applauding the clean-up initiatives."* The enthusiasm expressed by the residents through social media not only acknowledged the municipality's efforts but also motivated the ongoing pursuit of these initiatives, highlighting the reciprocal relationship between the municipality and its constituents.

II. Direct assistance through social media

The participants shared examples of how social media facilitated direct assistance to residents. P4 recounted an instance where a resident reported issues with her household utility account statement: *"She was connected with Lebo from the account statement department, who helped her by registering her for eThekwini municipality e-services, enabling her to retrieve her utility statement through her email."* This interaction demonstrates the effective use of social media for problem-solving, which fosters a sense of community and responsiveness.

III. Rapid response to complaints

The discussion also highlighted how social media can expedite municipal responses to community complaints. P13 provided an example of pothole complaints that prompted immediate action: "The public outcry on social media led to the municipality prioritizing and fixing those roads much quicker than usual." This illustrates how public engagement can create pressure for timely municipal action, leading to tangible improvements in community infrastructure.

IV. Enhanced public safety

Public safety concerns raised on social media also led to significant changes. P14 shared, "*After several posts and comments, the Metro Police increased their patrols in that area, which significantly improved the situation."* This highlights how social media can serve as a platform for raising awareness about safety issues, prompting responsive actions from the relevant authorities.

V. Feedback-driven improvements

The participants noted that social media feedback directly influenced various municipal services. P15 mentioned the installation of more public restrooms in busy areas as a response to community requests that, *"The municipality responded by installing additional facilities, which was well-received by the community."* This demonstrates the importance of listening to community feedback in shaping municipal services.

P16 added that the introduction of recycling bins was a direct result of persistent resident requests, reinforcing the idea that consistent public engagement can lead to improvements in sustainability efforts. Similarly, P17 noted discussions on improving public transport led to changes in bus routes and schedules, showing how social media can be instrumental in addressing broader community needs.

VI. Event improvements through feedback

Public events also benefited from social media suggestions. P18 highlighted feedback during the Durban Fashion Fair that led to improvements in the event, "*Implementing some of these ideas made the event more successful and enjoyable for attendees."* This demonstrates that community input can enhance not just governance but also cultural events, improving overall community satisfaction.

In summary, the focus group findings underscore the significant influence of social media on e-democracy in eThekwini. Hence, public engagement through social media platforms has resulted in tangible changes in governance and service delivery, from community clean-up initiatives to rapid responses to public safety concerns and infrastructure improvements. Additionally, the collaborative dynamic between the municipality and its residents, as facilitated by social media, underscores its potential as a vital tool for fostering an engaged and responsive democratic process.

6.4.3.1 Distribution for social media public officials' participants according to the existence of eThekwini e-services application

The focus group discussion illuminated the significance of the Sizakala e-services mobile application as a transformative tool for enhancing customer service and fault reporting processes within the eThekwini metropolitan municipality. The Sizakala e-services mobile app enhances customer service and fault reporting in the eThekwini Metropolitan Municipality. Relaunched in June 2023, it features integrated fault reporting for water and

electricity, tourism guidance, and customer account management. With over 100,000 downloads and extensive promotional efforts, the app reflects the municipality's commitment to improving access to services. The participants added that, while some users face technological challenges, a support team is in place, and further improvements were planned for 2024 and beyond. Hence, the app is designed to complement, not replace, in-person visits and calls to municipal services.

6.5 Section 4: Monitoring and advocacy

6.5.1 Distribution for social media public officials' participants according to monitoring the services of municipal services

The focus group discussion uncovered crucial themes regarding the use of social media for monitoring municipal services in the eThekwini metropolitan municipality. The participants highlighted the effectiveness of social media in gathering feedback, gauging public sentiment, and enhancing communication between the municipality and its residents.

I. Engagement and feedback collection

The participants noted that social media is primarily used to gauge public interaction with the municipality's posts, which includes measuring comments and overall engagement levels. P6 stated that, "*I believe it is utilised to assess the level of interaction with the posts we share,"* underscoring the platform's capacity to capture real-time reactions from the community. Furthermore, P11 remarked, "*Social media is a valuable tool for monitoring the performance of municipal services,*" emphasizing that direct feedback from the residents helps identify service quality and areas needing improvement.

II. Challenges in information management

Despite the advantages of social media in performance monitoring, the participants also acknowledged the challenges associated with filtering and interpreting the feedback received. P12 noted that, "*It can be challenging to filter through all the comments and identify the most pressing issues,"* indicating that important feedback can sometimes be

overlooked amidst the volume of responses. This sentiment aligns with P13's comment about using social media analytics to track trends and recurring issues, suggesting that systematic approaches are necessary to manage the data effectively.

III. Community engagement and responsiveness

Engagement with the community was highlighted as a significant benefit of using social media. P16 mentioned, "*Social media allows us to respond quickly to issues,"* exemplifying the platform's capacity for immediate interaction regarding pressing concerns, such as water supply problems. Additionally, P17 stated, *"By responding to comments and messages, we show that we care about residents' concerns,"* reinforcing the notion that proactive communication can enhance public trust and satisfaction.

IV. Balancing feedback

The participants recognized the importance of distinguishing between constructive feedback and complaints that are merely expressions of frustration. P15 pointed out that not all feedback is useful, stating, *"We sometimes receive complaints that are more about venting frustration than providing useful information."* However, positive feedback also plays a crucial role in monitoring performance. P14 stated that, *"Positive feedback is also important. It shows us what we're doing right and helps boost morale among municipal workers,"* highlighting the dual nature of public responses in shaping municipal service perceptions.

V. Overwhelming demand for monitoring

Finally, the participants expressed concerns about the overwhelming nature of constant monitoring of social media. P18 remarked, "*The constant monitoring can be overwhelming. It requires a dedicated team to manage effectively,"* indicating that while social media is a powerful tool for engagement, it necessitates substantial resources for effective management.

In summary, social media serves as a dynamic and essential platform for monitoring municipal service performance in eThekwini. It enables real-time feedback collection,

fosters community engagement, and provides insights into service quality. However, the challenges of managing information overload and distinguishing between different types of feedback highlight the need for dedicated resources and strategies to maximize its effectiveness.

6.5.2 Distribution for social media public officials' participants according to the ways social media is used as an advocacy tool on causes and policy issues

This focus group discussed how social media drives advocacy in the eThekwini Municipality, exploring successes, challenges, and the critical role of youth engagement. The aim was to provide insights into fostering public participation and supporting community mobilisation.

I. Advocacy through social media engagement

Social media has emerged as a potent advocacy tool within the eThekwini municipality, facilitating community engagement on various pressing issues. For instance, a post regarding the adoption of Section 3 of the rate policy in 2022 sparked significant debate among residents on the municipality's Facebook page, particularly under the hashtag #EThekwiniGeneralValueRoll. P8 highlighted this, noting that many residents expressed dissatisfaction over their obligation to pay rates without receiving adequate services, saying, "Some residents questioned why they should pay rates when they don't have streetlights," while others pointed to a lack of water supply. This discontent has led to widespread boycotts of rate payments and protests over service delivery failures, including road blockades and tire burnings, particularly in poorer communities.

II. Environmental concerns and community responses

Another critical issue that has gained prominence through social media is environmental safety, particularly concerning the closure of beaches due to sewage spills along the Durban coast. P3 emphasized the urgency of this matter, noting, *"Residents were concerned about swimming in contaminated water, and there was uncertainty about the municipality's course of action.*" Additionally, protests sparked by the retrenchment of

employees from the Poverty Elevation Program and the Expanded Public Works Program further illustrate how social media has been leveraged to mobilise collective action, with online demonstrations complementing physical marches.

III. Successful campaigns and community participation

The effectiveness of social media as an advocacy tool is further evidenced by specific campaigns that have mobilised significant community support. P11 remarked on the impact of social media in advocating for various causes, stating, "*We've seen significant traction on issues like environmental conservation and waste management.*" Notable initiatives, such as the hashtag ''*Clean My City"* campaign, demonstrated the power of community involvement, with residents actively sharing photos and updates that not only raised awareness but also encouraged action towards cleaner urban spaces. Similarly, the hashtag "*Save Our Beaches*" campaign by the residents successfully rallied around the issue of pollution, prompting the municipality to take necessary action.

IV. Challenges in advocacy efforts

However, it is important to note that not all advocacy efforts yield the desired results. P15 pointed out that some campaigns, particularly those aimed at promoting water conservation, may face challenges in sustaining public interest over time. Furthermore, P18 highlighted the need to effectively manage these issues to ensure the credibility and impact of advocacy efforts.

V. Youth engagement and community involvement

Despite these challenges, social media remains an essential channel for reaching diverse demographics, particularly the youth. P19 highlighted the success in advocating for youth programs and educational initiatives, stating, "*Social media has helped us reach a younger audience and get them involved.*" This ability to engage with various community members reinforces the importance of social media in fostering participation in local governance.

In summary, social media stands out as a crucial tool for advocacy within the eThekwini municipality, enabling direct engagement with residents and facilitating the mobilisation of support for important causes and policy issues. P20 aptly concluded that social media allows for “engagement with the community and rally support for important causes,” reflecting its integral role in shaping public discourse and driving change.

6.6 Section 5: Impact on service delivery

6.6.1 Distribution for social media public officials’ participants according to social media contribution to accelerate of service delivery

The discussion surrounding the impact of social media on service delivery within the eThekwini municipality reveals consensus among the participants that social media has indeed contributed to accelerating service delivery. P3 emphasized this point, stating, *“Indeed, service delivery is taking place in the eThekwini municipality. Our daily responsibility involves informing residents about the happenings in eThekwini and providing them with feedback.*” The use of social media as a communication tool has enabled timely dissemination of information, which the participants believe enhances responsiveness and service delivery.

I. Encouraging municipal accountability

The participants noted that social media acts as a platform to challenge and motivate municipal departments to perform better. P8 commented, *“By consistently posting, we also challenge and encourage other municipal departments to step up their game.”* This indicates a culture of accountability fostered by public scrutiny and recognition through social media engagement. The hashtag campaign #AtYourService serves as a notable example of this initiative. P4 explained, “*It features a series of pictures showcasing the eThekwini departments and units providing service delivery to the people,”* illustrating how social media is utilised to spotlight departmental efforts and encourage public engagement.

II. Challenges in social media engagement

Despite the benefits, there are still challenges that need to be addressed. For example, P6 pointed out that residents often go off-topic in their comments, leading to disjointed discussions. This shows a need for better moderation and engagement strategies on social media platforms. Additionally, P12 highlighted the overwhelming nature of the feedback received, stating, "*The volume of complaints and requests can sometimes slow down our response time.*" This dual nature of social media, serving both as a tool for engagement and a source of pressure, reflects the complexities of managing public expectations.

III. Transparency and accountability

The transparency enabled by social media not only facilitates swift feedback but also ensures that the municipality is held accountable. P14 emphasized, "*The knowledge that the public is monitoring our actions keeps us responsible."* This heightened transparency has the potential to build trust between the municipality and its residents, underscoring the significance of communication in governance.

IV. Real-time reporting and prioritization of issues

Social media has streamlined the reporting process, making it easier for residents to bring issues to the municipality's attention. P13 stated, "*Social media has made it easier for residents to report issues, which means we can respond faster.*" Real-time reporting has led to improvements in crucial service areas like waste management and road repairs, as highlighted by P17. Furthermore, P19 explained that engagement on social media helps prioritize issues based on urgency, which is critical in resource allocation and response strategies.

In summary, while the participants acknowledged that social media is not a panacea for all service delivery challenges, they agreed that it plays a vital role in fostering communication between the municipality and the community. P20 summed it up succinctly, stating, "*while there are challenges, social media has undoubtedly played a significant role in accelerating service delivery.*" This sentiment encapsulates the

transformative potential of social media in enhancing governance and ensuring that residents feel connected and engaged with their local government.

6.6.2 Distribution for social media public officials' participants according to the advantages and disadvantages of using social media for service delivery

The focus group discussion brought to light several important themes regarding the offering of both advantages and challenges. The participants illustrate an enhanced communication between officials and the residents, enabling quicker responses to community needs. However, they also show how it also places additional pressure on the officials, often pushing them beyond their job descriptions.

I. Impact on service delivery

The influence of social media on service delivery within the eThekwini municipality presents a complex interplay of advantages and disadvantages, as highlighted by various participants in the focus group discussions. P2 encapsulated the general sentiment by stating, "*While there are challenges, the advantages of using social media for service delivery purposes outweigh the disadvantages*." This perspective suggests that social media fosters a vital connection between municipal authorities and the community, enhancing responsiveness to residents' needs.

II. Pressure on officials and expanding roles

However, the increasing reliance on social media also imposes additional responsibilities on officials. P3 pointed out that the pressure to address issues beyond their official mandates can blur the lines of responsibility: *"The advantages of social media place pressure on officials responsible for managing social media platforms to address issues outside the scope of their job descriptions."* This often leads to officials inadvertently taking on call centre duties to compensate for shortcomings in other departments. Conversely, P8 acknowledged the benefit of this expanded role, noting, "*Our digital*

communication unit can address issues beyond its original mandate," which allows for a deeper understanding of residents' frustrations.

III. Accessibility and misinformation challenges

Social media facilitates cost-effective communication and engagement with the community, as noted by P1, who mentioned the potential for online town hall meetings that eliminate the need for physical venues. However, these meetings require significant data for live streaming and may expose participants to offensive language or negative behaviours typical of online environments. P5 raised a significant concern regarding misinformation, stating, "*Falsehoods can easily proliferate across social media platforms, causing significant harm before accurate information can be disseminated."* This highlights the dual-edged nature of social media; while it offers a platform for rapid communication, it also facilitates the rapid spread of misleading information.

IV. Real-time communication and overwhelming volume

The ability to communicate quickly and directly with residents is one of the standout advantages of social media, as expressed by P11: *"We can provide real-time updates and address issues promptly."* However, the sheer volume of interactions can be daunting, as P12 pointed out, leading to challenges in response times. This overwhelming influx of comments can hinder effective engagement, demonstrating that while social media serves as a tool for interaction, it also poses logistical challenges for officials.

V. Transparency and community engagement

Transparency is another key benefit of using social media in governance, fostering trust and accountability, as stated by P15 that, "*Residents can see our responses and actions, which helps build trust."* Nevertheless, the expectation for instant responses can lead to frustration among residents when issues cannot be resolved immediately, as highlighted by P16. This dynamic illustrates the delicate balance between maintaining transparency and managing public expectations.

VI. The role of feedback in service improvement

Social media also serves as a critical avenue for gathering feedback and monitoring public sentiment, enabling the municipality to align its services with community needs. P13 noted that, "*This helps us understand the community's needs and improve our services.*" However, the nature of feedback is not always constructive, as some comments are more focused on venting frustrations than offering actionable insights, as pointed out by P14.

In summary, while social media significantly enhances service delivery in eThekwini, enabling quicker communication, transparency, and community engagement, it also presents challenges related to misinformation, overwhelming interactions, and shifting roles for municipal officials. The sentiments expressed by the participants reflects a nuanced understanding of this duality, underscoring the need for effective management strategies to maximize the benefits of social media while mitigating its drawbacks. As P19 observed, "*The engagement we get on social media helps us prioritize issues based on the volume and urgency of the feedback we receive,"* emphasising the importance of strategic engagement in fostering a responsive and accountable municipal governance system.

6.7 Section 6: Social Media as a News and Campaign Platform

6.7.1 Distribution for social media public officials' participants according to social media used in the dissemination of news and information

The focus group discussed the eThekwini Municipality's use of social media for news dissemination, highlighting the diverse platforms used and the challenges faced. They emphasized the speed of social media for emergency updates but cautioned about the spread of misinformation. They also noted the need for alternative communication methods for residents not active on social media and the resources required to manage high interaction volumes. Visual content was recognized as effective, and a balanced approach to public communication was emphasized.

I. Dissemination of news and information

Social media has become an integral tool for the eThekwini municipality in disseminating news and information to its residents. P5 explained that every Friday, the municipality produces a 60-second news segment that highlights various municipal services and upcoming events. This content is tailored for popular platforms such as WhatsApp, LinkedIn, Facebook, and TikTok, showcasing the municipality's commitment to engaging a diverse audience. Additionally, the digital communications unit produces a fortnightly digital newspaper titled eZasegagani and releases a 12-minute podcast twice a month, with teasers shared on LinkedIn and links to full episodes on YouTube. This multi-platform approach allows the municipality to reach various demographics effectively.

II. Engaging different audiences

The EMTV channel, available at Sizakala centres, represents another innovative method of information dissemination. P3 described how this channel broadcasts infographics and videos to ratepayers while they wait to pay bills, although issues with service provider contracts have hindered its effectiveness. The need for an overhaul of content and strategy was identified, indicating a commitment to improving communication methods and keeping residents informed in an engaging way.

III. Speed and accuracy of information

The participants unanimously recognized the speed of information dissemination as a significant advantage of social media. P12 stated, "*If there's an emergency, we can quickly inform residents through platforms like Twitter and Facebook*." This ability to provide timely updates is crucial, especially in emergency situations. However, P13 cautioned that the rapid nature of social media also necessitates diligence in ensuring the accuracy of shared information. Mistakes can spread quickly, potentially leading to misinformation and confusion among the residents.

IV. Promoting events and engagement

Social media also serves as a vital promotional tool for municipal events. P14 noted that it helps increase attendance and engagement at events like the Durban Fashion Fair and community meetings. This highlights the role of social media not just in information dissemination, but also in fostering community involvement. However, P15 pointed out a critical limitation that, not all community members are active on social media, and this necessitates the adoption of alternative strategies to ensure that these individuals remain informed.

V. Direct engagement and challenges

The interactive nature of social media allows the municipality to engage directly with the residents. P16 explained that this platform enables them to answer questions and clarify doubts in real time. Yet, P17 highlighted the challenge of managing high volumes of interactions, requiring a dedicated team to monitor and respond effectively. This need for resources underscores the importance of establishing a robust communication strategy that can handle public inquiries and feedback efficiently.

VI. Visual content and real-time updates

Visual content is particularly effective in capturing attention on social media. P18 noted that photos and videos convey information more compellingly than text alone, in enhancing engagement. Furthermore, the ability to provide real-time updates during events, as highlighted by P19, enhances community interaction, as attendees can share live feedback and experiences.

In summary, while challenges persist, the participants overwhelmingly agree that social media is an invaluable tool for the eThekwini municipality in disseminating news and information. P20 succinctly summarised this sentiment by stating, "*It helps us stay connected with the community and ensures that residents are informed and engaged*." The effective use of social media not only enhances service delivery but also fosters a more engaged and informed citizenry, demonstrating the platform's critical role in modern governance and public service.

6.7.2 Distribution for social media to public officials' participants according to instances where social media is used for political campaigns and public awareness initiatives

The focus group discussed how social media enhances political campaigns, public awareness, and civic engagement in eThekwini Municipality. The participants shared insights on successes and challenges of using social media for governance and community mobilisation, including ethical dilemmas in political contexts.

I. Instances of effective use

P10 noted that there have been both positive and negative responses to campaigns for specific individuals, pointing out that some politicians seem to be marginalised in municipal media coverage based on their political affiliations. This observation underscores the complex dynamics of media representation in local governance, suggesting that political motivations may influence the visibility of certain figures.

II. Political challenges and bullying

P8 brought attention to the intimidation faced by some councillors, particularly a specific eThekwini councillor demanding exclusive media coverage during events attended by the mayor. This highlights the competitive nature of political visibility within the municipality and raises concerns about the ethical implications of such demands. The case of a former councillor requesting inclusion in media profiles, as described by P6, further illustrates the political influence exerted by individuals within the municipality, revealing the delicate balance between incumbents and former officials in media coverage.

III. Public awareness campaigns

The participants cited several successful public awareness campaigns that utilised social media effectively. For example, P11 highlighted the #PlayYourPart #CleanUp initiative, which encouraged residents to participate in community clean-up events, demonstrating social media's potential to mobilise community action. Similarly, P13 noted the success

of the #DBNSizzlingSummer #VisitDurban#DurbanHasMore campaign, aimed at promoting tourism while ensuring the cleanliness of local beaches. These examples illustrate how social media campaigns can effectively raise awareness and engage residents in community improvement efforts.

IV. Voter engagement and demographic reach

Social media has also proven effective in promoting voter registration drives, particularly targeting younger demographics, as noted by P14. This suggests that social media can be a powerful tool for civic engagement, helping to mobilise and inform citizens about their rights and responsibilities. However, P12 cautioned that political campaigns can be more challenging, often attracting scrutiny and mixed reactions from the public, highlighting the complexities of using social media for political purposes.

V. Ongoing challenges

Despite the successes, the participants acknowledged that some campaigns face challenges in maintaining public interest. P17 mentioned the #UseWatersparinglyWaterConservation campaign, which, although it raised awareness about water conservation, struggled to keep the momentum going. Additionally, P19 noted that ongoing issues like waste management require continuous engagement to sustain public interest, indicating that successful campaigns must be persistent and adaptive.

B. Semi-Structured Interview Analysis for EThekwini Municipality Political Parties

6.8 Section 1: General Experience with Social Media

6.8.1 Distribution for political party participants according to the use of social media as a tool for political engagement

Across the participants, there is a clear emphasis on social media's role in facilitating political engagement, particularly with younger and more metropolitan demographics. P1 highlighted that social media allows them to "*mobilise young people to hold politicians accountable and raise awareness about topics such as unemployment and inequality*," positioning it as a key platform for engaging marginalised communities. Similarly, P2 speaks to the importance of digital platforms in "*proactively engaging in online conversations and countering disinformation,*" a sentiment echoed by others who view social media as essential for sustaining leadership and communicating party values.

I. Direct engagement and transparency in governance

The participants also stressed social media's capacity to foster direct interaction between political parties and the citizens, particularly in municipalities like eThekwini. P3 pointed out that platforms such as Facebook and Twitter enabled the party to convey the party's position on important issues and advocate for transparency in local governance. P5 further added that social media provides real-time responses to community concerns, and thus helps the party build a strong grassroots network and hold municipal leadership accountable. P9 reinforces this by focusing on how social media allows their party to promote accountability, conversation, and mobilisation for improved municipal governance.

II. Social media as a platform for shaping public opinion and party messaging

Another recurring theme is the use of social media to shape public opinion and manage party messaging. P6 mentions how their party uses platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and TikTok to communicate the party's message and engage with the public, while P7 emphasizes the modernisation of political communication by managing the party's digital presence, particularly for younger audiences. This highlights a strategic use of social media not only for information dissemination but also for influencing public perception and engagement.

III. Social media as a catalyst for grassroots mobilisation

Many of the participants describe social media as a powerful tool for grassroots mobilisation. P8, for example, uses platforms to spread the party's message of grassroots development and community engagement, emphasising the localised impact of social media in eThekwini. Similarly, P10 discusses how their party uses social media to rally support for local projects and keep the government responsible, suggesting a dual purpose of both raising awareness and activating community involvement.

In summary, social media emerges as an essential tool for political parties in eThekwini, serving as a platform for direct engagement, transparency, and grassroots mobilisation. The participants' responses illustrate how parties strategically use digital platforms to influence public opinion, engage with diverse constituencies, and advocate for responsive governance. Through these platforms, political parties can interact with constituents in real-time, respond to governance issues, and maintain accountability within the municipal context.

6.9 Section 2: Democratic Strategies and Public Opinion on Governance

6.9.1 Distribution for political party participants according to social media's role in shaping public opinion

The participants emphasized the significant role of social media in engaging residents and building trust. Political parties leverage platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and

WhatsApp to promote inclusion and encourage community involvement. For instance, P1 noted that direct engagement allows parties to effectively address local issues, while P3 and 10 highlighted that real-time interactions make residents feel acknowledged and valued.

This emphasis on trust indicates a strategic effort to humanize political parties, enhancing their accessibility to the electorate. Additionally, the participants underscored the importance of establishing direct lines of communication, positioning their parties as attentive and accountable in the political space.

I. Shaping public opinion and combatting disinformation

A consistent thread among the participants is the use of social media to shape public opinion and combat disinformation. P1, P4, and P5 emphasized the importance of using social media to raise awareness about corruption and service delivery issues while providing accurate information about their activities and goals. By doing so, they aim to counter misinformation and provide the electorate with trustworthy narratives that resonate with community concerns.

P4 elaborated on how regular updates, visual content, and infographics are used to convey the party's vision and activities, highlighting social media's value in public relations and messaging. The ability to control the flow of information and maintain narrative integrity through these platforms is seen as crucial for safeguarding party reputations in the digital age.

II. Mobilisation and campaign strategies

Several participants (P6, P9) detailed how social media is leveraged for mobilising support during election periods. P6 described the use of targeted advertisements and discussions aimed at specific demographics, suggesting a strategic approach to voter outreach. This targeted engagement is instrumental in connecting with diverse community groups within eThekwini, ensuring that messages resonate with varying local contexts.

P9 further highlighted how grassroots mobilisation via social media is key to sustaining community engagement beyond election cycles. This underscores the role of social media as a long-term tool for building a dedicated support base, not just during political campaigns but as part of ongoing party activities.

VII. Responsiveness and policy adjustment

Political parties appear to value the feedback mechanisms embedded in social media, which allow them to adjust their strategies in response to public opinion. P7 and P10 pointed to the monitoring of online debates and comments as critical for gauging citizen sentiment. This input helps parties tailor their messages and activities to align with public needs, showcasing a dynamic, adaptive approach to governance.

The emphasis on responsiveness reinforces the notion that political parties are not only disseminators of information but also active listeners. This two-way communication, according to P10, strengthens community ties and enhances parties' understanding of citizen priorities.

VIII. Raising awareness and advocacy

The participants also noted that social media serves as a platform for raising awareness about pressing local issues (P8). Service delivery challenges, economic opportunities, and social justice are key topics that party's spotlight to galvanize public support. By advocating for community needs and encouraging civic action, political parties position themselves as champions of social and economic development in the municipality.

P8's focus on local issues aligns with the broader pattern of political parties using social media to frame their engagement as solutions-oriented, reinforcing their commitment to addressing community needs.

In summary, through a blend of engagement, advocacy, and responsiveness, political parties use social media as a multifaceted tool for promoting their platforms and fostering a more informed and participatory electorate.

6.9.2 Distribution for political party participants according to social media techniques used for engaging citizens

Political parties employ various strategies on social media to engage citizens and gather feedback on governance issues. P1 underscores the importance of timely postings that ignite discussions on critical topics such as waste management and transportation in eThekwini. This approach actively encourages community participation and invites residents to share their experiences. Furthermore, the party has created dedicated groups across all 111 branches and wards, serving as platforms for ongoing conversations about local government concerns and fostering a sense of community.

I. Enhancing engagement through visual storytelling

Visual storytelling emerges as a significant strategy for enhancing engagement. P2 mentions that the party collaborates with experts to create infographics and videos that discuss important governance topics. Such materials are not only more likely to be shared but also help to broaden public participation through comments and discussions. By actively monitoring comment sections and responding to constituents' queries, the party addresses specific governance issues, fostering deeper conversations. Additionally, direct messaging channels are encouraged for more confidential interactions, further enhancing engagement.

II. Personalisation of governance issues

Personalising governance issues is another effective technique, as noted by (P3). Sharing residents' experiences both positive and negative, helps to highlight pressing issues, fostering a sense of urgency among the public. The party also organises both in-person and online community gatherings to facilitate direct interactions between citizens and party officials, allowing for questions and feedback. Therefore, this dual approach of

sharing experiences and promoting direct interaction effectively enhances citizen involvement.

III. Maintaining transparency and public accountability

Transparency is vital in maintaining public trust. As described by P4, the party publishes updates on governance initiatives and progress reports on concerns raised by the citizens. Thus, by keeping the community informed and publicly responding to feedback, the party demonstrates its commitment to addressing citizen issues, thereby encouraging ongoing participation.

IV. Utilising polls and surveys

Utilising polls and surveys on social media platforms at regular intervals empowers political parties to better understand public sentiment regarding crucial governance issues, as detailed by (P5). This proactive approach not only encourages active participation but also yields significant insights into public concerns, thereby enabling the party to be more attuned to the needs of the citizens. Furthermore, conducting live Q&A sessions on platforms such as TikTok and Facebook serves as a testament to this transparency, fostering real-time dialogue between citizens and party representatives.

V. Fostering community ownership

Encouraging community ownership is an essential element of public engagement. (P6) notes that the party invites residents to share images and stories related to community projects and governance challenges. This practice fosters a sense of belonging and encourages residents to engage actively in governance issues. Regular hashtag campaigns raise awareness about specific topics, and prompt individuals to share their perspectives and experiences. The party also schedules fortnightly meetings to receive feedback, promoting consistent engagement with the community.

VI. Online forums and virtual listening tours

P7 emphasizes the role of online forums and webinars as platforms for knowledge-sharing and community involvement. By inviting experts and community members to participate in discussions on specific topics, the party leverages social media for virtual listening tours. These initiatives not only solicit community feedback but also offer incentives, such as merchandise, to boost participation rates. Gathering email addresses through campaigns allows the party to send out newsletters highlighting citizen feedback and party responses, further enhancing community engagement.

VII. Localised approach to governance

A localised approach is crucial for addressing specific community concerns. As outlined by P8, the party provides transparency reports detailing how resident feedback has influenced party policies. By showcasing various neighbourhoods and their unique issues, the party seeks localised responses and solutions.

VIII. Collaborative engagement with influencers

During election periods, collaborating with local influencers becomes a significant strategy. P9 highlights the importance of engaging community leaders to amplify the party's messages and foster dialogue on governance issues. Hence, the use of social media for rapid responses to local crises also demonstrates the party's commitment to addressing immediate community needs. Hosting debates and panel discussions further encourages citizen interaction and questions, enhancing public engagement.

IX. Promoting collaborative governance

Finally, fostering collaboration among political parties is emphasized by P10. Therefore, the party uses social media to communicate with representatives from other parties on shared challenges, promoting a cooperative governance approach. Additionally, gamification tactics, such as leaderboards and awards, are utilised to stimulate public engagement in feedback initiatives, creating an enjoyable and competitive atmosphere.

In summary, the analysis of these participants' insights reveals a comprehensive framework of strategies employed by political parties to engage citizens through social

media. By leveraging diverse techniques, ranging from visual storytelling to localised approaches and collaborative governance, political parties enhance public participation in e-democracy, significantly impacting governance and service delivery within the eThekwini Metropolitan Municipality.

6.9.3 Distribution for social media public officials' participants according to advantages and disadvantages of adopting social media

The adoption of social media as a tool for democratic engagement has elicited varied perspectives among political party representatives regarding its advantages and disadvantages. The participants consistently highlighted the dual nature of social media's impact on governance and service delivery within the eThekwini Metropolitan Municipality.

I. Facilitating direct communication and engagement

One notable advantage of social media is its capacity to foster direct connections between political parties and citizens. P1 emphasized that this form of communication circumvents traditional media, and thus enables quicker and more personal exchanges. It allows parties to swiftly gather feedback on policies and effectively reach a younger audience, as P2 mentions.

However, this immediacy also presents challenges. P1 cautioned that social media comments can be easily misinterpreted, leading to misconceptions about a party's positions. Furthermore, P3 noted that platforms like Twitter, with their character limits, may oversimplify complex governance issues, thereby diminishing the depth of engagement.

II. Enhancing civic participation while managing challenges

Social media serves as a platform for political parties to promote civic involvement and transparency. P3 mentions utilising Telegram and WhatsApp forward community groups, enabling residents to engage with local governance issues. Yet, P4 raises concerns about

hostility from online trolls and abusers, which can derail constructive conversations and hinder public engagement.

