





## Chapter 2

# Facebook Communication by South Africa's Eight Metros

Lakela Kaunda  and Ricky Mukonza 

The dawn of social media has changed the way people work, live and play, given the proliferation of digital communication tools at their fingertips. It has also added new platforms to the instruments that government and the public can use to communicate. Using the development communication approach as a theoretical framework, this chapter explores how the eight South African metropolitan municipalities use social media – particularly the Facebook platform – to engage in two-way communication with the public. Local government was selected for study as it is regarded as the sphere that is closest to the people (Mkhize, 2018). The delivery of basic services such as as electricity, access to potable water, proper sanitation and waste removal, street lighting, cutting the grass on the verges of the roads, repairing potholes and ensuring correct billing systems for both households and businesses, are delivered by municipalities (Madumo, 2015; Mkhize, 2018).

The post-1994 democratic policy and legislative framework of the country created a developmental local government system which emphasises the involvement and participation of the people in the work of municipalities, as articulated in the White Paper on Local Government (DPACD, 1998) and in Chapter 7 of the Constitution. In section 152(1), local government is given the task of amongst others, encouraging the involvement of communities and community organisations in the matters of local government. Legislation, such as the Local Government Municipal Systems Act 7 of 2000 (SA, 2000), also directs municipalities to encourage the involvement of communities and community organisations in local governance. The legislative framework

has thus institutionalised public participation in local government and the need for government to communicate with communities it services. Municipalities are required to publish the annual budget and the Integrated Development Plan (IDP) and invite members of the public to comment on them (Brand, 2016; Breakfast, Meko & Maphazi, 2015). The IDP of a municipality should outline what the council will do to promote socio-economic development and build a safe and healthy environment, and the information should be provided to citizens as a basic step in promoting accountability (Brand, 2016).

This study found that besides the statutory consultation mechanisms, members of the public seek to engage with municipalities on an ongoing basis on issues relating to electricity, water, refuse removal and other basic services. Such engagement is catered for in the Government Communication Policy – adopted by the South African Cabinet in November 2018 – which is anchored on the development communication framework (GCIS, 2018) (see Maseko in this volume).

Government defines development communication as the use of communication to facilitate social and economic change, with the principle of involving the people in activities that affect their lives, through ongoing engagement with government (GCIS, 2018). The policy enjoins government to disseminate information that will assist people to improve their livelihoods. It also underscores the need for government to listen to the people and respond to their inquiries (GCIS, 2018). The common denominator between developmental local government and government's development communication paradigm is the participation of members of the public in governance and the need for ongoing communication with the citizens.

The 'development communication' paradigm is attributed to Filipino Professor Nora C. Quebral, who is known as the mother of development communication, having first used the concept in 1971 according to Concepcion (2020). The scholar linked communication with development and the

improvement of the quality of life, and defined the field as, “the art and science of human communication applied to the speedy transformation of a country and the mass of its people from poverty to a dynamic state of economic growth that makes possible greater social equality and the larger fulfilment of the human potential” (Quebral, 2011: 4).

Quebral (2011) also describes, as a major shift, the marriage of the technology of information and of communication which, in her view, revolutionised how information is exchanged, even in developing societies. In South Africa, government has introduced electronic government or e-government, which is the use of information and communication technologies (ICT) to provide services to the public, according to the Department of Telecommunications and Postal Services (DTPS, 2017). ICT-enabled communication platforms such as social media, portals and websites have been developed to share information with the public (Palvia & Sharma, 2019; DTPS, 2017).

Using the qualitative research method, data was collected from the official Facebook pages of the eight South African metropolitan municipalities – commonly known as metros – and the content was thematically analysed. It has been established that all the metros have official Facebook accounts and post information daily on their official Facebook pages. Information disseminated on the pages relates to the provision of basic services such as water, electricity and refuse removal, including interruptions in the provision of services. The municipalities also distribute information about forthcoming events such as official openings and infrastructure projects, activities of the mayors and members of mayoral committees or other leaders, economic activities such as business exhibitions, health issues such as COVID-19 and notices on bylaws.

The study has found that the information route is unidirectional. Municipalities provided the information but did not engage or discuss the content with users in the majority of cases during the period of the study, November

2021. Members of the public responded to the information with questions and comments, especially in relation to the delivery of basic services or lack thereof, but these were ignored. The interactive capability of the Facebook platform was not taken advantage of to engage the users and respond to their inquiries, in line with the spirit of the development communication paradigm and the public participation ethos of developmental local government.

### **Background: Social media changing the way people communicate**

The term social media generally refers to the computer-based and internet-based technology that is used to share ideas, thoughts and information using virtual networks (Dollarhide, 2021). A common feature of social media is its interactive capability. People communicate and share information 24 hours a day in an interactive manner, and anyone can create content for social media and share it as and when they want to do so (Jordaan, 2019). Social media platforms include social networking sites such as Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, Telegram, Signal and Instagram or content production sites such as video platforms TikTok and YouTube (Jordaan, 2019; Apuke, 2017).

Facebook allows users to create their own profiles on which they can upload pictures and videos, as well as share messages. Twitter enables users to tweet short messages on their walls, which attracts comments from other users, while WhatsApp is a mobile social network that allows the sharing of information, pictures, videos, voice notes and other vital messages (Apuke, 2017). Facebook was established by global entrepreneur Mark Zuckerberg in 2004 as a platform for Harvard University students to connect with other students (McFadden, 2020). The site became immediately popular and within 24 hours of the launch, around 1 200 students had signed up. Facebook had more than 4.7 billion monthly active users globally in 2021, according to McFadden (2020).

