The use of social media for employee communication in selected South African municipalities

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ABSTRACT

Social media networks have become integral to everyday human life as they are now essential sources of news, entertainment and have enabled collaboration in both organisations and communities. This study sought to explore social media's use for employee communication and the challenges encountered in appropriating these social technologies focusing on communications departments in five local municipalities in the O.R Tambo District Municipality. The researcher adopted Grunig and Hunt's (1984) Excellence Theory as the theoretical framework for this study. The researcher used a mixed-methods research approach to collect, present and analyse data. Due to the COVID 19 pandemic, the researcher used twenty-eight online questionnaires to gather quantitative data. Simultaneously, in-depth telephonic interviews were also conducted with the four communications managers in municipalities to collect qualitative data. Quantitative data were analysed using Statistical Packages for Social Sciences (SPSS) software, and qualitative were nested in the quantitative data to expound the results. At the same time, the researcher undertook thematic analyses for the qualitative data.

The results of the research revealed that employees utilised social media for communication in the municipalities. Facebook and WhatsApp were particularly popular as they enable two-way symmetrical communication and dialogical communication. Social media played a significant role as a communication tool during the COVID 19 hard national lockdown as employees worked remotely. However, the challenge is that social media was not integrated and mainstreamed in overall communication strategies. As a result, some municipalities did not have social media policies and their support for social media use was minimal contrary to the Government Social Media Policy.

Furthermore, the findings revealed that respondents perceived social media as an effective and useful communication tool for employees despite these challenges. The study proposes a conceptual framework of integrating social media within employee communication in local municipalities. In terms of recommendations, this study recommends that social media be integrated into municipalities' overall communication strategies and must adhere to Government Communication Policy (2018). For

improved symmetrical communications, municipalities must also provide support by providing data, technology, training and a supportive policy framework.

Keywords: Social media, employee communication, two-way symmetrical communication, collaboration, networking and local municipalities.

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DEDICATION

I want to dedicate this thesis to my late sisters, Phendulwa Grawe-Bam who passed on in 2018 when I started my journey in this research and Khanyisa Grawe who passed on in 2020 when I was writing final chapters of this thesis. May their souls rest in peace.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

1.1   Background of the study

Social media has become so pervasive in the everyday lives of many people in South Africa. The aforementened statement is from The Digital Landscape in South Africa (2019: 12) which claims 40% use Facebook; YouTube has about 47%; WhatsApp has about 45%; Messenger has about 31%; LinkedIn has about 29%, and 26% of the South African population use Twitter. The extraordinary changes brought about by social media in ordinary people's everyday lives, inform this study. Today, people can interact at any time using these social media sites and platforms. Beyond ordinary people, organisations must ensure that they use the right social media to communicate with their stakeholders. Thus, this research explores the benefits of social media usage by public relations officers in local municipalities to improve internal communication in the organisation.

According to Mollet, Bromley, Gilson and Williams (2017), social media are computer-enabled systems that have allowed people to create user-produced content that they use to share texts, pictures, videos and sound. "The use of social media platforms such as blogs, social media sites and social tagging is proliferating at a pace that is incredible" (Treem and Leonardi, 2012:145). Social media are new communication platforms used in businesses, organisations and government departments. They have created a small distance among people who live in different areas by sending messages, videos, and sharing photos. Kim and Ko (2012:2) add that, "social media are online applications aimed at facilitating social communications, collaborations and the distribution of content using accessible communication systems."

Furthermore, Kim and Ko (2012) and Jindal (2016) consider social networks a diversity of forms, comprising social blogs, microblogging, weblogs, podcasts, pictures, and social bookmarking and videos. It uses internet-based technologies to make communication an interactive dialogue with the people. Ashley and Tuten (2015) confirm social media include online networks for messaging in various ways, represent

an increasingly important approach for organisations to communicate with strategic audience segments.

Also, Jacobs and Spierings (2016) state that social media are cheaper technologies and require no expertise to have the same or greater reach than traditional media. Thus, this study regards social media as a form of communication that are affordable, efficient and effective communication strategy. They are a paperless form of communication used anytime and in anyplace. It suggests that social media would boost effectiveness among municipality employees and provide accessibility to municipality citizens.

Nah and Saxton (2012) and Bonsón, Torres, Royo and Flores (2012) point out that the fast, spreading of social media networks provide new possibilities for organisations and municipalities to communicate and engage stakeholders. Vorster (2016) expands that social communication tools make it easy for professionals and organisations to engage their stakeholders, influencers and peers, and if used correctly, it is a reputation management tool. This section will explain the study's background, objectives, problem statement, ethics, and chapters outline.

1.2   Problem statement

This research assumes that local municipalities have immensely encountered difficulties adapting to social media to enhance employees' communication. This assumption is in line with the need for information by employees, particularly the communications unit in this era of information age facilitated by social media. Spagnoletti (2013) confirms that social media applications are rarely part of municipalities' communication strategies. There is a need for more knowledge about using these applications to their advantage and benefit. Sadioglu (2016) concurs that about 90% of local municipalities use social media, but they have not been integrated cohesively into communication strategies, resulting in them not using social media effectively.

1.3 Research objectives

This study's research objectives are in two sections: the main research objective and secondary objectives.

1.3.1 Main research objective

- To explore social media use for employee communication in local municipalities' communications departments in the O.R Tambo District Municipality.

1.3.2 Secondary objectives

- To establish communications practitioners' perception on the use of social media in local municipalities.

- To ascertain the role of social media in municipalities overall communication strategies from the viewpoint of employees who oversee communications in these organisations.

- To examine the challenges encountered in using social media in local municipalities according to employees who oversee communications in these organisations.

1.4 Research questions

The research questions investigated in this study were grouped into two sections, namely: the main research question and secondary research questions.

1.4.1 Main research question

- How do communications departments in local municipalities in O.R Tambo District Municipality use social media for employee communication?

1.4.2 Secondary research questions

- What are communications practitioners' perceptions about the use of social media in local municipalities?

- What is social media's role in municipalities' overall communication strategies according to employees who oversee these organisations' communications?

- What are the challenges encountered in using social media in local municipalities, according to employees who oversee these organisations' communications?

1.5 Significance of the research

This study will enable and provide municipality employees with compulsory background on social media usage and the benefits of using contemporary forms of communication, such as social media to ensure that social media networks' usage is effective. Sherren (2011) posits that instead of regular face-to-face meetings, workers will connect on Facebook, WhatsApp and other virtual inventions, allowing groups of workers to team up on projects in new and intuitive ways. The significance of this research is also in line with the aim of this research which is to explore social media use for employee communication in local municipalities' communications departments in their processes of communication, sharing of contents, information and knowledge.

This research will further contribute to knowledge by producing a reputable study on social media use in local municipalities. The study is significant because there is limited evidence in the literature that explores this subject in the spectrum of local municipalities.

1.6 Delimitation of the study

Limitations are constraints that are largely beyond your control but could affect the study outcomes (Simon and Goes, 2013). The researcher focused on social media use by public relations officers in local municipalities and excluded other departments and other officers. The decision to delimit this research study to public relations officers is motivated by the fact that they are the communications specialists. They communicate municipal programmes with other officers and other departments more often. Social media may facilitate communication as it allows two-way dialogical communication. Social media networks to be studied in this research project includes Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn and WhatsApp, as they are user friendly.

1.7   Outline of chapters

Chapter 1: Introduction and background

This chapter outlines a brief discussion of what this study entails: background to the study, rationale, background of the study area, problem statements research questions and objectives. The introduction to this study focuses on the concept of social media in local municipalities.

Chapter 2: A literature review

Reviews literature from various authors on the use of social media in the local municipality. This chapter provides a literature review on social media usage both from international and South African perspective, thereby discussing relevant areas about local municipalities. This chapter also examined vital literature pertinent to this research topic.

Chapter 3: Theoretical framework

This chapter presents the theoretical framework used to understand and examine the research problem and analyse its findings.

Chapter 4: Research methodology

This chapter discusses the methodology, research design and the methods used for data collection and the justifications for the choices. Data collection procedure, sampling procedures, ethics and data analysis as well are explained.

Chapter 5: Findings

This chapter contains the collection and presentation of data, which stems from the research objectives.

Chapter 6: Discussion

This chapter analyses emergent themes from the data and discusses the main findings. Here, the research objectives, research questions and theoretical framework direct the analysis and discussion.

Chapter 7: Conclusion and recommendations

This chapter provides a summary of study findings. The researcher will determine whether the study met the objectives of this research. Drawing from the results, the researcher will also recommend areas that further investigations could address.

1.8   Conclusion

This chapter discussed the problem statement and its relations to the background of the study. The chapter summarises the use of social media within the local municipalities' realm as a tool that can be used as a communication strategy among the employees. Research objectives and research questions are highlighted and significance of the study, then end by providing limitations and chapter outline.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1   Introduction

This chapter discusses the literature on social media use and employee communication in municipalities. The study highlights the segments according to the main objective: to explore social media usage for employee communication in local municipalities in the O.R Tambo District Municipality. The goal is to ensure that the literature review is logical. It is followed by reviewing literature based on secondary objectives, namely, establishing employees' perception of social media use in municipalities. The literature review will also ascertain social media's role in municipalities' overall communication strategies and examine the challenges encountered in social media use in local municipalities. The discussion ends with possible opportunities that municipalities can adopt to enhance the use of social media. The researcher also discussed the impact, influence and change that social media has on communication in the public relations industry and social media communication management in the local government.

2.2   Concepts

Generally, this study sought to explore social media use for employee communication in local municipalities of the O.R Tambo District Municipality. Therefore, this study will be dealing with employee communications, internal communications and social media. The study investigates social media's function in achieving employee communication in local municipalities, focusing on internal employee communication.

2.2.1 Internal employee communication

In this study, employee communication is seen as a critical concept because it is a crucial practice in which employees build relationships by sharing information, make sense of the information, and create organisational culture and values. Men and Stacks (2014) believe that internal communication allows for interactive decision making, employee collaboration, information sharing and an environment that brings about productivity and builds a sense of organisational ownership. Several scholars such as

Sivarajah, Irani, and Weerakkody (2015), Ngcobo (2016), Murabe (1990) and Mmutle, (2014) have established the overwhelming significance of internal employee communication in the present-day business setting. Employee communication is the strength of any organisation, be it private or public sector. However, besides the fact that scholars have generated significant research on internal communication, there have been few empirical investigations into the importance of employee communication among municipality employee communication and how they utilise social media platforms in their communication

Definitions of internal communication differ significantly. Quirke (2017) and Kim (2005) note the following common elements that constitute internal communication: messaging, flow of the messages, purpose, and medium. Internal communication comprises staff members and their relationships. Block and Laurinkari (2012) argued by defining internal communication to understand the impact of communication in an organisational setting. It comprises the production and delivery of messages and facilitates an information flow among the organisation's people (Quirke, 2017; Kim, 2005; Block and Laurinkari, 2012).

In terms of internal employee communication, Gregory (2016) notes that keeping good relationships with the internal public is one of the most important public relations managers' everyday jobs. Sivarajah, Irani, and Weerakkody (2015) maintain that the environment of internal communication shows a data collecting function for staff. It affords them with vital information to support them in understanding organisational activities to achieve organisational goals. Furthermore, Kim (2005) used internal communication creations as antecedents in his study to explore an internal relational aspect of organisations. The study assumed that these aspects make internal staff's perceptions, attitudes, and behaviours in an organisation. Internal structures appear to be a substantial factor in employees' responsibilities and actions. An example is that organisations have systems that allow employees to participate in decision making. Thus, the focus of this study is intra-organisational interactions, particularly employee organisation communication.

Mmutle (2014) studied internal communication as strategic for internal staff engagement and their performance using a case study of LG Electronics, South Korea.

The research stemmed from the need to understand internal communication as a strategic function that improves employee engagements, efficiency and organisational success. Furthermore, they showed significant awareness of reasons that contribute enormously to internal communication as a strategic function that enhances interaction, corporate culture, aims and ethics. The finding showed that internal staff had a great sense of identification and rights as part of programmes that intensified employee influence, level of communication, and understanding of the organisation's goals. Moreover, the scientific findings suggested employees' integration into a coalition of the organisation. They were also as innovators, and their contributions and suggestions were valued. The abovementioned perspective is in line with this study as they outline the critical driver and influences of internal employee communication which this study is investigating.

According to Wood (1999), numerous ways allows for continuous information to be in the organisation:

i.   Personal communication between the manager and the staff;
ii.   Written communication such as memos;
iii. Circulars; and
iv.   In-house newsletters or notice boards

Employee communication encompasses these communications tools listed above, but social media use in the local municipality has not been in literature discourses in this digital age. This study hopes to speak to that gap by providing a significant opportunity to advance the understanding of social media platform usage among municipality employees.

2.2.2 Public relations practitioner communication

There is a lot of published research that aims to define public relations. Smith (2017) defines public relations practice as the art and science of examining trends, predicting their results, encouraging organisational leaders and employing planned programmes of action which serve the interests of the organisation and the public. Grunig (1992:4) provides an in-depth analysis of public relations showing its relevance by giving the most common used definition of public relations as the comprehensive planning,

execution, and evaluation of an organisation's communication with external and internal publics. Much of the current literature on public relations pays particular attention to the Public Relations Institute of Southern Africa's (PRISA). PRISA defines public relations as the management, through communication, of the perceptions and strategic relationships between an organisation and its internal and external stakeholders (Rawjee, Veerasamy, and Gqamane, 2012). Therefore, in this study, public relations will be defined as the planning, executing, and managing an organisation's strategic publics; and forms an essential part of the organisation's total communication management strategy (Grunig 1992; Rawjee, Veerasamy, and Gqamane, 2012).

The core function of public relations is communication management which includes messages, channels, and the audience. Argenti (2012), argues that communication management is the management of communication on behalf of an organisation. It is communication aimed at increasing organisational efficiency by creating and maintaining relationships with interested parties. Grunig and Hunt (1984), define public relations as the management of communication between an organisation and its stakeholders. This definition equates the practice of public relations to that of communication management. According to Grunig (1992), public relations and communication management are comprehensive than communication methods and comprehensive than planned public relations programmes such as media relations or publicity. Public relations and communication management define the general planning and implementation and evaluation of an organisation's communication with key stakeholders that affect an organisation's capabilities to attain its goals.

Thus, communication management refers to the study of how people communicate in an organisational setting. Erasmus (2012) suggests that members of an organisation view the communication culture from four dimensions of meaning. These dimensions comprise the use of face-to-face communication, the communication system and the functioning of the communication process. Erasmus (2012) argues that internal from external communication are inseparable, thus also internal communication goes beyond organisational premises and experiences from members. Most communication

divisions are responsible for internal and external communication, and practitioners should typically be in charge.

The internet has changed how companies and institutions communicate, engage and interact with generic publics over the last decade. Technologies have become more prevalent in recent years, and the internet's notion as the strategic tool for sharing information and ideas is growing. Even though the power of this reality of internet on corporate communications is not explicitly defined, it is evident that the internet is a swiftly changing environment and all public relations practitioners should be aware of this change (Gregory, 2016). Internet has led to a new area of interest among public relations practitioners that seek to understand a better way to develop a strong workforce to cope with the changes brought about technologies. This changing climate offers internal communicators some exclusive opportunities for short-term success and long-term growth of their operations. The elementary recipe to these unique opportunities is a better understanding of internal communication among municipality employees.

Several studies have investigated the significance and benefits of new communication technologies in public relations. There is now no question about the relevance and importance of social media in public relations and no uncertainty that offers significant challenges and opportunities for practitioners (Erasmus, 2012). Some studies have found that practitioners try to engage in the online conversation on behalf of their organisation to expand their influence and collaborations by using the enormous environment and speed that social media offers, and to reach out to new stakeholders (Dozier, Grunig, and Grunig, 2013, Toledano, 2010:231). Collectively, the definitions provided in previous studies outline a critical part of communication in public relations in this age of digitalisation using the available technology opportunities such as social media.

2.2.3 The role of public relations in organisations

Public relations is two-way communication between the organisation and its audiences, and it is critical to an organisation's success. It is about handling organisational relationships to attain and maintain social groupings whose support to

the organisation rest on achieving its mission. Activities planned to promote contact with all stakeholders (internal and external) are known as public relations (Mikacova and Gavlakova, 2014). Thus, public relations play a crucial role in stakeholder relationship management. One of the primary role-players in achieving this is the public relations practitioner. Communications division might have the essential knowledge to practice exceptional communication. Still, senior communications managers must also share a mutual understanding of communication's role and purpose in an organisation for excellent communication.

The need for this study has risen from the perception that, if social media is to be implemented in municipalities' employee communication effectively, internal and external stakeholder communication will be vital. Public relations practitioners often have the know-how that can contribute to organisational decision-making. This practice of two-way symmetrical communication is the foundation of excellent communication.

2.2.4 Communication in local government

The researcher has explored the concept of communication in local government extensively and discussed in the existing literature. Reviewed studies considered communication platforms for a government-citizen interface in South Africa and effective public participation in municipalities. These studies place their focus more on external communication. This study argues that there is a lack of literature focussing on internal communication. Maqoko (2014) investigated the factors concerning employee satisfaction in the O.R. Tambo District Municipality. Maqoko (2014) further state that there are low levels of job satisfaction among O.R. Tambo District Municipality employees. The study reported shortcomings in internal organisational communication in the municipality. A significant level of job satisfaction among employees may be the basis of a highly dedicated and committed workforce. The benefits of that could impact positively on municipal performance. The study also revealed that it is a practice at O.R. Tambo District Municipality that directors hold meetings chaired by the accounting officer. These meetings discuss the municipality's strategic goals, including integrated development plans, budget implementation plans, and services delivery. These issues have an impact on the performance of divisional

heads and employees at a lower level. Some of the agenda items deliberated by top management affect the wellbeing of the employees. As a result, Maqoko (2014) suggests that there must prompt communication of resolutions from the director's meetings to the municipality's lowest level employee. Well-informed employees are good employees; therefore, organisations have the mandate to supply information to their employees before providing it to the outside world. This study investigates the employee's perspective on using social media to attain such goals in municipalities.

Using Bolobedu South at the Greater Tzaneen Municipality as a case study, Mamokhere, (2019) explored the underlying reasons behind municipal service delivery protests. The paper also examined whether members of community protest due to inadequate or sufficient services. The study revealed, among other things, that lack of access to information is an underlying factor behind protests. Linking these two studies done by Maqoko, (2014) in the O.R. Tambo District Municipality and Mamokhere, (2019), both municipalities do not have proper/ effective internal and external communication channels. As a result, it is essential to establish reliable communication channels and public relations starting within the organisation and then externally.

Ngcobo (2016) argues that communication is needed for the organisation's survival because it allows people to create and exchange information. It can make communication to shift upwards, downwards and horizontal. Communication in an organisation serves four main functions: informative, persuasive, integrative and regulative function (Myers, Knox, Pawlowski, and Ropog, 1999). Communication in organisations changed from its primary focus, such as speaking, writing, and persuasion to broader areas such as organisational behaviour and organisational culture (Barker and Angelopulo, 2006). Communication has transformed from traditional platforms and has developed and expanded throughout the organisations to the point that it is fundamental to an organisation's functioning.

2.3   The new era: public relations and social media

2.3.1 Defining social media

Studies into technological advancement and social media use in some different professions have led to many descriptions and explanations. The field of public relations and communication also offer various definitions of social media. According to Macnamara and Zerfass (2012), social media are internet-based applications put together on the technological grounds of Web 2.0. Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) define social media as some internet-based applications of Web 2.0, which permits the formation and exchange of user-generated content. From these definitions, Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) note that to understand social media, one has to understand Web 2.0. According to Moyo, (2014), this term Web 2.0 describes how users apply the World Wide Web to share information. From numerous definitions proposed by the founders of Web 2.0 and literature on Web 2.0, this growing communication technology's defining characteristics can be shortened to openness for participation and interactive dialogue, collaboration, and conversation (Macnamara and Zerfass, 2012).

Terms such as social media and social networks are interchangeable. However, Wigley and Zhang (2011) note some difference between the two. Wigley and Zhang (2011) posit that social networking sites are tools enabled by specific programmes to make connections to share and distribute content. These consist of a user profile, devices that allow end-users to connect and write comments on other pages.

2.3.2 Social media communication management and public relations practitioner communication

The overall message emerging from several academic publications such as Alfonso and Miguel (2006); Mergel (2013:123) and Graham and Avery (2013) is that public relations are in the process of acceptance of new opportunities. Companies and institutions have changed how they interact with their audiences due to the advent of social media. Innovative tools such as social media platforms have become more widespread, and the internet has become a strategic tool for knowledge and

information sharing. The impact is not well defined around social media's new reality on corporate communications, especially public government institutions in South Africa. Alfonso and Miguel, (2006) postulate that it is apparent that the internet is changing the practice for public relations rapidly, and all public relations practitioners have to be knowledgeable about these changes. This describes the approach that uses online technologies and enables users to share information, experiences and opinions (Mergel, 2013:123).