To combat misinformation and enhance public understanding, P5 states that the party uses infographics and videos to educate the electorate about policy issues and governance systems. This approach aims to foster an informed public. However, it also highlights the potential for social media to create cycles of dissatisfaction, where issues are exaggerated, prompting political parties to react to every scandal, whether substantiated or not.

III. Mobilisation and representation challenges

The participants also discussed social media's role in mobilising support, particularly during crises or significant political events. P6 noted that platforms like WhatsApp, Facebook, and Twitter facilitate quick mobilisation of supporters, allowing for two-way communication rather than one-way broadcasts. Nonetheless, there remains a concern that not all residents in eThekwini have reliable internet access or the necessary skills to engage online, which can exclude marginalised populations from the democratic process.

P7 emphasized the tailored messaging capabilities of social media, which allows parties to reach specific demographics effectively. This targeted approach can amplify party messages as citizens share posts within their networks. However, P8 warns that social media can also be a conduit for disinformation, leading to confusion and misconceptions about party priorities.

IV. Data analytics and political polarisation

The use of analytical tools provided by social media platforms is noted as a benefit for tracking public opinion and identifying key governance concerns. P9 states that these tools help parties understand their target audience and the issues that resonate with citizens. Nevertheless, P10 cautions that social media may exacerbate political polarization, creating echo chambers where users engage only with content that reinforces their pre-existing beliefs.

In summary, while social media presents significant advantages for democratic engagement, such as facilitating direct communication and enhancing civic participation, it also poses challenges, including misinformation, exclusion of certain demographics, and potential polarization. Political parties in the eThekwini Metropolitan Municipality recognize the need to navigate these complexities to effectively leverage social media in governance and service delivery.

6.10 Section 2: Holding the Government Accountable

6.10.1 Distribution for political party participants according to the use of social media in holding the government accountable

The use of social media as a tool for holding the government accountable for its actions and policies has become increasingly prominent among the residents and the political parties in the eThekwini Metropolitan Municipality. The participants highlighted various strategies that individuals and political parties can employ to leverage social media effectively for governance accountability.

I. Amplifying citizen voices and awareness

The participants agree that social media platforms like Twitter and Facebook serve as vital tools for residents to publicly voice their grievances regarding poor service delivery. P1 notes that residents can initiate hashtag campaigns, such as #FixRoads or #eThekwiniWaterCrisis, which not only raised awareness but also draw media attention to critical governance issues. By tagging municipal leaders and departments, citizens can increase pressure on local governments to respond to these concerns.

Further emphasizing this point, P2 discussed the impact of posting visual evidence, such as images and videos, to highlight government failures, whether it's potholes, water shortages, or corruption. The ability to initiate online petitions through social media

empowers residents to rally support for pressing issues like housing or public safety, effectively bringing them to the attention of local authorities.

II. Exposing corruption and facilitating whistleblowing

Another significant aspect of using social media for accountability is the potential for exposing corruption. As P3 points out, individuals can utilise these platforms for whistleblowing, thereby revealing misconduct within the municipality. This approach is further enhanced by collaborations with journalists. P4 highlights how social media enables residents to share their experiences of inadequate governance, creating compelling narratives that resonate with both the public and the media. By providing tips and information to investigative journalists and citizens can contribute to more in-depth investigations into government corruption.

III. Crowdsourcing information and tracking accountability

Social media also facilitates the crowdsourcing of data regarding governance issues. P5 noted that individuals can compile reports on recurring problems, such as power outages or infrastructure failures. This collective data-gathering empowers citizens to track promises made by government officials and ensures that they are held accountable when these commitments are not met.

Political parties, like P6, utilise social media to disseminate real-time updates on governance issues, such as water shortages and housing crises. This transparency keeps the public informed and holds the government accountable by exposing service delivery gaps. P7 and P8 echo this sentiment, indicating that political parties often issue public statements on social media that criticize local administration mismanagement, demanding accountability for failed policies. By fact-checking claims made by local governments, these parties aim to reveal inaccuracies and unfulfilled promises.

IV. Mobilising broader engagement and media pressure

To enhance the impact of accountability efforts, P9 discussed the importance of engaging local influencers and activists with significant social media followings. This strategy

amplifies concerns about government accountability and mobilises larger groups of citizens. Collaborative efforts between the citizens and the political parties to generate crowdsourced reports that track government actions can be shared widely on social media, increasing visibility and pressure on local administrations.

Lastly, as P10 suggests, social media can exert pressure on traditional media outlets to cover government failures. By highlighting specific cases, such as the Thabo Bester incident, social media users can push for investigative reporting that holds politicians accountable, emphasising the critical role that citizen engagement plays in the democratic process.

In summary, the overall participants have expressed that social media serves as a powerful tool for holding the government accountable in the eThekwini Metropolitan Municipality. Through public protests, evidence sharing, whistleblowing, crowdsourcing information, and engaging with media, citizens and political parties can create a robust framework for governance accountability. Therefore, by leveraging these strategies, the community can actively participate in the democratic process and advocate for better governance and service delivery.

6.11 Monitoring public services and performance accountability

6.11.1 Distribution for political party participants according to use of social media on holding the municipality accountable and monitor public services

The utilisation of social media by political party representatives in the eThekwini Metropolitan Municipality has emerged as a pivotal tool for holding municipal authorities accountable and monitoring public services. Through various campaigns and real-time engagements, political parties amplify public grievances, foster community mobilisation, and ensure transparency in governance. This consolidated analysis explored successful instances and strategies employed by political parties to leverage social media for

accountability and public service monitoring, highlighting patterns of engagement, public pressure, and the challenges faced.

I. Catalysing public response and infrastructure improvements

The participants highlighted significant events where social media acted as a catalyst for government accountability and service delivery improvements. P1 cites the #DurbanFloodsResponse campaign following the 2022 floods, where platforms like Twitter and Facebook were instrumental in criticizing the municipality's delayed response in providing aid and repairing infrastructure. The virality of the hashtag drew public attention and pressured authorities to expedite updates and necessary repairs.

In Umlazi, P2 notes the community's use of social media to document water shortages and damaged pipes, compelling the municipality to address these longstanding issues through emergency repairs. This immediacy in reporting service failures creates visibility around these failures, thereby putting pressure on municipal authorities to respond quickly. Hashtag campaigns such as #NoWaterInEThekwini play a vital role in aggregating complaints and mobilising public sentiment.

II. Amplifying evidence of poor service delivery

The participants discussed the power of visual evidence in amplifying calls for accountability. P3 recounts a sewage leak in Phoenix, where viral videos prompted the municipality to deploy emergency response teams, demonstrating how real-time documentation can lead to immediate government action. Sharing videos and images of broken infrastructure or service failures creates undeniable evidence of poor public service delivery. By mapping areas affected by service disruptions, parties can create heatmaps that hold the municipality accountable for prioritizing repairs.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, social media served as a critical tool for monitoring municipal health services and the distribution of relief resources, as highlighted by P4.

This transparency contributed to better management of vaccination centres and improved public health communication.

III. Environmental advocacy and crisis management

Social media plays a crucial role in environmental advocacy and crisis management. P3 references the Durban Bay oil leak in 2021, where activists utilised social media to raise awareness, ultimately attracting significant media coverage and leading the municipality to undertake cleanup operations. Similarly, P4 illustrates how social media posts regarding electricity blackouts in Ntuzuma spurred public outcry, resulting in the municipality acknowledging the issue and initiating infrastructure upgrades.

P5 provides an example of Clifton Beach flooding, where widespread posts about flooding and pollution forced the municipality to rectify neglected drainage systems. After natural disasters or protests, parties like the ANC and Action SA have leveraged social media to organise clean-up efforts and monitor the municipality's responsiveness to restoring essential services, exemplified by the #EThekwiniCleanUp campaign (P5).

IV. Campaigns addressing social issues

Political parties leverage social media for broader social issues. P6 mentions the #YouthUnemployment campaign by ACDP and Action SA, which ignited public discourse on youth unemployment, resulting in the implementation of new youth empowerment programs. P7 emphasizes how the #Elections2024 campaign facilitated the tracking of municipal election irregularities, leading to interventions by election authorities for greater transparency.

Furthermore, P8 details the #HousingForAll campaign, which spotlighted the housing crisis in informal settlements. The campaign's viral nature compelled the municipality to expedite housing developments, showcasing how social media can create substantial pressure for change.

V. Empowering communities and marginalised groups

The impact of social media is evident in initiatives aimed at marginalised communities. For instance, P9 discussed how the #ElectricityForAll campaign, driven by residents and political parties like the EFF, pressured the municipality to expand electrification projects in informal settlements. This highlights how collective voices on social media can lead to tangible improvements in service delivery.

Additionally, P10 illustrates the efforts of the ANC Women's League through the #StopViolenceAgainstWomen campaign, where social media was used to draw attention to the lack of municipal support for gender-based violence victims. Hence, this campaign effectively pressured the municipality to invest more resources in women's shelters and public awareness initiatives.

VI. Direct engagement and accountability

Engaging directly with specific municipal departments is a strategy employed to enhance accountability. P5 explains that the residents and the party members are encouraged to tag underperforming departments on platforms like Twitter and Facebook, and creating a public forum where these departments can be held accountable. Likewise, P6 emphasizes that if a department consistently fails, the party may resort to "naming and shaming" them on social media, effectively drawing public attention to their shortcomings and forcing a response.

Furthermore, P7 describes tracking the response times of public services to complaints made on social media. This comparative analysis of municipal leaders' promises versus actual performance is then exposed on social media, revealing discrepancies and holding officials accountable for their commitments.

VII. Fact-checking and public opinion

Fact-checking is an important aspect of using social media for accountability. Hence, P8 highlights that when municipal officials make claims about service delivery, citizens can

quickly counter these claims with real-time posts from affected communities. This practice promotes transparency and ensures that the voices of residents are amplified.

In addition, P9 mentioned that the utility of quick polls on platforms like Twitter and Facebook to gauge public opinion on service delivery issues. Therefore, by regularly retweeting or sharing residents' complaints, parties ensure that these issues are brought to the attention of municipal leaders, and highlight areas where services are lacking.

VIII. Whistleblowing and transparency

Social media facilitates whistleblowing, recognized as a significant advantage in promoting transparency. P10 states that platforms allow whistleblowers to anonymously report corruption in public services, and thus enhances accountability of municipal officials. This contributes to a culture of openness and responsiveness within the municipality.

In summary, political parties in the eThekwini Metropolitan Municipality have successfully harnessed social media to hold the government accountable and monitor public services through various campaigns and community mobilisations. This platform effectively amplifies public grievances and encourages community engagement, utilising tools such as real-time reporting, visual evidence, and direct communication with municipal departments.

However, it is important to navigate challenges like misinformation and potential public backlash in order to maintain the effectiveness of these strategies. Ultimately, social media has emerged as a crucial tool for democratic participation, enabling both citizens and political parties to demand accountability and improve governance in the municipality.

6.11.2 Distribution for political party participants according to difficulties and possibilities in utilising social media to monitor public services

The use of social media to hold the eThekwini Metropolitan Municipality accountable for public services presents both significant challenges and opportunities. The participants in the study have expressed concerns about access, authenticity, engagement, and institutional support, all of which influence how effectively social media can be used for governance.

I. Accessibility issues and engagement challenges

One of the most pressing difficulties identified is the lack of reliable internet access for a significant proportion of the population, particularly in rural and lower-income areas. Hence, P1 asserts that this digital divide limits the ability of these residents to engage in online discussions and report service issues. Additionally, P1 highlights that some municipal departments are unresponsive to issues raised on social media and lack dedicated teams to monitor and address complaints.

In addition to these access issues, Participant 2 points out that social media platforms can become inundated with complaints, making it difficult for political parties and municipal departments to filter and prioritize genuine concerns. The challenge of verifying the authenticity of complaints, especially in an era where manipulated images and AI-generated content are prevalent, compounds the difficulty of maintaining public trust.

II. The impact of misinformation and hostility

The participants also acknowledge that social media can be a breeding ground for misinformation. Hence, P3 mentions that fake news and rumours complicate the accountability process, while hostile interactions and trolling can derail constructive discussions about service delivery. Likewise, P4 emphasizes that delays in municipal follow-up on issues raised on social media can lead to citizen frustration and protests.

The fast-paced nature of social media further complicates this, as attention shifts rapidly even when unresolved public service issues persist.

III. Resource constraints and legal considerations

Resource limitations also pose a significant challenge, particularly for smaller parties such as the African Independent Congress (AIC) and the African Business Congress (ABC). P5 notes that these parties often lack the personnel and resources to manage active social media engagement, which constrains their monitoring capacity. Even when social media highlights issues effectively, municipalities may still lack the capacity to address them promptly.

Moreover, P6 raises critical legal and ethical concerns regarding privacy when posting sensitive information about public services or personal experiences. This necessitates a careful validation process before sharing information, further complicating accountability efforts. When issues raised on social media do not result in action, it can lead to disillusionment among the residents regarding both the municipality and political parties, and ultimately reduce public engagement over time.

IV. Fragmentation of complaints and institutional barriers

The fragmentation of communication across various social media platforms is another concern. Hence, P7 explains that residents utilise different platforms such as Twitter, WhatsApp, and Facebook to express complaints, making coordinated monitoring and response difficult. Additionally, social media algorithms can create echo chambers, which limit the exposure to diverse citizen input and dissenting opinions.

Institutional barriers also affect the effectiveness of social media as a monitoring tool. P8 points out that some municipal departments may lack institutional buy-in for using social media for public accountability, and thus undermine its potential. The risks of hacking or cyberattacks on party accounts, as mentioned by P8, further complicate the landscape, potentially compromising sensitive communications and disrupting campaigns focused on public services.

V. Confrontational perceptions and the influence of private interests

Furthermore, P9 highlights that some municipal departments may perceive public monitoring on social media as confrontational, leading to reluctance in engaging openly. This lack of transparency makes it harder to hold them accountable. P10 adds that private interests, such as contractors or service providers, may attempt to influence narratives on social media, distorting the real issues citizens face. The varied ways in which different citizens report the same issue can also create confusion regarding the severity or scope of the problems.

In summary, while social media holds significant potential for enhancing accountability and facilitating public engagement in the eThekwini Metropolitan Municipality, numerous challenges impede its effectiveness. Issues such as limited internet access, misinformation, resource constraints, and institutional barriers must be addressed to harness social media's full potential for monitoring public services. Political parties and municipal departments must work collaboratively to develop robust digital strategies that ensure a more inclusive and responsive governance framework.

6.12 Section 3: Social Media as An Advocacy Platform

6.12.1 Distribution for political party participants according to using social media as a political advocacy and policy decision-making

The use of social media as an advocacy platform has transformed the landscape of political engagement, particularly in the context of governance and service delivery within the eThekwini Metropolitan Municipality. The political party representatives express varied insights into how social media facilitates accountability and influences policy decision-making.

I. Direct communication and real-time response

Social media is recognized as a vital communication channel between the political parties and the residents. P1 highlights that it bypasses traditional media filters, and enables the advocacy of messages to reach the public swiftly and efficiently. This direct line of communication allows political parties to amplify their messages across platforms like Twitter, Facebook, and TikTok, raising awareness of key policy issues affecting the municipality.

Moreover, P2 emphasizes social media's capacity for real-time responsiveness to current events, allowing the political parties to shape public discourse around important issues such as service delivery and infrastructure development. This immediacy creates an interactive space for engagement, where the political parties can gather feedback from the residents that may influence final policy decisions.

II. Targeted advocacy campaigns and grassroots mobilisation

Social media's capacity to launch targeted advocacy campaigns is a significant advantage, as noted by P3. The political parties can focus on issues such as waste management and mobilise grassroots support through hashtag campaigns. This approach encourages citizen participation in rallies and petitions, thereby enhancing efforts for policy change.

P4 highlights the role of social media in holding public officials accountable and monitoring their performance. By participating in public debates and disseminating information, political parties can influence public opinion and foster a policymaking process that reflects community needs, and thus allow citizens to contribute a variety of perspectives.

III. Enhancing transparency and countering misinformation

Social media enhances transparency in the policy development process by enabling political parties to inform the public about policies and their implications. This transparency is vital for countering misinformation and cultivating an informed citizenry.

Furthermore, social media plays a crucial role in sustaining advocacy for policy change, ensuring that important issues remain in the public eye and facilitating ongoing dialogue. It also empowers parties to hold municipal officials accountable when community outcomes fall short.

IV. Engaging diverse audiences and continuous feedback

The participants acknowledge the effectiveness of Instagram and TikTok in engaging younger audiences. Hence, P7 suggests that political parties can connect with this demographic by collaborating with social media influencers, and broaden their outreach.

Furthermore, social media allows for immediate feedback on policy proposals. P8 notes that political parties can adapt their positions based on this input, and focus on issues like housing and healthcare while involving those directly affected. This responsiveness enhances the relevance of political discourse.

V. Gauging public sentiment and low-cost advocacy

The political parties utilise social media analytics to gauge public sentiment on policy issues, as highlighted by P9. By monitoring hashtags and comments, they can refine their strategies and engage both supporters and critics, and thus ensure that their policies align with community interests.

Furthermore, P10 emphasizes that social media provides an economical platform for advocacy, making it accessible to smaller parties. It also facilitates engagement with eThekwini residents abroad, thereby broadening the advocacy network and promoting inclusivity in the policymaking process.

In summary, social media plays a multifaceted role in holding the government accountable by facilitating direct communication, enabling real-time responses, fostering targeted advocacy campaigns, enhancing transparency, and providing continuous feedback mechanisms. The political parties in the eThekwini Metropolitan Municipality leverage

these advantages to engage the citizens in the policy-making process, thereby reinforcing democratic practices and promoting effective governance.

6.12.2 Distribution for political party participants according to social media advocacy examples and influence on policy decisions

The strategic use of social media as an advocacy tool within the eThekwini Metropolitan Municipality demonstrates a multifaceted approach. Several political parties have adeptly leveraged these platforms to enhance public awareness, instigate policy changes, and champion improved governance and service delivery.

I. Social media as an advocacy platform

The participants highlighted several key instances where social media has significantly influenced local governance. For example, P1 noted that the Democratic Alliance (DA) employed social media to demand transparency in the municipality's budget allocation. This advocacy led to increased public access to information, demonstrating how social media can put pressure on governmental bodies to be more accountable. Similarly, P2 pointed out that the Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) successfully utilised social media to address water shortages in informal settlements. Through campaigns like #WaterCrisis, they effectively mobilised public sentiment, and prompted the municipality to act regarding water supply issues.

II. Mobilising community action

P3 highlighted that the Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP)'s use of Facebook and WhatsApp to engage residents in local clean-up initiatives in Umlazi and KwaMashu, drew municipal attention to waste management policies and demonstrated social media's role in advocacy and community involvement.

Likewise, P4 noted the African National Congress (ANC)'s response to the floods in eThekwini, where social media campaigns for improved disaster management led to

quicker municipal responses. This underscores the platform's ability to facilitate urgent discussions about governance during crises.

III. Addressing service delivery issues

The commitment to address service delivery issues is a prominent theme in the participant's responses. P5 noted that Action SA used Facebook, Twitter, and TikTok to highlight waste collection backlogs, and emphasized their negative impact on health and sanitation, which pressured the municipality to improve waste management.

Furthermore, P6 pointed out that the EFF sparked public debates on land invasions through viral posts, encouraging municipality engagement in land redistribution discussions, showcasing social media's influence on political discourse.

In addition, P7 mentioned the Abantu Batho Congress (ABC), which used social media to reveal failures in essential services like water and electricity in townships. Their efforts led to increased responsiveness from local officials regarding service delays, highlighting the power of public accountability through social media.

IV. Promoting employment and health initiatives

Additionally, both the ANC and EFF have utilised social media to promote youth employment initiatives, as noted by P8. Their awareness campaigns, particularly on Facebook, resulted in more policies aimed at reducing unemployment. This illustrates how social media can shape governmental priorities and influence job creation schemes in response to public needs.

Finally, during the COVID-19 pandemic, P10 highlighted the ANC's extensive social media campaigns that promoted vaccination and public health protocols. This advocacy played a crucial role in shaping municipal health strategies and reflects the importance of social media in crisis communication and public health awareness.

In summary, the testimonies from the participants collectively illustrate the significant influence of social media on e-democracy within the eThekwini Metropolitan Municipality. The political parties are leveraging these platforms not only to advocate for transparency and accountability but also to engage communities and address pressing governance challenges. Through these initiatives, social media emerges as a vital tool for promoting democratic practices and enhancing service delivery within local governance frameworks.

6.13 Section 4: Impact on political campaigns and news feeding

6.13.1 Distribution for political party participants according to the role of social media in conveying political information and changing public discourse

The role of social media in conveying political information and transforming public discourse within the eThekwini Metropolitan Municipality is profound. The participants in the study emphasized various ways social media serves as an advocacy platform, highlighting its potential to foster direct communication between the political entities and the public while shaping the political landscape.

I. Instant access and real-time information

According to P1, social media provides instant access to political news and updates, and thus allows the citizens to stay informed about policy changes and government actions in real time. Platforms like Twitter and Facebook often serve as the primary sources for breaking political news or crises, such as service delivery protests or natural disasters. This rapid dissemination of critical information is essential for maintaining an informed electorate and fostering a responsive democratic environment.

II. Direct communication and bypassing traditional media

P2 noted that social media enables political leaders and parties to communicate directly with the public, circumventing traditional media filters. This direct line of communication allows political parties to present their views and policy stances unedited. Furthermore,

parties utilise polls and surveys on these platforms to gather public opinions, and shape discourse based on the electorate's resonating issues. This interaction not only democratises political communication but also empowers citizens to influence the political agenda actively.

III. Amplifying marginalised voices

The capacity of social media to amplify the voices of marginalised communities is significant, as highlighted by P3. It enables issues that might otherwise be overlooked to enter mainstream political discourse. Political parties craft their campaign messaging through posts, videos, and infographics on platforms like Instagram and WhatsApp, thereby influencing public perceptions and shaping the political narrative. This capability highlights social media's role in diversifying the political conversation, ensuring that various perspectives are represented.

IV. Shaping the public agenda

In line with this, P4 pointed out that political parties use social media to set the public agenda by prioritizing discussions on specific issues, such as healthcare, housing, or economic development. Through engaging formats like Facebook Live and Twitter Spaces, parties foster direct dialogue with the citizens, and allow for a two-way political conversation. This engagement not only encourages citizen participation but also enhances the accountability of political parties to the public.

V. Democratising journalism and enhancing accountability

The democratisation of journalism through social media is another critical theme. P5 explained that social media allows ordinary citizens to report on local issues and government actions, and thus creates more comprehensive understanding of what is occurring within the community. This accessibility provides the residents with a platform for immediate feedback, enhancing transparency and holding political parties accountable for their actions, particularly regarding governance failures and broken promises.

VI. Tailored political communication

The capacity for tailored political communication through social media was noted by P6, who highlighted that targeted advertising ensures specific demographic groups receive messages relevant to their concerns. Political parties can sway public opinion on key issues through consistent messaging and engagement. For instance, discussions around housing protests can evolve into broader conversations about sustainable development, demonstrating social media's ability to facilitate complex political discussions.

VII. Increasing transparency

P7 emphasized that social media increases transparency by sharing policy documents and budgets, and make political processes more accessible to the public. Political parties leverage these platforms to conduct public awareness campaigns on various issues, including voter registration and service delivery updates. This accessibility empowers the citizens by providing them with the information necessary to engage meaningfully in the political process.

VIII. Mobilising action and supporting digital activism

The role of social media in organising protests and mobilising citizens is crucial, as articulated by P8. Social media often serves as the spark for public action against issues such as service delivery failures or corruption. Political parties that align themselves with online movements, whether focused on social justice, gender equality, or environmental concerns, can significantly shape broader societal discussions.

IX. Advocating for policy change

As P9 pointed out, social media serves as a platform for political parties to advocate for specific policies or legislative changes. It enables them to explain the benefits of proposed laws and garner public support or opposition. Furthermore, social media fosters dialogue between different political parties and their supporters, and create spaces for debate and sometimes collaboration on shared local issues. This dialogue is crucial for fostering a vibrant democratic discourse.

X. Combating voter apathy

Finally, P10 highlighted the role of social media in combating voter apathy, especially among young people. Engaging content and targeted campaigns encourage youth participation in elections and political discussions. Social media provides political parties with an alternative to traditional media narratives, and allow them to present their stories and clarify issues directly. This direct engagement helps cultivate a more politically active and informed youth electorate.

In summary, the insights from the participants underscore the transformative role of social media in shaping political communication, enhancing public accountability, and fostering a more participatory democracy within the eThekwini Metropolitan Municipality. By facilitating direct engagement between the political parties and the citizens, social media not only informs public discourse but also empowers communities to advocate for their rights and influence governance.

6.14 Section 5: Operational usage for service delivery acceleration

6.14.1 Distribution for political party participants according to the way social media help to speed up service delivery

The role of social media in accelerating service delivery within the eThekwini Metropolitan Municipality is a prominent theme highlighted by the participants in the study. Various political parties and residents utilise social media platforms as vital tools for enhancing accountability, transparency, and responsiveness in governance.

I. Operational usage for service delivery acceleration

The participants noted that social media significantly enhances the ability of the residents to voice service delivery issues. As P1 explains, platforms like Twitter and Facebook empower citizens to quickly raise awareness, and enables the municipality to prioritize

problem areas effectively. This immediate feedback mechanism fosters a culture of accountability, where citizens can follow up on unfulfilled commitments, thereby keeping governmental departments accountable for their service delivery promises.

II. Emergency response coordination

In times of crisis, social media serves as a crucial tool for coordination and information dissemination. P2 emphasized that during emergencies, such as floods or road accidents, political parties utilise social media to inform the public and coordinate responses. This capacity for real-time communication ensures that citizens receive timely updates, which is essential for effective emergency management.

III. Enhancing transparency and feedback

Social media platforms contribute to transparency in service delivery processes. As noted by P3, municipal departments can post updates about ongoing projects, and keep the public informed of progress and delays. This transparency creates instant feedback loops, and allows the residents to comment on service delivery satisfaction or suggest improvements. The public can actively engage with the municipality, thus fostering a collaborative approach to governance.

Moreover, P4 pointed out that municipalities can use social media to send alerts about planned outages or maintenance schedules. This proactive communication allows the residents to plan accordingly, to minimize disruptions in their daily lives. Additionally, social media serves as a data collection tool for the political parties, which can leverage insights about recurring service delivery problems to apply pressure for improvements.

IV. Facilitating public engagement

The residents can lodge complaints and queries regarding service delivery via social media, and many political parties have effectively used this feedback to hold the municipality accountable. As articulated by P5, parties encourage citizen participation in ward meetings and public consultations, and ensure that community voices are integrated

into discussions that may lead to faster and improved service delivery. This engagement not only empowers the citizens but also reinforces the importance of participatory governance.

V. Targeting municipal accountability

The participants highlighted that the political parties could tag or direct service delivery issues to relevant municipal officials on social media. P6 noted that this targeted approach ensures that the right individuals are aware of existing problems, and thus facilitate quicker resolutions. The collaboration fostered between the public and local government through social media enhances the efficacy of community-driven initiatives aimed at improving service delivery.

VI. Monitoring promises and rights awareness

The ability of social media to monitor the fulfilment of service delivery promises is crucial. P7 indicated that both the political parties and the residents use social media to ensure that commitments made during campaigns are upheld, thereby increasing pressure on the municipality to meet deadlines. Additionally, social media empowers citizens to understand their rights and demand the services they deserve, as stated by P8. This awareness campaign aspect not only enhances accountability but also amplifies the voices of marginalised communities that may otherwise remain unheard.

VII. Exposing inefficiencies and corruption

Furthermore, social media serves as a platform for highlighting inefficiencies within the municipal system. According to P9, it encourages the streamlining of processes necessary for quicker service delivery. Social media can expose corrupt practices that hinder effective service provision, prompting swift interventions and the removal of obstacles that impede public service delivery.

VIII. Creating pressure for action

The visibility that social media affords to service delivery gaps exerts considerable pressure on municipal officials to act promptly. As noted by P10, discussions initiated by political parties around service delivery frequently led to policy suggestions aimed at improving service mechanisms. This dynamic indicates that social media not only facilitates public discourse but can also drive actionable change within municipal governance structures.

In summary, the insights from the participants collectively underscore the critical role of social media in enhancing e-democracy and accountability in the eThekwini Metropolitan Municipality. By facilitating communication, fostering transparency, and empowering citizens, social media serves as a powerful tool for political parties and residents alike in advocating for improved governance and service delivery. As such, it emerges as an essential component in the pursuit of effective and responsive local government.

6.14.2 Distribution for political party participants according to where social media played a critical role in accelerating service delivery

The role of social media in accelerating service delivery within the eThekwini Metropolitan Municipality has emerged as a prominent theme in the participants' responses. It is evident that social media platforms not only serve as channels for communication but also as tools for operational efficiency in addressing community needs. The participants highlighted several critical cases where social media significantly influenced municipal actions.

I. Enhanced responsiveness to complaints

Several participants illustrated how social media facilitated faster responses from municipal authorities. For instance, P1 recounted a water outage in Umlazi, noting that social media complaints rapidly gained momentum on Twitter. The municipality responded more quickly than usual, dispatching water tankers to affected areas. A similar pattern emerged in Phoenix, where persistent electricity outage complaints on Facebook

compelled political parties to pressure the municipality to prioritize infrastructure repairs. These examples suggest a clear correlation between social media visibility and governmental responsiveness, illustrating how public outcry on these platforms can expedite service delivery.

II. Coordinating community efforts

Additionally, P2 described how social media served as a catalyst for a citywide pothole repair campaign. Complaints from political parties and residents prompted the municipality to launch an initiative encouraging citizens to report potholes via Twitter and Facebook. This engagement significantly expedited the repair process, demonstrating the power of social media to mobilise collective action for service improvements. Following the heavy floods in Durban, the participants noted that social media was critical for coordinating relief efforts, with residents reporting damaged infrastructure and political parties alerting the municipality to prioritize disaster response.

III. Public engagement in service issues

The theme of public engagement through social media continued with P3, who pointed out that complaints about delayed waste collection in areas like Newlands and Chatsworth resulted in a swift municipal response. Political parties amplified public grievances, leading to additional waste collection services being deployed. Similarly, issues related to poor street lighting at Inanda were quickly addressed after social media users tagged municipal departments in their posts, prompting expedited repairs.

IV. Impact on infrastructure improvements

The testimony of P4 further emphasized the role of social media in highlighting neglected infrastructure issues. A major water leak in Westville, for instance, was reported via Twitter and swiftly addressed by the municipality after public pressure from political parties. The participants also noted that social media raised awareness about the poor conditions of schools in Clermont, leading to accelerated infrastructure support and improvements.

Moreover, P5 indicated that reports of illegal dumping in Cato Manor were addressed promptly due to pressure from political parties on social media, resulting in quicker clean -up efforts and enhanced monitoring of such issues. The engagement of the residents from Durban North regarding blocked drains also elicited a swift response from municipal teams, indicating that social media can prompt immediate attention to pressing local issues.

V. Facilitation of emergency responses

The operational utility of social media became particularly evident during emergencies, as noted by P6. Complaints regarding poor sanitation at a taxi rank in Pinetown led to immediate action after political parties escalated the issue on social platforms. During the COVID-19 pandemic, social media was instrumental in disseminating vital information about vaccination centres and schedules, enhancing community participation and service rollout.