The Facebook social media platform was selected for the study due to the large numbers of users in the country, its interactive capability, as well as the wide reach within the metropolitan municipalities that formed the sample of the study. Two studies have indicated high figures for the usage of the platform in South Africa. The DataReportal annual digital report for 2022 put Facebook users at 24 million, quoting advertising data obtained from the Facebook owners, Meta (Kemp, 2022).

The 2022 Social Media Landscape report for South Africa described Facebook as the most popular platform with an estimated 22 million local users (Goldstuck & Turner, 2022). Major metropolitan municipalities such as Johannesburg, Tshwane, eThekweni and Cape Town were found to have the highest level of numbers of people using Facebook according to the report. The breakdown of usage among provinces with metropolitan municipalities indicated the highest usage in Gauteng at 37.6%, followed by: KwaZulu-Natal (11.9%), Eastern Cape (9.58%), Free State (6.38%) and the Western Cape (8.18%) (Goldstuck & Turner, 2022). The Facebook reach therefore makes it an appropriate platform to gauge the way municipalities utilise social media platforms for interactive communication with the public.

Jakoet-Salie (2020) moots that the use of internet technology may greatly enhance citizen participation and improve government to citizen relations, given the access to public information and interaction that it provides. The public sector, as stated in the Government Communication Policy (GCIS, 2018), embraces social media and states that it provides an opportunity for interactive communication between government and citizens, partners and stakeholders. The Government Communication Policy (GCIS, 2018) also states that social media has increased the frequency and speed of engagement. Social media has also provided an important platform for municipalities to communicate with, or keep track of the views of, the public on service delivery issues and governance, in addition to institutional mechanisms such as ward committees (Kaunda, 2021)

## **Communicating for change and development using ICT-enabled platforms**

The essence of the development communication paradigm is that change must occur in the lives of those who are recipients or beneficiaries of government's communication efforts. Quebral (2011) described development communication as centred on change, and on the poor and the marginalised in a developing society who were to be supported in a move towards a better life. The theme is taken further by Odoom (2020), who introduces a link between communication, empowerment and participation. Odoom (2020) contends that development communication is used to promote participation in development activities and to provide people with the information and knowledge they need to improve their lives. Meanwhile, Ihsaniyati, Sarwoprasodjo, Muljono & Gandasari (2023) indicate that development communication and social development are not only limited to providing access to, or dissemination of, information, but also as a process that enables dialogue and public participation.

Pypers and Bassuday (2016) posit that municipalities invite citizens to actively participate in governance as voters, citizens, consumers and organised partners. The purpose is to ensure accountability on the part of the elected political leadership for the policies they wish to introduce Pypers and Bassuday (2016). The authors also differentiate between 'invited' spaces and 'invented' spaces of public participation (Pypers & Bassuday, 2016). Community protests are regarded as invented spaces, a form of public participation used by aggrieved citizens, while the 'invited' spaces are the formal mechanisms that are used to provide inputs into the work of municipalities such as the ward committees and public meetings or sending written submissions to council.

The growth of ICT platforms has enabled the development of e-participation or electronic participation of citizens in governance. E-participation is regarded as a subset of both public participation and e-government (Palvia & Sharma, 2007). E-participation is defined as encompassing

all forms of political participation which is carried out using digital media according to Lindner and Aichholzer (2020). E-participation in this study is used to mean the participation of citizens via the Facebook platform to provide their views about the information the municipalities post, as well as other issues that are of concern to them.

The South African Government produced an E-Government Strategy and Roadmap in 2017, which defines e-government as referring broadly to the innovative use of ICTs to link citizens and the public sector with the interest of improving governance and promoting collaboration and efficiency according to the erstwhile Department of Telecommunication and Postal Services (DTPS, 2017). Jakoet-Salie (2020) posits that e-government enables participatory democracy in the sense that it makes it possible for citizens to directly communicate with and debate with government about issues that affect them. The citizens can provide feedback to government about the services that are provided, posits the author (Jakoet-Salie (2020)). According to the E-Government Strategy and Roadmap, e-government operations may take three forms: Government-to-Government (G2G), Government-to-Business (G2B) and Government-to-Citizens (G2C). The G2C services are described as including applications that enable citizens to interact with government departments and institutions and pose questions. It also refers to services such as filing income tax returns or renewing driver's licences which are enhanced by the use of ICT applications (Pavlia & Sharma, 2019; DTPS, 2017). Government has also established a web portal called the *Batho Pele Gateway* from which the public can source government legislation and policy documents (Jakoet-Salie, 2020). The official government social media platforms form part of the G2C services.

Social media has become popular as an easily available tool during crises in the country (Allen, 2021). The South African government, especially the Department of Health (DoH), used social media extensively to communicate about the COVID-19 pandemic in its early stages, in addition to using traditional media forms. Government research indicated

that 90% of South Africans know what protocols to follow to avoid being infected by the virus, which was taken to mean the communication strategy had been a success, according to then GCIS director-general Phumla Williams (Williams, 2020). The social media platforms were also used widely during protests in South Africa, for example, the civil unrest that accompanied the arrest of former President Jacob Zuma in July 2021 (Allen, 2021), as well as the #FeesMustFall protests by higher education students in 2016 (Ntuli & Teferra, 2018). Ntuli and Teferra observe that the 2016 student protest wave was characterised by the successful use of social media to mobilise participation in the protests across the country.

Parkyn (2017) also cites the characteristic of social media as an organising tool, and refers to the Arab Spring, where social media was used to mobilise against governments in North Africa. However, the author (Parkyn, 2017) also argues that social media may be less effective in representing the interests of ordinary people on a sustained basis. Other scholars have noted that while social media is useful for quick communication during a crisis and as a participation tool, there are risks of misinformation and disinformation and spreading harmful messages (McNeill & Briggs, 2014). The fake news or false information that was distributed via social media in South Africa during the COVID-19 pandemic included a conspiracy theory that fifth generation (5G) ICT played a role in the conception of, or the spread of, the pandemic (Malinga, 2020).