Graham and Avery, (2013) analysed the views, trends and developments of social media usage in local government in the United States. Their study examined social media use by the government at a local level and citizens' perceptions of social media use, using data from 463 local government officials. The study discussed how social media is used for public relations functions to serve transparency, participatory, and democratic models in government environments. Results indicated that social media is somewhat underused by local governments officials, with about a 60% overall use rate. The study reported that it was unsatisfactory to find out that officials' views of whether or not the citizens expected them to use social media or not. Facebook and Twitter were the commonly utilised tools, and the majority of posts were about special occasions. Recognising the significance of technology in municipalities almost two decades ago, Moon (2002) conducted a study to assess the rhetoric and reality of e-government at the local municipality level in Texas.

The study further explored two institutional issues: size and type of government that contribute to the embracing of e-government tools among municipalities. Generally, the study concluded that e-government use had been accepted by numerous municipalities and has guaranteed that social media offer abundant opportunities for local municipalities. Therefore, this study will provide information on how social media usage among local municipalities' employees by providing a significant prospect to advance the social media platform's understanding.

Social media's transparent dialogic environment reduces many communication barriers that governments have encountered in the past (Bertot and Jaeger, 2010; Graham and Avery, 2013). The introduction of podcasts, blogs, and social networks makes available the avenues for government officials to communicate directly among

themselves or with publics without the interference of editors who can shorten the information. However, organisations must be concerned and be aware of the online behaviours that may damage the brand, like leakage of intellectual property, criticising management and embarrassing employees that could happen on an internal level (Kluemper, Mitra and Wang, 2016:153). On the other hand, organisations must be aware that using social media have many advantages that can be established, especially for public relations programmes.

Public relations practitioners who work in government note different and developing communication strategies for government organisations than businesses or non-profit organisations (Graham, and Avery, 2013). Liu and Horsley (2007) offered a theoretical approach to examining companies' and government communication practices' differences. The emphasis was that the public sector setting makes unique challenges and openings that distinguish public relations from the private division. The government's challenges and opportunities consist of politics, poor public perceptions, public good, and communication (Graham and Avery, 2013).

The data gathered from 450 local municipality officials across the United States by Avery and Graham (2013) explicitly discusses how staff and time resources, citizen expectations, and social media effectiveness affect social media use for networking, conferencing, and most research and information sharing. The study eventually reveals how social media is used as a strategic, tactical and public relations function to support interactive and transparent management. The results were that social media is a useful tool and offers future trends to government officials. The increasing popularity of social media has forced public relations practitioners to incorporate social media in their communication strategies and communication plans.

Furthermore, Graham (2014) conducted a study on communication in the digital era examining the effects social media in local municipality public relations. The study looked at social media as a communication tool and explored its usage and perceptions thereof. The results indicated that social media is a valuable communication tool for local municipalities.

Previous research by Jiang, Luo, and Kulemeka (2016) into social media use and engagement on how to improve and measure social media usage during crises have been consistent with Graham's (2014) study. The outcomes revealed that communication managers recognise the significance of making essential understandings of work to analyse participation signs in the stakeholders' interactive social media platforms. Additionally, the study reported that communications divisions recognise social media's prominence for scanning the environment, generating online voice notes to provide precise timeliness information to the public. An engaged public turn maintains an excellent level of presence and contributes in an ongoing conversation about the organisations and stakeholders.

Social media platforms are a major contributing factor to employees' communication behaviours for public relations. Another study by Krishna and Kim, (2015) studied employee communication manners in a de-identified online communication environment by analysing confessions written about on a Facebook confessions page. The researcher studied both positive and negative confessions to identify employees' motives in posting them. Generally, positive posts show gratitude for social media presence at work and social support from other staff members using social media to send the messages. In contrast, negative posts were words of anger and discrediting management.

Social media is growing as a critical public relations tool and enables two-way symmetrical communications with the public. Public relations practitioners face challenges with this unprecedented swift growth of social media that empowers practitioners. Practitioners are excited about these tools as they allow them to engage directly with their publics without any interference. Alikilic and Atabek (2012) provide an in-depth analysis by examining the social media acceptance of public relations practitioners in Turkey and how they use social media internally and externally, through an online survey of 126 public relations practitioners who subscribe to Turkish Public Relations Association. Results show that Turkish Public Relations professionals enjoy social media in modern public relations practice. However, the study reported that some social media platforms are swiftly adopted and that e-mail is the most adopted, followed by virtual world platforms.

Similarly, Kent (2013) explores how new media and access to an abundance of information is affecting democracy and the responsibility of public relations practitioners post-mass media. Kent reviewed the advantages and disadvantages of new media, vis-a-vis how public relations can advance communitarianism and dialogue. He also discusses social media's dialogical use.

To engage internal stakeholders effectively, organisations have to engage in two-way communication within a symmetrical worldview. It encourages internal stakeholders to feel more appreciated, thereby contributing to decision-making and achieving organisational goals. Practising two-way communication helps shape and build stronger interactions among managers and employees, leading to increased synergy and employee collaboration and engagement. Reyneke (2013) observes social media, specifically Facebook, as a platform that can make available transparent and open communication. In his study on Facebook's expectations for internal stakeholder engagement, Reyneke (2013) revealed that Facebook might also enable two-way communication, which leads to improved employee collaboration and communication. The study conclusively reported that it is apparent that Facebook may be an additional internal communication tool to improve employee communication. It requires trust between managers and employees in that management ought to trust employees to use Facebook in an ethical way to voice their views freely, without the fear of victimisation. Facebook can encourage engagements on a social level for relationships building inside the organisation.

Another study by Ndaba (2014) on how the local government interacts with its public used Ulundi municipality in South Africa as a case study. This study identified the need to enhance public participation and effective communication in local government. The study demonstrated challenges faced by local municipalities such as inadequate, ineffective communication techniques as the leading causes of its failure to meets its intended purpose.

Assessing the role of external municipality communication on service delivery issues at Mangaung Metropolitan Municipality, Gino (2012) states that local municipality links communities to the national government. This study suggests that if the local municipality can effectively implement communication, they can minimise damage to

relationships and reputation if any crisis occurs. The findings showed that external municipality communication at the Mangaung Metropolitan Municipality causes concerns and negatively impacts service delivery. Hence, serious intervention is needed regarding communication to improve the situation.

Similarly, Matthee (2011) investigated the use of social media to create a dialogue about brands. The study showed that social media application would positively affect public relations practice when utilised to its full potential. Jeffries (2012) argues that many research articles look at how internet-based micro-blogging affects social connectedness. However, literature looks at the effect that micro-blogging has when used internally, which would lead to effective employee communication or influence the organisation's competitive nature. Jeffries (2012) study used Vodacom, a telecommunications company in South Africa and looked at its information and communications technology (ICT), as a case study. The results demonstrated that even though Vodacom's micro-blogging set up has not matured at the time of the study, there were benefits already realised from using this service and employees were now engaging and communicating with each other on a personal level. This type of setting, therefore, promotes the organisation to react better to competitive forces. Understanding research like these is crucial in this study, as they shed more light on how other organisations perceive the impact of social media on employee communication.

Kilonda (2014) research was to comprehend how Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) in the Western Cape employee social media to communicate with their stakeholders based on interactive, relational and dialogic perspective. The study's secondary objective was to explore how social media are being integrated into organisations stakeholder relations management strategies to nurture and sustain relations. The research findings revealed that the sampled NGOs were using social media in different ways to build and maintain stakeholder relations. This study reported that NGOs communicated dialogically and in a two-way manner with their stakeholders through social media use. The study also establishes that social media platforms present an instant and immediate contact for NGOs and other social media users.

Government departments, organisations, corporations and small businesses are progressively adopting and adapting to social media for strategic communication and public relations. Therefore, there is a need for a firm internal communication strategy to attain this goal. Organisations understand this as a progressive development because of its openness brought about by Web 2.0 setting as it affords collaboration, dialogue, and community-building and potentially democratises voices.

2.3.3 Social media management in local government

The O.R. Tambo District Municipality is a vast government organisation with most of its employees working in several different site-based functions ranging from grass cutting, water and sanitation, community development projects, waste collection, roads and electricity. These employees should receive communication in text messages as those employees who work in offices environment. Hence, this study argues that it is essential to engage staff members regardless of the different places that they may be. Cheney et al. (2010) posit that organisations that do not practice two-way communication may fail because two-way communication brings coherence in the workplace and allows for better integration and coordination.

To improve internal communication, organisations need creativity, detailed planning, and monitoring and evaluation (Barrett, 2002). Organisational managers and communications officers must ensure understanding when communicating, accuracy, honesty, and communication plan needs to be timeliness prepared (Ngcobo, 2016). In an organisation, it is advisable that having effective communication is fundamental to build and maintain mutually beneficial relationships between the management and employees at an operational level. Handbook of Government Communications (2010), confirms that organisations should:

i. create a written communication strategy that is linked to the business and focuses on both deliverables and results; and

ii. conduct quantitative and qualitative research regularly on media platforms, products and language preferences for employees to understand organisational programs.

A documented policy that is known to all members of an organisation is another contributor to effective communication. Therefore, it is necessary to monitor, evaluate and promptly update the communication strategy (Meade 2010). Establishing two-way communication facilitated by social media is essential in this regard.

Effective internal communication is vital in building an organisational culture that allows people to work together for shared goals (Sharma and Kamalanabhan, 2012). Anitha (2014) emphasised that an organisation can considerably advance its employee communication by building an effective communication plan that will encourage employees to support organisational goals. Once staff collaboration and engagement are improved, employee confidence is boosted (Anitha, 2014). Organisations must employ communication processes such as two-way communication, dialogic communication and employee engagement to ensure that the relevant aspects of communication are practised (Crane and Livesey, 2017:40). It will lead to employees taking part in the execution of organisational programs. Furthermore, this will enable information sharing (Handbook of Government Communication, 2010).

Social media management is developing a space of organisational function, and still, academic research needs to explore empirical studies that lead to evidence-based approvals and recommendations. Empirical results find out that the dominant perceptions around social media are that managers are facing a challenge in coordinating and incorporating social media to organisational programmes. There are uncertainties about the return of investment on social media (Tørning, Jaffari and Vatrapu, 2015). A literature review on social media business management dimensions recently showed an over-emphasis on studies assessing social media features and an under-emphasis on social media's organisational purposes and functions. In South African municipalities, social media's effects on employees and managers have been understudied and not well understood. Social media is a means for interaction between municipal authorities and citizens. However, social media usage can become deep-rooted in traditional frameworks that stress transparency and openness over interactive communication and engagement.

According to Macnamara and Zerfass (2012), lack of control regarding the use of social media by employees has exposed organisations to significant risks such as:

i. Announcements of confidential information or organisational secrets; and

ii. Embarrassment through online comments that are inappropriate (racist or sexist language, cyberbullying, pornography, etc.)

Thus, education in the public relations profession about social media practices is a significant step in attaining the balance in organisational social media communication. In recent years, the essential method for public relations practitioners is effectively managing digital information, and the social web is the most crucial issues for communication management (Macnamara and Zerfass, 2012).

Emerging countries like South Africa have great potential for sustainable economic and social development by exploiting Information and Communication Technologies and effectively applying them to the local government sector. The use of platforms such as social media in government programmes worldwide has gained recognition across all political spheres. Social media facilitate two-way communication among employees in government departments in organisations and companies. Furthermore, this two-way communication is extended to organisational publics, stakeholders, and partners, increasing interaction. Simultaneously, the advent of social media brings challenges for government departments and organisations. Employees have to adapt to the new communication culture and try to navigate the faint line between official and personal social media use. South Africans and people worldwide are adopting digital technology to connect to other people in unimaginable levels. Considering this, governments worldwide have started to understand that there is a need to adopt social media and find their terms of reference using these new communication tools in the most effective way possible. The main reason for these guidelines is to present social media opportunities to government and raise awareness among government employees about the risks of using this type of technology. The procedures concentrate on providing direction around the social media use in South African government communications setting to improve employee communication, employee engagement, government transparency and public interaction. These lay down the foundation for government staff members who use social media for formal government communication purposes and at the same time for personal use.

Elias Motsoaledi Local Municipality located in Sekhukhune District of the Limpopo Province is one of the few municipalities to formulate its communication policy, Social Media Policy Guidelines. Many government policy documents encourage the involvement of communities. These are the Municipal Systems Act and the Municipal Structures Act. The policy aims to provide knowledge and shared understanding of opportunities that social media has around the government environment and make government staff aware of social media risks. The South African Local Government Association (SALGA) has made an effort to manage information and communication technology within municipal structures. All municipalities have the required ICT infrastructure, system and connectivity to fast-track services and improve efficiency (SALGA, 2011).

2.3.4 Social media platforms

In the social media space, it is crucial to classify the different platforms of social media available. The social media space is enormously populated, frequently developing, and new platforms frequently added. It is impossible to make available a complete list of all social media platforms at this time. Despite the growing number of social media platforms, their usage and benefits, social media use as a means for employee communication in municipalities in South Africa is still unknown. The existing studies show minimal literature relating to social media usage for internal employee communication in local municipalities. The focus has been on external communication. Since social media usage for employee communication is not widespread, this study is investigating, among other matters, the types of social media in use in the O.R. Tambo District Municipality. The selected social media platform for this research are Facebook, WhatsApp, Twitter, LinkedIn, Instagram, and YouTube. These platforms are considered the most common among the users in South Africa.

According to Baruah (20120), Facebook was launched in 2004 to enable users to communicate with their families, friends and co-workers. The primary purpose of Facebook is to offer users a platform to share information and make the world connected (Baruah 20120). After Facebook, WhatsApp became the second popular

platform in South Africa, with over 10.6 million users, and its popular instant messaging platform has more than 800 million users globally. WhatsApp enables people to share text, images, video, voice notes only on lower data costs (Okoli, 2016, Duffett, 2015). YouTube is the top online site for sharing videos by allowing users to upload, view, share and comment on video using mobile devices. YouTube is the third largest social media platform in South Africa, with 7.2 million users and has displayed the second-highest growth rate of 53% over the past year (Bullard, 2013).

Lazier (2010) describes micro-blogging as a short activity status available to users. While some social media platforms offer this functionality, the only platform dedicated to micro-blogging is Twitter. Twitter let users upload quick updates which are known as tweets. Numerous businesses, organisations, and individuals post blogs. Additionally, LinkedIn (2008) stated that its purpose is to connect professionals and give them a productive and successful platform. With over 65 million members worldwide, LinkedIn is a professional social network, and member benefits associated with LinkedIn include acquiring new business (Florenthal, 2015). Also, Instagram is the fastest growing social medium is SA that has seen a growth rate of 65% over the last year (2014) to 1.1 million users (De Veirman, Cauberghe, and Hudders, 2017), but grew astronomically by 580% in 2013, mainly owing to the rapid adoption of smartphones. Instagram has over 300 million monthly dynamic users worldwide and has also lately provided, especially marketing communication platforms, including video advertising towards the end of 2014.

These social media platforms discussed above have their own set of uniqueness as outlined in the above section, and they have been chosen for this study for their distinctiveness.   These platforms' unique characteristics are fundamental and advantageous to the public relations profession and can facilitate interactive communication in an organisation.

2.4   Conclusion

The literature review is discussed in this chapter, providing a contextualised background looking at how social media is understood and examined in line with

employee communication. It is apparent that the emergence of Web 1.0 to Web 2.0 has changed how public relations is practised, and the arrival of social media shows considerable development in the public relations profession. The chapter discussed concepts such as internal employee communication, public relations practitioner communication, the role of public relations in organisations, communication in local government, defining social media, social media communication management, social media management in local government and social media platforms.

<center>**CHAPTER THREE**</center>

<center>**THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**</center>

3.1   Introduction

This chapter discusses the theoretical framework of the study. The theoretical framework explains the key elements of the phenomena under investigation to examine their interrelatedness. The excellence theory, which Grunig and Hunt (1984) proposed, is used to understand and analyse social media use for employee communication in selected South African municipalities, which are the study's focus. The researcher also discusses the two-way symmetrical model as it specifically articulates the practice of communication in excellent public relations. However, before explaining the theory, the chapter discusses other public relations models that provide the foundation for developing the excellence theory, mainly the press agentry or publicity model, public information and the two-way asymmetrical models. In doing this, the excellence theory's developmental trajectory will be made clearer. The researcher also discusses its relevance in exploring social media usage for employee communication in local municipalities in the O.R Tambo District Municipality.

3.2   Models of public relations

The four models underpinning communication in public relations practice are discussed in this study. It is crucial to understand Grunig's different public relations models as part of his extensive communication model. The four public relations models (Grunig and Hunt, 1984:21-43; Grunig and Grunig, 1989:30; Leichty and Springsteen, 1993:328; Wilcox and Cameron, 2009:53) illustrate four stages and world views of the evolution of the public relations practice. The developmental stages of public relations can be better understood by looking at the models. Grunig (1992:286) explains these models as a set of principles and patterns to describe the behaviour characteristic of any approach taken by the public relations unit. These models also describe an evolutionary improvement of public relations in the last century and four ways public relations is practised today.

Grunig's 4 PR models

Characteristic	Press agentry / Publicity	Public Information	Two-way asymmetric	Two-way symmetric
Purpose	Propaganda	Dissemination of information	Scientific persuasion	Mutual understanding
Nature of communication	1 way, truth inessential	1 way, truth important	2 way, imbalanced effects	2 way, balanced effects
Philosophical worldview	asymmetrical	Pluralistic/ asymmetrical	asymmetrical	symmetrical
Mono/dialogic	monologic	monologic	Unbalanced monologic	dialogic
Habermasian equivalent	Strategic action	Strategic action	Strategic action	Communicative action
Game theory outcome	Zero sum	Zero sum	Zero sum	Positive sum

Figure 3.1: Source: (Theaker, 2004: p.27)

3.3 Press agentry

The evolution of the four public relations models begins with the press agentry. In the press agentry or publicity model, communication with stakeholders is understood as a propaganda function, meaning that it can mislead stakeholders. At the centre of this model is the persuasion, half-truth and influence of stakeholders to behave as the organisation desires. Gruning and Hunt (1984:23) argue that press agentry serves as a propaganda tool and spreads the confidence about the organisation involved, more often through half-true information, incomplete or distorted information. In this era, public relations lost integrity and credibility. Gruning and Hunt (1984) furthermore state that the press agentry model in public relations was introduced in the 19th century to influence public opinion by creating news. The communication in this model is imbalanced and hence the development of other models.

3.4   Public information

The second public relations model is the public information model which is recognised as the transmission of information. This model came to being early in the 20th century. "The main objective of the public information model is the transmission of information associated with the activities of the organisation to the target audience" (Ertürk and Berkman, 2016:64). The function of public relations requires mutually beneficial communication rather than to inform audiences and to disseminate information. Grunig and Hunt, (1984:21) posit that in this model, the public relations practitioner usually puts out relatively objective information about an organisation to the public, often through the mass media and controlled media. Furthermore, press agentry and public information models are perceived as one-way communication models (Grunig & Hunt, 1984:23).

3.5   Two-way asymmetrical

After public information is the two-way asymmetrical model which is the third model, this model is a scientific persuasion, conceptualised in the mid-20th century. "Persuasion of the public with the help of scientific data is the basic policy of the two-way asymmetrical model" (Ertürk and Berkman, 2016:64). It suggests that in this model, the public relations practice is consultative, employing research to persuade the stakeholders. In scientific persuasion, information is used to convince the public to accept the organisation's views. Okay and Okay (2005: 121) confirm that organisations' public relations divisions are seen as consultants in this model where various research methods are used to generate persuasive messages. It can be completed by sending messages to stakeholders that are likely to yield the organisation's desired attitudes and performances. "The two-way asymmetrical public relations model, being based on reciprocal but unbalanced communication between the organisation and the public, had been implemented since the 1920s" (Ertürk and Berkman, 2016:65). This model is irrelevant in current study as the communication is unbalanced abd imbalanced in support of the organisation. Grunig and Hunt (1984:22-23) concur that in this model information moves between the organisation and its stakeholders, but that information is imbalanced in service of the organisation. This

model was dominantly used until the emergence of the last model, namely the two-way symmetrical model discussed in the following part.

3.6 Excellence theory

The excellence theory is a general theory of best practices in public relations (Grunig 1992; Dozier et al. 1995; Grunig et al. 2002). Additionally, the excellence theory explained the significance of public relations to organisations and the value of relationships with stakeholder publics. Grunig *et al* (2002) state that organisations must communicate symmetrically with their publics and consider their public's interests to build high-quality, long-standing relationships. This research uses this theory to understand and analyse the social media use for employee communication in selected South African municipalities which is the focus of this study. The two-way symmetrical model lays a foundation on the practice of communication in excellent public relations.

3.6.1 Two-way symmetrical

A critique of the previous models is the two-way symmetrical model. By looking at the two-way symmetrical model, one can postulate that it relies on openness, tolerance, trust and mutual interaction between the organisation and its stakeholders. In this model, the institutions and the target audience have the opportunity to interact in a balanced manner. The notion of balanced two-way communication is a significant concept in public relations theory because it advocates for ethical public relations. The practice of this model is typically considered to be excellent and ethical public relations.

Grunig (1984) theorised that two-way symmetrical communication is understood to form the foundation of excellent public relations practice. From this viewpoint, symmetrical communication is a willingness of an organisation to attend and respond to its strategic public's worries and interests (Pearson, 2016:78). This study aligns itself with a two-way symmetrical model of public relations. A two-way symmetrical model is interconnected with relationship management theory, and it encourages two-way communication. The two-way symmetrical model observes communication as a process that is not just about sending messages but also includes responding to the

messages. Therefore, the two-way symmetrical model understands communication as the exchange of information and leads to the relation-building.