VI. Promoting accountability and service improvement

The participants highlighted instances where sustained social media campaigns led to significant improvements in service delivery. For example, P7 pointed out that social media brought attention to delays in housing allocations in Cornubia, and prompted the municipality to expedite the allocation process and provide public updates. Similarly, social media posts about deteriorating road conditions in KwaMashu caught municipal officials' attention, resulting in faster repairs due to public pressure.

VII. Addressing safety and transportation concerns

Social media's role in addressing safety concerns was underscored by P9, who noted that complaints about fire hazards in informal settlements led to quicker installation of fire safety measures. The participants also highlighted how social media enabled the citizens to voice frustrations regarding inconsistent public transport schedules, which prompted the municipality to improve service coordination.

Lastly, P10 illustrated how social media highlighted issues related to the harassment of street vendors in Durban Central, leading political parties to demand better regulation and protection for these vendors. Engagement on social media about long waiting times in clinics at Umlazi prompted the municipality to address staffing shortages and enhance service delivery at these healthcare facilities.

In summary, the findings from the semi-structured interviews demonstrate that social media serves as a powerful tool for operational efficiency and accountability in the eThekwini Metropolitan Municipality. By facilitating faster responses to community grievances and mobilising public engagement, social media significantly enhances the municipality's service delivery capabilities. This underscores the importance of social media in fostering a more responsive and accountable governance framework in the context of e-democracy.

6.15 Chapter summary

The chapter explored the transformative role of social media in eThekwini Municipality's governance, shedding light on its dual capacity to foster democratic engagement and streamline service delivery while grappling with significant challenges like misinformation and public expectations. It highlights how these platforms have become instrumental in driving accountability, transparency, and public participation within the municipality.

Furthermore, it is evident that social media is not merely a channel for information dissemination but a medium for fostering democratic dialogue. Hence, eThekwini Municipality has adopted innovative strategies such as live-streaming meetings and hosting interactive Q&A sessions to enhance accessibility and transparency. By prioritising real-time engagement and creating visually compelling content, officials have cultivated trust and credibility with the public. These approaches underscore the democratising power of social media, making governance more participatory and inclusive.

In addition, to strengthen accountability, the municipality employs effective networking strategies, such as forming operational groups on WhatsApp. These groups enable swift coordination among departments, ensuring public concerns are addressed promptly. However, the digital teams often face pressures that exceed their formal mandates, as residents expect them to resolve offline issues. This reflects a broader challenge of aligning institutional capacity with the growing demands placed on digital governance teams.

Moreover, monitoring public sentiment and service quality through social media has also become a cornerstone of governance. Tools like insight analysis provide valuable insights into public opinion, and enable the municipality to identify systemic issues and adapt its services. Despite the overwhelming volume of interactions, officials remain committed to maintaining real-time engagement, and demonstrate the importance of responsiveness in modern governance.

The chapter also highlights how social media empowers advocacy and policy influence. Campaigns such as #CleanMyCity and #SaveOurBeaches exemplify the potential of these platforms to mobilise community support for civic and environmental causes. Therefore, political parties similarly use social media to engage voters through targeted campaigns. Yet, concerns about political bullying and inequitable representation point to the need for ethical oversight and balanced governance of digital platforms.

Finally, social media accelerates service delivery by facilitating real-time issue reporting. Platforms like Twitter and WhatsApp enable residents to voice their concerns directly, while initiatives like #AtYourService highlight departmental efforts to address these issues. However, the dual nature of social media, as both a tool for efficiency and a source of public pressure requires careful management to optimise its use without overburdening municipal resources.

In summary, eThekwini Municipality's integration of social media reflects a pivotal evolution in governance. These platforms enhance democratic engagement, improve accountability, and expedite service delivery. Notably, they also present challenges, including managing public expectations, combating misinformation, and ensuring equitable representation. The municipality's approach exemplifies the potential of social media to transform governance, provided strategies evolve alongside technological advancements to uphold inclusivity, transparency, and democratic values.

CHAPTER SEVEN

7 TRIANGULATED PRESENTATIONS OF THE FINDINGS

7.1 Introduction

This study employed a sequential explanatory design within a mixed methodology quantitative data collection followed by qualitative study to provide a deeper understanding of the quantitative findings (Creswell, 2014; Creswell and Creswell, 2018).

According to Teddlie and Tashakkori (2018), concurrent triangulation design can be very beneficial in mixed methods research. It is against this backdrop that in this study the researcher used this method to gather both the quantitative and the qualitative data at the same time and then analysed the data separately before combining the results. This method was particularly effective for addressing complex research issues requiring detailed analysis. Therefore, 444 key stakeholders, involving 414 social media users, 20 eThekwini Municipality officials and representatives from 10 political parties, provided rich quantitative and qualitative insights into the impact of social media on e-democracy and governance.

Notably, the integration of these methodologies resulted in a comprehensive understanding of the interaction between social media, e-democracy, governance, and service delivery within the eThekwini Metropolitan Municipality. The combination of quantitative and qualitative methods ensured a robust analysis, cross-validating findings and uncovering patterns and linkages across datasets (Creswell and Creswell, 2018). Thus, this approach provided solid and dependable conclusions which enhance the overall reliability of the findings of the study.

Overall, the sequential explanatory design effectively elucidated the complex dynamics of social media's role in governance and service delivery in eThekwini. By merging quantitative data with qualitative insights, the study offered a detailed and nuanced

perspective on how these digital platforms influence public participation and governmental accountability (Creswell and Plano Clark, 2018; Johnson and Onwuegbuzie, 2004).

7.2. Quantitative and qualitative agreement on consent

The quantitative data in table 7 indicated a high consent rate (93.24%) from the 414 respondents, and 30 respondents in qualitative interviews also agreed (6.76%), bringing the total to 444 respondents. The overall consent rate across both groups was 100%. This strong agreement demonstrates a willingness to participate, affirming the credibility of the data collected through both methodologies.

Table 7: Informed consent

Consent Type	Quantitative Count (414)	Qualitative Count (30)	Total count	Percentage
Agree	414	30	444	100%

7.3 Demographic distribution across methods

7.3.1 Race of social media users

The data provides a rich view of social media engagement and demographic composition in eThekwini, highlighting both the diversity of its population and trends in engagement patterns.

The quantitative data indicates that among social media users with high engagement, 84.46% are identified as Black as illustrated in table 8, below. This majority presence is also supported by the literature demographic data, where Black Africans constitute 74% of the eThekwini population, as shown in Figure 27. This group is followed by the Indian population at 18%, while White and Coloured populations form smaller segments, at 6%

and 2% respectively (EThekwini Metro Profile: 2020). The qualitative insights align with these findings, showing strong engagement across racial groups, but particularly high involvement among Black respondents.

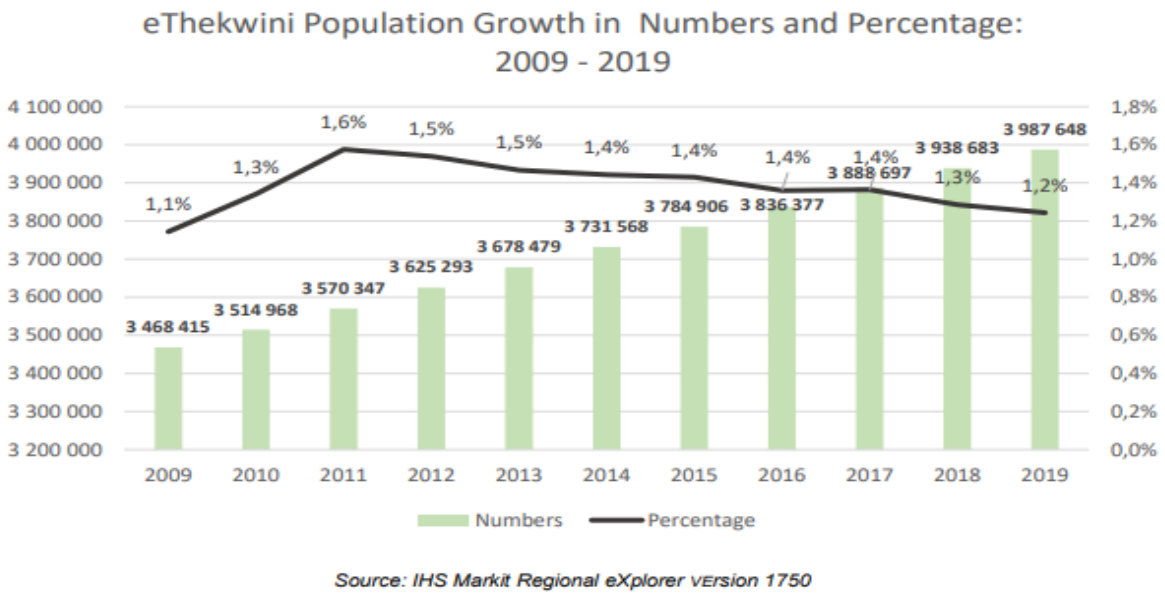
Further demographic trends reflect both population growth and shifts in growth rates over time, rating eThekwini municipality as the third most populated municipality in South Africa. Moreover, in 2019, eThekwini's population reached 3,987,648, up from 3,468,415 in 2009 (Figure 26). However, despite this increase, the annual growth rate has shown a steady decline, dropping from 1.6% in 2011 to 1.2% in 2019. This rate is on par with KwaZulu-Natal's overall growth but slightly lower than the national rate of 1.5% (EThekwini Metro Profile: 2020). Together, these insights offer a comprehensive picture of eThekwini's demographic and social media landscape, with substantial engagement among the Black population reflecting both their demographic majority and active social media presence.

Table 8: Race demographic

Race	**Quantitative Count (%)**	**Qualitative Count (%)**
Black	84.46%	High engagement
White	8.78%	Medium engagement
Indian	3.83%	Low engagement
Coloured	2.93%	Low engagement

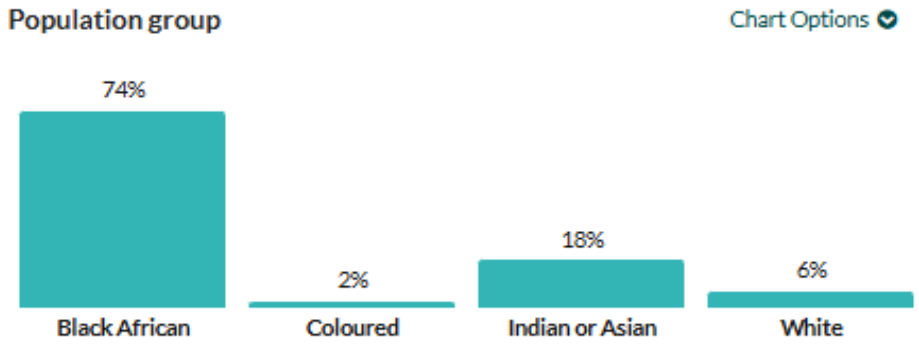
Data from the respondents

Figure 26: EThekwini Population



Source: IHS Markit Regional eXplorer version 1750

Figure 27: EThekwini population group



Source: Community Survey 2016

7.3.2 Age of social media users

Table 9: Age group

Age Group	Percentage
22-35 years	46.38%
36-65 years	41.55%
19-21 years	9.18%
14-18 years	2.90%

The quantitative findings show that, the age group comprising those respondents who are aged 22 to 35 dominates social media usage, accounting for 46.38% of the respondents. This group is followed closely by the 36-65 age group, which comprises 41.55% of the respondents. In contrast, younger respondents aged 19 to 21 account for only 9.18%, and teenagers aged 14-18 represent a mere 2.90%. These statistics suggest that the primary users of social media for civic engagement are young adults and middle-aged individuals, while participation among teenagers and younger adults remains limited.

Likewise, the respondents in the qualitative study illuminated these trends showing a strong influence of social media on political engagement, particularly among younger and urban populations. One respondent noted that it helps young people mobilise, hold politicians accountable, and raise awareness about unemployment and inequality, thus underscoring the important role of the 22 to 35 age group in civic discourse. Another respondent mentioned that platforms like Instagram and TikTok are effective and cost-efficient for reaching this demographic. Hence, Young people increasingly seek engagement with institutions that affect them, and improved digital access to information is seen as a way of strengthening democratic legitimacy in governance (Fung, 2015). It is notable that the Techno-optimism theory further enhances this understanding, through its proposing that digital platforms enhance political engagement by amplifying access to information and enabling interaction across societal strata. Likewise, Groshek and Tandoc (2018) assert that social media sites offer a potent tool for democratic involvement and

public engagement, particularly for those within the 22-35 demographic, as these individuals are digitally fluent and active participants in social discourse

Moreover, the Digital Citizenship Theory reinforces the importance of fostering responsible digital behaviour. As Smith and Jones (2023) explain, this theory encompasses norms, beliefs, and abilities that enable humans to utilise technology responsibly and ethically, particularly in civic spaces. This framework aligns with the observed digital literacy of young adults, who actively use platforms like TikTok and Instagram for awareness and mobilisation.

The integration of qualitative and quantitative data underscores the pivotal role of young adults in driving e-democracy within eThekwini. As Vromen (2017) observes, contemporary political engagement emphasizes individualization and the emergence of new citizen norms, which resonate strongly with the active participation of the 22 to 35 demographic age group. By leveraging the strengths of these theoretical frameworks, strategies can be devised to enhance inclusivity and bridge generational gaps in e-democracy participation.

7.3.3 Gender of social media users

The quantitative data clearly shows that women represent the majority of the respondents (57.97%), followed by men (37.20%), with a smaller group identified as non-binary (4.83%). This suggests that women are actively involved in using social media platforms for e-democracy purposes, a trend that is further supported by qualitative insights. During the focus group discussions, it was consistently observed that women are more proactive in addressing governance issues and actively participate in service delivery discussions through platforms such as Facebook and WhatsApp. This observation resonates with the Participatory Democracy Model, which emphasizes active citizenship and broad-based opinion formation through digital media, as outlined by Muhammad (2023). Platforms like

social media create opportunities for direct public debates and thus enable inclusivity and equitable participation, particularly for underrepresented groups.

Furthermore, the Digital Citizenship Theory sheds light on how norms and skills facilitate responsible and ethical technology use. It underscores the importance of providing all citizens, including women, with the digital literacy necessary to effectively engage in governance processes. As Smith and Jones (2023) argue, digital citizenship is characterized by a collection of norms, beliefs, and abilities that enable humans to utilise technology responsibly and ethically. This theoretical underpinning is critical in understanding the nuanced engagement of women in e-democracy.

In summary, the combined qualitative and quantitative data clearly indicate that women are inclined to use social media as a platform to advocate for better governance and actively engage in e-democracy. This highlights the significant role of gender in promoting civic participation.

7.3.4 Educational level of social media users

The quantitative data reveals a strong connection between education levels and engagement with social media for civic purposes, as demonstrated by most of the respondents (28.74%) who have completed Grade 12, while significant proportions hold diplomas (22.22%) and degrees (18.84%). This indicates that individuals with moderate to high levels of education are the most engaged in social media for civic purposes. Similarly, qualitative data supports this, showing that more educated respondents were likely to view social media as an effective tool for holding the government accountable and promoting civic education for instance, some of the respondents concluded that social media allows for engagement with the community and rally support for important causes and thus reflect its integral role in shaping public discourse and driving change.

Table 10: Education level of social media users

Education Level	Percentage
Grade 12	28.74%
Diploma	22.22%
Degree	18.84%
Honours	14.98%
Masters	6.52%
PhD	0.97%

The correlation between higher levels of education and social media engagement underscores the potential for individuals with advanced educational backgrounds to leverage social media as a tool to promote and support governance and democracy. Chapter 2 of the literature review emphasizes this point by illustrating how social media can be effectively framed to link politics, culture, and civil society.

According to Smith (2023) social media has become a vital component of people's lives in the digital era of the fourth industrial revolution. Indeed, social media platforms have become a vital component of people's lives. Hence, this widespread usage facilitates increased civic participation and government accountability, which is particularly relevant for individuals with higher educational backgrounds.

In summary, the findings from both the quantitative and the qualitative data demonstrate that higher levels of education are associated with greater engagement in social media for civic purposes.

7.4 Section B: Background

7.4 1. Social media usage: Frequency and influence

In eThekwini, social media is emerging as an influential driver of e-democracy, marked by high levels of daily engagement. Therefore, quantitative data in table 11, indicates that 83.33% of the respondents use social media daily, supporting its robust role in everyday civic engagement. These insights are reinforced by Bimber, Flanagin, and Stohl (2012) in their contention that social media has become a critical platform for public discourse and engagement and is a powerful tool in shaping public opinion and engaging citizens in governance processes (Kohler and Parker, 2010:123). Likewise, the qualitative insights further highlight the perceived influence of social media, with the focus group respondents from the eThekwini municipality emphasized the crucial role played by social media in communication with the public and internal coordination among team members. This includes managing content, engaging with the public, monitoring feedback, and ensuring transparency through live streaming. Therefore, this showcases a comprehensive approach to using social media for e-democracy, governance, and service delivery within the eThekwini Metropolitan Municipality. This aligns with observations that social media platforms allow for frequency in critique and response to government actions (Schwaiger et al., 2022) and as a result promote a culture of openness and collaboration between citizens and their governments (Macnamara, 2012).

These findings reflect the Techno-optimism perspective, which suggests that social media can increase political knowledge and interest, promoting greater public involvement (Groshek and Tandoc Jr., 2018:314). As social media enables individuals to stay informed and react swiftly, eThekwini's usage patterns reinforce the potential of digital tools to transform traditional civic engagement, aligning with Lindner and Aichholzer's (2020) view that e-democracy can revolutionize communication between individuals and governments when effectively implemented. Thus, social media, therefore, plays a central role in empowering the public and in facilitating everyday civic engagement.

Table 11: Social media usage level

Usage Level	Count	Percentage
Daily	345	83.33%
Weekly	29	7.00%
Monthly	22	5.31%

7.4.2 Social media platform usage and participation

This analysis of the quantitative information in table 12, on social media platform usage reveals that WhatsApp (92.27%) and Facebook (74.64%) are the primary tools for e-democracy in eThekwini municipality. This aligns with the Theory of Digital Democracy, which emphasizes the role of digital technologies in enhancing civic engagement and transparency. Hence, Metallo et al. (2022), state that social media plays a central role in politics and civil society by enabling citizen engagement in policy formation. The significant use of these platforms highlights their accessibility for mobilising community causes, aligning with Johnson et al.'s (2022) findings on the cooperation and information sharing fostered by social networking sites.

Table 12: Social media platform usage and participation

Platform	Percentage
WhatsApp	92.27%
Facebook	74.64%
TikTok	53.62%
Instagram	44.93%
Twitter	35.99%

Younger demographics are notably engaged on Instagram (44.93%) and TikTok (53.62%) in table 12, reflecting Smith's (2023) observation that social media contributes to the technological revolution, acting as a space for activism and political education. Likewise, on a government perspective, the qualitative findings from the respondents in the eThekwini municipality showcase how they use social media to disseminates news,

including weekly 60-second segments shared on various platforms. This initiative by the municipality also includes producing a digital newspaper and podcast to reach diverse audiences effectively. Likewise, political party respondent illustrates that social media platforms like Twitter and Facebook often serve as the primary sources for breaking political news or crises.

Notably, the findings are further enriched by the insights provided by the respondents from the eThekwini municipality, highlighting the reach, engagement, and follower statistics across various social media platforms between June and September 2024. These figures in table 13 below, underscore the municipality's strategic utilisation of social media for fostering democratic engagement and transparency:

a) **Facebook:** With a reach of 586,000 followers (EThekwini Municipality Facebook Page:2024), EThekwini Durban Metro Police 99,000 followers as well as Durban International Convention Center with 122,000 followers

   Facebook emerges as a dominant platform for the municipality. This aligns with the quantitative finding that 74.64% of the users rely on Facebook for e-democracy, affirming its role as a primary tool for community mobilisation and information dissemination.

b) **Instagram:** Despite having a smaller boast of 33,000 followers (EThekwini Municipality Instagram:2024). This reflects its popularity among younger demographics, consistent with the 44.93% Instagram usage highlighted in Table 13, this emphasizes the influence of platform-specific characteristics on user behaviour.

c) **TikTok**: With 10,000 followers (EThekwini Municipality Tictok:2024), TikTok's growing role, particularly among younger users, mirrors the qualitative findings about its potential for activism and political education. Its emergence aligns with

Smith's (2023) observation of social media as a driver of technological and communicative revolution.

d) **WhatsApp:** With 265 subscribers (EThekwini Municipality WhatApp:2024), its role in direct communication and targeted engagement is evident. The platform's dominance (92.27% usage) reflects its utility as a tool for real-time updates and community interaction, underscored by the municipality's tailored news and service updates.

e) **Twitter:** Garnering 240,700 followers (EThekwini Municipality Twiter:2024), Twitter serves as a critical platform for timely updates and fostering dialogue, consistent with its 35.99% usage rate reported in the quantitative data.

f) **LinkedIn:** With 157,000 followers (EThekwini Municipality Linkedin:2024), LinkedIn is utilised to engage professional audiences, reflecting the municipality's strategic diversification to connect with different stakeholder groups.

g) **YouTube:** While relatively modest at 3.62k followers (EThekwini Municipality, YouTube:2024), YouTube's role in hosting longer-form content such as podcasts and video segments complements the multimedia approach observed in the municipality's communication strategies.

These engagement metrics align with broader trends across Africa, where mobile phone usage is driving growth in social media platforms. WhatsApp users in Africa are projected to increase by 52.8 million (71.27%) by 2028, Twitter by 27.4 million (89.66%), and Instagram by a striking 128.1 million (161.31%) (Statista, 2022). These projections underscore the rising importance of social media as a pivotal tool for communication, activism, and governance within the region. This aligns with the Theory of Digital Democracy, which emphasizes the transformative power of ICTs in promoting transparency and participatory governance.

Table 13: EThekwini Municipality official social media accounts

Social media	Followers/subscribers
Facebook • EThekwini Municipality • EThekwini Durban Metro Police • Durban ICC	 586k 99k 122k
Instagram	33k
TikTok	10k
Twitter	240.7k
LinkedIn	157k
You tube	3.62k
Total	1,251,320

Notably, some respondents indicated that while social media has enabled more people to engage with the municipality, they pointed out that it does not capture the full spectrum of public opinion. They noted that despite the substantial number of individuals present on social media, there is still a larger population that remains disconnected from online platforms. Therefore, this indicates that while social media is a valuable tool, it has limitations in reaching populations without access to these platforms, thus potentially excluding certain voices from the discourse.

For instance, the eThekwini municipality has a total population estimated at 3,987,648 (EThekwini Metro Profile: 2020). Currently, the official social media platforms of eThekwini have attracted 1,251,320 followers and subscribers. This indicates that there is a substantial opportunity to engage with the remaining 2,736,328 individuals who have not yet connected with these platforms. By increasing its outreach and improving engagement strategies, the municipality can enhance its social media presence, which currently represents about 31.38% of the population. This presents a promising avenue

for fostering community involvement and keeping residents informed about local government initiatives.

It is notable, therefore, that through combining the quantitative and the qualitative data, there is an amplified social media's significant role in e-democracy. Hence, WhatsApp and Facebook's dominance on the eThekwini resident in policy engagement reaffirms their importance in modern democratic practices. Moreover, the preference of Instagram and TikTok among younger users indicates a generational shift toward visually oriented content.

The eThekwini municipality's strategic use of social media for updates and interactive content demonstrates a commitment to enhancing civic participation and transparency. This aligns with Hovik et al. (2022), highlighting the benefits of social media in fostering collaboration between citizens and local governments.

In summary, the findings emphasize social media's critical role in e-democracy. The widespread usage of platforms like WhatsApp and Facebook, combined with younger users' engagement on Instagram and TikTok, underscores their transformative potential in democratic practices.

7.4.3 Duration of engagement on social media

The findings highlight the deep integration of social media into public participation and civic engagement, as quantitatively illustrated by the extensive duration of use among respondents highlighted in table 14, that 46.38% engaged for 10-15 years and 35.27% for 5-10 years. This entrenched engagement suggests a significant cultural and functional shift towards digital platforms as tools for governance and public interaction, aligning closely with theoretical perspectives on e-democracy.

The concept of e-democracy, as expounded by Metallo et al. (2022) on the Theory of Digital Democracy, emphasizes the transformative role of ICTs in engaging citizens in

decision-making and policy formulation processes. The prolonged use of social media platforms like WhatsApp, Facebook, and Twitter within the eThekwini context, as noted in the findings, demonstrates their utility as participatory tools for fostering accountability and direct interaction with governance processes. This aligns with Muhammad's (2023) assertion that e-democracy facilitates inclusive engagement, transparency, and accessibility.

Likewise, the qualitative data from a historical lens, the EThekwini Municipality's phased adoption of social media platforms; starting with Facebook and Twitter in 2011 and You tube also in 2011, Instagram in 2014, and most recently TikTok in 2023 as well as WhatsApp in 2024, reflects a deliberate progression towards leveraging these tools for broader governance objectives., provides a foundation to evaluate the evolution of digital platforms within local governance. When triangulated with qualitative insights from interviews, a consistent narrative emerges regarding the impact of these platforms on public discourse and service delivery. The respondents' qualitative accounts highlight how long-term engagement on platforms like Facebook has increased their capacity to participate meaningfully in governance, supporting Hovik et al.'s (2022) notion of digital participation enhancing inclusivity.

In the literature, the role of trust within social media cycles, as explored by Wang and Benbasat (2023), underscores the necessity of reliable and transparent communication. The municipality's adoption of varied platforms complements this, leveraging trust to enhance their relative advantage over traditional modes of communication. Moreover, Van Dijk (2012) underscores that while digital democracy utilises online tools, the interplay between online and offline interactions remains crucial, a balance observed in eThekwini's strategic use of social media to amplify public voice and complement face-to-face participation. In addition, the focus group of EThekwini Municipality illustrated that social media has facilitated instant sharing of updates and improved community engagement. This has proven especially valuable during emergencies, due to the real-

time communication benefits of twitter. Furthermore, internal coordination has significantly improved with the use of WhatsApp, as mentioned by the focus group.

However, the duration of social media engagement, as revealed in the findings, points to generational shifts in how communities perceive and interact with governance structures. Most of the respondents using social media for over a decade suggests a matured digital literacy and adaptability to evolving e-governance tools, corroborating Smith's (2023) argument that social media's increasing ubiquity represents not just a trend but an entrenched civic utility.

In summary, the integration of findings into the theoretical landscape reveals that social media is not merely a peripheral tool but a central pillar in contemporary democratic engagement (Metallo et al., 2022:1544). This evidence a cultural and operational shift towards digital governance, positioning platforms as indispensable mediums for fostering civic participation and enhancing e-democracy.

Table 14: Duration of Social Media Use

Duration	**Percentage**
10-15 years	46.38%
5-10 years	35.27%
3-5 years	7.97%
1-3 years	7.97%
Less than 6 months	2.27%

7.1.1 Types of involvement on social media

The types of engagement on social media, as shown in the quantitative data from table 15, highlight the complex ways digital platforms interact with democratic processes. A notable 47.58% of the respondents identify as social media activists, closely followed by 43.24% of the respondents who participate in social movements. Meanwhile, 35.27% of the respondents engage with social media primarily for political party affiliations. However,

a smaller group of the respondents (28.26%) report that their involvement on social media is nonpartisan.

The qualitative findings complement this data by showing how social media serves as a tool for grassroots organising, civic education, and policy advocacy. For example, the political respondents note its role in mobilising protests against corruption and challenges in service delivery, as well as fostering inter-party dialogues that enrich democratic discussions.

Municipal officials in the eThekwini Metropolitan Municipality also highlight the broad use of social media platforms, not only for communication and information sharing but also for community engagement, sentiment monitoring, internal coordination, and event promotion. As social media thrives on interaction, the involvement of municipal officials on platforms like Facebook becomes essential. According to Kaunda (2021), users value connection and respond quickly to relevant issues, showing how deeply digital transformation has affected lives and work globally.

This ongoing engagement aligns with the principles of the Batho Pele (People First) White Paper, which promotes citizen-centred public services. These principles—such as service standards, access, courtesy, information, transparency, and consultation—help improve service delivery and strengthen the bond between citizens and their government. The focus group respondents also note that platforms like WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and LinkedIn serve multiple functions, from sharing service updates and managing public sentiment to fostering professional connections and promoting events. Social media plays a key role in improving transparency, accountability, and public participation in governance. Some political party respondents describe social media as a catalyst for grassroots movements and a forum for public discourse. This fits within the framework of Techno-Optimism, which argues that technology, including social media, can improve political knowledge, enhance public participation, and promote greater government responsiveness (Zhang, 2019:5). By making information more accessible

and encouraging engagement, these platforms become crucial in supporting democratic processes and allowing citizens to interact directly with decision-makers.

The use of social media in organising protests also reflects the ideals of Decentralised Participatory Democracy (DPD) and Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI), which advocate for local decision-making and citizen involvement through digital tools. Fischli and Muldoon (2024) suggest that such platforms empower individuals, allowing them to shape decisions, influence budgeting processes, and contribute to policymaking, ultimately transforming political structures.

Thus, while the quantitative data shows the extent of engagement, the qualitative findings offer a deeper understanding of why people participate and what motivates them. These dynamics can be better understood through the Digital Citizenship Theory and the Filter Bubble Theory. The Digital Citizenship theory emphasizes the responsible and ethical use of technology to engage in democratic practices (Smith and Jones, 2023), while the Filter Bubble Theory warns about the dangers of algorithmic curation that limits exposure to diverse viewpoints and can hinder meaningful public discourse (Pariser, 2011).

Through examining social media through these lenses, we see that digital platforms are not merely spaces for civic participation but also arenas where democracy can thrive or face challenges, depending on how these tools are used by both citizens and governments. These theoretical perspectives help us understand how social media can facilitate collective action and deepen democratic engagement, while also recognising the risks of polarization and exclusion, thus calling for careful and inclusive management of digital spaces.

Table 15: Involvement on social media

Involvement	**Percentage**
Social Media Activist	47.58%
Social Media Movement	43.24%

Political Party	35.27%
Nonpartisan	28.26%
None of the Above	12.80%

However, this data indicates that a substantial number of social media users engage in activism or political movements, and this demonstrates that social media has emerged as a potent tool for collective political action in eThekwini.

7.5 Part II: Democratic strategies on social media

7.5.1 Using democratic strategies on social media

The findings on democratic strategies in social media can be further illuminated by applying the Digital Citizenship Theory and Decentralised Participatory Democracy (DPD). These frameworks provide nuanced perspectives on how social media facilitates engagement, empowerment, and democratic practices at both individual and community levels.

Therefore, the Digital Citizenship Theory emphasizes the need for individuals to actively participate in digital environments as informed and responsible citizens. This theory aligns with table 16 quantitative finding that a holistic approach of 26.60% is the most preferred strategy for influencing public opinion, reflecting the power of integrating diverse methods such as education, dialogue, and fact-checking. Likewise, the qualitative insights from the eThekwini focus groups further support this framework and highlights the importance of accessibility and inclusivity in social media platforms. Moreover, the respondents underscored the need for digital tools that ensure equitable representation and foster civic participation. This resonates with Digital Citizenship's focus on digital literacy programs, which equip individuals to engage effectively in governance processes despite socioeconomic or cultural barriers.

Similarly, the theory of Decentralised Participatory Democracy offers another lens through which to understand these findings. DPD emphasizes grassroots involvement and the diffusion of power to local communities through participatory governance enabled by digital platforms. The quantitative findings of 14.44% of respondents on "Mobilising grassroots movements" and the 20.36% of the respondents on "Encouraging open dialogue" debate reflect social media's capacity to amplify local voices and facilitate direct engagement between citizens and decision-makers. The focus groups in eThekwini highlighted how social media fosters immediate and localised responses, reinforcing the DPD principle of empowering communities to actively shape governance.