The value of ICT and e-government services is also hampered by the digital divide, given that there are still many citizens who lack access to digital technologies. Mlaba (2021) breaks down South Africa's digital divide into three factors: access to hardware, understanding the digital tools and affordability. The author (Mlaba, 2021) contends that these factors have had a negative impact on access to education and employment opportunities.

Ihsaniyati et al. (2023) define the digital divide as the rural-urban gap, as well as a divide caused by demographics

such as age, education, gender and income. However, statistics indicate a growth in access to the internet, despite the concerning digital divide. DataReportal's Digital 2021: South Africa report pointed out that there were 38 million internet users in South Africa in 2021, with the internet penetration rate standing at 64% in January 2021 (Kemp, 2021). Meanwhile, The SA Social Media Landscape Report 2022 indicated the growth of social media users from 25 million in 2020 to almost 30 million in 2021 (Malinga, 2022). The platforms LinkedIn, Twitter and TikTok showed the fastest growth, while Facebook continued to be South Africa's most popular social network (Malinga, 2022). The report also indicated that most people with internet access use smartphones to connect.

Digital 2021 reported that there were more than 100 million cellular phone connections in the country in 2020 (Kemp, 2021). The information about the extensive use of cellular phones in South Africa is corroborated by the 2020 General Household Survey released by Statistics South Africa (StatsSA) (StatsSA, 2020), which reported that 89.4% of South African households exclusively use cellular phones. Using mobile phones to access the internet made it more accessible to residents in rural areas, according to Stats SA (2020). The General Household Survey also stated that 74.1% of South African households had at least one member who had access to or used the internet. They accessed the internet at locations such as their homes, work, place of study, internet cafés or public hotspots according to Stats SA (2020). The use of mobile internet access devices in rural areas was at 52.9% while the same use in urban areas was 71.6% and 66.8% in metropolitan areas (Stats SA, 2020).

The Minister of Communications and Digital Technologies Khumbudzo Ntshaveni outlined government's plans to ensure that 80% of South Africans have access to the internet through smart devices as part of bridging the digital gap (Ntshavheni, 2022). This would be achieved through Phase 2 of the South Africa/SA Connect programme, which sought to connect 44 000 government institutions and over 33 000 community Wi-Fi hotspots through a

partnership of government and the private sector. Ntshavheni (2022) also stated that government sought to automate government frontline services and take at least 50% of government services online. The Minister conceded that the plan would require that the poor and those in rural areas obtain basic digital skills to access government.

Research has however indicated that ensuring the availability of ICTs and communication applications does not necessarily lead to uptake by citizens. Muridzi (2019) examined the usage of ICTs by citizens in municipalities and found that while metropolitan municipalities had provided access to e-government services, the response from citizens had been slow. In the same vein, Okeke-Uzodike and Dlamini (2019) examined e-participation in municipalities in KwaZulu-Natal, Western Cape and Gauteng. The study found that Gauteng and KwaZulu-Natal had low levels of public participation using e-participation platforms and that municipalities were still using traditional forms of citizen participation. On the other hand, findings in the Western Cape province showed several e-participation projects being implemented. The authors recommended that effective implementation of an e-participatory platform would reduce protests and contribute to easing the divide in society.

Two studies revealed a muted response by government to inquiries by the public on official platforms. Mawela (2016) assessed how provincial government departments and municipalities use social media applications for electronic participation. The study established that citizens demonstrated increasing access and interest in social media and were ready to use the electronic platforms to interact with government departments. However, the departments responded sporadically to the responses of the public. Fashoro and Barnard (2021) undertook a qualitative study exploring social media platforms that are used by South African provincial departments and municipalities and how these platforms are used for public participation activities. The study found that all provinces and municipalities have social media accounts. However, the platforms are used mainly to

disseminate information or as an extension of the government websites where information is posted. The two studies bear resemblance to the focus of this chapter, the difference being that they focus on social media in general in various provincial government departments and in local government, while this paper specifically targets metros and the Facebook platform.

## **The state of local government**

Local government has been selected for the study given its importance in the government system as the sphere that is closest to residents (Mkhize, 2018; Kaunda, 2023). It has also been chosen due to the serious challenges facing many municipalities. In the 2022 Municipal Audit Report, the Auditor-General of South Africa (AGSA, 2022) highlighted shortcomings facing municipalities as being accountability and service delivery failures, poor governance, weak institutional capacity and instability.

The Auditor-General reported that by June 2021, 23 municipalities were under administration or provincial intervention, which further increased to 33 municipalities by February 2022 (AGSA, 2022). In the 2018 Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs (COGTA) Budget Vote speech, the then COGTA Minister Dr Zwelini Mkhize announced that only 7% of the country's municipalities were classified as well-functioning, while others ranged from reasonably functional to dysfunctional or distressed (Mkhize, 2018). In the 2022 report, the Auditor-General also reported a slight improvement as 27 municipalities were able to maintain their clean audit status throughout the term of the previous administration, while 14 achieved their first clean audit (AGSA, 2022).

The weaknesses in governance and financial administration coupled with poor communication with the public has been cited in official reports and studies by scholars as being responsible for service delivery protests. The 15 Years Review of Local Government report, produced by the South African Local Government Association (SALGA, 2015)

cited poor public participation and poor communication with the public as one of the main causes of community protests around the country. Other research studies have found a link between the dysfunctionality of municipalities and community protests. Reddy (2016) investigated service delivery protests in South African townships and highlighted service delivery failures that anger the public such as non-functioning traffic lights, uncut grass on the verges of the roads, broken or leaking water pipes, potholes on the roads and unanswered telephones. Reddy (2016) also cited the politicisation of local government and interference by politicians in administrative matters as a serious problem that led to dysfunctionality and distress.