Although other public relations models can be employed separately or combined, this study focuses on achieving effective employee communication through two-way communication. Unlike other models that are unequal or imbalanced aimed to change the behaviour of the stakeholders without trying to alter the organisational behaviour, the two-way symmetrical communication model employs research, attend to concerns and uses dialogue to manage communication and to nurture relationships with strategic publics (Kent and Taylor, 2002). It is a two-way communication method that uses negotiation to communicate with the key publics and support mutually beneficial understanding between the organisation and its publics.

Mafihlo (2015) conducted a study to explore citizens' views on how Facebook can effectively be used by the government and how social media can build public value. The study's findings show that the government's social media application can encourage key four dimensions of shared value – citizen engagement, efficiency, transparency, and accountability. These four dimenisions of shared value are in line with two-way symmetrical model because in two-way communication there is engagement, transparency, and ultimately efficiency and accountability.

3.6.2 Dialogic communication

The two-way symmetrical model of public relations consists of dialogue than a monologue (Grunig and Hunt, 1984:23) with the primary objective of improving relationships with key stakeholders. Agreeing, Dozier et al. (1995:13), the company or an organisation must adjust to fit its environment. It requires conflict management, negotiating and bringing interdependent ideas and attitudes of the organisation and its public (Botan and Hazelton, 1989:29). Toth (2007:27) argues that the public relations discipline will be "pragmatically poorer without the articulation of the two-way symmetrical model of organisational public relations."

The dialogic theory maintains that organisations should be keen to interact with the public in truthful and moral ways to create healthy communication channels (Wigley and Zhang, 2011). Freire (1970) contributed hugely towards the conceptualisation of

dialogic communication. Freire posits that human nature is dialogic and communication plays a vital role in this regard. Human beings are frequently in dialogue with others, and this is how they create and recreate themselves. Furthermore, Freire (1970) defines dialogue as "encounter between men to name the world. People who have been deprived of their primordial right to speak must first regain it and prevent the continuation of this act of exclusion". He further states that for dialogic communication to happen, someone should communicate the process. It is naturally a person, either internal or external, acting to ease the dialogue. Therefore, Dialogic discourse is a two-way communication method where members maintain their own opinions for their reason and keenly pay attention to other views with the aim of mutual understanding (Kent and Taylor, 2002).

Moreover, Innes (2007) states that the nature of dialogue and its part in the meaning-making practice is essential to understanding how discourse enables the development of enduring understandings for future problem-solving. Dialogic communication talks about two-way communication, where the method and its outputs are undecided and make new knowledge and answers, rather than merely transmit information (Thomas and Mefalopulos, 2009). The monologic mode is constrained communication. The dialogic way, on the other hand, is a circular, unrestricted process. Tufte and Mefalopulos's (2009) multi-track model divides communication methods into two primary groups: monologic and dialogic communication. Monologic communication refers to one-way communication style. However, this study is not interested in monologic communication but will focus on dialogic communication, thus implementing the dialogic theory.

3.6.3 Excellence theory in the social media environment

This part focuses on exploring the excellence theory in the social media setting. According to Pompper (2004), "excellence theory is normative in nature and prescribes how to do public relations in an ideal situation." Many scholars (Thurlow, Kushniryk, Yue, Blanchette, Murchland and Simon, 2016) state that fundamental to the perspective above is a formation of the advancement of public relations from asymmetric to two-way symmetrical communication. Furthermore, Kim, Hung-Baesecke, Yang and Grunig (2013: 198) argue that excellence theory considers public

relations a strategic management practice rather than messaging, media relations and publicity function. It is consistent with the argument postulated in this study under the two-way symmetric communication.

"New digital media may be the latest fad in public relations. These new media have the potential to make the profession more global, strategic, two-way and interactive, symmetrical or dialogical, and socially responsible" (Grunig, 2009:1). However, practitioners may use social media in the same old way of dumping the information to stakeholders favouring the organisation, referred to as Web 1.0. It is not in line with the excellence theory considered the model for two-way symmetric communication. Furthermore, Grunig (2009:1-2) suggests that two-way symmetrical public relations use research, attending to concern and dialogue to promote relationships with internal and external strategic stakeholders, referred to as public relations 2.0. "Primarily, public relations 2.0 tools rely on social media to accomplish their goals of providing information to stakeholders and initiate dialogue among the public" (Matthee, 13). The arguments above confirm that social media expedite the two-way symmetrical communication in this era, which is the element this study seeks to explore.

3.7   Conclusion

Generally, this chapter has discussed the theoretical framework of the study. It presented that internal communication and employee engagement in organisations can be applied and implemented using the concept of the two-way symmetric model of public relations. With the conversational nature of social media, communication has moved significantly closer to the elusive two-way symmetrical public relations model. Although the discussion in this chapter showed that the two-way symmetric model is the best choice, Grunig and Hunt (1984) stated that even other models are still relevant because organisations face different situations. This chapter shows that social media use for internal communications can stimulate dialogue and change the public's (such as employees) behaviour.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

4.1   Introduction

This chapter discusses the research methodology and methods used in this study. The researcher adopted a mixed-method approach to understanding social media use for employee communication in local municipalities in the O.R Tambo District Municipality. The researcher used a mixed-methods design complementarity, and it is a type of design in which different but complementary data are collected on the same topic. The chapter provides details on the use of the questionnaire to collect quantitative data. Concurrent with this data collection, the researcher utilised interviews to explore social media usage for employee communication in the O.R Tambo District Municipality. The reason for collecting both quantitative and qualitative data is to bring together the strengths of both forms of research to complement and expand the findings. The sampling procedures as well, data analysis process and ethical considerations are discussed.

4.2   Context/ case description

The researcher conducted the study in local municipalities in the O.R. Tambo District Municipality. This district municipality is in the jurisdiction of Eastern Cape, South Africa. O.R. Tambo District Municipality has five demarcated local municipalities under it, specifically, Ngquza Hill Municipality; Port St Johns Municipality; Nyandeni Municipality; Mhlontlo Municipality; and King Sabata Dalindyebo (KSD) Municipality (Eastern Cape Socio-Economic Consultative Council 2017:1). Eastern Cape Socio-Economic Consultative Council (2017:10) states, "Population statistics of O.R. Tambo District Municipality is 1.47 million."

The map below shows the names of local municipalities and towns in the O.R. Tambo District Municipality.
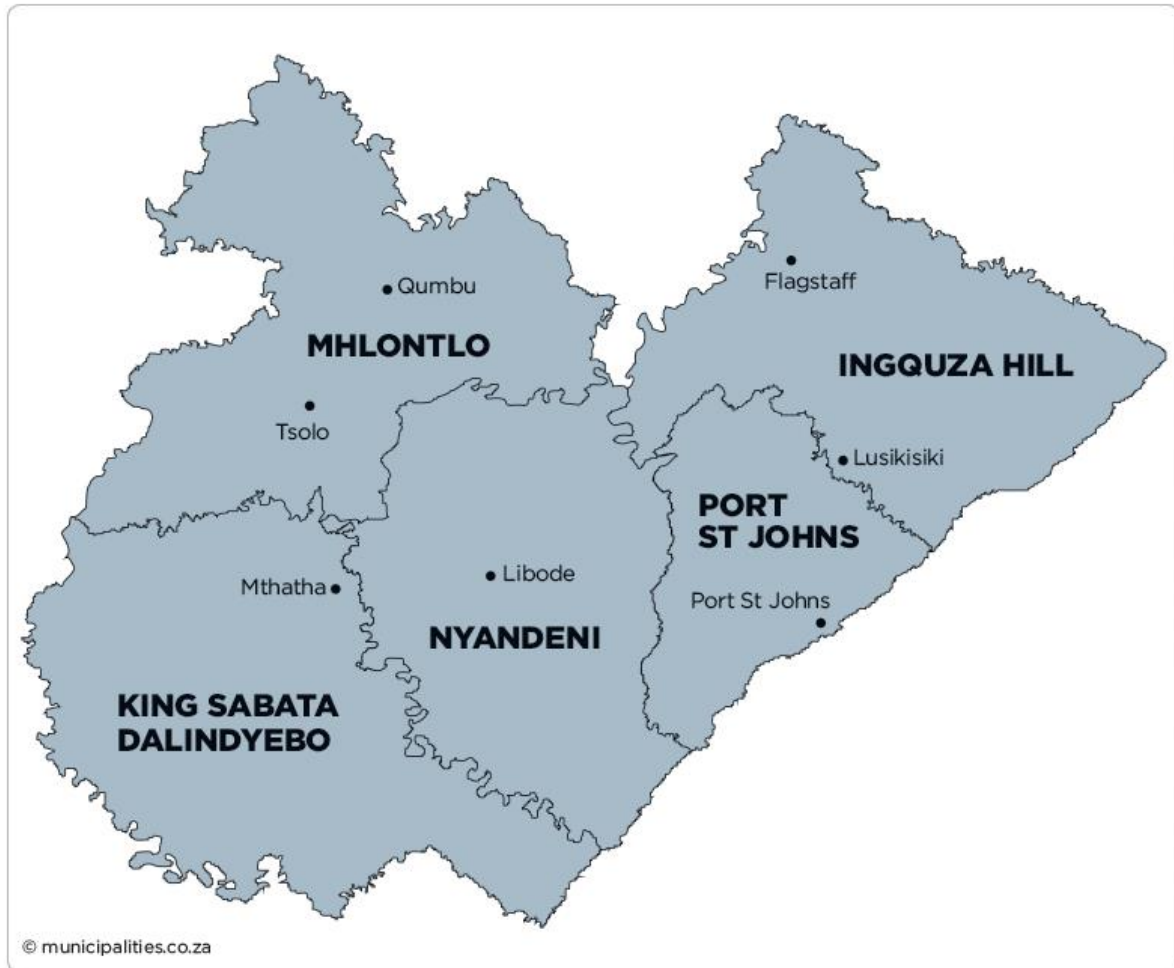
Figure 4.1: O.R. Tambo District Municipality map

This research focuses on employees in the communications divisions based on these municipalities mentioned above to explore their social media usage for employee communication. Employees in the communication division are responsible for employee communication and social media use in municipalities (Government Communication Policy, 2018:34). These municipalities were selected because they are accessible to the researcher in terms of proximity. Furthermore, an understanding of social media use in this district is significant. It is a district located in rural parts of the Eastern Cape, where the is relatively low usage of social media compared to urban areas. This district's social media usage level will give an overview of Information and Communications Technology advancement and the communication channels available in the surrounding areas. This study focused on communications division solely

because organisations' communication activities are administered and run by communications division.

4.3   Research design

It is an explorative study grounded on a pragmatic paradigm, using a case study research design and a mixed-methods approach to understanding social media platforms' use for employee communication in the municipalities. Exploration is a flexible design that permits a diversity of research findings (Gray, n.d). It means that one can get many perspectives on the phenomenon under study.

Burns and Grooves (2007) also explain that the exploratory design uses its tools to understand and find fresh ideas about the problem under investigation. This study explores social media usage for employee communication in local municipalities in the O.R. Tambo District Municipality. This study's focus looks at social media for employee communication, and the novelty of social media in the municipality context makes an exploratory approach the most suitable for this study.

Philosophically, the current research project is grounded on pragmatism since a mixed-methods approach allows for integrating qualitative and quantitative data in a single research study. A paradigm is a fundamental belief or assumption or worldview, which informs an individual's thinking and actions. In research, it is significant for an investigator to understand what paradigm is and what paradigm to use from the beginning of the research process. Johnson and Christensen (2012) define a paradigm as a perspective based on shared assumptions, concepts, values, and practices. In this respect, the researcher deemed pragmatism as most suitable for this research, aiming to work out a multidimensional and practical understanding of social media usage for employee communication in local municipalities. Morse (1991) states the aim of mixed methods approach, drawn from pragmatist philosophy, is to attain a holistic understanding of the experiences of individuals, communities, institutions and groups by employing two techniques in one research study. Creswell (2003), agrees to this point of view that mixed research method is related to pragmatism. It stresses

that researchers must look at many approaches when collecting and analysing data rather than using one strategy.

Johnson and Onwuegbuzie (2004) and Onwuegbuzie and Johnson (2006) posit that pragmatism is not about finding the fundamental truth but rather on empirical findings. The researcher adopted this practical approach since it enables one approach's strengths to address the other's weaknesses. Hence, the quantitative approach's weakness is managed by the qualitative aspect of the study (Creswell and Creswell ,2018).

A case study research design is employed in this research study to explore social media use for employee communication in local municipalities in the O.R. Tambo District Municipality. A case study is a research design intended at creating detailed and multidimensional understanding about issues that are happening in real life (Crowe, Creswell, Robertson, Huby, Avery and Sheikh, 2011). A case study is a version of exploratory research because it aims to provide a detailed and in-depth understanding of the problem. This research intends to find invaluable knowledge on the information discovered; it intends to generate an extensive knowledge of social media use for employee communication in the O.R. Tambo District Municipality. Miles and Huberman (1994) propose that a researcher choose a suitable research design for the study after a decision is made regarding sampling and data collection methods.

4.4   Research methodology

A plethora of researchers such as Aarons, Fettes, Sommerfeld and Palinkas (2011), Tashakkori and Teddlie (2003), and Landsverk, Chamberlain, Palinkas and Horwitz (2012) have suggested the use of mixed approach to research because they believe that some research problems are challenging to address using a single research method. For this reason, the study deemed the mixed method approach the best method because similar studies also use mixed methods research. Gorard (2004:17) posits that the mixed method is a crucial element in improving social science.

The mixed-methods approach used in this study is that the qualitative data is nested in the quantitative data to expound quantitative data findings. This means that a

qualitrative data will give a weight to the quantitative data gather in this study. Greene and Caracelli (1997), Creswell *et al*. (2003), Johnson and Turner (2003), Onwuegbuzie and Johnson (2006), Teddlie and Tashakkori (2009), postulate that one of the suggested advantages of mixed methods research is that it can win over the disadvantages of adopting a single method. Combining questionnaires and interviews in one research brings both the advantages of extensiveness and deepness connected with these two separate methods (Teddlie and Tashakkori, 2009). Mixed methods help provide a whole picture of a research topic and address an entire range of research questions by providing complete knowledge to enhance a research's practicality (Johnson and Onwuegbuzie, 2004). Likewise, Creswell et al. (2011) state that a mixed approach is used for numerous reasons, such as understanding a problem from multiple viewpoints. This study deems such an approach essential to understand social media usage for employee communication in local municipalities in the O.R. Tambo District Municipality. The researcher obtained qualitative data through interviews with the communications managers. The researcher got quantitative data through the questionnaire to communications division staff members in the local municipalities in O.R. Tambo District Municipality jurisdiction.

Merge the data:

Qualitative data → Results ← Quantitative data

Connect the data:

Qualitative data → Quantitative data → Results

Embed the data:
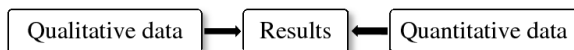
Quantitative data
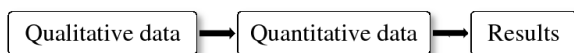
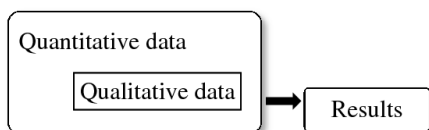Qualitative data → Results

Figure 4.2: Three ways of mixing quantitative and qualitative data (Creswell 2009)

4.5   Population and Sample of the study

A population is a group of people who share common characteristics (Zikmund, Babin, Carr and Griffin, 2010). In a research context, Brynard and Hanekom (2006:55) define a population as "a group of people chosen to participate in a study." This study's

population comprised public relations practitioners, communications managers and officers, media officers and administration officers in communications division from local municipalities under O.R. Tambo District Municipality. The researcher chose the study population because they are responsible for communications activities in these municipalities, and they would be able to provide answers as would be needed.

In this study, the researcher used purposive sampling technique to select communications managers and other communications personnel in the municipalities. Purposive sampling is a form of non-probability selection which allows the researcher to choose participants based on their knowledge of the subject addressed in the study (Oppong 2013:203). The researcher used this sampling technique to select communications managers from O.R. Tambo District Municipality and its local municipalities for interviews due to their knowledge of employee communication. Furthermore, this sampling technique was used to select communications personnel to complete an online questionnaire. The researcher obtained the O.R.Tambo District Municipality Communications Unit's communication personnel's contact details then contacted them. The researcher sent out a total of 32 online questionnaires, as this is the total number of personnel working in communications in these municipalities. The researcher received a total of 28 responses, indicating a response rate of 87.5%. Also, the researcher conducted four in-depth interviews with the communications manager. The rationale behind selecting four communications managers was that one municipalities did not have a communications manager. The post for communications manager in this municipality was vacant.

4.6   Data Collection Methods

Collecting data for any research is essential as data answers the study's research questions. Researchers often collect data through the use of qualitative or quantitative methods. This present study uses both methods. Burns and Groove (2007) state that data collection is where investigators use several tools such as interviews and questionnaires to collect data.

4.6.1 Designing of the questionnaire

A questionnaire is a document that contains a list of questions designed to investigate information about a selected sample to represent the entire population (Hussey and Hussey, 1997:161; Fox and Bayat, 2007:89). According to Johnson and Christensen (2012), questionnaires with open-ended questions are referred to as qualitative questionnaires, and yet those with close-ended questions are known as quantitative questionnaires. This study uses a quantitative questionnaire. Cooper and Schindler (2003) address the questionnaire's objectives by stating that they should answer the study's research problem, questions, and objective. In designing the questionnaire, previous work by Haddud, Dugger and Gill (2016) was followed and hence addressed aspects such as work experience, organisational policies, social media preferences, among others. The instrument was developed, piloted and revised considering how understandable the questions were and whether the tool covered all the essential aspects of social media use in the public sector and other issues raised by the theoretical framework.

In this study, the researcher developed a questionnaire and submitted it to the supervisor. The questionnaire has two sections, A and B.

- Section A: This section collects biographical information of selected municipality employees in the communications division. Information such as gender, age, educational level, years of experience, job status, job title and ranks to understand whether these affect the participants' views on the efficacy of social media use in organisations.

- Section B: This section collects information about social media use and knowledge. Questions such as to indicate if you use social media for work purposes or not. Indicate if you have used the following social media and the frequency thereof. Indicate if you use the following social media for work and on a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 indicating strongly disagree and 5 indicating strongly agree. Indicate your views on the following statements are being asked.

The first draft of a questionnaire was submitted to the supervisor for suggestions and recommendations. It was then returned, and the guidance and recommendations were implemented. Zikmund (2010:186) posits that a study must use a questionnaire to collect quantitative data as it is a quick, cheap and efficient way of accessing information from the sample. Initially, the researcher intended to use the traditional form of printing questionnaires and hand them out to respondents. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the national lockdown, the researcher had to use Google Forms, an online-based tool for collecting data from respondents. The challenge with Google Forms is that the researcher must have email addresses or cell phone numbers to send the link to a questionnaire. On the other side, the participants must have a smart device such as a smartphone or computer with an internet connection to complete the online questionnaire.

4.6.1.1   Quantitative data capturing

The researcher used Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) to translate information obtained from the questionnaires to a format that is easy to interpret. The researcher coded each question from the questionnaire. The researcher reported all variables using the descriptive analysis to attain descriptive statistics and frequency statistics.

4.6.2 Qualitative Data collection

The interview is a conversation between two or more people. An interviewer asks questions from the interviewee to get information for a specific purpose (MacNamara 2009). On the other hand, King (2004:11) describes interviews as a tool for gathering qualitative research data. However, Paylenko (2007) states that interviews can be challenging concerning the constructed nature of oral responses.

Initially, the researcher intended to conduct in-depth face-to-face semi-structured interviews to collect information from four communications managers from the municipalities. Again, the national lockdown due to the COVID-19 pandemic motivated the use of telephonic interviews and call recorder app to record the conversation. The interviews aimed to answer research questions more specifically, the questions that start with "how".

- How do local municipalities in O.R Tambo District Municipality use social media for employee communication?

- What are municipality employees' perceptions of the use of social media in local municipalities?

- What is the role of social media in municipalities overall communication strategies?

- What are the challenges encountered by the use of social media in local municipalities?

The researcher asked questions in an organised and consistent manner. The researcher deems this an opportunity to afford the communications managers freedom to ask questions and share their experiences about the subject matter. The interviews are fundamental because they enabled the researcher to gather data challenging to attain using a questionnaire.

4.6.2.1 Interview process

The process of conducting the interview is as follows:

- The researcher sends out consent to participants (four communication managers) of the study. The researcher asked participants to sign the consent forms;

- Again, during the interview the researcher read out the Consent to Participate in a Research Study;

- The interviewer asks one question and gives a chance to interviewee to respond; and

- The researcher allowed interviewees to ask questions.

4.7 Data analysis

Field (2009) posits that researchers undertake analysis after data is collected to make sense of the findings and reach conclusions about the investigation. For this study,

the researcher analysed qualitative and quantitative data. The researcher ensured that qualitative data was embedded within the quantitative data to understand social media usage for employee communication in local municipalities in the O.R Tambo District Municipality.