Real-world examples further anchor these theoretical insights. Platforms such as Melbourne's Participate Melbourne and Oslo's open half-hour sessions provide concrete evidence of how digital initiatives promote Decentralised participation. These cases illustrate that e-participation tools not only complement traditional governance structures but also amplify the voices of marginalised groups, enabling more inclusive decision-making processes. As McShane (2021) observes, such digital initiatives create synergies between traditional and modern governance frameworks and thus allow communities to address localized challenges effectively.

Therefore, both the Digital Citizenship Theory and the DPD align closely with the strategies identified in the findings. Hence, Digital Citizenship, on the one hand, focuses on equipping individuals with the skills and knowledge to engage meaningfully online, a priority reflected in the 23.25% preference for "Promoting civic education and awareness". DPD, on the other hand, emphasizes the collective empowerment of communities, mirroring the qualitative insights into social media's role in fostering grassroots activism and open dialogue. These theories underscore that social media is not merely a tool for information dissemination but a transformative medium for fostering inclusive and participatory governance.

As Johnson et al. (2022) assert, social media is a user-driven ecosystem fostering collaboration, communication, and civic engagement and is a cornerstone of Digital Citizenship Theory. Similarly, McShane (2021) emphasizes that Decentralised digital initiatives amplify silent voices and enable governance to become more responsive and inclusive. In addition, together, these frameworks enrich our understanding of how social media strategies, as demonstrated in the findings, contribute to strengthening democratic practices in both the individual and the collective spheres.

Table 16: Strategy for social media usage

Strategy	**Percentage**
Promoting civic education	23.25%
Encouraging open dialogue	20.36%
Mobilising grassroots movements	14.44%
Fact-checking and debunking misinformation	13.68%
All of the Above	26.60%

7.5.2 Types of social media's role

The findings projected in table 17 below, provide a good understanding of the multiple roles played by residents, political parties as well as the social media municipal governance findings, the researcher elucidates how social media platforms facilitate civic engagement, information dissemination, and political participation, while also identifying the challenges posed by misinformation and limited engagement.

I. Information sharing and political updates

The data shows that 28% of the respondents see social media as a critical tool for disseminating political information and updates on service delivery. This aligns with the literature emphasizing the importance of digital platforms in promoting transparency and keeping citizens informed about governmental activities. The focused group from eThekwini municipality supports this view and notes that platforms like Facebook and

Twitter are instrumental in enhancing community engagement, professional networking, and public participation. This transformation reflects the broader shift towards e-democracy, where ICTs are utilised to engage citizens in policy formulation and decision-making processes (Metallo et al., 2022).

The qualitative data highlights that political parties in eThekwini leverage visual storytelling, online forums, and virtual listening tours to enhance public participation in e-democracy. These strategies align with the concept of e-democracy as described by Muhammad (2023), who notes that e-democracy integrates modern technologies to promote civic participation and enhance democratic processes. The use of infographics and videos for governance topics, as well as the active monitoring of comment sections, exemplifies how social media can foster deeper conversations and address specific governance issues.

II. Group creation and citizen organisation

Social media facilitates the creation of groups and community organisation, with 19% of the respondents noting its role in mobilising residents around specific political agendas. This mirrors findings in the literature that highlight the collaborative nature of social media in fostering high-quality information sharing and community involvement (Bruns & Weller, 2021). Political parties in eThekwini also use dedicated groups across municipal branches to promote continuous feedback on governance matters and thus illustrates the platform's role in sustaining political discourse.

III. Polling, petitions, and decision-making

Social media's role in polling, petitions, and surveys, emphasized by 16% of the respondents, underscores its potential to engage citizens in decision-making. This aspect of social media aligns with the theoretical framework of e-participation, where digital tools facilitate interaction among citizens and policymakers and thus enhance transparency and inclusivity in governance (Hovik et al., 2022).

IV. Misinformation and manipulation

A critical concern is the spread of misinformation, as noted by 13% of the respondents. This issue is supported by the literature, which identifies the challenges posed by digital wildfires and the spread of fake news on social media (World Economic Forum, 2013). The focused group from eThekwini emphasizes the need for a collaborative approach to prevent misinformation and maintain public trust and thus highlights the importance of accurate and consistent communication.

V. Citizen education and political awareness

Social media's role in educating citizens about political processes and governance is noted by 12% of the respondents. This is corroborated by the literature, which underscores the potential of digital platforms to enhance political literacy and empower citizens (Van Dijk, 2012). However, the expectations placed on the municipality's social media unit to address all issues indicate a need for improved public education on the roles and limitations of these platforms.

VI. Media alternatives and fact-checking issues

Seven percent of the respondents view social media as an alternative to traditional media, and thus emphasizes its role in providing real-time updates and fact-checking government claims. This aligns with the findings that highlight the use of social media for accountability and the importance of real-time citizen feedback (Schwaiger et al., 2022).

VII. Limited engagement outside elections

The challenge of limited engagement outside election periods, noted by 5% of the respondents, reflects broader concerns about sustaining political participation. The literature suggests that consistent engagement beyond election cycles is crucial for realizing the full potential of e-democracy (Muhammad, 2023).

In summary, the quantitative data from the survey highlights some of the key roles of social media in information sharing, group organisation, and decision-making, while also

pointing out challenges like misinformation and limited engagement. The qualitative data provides deeper insights into these roles, illustrating how social media facilitates political discourse, community organisation, and direct interaction with municipal officials.

The integration of these findings with the literature on e-democracy and digital governance frameworks demonstrates the multifaceted role of social media in enhancing civic engagement and government accountability. As Hovik et al. (2022) note, the collaborative nature of social media platforms fosters a more inclusive and responsive governance model and thus aligns with the theoretical underpinnings of e-democracy. Furthermore, the study suggests that while social media facilitates increased political participation and transparency, its effectiveness is contingent on addressing challenges such as misinformation and ensuring consistent engagement beyond election cycles. As one respondent succinctly stated, "Social media is crucial for informing the public about new policies and discussing economic issues" and this encapsulates the essential role these platforms play in modern governance.

Table 17: Strategy for social media usage

Strategy	**Percentage (%)**
Information sharing and updates	28%
Group creation and citizen organisation	19%
Polling, petitions, and decision-making	16%
Misinformation and manipulation	13%
Citizen education and political awareness	12%
Media alternative and fact-checking issues	7%
Limited engagement outside elections	5%

7.5.3 Social media influence on political campaigns

The quantitative data revealed in table 18 below illustrates that a significant majority, 67.15%, of the survey respondents are of the view that social media is very influential in political campaigns and policymaking. This dominant perception underscores social media's powerful ability to shape political discourse, engage voters in real-time, and serve as an effective platform for targeted communication. Abraham Lincoln's assertion that "Public sentiment is everything. With public sentiment, nothing can fail; without it, nothing media today. This is corroborated by the literature, which highlights how digital democracy, and the use of information and communication technologies (ICTs) engage citizens in policy formulation and decision-making processes (Metallo et al., 2022).

The second-largest group, (20.53%) of the respondents considers social media to be somewhat influential. These respondents acknowledge social media's role in fostering public dialogue, raising awareness, and supporting political causes, albeit with a perceived moderate impact. This aligns with findings in the literature which indicate that digital platforms can facilitate public service monitoring, advocacy, and operational service delivery (Bruns and Weller, 2021).

A smaller proportion of the respondents (8.94%), remains neutral, neither fully endorsing nor dismissing social media's influence on political campaigns and policy-making processes. This group may balance the benefits and drawbacks of social media or believe that traditional media or direct community engagement are equally significant.

Notably, 1.69% of the respondents assert that social media is not influential at all, and 1.45% believe it is not very influential, and this suggests that for a minority, other channels of political communication and influence, such as television and radio, are seen as more pivotal.

Likewise, the qualitative data from the focus groups and the semi-structured interviews further illuminate these quantitative findings. For example, the respondents from the

eThekwini municipality reported that social media has been instrumental in promoting voter registration drives among younger demographics. However, some respondents also cautioned that political campaigns on social media can attract scrutiny and mixed reactions and thus highlights the complexities and potential downsides of digital political engagement.

Moreover, the focus group respondents in eThekwini also noted the competitive nature of political visibility on social media, sometimes leading to ethical concerns over demands for exclusive media coverage. This indicates a need for careful management to avoid polarisation and backlash within the community.

The semi-structured interviews with the political party respondents revealed that social media platforms like Twitter and Facebook provide instant access to political news and thus keep citizens informed about policy changes and government actions in real time. These platforms allow political leaders to bypass traditional media as they present their views unedited and gathering public opinions through polls, thus empowering citizens to influence the political agenda directly.

However, the filter bubble theory by Eli Pariser (2011), acknowledges a phenomenon where algorithms on social media platforms personalise content based on a user's preferences, behaviors, and previous interactions. While this customization increases engagement, it also narrows the scope of information exposure, effectively creating "*bubbles*" where users are primarily exposed to content that reinforces their existing campaigns.

Moreover, the filter bubble theory complements e-democracy and digital democracy frameworks by adding a critical dimension, while digital tools democratise access to information and foster engagement, algorithms simultaneously constrain the diversity of that information. For instance, Van Dijk (2012) asserts that digital democracy involves both online and offline interactions, but filter bubbles may limit the breadth of online

engagement by overemphasizing alignment with user preferences. In addition, Van Dijk (2012) emphasizes that digital democracy complements rather than replaces traditional forms of political communication and thus underscores the importance of integrating both digital and face-to-face interactions to achieve democratic outcomes.

Likewise, the concept of trust in digital media, as explored by Wang and Benbasat (2023), is critical in understanding social media's impact on political engagement. Higher levels of informational trust in digital platforms enhance the perceived advantages of these channels and thus makes them more effective for political communication and engagement.

The integration of the quantitative data with the qualitative insights provides a nuanced understanding of social media's role in political campaigns. The majority of the respondents (67,15%) view it as a critical tool and sees it as very influential. This is supported by the qualitative reports of effective voter engagement and real-time political discourse. This reflects the power of personalised content delivery, while the qualitative accounts reveal the ethical, practical, and emotional complexities faced by the individuals navigating these bubbles.

The 20.53% of the respondents who see it as somewhat influential reflect on the moderate but significant role of social media in fostering public dialogue and awareness, while the qualitative data highlights both the opportunities and the challenges of this medium in the political arena. The frameworks of e-democracy and digital democracy emphasize the potential for enhanced participation, but filter bubbles caution against over-reliance on algorithm-driven systems without safeguards for diversity and inclusion.

In summary, the findings clearly indicate that social media is perceived as a transformative tool in political campaigns. The combined total of 87.68% of the respondents who view it as either very or somewhat influential underscores its significant impact. Despite a small minority of the respondents dismissing its role, the overall data suggests that in today's

digital age, social media tools are pivotal in shaping political campaigns and the policymaking process.

As one respondent eloquently summarised: "*It allows us to engage with the community and rally support for important causes*," and this highlights the dual role of social media in facilitating communication and engagement while necessitating careful management to avoid polarization and backlash within the community. Balancing the transformative potential of social media with the risks of filter bubbles requires strategies to promote diverse viewpoints and foster meaningful dialogue across ideological divides.

Table 18: Social media influence on political campaigns

Influence Level	Percentage
Very Influential	67.15%
Somewhat Influential	20.53%
Neutral	8.94%
Not Influential at All	1.69%

7.6 Part III: Holding the government accountable

7.6.1 Techniques employed on social media to hold the government accountable

The findings on the techniques employed by social media users within eThekwini Metropolitan Municipality to hold the government accountable, supported by both the qualitative and quantitative the insights, reveal the transformative role of digital platforms in promoting transparency, accountability, and participatory governance.

Table 19 highlights the multifaceted engagement strategies of social media users in eThekwini. Among these, 25.6% of the respondents employ multiple techniques simultaneously and thus reflects a diverse and robust engagement approach. These include online petitions, crowdsourcing, digital activism, and hashtag campaigns, mirroring the active participation in governance noted in interviews with municipal officials.

Johnson et al. (2022) describes this as a hallmark of contemporary digital interaction, where various tools converge to enhance communication and public influence. Further triangulation is observed with 20.53% of the users engaging in citizen journalism and fact-checking. This finding complements the eThekwini Municipality's acknowledgment of social media as indispensable for addressing misinformation and ensuring accurate public discourse. Bruns and Weller (2021) emphasize that collaborative digital projects like fact-checking enhance the quality and trustworthiness of the information shared online and thus fosters accountability.

The municipality’s use of social media for crisis management and service delivery enhancement, as seen in the example of the bridge collapse, also resonates with 10.14% of the respondents using direct interactions with officials. This illustrates the real-time responsiveness of social media, which Metallo et al. (2022) identify as a cornerstone of modern governance strategies.

The municipality’s officials view social media as a revolutionary tool for public participation and accountability. They highlighted its role in fostering direct dialogue with the residents, providing a space where concerns can be raised, and ensuring transparency through real-time updates and responses. For instance, it is alluded that, during the bridge collapse, social media was critical in managing public outrage and misinformation, showcasing its value as a crisis communication tool. The interviews with the political party representatives echoed these sentiments and emphasized how platforms like Twitter and Facebook amplify citizen voices through hashtag campaigns such as #FixRoads and #eThekwiniWaterCrisis. The power of visual evidence, images and videos has proven instrumental in exposing governance failures, while online petitions and whistleblowing further underscore the participatory and investigative roles that social media plays in the democratic process. Political parties also leverage these platforms to issue statements, fact-check government claims, and collaborate with journalists to expose corruption, creating a dynamic and interactive accountability framework.

These findings align with E-Democracy literatures, which underscore the use of digital tools to enhance participatory governance. Muhammad (2023) emphasizes that e-democracy integrates digital technologies to promote inclusivity and transparency which is trait vividly reflected in the eThekwini Municipality's social media practices. Similarly, Syed (2017) notes that online platforms like Google, YouTube, and Facebook have implemented measures against fake news. Google has adjusted its search algorithm to exclude conspiracy and hoax sites, while YouTube limits visibility for flagged videos with controversial content and thus prevents them from being suggested, monetized, or commented on. Furthermore, Facebook collaborates with fact-checkers to identify and flag misleading information. These actions may affect the algorithms that shape the information users encounter. However, Wang and Benbasat (2023) observe that higher informational trust enhances the perceived value of the digital channels which is a dynamic evident in eThekwini's social media ecosystem.

In summary the words of Coleman and Gotze (2001): "the collaborative nature of social media can be a powerful tool for citizens to demand information and explanations from their governments" are worth noting. The eThekwini Municipality's use of social media exemplifies this, as it facilitates enhanced public participation, accountability, and service delivery. Notably, political parties and residents utilise these platforms to expose governance failures, mobilise collective action, and ensure transparency through techniques like hashtag activism, whistleblowing, and crowdsourced reporting. These combined efforts underline the transformative potential of social media in creating a responsive and inclusive governance framework.

Table 19: Accountability techniques on social media

Technique	**Percentage (%)**
Engaging in multiple techniques simultaneously	25.6
Citizen journalism and fact-checking	20.53
Information sharing and hashtag campaigns	18.36
Online petitions and online activism	11.11

Direct interactions and crowdsourcing	10.14
Whistleblowing and collaborative investigations	6.28
Not using any techniques	4.11
Using email	3.14
Other unspecified methods	0.72

7.6.2 Effectiveness of social media in governance transparency

The role of social media in enhancing governance transparency is underscored by its effectiveness as both a communicative and participatory tool. This integration of quantitative data, qualitative findings, and theoretical insights highlights its transformative potential while acknowledging its inherent challenges.

The quantitative findings in table 20 reveal that 41.06% of the respondents regard social media as “extremely effective” in enhancing transparency. This aligns with Techno-optimism, which posits that digital platforms amplify political engagement and public involvement by providing accessible and real-time information. Groshek and Tandoc Jr. (2018) argue that such tools bridge gaps between governments and citizens by enabling dynamic interaction and feedback. Platforms like Facebook and WhatsApp democratise information flow and thus empower the citizens to hold the government accountable. Notably, the Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA) highlights this in its observation that transparency facilitated by social media exposes weaknesses in accountability and allows citizens to scrutinize government spending and service delivery, thereby bridging the gap between the government and its citizens.

The qualitative findings from the focus group discussions emphasize the significant role of live streaming and social media in fostering transparency and trust within governance. The respondents highlighted that live-streaming council meetings and other events makes the governance process more open and accessible. This approach not only builds trust but also makes officials more approachable and responsive to public concerns.

Additionally, the use of podcasts, live events, and video streaming were noted as effective methods for community engagement. These tools provide both formal and informal ways for the residents to interact with the municipality and thus enhance overall transparency.

However, the respondents also noted the challenge of balancing transparency with confidentiality. While there is a need to be open, some information cannot be shared publicly, which can be tricky given the public's demand for immediate and detailed updates. Social media was emphasized as a powerful tool for enhancing transparency and accountability. By addressing concerns and providing real-time updates, the municipality can build trust and demonstrate its commitment to meeting public needs. This direct interaction ensures that the municipality remains accountable and strengthens its relationship with the community.

On other hand, political party representatives in eThekwini highlighted how social media platforms like Facebook and Twitter are instrumental in promoting transparency and trust in governance. They assume that these platforms enable political parties to communicate positions on important issues, advocate for transparency, and build strong grassroots networks. This direct interaction holds municipal leadership accountable and encourages public participation. In addition, they illustrate that, real-time responses to community concerns foster a culture of openness, while transparency reports detail how resident feedback influences party policies. Social media campaigns, such as #Elections2024, demonstrate its role in addressing election irregularities, while anonymous whistleblowing strengthens accountability by exposing corruption.

Moreover, the political parties highlight that, platforms like Telegram and WhatsApp facilitate civic involvement by engaging the residents in governance issues though challenges like online hostility can hinder constructive conversations. Political parties also use social media to share policy documents and budgets and make processes more accessible and empowering to the citizens to engage meaningfully in governance. These qualitative insights, combined with the quantitative evidence, align closely with the

theoretical models. To this effect, the Techno-optimism theory frames social media as a transformative tool for democratic engagement, while the Digital Citizenship Theory emphasizes the importance of ethical and informed use of digital platforms to promote governance transparency. Also, of importance to note is the fact that the Information Model of e-democracy highlights the dissemination of government actions and progress reports as essential for accountability. However, the findings also reflect challenges predicted by the Filter Bubble Theory, such as the risk of echo chambers that limit exposure to diverse perspectives. Therefore, to address these risks, social media must promote inclusivity and balanced content to foster open and meaningful discourse.

In summary, the role of social media in governance transparency is aptly summarized by Lindner and Aichholzer (2020), who argue that digital platforms "revolutionize communication and public access to information." This finding aligns with Danaher's (2022) perspective that, the thoughtful implementation of e-democracy, coupled with ongoing political dedication, has the potential of improving traditional representations of democratic processes by incorporating participatory elements. Therefore, by leveraging the power of social media tools such as live streaming, real-time updates, and community-driven campaigns, governance can become more transparent and inclusive and thus foster trust and accountability. These findings collectively illustrate the dual role of social media as a platform for real-time public communication tool and a transformative agent in governance transparency

Table 20: Effectiveness of social media in Governance Transparency

Effectiveness Level	**Percentage**
Extremely Effective	41.06%
Very Effective	21.98%
Somewhat Effective	20.77%
Neutral	11.35%
Very Ineffective	2.9%
Somewhat Ineffective	1.93%

7.6.3 Reasons for effectiveness in promoting transparency and accountability

Social media's role in promoting transparency and accountability in governance within the eThekwini Metropolitan Municipality is multifaceted, as evidenced by the triangulation of the quantitative and the qualitative findings. Data from table 21, which highlights factors such as real-time information dissemination (23.19%), mobilisation and awareness (24.42%), public discourse (17.39%), and exposing corruption (9.9%), aligns with the qualitative insights from the focus group discussions involving municipal officials and political party representatives.

The respondents in the focus groups, on the one hand, highlighted how social media serves as a critical tool for building trust and fostering transparency between the municipality and residents. Through real-time updates and consistent engagement, social media addresses public concerns and ensures that residents are informed throughout the resolution process. This ongoing communication demonstrates responsiveness and thus reinforces trust and accountability. Furthermore, municipal representatives noted that the swift feedback enabled by social media allows citizens to monitor government actions closely, ensuring that officials are held responsible for their commitments. These findings resonate with the Techno-Optimism Theory, which posits that social media enhances governmental responsiveness by creating direct communication channels between the citizens and the authorities (West, 2004; Zhang, 2019).

On the other hand, the political party representatives emphasized the strategic use of social media to advocate for transparency and accountability. By leveraging these platforms, parties engage communities, address governance challenges, and foster a culture of accountability. Thus, social media allows citizens to track unfulfilled promises and hold officials accountable for lapses in service delivery. This approach reflects the Information Model of E-Democracy, which highlights the role of digital technologies in exposing governance gaps and ensuring that decision-makers remain transparent and responsive (Muhammad, 2023).

The respondents from the political parties added that, another significant aspect of social media is its role in exposing corruption, through using platforms that enable whistleblowing and collaboration with investigative journalists and thus allow the residents to share evidence of governance failures. Furthermore, the respondents assume that crowdsourcing information further empowers citizens to track promises made by government officials and thus ensures accountability. While this reflects the empowering potential of social media, the Filter Bubble Theory warns that algorithmic biases may limit exposure to diverse perspectives and thus potentially narrow the scope of civic participation (Pariser, 2011).

Political parties also use social media to disseminate real-time updates on governance issues such as service delivery gaps, and demand accountability for failed policies. They engage influencers with substantial followings to amplify concerns, mobilise larger citizen groups, and generate crowdsourced reports that increase pressure on local administrations. This mobilisation aligns with the principles of Decentralised Participatory Democracy which emphasize grassroots-level involvement to influence governance outcomes (Fischli and Muldoon, 2024). Moreover, social media exerts pressure on traditional media outlets to address government failures through investigative reporting. Highlighting specific cases encourages in-depth journalistic coverage and ensures greater accountability. This reflects the Hybrid E-Democracy Model, where digital platforms complement traditional media in amplifying citizen concerns (Chadwick, 2017).

The integration of the findings highlights both the potential and challenges of social media as a governance tool. Therefore, the Techno-Optimism Theory, on the one hand, underscores the transformative power of social media in enhancing engagement and accountability. On the other hand, the Digital Citizenship Theory emphasizes the ethical and responsible use of digital platforms to foster participatory governance. Meanwhile, Filter Bubble Theory provides a cautionary perspective, reminding us of the risks posed by algorithm-driven echo chambers that may limit exposure to diverse viewpoints.

Together, these frameworks offer a comprehensive lens to understand social media's impact on governance and accountability.

In summary, the findings affirm that social media is a powerful tool for transparency and accountability in eThekwini Metropolitan Municipality. Groshek and Tandoc Jr. (2018:314) observe that social media platforms democratise access to information and empower citizens to organise and hold governments accountable. This is further supported by Pariser (2011:45), who cautions that social media's tailored algorithms create both opportunities and challenges for inclusivity and accountability in public discourse. Moreover, Fischli and Muldoon (2024:2) contend that digital platforms advance collective empowerment and transform political institutions through participatory governance. In addition, through enabling real-time updates, facilitating public discourse, exposing corruption, and pressuring traditional media to investigate governance failures, social media empowers the citizens and the political actors to actively participate in the democratic process. These findings emphasize the critical role of digital platforms in creating a robust framework for accountability which fosters improved governance and service delivery.

Table 21: Transparency reasons

Reasons	**Percentage (%)**
Mobilisation and awareness/Democratisation of information	24.42
Accessibility and reach/Real-time information	23.19
Public discourse and engagement	17.39
Data analysis and research	14.49
Exposure of corruption and wrongdoing	9.9
Other	10.63

7.6.4 Social media users' responses on successful public accountability of officials

The findings from the eThekwini Municipality illustrate the profound impact of social media in advancing public accountability, as evidenced by the nuanced analysis of the quantitative data and the qualitative insights. These findings can be enriched and interpreted through theoretical lenses such as Techno-Optimism, Digital Citizenship Theory, and the Filter Bubble Theory. Table 32 further underscores these dynamics and categorizes the success and challenges of social media in driving accountability.

The quantitative survey reveals that 71.25% of the respondents are of the view that social media effectively holds officials accountable, and this aligns with the Techno-Optimism theory which posits that digital technologies can foster citizen engagement and governmental transparency (Groshek and Tandoc Jr., 2018). The success categories in Table 32, such as public exposure and accountability (28.6%), citizen engagement (17.6%), and investigations following social media exposure (15.1%) are tangible manifestations of this theoretical framework. For instance, initiatives like tagging officials or documenting service delivery failures exemplify how digital platforms enable participatory democracy.

The qualitative findings from the focus groups highlighted the effectiveness of various platforms, such as Facebook for detailed discussions, Twitter for real-time feedback, and WhatsApp for immediate updates. The political respondents reinforced these observations and cited campaigns such as #DurbanFloodsResponse and #NoWaterInEThekwini where social media galvanized collective action and pressured authorities to act. Hence, these align with the Digital Citizenship Theory, which emphasizes ethical and responsible use of the digital spaces for civic participation (Smith and Jones, 2023).

The Filter Bubble Theory, however, highlights limitations inherent in social media's algorithmic structures. Thus, while social media amplifies citizen voices, it may also restrict exposure to diverse perspectives and potentially reinforce echo chambers and biases (Pariser, 2011). This aligns with the 28.75% of the respondents who perceive social media as ineffective in ensuring accountability due to oversaturation and institutional resistance.

Table 22's examples, like the Thabo Bester case and viral incidents prompting Public Protector investigations demonstrate the transformative potential of digital platforms in exposing corruption and mobilising action. However, the challenges of sustaining momentum and ensuring follow-through reflect critiques of techno-optimism, emphasizing the need for structural reform and enhanced digital literacy (Bimber et al., 2012).

The integration of theoretical perspectives underscores a balanced view. Techno-optimism celebrates the successes of e-participation, as seen in eThekwini's ability to leverage platforms for public engagement. Digital Citizenship Theory advocates for broader, responsible participation, as evidenced by the diverse use of social media channels. Yet, the Filter Bubble Theory reminds us of the challenges in ensuring inclusivity and preventing misinformation.

Smith and Jones (2023:7) note that digital citizenship requires not only participation but also critical engagement with the tools and content of technology to truly transform governance and accountability. To maximize the potential of social media in eThekwini, addressing algorithmic biases, fostering cross-platform dialogues, and enhancing institutional responsiveness are paramount.

The findings from the eThekwini municipality reveal a multifaceted role for social media in promoting public accountability. Therefore, table 32 provides a detailed breakdown of this role and thus illustrate successes and limitations in holding officials accountable. Furthermore, these insights, when woven with literature and theoretical frameworks,

create a vivid narrative of social media's transformative and complex influence on governance.

To the residents of eThekwini social media shines most prominently as a tool for public exposure and accountability, with 28.6% of cases highlighting its effectiveness in this regard. Hence, platforms like Twitter and Facebook empower the citizens to bring attention to governance issues, such as an example made by the respondents of the general secretary of the African National Congress Fikile Mbalula's several public apologies on Twitter as well as public outcries leading to investigations by the Public Protector. Moreover, these examples embody the essence of Techno-optimism Theory, which views technology as a transformative force for transparency and engagement.

Another critical success lies in facilitating citizen engagement and direct complaints, accounting for 17.6% of the data. In addition, the respondents assume that social media serves as a direct line for residents to voice concerns about service delivery issues, such as unmaintained infrastructure or delays in addressing urgent matters. This practice reflects the principles of Digital Citizenship Theory, which emphasizes ethical and responsible online behaviour. By providing visual evidence and tagging relevant authorities, citizens are not just spectators but active participants in governance, ensuring accountability and responsiveness.

The exposure of political corruption and official misconduct, comprising 13.4% of the cases, highlights social media's capacity to challenge powerful structures. Another respondent referred to the scandals like president of South Africa Cyril Ramaphosa's Phala Phala saga of money stolen under his mattress as well as other corruption-related investigations, demonstrate the role of platforms in fostering public discourse on governance. Therefore, this aligns with Techno-optimism Theory, which sees digital tools as a means to amplify marginalised voices, while also reflecting Filter Bubble Theory's caution about the risks of echo chambers and misinformation.

Furthermore, in 9.2% of the cases, viral incidents and media coverage drive public discourse. According to the survey respondents, social media movements like #BlackLivesMatter and the Life Esidimeni tragedy underscore how social media unifies communities around shared causes. These campaigns resonate with the Digital Citizenship Theory which highlights the ethical use of platforms for civic engagement. However, they also reveal challenges, such as the prioritization of sensational content over less dramatic but equally pressing issues.

However, the qualitative findings from the focus groups highlighted the effectiveness of various platforms, such as Facebook for detailed discussions, Twitter for real-time feedback, and WhatsApp for immediate updates. Political participants reinforced these observations, citing campaigns like #DurbanFloodsResponse and #NoWaterInEThekwini, where social media galvanized collective action and pressured authorities to act. These align with the Digital Citizenship Theory, which emphasizes ethical, responsible use of digital spaces for civic participation (Smith and Jones, 2023).

Despite these successes, 28.75% of the respondents are of the view that social media's impact is limited. This perception stems from institutional resistance, oversaturation of content, and the difficulty of translating public outcry into systemic change. The Filter Bubble Theory sheds light on these limitations, warning that algorithm-driven silos can stifle diverse viewpoints and hinder meaningful dialogue. For instance, while viral campaigns raise awareness, they may fail to achieve long-term outcomes due to the fragmented nature of digital discourse.

The data reveals a complex interplay between empowerment and limitation. The quantitative findings underscore that most of the respondents (71.25%) recognize social media's effectiveness, while the qualitative insights provide depth and illustrate specific mechanisms of accountability, such as direct complaints (17.6%) and investigations (15.1%). Theories like Techno-optimism, Filter Bubble Theory, and Digital Citizenship

Theory contextualize these dynamics, explaining both the opportunities and challenges inherent in social media engagement.

These findings align with Lindner and Aichholzer's (2020) assertion that although e-democracy enhances citizen-government communication it requires systemic adjustments to overcome institutional inertia. Schatzberg's (2018) emphasis on designing culturally inclusive and transparent systems further reinforces the importance of aligning digital tools with democratic values. As Smith and Jones (2023) aptly observe, digital citizenship is characterized by norms, attitudes, and abilities that enable humans to use technology responsibly and ethically. This perspective underscores the necessity for municipalities like eThekwini to address the challenges of misinformation, algorithmic biases, and weak institutional responsiveness. By fostering digital literacy, improving feedback mechanisms, and strategically leveraging diverse platforms, eThekwini can fully harness social media's potential as a cornerstone of accountability and participatory governance.

In summary, social media is not just a tool but a dynamic platform that reflects the evolving relationship between citizens and government. Its successes in exposing corruption, driving investigations, and engaging communities highlight its transformative power, while its limitations point to areas for improvement. Through strategic reforms and a commitment to inclusivity, the eThekwini municipality can build on these strengths to solidify social media's role in advancing democratic ideals.