The view on the causes of protests is shared by Morudu (2017), who explored the link between the increase in service delivery protests and the level of services delivered by local municipalities in 234 municipalities. The study recommended that to minimise the number of protests, local municipalities should increase the provision of basic services. Botes (2018), who concurs with Morudu (2017), investigated why service delivery protests continued despite an increase in the delivery of services by government. The study found that people needed to see a tangible improvement where they live for the protests to end. The author also emphasised the need for participatory democracy to be widened and consolidated in order to stop the protests.

## **Methodology**

### **Research techniques and operationalisation of the study**

Facebook was selected for the study given its standing as the most popular and most widely used social media platform (Malinga, 2020). The metros were selected through purposive sampling. Bertram and Christiansen (2020) point out that a purposive sample is chosen for a particular purpose which could be either because it is representative of the population or encapsulates a number of issues which exist in the population.

The metros were specifically chosen given reports that social media penetration is higher in urban areas (Malinga, 2020).

The Auditor-General of South Africa (AGSA, 2022) describes described as large urban complexes with populations of more than one million people. The metros account for the largest portion of municipal expenditure, serve the highest number of households and were responsible for a budget of R247.48 billion in 2020/21 according to the AGSA (2022). Data was collected in November 2021. This was the period of the South Africa local government elections, which took place on 1 November 2021. This period also overlapped with the period of the COVID-19 pandemic which incidentally made social media and other digital tools more important for communication as in-person public meetings were restricted (NICD, 2020).

Information sought from the metropolitan municipalities' Facebook pages included the number of followers of the official page, the information distributed by the municipality on the page, the responses and comments of members of the public or followers, and the nature of engagement on the page, for example, whether the information flow is two-way or unidirectional. The Facebook pages of the municipalities were scrutinised daily, monitoring the posts and engagement between the municipalities and the users and, where there was none, observing the lack thereof. A thematic analysis of the data was undertaken. Willis (2013: 323) describes thematic analysis, which explores the presence of themes, both pre-determined and themes observed within the data, as the most used form of analysis in qualitative research. The themes and findings are discussed in the next section.

## **Discussion**

### **Dominance of service delivery issues**

It was established that all metros selected for the study have an official presence on the Facebook platform, with information being posted daily during the period under review – November

2021 – except for Mangaung Metropolitan Municipality, which had sporadic posts (Facebook, 2021; Kaunda 2021). The common topics gleaned from the data collected are service delivery interruptions and maintenance, infrastructure development, announcements of public events, consultations on policy or bylaws or surveys, and the introduction of new municipal political leadership following the 2021 local government elections. The overriding theme in the responses by the social media users is service delivery and access to basic services such as water, electricity and refuse removal.

Users wrote about water problems, electricity outages or refuse removal interruptions even in municipal posts that had nothing to do with service delivery. For example, municipal posts on COVID-19 attracted questions about an electricity outage in an area. The metros featured a considerable amount of information on COVID-19 on their Facebook pages, including alerts about rising case numbers, vaccination sites, COVID-19 prevention methods and information on trends. The responses from users tended to be negative or cynical about COVID-19 and also diverted to service delivery issues instead. For example, on 29 November 2021, eThekweni Municipality posted information on the new COVID-19 adjusted levels following an address by President Cyril Ramaphosa (Facebook, 2021). The responses from users were primarily about water and electricity outages. “We do not have water in the Sawpit area, it’s been a whole week now. *Aniscabangeli nina* (You don’t care about us).” The municipality responded with contact details of where the fault could be reported.

The Ekurhuleni metro posted COVID-19 prevention methods and the president’s speech on the COVID-19 lockdown (Facebook, 2021). The responses from users also focused primarily on water and electricity. For example, “We have power outage here at Clayville ext 71 since yesterday around 13:00, are you aware of it?” and: “Food is getting rotten”. Responses to notices about forthcoming public events also veered towards complaints about service delivery issues. On 22 November 2021, the City of Tshwane posted about the Birding Big Day, which would take place on 27 November ((Facebook,

2021). The users responded with service delivery issues: “We don’t have electricity in extension 11 and 8 since the early hours of the morning in Soshanguve South Ext 8 and 11” and “We don’t have power as well in some parts of Atteridgeville”. On 25 November 2021, the City of Johannesburg announced that the Johannesburg Open golf tournament would be hosted by the city at the Randpark Golf Club featuring international golfers (Facebook, 2021). The comments by users included: “Is playing golf part of service delivery?”

Infrastructure delivery announcements also attracted cynical comments, in the main. Mangaung Metropolitan Municipality published an announcement on 25 November 2021 informing the public about the Hauweng bus infrastructure that had been designed to accommodate people with disabilities (Facebook, 2021). One of the users wrote in response: “It is not like there is a shortage of public transport in MMM. Just create job opportunities and forget this nonsense”. The municipality did not respond to the comments. The City of Cape Town metro attracted more favourable comments (Facebook, 2021). On 26 November 2021, the metro thanked customers for their patience during routine maintenance of electrical infrastructure and indicated that routine regular planned maintenance was taking place daily in various parts of the city. The City’s Facebook page received positive responses as follows: “At least you do maintenance”; “Just grateful you do maintenance”; “Maintenance done in Glencairn on Wednesday. Very efficient with only a couple of interruptions”. One resident indicated that she needed help with sewage spillages in her area too and other users advised her to email the member of the mayoral committee and also to speak to the local councillor. There was no response from the municipality to the inquiry. Buffalo City Municipality announced a water outage in East London areas on the 30<sup>th</sup> of November 2021 with a promise that the water would be restored in the afternoon (Facebook, 2021). Comments indicate that the promise was not kept. “*BCM is there any news on the water issue? Please be honest and frank and allow us to make additional plans with correct information at hand.*”

*Not everyone has a swimming pool or tank connected that can be used to shower. Most of us need to work.”* Another Facebook user responded: *“Afternoon has come and gone and still no water in Nahoon Valley Park as promised by yourself earlier of water to be restored by afternoon, besides water being necessary for hydration and hygiene we are also in the middle of a pandemic, please advise”*. There was no response from the municipality to the several comments on the same issue.