4.7.1 Quantitative data analysis

According to Cooper and Schindler (2003:87) and Miles and Huberman (1994:10) data analysis is a process of data reduction to a suitable, manageable size and smaller units. Blumberg (2008:297) put forward that SPSS should be used to analyse quantitative data. The researcher used SPSS to analyse and interpret quantitative data.

4.7.2 Qualitative data analysis

Miles and Huberman (1994:9) outlines the qualitative data analysis process as follows:

- Allocating codes to data capture from interviews;

- Identifying themes, patterns, similar phrases;

- Sub-group and sequences;

- Identifying commonalities and differences; and

- Elaborate a small set of generalization.

The researcher sorted the data into themes and coding groups and analysed data collected from interviews. The groups will be in line with the research question. The embed data will be used to give meaning to the quantitative data.

4.8   Research rigour

Patton (2002) and Kuper, Lingard and Levinson (2008). In qualitative research, quality and authenticity promote the research rigour by ensuring that data analysis has quality and trustworthiness. Furthermore, these authors state that this is similar in ensuring validity and reliability in that order, in quantitative research.

4.8.1 Credibility

Credibility refers to the honesty and trustworthy of findings in research. (Streubert and Carpenter, 1999:330). In this study, the researcher employed the following methods to ensure credibility:

- The researcher asked participants the same vital questions;
- The researcher interviews the participants to the point where there is no new information raised; and
- The researcher recorded and transcribed each interview.

4.8.2 Dependability

The dependability brings up the issues of consistency of findings. Lincoln and Guba (1985:316), states that there is no validity without reliability, and thus, there is no credibility without dependability. This study will produce consistent results time after time as the data attained from respondents will not be contaminated due to the logic used when selecting the population and checking mistakes in collecting data, interpreting findings and reporting results.

4.8.3 Confirmability

Confirmability speaks of the objectivity of the data, in such that there should be an agreement between two or more independent views about the data's relevance to the study (Krefting 1991:221; Polit and Hungler 1995:255). To ensure confirmability in this study, a supervisor will supervise the novice researcher when doing data analysis. The supervisor did an audit trail that looked at raw data, recorded data, and written documents.

4.8.4 Transferability

According to Mouton (2001) and Polit and Hungler (1995), transferability means applying the findings in other contexts and settings. It may also involve other participants to find generalisability. The researcher ensures transferability by

thoroughly describing this research context and thoroughly looking at literature wherein similar findings of other research studies were reported.

4.9 Ethical Considerations

The Office of the Research Ethics Committee, Faculty of Informatics and Design at Cape Peninsula University granted an ethical clearance certificate to the researcher before starting data collection. The researcher got permission from the O.R. Tambo District Municipality authorising the conduct of this research. Also, all the participants voluntarily participated in the study.

The following points guided participants:

- Voluntary participants: no one was forced into taking part in the research.

- Informed consent: potential participants must be fully knowledgeable about the procedures and risks involved.

- Risk of harm: participation must not expose participants to the risk of physical or psychological harm resulting from their participation.

- Confidentiality: assure participants that identity information will not be accessible to anyone who is not directly involved in the study.

- Anonymity: participants remain anonymous throughout the study.

- The researcher got permission to record the telephonic interviews.

- Also, participants had a freedom to withdrew at any stage of data collection.

4.10 Conclusion

This chapter discussed the research methodology adopted for the study. The researcher also outlined and explained the process involved in selecting and employing a mixed-method approach for the research. The researcher also exhaustively discussed the process and considerations involved in gathering data for the study's quantitative and qualitative aspects and choosing an appropriate sampling technique for the research. The next chapter will be the presentation of the findings of the study.

CHAPTER FIVE

FINDINGS

5.1 Introduction

The previous chapter discussed the research methodology, especially the research design, research instruments, Sampling, data collection, and data analysis. This chapter presents the findings and analysis of the results. As highlighted in chapter one, this study sought:

- To explore social media usage for employee communication in local municipalities in the O.R Tambo District Municipality.
- To establish employees' perception on the use of social media in the municipalities.
- To ascertain the role of social media in municipalities overall communication strategies.
- To examine the challenges encountered by the use of social media in local municipalities.

The researcher analysed data obtained through an online questionnaire and telephonic interviews. The researcher analysed the data in line with the study's objectives outlined above. Grunig and Hunt's (1984) excellence theory provided insights on social media use for employee communication. The researcher presented the section using statistical and thematic analysis obtained from the data above sources. The findings are broken down into thematic sections, namely: social media use for work purposes, effectiveness of social media for internal communication, senior management's perspectives, the challenges experienced when using social media for internal communication and social media policy in the organisation.

5.2 The usage of social media for employee communication in local municipalities in the O.R Tambo District Municipality

5.2.1 Patterns of social media use

The findings show how participants generally use social media platforms per day.

Figure 5.1 shows that 100% of participants use WhatsApp daily, followed by 68% of participants who use Facebook daily. About 29% of participants stated that they use Twitter daily. Instagram has 21% use from participants per day. YouTube and LinkedIn were the last two social media platforms studied in this research project, with 17.9% and 14.3%, respectively.
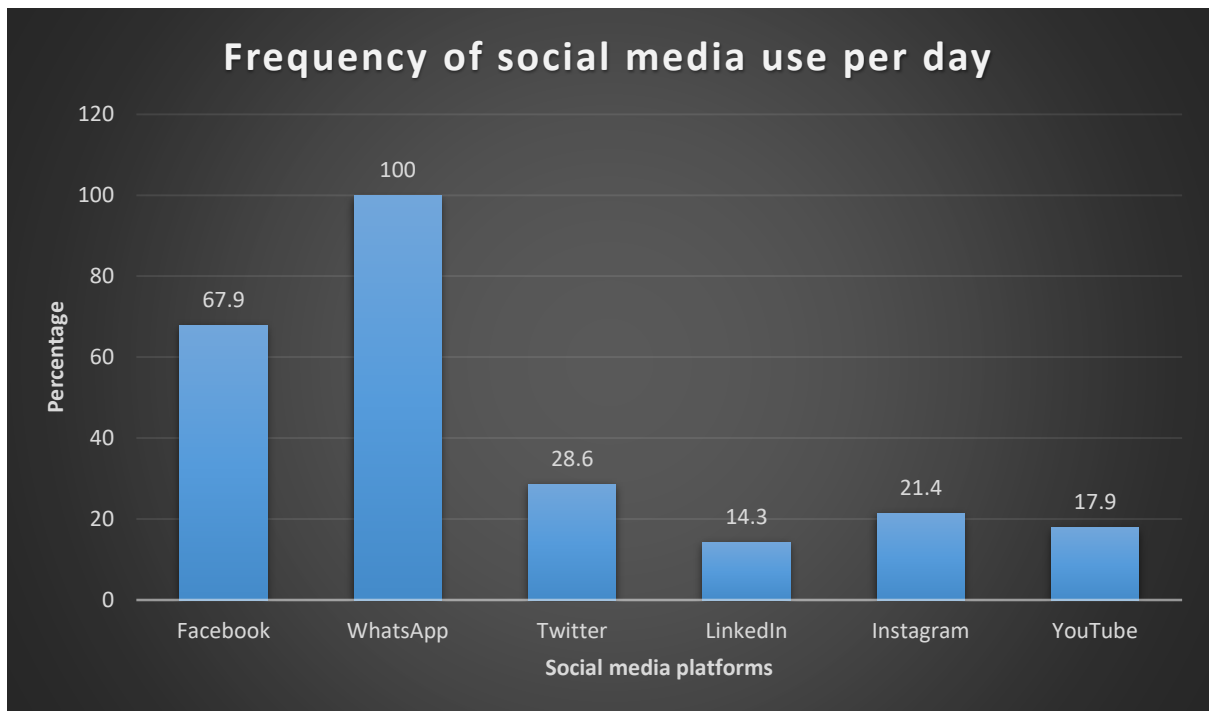
Figure 5.1: Frequency of social media use per day

The Digital Landscape in South Africa (2020), state that generally the average age of people who use social media is between 25-34 and thus make up the largest proportion of social media users in South Africa, correlating with the average age of the participants who participated in this study.

5.2.2 Social media adoption

The results showed that it was easy for the participants to adapt to using social media for internal communications in their municipalities. About 64% of the participants agreed that it was easy for them to adapt to using social media for employee communication purposes instead of the minority of 32% who disagreed.

Figure 5.2: Individual adapting to using social media

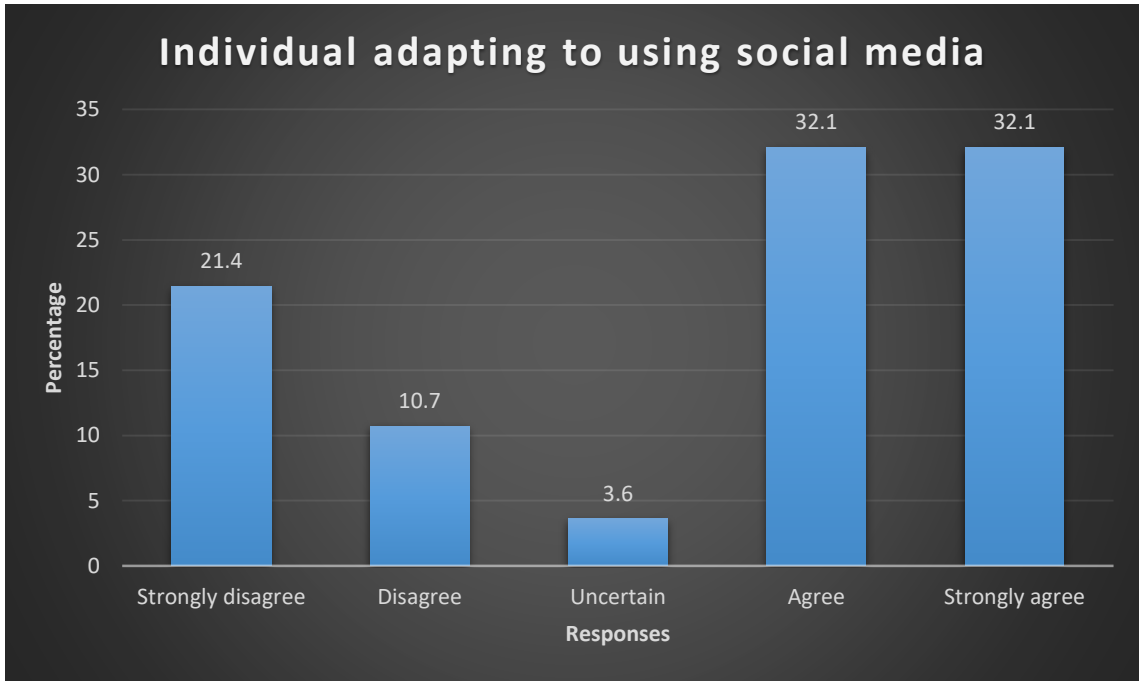However, when the researcher asked participants if it was easy for their municipalities to use social media for employee communication, most disagreed. About 50% of participants disagreed, and only 36% agreed while about 14% of the participants were uncertain.
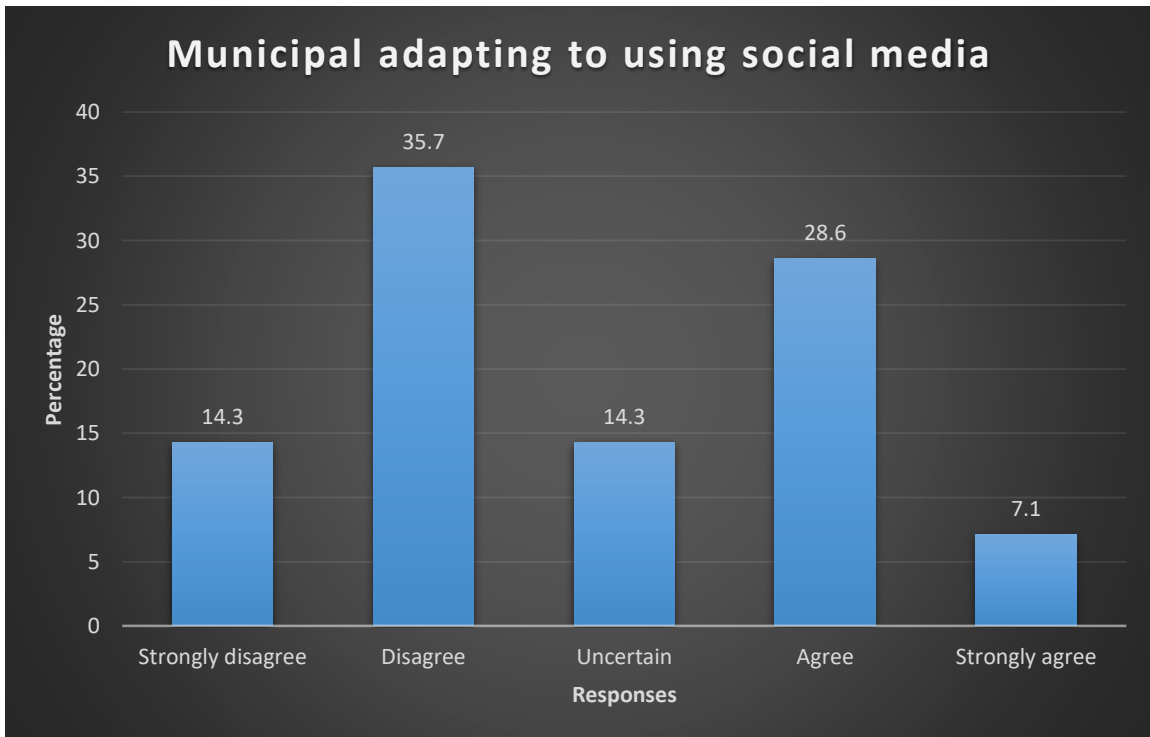
Figure 5.3: Municipal adapting to using social media

One interviewee noted.

> Not relatively easy for us at work to adapt to using social media. We have older adults who are not technologically advanced or equipped, so it isn't straightforward. We had to train them and like teach them how to use it, but now they readily adopted, and now almost everyone is part of that group.

From a global perspective, Andreasson (2018), concurs that development and adoption of formal social media or Gov 3.0 are still low at local government. The author furthermore, states it is a relatively new and government are struggling to understand how to best and responsibly manage implementations of web 3.0 tools for local government use.

5.3   Employees' perception of the use of social media in the municipalities

5.3.1 Social media effectiveness and usefulness

The results have shown that the communication's personnel surveyed in this study perceive social media as being a good communication too. These results revealed that 93% agreed that social media is a useful communication tool, whereas 7% is not sure whether social media is valuable or not.
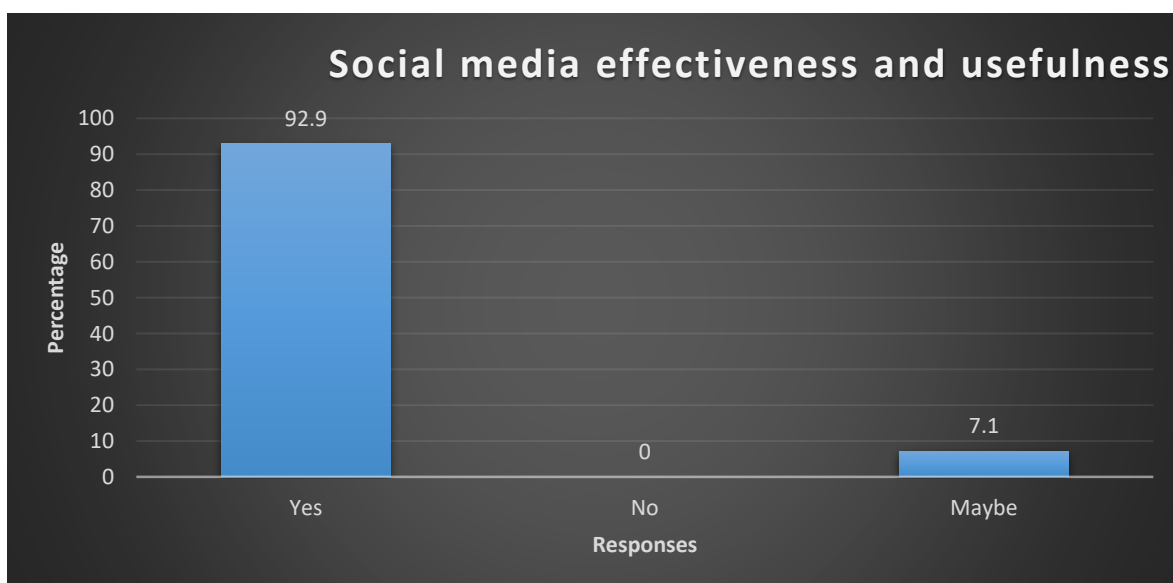
Figure 5.4: Social media effectiveness and usefulness

Shrestha (2015) confirms that social media has become a convenient tool for organisational communication. The author adds that social media use by private companies and the public sector is very high. The above observations concur with the results shown below that social media is a useful communication tool. WhatsApp still is the most helpful platform for the work done in the communications division, followed by Facebook.
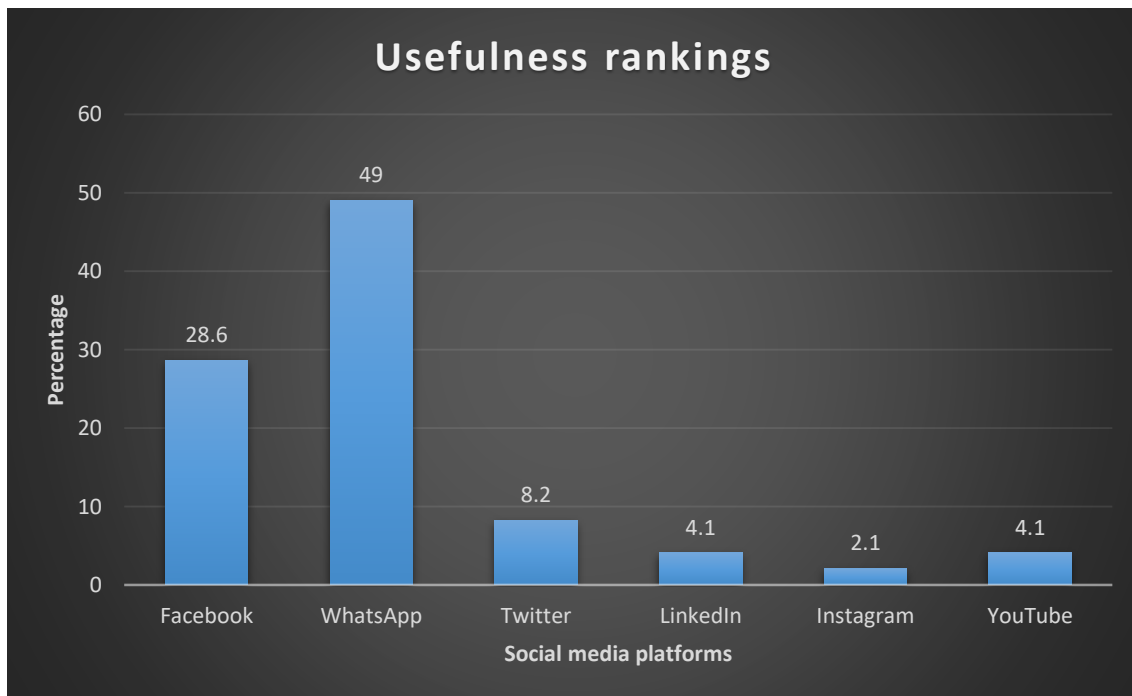
Figure 5.5: Usefulness rankings

The findings show that 81.2% of the participants stated that WhatsApp is useful for employee communication, whereas only 19% said that Facebook is useful for employee communication. These findings are consistent with Ariffin and Omar's (2018) study. They aver that WhatsApp's usage as a communication tool is an effective method for employee communication in organisations because WhatsApp is cheap and quick and easy to operate.
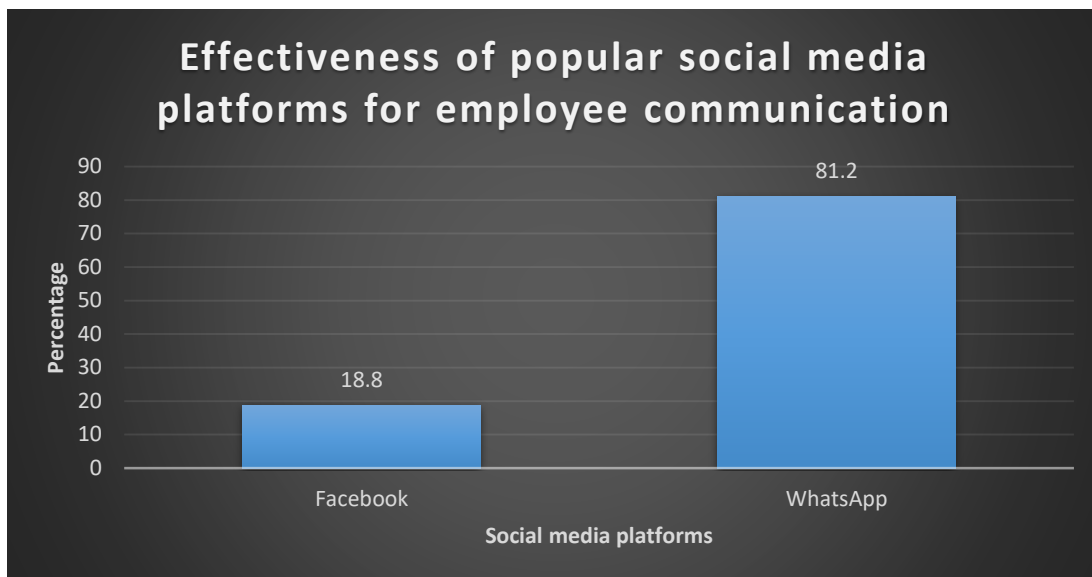
Figure 5.6: Effectiveness of popular social media platforms for employee communication

However, when the researcher further asked respondents whether social media is used effectively in their municipalities, about 40% of the respondents noted that social media is useful.