Table 22: Successful public accountability

Category	**Percentage (%)**	**Examples**
Yes - Examples of success in holding public officials accountable	**71.25**	
Social media as a tool for public exposure and accountability	28.6	- Fikile Mbalula's public apology (R7)

		- Tagging officials for response (R5) - Public outcries leading to Public Protector investigations (R10)
Citizen engagement and direct complaints	17.6	- Complaints about service delivery, such as infrastructure (R22) - Tagging departments for service delivery issues (R45, R84, R85)
Investigations and actions following social media exposure	15.1	- Public Protector investigations after social media exposure (R10) - Arrests following corruption videos (R24) - Thabo Bester case (R112)
Political cases, corruption, and official misconduct exposed	13.4	- Cyril Ramaphosa's Phala Phala saga (R25) - Corruption scandals leading to investigations (R66) - Thabo Bester's exposure (R88)
Viral incidents and media coverage leading to public discourse	9.2	- Life Esidimeni tragedy (R16) - Miss SA controversy (R42, R97) - #BlackLivesMatter movement (R62)

No - Instances where social media was not effective in ensuring accountability	28.75	

7.7 Part IV: Social media and public services

7.7.1 Monitoring public services for accountability

The integration of the quantitative and the qualitative data from the findings on the significance of social media in monitoring public services reveals a compelling narrative about its role in enhancing accountability within the eThekwini Metropolitan Municipality.

The quantitative analysis presented in table 23 below indicates that a significant majority of 54.35% of the respondents view social media as playing a highly significant role in monitoring public services, while an additional 28.02% of the respondents attribute the medium significance to it. This cumulative figure of 82.37% reflects a strong consensus among respondents regarding the positive impact of social media in fostering accountability in public service. Only a small proportion of 9.66% consider social media to have small significance, with an even smaller segment (2.17%) viewing it as holding no significance at all. This data underscores the perception that social media is not merely a supplementary tool but a crucial element in the landscape of public service oversight.

On the qualitative side, insights from the political party respondents further illuminate how social media is operationalised as a tool for accountability and engagement. They highlight various successful campaigns and community mobilisations that exemplify the effective use of social media to amplify public grievances and foster community engagement. For instance, through real-time reporting and visual evidence, political parties can engage directly with municipal departments and facilitate whistleblowing to ensure that the residents' concerns are voiced. This aligns with the literature suggesting

that social media enhances democratic participation by allowing the citizens and the political entities to demand accountability from their governments (Muhammad, 2023:65).

Moreover, political parties emphasized the importance of actively monitoring comment sections and responding to constituents' queries on their social media accounts, which fosters deeper conversations about governance issues. They also advocate for direct messaging channels to enhance engagement on sensitive matters. However, they acknowledge challenges such as misinformation and resource limitations for smaller parties, which can hinder their capacity for effective monitoring and engagement.

Likewise, from the perspective of eThekwini municipality's focus group discussions, the respondents reiterated their responsibilities in managing public feedback and sentiment monitoring via social media platforms like Facebook and Twitter. One respondent noted thus: "*I monitor public sentiment and feedback on Facebook and Twitter to gather insights for improving our communication strategies*." This statement reflects the municipality's commitment to adapting its communication strategies based on public reactions and thus demonstrate a proactive approach to governance.

Overall, these findings illustrate a triangulation between the quantitative data showing broad support for social media's role in accountability and the qualitative insights revealing how political parties and municipal officials utilise these platforms to engage with the citizens effectively.

In summary, as articulated by various scholars, social media serves as a vital instrument for enhancing transparency and civic engagement in democratic processes. Therefore, it has become an essential instrument for democratic participation, enabling citizens and political parties to demand accountability and improve governance in the municipality. However, challenges such as misinformation must be navigated carefully to maintain the integrity of these strategies (Wang and Benbasat, 2023).

Table 23: Accountability and monitoring public services

Level	Percentage (%)
Large	54.35%
Medium	28.02%
Small	9.66%
Neutral	5.80%
None	2.17%

7.7.2 The significance of social media monitoring service

Social media has emerged as a transformative tool in monitoring public services within the eThekwini Metropolitan Municipality and plays a significant role in fostering accountability and strengthening democratic engagement. According to Guzmán, 2019: 189) this is consistent with the growing trend of digital engagement in public service monitoring. However, the convergence of the quantitative data from the survey respondents and the qualitative insights from the eThekwini, focus group discussions and political parties' perspectives paints a complex picture of its impact and potential.

The quantitative survey data in table 24 below, reveals that the most widely recognized benefit of social media, identified by 35.99% of the respondents, is its accessibility and ease of information sharing. This underscores social media's capacity to democratise communication, providing a platform for citizens to voice concerns, share information, and bypass traditional barriers. This aligns with the literature, which emphasizes that social media platforms have become a vital component of people's lives due to their ability to connect users, foster relationships, and disseminate diverse content efficiently (Smith, 2023:1). Furthermore, the integration of social media into e-democracy reflects a broader societal shift toward digital participation, where citizens leverage these platforms for policy formulation and decision-making processes (Metallo et al., 2022).

Moreover, the focus group discussions in eThekwini municipality emphasized the real-time feedback mechanism of social media, in line with sentiments shared by 11.35% of the survey respondents. There respondents highlighted that platforms like Twitter and Facebook serve as critical tools for assessing public sentiment and addressing municipal issues swiftly. This resonates with the findings that digital tools facilitate direct connections between citizens and policymakers and thus enable enhanced responsiveness in governance (Hovik et al., 2022).

The ability of social media to amplify public dissatisfaction, noted by 10.14% of the respondents, also finds support in academic discussions. Scholars argue that the collaborative nature of platforms fosters high-quality information sharing and mobilises collective action and ultimately enhance accountability (Bruns and Weller, 2021). Moreover, transparency is a cornerstone of these platforms, as they expose weaknesses in accountability, making it difficult for governments to obscure inefficiencies (IDEA, 2013).

However, smaller but significant groups focus on other dimensions of social media's role. For example, 7.49% of the respondents cite its potential for crowd monitoring and vigilance, as well as another 7.49% of the respondent’s reflecting grassroots activism and public oversight. Similarly, 7.49% of the respondents identify citizen journalism and investigative collaboration as key contributions.

Moreover, transparency and open data, highlighted by 5.31% of the respondents and enhanced governmental responsiveness, noted by 4.83% of the respondents, further underline social media's potential to drive greater accountability and openness. The quantitative data illustrates the varied roles of social media, while qualitative insights provide a deeper understanding of its practical applications and inherent challenges. Therefore, the focus group discussions revealed that social media is particularly adept at engaging the public and collecting feedback, enabling municipalities to assess public sentiment through comments and reactions. Furthermore, real-time feedback proves

essential for addressing issues such as water supply disruptions and fostering trust by showcasing responsiveness.

However, the respondents acknowledged the difficulties in managing large volumes of feedback, as significant concerns can occasionally be lost amid the overwhelming noise. They emphasized the necessity of analytical tools to identify trends and prioritize responses. Therefore, this situation reflects broader challenges in e-participation, where digital tools can enhance citizen interaction, reduce costs, and promote equality and inclusion, but also require effective management for optimal results (Hovik et al., 2022:3).

Furthermore, the focus groups underscored the dual nature of social media feedback, characterized as both constructive and critical. While negative feedback can serve as a catalyst for improvements, an overabundance of complaints may overwhelm municipal teams and highlight the necessity for balance. The respondents also pointed out that monitoring social media requires significant resources, advocating for dedicated teams to ensure timely and effective engagement. This perspective aligns with the assertion that social media platforms are intended for creating, sharing, collaborating, engaging, participating, and providing feedback (Ihechu et al., 2022).

In a similar vein, the semi-structured interviews conducted with the political parties' respondents within the municipality provided a broader perspective on the role of social media. They recognized that social media amplifies grievances, fosters community mobilisation, and enhances transparency. For instance, during the COVID-19 pandemic, social media played a crucial role in tracking health services and managing relief distribution. However, the parties also identified several barriers that impede its effectiveness. For instance, limited internet access in rural and low-income areas restricts participation, while the use of multiple platforms such as Twitter, WhatsApp, and Facebook results in fragmented communication. Additionally, institutional resistance to use social media as a formal accountability tool diminishes its potential. Moreover, the widespread prevalence of misinformation further undermines public trust and complicates

the verification of issues. While social media can facilitate public influence through open-source information, it also runs the risk of perpetuating misinformation that can erode trust (OECD Report, 2022). Moreover, the reluctance of institutions to embrace social media ultimately undermines its capability to enhance governance.

The triangulation of the quantitative and the qualitative data highlights the strengths and limitations of social media. Its accessibility and immediacy serve as significant enablers of citizen engagement and accountability. When contrasting these perspectives, a distinct separation emerges. Thus, the quantitative data underscores the functional advantages of social media, such as its accessibility and real-time communication, while the qualitative narratives provide insight into the lived experiences and systemic challenges that users encounter. For instance, the 35.99% of the respondents who emphasize accessibility align with the focus group findings regarding engagement and real-time feedback. However, these benefits are tainted by concerns from political parties about digital divides and fragmented communication. This duality aligns with the broader discourse surrounding e-democracy, which seeks to transform democratic processes through the integration of digital tools (Muhammad, 2023).

Overall, social media is a powerful tool for monitoring public services, enabling citizen participation, fostering transparency, and enhancing responsiveness. However, its potential is constrained by challenges such as accessibility gaps, information overload, and institutional reluctance. To fully harness its benefits, the eThekwini Metropolitan Municipality must develop inclusive digital frameworks, allocate resources for structured monitoring, and embrace social media as a collaborative tool for governance. Only through addressing these barriers can social media fulfil its promise as a cornerstone of e-democracy and effective public service oversight. As noted, leveraging social media tools is crucial for effective public service management (Akter et al., 2024). With strategic frameworks and dedicated resources, social media can further strengthen governance and public accountability.

Table 24: Reason for Social Media Significance in Monitoring

Reasons	Percentage (%)
Accessibility and Information Sharing	35.99
Real-time Feedback and Reporting	11.35
Amplifying Public Dissatisfaction	10.14
Other	9.90
Citizen Journalism and Investigation	7.49
Collaboration and Collective Action	7.49
Crowd Monitoring and Vigilance	7.49
Transparency and Open Data	5.31
Government Responsiveness	4.83

7.7.2.1 Other significant reasons for social media monitoring skills

The findings reveal a complex interplay between social media monitoring, governance, and public participation. Through integrating the quantitative data with the qualitative insights, the researcher developed a more nuanced understanding of how social media influences democratic processes in the eThekwini Metropolitan Municipality, either enhancing or undermining them. These findings are particularly significant when examined through established theoretical frameworks such as Techno-optimism, Filter Bubble Theory, and Digital Citizenship Theory, which provide various perspectives on the role of technology in governance and service delivery.

I. Lack of government responsiveness

A key quantitative finding highlights that 40% of the respondent's expressed dissatisfaction with the government's responsiveness to social media-driven concerns and this illustrates a mismatch between the potential of social media as a platform for raising issues and the actual government follow-up. Therefore, techno-optimism theory provides a positive outlook on the role of technology, suggesting that social media can improve governance by increasing political knowledge and citizen engagement (Groshek

and Tandoc Jr., 2018). However, the lack of government responsiveness challenges this view, revealing the disconnect between the promise of social media and its limitations in ensuring tangible outcomes in governance.

In the focus group discussions, the respondents emphasized that while social media platforms (like WhatsApp) are used for internal coordination and monitoring issues, the municipality still struggles with timely communication and long resolution times. This qualitative insight underscores the frustration voiced by the citizens and thus align with the critics of Techno-optimism who argue that the ideal of e-governance may overlook the bureaucratic realities that hinder the potential of social media for enhancing democratic responsiveness (Bimber, Flanagin, and Stohl, 2012).

II. Rapid Information Dissemination

Thirty-five percent 35% of the respondents indicated that the rapid dissemination of information via social media aligns with the techno-optimism perspectives on how technology can enhance communication between the citizens and governments. The swift nature of social media allows for the immediate sharing of public concerns and thus create a platform that fosters greater transparency and accountability. This corresponds with the positive role that digital media can play in enhancing public access to governance-related information and facilitating citizen engagement (Zhang, 2019).

Furthermore, the qualitative data from the focus group discussions suggest that social media increasingly functions as a problem-solving tool. The respondents noted that these platforms utilise feedback and monitoring tools to address recurring issues in service delivery. This direct interaction between the citizens and the municipal departments highlights the potential of social media, when effectively leveraged, to promote a collaborative approach to governance. However, the respondents also acknowledged that communication challenges, especially regarding complex issues, persist as significant barriers.

III. Public Participation and Engagement

Twenty-five percent 25% of the respondents who highlighted the significance of social media for public participation echo the perspectives found in the Digital Citizenship Theory. This theory underscores the role of digital technologies in fostering responsible and ethical engagement, thereby empowering citizens to play an active role in democratic processes (Smith and Jones, 2023). Although social media platforms offer citizens a venue to express their opinions and interact with government policies, the effectiveness of such engagement can vary considerably.

As noted in the semi-structured interviews, the political parties' respondents in eThekwini regard social media as vital for establishing immediate feedback mechanisms that enhance governmental accountability. This viewpoint also aligns with the participatory aspects of Digital Citizenship, where technology is instrumental in facilitating active participation and informed civic involvement.

Conversely, the Filter Bubble Theory suggests that the personalised nature of social media can limit exposure to diverse perspectives, potentially resulting in echo chambers. This dynamic may undermine the broader democratic potential of social media by reinforcing existing biases and hindering the creation of a shared, inclusive public discourse (Pariser, 2011). Nevertheless, some of the respondents have indicated that the selective nature of information on social media might diminish the overall effectiveness of public engagement in governance.

IV. Misinformation and Manipulation

Finally, fifteen percent (15%) of the respondents raised concerns regarding misinformation and manipulation on social media, which is a significant issue within both the Filter Bubble Theory and the Digital Citizenship Theory. Notably, the unchecked proliferation of misinformation can jeopardize the democratic potential of social media by distorting public opinion and hindering accountability. Pariser (2011) explores how tailored algorithms employed by social media platforms create filter bubbles that restrict users'

access to diverse information, thereby reinforcing existing biases. This has critical implications for governance and service delivery, as misinformation can obstruct informed citizen participation and erode public trust in government initiatives.

In the focus group discussions, the respondents reflected on the growing significance of social media in service delivery processes, noting the collaboration of social media agents with various municipal departments to resolve issues. However, the persistent presence of misinformation and manipulation suggests that unregulated digital platforms can adversely affect the transparency and integrity of governance systems. This highlights the importance of promoting digital literacy and encouraging the responsible use of technology (Smith and Jones, 2023).

In summary, the integration of the quantitative data with the qualitative insights from the focus group discussions illuminates the complex role of social media in public service monitoring and governance. While social media platforms possess the potential to enable rapid information dissemination, increase public participation, and enhance engagement, their effectiveness is significantly compromised by government inaction, misinformation, and manipulation. This interplay aligns with the theoretical frameworks that highlight both the opportunities and limitations of technology within democratic processes.

Therefore, the concept of techno-optimism posits that social media can positively impact governance, however, this view is challenged by the lack of governmental responsiveness and the reality of political manipulation, which obstruct its full potential. Additionally, the Filter Bubble Theory and Digital Citizenship Theory emphasize the necessity for critical engagement with technology and ensure that social media serves as an inclusive, accountable, and effective platform for democratic participation and good governance.

As Pariser (2011) observes, the information one receives from Google’s algorithm is tailored to one’s specific preferences, while others may see something completely different. This statement highlights the challenges presented by the Filter Bubble theory

in achieving a genuinely democratic and transparent online environment. Additionally, it underscores the urgent need for initiatives that promote diverse engagement and enhance digital literacy to mitigate the risks associated with algorithmic manipulation.

7.7.3 Social media capacity to improve performance and delivery of public services

This data explored the transformative role of social media in improving public service delivery. Therefore, the findings presented in table 25 indicate that a significant majority of respondents acknowledge the positive impact of social media on the performance and delivery of public services. Specifically, 68.80% of the survey respondents rated social media's influence as either neutral (35.27%) or positive (33.57%). In contrast, 16.67% of the respondents are of the view that it may have a "worst best" impact. Furthermore, a small percentage view its influence negatively, with 4.83% of the respondents identifying a detrimental impact and 9.66% of the respondents offering other responses. In addition, 31.40% of the respondents in figure 19 shows effective reporting of service issues, with real-time feedback improving response times and efficiency.

This quantitative insight underscores a predominantly favourable perception of social media and highlight its potential as a valuable tool for enhancing public service delivery.

I. Social media as a catalyst for improved performance

The findings from the focus group respondents in the eThekwini municipality enrich the survey results by providing a qualitative perspective to the statistical data. Municipal employees pointed out that social media enhances communication efficiency, fosters community engagement, and strengthens trust. For example, the respondents in the eThekwini focus group remarked that interacting with the public through platforms like Facebook has "*helped build trust and transparency*." One respondent emphasized the significance of the "instant sharing of updates" during emergencies. These qualitative insights illustrate how social media bolsters the operational capabilities of municipal staff, and further corroborate the positive assessments reflected in the quantitative data.

Furthermore, the application of the Techno-Optimism theory reinforces these findings by positing that technology can improve governance, promote responsiveness, and elevate citizen engagement. Thus, Zhang (2019) highlights that platforms like Facebook amplify previously marginalised voices, providing essential tools for democratic participation. Likewise, Lindner and Aichholzer (2020) contend that e-democracy has transformed communication, enhancing both transparency and trust.

II. Addressing service delivery gaps and public sentiment

The qualitative insights demonstrate that social media is vital in identifying and addressing shortcomings in service delivery. A member of the eThekwini municipality focus group noted that "*Monitoring public sentiment provides invaluable insights into community concerns, facilitating more effective issue resolution.*" This observation aligns with the 68.80% consensus from the survey responses which indicate that social media has a positive impact on public services. In addition, the proactive actions described by the respondents who implement Batho Pele principles to uplift community members through social platforms further reinforce the statistical evidence of social media's role in promoting accountability and responsiveness.

These findings also align with the Digital Citizenship Theory, which underscores the significance of ethical and active use of the digital platforms to enhance civic participation. Thus, Smith and Jones (2023) emphasize that responsible digital engagement can empower municipalities to effectively address residents' needs while fostering inclusivity.

III. Operational efficiency through public engagement

The explanations provided by the political party respondents illustrate how effectively social media can expedite municipal actions. One respondent noted the prompt response to water outages by the eThekwini municipality social media, while another highlighted the swift resolution of illegal dumping issues, driven by public pressure on social media platforms. These examples correspond with the survey's quantitative findings, which indicate that a majority of the respondents recognize the beneficial role of social media in

enhancing service delivery. Additionally, the Collaborative Model of e-democracy supports this perspective. By encouraging participatory governance, it enables municipalities like eThekwini to crowdsource ideas and solutions from the residents, as discussed by Brabham (2013) in the context of collective problem-solving via digital platforms.

IV. Challenges and moderation needs

While social media offers several advantages, the respondents acknowledged its dual role as both a tool for engagement and a source of operational pressure. Hence, the focus group respondents from the eThekwini municipality noted the overwhelming influx of complaints on their social media platforms, stated thus: "*The volume of complaints and requests can sometimes slow down our response time.*" Furthermore, the qualitative observations highlighted the disjointed nature of discussions caused by off-topic comments and this indicates an urgent need for improved moderation. This nuance, though absent from the quantitative data, is crucial for grasping the complexities involved.

Thus, the Filter Bubble theory emphasizes the potential risks associated with algorithmic curation and illustrates how it can create echo chambers that impede diverse public discourse (Pariser, 2011). Therefore, addressing these challenges necessitates the implementation of robust moderation strategies and the promotion of digital literacy initiatives to ensure balanced and inclusive engagement

V. Broader impacts and collaboration

The role of social media extends well beyond public engagement as the respondents from the focus groups and political parties highlighted how LinkedIn facilitates professional networking and fosters valuable partnerships. This strategic application aligns with the observations made by visual content creators, who noted that their work now reaches a broader audience and thereby enhances public participation and elevates the municipality's reputation.

Therefore, the Information Model of e-democracy provides a framework for understanding this phenomenon, emphasizing the crucial role of social media in promoting transparency and enabling citizens to hold officials accountable (Muhammad, 2023). Moreover, the respondents added that platforms like LinkedIn act as essential tools for increasing municipal visibility and encourages collaboration.

The triangulation of the quantitative data with the qualitative findings reveals a robust narrative: social media is an invaluable tool for improving public service delivery. While the 68.80% positive perception from the surveyed respondents provides a statistical foundation, the focus group and political party insights add depth and demonstrate how social media transforms municipal operations. The respondents' words capture this shift powerfully:

a) An eThekwini municipality focus group member, on their sense of duty remarked thus: "*I feel a deep responsibility to address societal issues and service gaps by going above and beyond to assist*."

b) A political party respondent, on accelerated service delivery stated: "*Indeed, service delivery is taking place in the eThekwini municipality. Our daily responsibility involves informing residents about the happenings in eThekwini and providing them with feedback."*

c) Another political party respondent, in summarizing the overall impact remarked that: "*Overall, while there are challenges, social media has undoubtedly played a significant role in accelerating service delivery*."

These reflections validate the quantitative trends and emphasize the transformative role of social media in fostering transparency, responsiveness, and enhanced governance. The combined application of theories like Techno-optimism, Digital Citizenship, and e-

democracy models ensures a balanced approach in maximizing social media's potential while addressing its challenges.

Additionally, frameworks such as Decentralised Participatory Democracy (DPD) and Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI) underscore the need for more grassroots-driven and technology-supported governance. According to Fischli and Muldoon (2024), DPD initiatives allow citizens to actively shape policies through digital platforms, ensuring inclusivity and collective decision-making. Similarly, DPI highlights the role of robust, secure digital infrastructures in fostering effective civic participation.

By integrating these theoretical frameworks, municipalities like eThekwini can explore more sophisticated approaches to leveraging social media. For instance, investing in digital literacy programs to bridge the digital divide and deploying platforms such as D-CENT to enhance public engagement could create more resilient and participatory governance structures.

Ultimately, the role of social media in transforming service delivery lies not just in its immediate utility but also in its ability to redefine long-term governance paradigms. The intersection of the qualitative narratives, the quantitative trends and the theoretical insights offers a comprehensive understanding of how these platforms reshape public service delivery and this ensures that eThekwini remains adaptive, inclusive, and responsive in the digital age.

Table 25: Social media capacity to improve perform and delivery

Category	**Percentage**
Good Neutral	35.27%
Good	33.57%
Best Worse	16.67%
Other	9.66%
Bad	4.83%

7.7.3.1 Other social media capacity to improve performance and delivery of public services

The comprehensive analysis explores the vital role social media plays in improving the performance and effectiveness of public service delivery. It builds upon existing quantitative and qualitative studies to demonstrate how various social media platforms can foster better communication, engagement, and responsiveness between public institutions and the communities they serve. In the following sections, the researcher delves into thematic findings that highlight the specific ways social media enhances public services and thus contribute to increased accessibility, transparency, and overall citizen satisfaction.

I. Public Accountability

Public accountability has emerged as a significant theme and is recognized by 21% of the surveyed respondents. The respondents emphasized the role of social media in exposing resource misuse and ensures that public officials are held accountable. They pointed out that platforms like Facebook and WhatsApp promote transparency by offering residents a public forum to voice their concerns. One respondent remarked thus: “We need to demonstrate our responsiveness to their needs, which fosters trust.”

Insights from the focus groups reveal how eThekwini municipal officials utilise social media to improve two-way communication, address issues, and provide real-time updates. Similarly, political parties harness these platforms for grassroots mobilisation and engagement in advocating for responsive governance. A focus group respondent noted that “Social media has become an essential tool for enhancing public participation and accountability in our governance processes.”

This aligns with the notion of techno-optimism, which posits that technology can democratise governance by enhancing accountability and citizen oversight. Lindner and Aichholzer (2020) argue that social media tools facilitate real-time monitoring and

transparency and thereby reduces the likelihood of corruption. Additionally, the Hybrid E-Democracy Model highlights how digital platforms enable both direct citizen engagement and representational governance (Chadwick, 2017).

Overall, the quantitative data underscores social media's perceived value in enhancing accountability and the qualitative insights showcase its practical application in governance processes, and the theoretical frameworks highlight its potential to institutionalize transparency. Together, these perspectives demonstrate how social media bridges the gap between public officials and citizens and ensures oversight in service delivery.

II. Information accessibility

Eighteen percent (18%) of the survey respondents recognized the significant role of social media in enhancing information accessibility and particularly noted how platforms like Facebook and Twitter facilitate the straightforward dissemination of government updates and policies. They emphasized that the ease of obtaining information through these channels is crucial for raising awareness and ensuring timely communication.

Likewise, the respondents from the focus groups in the eThekwini municipality highlighted how online town hall meetings and cost-effective communication tools help eliminate traditional barriers to public engagement. However, they also underscored the dual-edged nature of social media. As one respondent cautioned, “Falsehoods can easily proliferate across social media platforms, causing substantial harm before accurate information is able to circulate.”

Therefore, the Digital Citizenship Theory provides a valuable framework for understanding these dynamics, promoting the responsible and ethical use of digital platforms to foster informed public discourse (Mossberger et al., 2008). Furthermore, the Filter Bubble Theory, as articulated by Pariser (2011), outlines risks such as algorithmic

curation, which can confine users within echo chambers and restrict their exposure to diverse perspectives.

In summary, the quantitative findings demonstrate the utility of social media in improving accessibility, while the qualitative data reveals challenges such as misinformation. As some of the above-mentioned theory frameworks also offer guidance for ethical communication practices. Collectively, these insights indicate that while social media enhances information flow, proactive measures like content verification are essential to safeguard its credibility.

III. Public participation

Public participation has emerged as the most significant theme, with 27% of the survey respondents highlighting the value of social media platforms in enabling citizens to express their concerns, influence governance, and actively engage in public decision-making. Specifically, tools like Citizen Lab have been recognized for their effectiveness in involving residents and gathering valuable feedback.

The eThekwini Municipal focus group further emphasized the transformative role of platforms such as WhatsApp and LinkedIn in enhancing community engagement and professional networking. One respondent noted thus: “I manage event promotions by creating and sharing posts about upcoming events, workshops, and public meetings on Facebook and Instagram.”

This aligns with the principles of Participatory E-Democracy Models, which advocate for active citizen engagement through digital tools (Fung, 2015). Moreover, Decentralised Participatory Democracy (DPD) stresses the importance of grassroots involvement, illustrating how platforms like D-CENT promote collaborative governance (Fischli and Muldoon, 2024).

In summary, the quantitative data highlights the broad recognition of social media as a means to enhance participation, while the qualitative findings showcase its effective application in municipal activities. Thus, the abovementioned theoretical frameworks further reinforce its integration into participatory governance models, underscoring the essential role that social media plays in fostering inclusive and collaborative public service delivery.

IV. Speed of communication

Twelve percent of (12%) of the respondents recognized speed as a significant strength of social media, especially during emergencies. They pointed out that platforms like Twitter allow governments to deliver immediate updates, thereby enhancing responsiveness and crisis management.

Furthermore, respondents were unanimous in acknowledging the importance of rapid information dissemination. One respondent remarked thus: “In the event of an emergency, we can swiftly inform residents through platforms such as Twitter and Facebook.” However, the quick spread of information also creates challenges, as inaccuracies and misinformation can result in public confusion.

Hence, the Representation Model of E-Democracy highlights the necessity of timely communication to maintain transparency and trust between citizens and officials (Muhammad, 2023). In contrast, the Filter Bubble Theory cautions that disseminating information rapidly without verification can amplify inaccuracies, making robust content monitoring essential.

The quantitative data underscores the significance of speed, while qualitative feedback demonstrates its vital role in emergency management. Moreover, the previously mentioned theoretical frameworks emphasize the importance of maintaining accuracy in real-time communication. Collectively, these insights highlight the necessity of achieving a careful balance between speed and thoroughness in the effective use of social media.

V. Misinformation

Lastly, misinformation was cited by 21% of the respondents as a critical challenge in leveraging social media for public service delivery. The survey respondents noted that while platforms facilitate swift communication, they also enable the rapid spread of false information, and this can compromise efforts to combat misinformation in governance.

The focus groups respondents described strategies to combat misinformation, including using infographics and videos to clarify inaccuracies and educate the public. As one respondent explained: “Social media enables us to promptly clarify any misinformation, which is essential for upholding public trust.” However, the high volume of messages and comments complicates efforts to maintain accurate communication.

Therefore, the Filter Bubble Theory highlights the structural vulnerabilities of social media, where algorithmic reinforcement can perpetuate misinformation. However, the Digital Citizenship Theory emphasizes fostering digital literacy and ethical online behaviour as essential solutions to misinformation risks.

In summary, the quantitative data reflects the prevalence of misinformation as a concern, the qualitative insights detail strategies to address it, and the theoretical frameworks provide actionable guidance for mitigating its effects. This triangulation reveals that while misinformation poses significant challenges, it can be managed through proactive communication and citizen education.

Furthermore, practical models like Decentralised Participatory Democracy (DPD) and Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI) offer actionable solutions to address these challenges. In addition, through integrating these insights, the eThekwini Metropolitan Municipality can leverage social media to create a governance system that is transparent, participatory, and responsive, setting a benchmark for effective public service delivery in the digital era.

7.7.4 Successful instances of social media usage in issues of public services

The findings from the eThekwini Metropolitan Municipality offer insightful perspectives on how social media and digital tools, particularly the Sizakala e-services mobile application, are revolutionizing governance and public service delivery. By integrating quantitative data with qualitative insights and utilising relevant theoretical frameworks, researcher presents a detailed overview of the transformative potential and challenges posed by digital platforms in advancing e-democracy.

I. Service delivery complaints and e-governance

The quantitative data revealed that Service Delivery Complaints emerged as the dominant theme, comprising 28.7% of the survey responses. It is suggested by the respondents that social media platforms like Facebook and WhatsApp have facilitated faster reporting and resolution of issues such as water shortages, power outages, and road maintenance.

Likewise, focus group discussions further underscored these findings, with participants sharing examples from Umlazi where persistent social media posts led to timely interventions, including the dispatch of water tankers.

However, the Techno-optimism theory and the E-Governance Model highlight the efficiency gains associated with digital tools. According to Groshek and Tandoc Jr. (2018), technology has the potential to bridge the gap between the citizens and the government by enhancing responsiveness. Nevertheless, critics of techno-optimism caution against overestimating the inclusivity of these solutions, particularly for underserved demographics (Bimber, Flanagin, and Stohl, 2012).

Moreover, the integration of e-governance frameworks emphasizes the scalability of these tools. Hence, the transition from traditional service delivery to digitized reporting systems marks a significant evolution in public administration. In addition, the incorporation of real-time feedback loops within municipal operations demonstrates the

potential for improved interactions between the citizens and the government and this suggests a pathway for building greater trust over time.

II. Government responsiveness

Government responsiveness has emerged as a significant theme, representing 23% of the survey responses. Therefore, the respondents indicated that platforms are effectively utilised for project updates and service notifications. However, focus group discussions revealed shortcomings in addressing individual grievances, which were identified as key barriers to building trust.

These findings resonate with the theory of Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI), which emphasizes the necessity for robust and inclusive platforms in governance (Fischli and Muldoon, 2024). Therefore, the Sizakala app serves as an example of how DPI can enhance service delivery, however, the municipality must tackle technological disparities to ensure equitable access for all users.

Furthermore, the qualitative insights highlight a duality in responsiveness. For instance, while updates on large-scale projects signify progress, the unmet needs reflected in individual complaints reveal gaps in implementation. This duality raises important questions about the sustainability of these platforms in effectively managing the rising expectations of the public.

III. Community mobilisation

The quantitative data showed community mobilisation accounted for 12.3% of the survey responses. According to respondents, WhatsApp groups in areas like Umlazi and Chatsworth served as hubs for collaboration between residents and municipal officials, reducing protest likelihood and enhancing accountability. Likewise, focus groups corroborated these findings, highlighting collective actions such as waste collection initiatives.