The focus on basic services confirms that the effective delivery of basic services remains a pivotal issue for local government as indicated in the studies done on this subject (Botes, 2018; Morudu, 2017; Reddy, 2016), as well as the report of the Auditor-General (2022).

### **One-way communication**

The study has found that all eight metros use the Facebook pages to share information in a unidirectional way. Users continue engaging following the posting of information but there is no response from the administrators of the page. The state of affairs confirms the finding by Fashoro and Barnard (2021) and Mawela (2016), who examined the social media accounts of provincial government departments and municipalities and found that the social media accounts were used for one-way communication from government to the people. In failing to entertain the inquiries and responses from the public, the municipalities were unable to benefit from the interactive capability of social media.

Among the advantages of social media is that users benefit from socially interacting with other users while organisations providing the social media platform – in this case, municipalities – gain a captive audience (O'Brien, 2018). The author also posits that for business, the two-way process is beneficial as users engage and provide their views on products. The residents or citizens of the eight metros provide their views on the products or services provided, which is beneficial to the municipality.

The need to respond to the comments and queries from the public is summed up by a user on the Mangaung Metropolitan Municipality Facebook page (Facebook, 2021), responding to the announcement of the new bus service for Mangaung on 25 November 2021:

The most offensive thing about this page of Mangaung Municipality is that they would throw things here for the information of the citizenry, which is a move I applaud. However, when we give feedback on what they have provided, they keep quiet and not interact, which defeats the whole objective of having this page in the first place (Facebook, 2021).

The lack of two-way communication confirms the outcome of other studies. For example, Mawela (2016) found that while citizens were willing to use platforms provided to engage with government departments, the departments responded sporadically. In addition, Fashoro and Barnard (2021) found that social media platforms in provincial and local government departments are used mainly for information dissemination and as an extension of the government websites. The metros were not engaged to ascertain the reasons for the lack of systematic ongoing responses to issues raised by the users on their official accounts as that exercise is beyond the scope of this study. Further work in this regard would be valuable.

### **Public notices requiring responses from the public**

The study demonstrated that Facebook pages are not ideal for the sharing of information on policy issues that require feedback from residents or ratepayers to enable or contribute to decision-making. Residents either responded flippantly or raised service delivery issues that were not related to the matter. A public notice was posted on the Facebook page of the City of Tshwane inviting comments on the City of Tshwane Events Compliance Bylaw (Facebook, 2021). The notice attracted three comments. Two of the comments requested Eskom electricity loadshedding schedules and the third was

a spam post on love potions. The reference to loadshedding schedules demonstrated yet again that the public view the work of municipalities as being to provide basic services. There was no comment on the policy document.

The City of Ekurhuleni issued an invitation to members of the public to comment on its draft Integrated Waste Management Plan on its Facebook page (Facebook, 2021). The responses from users focused on immediate service delivery issues such as refuse not being removed for six weeks, failure to cut grass and electricity outages in specific areas. A user chastised the municipality for using Facebook to seek comments and recommended the undertaking of a roadshow instead to ensure the inclusion of residents who do not have access to social media. Such notices may fall within the ambit of matters on which the public should be formally consulted. For example, municipalities are required by law to publish the IDPS, the annual budgets, and to invite members of the public to comment on them (Breakfast, Meko & Maphazi, 2015).

### **Job opportunities posted by municipalities**

Information on job opportunities falls within the ambit of communication that empowers citizens and provides opportunities. The exchanges on the City of Johannesburg Facebook page relating to jobs demonstrated the value of two-way communication with citizens, and it was one of the few instances where municipalities responded to users (Facebook, 2021). On 24 November 2021, the City of Johannesburg metro posted information looking for seasonal lifeguards, cashiers and cloakroom assistants for swimming pools. A user wrote: “I do love seeing these posts, they do give me a purpose, I hope one day I get to score a vacancy from Joburg”, to which the municipality responded: “Best wishes”.

The City of Johannesburg also announced a partnership with National Treasury inviting unemployed youth to participate in the Infrastructure Skills Development Grant (Facebook, 2021). A user asked for a clearer application form and the municipality responded with assistance to obtain the

form via an online link. Another user complained that the opportunity did not apply to people who were over the age of 35 and the municipality directed the user to the general vacancies page.

However, unlike the City of Johannesburg, a Nelson Mandela Bay metro announcement on possible job opportunities did not attract an enthusiastic response from users. The municipality announced on 26 November 2021 that the new municipal leadership would assist in resolving a potential bottleneck in the implementation of work opportunities and that R400 million had been set aside (Facebook, 2021). There was only one response to the post and it was related to service delivery: "Electricity has been off since yesterday in Motherwell NU3, the call centre cannot assist as the matter is with the electricity department."

## **Recommendations and proposals**

The Government Communication Policy promotes two-way communication between the government and citizens (GCIS, 2018). One-way communication with the public is not in line with the policy or the development communication paradigm, nor with the developmental local government framework, which call for an interactive engagement with the public. It is recommended that the GCIS should promote the implementation of the policy and highlight the benefits of social media as a tool for enabling more effective participation and two-way engagement of citizens who have access to the internet.