One respondent noted.

> Social media is useful because it allows for instant communication between two colleagues or more. In social media, one can have groups like WhatsApp groups used to communicate with many people, so I say social media is useful.

However, this is lower than the 50% of the respondents who disagreed that social media are effective in their municipalities. The respondents that claimed social media platforms are not helpful cited the challenges posed by old age, rural areas with limited access to social media platforms and educational levels of the staff members as a significant reason for the ineffectiveness.
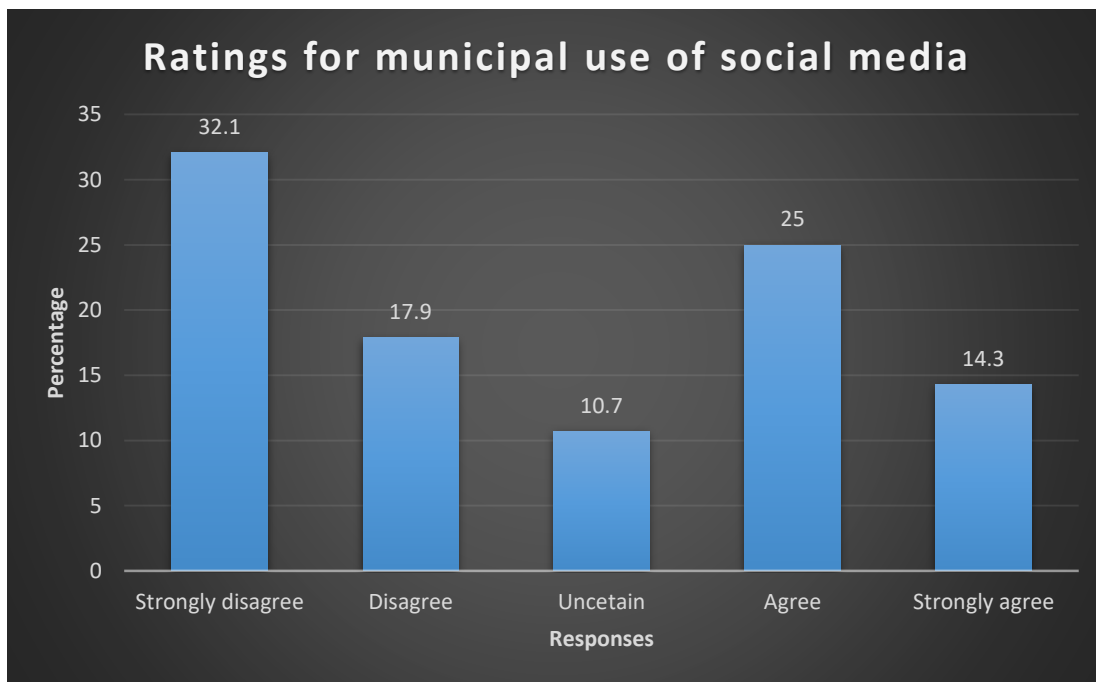
Figure 5.7: Ratings for municipal use of social media

Some participants generally agreed on the effectiveness of social media. The researcher further asked them to rate how their municipalities deployed these tools. As shown in the table above, only 25% agreed, while only 14 % strongly agreed. These results indicate that less than 40% agreed that municipalities were utilising these tools well.

However, amongst the nearly 50% of the respondents disagreed and noted that their organisations were not utilising the social media well. One of the respondents blamed this situation on several factors: the lack of systematic deployment, educational levels and age. He noted:

> "Yaa, social media is not effective …. they could be integrated, but again I would say… ehhh, you would have to educate people more because you would find that there are old people in the municipalities, especially here O.R. Tambo District."

Another respondent noted:

> "As things stand right now, social media is not effective here because there are people from remote areas who work here. This municipality is situated in a remote area, which means some colleagues are not so accommodative to social media due to their background. As I have said before, because of the geographic areas, like our local municipalities, one would need to improve the ICT systems to integrate social media as part of the improvement in

communication."

These quotations are in line with ALotaibi, Ramachandran, Kor and Hosseinian-Far (2018). They claim that the transition from a traditional system to a technology-oriented system, like the adoption of social media by governments often requires an organisational change in terms of the structure, culture, people and processes to achieve effective outcomes. These findings concur with Sobaci (2019) that municipalities' preferred social media platforms to interact with citizens are Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube. However, the same platforms are not used as much for interacting with employees. It is consistent with Spagnoletti (2017) that municipalities rarely integrate social media applications to communication strategies, and there is a need for more knowledge to be explored on how to use these applications to their advantages and benefits.

5.4   The role of social media in municipalities overall communication strategies

Figure 5.8 shows that 79% of the participants indicated that they use social media for communicating with their colleagues. It means that the majority of communications personnel in municipalities use social media for work purposes.
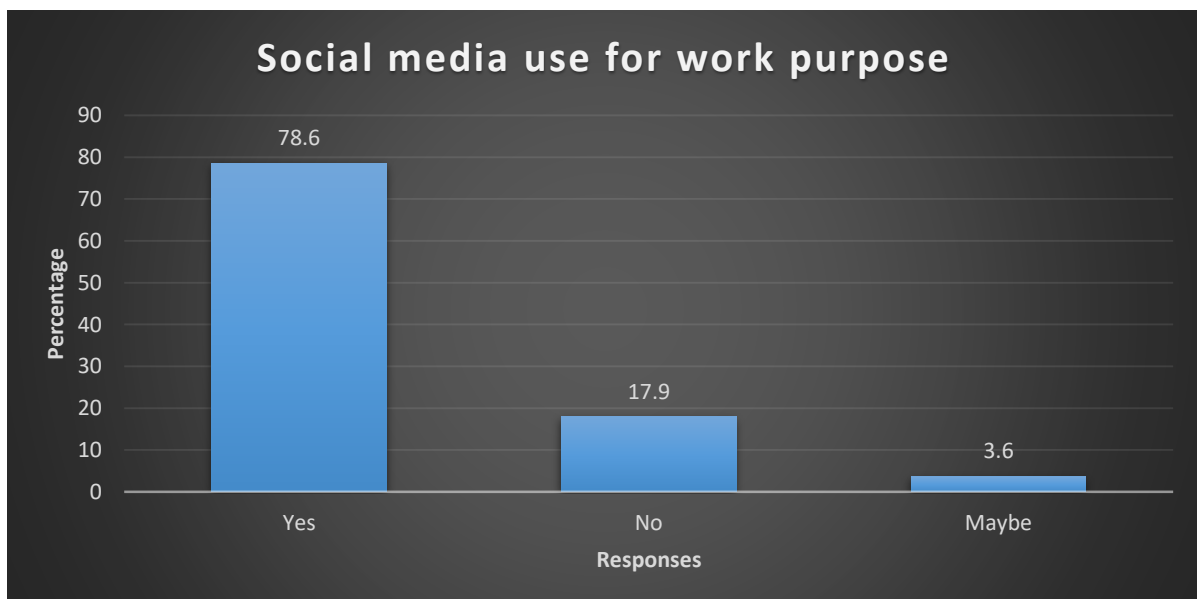
Figure 5.8: Social media use for work purposes

One interviewee highlighted that social media are now crucial for their organisation.

> "Yes, yes!! We use social media for employee communication regularly. We use WhatsApp. There are WhatsApp groups per section, within the municipality, and each group include the senior manager in each section and among other things there is a Facebook page for the municipality where we expect the communication from the seniors of the municipality."

It correlates with the Digital Landscape report in South Africa (2020) that 40% of South Africa's population are active social media users. That's 22.89 million people out of an estimated population of over 57 million with the age group of 25-34 making up the largest proportion of social media users in South Africa. This suggests that South Africa has a growing number of social media in general.

Figure 5.9 shows that WhatsApp is the most useful platform by the communications employees surveyed in local municipalities studied in this present study. The second most used social media platform was Facebook. Twitter is the third most used platform. In contrast, 10% of the participants do not use social media platforms to communicate with others.
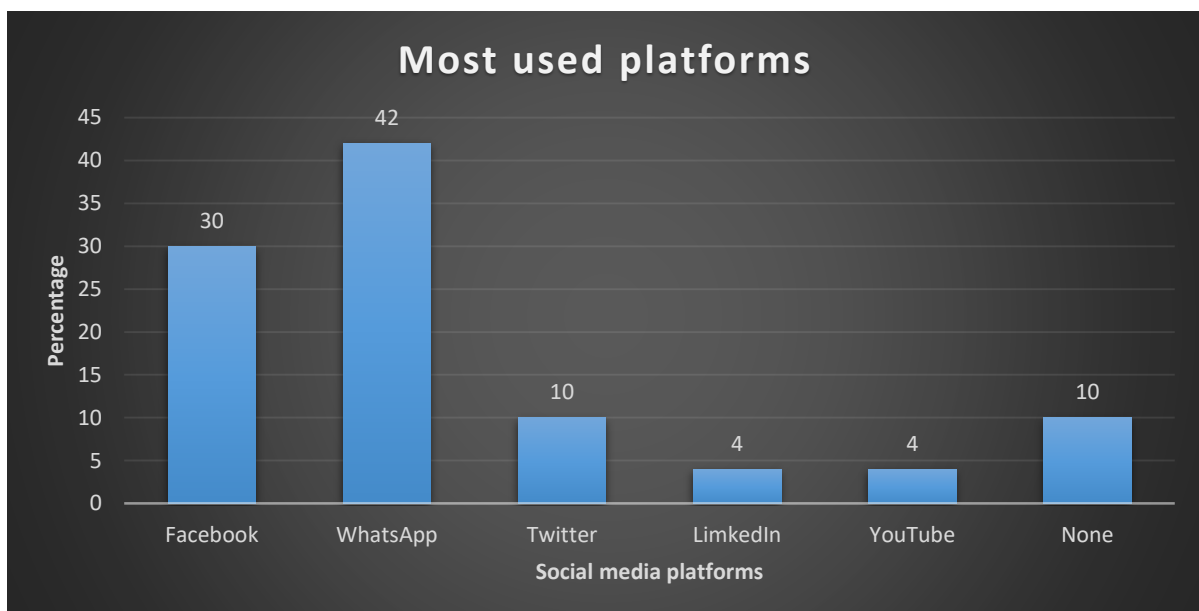
Figure 5.9: Most used platforms

One interviewee agreed that they use social media for internal communication and that they used WhatsApp even more during the national lockdown implemented due

to the COVID-19 pandemic. During the national lockdown, employees were encouraged to work from remotely from home to prevent the spread of the COVID-19 (George and George, 2020)

> We use social media more, especially if I can say now in the crisis the whole world is under because many people are currently working remotely. We have opened WhatsApp groups where staff members can be notified about new developments about what is happening internally.

The findings revealed that social media platforms that communications officers use in local municipalities studied in this research are the same as South Africa's most popular social media platforms: WhatsApp, YouTube, Facebook, Twitter and Instagram, (The Digital Landscape in South Africa, 2020). Waterloo, Baumgartner, Peter and Valkenburg (2018) confirm that most social media users are WhatsApp users in South Africa, followed by Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter.

The results further revealed that 71% of senior managers use social media when communicating with employees within the municipalities.
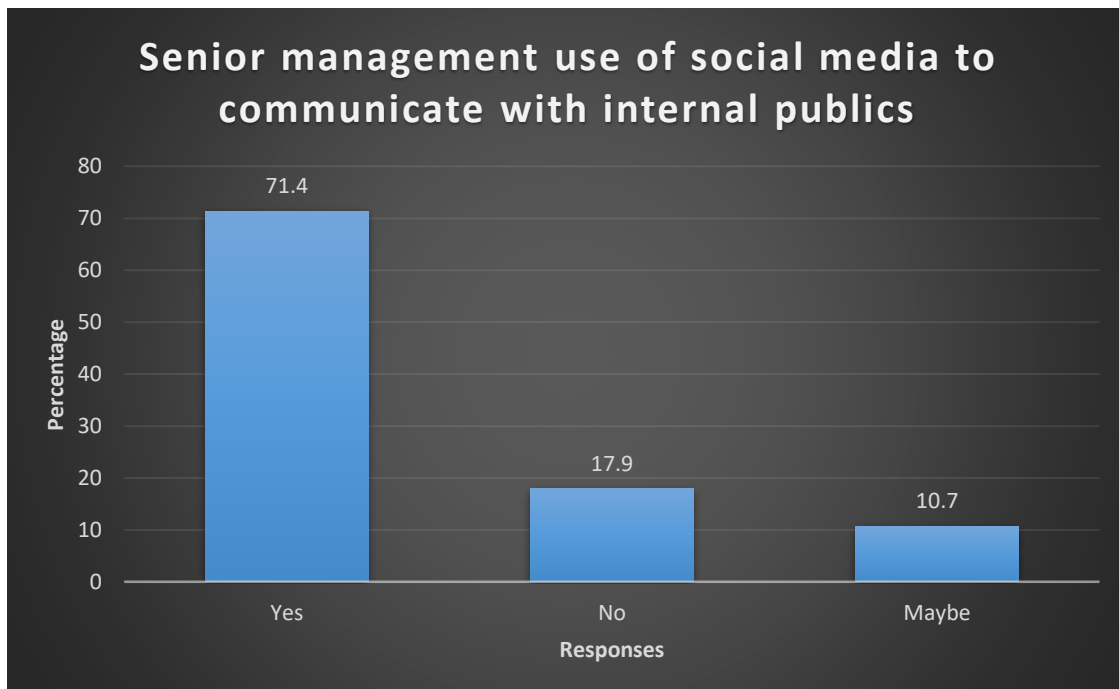
Figure 5.10: Senior management use of social media to communicate with internal publics

These results are in line with Sandel and Ju (2018). They noted that managers preferred using social media when communicating with their subordinates, generally rich and more appropriate when communicating difficult, equivocal messages and allowing for rapid feedback and multiple cues.

Additionally, the statistical results below revealed that 71% of senior managers use WhatsApp for internal communication and Facebook. However, only 12% indicated that their managers do not used social media platforms for internal communication.

Social media platforms most used by senior management
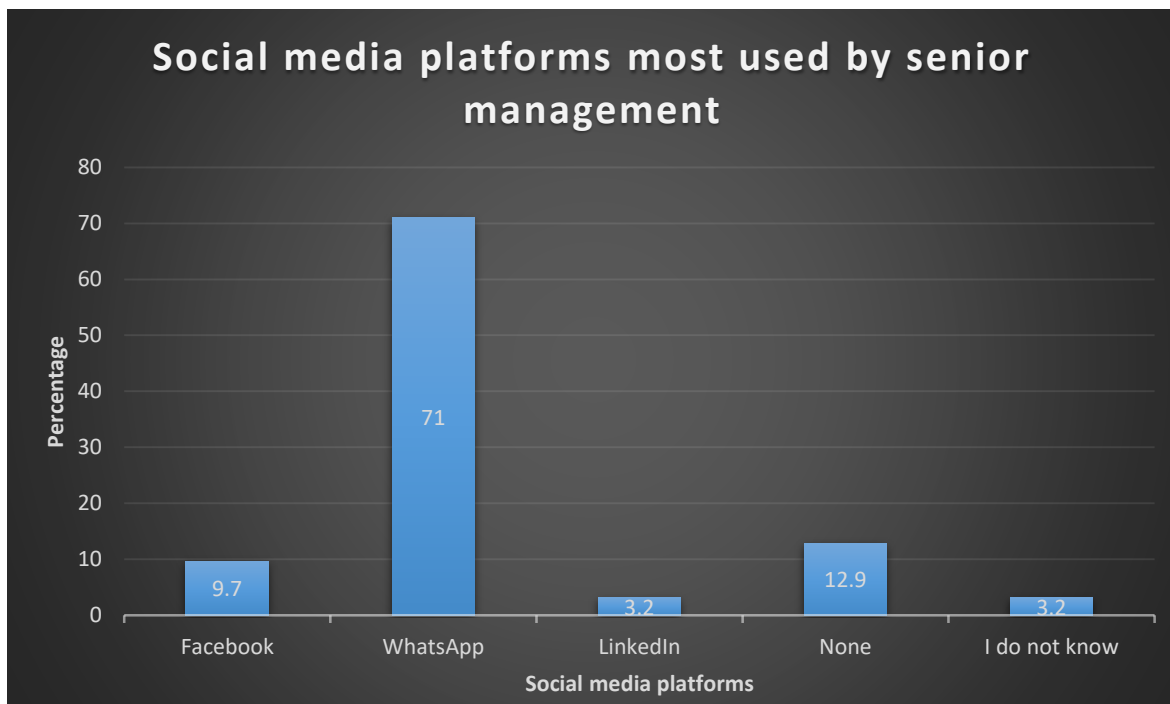
Figure 5.11: Social media platforms most used by senior management

5.4.1 Social media platforms preferred for group communication in the workplace

In any workplace, groups are an essential social structure as it helps in the delivery of services. This study also sought to establish which networks were used mostly for group communication, and the results showed that most participants used WhatsApp communication within their groups. The results have shown that WhatsApp is the most frequently used platform for communicating with municipalities' groups and individuals. The second most used platform to share with groups was Facebook. These results are shown in figure 5.12.
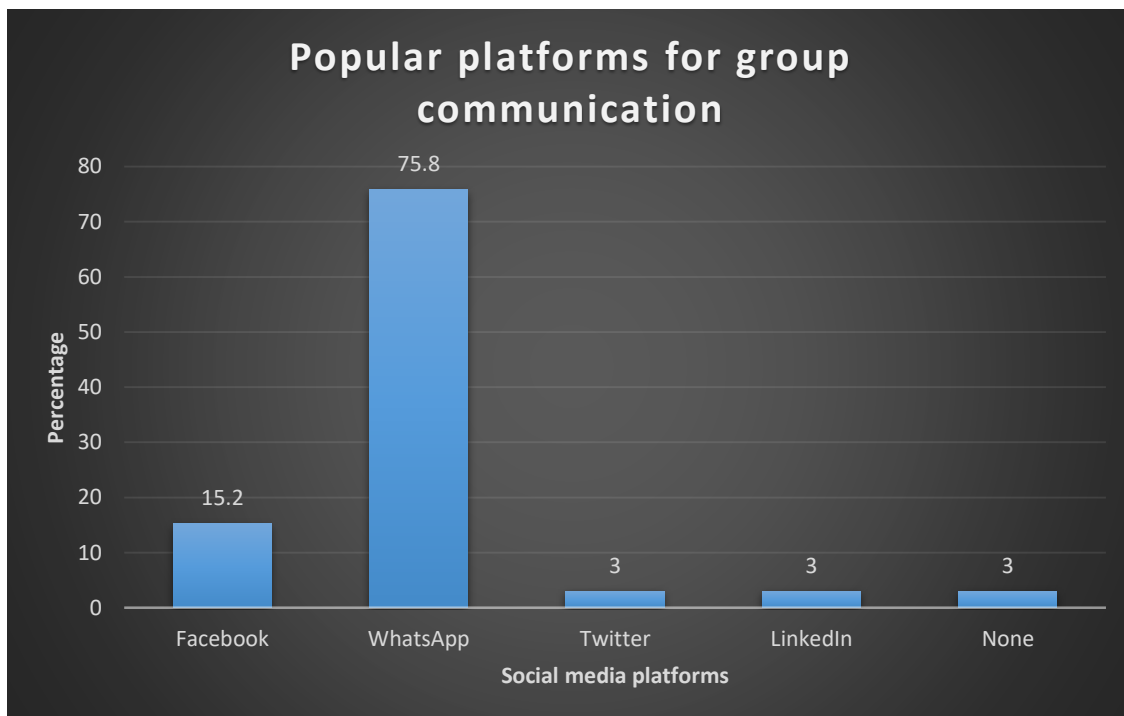
Figure 5.12: Popular platforms for group communication

One respondent noted that WhatsApp is mostly used when communicating with groups.

> Social media platforms like WhatsApp are mostly used when communicating with groups or even with individuals because it allows local municipalities transparency. The information is being shared in our WhatsApp group within the department and directly to myself.

These results correlate with The Digital Landscape in South Africa (2020) that WhatsApp is the most used social media platform with 10.1 million users. However, this research project's statistical results are not consistent with The Digital Landscape in South Africa (2020:57), which has two social media platforms rated at number two with the same number of users: Facebook and YouTube with 9.1 million users each. Ariffin and Omar (2018) concur that WhatsApp usage among the organisation's employees is very high. It shows WhatsApp's practical use as a form of communication among the organisation's employees to exchange and disseminate information, either for personal or work purposes.

