

THE USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA BY PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATES DURING
NAMIBIA'S 2019 ELECTION CAMPAIGNS IN WINDHOEK

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ABSTRACT

Social media has emerged as one of the most effective communication platforms for attracting voters during electoral campaigns. The study aimed to assess how social media was used during Namibia's 2019 Presidential election campaigns by the top three political parties: the Southwest Africa People's Organisation (SWAPO) party, the Independent Patriots for Change (IPC) party and the Popular Democratic Movement (PDM) party. The study was based on a pragmatic approach and utilised an explanatory convergent parallel mixed-method research design. The study sample consisted of 385 respondents from Windhoek, three (3) Party Coordinators from the top three political parties (SWAPO, IPC and PDM) and three (3) social media platforms, namely, Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram, respectively. Data was collected through online questionnaires, structured interviews, and a content analysis scheme. Descriptive statistics were used to describe frequencies with data presentation in graphs and charts, while qualitative data were thematically categorised and presented narratively. The quantitative and qualitative data sets were compared, contrasted, and integrated to produce a single interpretation, thereby drawing appropriate conclusions. The study established that previous literature indicated that Facebook and WhatsApp were the most used social media platforms in Namibia, whereas this study showed that in Namibia, Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram are the most used social media platforms with Telegram and YouTube being the least used platforms. The study also found poor social media engagement between Windhoek residents and political candidates during Namibia's 2019 presidential election campaigns. The study recommended that political parties make more use of social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram to communicate and engage with voters and share more political content to entice voters.

Keywords: Social media, Windhoek residents, Presidential campaigns, Party Coordinators, Social Media Engagement Theory (SMET)

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

| | |
|-------|---|
| APP | All People's Party |
| CDV | Christian Democratic Voice |
| ECN | Electoral Commission Namibia |
| EVM | Electoral Voting Machine |
| IC | Independent Candidate |
| IPC | Independent Patriots of Change |
| LPM | Landless People Movement |
| NDP | National Democratic Movement |
| NEFF | Namibia Economic Freedom Fighters |
| NUDO | National Unity Democratic Organisation |
| PDM | Popular Democratic Movement |
| RDP | Rally for Democratic and Progress |
| RP | Republican Party |
| SMET | Social Media Engagement Theory |
| SPSS | Statistical Package for the Social Sciences |
| SWANU | South West Africa National Union |
| SWAPO | South West Africa People's Organisation |
| WRP | Workers Revolutionary Party |
| UDF | United Democratic Front of Namibia |
| UNAM | University of Namibia |

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DEDICATIONS

First and foremost, this paper is dedicated to the most notable God Almighty for providing me with the knowledge, protection, and strength to complete this study. Secondly, this document is dedicated to my late mother, Valeria Mungandjera, as everything I do is to make you proud up in heaven. May you continue resting in peace.

DECLARATION

I, Agnes S. Iikuyu, hereby declare that this study is my own work and is a true reflection of my research, and that this work, or any part thereof has not been submitted for a degree at any other institution. No part of this thesis/dissertation may be reproduced, stored in any retrieval system, or transmitted in any form, or by means (e.g. electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise) without the prior permission of the author, or The University of Namibia in that behalf.

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| Name of Student | Signature | Date |

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

1.1 Introduction

This chapter introduces a study titled, “*The Use of Social Media by Presidential Candidates during Namibia’s 2019 Presidential Election Campaigns*”, where it began with the background of the study. The chapter articulates the orientation of the study, where it reviews the current situation on social media use in Namibia while providing background information, followed by a statement of the problem and research objectives. In addition, the significance of the study is presented, while shedding light on the scope and limitations that were encountered during the study, concluding with the delimitations and assumptions of the study.

1.2 Orientation of the Study

The global political landscape has been fundamentally transformed by the rapid surge in social media usage. These digital spaces have progressed beyond simple social networking platforms and have become vital channels for political communication, voter mobilisation, and public discourse (Castells, 2012 and Shirky, 2011). This paradigm shift has not been limited to Western democracies only, it has also significantly affected electoral processes across the African continent, including Namibia (Chatora, 2012).

The phrase "social media" was first used in the mid-1990s by Wellman (1996), who defined it as computer networks that connect individuals and communities. Later, in the early 2000s, it evolved and was referred to as “any online resource that is designed to facilitate engagement between individuals” (Bishop, 2019, p. 61). Authors such as Fox and Jones (2009), Kaplan and Haenlein (2010), and Biswas et al. (2014) further challenged these definitions and developed their own, which they described as the leveraging of modern social networks and digital technologies using communication channels known as e-communication and Web 2.0 to share content.

In Namibia, the rise of social media has become particularly resilient and powerful. Social media has made it easier for people to link, connect and partake in many aspects of social life, changing the term of “audience” to “netizens” (Frandsen & Johansen, 2016).

Although social media encourages people to participate in their community matters, it also has a history of spreading false information (Kadhimo, 2019), therefore, individuals should be cautious concerning how they utilise it. Regardless of these findings, there remains a gap in understanding how Namibia's 2019 presidential candidates employed social media to encourage or discourage community engagement.