The GCIS manages and coordinates inter-governmental communication forums across the three spheres of government. The forums include the National Government Communicators' Forum, the Provincial Government Communicators' Forum, District Communicators' Forum, the Local Communicators' Forum and the Intergovernmental Communicators' Forum (GCIS, 2018). The South African Local Government Association manages the SALGA National Communications Forum (NCF), which brings together

municipal communication officials, marketers and municipal spokespersons, as well as COGTA and GCIS (SALGA, 2023). SALGA held its sixth forum meeting on 11 April 2023 and said the meeting was convened to deliberate on the impact of technology and how it can be better managed to complement the rollout of service delivery and improve governance systems in local government (SALGA, 2023). The forums provide viable platforms for engagement and mobilisation of communicators to use technology more efficiently for the benefit of citizens in a developmental manner, in line with the development communication paradigm and the Government Communication Policy (GCIS, 2018).

Quebral (2011: 5) posits that development communication was seen as a “confluence of the development process and the communication process”. Meanwhile, the Government Communication Policy directs government communicators, referred to as “development communicators”, to engage in work that will “uplift the quality of life of the South African public, not only socially, but also economically and culturally, using a range of communication tools” (GCIS, 2018).

Municipalities should thus assign communication staff to monitor the official Facebook pages and respond to the public inquiries on a regular basis, especially those from users seeking information about the delivery of basic services in their areas, as well as updates on outages and interruptions.

The methodology followed in the study did not include engagement with municipal staff to establish the reasons for not systematically responding to the public. A further study looking into the social media strategies and human and financial resources allocated to manage the social media platforms in the metros, would contribute further to knowledge on the use of social media for communication with the public in metropolitan municipalities.

This study has found that service delivery is a high priority for users of the metro Facebook pages. The various areas where service delivery backlogs or interruptions are

being experienced are also mentioned. The content of the Facebook pages therefore provides valuable information and indicates the mood and views of the users of municipal services. It is recommended that municipalities should use the Facebook pages for research purposes to assist in planning for future interventions and to respond to the immediate needs raised by users or citizens.

## **Conclusion**

The study has contributed to knowledge on the utilisation of e-government services, – in particular, social media platforms – to communicate with the public in an interactive manner. It has found that the capability of the social media technologies is not utilised to the fullest by metropolitan municipalities as they engage in unidirectional communication with the public. In addition, the municipalities are not in line with the development communication and developmental local government frameworks of government, which underscore public participation in governance and service delivery. Municipalities are encouraged to utilise the social media platforms more effectively. GCIS, as the lead department in communication coordination, is encouraged to spearhead municipal implementation of the Government Communication Policy, with its attendant principles of public participation and usage of social media to enhance service delivery.

## **References**

- Allen K. (2021). *Social media, riots and consequences*. Daily Maverick. 16 July. [Retrieved 8 November 2022]. <https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2021-07-16-social-media-riots-and-consequences/>
- Apuke OD. (2017). Social and traditional mainstream media of communication: Synergy and variance perspective. *New Media and Mass Communication*, 54:83–86. <https://doi.org/10.29333/ojcm/2614>

- Bertram C & Christiansen I. (2020). *Understanding Research: An Introduction to Reading Research*. 2nd Edition. Pretoria: Van Schaik Publishers.
- Brand D. (2016). *South Africans have made their voices heard. Now what for local councils?* The Conversation. 15 August. [Retrieved 2 August 2023]. <https://theconversation.com/south-africans-have-made-their-voices-heard-now-what-for-local-councils-63854>
- Breakfast N, Mekoa I & Maphazi N. (2015). Participatory democracy in theory and practice: A case study of local government in South Africa. *Africa's Public Service Delivery & Performance Review*, 3(3):31–51. <https://doi.org/10.4102/apsdpr.v3i3.88>
- Botes L. (2018). South Africa's landscape of social protests: A way forward for developmental local government? *African Journal of Public Affairs*, 10(4):241–256.
- Concepcion DL (2020). *UP President Danilo L. Concepcion pays tribute to the "Mother of DevCom", Dr Nora C Quebral*. University of the Philippines. 28 October. [Retrieved 24 April 2023]. <https://up.edu.ph/up-president-danilo-l-concepcion-pays-tribute-to-the-mother-of-devcom-dr-nora-c-quebral/>
- Dollarhide M. (2021). *Social media definition*. Investopedia. 23 February. [Retrieved 3 August 2021]. <https://www.investopedia.com/terms/s/social-media.asp>
- Facebook (2021). *Buffalo City Metropolitan Municipality Facebook page*. [Retrieved 8–11 November 2021]. <https://www.facebook.com/BuffaloCityMetro/>
- Facebook (2021). *City of Cape Town Metropolitan Municipality Facebook page*. [Retrieved 8–11 November 2021]. <https://www.facebook.com/CityofCT/>
- Facebook (2021). *City of Johannesburg Metropolitan Municipality Facebook page*. [Retrieved 8–11 November 2021]. <https://www.facebook.com/CityofJoburg/>