5.4.2 Platforms used for communicating with individuals

This study's statistical result concurs with the statement above. It indicated that about 84% of participants use WhatsApp to communicate with individuals in the municipalities, presented in the table below. The results furthermore reveal that only three social media platforms are used when communicating with individuals.
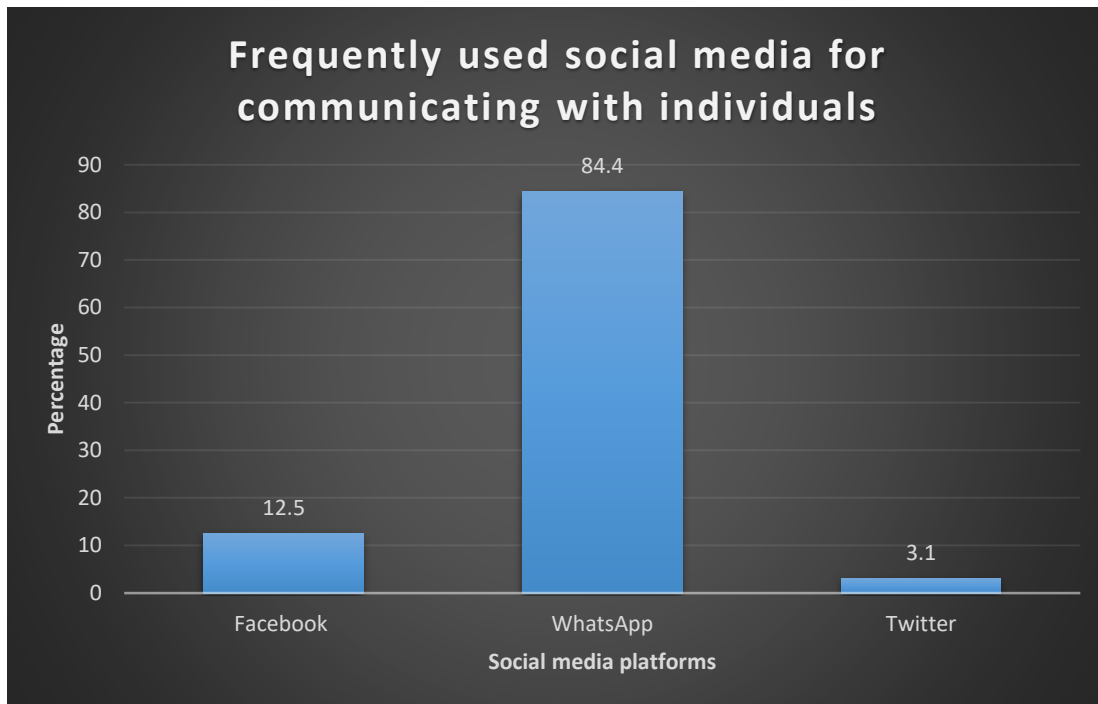
Figure 5.13: Frequently used social media for communicating with individuals

5.4.3 Social media monitoring

Monitoring social media usage in the municipality is required under The Government Communication Policy (2018:34). According to this policy, monitoring is essential as it enables a government department to communicate effectively. Therefore, this study required participants to indicate whether they do monitor social media usage in their municipalities. Figure 5.14 below summarises the findings.
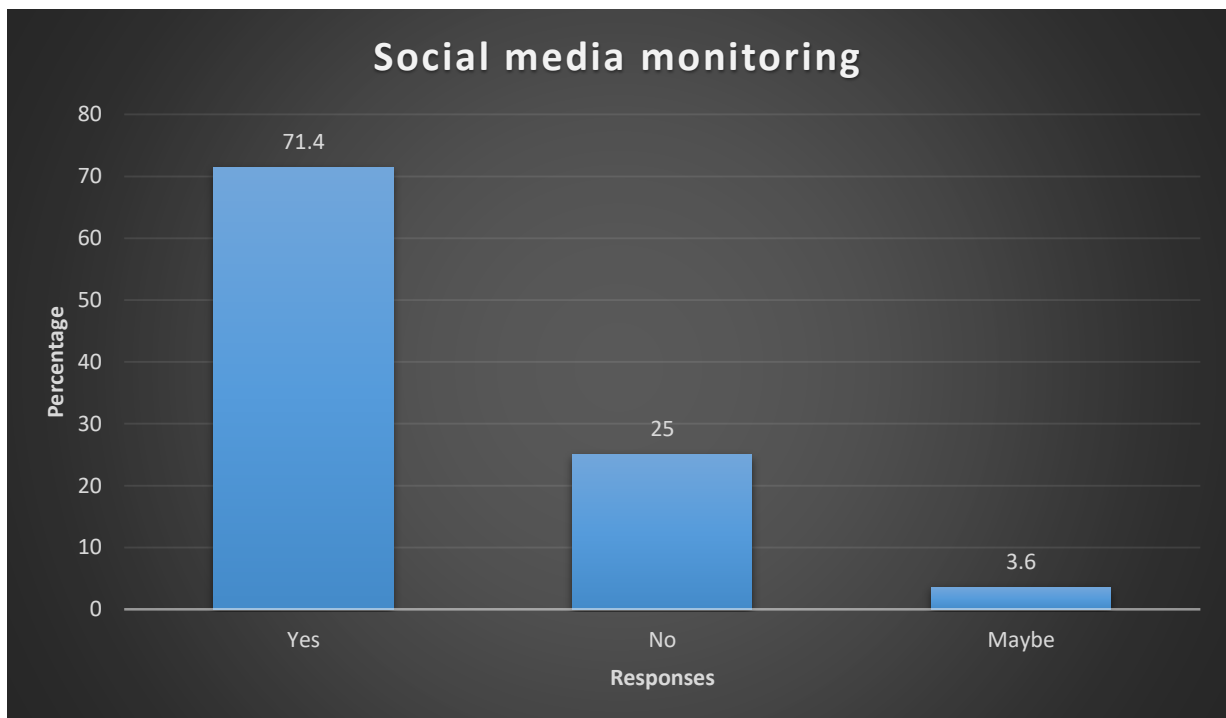
Figure 5.14: Social media monitoring

The researcher found that local municipalities in O.R. Tambo District Municipality have monitored their organisations' social media messages. About 71% of participants revealed that they monitor social media. However, there is 25% who said they do not monitor social media.

One interviewee confirmed the statistical results.

> "Yes, we do monitor especially our Facebook page because we have a lot of followers. Many people state that they don't have water in a particular area, so we monitor a lot. Thus, we know what they need and try by all means to provide what they need, so we monitor a lot to offer them what they need."

Furthermore, the observations above are comparable to the table below, which shows that participants respond to the comments posted on social media about their local municipalities.
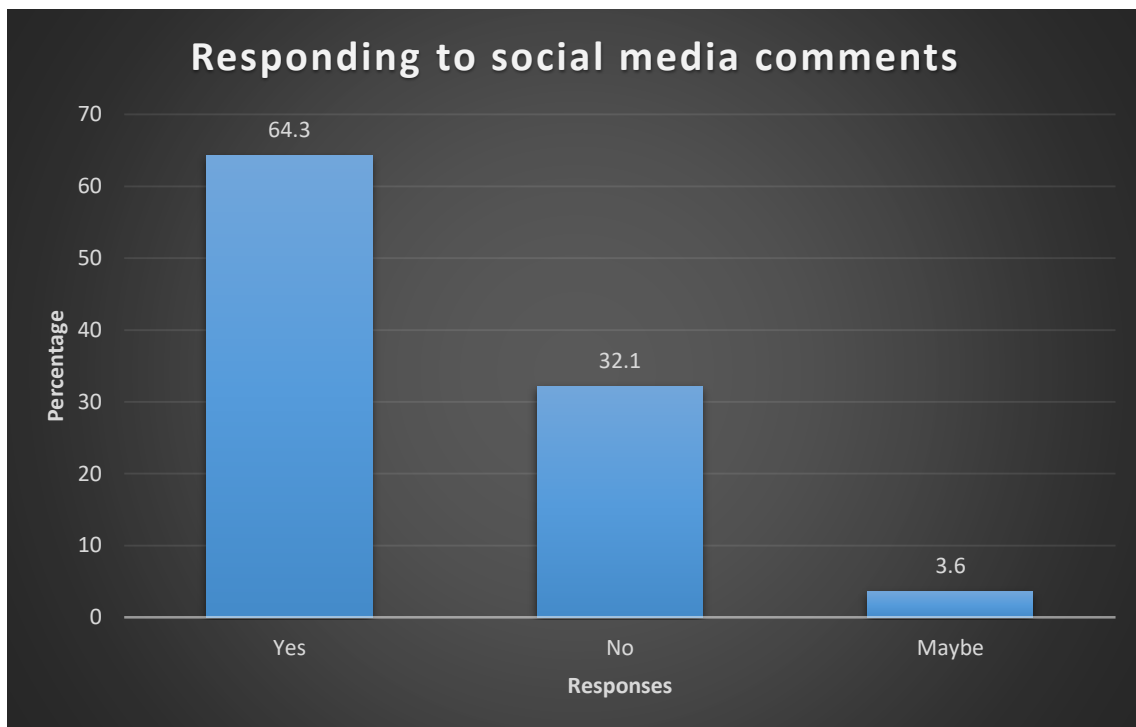
Figure 5.15: Responding to comments

64% of respondents revealed that they respond to comments, while about 32% indicated that they do not respond to comments. Some participants are not sure whether or not they respond to comments.

5.4.4 Monitored platforms

Also, participants showed that they use social media platforms like Facebook, WhatsApp, Twitter, and YouTube to monitor their organisations' social media messages. 42% of participants indicated that they use Facebook for monitoring, about 29% of participants use WhatsApp, Twitter is used by 17%, and YouTube by 2% for monitoring. However, 9% of participants do not use any of these social media platforms for monitoring. The table below gives a statistical summary around social media platforms used for tracking in O.R. Tambo District Municipality.
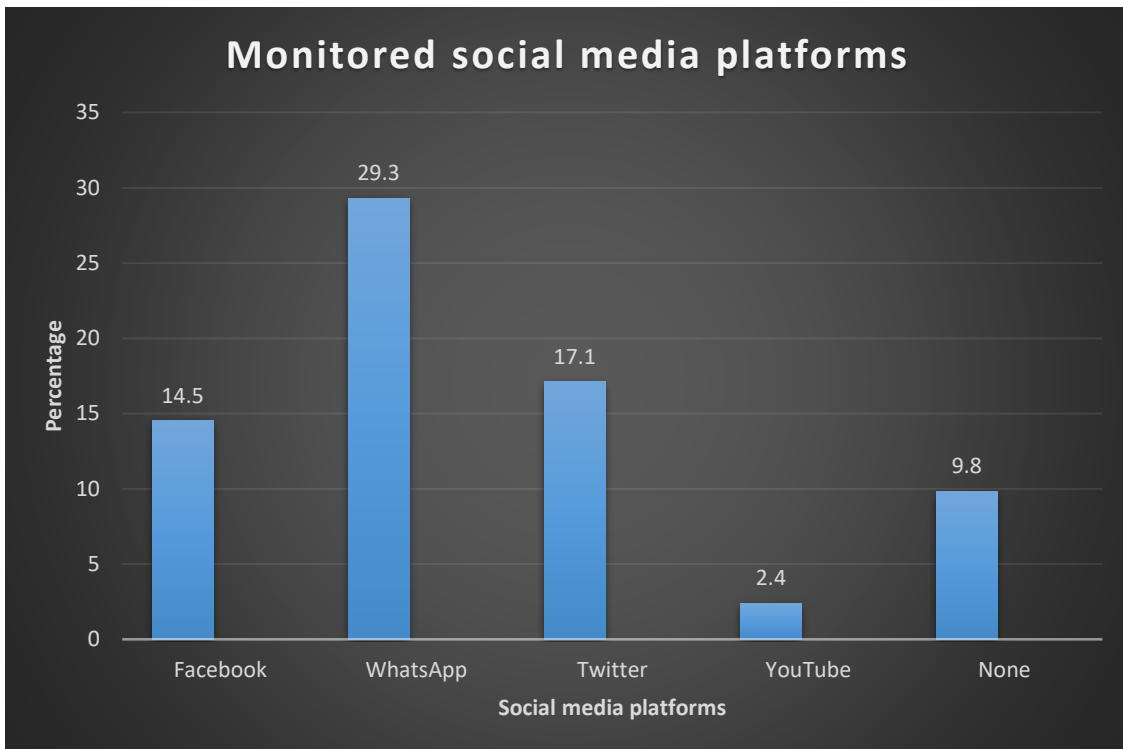
Figure 5.16: Monitored social media platforms

The participants furthermore, revealed that they are using social media platforms like Facebook, WhatsApp, Twitter, LinkedIn and Instagram to respond to comments that are posted on social media about their municipalities. Some participants also stated that they do not use any of these platforms to respond to comments. The majority use WhatsApp to respond to comments as it has about 39.1%, followed by Facebook with 28%, Twitter with 11%, Instagram with 7%, and LinkedIn with 2%. About 13% indicated that they do not respond to comments.
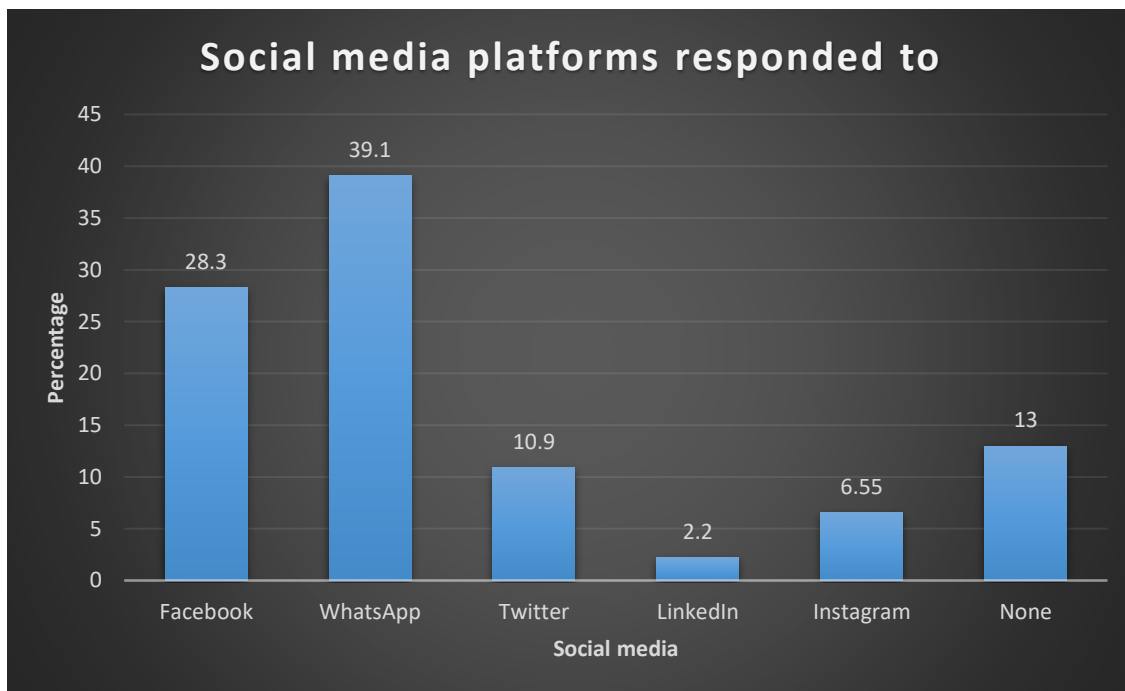
Figure 5.17: Social media platforms responded to

One interviewee confirmed the statistical results.

> Yes, we monitor social media comments; they are essential. At times you need to check the response from the audience. If you have communicated anything internally, you need to check how many people have seen the replies because you know what people need. So yes, the communications department monitors comments.

5.5 The challenges encountered by the use of social media in local municipalities.

5.5.1 Social media policy.

One of the factors that lead to the municipalities not using social media effectively has been the lack of social media policies in some municipalities. Thus, employees are not guided on social media use. This study further asked participants whether they had an existing social media policy. The findings showed that 50% of the participants have a social media policy. However, 7% indicated that they do not have a social media policy. About 43% indicated that they are not sure whether their local municipalities have social media policy or not.
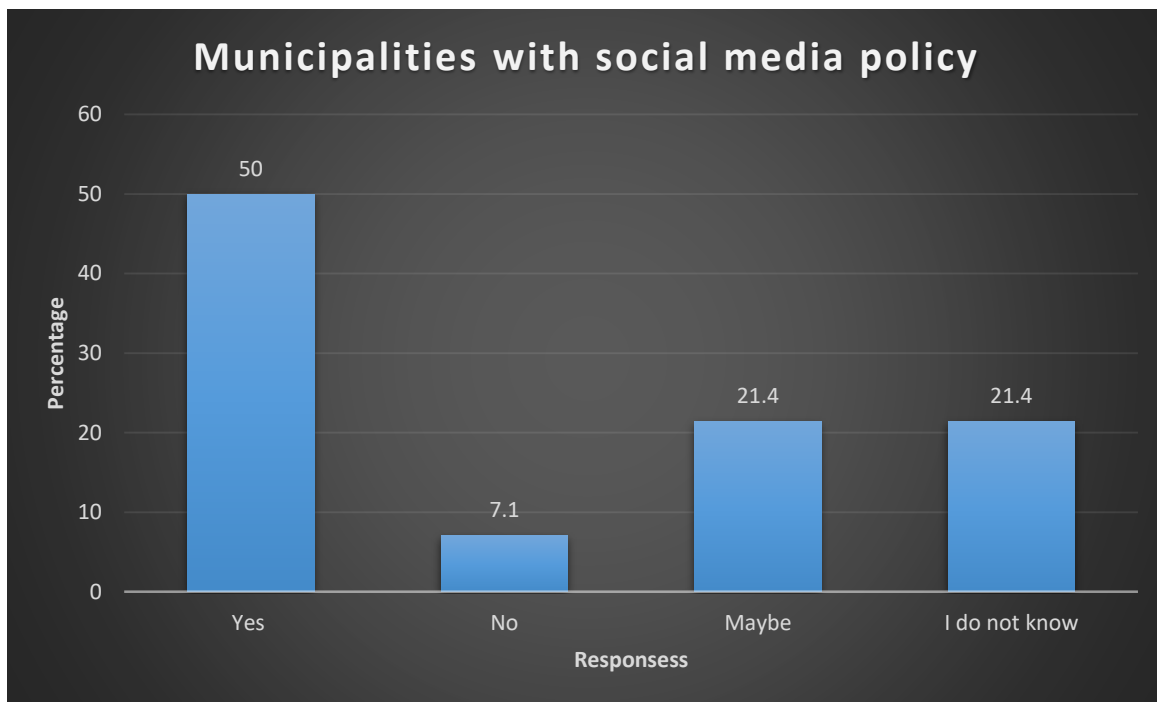
Figure 5.18: Municipalities with social media policy

One interviewee concurred with 50% of participants who indicated a social media policy in their municipalities.

> "Yes, we have a social media policy. It gives a clear understanding of the expectations and how we will manage the communication on social media; in that way, we know what someone post on social media. We also get to know how to react on that, and if I post something that is not right using the company's Facebook page, they should know what to do to discipline me. If I do this and that how can they react and reprimand me from that. We need to know the do's and don'ts of using social media, you see."

The high number of participants (50%) saying that the organisations had policies can be attributable to the Government Communication Policy (2018:34). The policy places the responsibility of managing this policy to the heads of communication, responsible for managing communications in municipalities. The results justify why 50% of participants stated that their municipalities have social media policy. Other respondents working in management also concurred that the national policy guides their policies.

> "In terms of the social media policy, we are guided by the Government Communication Policy, which requires us to set internal usage guidelines, implement and monitor social media usage in the municipality."

Still, others noted that even if the policy existed, there was a tendency to disregard these guidelines.

> "You tell [people] some policy sections, but they go ahead and set up their own private WhatsApp groups. So this means that we are not able to monitor what is said in those groups. It is a challenge that we face."