Conversely, the theory of Decentralised Participatory Democracy (DPD) provides a valuable framework for understanding the significance of grassroots engagement in governance. Therefore, tools such as the Sizakala app have the potential to enhance this participatory approach by enabling direct citizen involvement in municipal decision-making, Furthermore, the DPD theory by Fischli and Muldoon, (2024) underscores the importance of community-driven initiatives in shaping municipal priorities. These localized efforts demonstrate the necessity of empowering smaller administrative units within e-governance structures, ensuring that collective actions can effectively scale to address broader municipal objectives (Fischli and Muldoon, 2024). Nevertheless, challenges related to the digital divide remain, emphasizing the need for inclusive technological strategies.

IV. Social Media in Emergency Response

During disasters such as the Tongaat floods in 2024, social media platforms like TikTok and Twitter facilitated real-time crisis management, and this is noted by 8.2% of the survey respondents. Likewise, the focus group respondents praised these platforms for mobilising relief efforts and prioritizing emergency responses.

Moreover, the role of social media in emergencies aligns with Techno-optimism and Digital Public Infrastructure theories. These frameworks highlight how digital tools can enhance government responsiveness. However, the Filter Bubble Theory warns of potential inequities in information dissemination, as algorithm-driven platforms may not reach all affected demographics (Pariser, 2011).

Additionally, the qualitative feedback pointed to the adaptability of digital tools in prioritizing aid distribution during crises. However, reliance on external platforms, such as TikTok, also raises concerns about data ownership and privacy, underscoring the need for localized solutions within the municipality's digital framework.

VI. Accountability and Transparency

Accountability and transparency emerged as prominent themes in the findings, accounting for 9.8% and 18% of the responses, respectively. According to the respondents, social media platforms played a vital role in uncovering corruption and mismanagement, which led to corrective actions such as clean-up campaigns in Cato Manor. Furthermore, these platforms served as crucial channels for disseminating critical health information during the COVID-19 pandemic, thereby enhancing public trust.

However, the Information Model of e-democracy underscores the significance of digital tools in fostering transparency and an informed citizenry (Muhammad, 2023). Likewise, Digital Citizenship theory emphasizes the importance of ethical and responsible digital engagement in building trust (Smith and Jones, 2023). Nonetheless, persistent challenges like misinformation and echo chambers, as outlined by the Filter Bubble Theory, remain significant hurdles.

Moreover, the findings from the focus groups indicate that transparency campaigns, such as #AtYourService, not only bolster municipal accountability but also promote inter-departmental benchmarking. As a result, the public nature of these campaigns cultivates a competitive spirit among government entities, driving performance improvements throughout the municipality.

VII. The Sizakala E-Services Mobile Application

The Sizakala e-services app emerged as a transformative tool for enhancing customer service and fault reporting. Relaunched in June 2023, the app integrated services such as water and electricity fault reporting, tourism guidance, and customer account management. The focused group respondents highlighted that, the app was designed to “improve customer service and fault reporting processes.”

Furthermore, promotional campaigns, including social media advertisements and branding on public transport, boosted downloads to over 100,000. However, challenges related to technological requirements and digital literacy were noted by one of the

participants, emphasizing the need for ongoing technical support and iterative development.

However, the app reflects principles of Techno-optimism by enhancing efficiency and responsiveness while aligning with Digital Public Infrastructure by creating centralized service access. Importantly, it complements traditional service channels, ensuring inclusivity for residents without digital access.

Additionally, the app's success points to the scalability of mobile solutions in addressing urban governance challenges. According to the respondents, the planned second-phase enhancements, including expanded functionalities, underscore a long-term commitment to technological evolution within the municipality.

VIII. Challenges and limitations

The municipality's digital initiatives face three key challenges. First, the digital divide limits inclusivity, as disparities in access and literacy hinder participation among marginalised groups. Second, misinformation and algorithm-driven biases distort public perceptions, requiring transparency, fact-checking, and collaboration with platforms to ensure accurate information. Third, sustained engagement is challenged by overwhelming feedback volumes and limited resources, necessitating advanced moderation tools and better resource allocation. Addressing these issues is essential for fostering equitable, effective, and responsive digital governance.

Moreover, the municipality must prioritize investments in both hardware and software infrastructure to meet the demands of an increasingly digital citizenry. Initiatives like the Sizakala app demonstrate promise but require ongoing evaluation to adapt to citizens' changing needs.

The integration of the quantitative and the qualitative findings demonstrates that social media and digital tools like the Sizakala app have significantly enhanced governance and

service delivery in eThekwini. Theoretical frameworks such as Techno-optimism, Decentralised Participatory Democracy, Digital Public Infrastructure, and Digital Citizenship provide a comprehensive lens for understanding these dynamics. While challenges related to inclusivity, misinformation, and sustained engagement persist, continued investment in digital infrastructure and literacy can further bridge gaps and foster a more responsive, transparent, and participatory governance model.

This multifaceted approach not only addresses immediate governance challenges but also positions eThekwini as a leader in integrating digital innovation into public administration. By maintaining a commitment to inclusivity and adaptability, the municipality can ensure that its digital transformation efforts translate into tangible benefits for all residents.

7.8 Part V: Social Media as an Advocacy Tool

7.8.1 Efficiency of social media as digital civil society advocacy tool

The quantitative data from table 26 reveals that 72.46% of the respondents perceive social media as either very efficient or somewhat efficient in promoting advocacy causes and influencing policy decisions. This perception is supported by qualitative findings from the eThekwini Municipality focus group, which highlight the practical application of social media in mobilising community action and addressing pressing issues such as environmental safety and service delivery failures.

For instance, campaigns like hashtag Clean My City and Save Our Beaches utilised social media to raise awareness and prompt municipal action, demonstrating the platform's ability to foster collective action. However, the focus group assumes that challenges such as sustaining interest in campaigns like water conservation underscore the variability in social media's effectiveness, influenced by factors such as audience engagement, messaging, and context.

The theoretical lens of Techno-optimism aligns with these findings, suggesting that social media enhances political knowledge, public involvement, and democratic engagement (Groshek and Tandoc Jr., 2018). This theory posits that platforms like Facebook and Twitter amplify marginalised voices, facilitate direct interaction with policymakers, and improve information access, as evidenced by the eThekwini campaigns. For example, according to political party's interviews, social media enabled real-time responsiveness and targeted advocacy campaigns, particularly through hashtag movements and public accountability measures. Furthermore, younger audiences were engaged through platforms like Instagram and TikTok, reflecting the evolving dynamics of digital advocacy.

However, the Filter Bubble Theory highlights potential drawbacks, such as the creation of echo chambers that limit exposure to diverse viewpoints and reinforce existing biases Pariser (2011). This aligns with the critical perspectives of some respondents who expressed scepticism about social media's efficiency. While social media campaigns like #FeesMustFall and #BlackLivesMatter have demonstrated the power of digital platforms in driving social change, the risks of polarization and misinformation remain significant challenges. For instance, political parties assume that the spread of disinformation during political campaigns or crises can undermine the credibility of advocacy efforts and democratic processes.

However, the Digital Citizenship Theory further emphasizes the importance of responsible and ethical use of social media for civic engagement (Smith and Jones, 2023). This theory underscores the need for digital literacy to ensure that social media is used effectively to foster inclusivity and transparency. In the context of eThekwini, the theory complements findings that social media can engage diverse demographics, including youth, and foster community involvement. For example, the municipality's use of platforms like Facebook and Twitter to share updates on service delivery and engage residents highlights the potential of social media to enhance government accountability and responsiveness (respondents).

Likewise, the qualitative data from eThekwini also reveals the role of social media in facilitating direct communication between political parties and residents. Representatives noted that social media bypasses traditional media filters, enabling real-time interaction and feedback. This aligns with the Collaborative Model of E-Democracy, which emphasizes the role of digital platforms in fostering participatory governance and collective problem-solving Muhammad (2023). For instance, platforms like Decide Madrid and Participate Melbourne have demonstrated the potential of digital tools to enhance citizen engagement and influence policy decisions (Hovik et al, 2022).

Despite these advantages, the findings also highlight the challenges of sustaining meaningful engagement and addressing the digital divide. The Decentralised Participatory Democracy (DPD) framework suggests that digital platforms can empower citizens by enabling direct participation in decision-making processes (Fischli and Muldoon, 2024). However, the success of such initiatives depends on addressing barriers to access and ensuring that all citizens, regardless of socio-economic status, can participate in e-democracy.

While the quantitative data highlights a majority (72.46%) consensus on social media's efficiency, the qualitative insights from eThekwini illustrate its practical application in mobilising community action and influencing policy. Theoretical perspectives such as Techno-optimism and Digital Citizenship Theory provide a comprehensive understanding of how social media can enhance democratic engagement, while also addressing potential challenges like echo chambers and misinformation.

To maximize the potential of social media as an advocacy tool, it is essential to continually assess and refine strategies, ensuring they are inclusive, transparent, and effective. As highlighted by the focus group respondents, social media enables “engagement with the community and rallying support for important causes” and reflects its integral role in shaping public discourse and driving change. However, addressing the limitations of

digital platforms, such as the risks of polarization and the digital divide, remains critical to fostering a more inclusive and participatory digital public sphere.

However, the presence of neutral and critical responses suggests variability in its effectiveness, influenced by factors such as audience, messaging, and context. To maximise advocacy outcomes, it is essential to continually assess and refine social media strategies, ensuring they are inclusive and effective.

Table 26: Social media as a digital civil society advocacy

Category	Percentage
Very efficient	48.31%
Somewhat efficient	24.15%
Neutral	12.56%
Neither efficient nor inefficient	4.35%
Not very efficient	4.11%
Not efficient at all	3.62%
Somewhat inefficient	1.93%
Very inefficient	0.72%
Other	0.24%

7.8.1.1 Reasons for social media as digital civil society advocacy tool

The findings, as illustrated in table 27, further show various reasons why social media is perceived as an effective tool for civil society advocacy. Each reason is backed by both quantitative data and qualitative insights, reinforcing the diverse ways in which social media contributes to democratic engagement and governance. Below is a detailed discussion of each reason and its implications.

I. Reach and accessibility

The largest proportion of 29.23% of the survey respondents identify the reach and accessibility of social media as the key reason for its effectiveness in advocacy. This aligns with the findings that social media's widespread reach enables messages to quickly circulate across vast audiences, making it a powerful tool for awareness-raising and mobilising public support. As Gil-Garcia (2012) notes, social media platforms break traditional barriers to information access, offering a means for citizens to connect with governance structures that were previously inaccessible. The qualitative data from the Democratic Alliance (DA) and Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) campaigns illustrates how social media's reach is leveraged for transparency (budget allocation) and crisis mobilisation (water shortages), directly linking to the importance of widespread communication in advocacy efforts.

II. Amplification of voices

24.40% of the survey respondents highlight the amplification of voices as a critical feature of social media. This finding is consistent with echo chamber in the Filter Bubble Theory by (Pariser, 2011), which suggests that social media platforms amplify the voices of marginalised or otherwise unheard communities. For example, the EFF's use of social media during the #WaterCrisis campaign in eThekwini demonstrated how marginalised communities could mobilise public sentiment around an urgent issue, leading to a governmental response. However, Smith and Jones (2023) emphasize that social media provides a level playing field, allowing underrepresented groups to amplify their demands, which is evident in the success of campaigns led by political parties such as the EFF and DA. This amplification of voices, particularly in the face of governance issues, is essential for pushing for systemic changes in service delivery.

Notably, the Techno-optimism theory suggests that social media can enhance political knowledge and public involvement, leading to increased democratic engagement (Groshek and Tandoc Jr., 2018). This aligns with the qualitative findings showing that social media has been used effectively by various political parties to mobilise community action and influence policy decisions in eThekwini. Hence, social media platforms offer a

potent tool for democratic involvement and public engagement by improving information access and magnifying the voices of marginalised groups (Lindner and Aichholzer, 2020).

III. Community building and networking

14.98% of the respondents recognized the importance of community building and networking through social media. Therefore, social media platforms allow individuals to create digital communities, fostering collaboration around shared causes. The qualitative findings, such as the Inkatha Freedom Party's (IFP) clean-up campaigns, reveal how platforms like Facebook and WhatsApp serve as spaces for solidarity and collective action. This supports Digital Citizenship Theory, which advocates for the ethical use of technology to strengthen communities and promote collective governance (Smith and Jones, 2023). Hence, the role of social media in cultivating networks of civic engagement, as seen in local initiatives like the Clean My City campaign, speaks to how social media empowers local communities to act and demand change.

IV. Rapid information sharing

The 14.73% of the respondents who pointed to rapid information sharing underscore the importance of speed and agility in advocacy campaigns. Therefore, social media's ability to rapidly disseminate information allows for real-time engagement and responses to governance issues, which is essential in crisis situations. For instance, the ANC's social media campaigns during the floods in eThekwini demonstrate how fast communication enabled quicker municipal responses and public action. This correlates with the information model highlights the role of social media in eThekwini as a vital tool for transparency and citizen accountability (Bertot, Jaeger, and Grimes, 2010). Hence, the ability to provide immediate feedback, particularly in real-time events, enables citizens and governments to act swiftly, a crucial element in maintaining public trust and achieving advocacy goals.

V. Direct engagement with decision-makers

9.90% of the respondents identified direct engagement with decision-makers as an important function of social media. Hence, social media provides a platform for citizens to directly communicate with government officials, holding them accountable and pressuring them to address public issues. For example, political parties like the DA and EFF have used platforms like Twitter and Facebook to engage with municipal officials, prompting greater transparency and action. This aspect of social media's advocacy role is aligned with the E-Democracy Model of Governance by Muhammad (2023), which promotes direct involvement of citizens in political decision-making and governance processes. The ability of citizens to tag officials or comment directly on posts allows for a form of instant accountability as mentioned by the qualitative respondents which is often more immediate than the traditional methods of civic engagement.

VI. Limitations and challenges

Despite the overwhelming positive perception of social media's effectiveness, 6.52% of the respondents acknowledged the limitations and challenges of using social media for advocacy. Issues such as misinformation, digital divides, and the potential for online harassment are some of the barriers to social media's full potential as an advocacy tool. These limitations were reflected in the focus group discussions, where participants pointed to the challenges of ensuring credibility and managing public sentiment amidst misinformation. As Woolley and Howard (2016) argue, social media platforms can contribute to the spread of misleading information, undermining their effectiveness for civic engagement and advocacy. Furthermore, as Van Dijk (2012) highlights, the digital divide remains a significant challenge, where unequal access to digital platforms can leave some communities disenfranchised, limiting the overall impact of social media in advocacy efforts.

Moreover, the Filter Bubble theory proposed by Pariser (2011) posits that social media algorithms create echo chambers, limiting exposure to diverse viewpoints and reinforcing existing biases. This theory highlights potential drawbacks, such as the risk of polarization and misinformation, which are noted in the qualitative findings regarding the limitations

and challenges of social media. These challenges suggest the need for effective management of social media strategies to maintain credibility and avoid the pitfalls of filter bubbles.

VII. Other perspectives

A small proportion of the respondents (0.24%) mentioned other reasons outside the predefined categories. This negligible percentage suggests that while social media's role in advocacy is widely acknowledged, there may be niche perspectives or additional factors not captured in the primary categories. The limited mention of “other” reasons could indicate that social media’s effectiveness as an advocacy tool is relatively well-understood across the respondents, with little divergence in views beyond the common themes discussed.

The table discussion highlights the multifaceted role that social media plays in civil society advocacy. Therefore, reach and accessibility, amplification of voices, and community building and networking were identified as the most prominent reasons for social media’s perceived effectiveness in driving change. These findings are further supported by the qualitative examples from the political parties and the focus group respondents showing how social media enables direct communication with decision-makers and facilitates rapid information sharing and creates spaces for community collaboration. While social media is seen as a powerful tool for advocacy, challenges such as misinformation and the digital divide must be addressed to maximize its potential. As Smith and Jones (2023) note that, digital citizenship empowers individuals to engage in political and civic actions through digital platforms, reinforcing the integral role social media plays in shaping public discourse, promoting democratic engagement, and enhancing governance.

In addition, eThekwini, social media enhances citizen feedback on municipal policies through various models. For example, the Representation Model increases political participation (Muhammad, 2023), the Deliberation Model fosters public discourse (Muhammad, 2023; Warren, 2017), the Collaborative Model supports community

initiatives (Muhammad, 2023), and the Information Model improves transparency and accountability (Muhammad, 2023).

However, challenges such as misinformation and the digital divide suggest that its effectiveness is not universal. To maximize advocacy outcomes, it is essential to continually assess and refine social media strategies, ensuring they are inclusive and effective. this comprehensive analysis and integration of practical theories and models demonstrate how social media can be leveraged to enhance civil society advocacy and governance within the eThekwini Metropolitan Municipality.

Table 27: Reason for social media as digital civil society advocacy tool

Reasons	Percentage (%)
Reach and Accessibility	29.23
Amplification of Voices	24.40
Community Building and Networking	14.98
Rapid Information Sharing	14.73
Direct Engagement with Decision-Makers	9.90
Limitations and Challenges	6.52
Other	0.24

7.8.2 Participation on social media campaigns towards socio-political issues

The survey data presented in Figure 23 highlights the diverse perspectives of the respondents regarding the power of social media to effect significant socio-political change within the eThekwini Metropolitan Municipality. The findings underscore the multifaceted role of social media as a tool for democratization, connectivity, and engagement while also revealing concerns about its potential drawbacks.

I. Democratising information

The dominant finding that 30.92% of the survey respondents view social media as instrumental in democratizing information reflects its transformative potential in governance. Techno-optimism theory aligns with this perspective, asserting that digital platforms enhance transparency and public accountability by enabling widespread information dissemination and empowering citizens to scrutinize government actions (Groshek and Tandoc Jr., 2018). Furthermore, e-democracy frameworks emphasize the role of social media in bridging gaps between the citizens and policymakers, facilitating participation, and democratizing political communication (Metallo et al., 2022)

The qualitative insights from the focus groups in eThekwini affirm this finding, as the respondents highlighted the capacity of social media to keep citizens informed about critical events in real time. For instance, its role in service delivery updates demonstrates practical applications of digital tools to ensure public awareness. The Digital citizenship theory also supports this, emphasizing ethical and responsible engagement on platforms to maximize transparency while safeguarding against misuse (Hintz, Dencik and Wahl-Jorgensen, 2017).

II. Global connectivity and solidarity

Approximately 19.57% of the survey respondents emphasized social media's capacity for global connectivity, highlighting its role in forming transnational coalitions and amplifying local issues on international platforms. This finding aligns with the digital citizenship theory, which underscores the importance of ethical global participation to address socio-political challenges responsibly (Smith and Jones, 2023)

Likewise, qualitative data from eThekwini's focus groups underscore the strategic use of LinkedIn to expand professional networks and foster collaborations. The respondents noted that global connectivity facilitated partnerships that benefited municipal initiatives, and this reflects the practical application of digital platforms for governance. The Techno-optimism theory also supports this view and suggests that social media amplifies

marginalised voices and fosters solidarity across boundaries (Bimber and Flanagin, 2019)
.

III. Direct interaction with decision-makers

The role of social media in enabling direct communication with policymakers was highlighted by 12.08% of the survey respondents. This aligns with the techno-optimist perspective, which posits that digital tools can enhance participatory governance by bridging communication gaps between the citizens and the government (Lindner and Aichholzer, 2020)

Likewise, the qualitative findings from the interviews with the political respondents in eThekwini corroborate this finding and this emphasizes social media's utility in creating channels for immediate feedback and accountability. However, the Filter Bubble theory cautions that algorithmic personalization may restrict this engagement to ideologically similar groups, reducing the diversity of voices and potentially polarizing discourse (Pariser, 2011).

IV. Real-time reporting

Social media's capacity for real-time reporting was acknowledged by 11.84% of the survey respondents, reflecting its critical role in crisis management and situational awareness. Focus group discussions highlighted how platforms facilitated rapid response in areas like waste management and road repairs, prioritizing resource allocation effectively.

From a theoretical standpoint, techno-optimism frames this as evidence of the power of digital platforms to improve governance through real-time responsiveness (Groshek and Tandoc Jr., 2018). Practical applications, such as live-streamed municipal meetings in eThekwini, align with digital citizenship theory, which advocates for transparency and accountability in governance.

V. Mobilisation

The ability of social media to foster collective action was recognized by 10.39% of the respondents, reflecting its transformative potential in grassroots activism and socio-political movements. Movements such as #FeesMustFall and #BlackLivesMatter exemplify how digital platforms enable mobilisation by amplifying marginalised voices and rallying public support.

Techno-optimism views this as a democratizing force, while the Filter Bubble theory warns that targeted mobilisation can result in echo chambers that reinforce existing biases (Pariser, 2011). The qualitative findings from eThekwini's focus groups emphasize the role of social media in engaging communities around local governance issues, further illustrating its dual impact.

VIII. Concerns about misinformation

Concerns about misinformation were raised by 8.94% of the survey respondents, highlighting risks associated with unregulated content and propaganda. This aligns with the critiques of techno-optimism, which argue that digital platforms, while democratizing, also pose risks of misinformation and reduced trust in governance (Woolley and Howard, 2016)

Likewise, the Focus groups and political interviews in eThekwini echoed these concerns, emphasizing the need for stricter content regulation to mitigate risks. Filter bubble theory further critiques how algorithms amplify disinformation, creating polarized environments that undermine democratic discourse (Pariser, 2011).

IX. Other perspectives

The smallest category, encompassing 6.28% of the respondents, included diverse qualitative insights such as fostering accountability, enhancing global collaboration, and mitigating reputational risks. These perspectives illustrate the complex and multifaceted role of social media in governance.

The quantitative 30.92% dominance of democratizing information and global connectivity of 19.57% reflects public optimism about the positive impacts of social media. However, concerns about the 8.94% misinformation and the limitations of direct engagement of 12.08% highlight the tension between empowerment and risk.

However, the qualitative data provide depth, emphasizing the operational benefits of social media in real-time governance and collaborative networks. Theoretical perspectives such as techno-optimism highlight the transformative potential of these platforms, while filter bubble theory critiques their risks.

Therefore, the overall findings illustrate that social media plays a dual role in governance, as a transformative tool for democratization and as a medium fraught with challenges such as misinformation and polarization. The integration of the quantitative and the qualitative data reveals a nuanced perspective, where social media is seen as both a democratizing force and a potential risk to public discourse.

As Lindner and Aichholzer (2020) assert, the fields of e-democracy and e-participation have successfully revolutionized communication between individuals and governments. However, Pariser (2011) warns, that tailored content restricts users' access to a wide range of information, distorting public opinion and jeopardising democratic processes. These contrasted perspectives underscore the need for balanced governance strategies that utilise the benefits of social media while addressing its limitations.

7.9 Part VI: Social Media and Political Campaigns

7.9.1 Effectiveness of social media in political campaigns, corporate and news dissemination

The findings of this study underscore the multifaceted impact of social media. Both the quantitative and the qualitative results demonstrate that social media is instrumental in

shaping public opinion and facilitating communication across various sectors. Notably, the table 28 quantitative data reveals that 53% of the survey respondents consider social media to be very effective, highlighting its considerable influence in political campaigns, corporate communication, and the dissemination of news. This finding aligns with the study by Metallo et al. (2022) who noted that, digital platforms have become essential tools in disseminating information, thereby reshaping democratic engagement, public service monitoring, and corporate communication. Additionally, a report by the Pew Research Center (2022) suggests that social media has enhanced individuals' access to global and local news, further emphasizing its role in expanding knowledge and fostering a more connected public sphere.

However, despite the overwhelming majority of the respondents viewing social media as effective, 25% of the survey respondents deemed it somewhat effective, reflecting an acknowledgment of its limitations. These limitations include concerns over misinformation, technological accessibility, and the risk of privacy violations. Such concerns are consistent with findings by Hovik et al. (2022), who argue that while digital platforms enable engagement, they also introduce challenges related to transparency, digital literacy, and trust. Furthermore, 13% of the respondents remained neutral, and 9% of them found social media to be ineffective, indicating scepticism about its impact and underscoring the complexities involved in its use for communication purposes.

I. Local applications of social media

The qualitative data from the eThekwini Municipality provides additional context to the findings indicating that social media is utilised as a multifaceted tool for news dissemination, engagement, and emergency communication. Platforms like Facebook, TikTok and WhatsApp news segments allow the municipality to reach diverse demographic groups, thus enhancing its ability to communicate effectively with the public. likewise, Kapoor et al. (2023) describe social media as a user-driven ecosystem that fosters relationship-building and information exchange. This resonates with the findings from eThekwini focus group on eThekwini Municipality's diverse media strategies,

including its digital newspaper eZasegagani and its podcasts. These initiatives demonstrate an application of digital citizenship principles by prioritising accessibility and inclusivity (Hintz, Dencik, and Wahl-Jorgensen, 2017). However, the digital divide and resource limitations highlight the ongoing challenges in ensuring equitable communication strategies.

Notably, the effectiveness of visual content, particularly photos and videos, was highlighted by eThekwini focus group respondents as crucial in capturing attention and increasing engagement, aligning with the findings of Wang and Benbasat (2023) who assert that trust and immediacy significantly enhance the perceived value of digital communication. Therefore, visual content and real-time updates emerged as effective engagement strategies. The respondents also noted social media's speed in emergency updates while acknowledging challenges like misinformation and limited access for non-digital audiences. This reflects the balance between leveraging the advantages of rapid information dissemination and addressing digital divides, a recurrent theme in studies of digital governance (Smith, 2023)

It is notable that the respondents also pointed out the challenges inherent in social media use, such as managing high volumes of interactions, ensuring the accuracy of disseminated information, and addressing the spread of misinformation. These challenges are consistent with the observations of Van Dijk (2012), who argues that while social media can enhance democratic participation, it also necessitates rigorous oversight to prevent the dissemination of false or misleading information.

II. Political campaigns and citizen engagement

In the realm of political campaigns, social media is particularly powerful in facilitating direct communication between political parties and the electorate. Political parties' respondents noted that social media provides a platform for political entities to bypass traditional media filters and thus offers unmediated access to information and fostering real-time interactions with voters. This aspect of social media is consistent with the

concept of e-democracy, which Muhammad (2023) describes as a transformative tool for citizen engagement and empowerment in the political process. Platforms such as Twitter and Facebook allow political leaders to present their views, set the public agenda, and engage with citizens in ways that traditional media cannot replicate.

Moreover, social media's role in amplifying marginalised voices was emphasized, with participants noting that it allows previously underrepresented groups to influence political discourse. This is in line with research by Bhanye et al. (2023), who highlight social media's capacity to democratise public discourse and ensure that a wider range of perspectives are heard in political conversations. However, as with other sectors, political campaigns on social media are not without their risks, including the potential for misinformation and the challenges of ensuring the accuracy of content shared online.

The overall findings align with the theories of digital democracy and e-democracy. Thus, Van Dijk (2012) defines digital democracy as the use of digital media to facilitate political communication and citizen engagement. This concept is supported by the eThekwini Municipality's use of multi-platform strategies, which integrate both traditional and digital communication channels to enhance public engagement. Similarly, e-participation models, such as those discussed by Hovik et al. (2022), highlight the importance of integrating digital tools with traditional governance practices to improve citizen engagement and transparency.

Furthermore, the findings also resonate with the concept of collaborative governance, as social media platforms enable citizens to participate in decision-making processes, thus promoting greater accountability and responsiveness in governance. As Bruns and Weller (2021) argue that social media fosters a collaborative approach to knowledge sharing, which can be applied in both political and public administration contexts to improve transparency and public engagement.

Overall, the study affirms that social media has become a transformative tool in political campaigns, corporate communication, and news dissemination. While the majority of the respondents view social media as a very effective tool, the study also highlights concerns regarding its limitations, including misinformation and the challenges of managing high interaction volumes. Therefore, social media's role in democratizing communication, amplifying marginalised voices, and fostering real-time engagement underscores its potential to reshape political and public communication. However, as highlighted by scholars such as Muhammed and Mathew (2020), the effectiveness of social media is contingent upon trust, accuracy, and the strategic management of digital platforms. As social media continues to evolve, further research is necessary to explore its broader implications for governance and public service delivery in the digital age.

Table 28: Effectiveness of social media in political campaigns, corporate and news dissemination

Category	**Percentage (%)**
Very effective	53%
Somewhat effective	25%
Neither effective nor ineffective	13%
Somewhat ineffective	5%
Very ineffective	4%

7.9.1.1 Reasons for effectiveness of social media

The findings from the quantitative survey and the qualitative insights delve into the reasons behind the effectiveness of social media platforms into facilitating a rapid and widespread communication, as well as enabling political campaigns to reach a broader audience more efficiently. By contextualizing these findings, the analysis underscores the strategic advantages of social media, emphasizing its role in shaping public opinion, driving engagement, and fostering community interaction. This comprehensive examination of social media's impact within the eThekwini Metropolitan Municipality and

beyond provides a nuanced understanding of its effectiveness in contemporary communication landscapes.

I. Reach and engagement

The most prominent advantage identified in the survey was the capacity of social media to facilitate reach and engagement, as noted by 57.9% of the respondents. Likewise, the focus group respondents from the eThekwini municipality emphasized that platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and WhatsApp have the ability to disseminate real-time information. Political party interviewees similarly noted that social media allows for direct communication with the electorate, bypassing traditional media filters. This direct line of communication was seen as essential for engaging supporters and fostering immediate feedback loops.

This aligns with Van Dijk's (2012) conceptualization of digital democracy; wherein digital platforms play a crucial role in expanding the reach of political messages and enabling broader public participation. This percentage indicates the predominant view that social media transcends traditional communication barriers, facilitating the delivery of political content to a wide audience and encouraging interactive dialogues. Such findings support the work of Hovik et al. (2022), which underscores the importance of digital tools in promoting real-time public interaction and enabling inclusive political discourse.

II. Grassroots mobilisation

The significant proportion of the respondents (13.8%) who identified grassroots mobilisation as an essential benefit further emphasizes the role of social media as a tool for civic participation and collective action. This supporting Metallo et al.'s (2022) findings that social media fosters activism and community engagement.

Likewise, the political interviews provided concrete examples, such as the #FeesMustFall movement, which utilised social media to galvanize support for widespread protests. Similarly, the eThekwini focus group identified social media as a tool for organising

community events and fostering collective action. According to Kapoor et al. (2023), social media is instrumental in amplifying marginalised voices and organising grassroots movements that can drive real-world political and social change. This finding supports the view that social media not only extends the reach of political campaigns but also empowers communities to organise, mobilise, and advocate for their causes, thereby contributing to a more participatory democratic process.

III. Targeted advertising

The ability of social media to facilitate targeted advertising was highlighted by 7.5% of the respondents, aligning with the literature on tailored political communication. Wang and Benbasat (2023) emphasize that the effectiveness of digital channels hinges on the trustworthiness and relevance of the information they provide. Likewise, the qualitative insights from the political party respondents emphasized the strategic importance of tailoring messages to specific demographics. They noted that targeted advertising enhanced message relevance, albeit with challenges in maintaining appeal across diverse voter groups, though it is less impactful compared to broader engagement strategies, indicating the nuanced role of personalised political communication in shaping public opinion.

IV. Challenges: Amplification of controversies and misinformation

In the survey, 5.6% of the respondents identified the amplification of controversies as a significant downside of digital platforms. Additionally, 3.5% of the respondents pointed to the proliferation of misinformation as a notable concern. These figures, while seemingly minor, highlight specific areas of public apprehension regarding digital communication.