## Facebook Communication by South Africa's Eight Metros

- Facebook (2021). *City of Ekurhuleni Metropolitan Municipality Facebook page*. [Retrieved 8–11 November 2021]. <https://www.facebook.com/CityOfEkurhuleni/>
- Facebook (2021). *City of Tshwane Metropolitan Municipality Facebook page*. [Retrieved 8–11 November 2021]. <https://www.facebook.com/CityOfTshwane/>
- Facebook (2021). *EThekweni Metropolitan Municipality Facebook page*: [Retrieved 8–11 November 2021]. <https://www.facebook.com/eThekweniM/>
- Facebook (2021). *Mangaung Metropolitan Municipality Facebook page*: [Retrieved 8–11 November 2021]. <https://www.facebook.com/MangaungMetropolitanMunicipalityOfficial/>
- Facebook (2021). *Nelson Mandela Bay Metropolitan Municipality Facebook page*. [Retrieved 8–11 November 2021]. <https://www.facebook.com/NMBayM/>
- Fashoro I & Barnard L. (2021). Assessing South African government's use of social media for citizen participation. *The African Journal of African Information Systems*, 13(1):1936–0282.
- Goldstuck A & Turner B. (2022). *Facebook analysis*. In: *Social Media Landscape Report: The Metaverse. Is it a David vs Goliath Play?* Ornicco/World Wide Worx. [Retrieved 31 October 2023]. <https://website.ornicco.co.za/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/The-SA-Social-Media-Landscape-Report-2022.pdf>
- Ihsaniyati H, Sarwoprasodjo S, Muljono P and Gandasari D. (2023). The Use of social media for development communication and social change: a review. *Sustainability* 2023, 15(3): 2283. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su15032283>

- Jakoet-Salie A (2020). E-government Strategies in South Africa: A Plausible Attempt at Effective Delivery of Services. *Administratio Publica*, 28(3). <https://journals.co.za/doi/pdf/10.10520/ejc-adminpub-v28-n3-a2>Jordaan L. (2019). *Broken beats: The state of South Africa's newsrooms*. The Media Online. 5 November. [Retrieved 10 October 2021]. <https://themediainline.co.za/2019/11/broken-beats-the-state-of-south-africas-newsrooms/>
- Kaunda L. (2023). Beat reporters needed for local govt. *Politicsweb*, 30 November. [Retrieved: 12 February 2024]<https://www.politicsweb.co.za/opinion/local-govt-important-sphere-of-government>
- Kaunda L. (2021). Public participation platform: Municipalities must actively engaged with citizens. *Daily Maverick*, September 12. [Retrieved: 23 March 2022]. <https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/opinionista/2021-09-12-public-participation-platform-municipalities-must-actively-engage-with-citizens-on-social-media/>
- Kemp S. (2021). Digital 2021: Global Overview Report. DataReportal. 27 January. [Retrieved 21 July 2021]. <https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2021-global-overview-report>
- Kemp S. (2022). Digital 2022: South Africa. DataReportal. 15 February. [Retrieved: 31 October 2023]. <https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2022-south-africa>
- Lada A, Wang M & Yan T. (2021). How does news feed predict what you want to see? Facebook. 26 January. [Retrieved: 4 November 2022]. <https://about.fb.com/news/2021/01/how-does-news-feed-predict-what-you-want-to-see/>
- Lindner R & Aichholzer G. (2020). E-Democracy: Conceptual foundations and recent trends. In: L Hennen, I van Keulen, I Korthagen, G Aichholzer, R Lindner & RØ Nielsen (Eds). *European E-Democracy in Practice*. Cham, Switzerland: Springer Open. 11–45. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-27184-8\\_2](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-27184-8_2)

## Facebook Communication by South Africa's Eight Metros

- Madumo OS. (2015). Developmental local government challenges and progress in South Africa *Administratio Publica*, 23(2): 153–166.
- Malinga S. (2020). *Dr Zweli Mkhize debunks 5G-coronavirus link theories*. ITWeb. 1 April. [Retrieved: 20 February 2021]. <https://www.itweb.co.za/content/LPp6V7rDW3xqDKQz>
- Malinga S. (2022). *Half of SA's population now active on social media*. ITWeb. 1 July. [Retrieved: 20 April 2023]. <https://www.itweb.co.za/content/rW1xLv5nGyP7Rk6m>
- Mawela T. (2016). Exploring the role of social media in the G2C relationship: A South African perspective. *Information Development*, 33(2): 117–132. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0266666916639743>
- McFadden C. (2020). *A brief history of Facebook and its major milestones*. Interesting Engineering. 7 July. [Retrieved: 25 April 2023]. <https://interestingengineering.com/culture/history-of-facebook>
- McNeill A & Briggs P. (2014). *Theoretical perspectives on the usage of social media in the propagation of health messages*. [Retrieved: 12 February 2021]. [https://hcihealthcarefieldwork.files.wordpress.com/2013/11/theoryhealthchi2014\\_submission\\_2.pdf](https://hcihealthcarefieldwork.files.wordpress.com/2013/11/theoryhealthchi2014_submission_2.pdf)
- Mkhize ZL. (2018). Local government is everybody's business. *Tabling of the COGTA budget vote*. Cape Town: National Assembly. Speech, 15 May. <https://www.cogta.gov.za/index.php/2018/05/14/speech-by-minister-zweli-mkhize-during-the-local-government-week-event/>
- Mlaba K. (2021). *How is South Africa's digital divide making inequality worse in the country?* Global Citizen. 3 August. [Retrieved 21 March 2023]. <https://www.globalcitizen.org/en/content/south-africa-digital-divide-makes-inequality-worse/>