In terms of the awareness of municipal policies, the figure below summarises the understanding of their respective municipalities' social media policies.
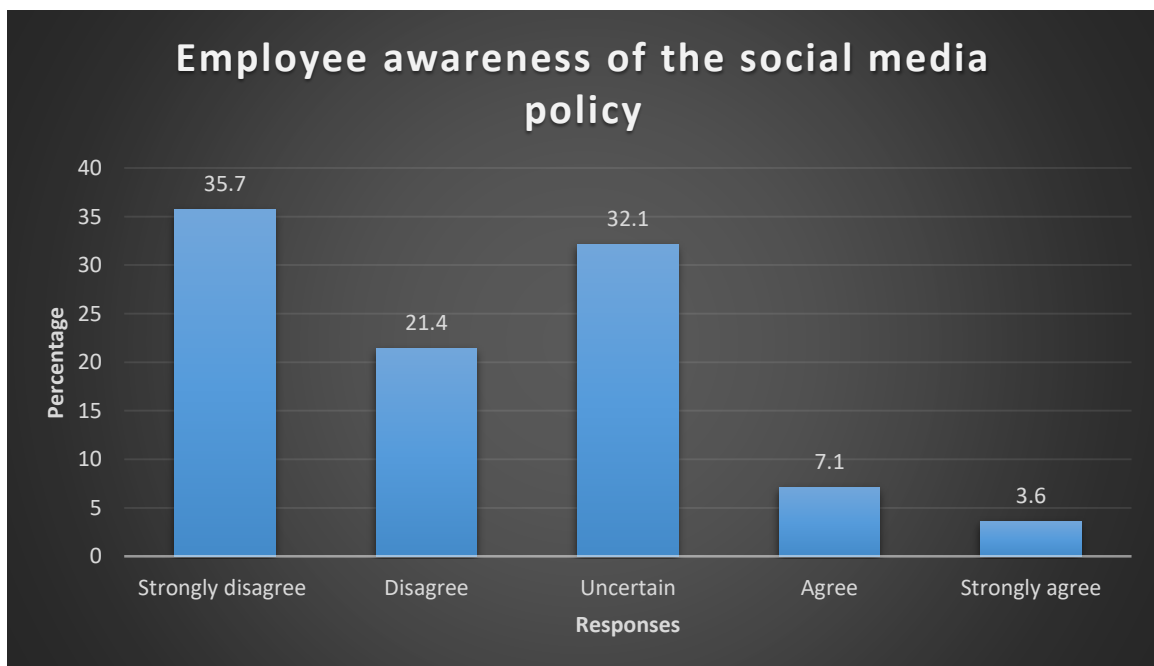
Figure 5.19: Employees Awareness of the social media policy

The table shows that 3.6 % strongly agree, 7.1% agree, 32.1% are uncertain, 21.4% disagree while 35.7% strongly disagree. It means that the majority of the participants are not aware of social media policies.

One interviewee concurred with the findings presented in the table above.

> "I have never seen social media policy within the municipality. So I doubt we do have such a policy. Even if we have it, but we don't know it."

This situation is risky as individuals will begin using social media haphazardly and sometimes against the municipal policies.

5.5.2 Employee adherence to the social media policy

Government Communication Policy (2018:34) place the responsibility of administering the social media policies to communication personnel. The study further wanted to find out whetheremployees were adhering to the policy. The research revealed that out of the employees who know the local municipalities' social media policy, only 42% comply with the policy, and 10% do not adhere to the policy. About 46.4% of the participants noted that they are unsure whether all municipalities' employees comply with the policy.
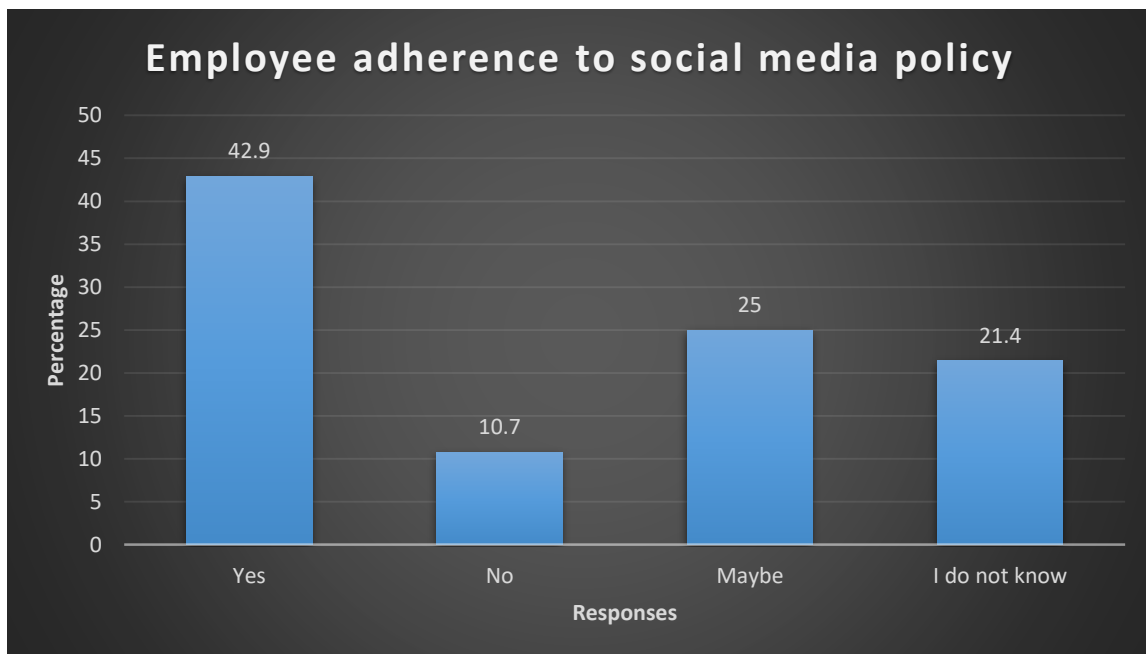
Figure 5.20: Employees adherence to the social media policy

5.5.3 Organisational support for policy implementation

For the organisation to implement the policy, some resources are required. These include help with the data to access social media sites, smartphones, and even personnel to ensure that they support other staff members to implement the policy. The results revealed the local municipalities do not help the participants with necessary resources to ensure that they use social media. The figure below shows the results:
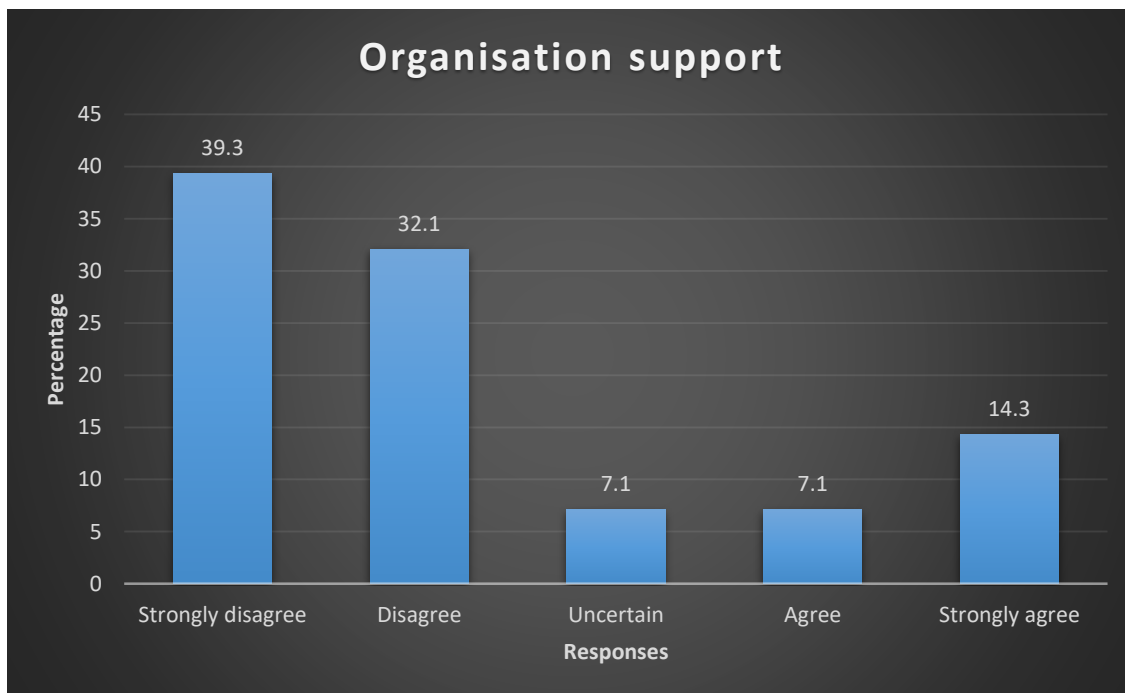
Figure 5.21: Organisational support

71% of the participants noted that their municipalities do not provide them with everything to ensure that they have everything they need to use social media for work purposes. They indicated that they would need internet connectivity or data, a suitable device or personnel to help them successfully implement the policy.

One respondent noted that:

> Some employees have the necessary equipment to do their work remotely, but others do not have all of that. In this digital era, it would be nice for all employees to have laptops and connective even at home.

Only 21% of participants agreed that municipalities ensure that they have everything they need to use social media for work purposes.

5.6   Conclusion

This chapter presented quantitative data, and qualitative data is nested in the quantitative data to expound the findings of quantitative data. The quantitative data which was obtained through the online questionnaires to communications division in the five demarcated local municipalities in the O.R Tambo District Municipality is

presented and analysed in tabular format. The qualitative data obtained through the interviews with communications managers in the four local municipalities is presented and interpreted to expound the quantitative data.

This chapter noted that social media, specifically, WhatsApp and Facebook, are being used by local municipalities for employee communication. However, the results also show that local municipalities do not use social media effectively; most employees do not know social media policy and adapting to social media for employee communication is a challenge. These results are consistent with the problem statement of this research project. The findings also indicate that the most commonly used social media platforms are WhatsApp, Facebook and Twitter.

CHAPTER SIX

DISCUSSION

6.1 Introduction

This study aimed to explore social media use for employee communication in local municipalities in the O.R. Tambo District Municipality. It was also to establish employees' perception of social media use in the municipalities; to ascertain the role of social media in municipalities' overall communication strategies, and examine the challenges encountered in social media. The researcher gathered data through online questionnaires administered to five local municipalities in the O.R. Tambo District Municipality. The researcher also conducted telephonic interviews with communications managers.

This study sought to answer the following research questions:

- How do local municipalities in O.R Tambo District Municipality use social media for employee communication?
- What are municipality employees' perceptions of the use of social media in local municipalities?
- What is the role of social media in municipalities overall communication strategies?
- What are the challenges encountered by the use of social media in local municipalities?

This chapter used themes and sub-themes that arose from the findings to discuss the meaning of the results. This chapter discusses the research questions and concludes with a discussion of the findings in light of the theoretical framework, such as Grunig and Hunt's (1984) excellence theory.

6.2 The use of social media for employee communication in the O.R. Tambo District Municipality

6.2.1 Social media adoption

Several conclusions can be reached from the findings presented in Chapter Five, which relates to the first research question. This study's statistical results have shown that social networks have been widely appropriated for employee communication in their municipalities. The majority of the participants agreed that it was easy for them to adapt to using social media for employee communication purposes instead of a minority of participants who disagreed.

Conversely, when respondents were asked if it was easy for their municipalities to adapt to using social media for employee communication, most disagreed. Findings also showed that few respondents agreed while others were uncertain. The respondents pointed out that it was not easy for them to work in the local municipality to adapt to social media. Alotaibi, Ramachandran, Kor and Hosseinian-Far (2018) added that the transition from a traditional system to a technology-oriented system often requires an organisational change in terms of the structure, culture, people and processes to achieve effective outcomes.

The benefits of adopting social media, such as providing immediate feedback and cost-effectiveness, explain why social media use has been widespread when communicating with fellow employees. In the past, internal communications, as argued by Steinberg (2007) was through notice boards, internal newsletters, meetings but now with the social networks one need not use lots of resources when producing communication materials such as magazines, videos and others. Another factor was that since 75% of the respondents were between 25-30 years, such respondents are mostly the demographic group with widely appropriated social media. However, respondents highlighted the same issue by pointing out that some older adults struggle to adapt to social networks and emphasised that they would need training to effectively and efficiently use social media. The results suggested it can only be easier to adapt to social media once there is training for all employees and enhance awareness of government social media policies.

6.2.2 The use of social media for employee communication

 The starting point is to note that the statistical results show that the respondents use social media platforms daily to communicate. Also, the results indicated how often each social media platform is generally used on a day-to-day basis. As was pointed out by Karakiza (2015), social media use in public organisations is growing, but this study showed the dominance of WhatsApp in the context. The respondents indicated, by and large, that they use platforms such as WhatsApp, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube and LinkedIn. WhatsApp and Facebook are standing on top in terms of usage percentages. As argued by Karakiza (2015) and Kustijono and Zuhri (2018), these platforms are cheaper to use, and that one can get instant feedback. WhatsApp is common amongst people with close ties to each other, and at the same time, the same people on WhatsApp are likely to be friends on Facebook, hence the dominance of the two applications. Facebook and WhatsApp popularity in the local municipality could be that these two social platforms help people communicate more efficiently with their friends, family and co-workers (Baruah, 2012).

It speaks to two way-symmetrical communications because there is an incorporation of audience feedback deemed necessary in communication practice and communication tactics (Laskin, 2009). The two applications also promote horizontal communications instead of centralised communication systems in organisations. Social media in local municipalities is perhaps a result of social media becoming increasingly popular for organisations because it allows communications to go beyond a private one-to-one conversation to become many-to-many (Siamagka, Christodoulides, Michaelidou, and Valvi, 2015). These aforementioned social media platforms included South Africa's five most popular social media platforms.

The Digital Statistics and Usage in South Africa (2020) report noted that social media platforms such as WhatsApp, YouTube, Facebook, Facebook Messenger and Instagram are the most popular social media platforms. The report further states that YouTube has outdone Facebook in terms of usage due to cheaper data costs and greater data accessibility. The latter is not consistent with the finding of this research project which noted that WhatsApp and Facebook are the most popular social media

platforms. The most surprising result of the study conducted by Ahmad (2019) is that Facebook is the most popular social media platform, followed by YouTube, WhatsApp, Instagram, and Twitter, respectively. It means that social media use differs in different contexts. There is less correlation among how social media is used in local municipalities in the O.R. Tambo District Municipality, South Africa, and worldwide.

The findings revealed that in local municipalities in the O.R. Tambo District Municipality, WhatsApp and Facebook are social media platforms used for employee communication with Twitter, Instagram, YouTube and LinkedIn is generally used for external communication activities of the municipality. As shown in the results that Facebook and WhatsApp enable feedback in employee communication, this is in line with excellence theory which advocates for two-way symmetrical communication and dialogic communication (Gruning, 2009). Gruning's Excellence Theory in public relations, argues that symmetrical communication of employee communication increased employees' engagement with their jobs and with the organisation.

In general, Mazzei (2014), Kang and Sung, (2017) and Kim and Rhee (2011) argue that employee communication improves the competitive advantage of the organisation, that it is significant for organisational effectiveness and success as it influences the reputation and organization-public relationships. In that vein, Men and Stacks (2014) point out that employee communication allows for interactive decision making, employee collaboration, information sharing and an environment that brings about productivity and builds a sense of organisational ownership. It means that since social media tools have enabled employee engagement, this goes a long way in improving employee productivity and belongingness. Thus, social media, Facebook and WhatsApp, particularly for employee communication in the O.R. Tambo District Municipality, help develop shared common understanding of employee communication.

6.3 Municipality employees' perceptions of the use of social media in local municipalities

The results have shown that social media platforms are useful communication tools, as presented in Chapter Five. The results showed that social media could improve communication speed between employees in the municipalities, expand knowledge-sharing, improve employee learning from each other, increase employee productivity, and increase the creativity and innovation within municipality environments. Hence it is viewed useful. Social media enhance effective, affordable and allow for communication innovations (Ahmad, Ahmad and Bakar, 2018). Shrestha (2015) points out that social media has become a handy tool for organisational communication. Rutsaert, Pieniak, Regan, McConnon, Kuttschreuter, Lores, Lozano, Guzzon, Santare and Verbeke (2014) confirms that social media is useful, especially when one is to communicate with many people.

The results revealed that most respondents agreed that they view social media as a useful communication tool. In contrast, a small number of respondents viewed social media, not as a helpful communication tool. Conversely, Shakki, Nia, Bai (2019) argue that social media for employee communication has negative consequences for employees and the organization. Shakki, Nia, Bai (2019) mentioned that the negative results of using social media in organisational environments for employees are job inattention and performance decline.

The authors mentioned above further stated that employees' involvement in social media during work hours causes the negligence of job responsibilities. Instead of engaging in a job, employees are drowned in social media, leading to job discontinuity. This study is cognisant of these challenges in using social media for employee communication. However, the benefits of using social media for employee communication seem to outweigh the challenges.

Also, the study ranked the usefulness of these social media platforms. The results showed that social media is viewed as a useful communication tool. Furthermore, WhatsApp is perceived to be the most useful platform for the communications

division's work. It showed that the communications division uses WhatsApp as communication tool mostly, followed by Facebook. Social media platforms such as Twitter, LinkedIn, YouTube and Instagram were perceived as less useful than WhatsApp and Facebook. These results highlight the need for practitioners to note the differential usage of social networks and their impact on two-way symmetrical communication.

Effectively, WhatsApp and Facebook enable employee engagement more than other platforms such as Instagram, YouTube, and Twitter in the workplace. This has implications on practice as it becomes essential to consider when designing employee communication plans. Spagnoletti (2017) observed this when he observed that social media applications are rarely integrated into municipalities' communication strategies. There is a need for more knowledge to be explored on how municipalities could use these applications to their advantages and benefits.

Additionally, Sobaci (2019) notes that municipalities' social media platforms for interacting with citizens are Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube; however, the same platforms are not used to interact with employees. The findings further show that there is a lack of systematic deployment of social media platforms in municipalities. In conclusion, the results showed why it is imperative to systematically integrate social media usage in a broader employee communication strategy. Employee communication strategies must consider contextual and demographic issues since social networks' use varies, vis-a-vis age, educational level, and development level.

6.4 The role of social media in municipalities' overall communication strategies

The findings revealed that municipal employees use social media to communicate with their colleagues and citizens. The majority of respondents noted that communications personnel in their municipalities use social media for various work purposes. The findings highlighted that:

i.   social media is used regularly for internal communication;

ii. Facebook and WhatsApp are the most used social media platforms for employee communication because they allow instant feedback;

iii. there are WhatsApp groups for each department, and those WhatsApp groups include the senior managers;

iv. There is a Facebook page for the municipalities where municipality employees and citizens get information about municipal programmes and comment on the information posted.

The pointers above are in line with Ngai, Tao and Moon (2015:6) who state that "the advent of social media has substantially changed how people and organisations communicate and interact." Rana, Tajvidi, Lal, Sahu and Gupta (2017), Rana, Dwivedi, Lal, Williams and Clement (2017) and Shareef, Dwivedi, Kumar and Kumar (2016) noted that social media is one of such powerful tools that holds all the fundamentals to improve the relationship between the strategic publics and the organisation.

The results indicated that local municipalities are now regularly using social media to communicate internal publics and that managers are also using social media platforms for employee communication. The findings further revealed that WhatsApp plays the most significant role in municipalities' broader communication strategies followed by Facebook. Twitter became third in social media platforms that play a role in the municipalities' overall communication strategies. LinkedIn and YouTube had the least role regarding the usage of social media platforms for employee communication. Interestingly, the respondents highlighted that social media for employee communication, WhatsApp became so prevalent during the hard national lockdown implemented due to the COVID-19 pandemic. As argued by Wang, Hao, Platt (2020), social media played an important role, particularly during COVID 19 for government employees who were disseminating information concerning different situations. During the hard national lockdown, the municipal employees had to work remotely, and employees were notified through Whatsapp groups, about new developments internally. Employees would subsequently reply to those notifications. A study conducted by Saleh (2020) on ICT, social media and COVID-19 in Kuwait City indicated that COVID-19 had a different impact on different sectors.

This study noted that local municipality employees had to rely on social media for communication as it allows for remote communication. Therefore, the excellence theory which aligns its roots to two-way symmetrical communication and dialogical communication is consistent with how social media is used in municipalities for employee communication. The above discussion indicates that social media plays a role that permits two-way communication and dialogue in municipalities, an excellent public relations practice (Gruning, 2009). However, the results do not indicate whether or not the employee communication through social media was balanced, which is one component of two-way symmetrical communication. Gruning (2013) acknowledges that social media brought good public relations opportunities, but practitioners must understand social media, not as a symbolic-interpretive tool rather than an interactive one.

Additionally, this study indicated that management uses social media platforms such as WhatsApp and Facebook for employee communication. Singh, Dwivedi, Kahlon, Sawhney, Alalwan and Rana (2019) noted that the exponential rise in usage of social media platforms by the general public had given management in public institutions a broader insight to use social media. As was opined by Sandel and Ju (2018), this study confirms that management used social media when communicating with their subordinate. Social media platforms are generally rich and more appropriate when sharing difficult, equivocal messages and allowing for rapid feedback and multiple cues.

However, the results also show that not all managers within local municipalities in the O.R. Tambo District Municipality use social media platforms for employee communication. It can be attributable to the fact that municipalities being studied in this present study are based in disadvantaged and poor areas of the Eastern Cape, where not everyone uses social media effectively in a manner that occurs in more urban and affluent areas. The above perspective is pointed out in the Handbook of Government Communications (2010) that organisations are forced to:

i.   create a written communication strategy that is linked to the core business and focuses on both deliverables and results; and

ii.   conduct quantitative and qualitative research regularly on social media platforms, language preferences for employees to understand organisational programmes.

Social media in municipalities seem to lack strategies, even though social media permits dialogue and two-way communication, leading to collaboration, sharing information, and subsequently informing decision-making.