During the focus group discussions in eThekwini, the respondents voiced substantial concerns about the spread of misinformation, especially during emergencies. This underscores the urgent need for robust verification mechanisms to ensure the accuracy of information disseminated in critical times. Likewise, political interviews further echoed these concerns, providing concrete examples where content has eroded public trust.

These challenges align with Van Dijk's (2012) cautionary perspective on digital democracy, which warns of the potential pitfalls of digital communication in democratic processes. Similarly, Wang and Benbasat (2023) emphasize the importance of trust in digital interactions. Although the quantitative data (5.6% and 3.5%) might suggest that these issues are of lesser importance, the qualitative insights reveal their profound implications for governance and public perception.

The findings strongly support Smith's (2023) argument for enhanced regulation and digital literacy. By improving these areas, it is possible to mitigate the risks associated with misinformation and the amplification of controversies, thereby fostering a more trustworthy digital environment.

V. Enhancing brand visibility

The quantitative survey revealed that 4% of the respondents recognized the importance of enhancing brand visibility through social media. This finding underscores the significant role that personal branding plays in modern political campaigns.

Likewise, the respondents in the qualitative study highlighted the strategic use of platforms like TikTok and Instagram to humanize political figures and strengthen public perception. These social media tools were seen as crucial for establishing and maintaining a consistent public image. By leveraging these platforms, political figures can present themselves in a more relatable and approachable manner, thereby enhancing their connection with the public.

This observation aligns with existing literature that describes social media as a powerful platform for digital marketing and political brand-building. Johnson et al. (2021) assert that social media has transformed political engagement from a purely policy-driven discourse to a more personalised and image-centric approach. This shift reinforces the

importance of brand visibility in connecting with voters, highlighting the strategic value of social media in modern political communication.

VI. Rapid Information Sharing

The quantitative survey indicated that 3.5% of the respondents cited rapid information sharing as a key advantage of social media. This finding highlights the perceived value of social media platforms in facilitating swift communication. This observation aligns with Metallo et al.'s (2022) emphasis on the importance of real-time communication.

Likewise, the qualitative insights from the respondents of eThekwini praised the speed of social media, particularly during crises. They noted that platforms like Twitter are invaluable for the immediate dissemination of emergency updates. This rapid sharing capability is crucial for effective crisis management and ensuring public safety.

Similarly, Hovik et al. (2022) acknowledge social media's capacity for rapid updates, underscoring its utility in urgent situations. While the quantitative data (3.5%) may suggest a moderate level of importance, the qualitative examples underscore the critical role of social media in crisis management and public service delivery. These insights collectively highlight the strategic value of social media in maintaining timely and effective communication during emergencies.

VII. Viral content and diverse perspectives

The quantitative survey revealed that 2.2% of the respondents valued viral content, while 1.6% of the respondent's appreciated exposure to diverse perspectives. Although these figures are relatively minor, they highlight specific benefits of social media that contribute to its overall impact.

Likewise, the qualitative interviews conducted during the study underscored the significant role of viral campaigns in amplifying political messages and fostering broader awareness. Hence, respondents noted that viral content can effectively capture public

attention and drive political engagement. Additionally, the focus groups emphasized the inclusivity that exposure to diverse perspectives brings to public discourse. They highlighted that social media platforms provide a space for a wide range of voices and opinions, enriching the political conversation and promoting a more democratic exchange of ideas.

These findings align with Bruns and Weller's (2021) discussion of viral content as a driver of political awareness. Viral content serves as a catalyst for engaging a wider audience, thereby enhancing political participation and awareness. Similarly, Kapoor et al. (2023) assert that social media enhances inclusivity in political dialogue by enabling a multiplicity of voices and opinions. Although the quantitative data (2.2% and 1.6%) may appear modest, the qualitative insights underscore their potential to enrich political discourse and foster democratic engagement. These insights collectively highlight the strategic value of social media in modern political communication, emphasizing its role in both mobilising political awareness through viral content and fostering inclusivity through diverse perspectives.

VIII. Other factors

The minimal 0.4% of the respondents that acknowledged other factors reflects the idea that while social media offers a range of benefits, its most impactful roles lie in engagement and information dissemination. This highlights that additional advantages are considered peripheral compared to the major benefits highlighted above.

The convergence of the quantitative and the qualitative findings provides a nuanced understanding of social media's role in political campaigns and governance. The predominance of reach and engagement (57.9%) and grassroots mobilisation (13.8%) in the survey is supported by the qualitative evidence of real-time communication and community-building efforts. These findings align with the theoretical models of digital democracy (Van Dijk, 2012) and civic participation (Kapoor et al., 2023) and demonstrate the transformative potential of social media in modern governance.

Conversely, challenges such as misinformation (3.5%) and amplification of controversies (5.6%) highlight critical areas requiring intervention. While these issues are quantitatively less emphasized, the qualitative insights reveal their profound impact on trust and public discourse. These risks underscore the importance of platform regulation and digital literacy, as recommended by Smith (2023) and Wang et al (2023).

Ultimately, social media emerges as a powerful tool for political communication and governance, offering opportunities for enhanced engagement, transparency, and participation. However, its potential can only be fully realised through strategic management and the mitigation of associated risks, ensuring its contributions to democratic processes are sustainable and equitable.

Table 29: Reasons for effectiveness of social media

Reasons	**Percentage**
Reach and Engagement	57.90%
Grassroots Mobilisation	13.80%
Targeted Advertising	7.50%
Amplification of Controversy	5.60%
Brand Visibility	4.00%
Rapid Information Sharing	3.50%
Misinformation Challenge	3.50%
Virality and Trending Topics	2.20%
Diverse Sources and Perspectives	1.60%
Other	0.40%

7.10 Examples of successful political campaigns and social movements that heavily relied on social media platforms

The findings from the quantitative survey and the qualitative insights delve into the successful examples of political campaigns. This extends to social movements that

heavily relied on social media platforms behind the effectiveness of social media platforms into facilitating a rapid and widespread communication, as well as enabling political campaigns to reach a broader audience more efficiently. By contextualising these findings, the analysis underscores understanding that the dual impact of social media requires an exploration of its role in three critical areas: campaign effectiveness, ethical challenges, and propaganda. This analysis aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of both the potential and pitfalls of social media in modern governance.

I. Campaign effectiveness and civic mobilisation

43.5% of the survey respondents emphasized social media's role in political campaigns and highlighted its ability to foster direct voter engagement, build campaign momentum, and facilitate widespread communication of political agendas. Platforms like Facebook and Twitter allow political parties to rapidly disseminate information to diverse audiences, offering a level of reach and efficiency unattainable through traditional media. These insights align with governance models explored by Metallo et al. (2022), which underscore the importance of digital tools in enhancing political engagement.

Likewise, the qualitative findings from the eThekwini focus group added depth to these observations and illustrating how multimedia tools such as live streams foster transparency and trust. For instance, eThekwini's municipal full council meetings are statutorily streamed live, and have significantly improved public participation and accountability. Such practices exemplify the integration of technology into governance processes to enhance accessibility and trust. Conversely, the political party interviews assumed that social movements like #FeesMustFall and Black Lives Matter provide further evidence of social media's capacity to galvanize collective action. Therefore, these campaigns demonstrate how digital platforms bridge citizen-policy gaps and mobilise younger audiences, who are often at the forefront of digital advocacy. Hovik et al. (2022) highlight these platforms as critical enablers of participatory governance, fostering inclusive dialogue across diverse demographics.

II. Ethical challenges and trust

While social media offers numerous benefits, it also presents considerable ethical challenges. Approximately 23.5% of the respondents identified risks, including misinformation and the erosion of institutional trust. According to respondents, misinformation spreads rapidly, complicating efforts to maintain credibility in governance and political campaigns. This issue is compounded by the rise of politically motivated bias and intimidation, which create further obstacles to transparency and accountability.

However, building and maintaining public trust are essential in navigating these challenges. Examples such as the Decide Madrid platform illustrate how transparency and participatory governance can foster public confidence (Royo et al., 2020). By involving citizens in decision-making through digital tools, governments can bridge the trust gap while promoting inclusivity. Real-time feedback mechanisms, such as WhatsApp, enable officials to adapt their strategies in response to public concerns. However, these tools require strategic oversight to address digital divides and mitigate the risks of misinformation. As Wang and Benbasat (2023) suggest, trust in digital channels depends on consistent and credible communication, which can be achieved through thoughtful implementation of feedback tools and ethical standards.

On the other hand, the qualitative data from the focus groups reinforce these observations and emphasize the necessity of bridging technological divides to ensure equitable access. The respondents noted that while tools like WhatsApp facilitate rapid communication, their potential is often undermined by inconsistent governance and limited public awareness of digital literacy. Addressing these gaps is vital to ensuring that social media fulfils its promise as a tool for inclusive governance and not merely an echo chamber for misinformation.

III. Criticism and propaganda

A proportion of 23.5% of the survey respondents, expressed concerns about the use of social media for propaganda and the dissemination of fake news. This theme captures

the darker aspects of social media's influence, particularly its ability to undermine trust in political institutions and amplify divisive narratives. Misinformation's rapid spread creates significant challenges for governance, as it fosters confusion and scepticism among citizens.

However, the qualitative insights provide a deeper perspective on this issue. The respondents from eThekwini Municipality highlighted how fake news and propaganda often exploit the speed and reach of social media to destabilize public trust. These challenges align with Van Dijk's (2012) theory, which emphasizes the need for vigilance in preventing digital platforms from being weaponized. While social media enables widespread engagement, unchecked misuse can erode the very foundations of democratic participation.

The respondents emphasized the need for robust ethical standards and platform accountability to combat the spread of misinformation. For example, algorithms that prioritize sensationalist content over information exacerbate the problem, further entrenching political divisions. Addressing this requires a multifaceted approach, which combines a regulatory framework with public education initiatives to improve digital literacy and encourage critical engagement with online content.

Social media represents both an opportunity and a challenge for modern governance. On the one hand, it facilitates unprecedented levels of mobilisation, transparency, and citizen engagement. On the other hand, its potential misuse for propaganda and misinformation necessitates vigilant oversight and robust ethical frameworks.

Therefore, to maximize the benefits while minimizing the risks, future initiatives should focus on:

(a) Technological Training: Equipping administrators with skills to effectively manage platforms and counter misinformation.

(b) Ethical Standards: Developing clear guidelines to ensure fair and unbiased communication in political and governance contexts.
(c) Inclusive Strategies: Addressing digital divides to ensure equal representation and participation across all demographic groups.
(d) Public Education: Enhancing digital literacy to empower citizens to critically assess online content and engage constructively.

Through addressing these priorities, social media can continue to evolve as a powerful tool for fostering democratic participation and responsive governance, bridging the gap between citizens and policymakers in meaningful ways.

7.11 Advantages and disadvantages of using social media for political purposes

This analysis triangulates the findings from the focus groups, the semi-structured interviews and the quantitative survey responses to critically evaluate the advantages and disadvantages of using social media for political purposes. Drawing from models, theories, and literature, the discussion integrates empirical evidence with conceptual frameworks to provide a comprehensive understanding of social media's impact on political engagement.

Advantages of social media for political purposes

I. Transparency and Engagement

Social media's role in enhancing transparency aligns closely with the principles of e-democracy. Metallo et al. (2022) describe e-democracy as a digital transformation of democratic practices, where information and communication technologies (ICTs) enable citizens to engage in governance. The survey findings support this, with 14.4% of the respondents emphasizing social media's contribution to openness and accountability. One respondent noted thus: "It promotes transparency, openness, and provides real-time data." Likewise, the focus groups highlighted the platforms' ability to facilitate direct

communication between the officials and the constituents and thus bypass traditional media filters, as observed in platforms like Decide Madrid.

II. Inclusivity and accessibility

The inclusivity fostered by social media is reflective of collaborative governance models, which emphasize the engagement of diverse stakeholders. Hovik et al. (2022) illustrate how cities like Melbourne use digital tools to expand participation among varied demographics, including marginalised groups. This finding aligns with the survey responses, where 12.3% of the respondents noted social media's capacity to reach a wider audience. One respondent observed thus: "It can reach a wider audience," and this highlights its effectiveness in democratizing political participation.

III. Real-Time information sharing and engagement

The immediacy of social media in disseminating information parallels the concept of cyber-localism, as described by Miller et al. (2019). This concept highlights the localized impact of digital platforms in fostering real-time interactions. The survey findings show that 17.1% of the respondents valued real-time information sharing, with one respondent stating that, "Real-time information can be easily shared." Focus groups reinforced this, emphasizing its role in maintaining continuous dialogue between the political actors and the citizens.

IV. Cost-effectiveness and operational efficiency

The semi-structured interviews highlighted the cost-effectiveness of social media, which aligns with e-governance theories emphasizing efficiency through digital tools (Chen et al., 2017). Social media reduces reliance on resource-intensive traditional campaign methods, enabling political actors to disseminate messages at scale with minimal expense.

V. Mobilisation and advocacy

The ability of social media to mobilise and advocate for political causes resonates with theories of networked activism (Granillo, 2020). Movements such as #FeesMustFall in South Africa demonstrate how social media galvanizes collective action. The survey findings showed that 13.7% of the respondents recognized its effectiveness in mobilising, crowdsourcing, and organising, reflecting its capacity to drive community-based advocacy and civic engagement.

Disadvantages of social media for political purposes

I. Misinformation and fake news

Misinformation represents a critical challenge, as highlighted in the digital wildfires' framework from the World Economic Forum (2013). The survey findings identified misinformation as the most critical disadvantage, with 21.9% of the respondents expressing concern about the spread of false information. One respondent remarked and alluded to "different views and easily [shared] misinformation," reflecting the complexities of navigating truth in a digital landscape.

II. Ethical concerns and propaganda

The manipulation of social media narratives reflects concerns raised in literature on algorithmic biases and propaganda (Van Dijck, 2013). The focus groups identified biased representation and the spread of propaganda as ethical dilemmas, which align with survey findings where 15.8% of the respondents noted the platform's susceptibility to misuse. One respondent stated that "It has the disadvantage of spreading false propaganda," thus underscoring the ethical challenges of maintaining integrity in digital political discourse.

III. Polarisation and overwhelming public interaction

The polarizing effects of social media align with theories of echo chambers, where like-minded individuals reinforce their biases and create divisions (Muhammad, 2023). The focus groups discussed how polarized discourse complicates meaningful engagement,

while 9.6% of the survey respondents noted confusion arising from conflicting narratives. One respondent observed that, "People are sharing different things about politics, so other people are getting confused," and this reflects the challenges of fragmented political dialogue.

IV. Digital divide and exclusion

The digital divide, as discussed by Steinbach et al. (2019), highlights barriers to access that exclude certain demographics from political participation. This was echoed in the survey responses, where 10.3% of the respondents pointed to challenges such as limited network access in rural areas. One respondent noted that, "Mostly in rural areas, they have a challenge with network," illustrating persistent inequalities in digital inclusion.

V. Reputational and cybersecurity risks

Social media's public nature exposes political actors to reputational harm and cybersecurity threats. The semi-structured interviews identified risks such as defamation and cyberbullying, consistent with findings from Wang and Benbasat (2023) on the importance of trust in digital channels. The survey responses indicated that 8.2% of the respondents were concerned about defamation, while 6.8% of the respondents mentioned cyberbullying as a critical drawback.

VI. Sustainability and declining interest

Maintaining engagement over extended campaigns, such as water conservation initiatives, reflects broader challenges in sustaining digital participation (Hovik et al., 2022). The semi-structured interviews highlighted the difficulty of retaining public interest, necessitating innovative approaches to sustain long-term participation.

The triangulation of the findings highlights the dual-edged nature of social media in political contexts. While platforms enable transparency, inclusivity, and real-time engagement, they are equally susceptible to misinformation, polarization, and ethical concerns. As one respondent aptly noted, "It is a tool for both sharing information and

influencing the public." By aligning the findings with theories such as e-democracy, collaborative governance, and networked activism, this analysis underscores the need for strategic management and robust safeguards to maximize the benefits of social media while addressing its limitations.

7.12 Chapter Summary

This chapter examined the influence of social media on e-democracy, governance, and public service delivery within the eThekwini Metropolitan Municipality. Specifically, it explored how social media fosters public participation, ensures government accountability, and enhances service delivery efficiency. The study addressed six key questions related to the strategies, techniques, and impacts of social media on governance processes.

Therefore, a mixed-methods approach was employed, combining quantitative surveys with qualitative interviews and focus groups. Data was collected from 414 social media users, 20 municipal officials, and representatives of 10 political parties, culminating in a total of 444 respondents. This approach facilitated a comprehensive and multidimensional analysis, allowing for a robust examination of the role of social media across various demographic and institutional contexts.

The mixed methods design not only captured numerical trends but also provided nuanced insights into the lived experiences of the respondents. The quantitative data established patterns of engagement and preferences, while the qualitative narratives enriched these findings with deeper context, illustrating how social media usage shapes and is shaped by governance practices in eThekwini.

I. Democratic strategies on social media

The quantitative findings revealed the prominence of platforms like WhatsApp (92.27% usage) and Facebook (74.64%) in fostering public discourse and democratic

engagement. The respondents reported employing strategies such as promoting civic education (23.25%) and encouraging open dialogue (20.36%) to enhance participatory governance. These platforms were instrumental in bridging communication gaps between the municipality and its citizens, creating spaces for interaction that transcend traditional barriers.

Demographic analysis showed that Black respondents (84.46%), young adults aged 22-35 (46.38%), and women (57.97%) dominate these engagements, highlighting the inclusivity of social media as a democratic tool. The qualitative insights from the municipal social media officials further emphasized the transformative role of these platforms, citing initiatives like interactive Q&A sessions and live-streamed meetings as pivotal in promoting transparency and accessibility. Innovations such as visual media, infographics, and multilingual content have broadened the reach and effectiveness of these platforms.

Moreover, the municipality has adopted proactive measures to sustain residents' engagement through social media campaigns, workshops, and partnerships with community leaders. These efforts have not only increased the frequency of public participation but have also fostered a sense of ownership and trust among residents. The findings underline the importance of tailoring content to diverse audiences and ensuring that platforms remain accessible to all.

II. Techniques and networking strategies for accountability

The quantitative data underscored the significance of citizen journalism (20.53%), information sharing, and hashtag campaigns (18.36%) as accountability mechanisms. Nearly half of the respondents (47.58%) identified as activists, use social media to expose corruption and demand transparency. Educational attainment, with 28.74% of the respondents having completed Grade 12 or higher, was a key factor in effective platform utilisation, indicating that informed citizens are more likely to leverage these tools for accountability.

Likewise, the qualitative findings highlighted the role of “Operations groups” on WhatsApp in streamlining internal coordination and escalating public concerns to relevant departments. Despite their efficacy, officials noted challenges in managing heightened public expectations and resource constraints. Therefore, cross-departmental collaboration was identified as a critical component of enhancing accountability.

In addition, the municipality has also embraced technological advancements to support accountability efforts. Furthermore, tools such as data analytics and real-time tracking have been implemented to monitor the effectiveness of initiatives and address inefficiencies promptly. However, the study revealed that sustained success requires continuous training for officials and the allocation of sufficient resources to avoid burnout.

III. Monitoring public services via social media

Over 54% of the respondents viewed social media as an essential tool for ensuring transparency and responsiveness in service delivery. Thus, real-time feedback mechanisms allowed users to report issues such as water shortages and infrastructure failures effectively. Hence, long-term engagement, with 46.38% of the respondents having used social media for over 10 years, further validated the utility of these tools.

Furthermore, the qualitative findings highlighted the municipality’s use of sentiment analysis and monitoring tools to gauge public opinion and service quality. Therefore, despite challenges in managing high interaction volumes, these efforts align with the quantitative data in demonstrating the adaptive and responsive role of social media in governance. Hence, predictive analytics and trend mapping further enhanced the municipality’s crisis preparedness and innovation.

Additionally, the integration of residents’ feedback into decision-making processes has strengthened the municipality’s ability to address systemic challenges. Moreover, public input collected via social media has informed policy adjustments and resource allocation, ensuring that governance practices remain aligned with community needs. In essence,

these mechanisms illustrate the potential of social media to transform traditional approaches to service delivery.

IV. Advocacy, policy influence, and campaigns

Nearly half of the respondents (48.31%) found social media highly effective in advocacy and policy influence. Thus, platforms amplified marginalised voices and fostered community building, particularly among young adults and women. Further to that, higher education levels correlated with increased participation, emphasising the role of critical thinking in policy engagement.

In contrast, the qualitative narratives, such as the #CleanMyCity and #SaveOurBeaches campaigns, illustrated the power of social media in rallying community support and influencing policy. These campaigns not only garnered widespread attention but also prompted tangible policy changes, demonstrating the impact of collective digital advocacy. However, ethical concerns about political bullying and unequal representation were noted. Thus, social media also facilitated micro-campaigns addressing hyper-local issues, underscoring the need for ethical guidelines to ensure balanced and inclusive advocacy.

Furthermore, political parties and advocacy groups have increasingly turned to social media to amplify their messages and engage with constituents. Thus, targeted advertising and data-driven strategies have allowed for more personalised interactions, although these practices raise questions about privacy and the potential for misuse. Hence, the findings highlight the dual role of social media as both a tool for empowerment and a platform requiring vigilant oversight.

V. Social media's impact on political campaigns and news dissemination

Social media was perceived as critical in shaping political campaigns and discourse, with 67.15% of the respondents identifying platforms as alternative news sources. However,

misinformation emerged as a critical challenge, highlighting the need for robust fact-checking mechanisms.

Furthermore, the qualitative feedback from the political party administrators emphasized the strategic use of platforms to engage voters and democratise information. For instance, innovative practices such as virtual town halls and AI-driven sentiment analysis further enhanced voter engagement and outreach though ethical oversight was deemed essential to maintain fairness.

In addition, the role of social media in shaping public opinion and electoral outcomes cannot be overstated. Hence, platforms have become arenas for ideological debates, issue-based discussions, and mobilisation efforts, reflecting their growing influence in modern political landscapes. However, the proliferation of fake news and propaganda underscores the need for comprehensive strategies to safeguard the integrity of information.

VI. Acceleration of service delivery

The quantitative data showed that 31.40% of the respondents viewed social media as effective in reporting service delivery issues. Hence, platforms facilitated real-time feedback loops, enabling quicker responses and improved efficiency. Moreover, consistent daily usage (83.33%) and long-term engagement underscored the sustained potential of these tools.

Similarly, the qualitative findings supported these results, citing campaigns like #AtYourService as examples of promoting accountability. However, inconsistent government responsiveness and misinformation were identified as barriers. Thus, automation tools, such as chatbots and complaint tracking systems, improved operational efficiency but highlighted the enduring importance of human interaction in maintaining trust.

Moreover, the municipality has initiated training programs to enhance officials' capacity to manage social media interactions effectively. However, by balancing technological innovation with human-centred approaches, the municipality will optimise service delivery outcomes and build stronger relationships with the residents.

Challenges and Barriers

While social media's benefits are evident, several challenges were identified:

(a) Misinformation: Undermines public trust and complicates issue verification.
(b) Digital Divide: Limited access in rural areas restricts inclusivity.
(c) Institutional Resistance: Hinders the formal adoption of social media in governance.

Theoretical frameworks and insights

The findings were contextualized through several theoretical frameworks:

(a) Techno-Optimism Theory: Highlights the potential of social media to enhance governance, tempered by observed challenges.
(b) Digital Citizenship Theory: Emphasizes ethical and informed platform use for participatory governance.
(c) Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI): Addresses the structural integration of digital tools in governance.
(d) Filter Bubble Theory: Warns of algorithm-driven silos that limit exposure to diverse perspectives.

Implications and Recommendations

The chapter concluded with strategic recommendations:

(a) Enhancing Digital Literacy: Equip citizens with skills to navigate platforms responsibly.

(b) Developing Inclusive Digital Policies: Address barriers to access and ensure equitable participation.
(c) Institutionalising social media in Governance: Allocate resources for structured monitoring and formal civic engagement protocols.

In summary, the convergence of the quantitative and the qualitative findings provided a comprehensive understanding of social media's role in governance within eThekwini Municipality. Thus, platforms facilitate transparency, interaction, and advocacy but require strategic interventions to address challenges and optimise effectiveness. However, by investing in digital infrastructure, capacity building, and ethical frameworks, the municipality can fully harness the transformative potential of social media, ensuring that it remains a cornerstone of participatory and transparent governance.

Therefore, the findings underscore the dynamic and evolving nature of social media in governance. As technology advances, continuous innovation and adaptation will be necessary to address emerging challenges and opportunities. Through collaborative efforts and a commitment to inclusivity, eThekwini Municipality can set a precedent for leveraging social media to enhance democratic processes and improve public service delivery.

CHAPTER EIGHT

8. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

8.1 Introduction

This study explored the vital and multifaceted roles of social media in influencing democratic practices and enhancing governance within the eThekwini Metropolitan Municipality. Social media has fundamentally changed the way citizens engage with civic and governmental processes, offering unique tools for communication, collaboration, and transparency. Thus, through employing a mix of quantitative and qualitative research methods, this study sought to highlight how these platforms empower the residents, foster accountability, and promote participatory democracy.

The researcher acknowledges that the swift evolution of digital platforms creates both opportunities and challenges for municipal governments. Moreover, this dynamic landscape underscores the need for thoughtful strategies that effectively align technological advancements with governance goals. Ultimately, this study demonstrate how social media can strengthen the relationship between the citizens and their governments, thus paving the way for more inclusive, transparent, and effective democratic practices.

8.2 Conclusion

This study provided an extensive and multidimensional analysis the critical roles of social media in enhancing democratic practices, governance frameworks, and public service delivery mechanisms within the eThekwini Metropolitan Municipality. By employing a robust mixed-methods approach that integrates both quantitative and qualitative data, the study has shed light on significant insights into the multifaceted ways social media

influences public engagement, promotes transparency, and ensures accountability in governance processes.

8.2.1 Important findings

The study findings provide a detailed and data-driven examination of the transformative impact of social media on governance within the eThekwini Metropolitan Municipality. Utilising a mixed-methods approach that involved data collection from 414 social media users, 20 municipal officials, and representatives from 10 political parties, the study offers comprehensive insights into social media's role in enhancing governance, accountability, and service delivery.

Moreover, the study revealed that social media significantly fosters public participation in governance processes. Approximately 72% of the respondents indicated active engagement in governance-related discussions on platforms such as WhatsApp and Facebook. In addition, young adults (aged 18-34) formed the majority of this demographic, illustrating the role of digital platforms in engaging traditionally underrepresented groups. This aligns with the broader literature on social media's democratising potential, offering evidence of its ability to connect diverse populations with governance mechanisms.

Furthermore, social media was found to be a pivotal tool for promoting government accountability and citizen advocacy. Hence, 68% of the participants reported using social media to expose inefficiencies or instances of corruption within the municipality. Notable campaigns like #CleanMyCity effectively mobilised large segments of the population and pressured municipal authorities to act promptly. Interviews with the officials revealed that public pressure generated by viral campaigns often accelerated decision-making processes and improved responsiveness.

However, the study identified real-time feedback mechanisms on social media as a critical innovation in service delivery. Hence, over 75% of the surveyed users reported lodging

complaints or raising service delivery concerns through social media. Similarly, the municipal officials acknowledged that these platforms allowed for prioritisation of issues based on urgency and public sentiment. However, they also highlighted operational challenges, including resource limitations and the high volume of user complaints requiring resolution.

Moreover, social media's influence extended to political engagement, with 61% of the respondents identifying it as their primary source of political information. However, despite its role in facilitating voter education and campaign outreach, misinformation emerged as a significant concern. In contrast, 54% of the participants acknowledged encountering false or misleading content, thus underscoring the need for targeted digital literacy initiatives to enhance critical consumption of information.

In addition, the integration of predictive analytics tools enabled the municipal officials to leverage social media trends to anticipate and address public concerns. Examples included preparing for seasonal increases in service demands, such as waste management during holiday periods. Hence, these tools were particularly effective in improving planning and resource allocation, demonstrating the potential of data-driven governance models.

On the contrary, while the findings illustrate the utility of social media in governance, they also highlight several challenges, such as Misinformation, resource constraints, and ethical concerns, such as privacy violations and algorithmic biases, were identified as significant barriers to optimal implementation. Subsequently, addressing these challenges requires institutional commitment to establishing ethical guidelines and investing in both technological infrastructure and human resource capacity.

In summary, the study emphasizes the dual role of social media as both a facilitator of governance and a platform presenting unique challenges. On the one hand, it enhances inclusivity, accountability, and efficiency in governance processes. On the other hand, it

necessitates a strategic approach to mitigate risks, such as misinformation and the digital divide. However, these findings contribute to the growing body of literature advocating for the formal integration of social media into governance frameworks to promote participatory, transparent, and adaptive governance practices.

8.2.2 Theoretical reflections

The dangers posed by echo chambers highlight the need for a thoughtful and intentional approach to fully realise the potential of these platforms. In conjunction with these challenges, the study also resonates with important theoretical frameworks such as Digital Citizenship Theory, Decentralised Participatory Democracy, Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI) and Techno-Optimism Theory as well as the Filter Bubble Theory. These frameworks illuminate the transformative power of digital platforms in encouraging informed civic engagement when utilised effectively. For instance, Techno-Optimism Theory emphasizes how technology can democratise information access, enhance political knowledge, and foster greater public involvement through platforms that facilitate genuine interactions (Groshek and Tandoc Jr., 2018; Zhang, 2019). However, while algorithmic curation can tailor content to individual preferences (Pariser, 2011; Ray and George, 2019; Robertson, Green, Ruck, Ognyanova, Wilson and Lazer, 2021), it also raises concerns about Filter bubble that restrict exposure to a range of perspectives (Sunstein, 2023).

Moreover, Digital Citizenship Theory underscores the necessity of responsible and ethical technology use, advocating for standards that nurture inclusivity and Decentralised governance (Hintz, Dencik, and Wahl-Jorgensen, 2017; Smith and Jones, 2023; Johnson, 2022). Establishing robust digital infrastructures is essential for ensuring accessibility and empowering citizens to participate actively in a participatory democracy.

Ultimately, Decentralised Participatory Democracy (DPD) theory is characterized by three main political aims: organising political communities to build collective power, empowering

citizens through direct participation in decision-making, and transforming political institutions (Fischli and Muldoon, 2024). Therefore, this study emphasizes the substantial promise of social media in bridging the divides between citizens and government, cultivating a culture of mutual trust, and fostering a collaborative governance framework that is both inclusive and participatory. Thus, it is through these efforts that eThekwini municipality can envision a more engaged and informed society.

In addition, Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI) is the foundational digital systems that support public services and civic engagement. Therefore, an effective DPI ensures that the technological infrastructure is accessible, secure, and capable of supporting large-scale participatory initiatives (Noveck, 2015). On the contrary, Eli Pariser's (2001) filter bubble theory articulates how algorithmic personalization can create individualized content "bubbles" that isolate users from diverse viewpoints, thereby reinforcing their existing biases. This concept may be particularly relevant as municipality explore similar strategies on social media to effectively target specific demographics, encourage civic engagement, and mitigate the spread of misinformation through the prioritization of verified information. Nevertheless, the implementation of such strategies raises significant ethical concerns. Transparency is paramount, as citizens often remain uninformed about the ways their data is utilised. An overemphasis on personalization may result in the exclusion of critical perspectives, ultimately undermining the principles of democratic discourse. Furthermore, there exists the potential for manipulation, wherein tailored content subtly influences public opinion or behaviour, which raises troubling questions regarding propaganda and its implications. Thus, it becomes imperative to strike a balance between harnessing the advantages of algorithmic personalisation and addressing the ethical challenges it presents and ensure that municipality utilise social media in a manner that upholds democratic values and fosters an informed citizenry.