## Public Sector Communication in the Digital Age

- Morudu HD. (2017). Service delivery protests in South African municipalities: An exploration using principal component regression and 2013 data. *Cogent Social Sciences*, 3(1). <https://doi.org/10.1080/23311886.2017.1329106>
- Muridzi G. (2019). Framework for E-governance to Improve Service Delivery for Local Authorities in South Africa. PhD thesis. North-West University. <https://dspace.nwu.ac.za/handle/10394/35328>
- Ntshavheni K. (2022). Unlocking the potential of South Africa's digital economy. *NASPERS/DCDT Stakeholder Forum*. Sandton, Johannesburg. Speech, 23 March. <https://www.polity.org.za/article/sa-khumbudzo-ntshavheni-address-by-communications-minister-at-the-naspersdcdt-stakeholder-summit-under-the-theme-unlocking-the-potential-of-south-africas-digital-economy-230322-2022-03-23>
- Ntuli ME & Teferra D. (2018). Implications of social media on student activism: The South African experience in a digital age. *Journal of Higher Education in Africa*, 15 (2):63–80. <https://doi.org/10.57054/jhea.v15i2.1481>
- O'Brien T. (2018). *Why social media is important for your business*. Engageware. 16 August. [Retrieved 23 October 2022]. <https://engageware.com/blog/why-social-media-engagement-is-important-for-your-business/>
- Odoom MD. (2020). Understanding development communication: A review of selected literature. *E-Journal of Humanities Arts and Social Sciences (EHASS)*, 1(5): 37–48. <https://doi.org/10.38159/ehass.2020055>
- Okeke-Uzodike OE & Dlamini B. (2019). Citizens' e-participation at local municipal government in South Africa. *Journal of Reviews on Global Economics*, 8:458–468. <https://doi.org/10.6000/1929-7092.2019.08.39>

- Palvia SCJ & Sharma SS. (2007). E-Government and e-governance: Definitions/domain framework and status around the world. In: *Proceedings of the 5th International Conference on E-governance*. Hyderabad: Hyderabad Central University. 5(1):1–12.
- Parkyn R. (2017). *The role of social media in development*. BBC. 31 March. [Retrieved 20 April 2023]. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/blogs/mediaactioninsight/entries/63e297a8-83b6-456d-aff5-67dc55f45d27>
- Pypers E & Bassuday J. (2016). Public participation in local government. *Southern African Catholics Bishops' Conference Parliamentary Liaison Office*. Briefing Paper 421. December. <https://www.cplo.org.za/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/BP-421-Public-Participation-In-Local-Government-December-2016.pdf>
- Quebral NC. (2011). Devcom Los Baños Style. *Honorary Doctorate Celebration Seminar*. London, UK: University of London. Lecture, 7 December. <https://www.lse.ac.uk/media-and-communications/assets/documents/events/past-events/Professor-Nora-Cruz-Quebral-Dec-2011-lecture.pdf>
- Reddy PS. (2016). The politics of service delivery in South Africa: The local government sphere in context. *The Journal for Transdisciplinary Research in Southern Africa*, 12(1):a337. <https://doi.org/10.4102/td.v12i1.337>
- Republic of South Africa. Auditor-General. (AGSA). (2022). Consolidated General Report on Local Government Audit Outcomes: MFMA 2020/21. [Retrieved 23 April 2022]. <https://mfma-2022.agsareports.co.za/>
- Republic of South Africa. Constitution of the Republic of South Africa. (1996). Government Gazette No. 25799. Pretoria: Government Printer.
- Republic of South Africa. Department of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs. (COGTA). (2020). Municipal Profiles. District Development Model. [Retrieved: 23 October 2021]. <https://www.cogta.gov.za/ddm/index.php/documents/>

## Public Sector Communication in the Digital Age

- Republic of South Africa. Department of Provincial Affairs and Constitutional Development (DPACD). (1998). *The White Paper on Local Government*. Pretoria: Government Printer.
- Republic of South Africa. Department of Telecommunications and Postal Services (DTPS). (2017). *National E-Government Strategy and Roadmap*. Government Gazette No. 41241. 10 November. Pretoria: Government Printer. [Retrieved 24 April 2023]. [https://www.gov.za/sites/default/files/gcis\\_document/201711/41241gen886.pdf](https://www.gov.za/sites/default/files/gcis_document/201711/41241gen886.pdf)
- Republic of South Africa. (2018). *Government Communication and Information System (GCIS). Government Communication Policy*. [Retrieved 10 April 2022]. <https://www.gcis.gov.za/sites/default/files/Government%20Communication%20Policy%20Cabinet%20Approved%20oct%202018.pdf>
- Republic of South Africa. Independent Electoral Commission (IEC). (n.d.). *More about municipalities*. [Retrieved 25 October 2021]. <https://www.elections.org.za/content/Elections/2016-Municipal-Elections/More-about-municipalities/>
- Republic of South Africa. National Institute for Communicable Diseases (NICD). (2020). *First case of COVID-19 announced – An update*. NICD. 5 March. [Retrieved 15 October 2021]. <https://www.nicd.ac.za/first-case-of-covid-19-announced-an-update/>
- Republic of South Africa. Statistics SA (StatsSA). (2020). *General Household Survey*. [Retrieved 20 April 2023]. <https://www.statssa.gov.za/publications/P0318/P03182020.pdf>
- South African Local Government Association (SALGA). (2015). *15 Years of developmental and democratic local government: 2000–2015*. [Retrieved 21 July 2021]. <https://www.salga.org.za/Documents/Knowledge-products-per-theme/Plans-N-Strategies/15%20Years%20of%20Developmental%20and%20Democratic%20Local%20Government.pdf>

*Facebook Communication by South Africa's Eight Metros*

- South African Local Government Association (SALGA). (2023). SALGA to convene the 6th Annual SALGA National Communicators' Forum in Cape Town. [Retrieved 18 April 2023]. <https://www.salga.org.za/event/ncf-23/ncf/documents/Media%20Release%20SALGA%20to%20convene%20the%206th%20Annual%20SALGA%20National%20Communicators%20Forum%20in%20Cape%20Town.pdf>
- Williams P. (2020). *The importance of leading communication during epidemics*. SANews. 3 September. [Retrieved 10 February 2021]. <https://www.sanews.gov.za/south-africa/importance-leading-communication-during-epidemics>
- Willis K. (2013). *Analysing qualitative data*. In: Walter, M. (ed.). *Social research methods*. 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. Victoria, Australia: Oxford University Press.
- Willis (2013: 323)