6.4.1 Use of social media for group communication in local municipalities

In any workplace, groups are an essential social structure as it helps in the delivery of services. This study also sought to establish which social media platforms were used mostly for group communication, and the results showed that most respondents used WhatsApp communication within their groups. The results have shown that WhatsApp is the most frequently used social media platform to communicate both with groups and individuals within municipalities. The respondents noted that social media platforms like WhatsApp are mostly used when communicating with groups or even with individuals because it allows transparency in local municipalities as the information is shared in their WhatsApp groups within the department. Lu, Zhang, and Fan (2015) confirm that social media's core utilisation is openness, transparency, participation, networking, collaboration, and data sharing, critical variables for two-way symmetrical communication.

Furthermore, the authors state that the dialogue amongst employees in public institutions promotes a culture of openness and transparency. The second most used social media platform to communicate with groups in municipalities was Facebook. Twitter and LinkedIn were the least used social media platforms for group communication, highlighting the importance of using social media platforms selectively to attain set objectives. However, the results also show employees who lack appropriate equipment, lack of skills, and old age do not use social media for group communication.

6.4.2 Use of social media for individual communication in local municipalities

This study's statistical result indicated that most respondents use WhatsApp to communicate with individuals in the municipalities. The results furthermore reveal that only three social media platforms are used when communicating with individuals. Facebook and Twitter were said to be the least used social media platforms for sharing with individuals.

6.5 Challenges encountered by the use of social media in local municipalities

6.5.1 Social media policy

One of the challenges that lead to the municipalities not deploying these technologies effectively has been the lack of social media policies in some municipalities. When respondents were asked whether they had an existing social media policy, the findings showed some local municipalities have social media policy derived from the Government Communication Policy (2018:34). Social media policies are important as they guide everyday practice in municipalities. The findings indicated that social media policy clarifies the expectations and how they will manage social media communication. The Government Communication Policy requires municipalities to set internal usage guidelines, implement and monitor social media usage. However, it becomes a challenge when there is no social media policy to guide social media use in municipalities.

Also, some respondents were not sure whether their local municipalities have a social media policy or not. The results further revealed that there is also a tendency to disregard social media policy. These results are inconsistent with Government Communication Policy (2018) and Handbook of Government Communications (2010) that indicate that there must be policy and written strategy which serve as a guide for social media use. The excellence theory is quiet about social media policy in the context of this study. However, Gruning (2013) feared that the use of social media might not be in line with excellent public relations practice. In terms of the awareness of municipal policies, respondents indicated that most municipal employees are not aware of the social media policies, highlighting that they have never seen the policy

nor know it. This situation is risky as individuals will begin using social media haphazardly and sometimes against the municipal policies.

The above observation has implications on the Excellence theory. It highlights the significance of ensuring awareness amongst stakeholders of the available policies and developing and publicising them in the case of policies being unavailable. Two-way symmetrical communication must be codified in the form of policies, and these are supposed to be practised by practitioners in organisations.

6.5.2 Organisational support

As noted above, two-way dialogical communication must be policy-guided in organisations. Those organisations must also provide support to ensure that people can practice and implement those policies. For the organisation to implement the policy, several resources are required. These include help with data to access social media sites, smartphones, and even trained personnel to ensure that they support other staff members to implement the policy. The results revealed the local municipalities do not help the participants with necessary resources to ensure that they use social media. The challenge is integrating social media in municipalities (Zavattaro, French, and Mohanty, 2015). It is in line with the problem statement of this research project. The findings highlighted that some employees have the necessary equipment to do their work remotely. Still, others do not have the required equipment, with respondents noting that it would be nice for all employees to have all the resources that allow for connection even at home in this digital era.

6.6   Excellence theory in the context of social media in local
municipalities

The research has shown that social media feedback has been amongst the driving forces for the growing use of social media in many municipalities. Social media offer instantaneous feedback, which can empower municipalities to quickly respond to the issues raised on social networks. Grunig's (2009:1) excellence theory agrees that these social media can make communication more global, strategic, two-way and interactive,

symmetrical or dialogical, and socially responsible. Thus, it requires constant monitoring of social media, though this study has shown that the focus on social media monitoring is not that perfect. The Excellence Theory has conceptual implications on how public institutions can achieve two-way symmetrical communications. Figure 6.1 explains how social media can enhance public relations practice.
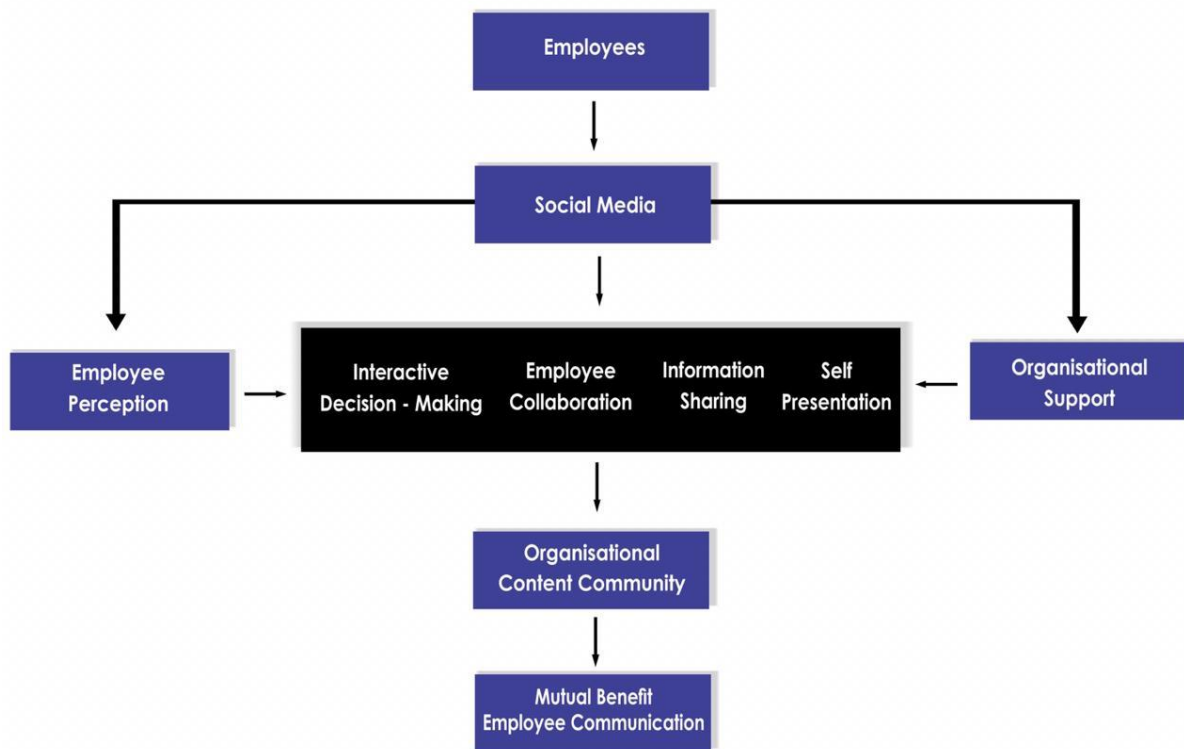
Figure 6.1: Excellence theory and Social media: A conceptual frame. **Source: Researcher's conceptualization**

As shown in figure 6.1, effective two-way employee communication requires employees to incorporate social media in their overall communication strategies and tactics. However, employee perception, employees' ability to use social media and employees' belief that social media could improve employee communication is crucial. Organisational support is necessary. It refers specifically to the provision of resources such as communication equipment, data, training and the subsequent development of social media policy and strategy, enhancing the use of social media platforms for the overall attainment of two-way communication. The combination of employee

perception about social media use for employee communication, and organisational support leads interactive decision-making, employee collaboration, information sharing and self-presentation of employees. After that, employees would produce content of their own about the organisation rather than management to provide them with information.

Creating online communities in organisations helps develop a sense of belongingness in the organisation, enabling them to create content that furthers organisational objectives. It promotes decentralised communication systems in the organisation. The ultimate goal after that is mutual beneficial employee communication which is in line with two-way symmetrical communication. This framework highlights that social networks are essential in a public organisation, and two-way communication does not happen by accident but must be planned systematically. Thus, the deployment of social networks in public organisations must be carefully implemented if these tools are to have a positive impact on the organisation.

6.7   Conclusion

This section examined the usage, perceptions, role and challenges of social media in O.R. Tambo District Municipality. The study revealed that there is an increase in the use of social media for employee communication. Importantly, this study has proved that social media are vital for group communication. As a result, managers and individual employees appreciate the ability to communicate with wider audiences with speed and effectiveness. However, the most common challenges are related to the employees' age, knowledge of the policy, and organisational support. By and large, there is an increasingly growing recognition of the role that social media can play to improve communication. However, given that the municipalities are located in rural communities, as will be indicated in the following section, there is a necessity to understand how rural communities contribute to social media discourses.

CHAPTER SEVEN

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

7.1   Introduction

This chapter provides a conclusion to this research project based on the findings and discussion. This study's main objective was to explore social media usage for employee communication in local municipalities in the O.R. Tambo District Municipality. The study further establishes employees' perception of social media use in the municipalities; ascertained the role of social media in municipalities' overall communication strategies, and examined the challenges encountered by the use of social media in local municipalities. The research gave an insight into how social media is used for employee communication in South African municipalities**.**

The focus was on five municipalities under O.R. Tambo District Municipality, namely: Ngquza Hill Municipality; Nyandeni Municipality; Port St Johns Municipality; Mhlontlo Municipality; and King Sabata Dalindyebo (KSD) Municipality. The theoretical framework was Grunig and Hunt's (1984) excellence theory, which was used to understand and provide insights on social media use for employee communication. The researcher summarised the study's results and provided recommendations concerning further research on social media for employee communication.

7.2   Summary of findings

This research project studied the use of social media for employee communication in selected South African municipalities. The research revealed that the O.R. Tambo District Municipality local municipalities use social media for employee communication. The study further revealed WhatsApp groups and Facebook pages in some municipalities sections to foster employee communication. The sampled population of the study comprised of public relations practitioners, communications managers and officers, media officers and administrative officers in the communications division

indicated that employees in these municipalities are mainly using social media every day. For employee; communication, the results revealed that:

1. WhatsApp and Facebook were the most popular social media platforms used by employees to communicate with each other.
2. Twitter, LinkedIn, Instagram and YouTube are not popular in municipalities.
3. There is growing usage of social media platforms in municipalities for employee communication which was not a case.
4. Other employees are not aware of the Government Communication Policy (2018), which governs social media use in the municipalities.
5. Comminutions personnel are not in control of social media platforms' usage per Government Communication Policy (2018).
6. Most municipalities do not provide resource support and policy frameworks to utilize social media platforms as communication tools fully.

Furthermore, the study revealed that social media platforms are not integrated into most local municipalities' overall communication strategy. Thus, some local municipalities do not have a social media policy. Even those municipalities with social media policy do not know the policy or do not adhere to it. The study also shows that local municipalities do not effectively use social media, pointing out that adopting social media for employee communication is challenging. Other employees are using social media roughly and haphazardly.

7.3   Recommendations

This study recommends the following for local municipalities to enjoy the use of social media for employee communication:

- Local municipalities must adhere to Government Communication Policy (2018);
- Social media be integrated into all local municipalities' overall/broader communication strategy;
- Local municipalities must have a social media policy, and the policy must be made available to all employees even to the interns and part-time employees;
- Municipal employees must be trained on social media, specifically on how to

use social media for employee communication;

- Municipal employees must be trained on the ethical use of social media to avoid rough and haphazard usage of social media;
- Local municipalities must have internal social media groups or pages, where they will furnish employees with updates on the latest news and developments to allow two-way communication, but must be reviewed and monitored by the communications officer;
- Establish an office that deals with social media abuses;
- Municipal employees must be furnished with all the necessary tools, such as smartphones and data, to connect.

7.4   Further research

The study had a limited scope that focused only on public relations practitioners, communications managers and officers, media officers, and administrative officers in five municipalities' communications division under O.R. Tambo District Municipality. A study with a larger sample at the provincial or national levels or an international level could be conducted because this study was limited in the O.R. Tambo District Municapality. This study focused on employee communication and ignored external communication. A study focusing on both internal and external communication could be conducted. A study exploring the impact of social media in internal communication is recommended. Also, given that local municipalities are located in rural communities, there is a necessity to understand how rural communities contribute to social media discourses. Furthermore, ethnographic research could be conducted to observe and interact with the participants in their real-life environment.

7.5   Conclusion

The chapter provided a summary of the findings and made recommendations for further studies. The study concluded that social media tools are now crucial for employee communication and that WhatsApp and Facebook are now essential employee communication tools. Further studies are recommended to study employees

and the usage of these social networks, especially ethnographically.

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APPENDIX A: CONSENT LETTER

O. R. TAMBO DISTRICT MUNICIPALITY

OFFICE ADDRESS:
O.R. Tambo District
Municipality House
Nelson Mandela Drive

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Private Bag X 6048
UMTATA
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D.R. TAMBO
DISTRICT MUNICIPALITY

Mr M.N. GRAWE   12 SEPTEMBER 2019
MTHATHA
5D99

Dear Sir

RE: REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH STUDY FOR ACADEMIC PURPOSES

We refer to the abovementioned request and are hereby pleased to advise that the O. R. Tambo District Municipality has no objection to you conducting your research with us.

Wishing you all the best with your studies.

Yours in Development

O.N. HLAZO
MUNICIPAL MANAGER

1

APPENDIX B: CPUT ETHICS CERTIFICATE

Cape Peninsula
University of Technology

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Office of the Research Ethics Committee	Faculty of Informatics and Design

Ethics clearance was granted to Mr Mkhululi Nceba Grawe, student number 212125966, for research activities related to the MTech in Public Relations Management in the Faculty of Informatics and Design, Cape Peninsula University of Technology.

Title of research proposal:	The use of social media for employee communication in selected South African municipalities

Comments

Research activities are restricted to those detailed in the research proposal.

Signed: Faculty Research Ethics Committee	17|9|19 Date

RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE
INFORMATICS AND DESIGN
ETHICS APPROVAL GRANTED

1 7 SEP 2019

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Consent to Participate in a Research Study

Title of Study: The use of social media for employee communication in selected South African municipalities.

Name of Investigators: Mkhululi Nceba Grawe

Dept: Public Relations Management

Introduction and Purpose of the Study

You are being asked to participate in a research study which explores the use of social media for employee communication in selected South African municipalities. The purpose of the study is to explore the usage of social media for employee communication in local municipalities in the O.R. Tambo District Municipality. The results of this study will inform the thesis that I plan to submit for my Masters qualification, and will be published in the final thesis. They may also be published as part of research outputs such as academic journal articles and conference presentations.

You are selected as a possible participant because you are an employee at O.R. Tambo District Municipality.

kindly read this form and ask any questions that you may have before agreeing to participate in the study.

Description of the Study Procedures

If you agree to be in this study, you will be asked to do the following:

Take part in an unstructured interview that will be recorded. The interview will be done once and will take not more than 10 minutes of your time.

Potential Risks and Discomforts

There are no reasonable foreseeable or expected risks.

Potential Benefits

People who participated in this study may have the better understanding of different social media platforms and their usages.

Confidentiality

Your identity and your responses will be kept anonymous. The records of this study will be kept strictly confidential for the purposes of this study. Research records will be kept in a locked file, and all electronic information will be coded and secured using a password protected file.

Payments

You will not receive any payment/reimbursement for participating in the study.

Right to Refuse or Withdraw

If you decide to participate in this research study, you may withdraw from your participation at any time without penalties.

Right to Ask Questions and Report Concerns

You have the right to ask questions about this research study and to have those questions answered by me before, during or after the research. If you have any further questions about the study, at any time feel free to contact me, Mkhululi N. Grawe at mngrawe@gmail.com or by telephone at 060 440 3169/047 501 1420 . If you like, a summary of the results of the study will be sent to you.

Consent

Your signature below indicates that you have agreed to volunteer as a research participant for this study, and that you have read and understood the information

provided above. You will be given a signed and dated copy of this form to keep, along with any other printed materials deemed necessary by the study investigators.

Signature of research participant:

…………………………….. ……………………

Signature of participant   Date:

Signature of researcher:

…………………………… …………………………

Signature of researcher   Date:

Dear Participant

Request for you to participate in this questionnaire

I am a registered M Tech: Public Relations student at the Cape Peninsula University of Technology, faculty of Informatics and Design, department of Public Relation Management. I am conducting research study titled: The use of social media for employee communication in selected South African municipalities.

The main objective of the study is to explore the usage of social media for employee communication in local municipalities in the O.R Tambo District Municipality. The results of this study will inform the thesis that I plan to submit for my Masters qualification, and will be published in the final thesis. They may also be published as part of research outputs such as academic journal articles and conference presentations.

The data from the study will be anonymized, meaning no one will know your answers to the study. It will also be kept confidential which means that the identity information of participants will not be made available to anyone who is not directly involved in the study.

Please complete the whole questionnaire. Your accuracy and honesty will be appreciated. This questionnaire will take approximately 15 to 30 minutes of your time. Should you have any questions or require additional information, feel free to contact Ms S. Nkoala at 021 469 1118 (supervisor) or myself (the researcher) at 060 440 3168/ 047 501 1420.

Section A - Biographical information

Please mark with an X where appropriate

A1.   Gender

Male		Female		Prefer not to say	

A2.   Age

| 18-24 | | 25-30 | | 31-35 | | 36-40 | | 41-45 | | 46-50 | | 50+ | |

A3.   Educational level

Matric		Diploma		B Tech		Honours		Masters		Other	
Other (Please Specify)											

A4.   How long have you been working in local government?

| 0-5 years | | 6-10 years | | 11-15 years | | 16+ years | |

A5.   Job status

Permanent		Temporary		Part-time		Internship	
Other (Please Specify)							

A6.   Job title

Communication manager		Spokesperson		Internal communication officer		External communication officer		Marketing officer	
Media officer		Public relations officer		Audio-visual technician		Social media officer		Admin officer	
Other (Please Specify)									

A7.   Rank

Top management		Middle management		Line management		Operational level	
Other (Please Specify)							

Section B – Social media use and knowledge:

B1.   Indicate if you use social media for work purposes or not.

Do you use social media for work purposes?	Yes	No	Maybe	I do not Know
Does your senior management use social media to communicate with internal public?	Yes	No	Maybe	I do not Know

Do you think Social media is a useful communication tool?	Yes	No	Maybe	I do not Know
Do you monitor social media messages about your organization?	Yes	No	Maybe	I do not Know
Do you respond to the comments?	Yes	No	Maybe	I do not Know
Does your organization have a social media use policy?	Yes	No	Maybe	I do not Know
Are all stakeholders (internal) adhering to the policy?	Yes	No	Maybe	I do not Know

B2.   Indicate if you have used the following social media and the frequency thereof.

Type of social media	Several times a day	About once a day	A few times a week	Once a month or less	I do not use this platform
Facebook					
WhatsApp					
Twitter					
LinkedIn					
Instagram					
YouTube					

B3.   Indicate if you use the following social media for work.

							None	I do not know
Which of these platforms do you								

use for work purposes?								
Which of these platforms do you use for recreational purposes?								
Which of the platforms does your senior management use to communicate internally?								
Which of these platforms do you think is useful as a communication tool for the work that you do?								
Which of these platforms do you use to monitor messages about your organisation?								
Which of these platforms do you frequently use to communicate with groups within your organisation?								
Which of these platforms do you frequently use to communicate with individuals								

within your organisation?									
Which of these platforms do people within your organisation use most frequently when communicating with you?									
Which of these platforms do you think is most effective for internal communication?									
On which of these platforms do you respond to comments?									

B4. On a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 indicating strongly disagree and 5 indicating strongly agree, indicate your views on the following statements.

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	strongly agree	I do not know
Social media is used effectively in my organisation.						
All employees within my organisation know the social media policy.						

All employees within my organisation adhere to the social media policy.		113			
It was easy for me as an individual to adapt to using social media for internal communications in my organisations.					
It was easy for my organisation to adapt to using social media for internal communication.					
My organization ensures that I have everything I need to be able to use social media for work purposes (internet connectivity, a suitable device etc.).					

APPENDIX E: INTERVIEWS

Interview questions for the research study on the use of social media for employee communication in selected South African municipalities.

1. What is your view about employee communication in local municipalities?
2. What is your view about the use of social media in local municipalities for employee communication?
3. Do you use social media for employee communication? If yes, why and if no, why?
4. If you use social media for employee communication, how was it for you to adapt to it?
5. Do other employees use social media for employee communication? If yes, what do you think is their reason and if no, what do you think is their reason for not using it?
6. What do you think are the advantages of using social media for employee communication in your oganisation?
7. What do you think are the disadvantages of using social media for employee communication in your oganisation?
8. What are the benefits of using social media specifically for communications division?
9. Does communication division monitor social media comments?
10. Does your organisation have a policy on social media usage? If yes, what do you think is the reason for the policy and if no, what do you think is the reason for not having the policy?
11. What role do you think social media plays in your division's communication strategy?

12. What role do you think social media plays in your municipality's overall communication strategy?

13. What challenges do you think municipalities face when it comes to using social media for communication purposes?

14. Is there anything that you think needs to be done to enhance your municipalities use of social media for communication purposes?

15. Would you recommend social media usage for employee communication?