However, the role of social media extends beyond basic communication, for instance, it serves as a vital instrument for redefining the interactions between citizens and their government. Thus, through innovative engagement strategies, these platforms not only

amplify diverse voices but also promote creativity in the policymaking process. Moreover, by acknowledging the transformative potential of these digital tools, governance of eThekwini municipality can evolve into a more participatory practice where the sentiments of the public are prioritised in decision-making. This study illustrates how social media can act as a conduit for ushering in an era where civic engagement and digital inclusion are key drivers of democratic advancement.

8.3 Recommendations for future research

8.3.1 Enhancing digital literacy and inclusivity

The researcher posits that fostering equitable engagement is contingent upon addressing the digital divide through initiatives aimed at enhancing digital literacy and ensuring affordable access to technology. It is essential to develop comprehensive training programs specifically targeting marginalised groups, and thereby equip them with the critical skills necessary for responsible engagement on social media platforms.

Furthermore, the establishment of community technology hubs can serve to support individuals who lack personal access to digital tools. These strategic efforts are crucial in promoting broader representation within digital spaces and empowering underserved populations to actively participate in governance processes.

8.3.2. Strengthening governance through social media

The study suggests that real-time engagement strategies, including the live streaming of council meetings and the timely responses to citizen inquiries, significantly enhance transparency and foster public trust. Furthermore, the development of professional guidelines for social media management is essential for ensuring content accuracy and mitigating the spread of misinformation, while also promoting a culture of professionalism. By adopting these practices, municipalities can cultivate more robust relationships with the community and establish efficient communication channels that serve the public interest.

8.3.3 Promoting transparency and accountability

The study asserts that effective governance strategies should consciously incorporate data-driven decision-making tools, including sentiment analysis, to achieve a deeper understanding of public opinion. These tools facilitate the identification of community sentiments and concerns, and allow policymakers to tailor their approaches more effectively. Furthermore, the establishment of comprehensive public reporting mechanisms and interactive feedback platforms fosters ongoing dialogue between government entities and residents.

Additionally, these platforms not only provide regular updates on service delivery, enhancing transparency, but also ensure that citizen voices and perspectives are actively integrated into the policy-making process. Thereto, by harmonising data utilisation with public engagement, governance can cultivate a culture of accountability, ultimately strengthening the trust and relationship between policymakers and the communities they serve.

8.3.4 Encouraging civic engagement and advocacy

The researcher posits that the eThekwini municipality can significantly enhance citizen participation by implementing comprehensive interactive campaigns that effectively harness their social media platforms. By employing tools such as engaging polls, robust discussion forums, and targeted advocacy initiatives, local governments can foster a deeper sense of community involvement.

Furthermore, the study suggests that grassroots mobilisation efforts play a critical role in amplifying diverse voices, and ensure that a wide array of perspectives is considered in decision-making processes. In contrast, collaborations with local influencers and community organisations can further enrich these efforts, and create a more inclusive environment for dialogue and action. Therefore, collectively, these strategies contribute to a civic engagement framework that is not only dynamic and impactful but also prioritizes

the voices and needs of all community members, thereby reinforcing the democratic process.

8.3.5 Mitigating misinformation and managing public perception

The researcher posits that cultivating partnerships between municipal bodies and fact-checking organisations is essential for addressing misinformation in a systematic manner. Consequently, such collaborations can facilitate the development of comprehensive training programs for municipal staff, focusing on enhancing skills in crisis management and effective communication.

Furthermore, the establishment of transparent correction protocols is crucial for reinforcing public trust in official communication platforms. Collectively, these initiatives serve to promote the accuracy of information and uphold the integrity of digital discourse, thereby fostering a well-informed community that is better equipped to navigate the complexities of misinformation.

8.3.6 Expanding platform-specific strategies

Recent research emphasizes the importance of engaging younger audiences through visually stimulating platforms, notably TikTok and Instagram. These platforms are characterized by their dynamic content, which not only captures attention but also fosters creativity and interaction among users. This is particularly relevant for a demographic that increasingly prefers visual communication over traditional text-based formats.

Conversely, LinkedIn emerges as a crucial network for fostering professional connections and enabling collaboration among stakeholders. It provides a structured environment for meaningful exchanges of ideas and resources, and thereby facilitates professional growth and partnerships.

Furthermore, through employing a diversified approach across these distinct platforms, organisations can enhance their outreach efforts and effectively connect with a wider range of demographic groups. This strategy also embraces the incorporation of innovative tools, such as podcasts, which serve as an engaging medium for delivering in-depth content. Collectively, these strategies contribute to the formulation of comprehensive and adaptive engagement frameworks that align with the varied preferences and behaviours of different audience segments.

8.3.7 Monitoring and evaluation

The establishment of key performance indicators (KPIs) and the implementation of systematic social media audits are critical for evaluating the effectiveness of a social media strategy. By employing regular feedback loops and conducting surveys, organisations can gain essential insights into the shifting needs and preferences of their audience. This methodology promotes an adaptive approach, and allows strategies to be refined and adjusted in response to community feedback. Furthermore, engaging in these ongoing assessments not only ensures that the social media strategy remains attuned to contemporary trends but also reinforces its relevance to the constituents it aims to serve. Therefore, such practices foster a more responsive communication model, which ultimately enhances the relationship between the organisation and its audience.

8.3.8 Promoting cross-sector collaboration

The establishment of partnerships between civil society organisations and the private sector is essential for enhancing civic engagement initiatives. Developing knowledge-sharing forums and comprehensive repositories, would equally facilitate the dissemination of effective practices and innovative solutions among a diverse array of stakeholders. Therefore, collaborative efforts not only maximise the efficient use of available resources but also create meaningful synergies that enable different sectors to work together effectively in addressing the complex challenges faced by communities.

Through this integrative approach, the municipality can foster a deeper sense of civic involvement and contribute to the overall well-being of society.

In addition, the blending of perspectives and expertise from various sectors enriches our understanding and response to community needs, and ultimately leads to more sustainable and impactful outcomes.

8.3.9 Addressing accessibility barriers

Addressing accessibility barriers is a fundamental responsibility for municipalities aiming to create an inclusive environment for all community members. Therefore, by developing content that is available in a variety of languages and is culturally relevant, local governments can enhance access for diverse populations, ensuring that everyone feels represented and included.

Moreover, the incorporation of assistive technologies, such as sophisticated text-to-speech tools, plays a pivotal role in empowering individuals with disabilities. Hence, these technologies facilitate meaningful engagement, and allow users to navigate digital platforms with ease and confidence. However, this commitment to inclusivity not only underscores the values inherent in effective digital governance but also fosters a sense of belonging within the community.

In addition, though actively recognising and addressing these accessibility barriers, municipalities can work toward a more equitable society. Notably, such approach not only promotes universal access to critical information and services but also respects and acknowledges the dignity and worth of every individual, reinforcing the idea that inclusivity is essential to the health and well-being of the entire community.

8.3.10 Contribution of the study

Table 30: Summary of steps

Step	Description	Objective
Establishing Governance Frameworks	Develop communication policies, appoint communications representatives from varies departments, and centralise oversight to ensure consistent messaging.	Guarantee professionalism and alignment in communication strategies.
Structured Posting Systems	Implement content calendars, automate scheduling, and create submission protocols for departments.	Ensure timely, coordinated, and relevant messaging.
Pre-Approved Response Templates	Develop standardised FAQs and response templates tailored to public inquiries, with regular updates for relevance.	Enhance efficiency and maintain professionalism in responses.
Verification and Approval Processes	Establish content approval workflows, train staff on verification protocols, and centralise approvals for sensitive information.	Ensure content accuracy and compliance with policies.
Crisis Communication Protocols	Predefine templates for emergencies, establish rapid-response teams, and streamline departmental communication channels.	Provide timely and effective communication during crises.
Ongoing Collaboration and Training	Conduct workshops, hold strategy meetings, and integrate stakeholder feedback.	Foster continuous improvement and team alignment.
Monitoring and Evaluation	Use KPIs, regular audits, and sentiment analysis to measure and refine social media performance.	Optimise strategies with data-driven insights.
Strengthening Public Trust	Provide transparent updates, address concerns, and ensure consistent professionalism across platforms.	Build and maintain trust in municipal governance.

Cross-Departmental Representation	Appoint representatives for each department to manage specific initiatives, with regular inter-departmental collaboration.	Ensure cohesive and inclusive messaging across departments.
Integrated Application Systems	Centralise inquiries via dashboards linked to departmental tools for streamlined management and analysis.	Improve efficiency and service delivery through coordinated responses.
Continuous Feedback and Reporting	Implement feedback loops, monthly reviews, and public engagement reports to guide iterative improvements.	Enhance accountability and adapt strategies to public needs.

Source: Researcher own data

Through aligning these structured steps with the municipality's goals, the eThekwini Metropolitan Municipality can refine its social media strategy to foster transparency, responsiveness, and inclusive governance. Therefore, through systematic and adaptive implementation, municipalities can meet the evolving demands of their citizens while advancing democratic engagement.

However, the outlined steps provide a robust roadmap for municipalities seeking to harness the full potential of social media. These practices enable seamless communication, inclusive engagement, and transparent governance that meet the dynamic needs of the citizens in the digital era. Together, these strategies demonstrate the transformative power of social media when leveraged responsibly and effectively. By fostering collaboration, transparency, and inclusivity, municipalities like eThekwini can ensure they are not only meeting the current expectations of their citizens but also setting a forward-thinking precedent for the future of governance in the digital age.

8.4 Suggestions for further research

Firstly, the exploration of the long-term effects of social media integration on governance outcomes reveals transformative potential across various dimensions of public

administration. Social media platforms have demonstrated their ability to influence the efficiency, transparency, and inclusivity of governance processes over sustained periods. By enabling real-time interaction, fostering community engagement, and serving as tools for advocacy, these platforms have created new opportunities for participatory governance. However, they also pose challenges, such as managing misinformation, sustaining public trust, and addressing evolving technological demands. Understanding these dynamics requires ongoing research to evaluate how sustained use of social media shapes public expectations, accountability mechanisms, and institutional practices over time. This exploration emphasizes the need for adaptive strategies and ethical considerations to ensure that the integration of social media continues to enhance governance rather than undermine its core objectives.

Secondly, the role of emerging technologies, such as artificial intelligence (AI) and machine learning, in enhancing digital governance is a growing area of interest and importance. These technologies have the potential to revolutionise public administration by enabling data-driven decision-making, predictive analytics, and automated processes. AI can analyse vast amounts of data to identify patterns and trends, and help governments anticipate challenges and respond proactively. Machine learning algorithms, on the other hand, can enhance service delivery by personalising residents' interactions and optimising resource allocation. Moreover, these tools are assumed to also improve transparency and accountability by automating routine tasks, reducing human error, and providing real-time updates to the public. However, the integration of such advanced technologies into governance systems comes with challenges, including data privacy concerns, ethical considerations, and the need for significant investment in digital infrastructure. However, ongoing research and collaboration between technologists and policymakers are essential to ensure that these technologies are implemented in ways that promote inclusivity, equity, and trust in governance processes.

Thirdly, bridging the digital divide is essential for ensuring equitable access to e-governance tools, as it directly impacts the inclusivity and effectiveness of participatory

governance. This involves implementing targeted initiatives such as expanding broadband infrastructure in underserved areas, subsidising digital devices for low-income communities, and promoting widespread digital literacy programs. By addressing these disparities, governments can empower all citizens to engage with e-governance platforms, fostering a more inclusive and democratic digital environment. The role of public-private partnerships and international collaborations in achieving these goals cannot be overstated, as they bring resources and expertise critical to closing the digital gap.

Fourthly, the influence of social media on public opinion formation during crises represents a critical dynamic with far-reaching implications for governance. Hence, social media platforms, acting as real-time information hubs, significantly shape public perception during emergencies by amplifying voices, disseminating information, and fostering collective responses. However, the dual nature of these platforms becomes evident as they simultaneously offer opportunities for enhanced transparency and participatory governance while posing risks through the rapid spread of misinformation.

In addition, by examining how public opinion is formed in these high-pressure scenarios, the study underscores the necessity for government agencies to actively engage with social media tools, ensuring timely and accurate communication. Furthermore, these dynamics highlights the importance of integrating robust fact-checking mechanisms and strategic communication frameworks to mitigate misinformation's impact, strengthen public trust, and enhance decision-making processes in crisis governance.

Overall, this study has illuminated the multifaceted role of social media in governance and shed light on its potential as a cornerstone of e-democracy and participatory governance. By fostering inclusivity, accountability, and operational efficiency, social media represents a transformative force in modern governance. However, its effective utilisation requires addressing ethical concerns, resource constraints, and institutional resistance. Therefore, future research and practice should aim to develop robust frameworks that maximise

social media's potential while mitigating its limitations. As technology evolves, governance strategies must adapt to ensure that social media remains a catalyst for transparency, engagement, and innovation in public administration.

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ANNEXURE A: PARTICIPANT INFORMED CONSENT DECLARATION

INFORMED CONSENT DECLARATION
(Participant)

Project Title: **The influence of social media on e-democracy in respect of governance and service delivery within eThekwini metropolitan municipality**

I Siphelele Jiyana ***(researcher)*** from the Department of Public Administration, University of Zululand has requested my permission to participate in the above-mentioned research project.

The nature and the purpose of the research project, and of this informed consent declaration have been explained to me in a language that I understand.

I am aware that:

1. The purpose of the research project is to determine how far social media can be used in eThekwini municipality to carry out democratic aspects such as advocacy, monitoring and organising people through public opinion, and civic interactions with the goal of holding the government accountable as well as using social media to advance service delivery.

2. The University of Zululand has given ethical clearance to this research project, and I have seen/ may request to see the clearance certificate.

3. By participating in this research project, I will be contributing towards benefiting several communities from the creation of new models and responsive monitoring and evaluation systems. Moreover, it will also help to achieve the primary aim of

improving civil society policy advocacy mobilisation and the impact of policy decision-making procedures, as well as providing a space for interaction and expanding solidarity consciousness locally, nationally, and globally. The study intends to contribute to long-term community transformation for future development objectives.

4. I will participate in the project by sharing your provide knowledge and expertise, this will involve various methods such as surveys. This research will involve various methods such as surveys and interviews, information may also be gathered from my social media account insight analyses samples, or other sources. Participants may be expected to attend follow-up visits or assessments where needs be.

5. My participation is entirely voluntary and should I at any stage wish to withdraw from participating further, I may do so without any negative consequences.

6. I will not be compensated for participating in the research, but my out-of-pocket expenses will be reimbursed.

7. There may be risks associated with my participation in the project. I am aware that

   a. the following risks are associated with my participation: They will be no risk in participating into the project.
   b. the following steps have been taken to prevent the risks: Withdrawal from the project.
   c. there is a 0% chance of the risk materialising.

8. The researcher intends publishing the research results in the form of articles, conferences and journals. However, confidentiality and anonymity of records will be maintained and that my name and identity will not be revealed to anyone who

has not been involved in the conduct of the research.

9. I will receive feedback in the form of writing or through conference call upon request regarding the results obtained during the study.

10. Any further questions that I might have concerning the research or my participation will be answered by Siphelele Jiyana jsphe@ymail.com

11. By signing this informed consent declaration I am not waiving any legal claims, rights or remedies.

12. A copy of this informed consent declaration will be given to me, and the original will be kept on record.

I, …….. have read the above information / confirm that the above information has been explained to me in a language that I understand and I am aware of this document's contents. I have asked all questions that I wished to ask and these have been answered to my satisfaction. I fully understand what is expected of me during the research.

I have not been pressurised in any way and I voluntarily agree to participate in the above-mentioned project.

…… ……

Participant's signature **Date**

ANNEXURE B: PERMISSION TO CONDUCT A STUDY

Dear Prospective participant,

Thank you for taking interest in our research. The goal of this study was to look at the influence of social media on e-democracy in respect of governance and service delivery within eThekwini metropolitan municipality initiatives performed by the civil society of the eThekwini metropolitan municipality, with a focus on the fourth industrial revolution. We request that you respond to and complete our questionnaire.

Furthermore, the researchers would like to inform you that the true purpose of this study is to determine how far social media can be used in eThekwini municipality to carry out democratic aspects such as advocacy, monitoring and organising people through public opinion, and civic interactions with the goal of holding the government accountable and using social media to advance service delivery.

The research will also aim to strengthen numerous communities that will benefit from this initiative by developing new models and responsive monitoring and evaluation mechanisms. Therefore, it will contribute to the primary goal of increasing civil society policy advocacy mobilisation and the influence of policy decision-making procedures, as well as creating a place for interaction and developing solidarity consciousness on a local, national, and worldwide scale.

We hope that you found the study interesting and informative.

If you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact us at jsphe@ymail.com

Thank you again for your participation.

Sincerely,

Siphelele Eugene Jiyane

ANNEXURE C: INTERVIEW GUIDE/ SCHEDULE

INSTRUCTIONS TO THE RESPONDENT
Read each all questions carefully and pick the answer you think is best. Fill in the box next to your answer. Please select by clicking to pick your best answer of choice. If you decide to change your answer, you can always make changes by clicking at correct answer over your first answer and then select in a new box to select a new choice. Ask for help if you do not understand something or are not sure how to answer.

Part i: Demographics

Section A

a) Gender: Male ☐ female ☐

b) Race: African ☐ White ☐ Indian ☐ Coloured ☐

c) Age: 14-18 ☐ 19-21 ☐ 22- 35 ☐ 36-65 ☐

d) Education level: ☐

e) Political affiliated ☐ Nonpartisan ☐ Movement affiliated ☐

Section B: Background

How frequently do you use social media platforms?

Daily ☐ several times a week ☐ once a week ☐ rarely ☐ never ☐

Which social media platforms do you use regularly? (Select all that apply)

☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

Facebook Twitter Instagram LinkedIn TikTok

YouTube ☐ snapchat ☐ Reddit ☐ Other (please specify): _____

How long have you been actively using social media platforms?

6 mouths ☐ 1 -3 years ☐ 3 - 5 years ☐ 5 – 10 years ☐ 0 - 15 years ☐

How would you describe your involvement on social media? (Select all that apply)

nonpartisan social media movement ☐

social media activist ☐

political party organisation ☐

None of the above ☐

Part ii: democratic strategies on social media

What are the democratic strategies employed on social media to shape public opinion on governance?

a) Fact-checking and debunking misinformation. ☐

b) Encouraging open dialogue and debate. ☐

c) Promoting civic education and awareness. ☐

d) Mobilising grassroots movements. ☐

e) All the above. ☐

f) Other (please specify) ☐

_____

_____

Can you provide examples of how social media is used to engage citizens in political discussions and decision-making?

_____

_____

How do you believe social media platforms can influence political campaigns and policy-making processes?

A. Very influential ☐

B. Somewhat influential ☐

C. Neutral ☐

D. Not very influential ☐

E. Not influential at all ☐

F. Other (please specify) ☐

Please give reason for your answer:

_____

_____

_____

Part iii: Holding the government accountable.

What techniques do you see being employed on social media to hold the government accountable?

a. Citizen journalism ☐
b. Information sharing ☐
c. Fact-checking ☐
d. Online petitions ☐
e. Hashtag campaigns ☐
f. Online activism ☐
g. Engaging with officials ☐
h. Crowdsourcing and data analysis ☐
i. Whistleblowing ☐
j. Collaborative investigation ☐
k. Others (please specify) ☐

Give reasons for your answer:

_____

_____

How effective do you think these techniques are in promoting government transparency and accountability?

a) Very effective ☐
b) Somewhat effective ☐
c) Neutral ☐
d) Not very effective ☐
e) Not effective at all ☐

f) Others (please specify: _____)

Please select reason below:

a. Accessibility and reach ☐
b. Real-time information ☐
c. Democratization of information ☐
d. Mobilisation and awareness ☐
e. Public discourse and engagement ☐
f. Exposure of corruption and wrongdoing ☐
g. Data analysis and research ☐
h. Other (please specify,below) ☐

_____

_____

_____

Can you share any specific examples of how social media has been successful in holding public officials responsible for their performance?

Yes ☐ **No** ☐

If yes, please elaborate:

_____

_____

_____

_____

Part iv: social media and public services

To what extent do you believe social media is significant in monitoring public services and ensuring their accountability?

1. Large ☐
2. medium ☐
3. Neutral ☐
4. small ☐
5. None ☐

Please select reason for your answer:

a. Accessibility and information sharing ☐
b. Real-time feedback and reporting ☐
c. Crowd monitoring and vigilance ☐
d. Amplifying public dissatisfaction ☐
e. Citizen journalism and investigation ☐
f. Transparency and open data ☐
g. Collaboration and collective action ☐
h. Government responsiveness ☐
i. Others (please specify, below) ☐

_____

_____

_____

_____

How do you think social media can be used to improve the performance and delivery of public services?

1. Best ☐
2. Good ☐
3. Neutral ☐
4. Bad ☐
5. worse ☐
6. Others (please specify: _____)

Select reasons for answers:

a. For real-time feedback on the performance of public services ☐

b. Customer engagement ☐

c. Promotion transparency in the delivery of public services ☐

d. To co-design services that meet customer needs and preferences ☐

e. To drive shared innovation in the delivery of public services ☐

f. Citizens can use social media to report service delivery issues or share their experiences. ☐

g. To facilitate collaboration among service providers, citizens, and other stakeholders ☐

h. Others (please specify, below) ☐

_____

_____

_____

Can you provide examples of successful instances where social media was used to address issues related to public services?

_____

_____

_____

Part v: social media as an advocacy tool

How efficient do you think social media is as a digital civil society advocacy tool for promoting causes and influencing policy decision-making?

1. Very efficient ☐
2. Somewhat efficient ☐
3. C. Neutral ☐
4. D. Not very efficient ☐
5. E. Not efficient at all ☐
6. F. Others (please specify: _____)

Reasons for your answers:

a. Reach and accessibility: vast user base, providing a wide-reaching audience for advocacy efforts. ☐

b. Amplification of voices: enables individuals and organisations to amplify their voices and reach a broader audience than traditional advocacy methods ☐

c. Rapid information sharing: can be effective in crisis situations or when time-sensitive policy decisions are being made. ☐

d. Community Building and Networking: allows like-minded individuals and organisations to connect, collaborate, and form communities around shared causes ☐

e. Direct Engagement with Decision-Makers provides an opportunity for direct engagement with policymakers, politicians, and other influential individuals ☐

f. Limitations and Challenges: algorithms and the presence of misinformation can hinder the dissemination of accurate information and impede the effectiveness of advocacy efforts. ☐

g. Others (please be specific) ☐

_____

_____

_____

_____

Have you personally participated in any social media campaigns or movements related to social or political issues?

If yes, please describe your involvement and the impact it had, if any.

_____

_____

_____

_____

Do you believe social media has the power to bring about significant social or political change?

Yes ☐ ☐ **No**

Select reasons for your answer:

a. Democratization of Information ☐
b. Amplification and Mobilisation ☐
c. Real-Time Reporting ☐
d. Direct Interaction with Decision-Makers ☐
e. Global Connectivity and Solidarity ☐
f. Spreading propaganda and fake news ☐
g. Others (please specify)

_____

_____

_____

Part vi: social media and political campaigns

How effective do you find social media platforms in political campaigns, corporate promotion, and news dissemination?

1. Very effective ☐
2. Somewhat effective ☐
3. C. Neutral ☐
4. D. Not very effective ☐

5. E. Not effective at all
6. F. Others (please specify: _____)

Select reason for your answer:

a. Reach and Engagement: Candidates can share their messages, policies, and campaign updates, while also interacting with supporters and addressing concerns. ☐

b. Targeted Advertising: allowing political campaigns to reach specific demographics. ☐

c. Grassroots Mobilisation: facilitate grassroots mobilisation efforts, helping campaigns rally supporters, organise events, and raise funds. ☐

d. Amplification of Controversy: platforms can quickly amplify controversies or negative information. ☐

e. Brand Visibility: platforms provide a means for companies to enhance their brand visibility, engage with customers. ☐

f. Rapid Information Sharing: platforms excel at the rapid dissemination of news and information, enabling real-time updates and citizen journalism. ☐

g. Diverse Sources and perspectives: offer a wide range of sources and perspectives ☐

h. Virality and Trending Topics: News stories can quickly go viral on social media, driving conversations and influencing public discourse. ☐

i. Misinformation Challenge: correction of rapid spread of unverified or false information can occur. ☐

j. Other reasons (please specify)

_____

_____

_____

Can you provide examples of successful political campaigns or movements that heavily relied on social media platforms?

_____

_____

_____

In your opinion, what are the advantages and disadvantages of using social media for political purposes?

_____

_____**Tha nk you for your participation! Your responses will contribute to valuable insights into the influence of social media on e-democracy in respect of governance and service delivery within eThekwini metropolitan municipality.**

ANNEXURE D: ETHICAL CLEARANCE APPLICATION FORM

Does this study cover research involve:	YES	NO
Children (individuals under the age of 18 years)		X
Persons who are intellectually or mentally impaired		X
Persons who have experienced traumatic or stressful life circumstances		X
Persons who are HIV positive		X
Persons highly dependent on medical care		X
Persons in dependent or unequal relationships		X
Persons in captivity		X
Persons living in particularly vulnerable life circumstances		X

If "Yes" what measures, you will take to protect the autonomy of respondents and to prevent social stigmatization and/or secondary victimization of respondents. If you are unsure about any of these concepts, please consult your project leader/supervisor.
N/A

Will data collection involve any of the following:	**YES**	**NO**
Access to confidential information without prior consent of participants		X
Participants being required to commit an act which might diminish self-respect or cause them to experience shame, embarrassment, or regret		X
Participants being exposed to questions which may be experienced as stressful or upsetting, or to procedures which may have unpleasant or harmful side effects		X
The use of stimuli, tasks or procedures which may be experienced as stressful, noxious, or unpleasant		X
Any **form** of deception		X

If "Yes" explain and justify. Explain what steps you will take to minimize the potential stress/harm.
N/A

Will any of the following instruments be used for purposes of data collection:	**YES**	**NO**
Questionnaire (Structured, Semi-structured)	X	
Interview schedule (one on one interviews, focus groups)	X	
Observation Schedule	X	
Psychometric test		X
Other		X

If data collection involves the use of a psychometric test or equivalent assessment instrument, you are required to provide evidence here that the measure is likely to provide a valid, reliable, and unbiased estimate of the construct being measured. If data collection involves interviews and/or focus groups, please provide a list of the topics to be covered/ kinds of questions to be asked.

N/A		
Will the autonomy of participants be protected through the use of an informed consent form, which specifies (in language that respondents will understand):	**YES**	**NO**
The nature and purpose/s of the research	**X**	
The identity and institutional association of the researcher and supervisor/project leader and their contact details	**X**	
The fact that participation is voluntary	**X**	
That responses will be treated in a confidential manner	**X**	
Any limits on confidentiality which may apply	**X**	
That anonymity will be ensured where appropriate (e.g., coded/ disguised names of participants/ respondents/ institutions)	**X**	
The fact that participants are free to withdraw from the research at any time without any negative or undesirable consequences to themselves	**X**	
The nature and limits of any benefits participants may receive as a result of their participation in the research	**X**	
Is a copy of the informed consent **form** attached?	**X**	
If not, this needs to be explained and justified, also the measures to be adopted to ensure that the respondents fully understand the nature of the research and the consent that they are giving.		
N/A		

How will the research data collected via the interview or questionnaire be safely stored and subsequently be disposed of? Interview Questionnaires, Analysed documents.
Lockable Safe

In the subsequent dissemination of your research findings – in the form of the finished research project, publication and oral presentation. How will anonymity/ confidentiality be maintained and protected		
Personal particulars for all participants will not be disclosed		
Is this research supported by funding that is likely to inform or impact in any way on the design, outcome and dissemination of the research?	**YES**	**NO**
		x
If yes, please, explained and justified. N/A		

FOR OFFICIAL USE ONLY				
Research Coordinator				
Unique EC reference number				
Proposal approved / provisionally approved	❑	Yes	❑	No
Ethical clearance granted	❑	Yes	❑	No
Refer to Committee for approval	❑	Yes	❑	No
Referral date				

ANNEXURE E: GATEKEEPER REQUEST LETTER

UNIVERSITY OF ZULULAND

University of Zululand, Private Bag X1001, KwaDlangezwa, 3886
W: www.unizulu.ac.za

T: +27 35 902 6615 **C:** +27 72 639 0115 **E:** JilN@unizulu.ac.za

Faculty of Commerce, Administration and Law
Department of Public Administration

10 July 2024

EThekwini Metropolitan municipality

Municipal institute of learning

Dear Sir/Madam

REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH

This letter serves as a request for permission to conduct research at eThekwini Metropolitan municipality. Research will involve data collection from sampled number of employees. The research is strictly for academic purposes to fulfil the requirement to obtain a Doctor of Public Administration degree for Siphelele Jiyana, student number 200801994. The findings of the research project titled "The influence of social media on e-democracy in respect of governance and service delivery within eThekwini metropolitan municipality", will be shared with the municipality and the supervisor will participate in the feedback session with the city. This will assist in areas of development, serve as a baseline for future assessments and further enhancement on the processes followed in e-governance and service delivery.

Your approval to conduct this research will be greatly appreciated. For more information, please do not hesitate to contact myself on the contact details provided above OR Siphelele Jiyana: jsphe@ymail.com 073 831 6546 (The Candidate).

Sincerely,

.....

Prof Nokukhanya N Jili
HoD and Supervisor

ANNEXURE F: GATE KEEPER LETTER

POD 7, GROUND FLOOR, INTUTHUKO JUNCTION, 750 MARY THIPHE STREET, UMKHUMBANE, CATO MANOR, DURBAN 4001
TEL: 031 322 4513, FAX: 031 261 3405, FAX TO EMAIL: 086 265 7160, EMAIL: MILE@DURBAN.GOV.ZA, WEBSITE: WWW.MILE.ORG.ZA

For attention:
Chair of Research Ethics Committee
Faulty of Commerce Administration & Law
University of Zululand
kwaDlangezwa
3886
1 August 2024

RE: LETTER OF SUPPORT TO S.E JIYANA STUDENT NO: -200801994 GRANTING PERMISSION TO USE ETHEKWINI MUNICIPALITY AS A STUDY SITE

The Communications Unit and Municipal Institute of Learning (MILE) in eThekwini Municipality, have considered a request from **Siphelele Eugene Jiyana** (Mr) to use eThekwini Municipality as a research study site for the purposes of undertaking a research study entitled: **The influence of social media on e-democracy in respect of governance and service delivery within eThekwini metropolitan municipality-** Leading to the awarding of a **Doctor of Philosophy in(Public Administration Degree)**

We wish to inform you of the acceptance of his request and hereby assure his of our utmost cooperation towards achieving his academic goals; the outcome which we believe may help this municipality to improve it evident base on governance & service delivery. The student is reminded of the ethical consideration regulations when conducting this research. The student must take all necessary measures to ensure his personal safety during the research period as eThekwini Municipality indemnifies itself from any incidental claims that may arise. **In return, we stipulate as mandatory that the student contacts sthabile.mbongwa@durban.gov.za to present the preliminary results and recommendations of this study to the related unit/s.**

Wishing the student all the best in his studies.

.....
Mr. Mandla Nsele
Act. Head: Communications Unit
eThekwini Municipality

.....
Dr. Collin Pillay
Program Manager: MILE
eThekwini Municipality

. I . Siphelele Jiyana .....hereby accept as mandatory that I will comply fully as per the conditions stipulated above.

Signed: ..... Date: 01 August 2024