A study by Kadhimo (2019) discovered that 92% of 18-35-year-olds now use social media heavily, compared to any other age group. In support is Stoman and Stoman (2014), who indicated that the shift in social media usage has been noted in Namibia, where the percentage of daily internet users increased from 14 to 49% between November 2012 and September 2014. This study is yet to determine whether young Namibians utilised social media to engage with presidential candidates during the 2019 Presidential campaigns.

Social media's involvement in elections across Africa has grown increasingly important, impacting voter mobilisation, public discourse, and campaign strategies (Chatora, 2012; Frontiers, 2002). It is also very crucial to comprehend that social media platforms are used not only by youth but also by politicians, non-politicians, and other individuals in several regions for different purposes such as marketing, sharing information, connecting with friends, acquiring knowledge, and taking part in online debate forums (Tyson et al., 2015). Shihomeka (2019) backs Tyson et al.'s (2015) argument by stating that more and more young people are increasingly embracing new media like Facebook and Twitter not only for entertainment and enjoyment but also for political engagement.

A study done by the Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR) (2021) claims that President Hage Geingob's social media use enabled real-time connection with people, hence promoting openness and accessibility. Link (2022) also highlighted that SWAPO's internet presence was critical in reaching younger voters who were increasingly active on digital media. Links (2022) further added that, opposition groups such as the Independent Patriots for Change (IPC) also used social media to criticise the governing party's narratives. The IPC's strategic use of social media campaigns sought to expose the ruling government's ill activities and organise opposition parties to stand against the ruling party, SWAPO (The Namibian, 2022). This dynamic generated a competitive climate in

which both parties attempted to dominate the online conversation. Content shared by the Namibian President frequently reflects governance and development agendas, which can influence public opinion and political narratives (Kruikemeier, 2014).

Namibia has an estimated total population of about 2 500 000 while Windhoek, the capital city of Namibia, has an estimated 470 000 residents (World Population Review, 2018). The 2019 Electoral Commission Namibia (ECN) (2019) report states that a total number of 700 648 young people registered themselves as voters, making up a total of 52% of the votes countrywide.

Windhoek alone had 358 468 registered voters with ECN, although only 286 198 cast their votes, representing 60.8% of registered voters in Windhoek (ECN, 2019). According to the ECN (2020), in 2009, Namibia had 11 registered political parties that participated in the 2019 Presidential Elections namely; All People's Party (APP), Namibia Economic Freedom Fighters (NEFF), National Unity Democratic Organisation of Namibia (NUDO), South West Africa National Unity (SWANU), United Democratic Front of Namibia (UDF), Popular Democratic Movement (PDM), Rally for Democracy and Progress (RDP), Republican Party of Namibia (RP), Landless People's Movement (LPM), South West Africa People's Organisation (SWAPO) and Independent Presidential Candidate, Dr. Panduleni F. B. Iitula. Dr. Iitula subsequently formed a political party named the Independent Patriots for Change (IPC). The IPC is therefore included in this study.

Although traditional media and public rallies have previously dominated political campaigns (IPPR, 2021), the 2019 presidential elections witnessed a major turn towards candidates strategically utilising social media platforms to campaign. Despite these observable trends, there remain further gaps in the academic literature regarding the specific modalities and impacts that social media had on presidential candidates and voters during the 2019 Presidential election campaigns, particularly within the capital city, Windhoek. Previous studies have explored broader media coverage in Namibia and disinformation (IPPR, 2020); however, there remains a lack of focused analysis on candidate-driven social media engagement platforms, shared content, and its impact on Namibia's 2019 Presidential election campaigns.

There is no doubt that social media is one of the fast-growing and effective electronic platforms where residents can interact and discuss political issues affecting their daily lives (Nunuhe, 2020). However, little remains known about how social media has impacted Namibia's 2019 Presidential election campaigns.

It is in this context that this study seeks to critically analyse the strategic use of social media platforms by presidential candidates during Namibia's 2019 presidential election campaigns, with a specific focus on activities held within the capital city of Windhoek. The study further emphasises how presidential candidates shaped public perception, communicated their political policies, and connected with the digitally active electorates in a modern Namibian context.

1.3 Statement of the Problem

A research problem or statement of the problem is defined by Creswell (2006, p. 20) as an "issue or concern that needs to be addressed". The relationship between presidential social media presence and political party operations in Namibia is a complex issue that requires careful consideration, and the issue under investigation is how Presidential candidates used social media to engage, disseminate and deliver political content to Windhoek residents during the 2019 Presidential election campaigns.

Social media has been demonstrated to facilitate communication at both the social and political levels. According to Funda (2014), in Namibia, social media was first used as a political communication platform in 2014. This was supported by Shihomeka's (2019) study which revealed that Namibian citizens were proud of this system as it was the first time using new technology and electronic platforms during political activities. Shihomeka (2019) also conducted a study on how the youth in the Ohangwena Region engaged with political leaders through social media using mobile phones. Most studies conducted to date by authors such as Tyson et al. (2015), Shihomeka (2019) and Stoman and Stoman (2014) have explored the role of social media in general, and the use of social media in politics and government institutions amongst others. However, none of these studies investigated how political candidates used social media to broadcast their political campaigns to the Windhoek residents during Namibia's 2019 Presidential election campaigns.

Studies by Tyson et al. (2015) and Stoman and Stoman (2014) stated that, politicians should consider using social media platforms to campaign as more citizens, especially young people, are on social media platforms such as Twitter and Facebook. It is in this context that this study aimed to investigate how social media was used by Presidential candidates to broadcast political content to the Windhoek residents during the 2019 Presidential election campaigns in Namibia.

1.4 Objectives of the Study

This study aims to investigate the extent to which social media was used by the top three Presidential Candidates namely: Hage G. Geingob of SWAPO, Panduleni F. B. Itula of IPC and McHenry Venaani of PDM to broadcast and promote political activities during Namibia's 2019 Presidential election campaigns in Windhoek.

This study was guided by the following research questions:

1. Which social media platforms were used by the top three (3) Presidential candidates to broadcast political information to Windhoek residents?
2. What type of political content was shared on social media by political Candidates in 2019?
3. To what extent did social media enhance public engagement between Presidential candidates and the Windhoek residents?
4. Did social media have any influence on the political choices and decision-making of Windhoek residents?

1.5 Significance of the study

This study is significant for both academic and practical reasons. Academically, it will contribute to the limited body of knowledge on the role of social media during election campaigns, with a specific focus on Namibia's 2019 presidential elections.

By analysing the communication strategies of presidential candidates in Windhoek, this study will also provide a current and contextually relevant case study that can inform future scholarly work.

Practically, the study will be valuable to political parties, campaign strategists, and non-governmental organisations in Namibia as it will provide insights into effective social media engagement strategies, helping political parties and their candidates better understand how to leverage digital platforms to reach and mobilise young voters. Furthermore, it will inform public discourse on media and democracy, highlighting the challenges of misinformation and the opportunities for civic engagement in the digital age.

The study further employed the Social Media Engagement Theory, which posits a positive correlation between social media use and political engagement. However, the study uncovered that there was disengagement and political content attrition between the presidential candidates and public members during Namibia's 2019 presidential campaigns. Social media interactions were largely one-sided and lacked meaningful dialogue. The disengagement manifested in a lack of meaningful two-way communication, with candidates often broadcasting messages rather than fostering genuine dialogue. This study, therefore, contributes new knowledge by critically examining the limitations of the Social Media Engagement Theory within a specific Namibian electoral context. By moving beyond a simplistic view of social media as a mobilisation tool and positioning it as a site where both engagement and disengagement can occur.

A unique finding in the study that will equally contribute to the body of knowledge is the prevalence of political content attrition, a phenomenon wherein a message's visibility and impact on social media diminishes rapidly over time. The study found this to be a common outcome for broadcast-style political posts that lacked meaningful engagement opportunities. This lack of engagement accelerates the attrition of the content, making it less visible and ultimately contributing to the overall disengagement observed, as the public is no longer meaningfully interacting with the political message.

1.6 Scope and Limitation of the Study

Limitations are study elements that are beyond the researcher's control, carrying a high probability of influencing the outcome of the study (Ross & Zaidi, 2019). In terms of the

scope, the study only focused on Windhoek residents, leaving out other major towns in Namibia. Additionally, the study only focused on the top three Presidential candidates that grabbed the majority of the votes during Namibia's 2019 namely, SWAPO, IPC, and PDM leaving out eight other political candidates from the APP, LPM, NEFF, NUDO, RDP, RP, SWANU, and UDF parties, who were also part of the 2019 Presidential election campaigns.

For content analysis, analysis was limited to the three major social media platforms namely, Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram, leaving out other social media platforms such as LinkedIn, WhatsApp, Telegram and others. The following limitations were encountered during the study: the online questionnaire could only be completed by those who had access to Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn and Instagram, where the link was shared. In addition, interviews for the Party Coordinators could only be conducted through Zoom® due to time and distance constraints.

1.7 Delimitation of the Study

Delimitation means demarcating or establishing bounds around something (Denscombe, 2017, p. 69). Similarly, the study included Windhoek residents only that had access to the online questionnaire link which was to be obtained from Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, Instagram and LinkedIn during the time of the study.

1.8 Assumption of the study

The study employed an online questionnaire as a data collection instrument. It only made sense to collect data using social media platforms as the study is investigating its discourse. The study selected the top three performing presidential candidates as the focus of the study as per the results of the 2019 Presidential elections (ECN, 2021). Other social media platforms were omitted from the content analysis because the study aimed to confirm and verify the efficacy of the most used social media platforms (Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook) as specified by Shihomeka (2019).

The assumption is that SWAPO has had the majority support of voters since independence. This notion could be attributed to the number of loyal supporters the party has, and in part to its contribution towards the liberation of the country. However, the

2019 Presidential election, saw the emergence of an independent candidate, a first for Namibia. Despite being a new entrant on the political scene, the independent candidate managed to acquire 29.4% of the total votes. The political campaign of the independent candidate was mainly conducted through social media and televised news reports. The assumption is that social media may have been the driver of him emerging as the runner-up in the elections.

The study made a second assumption that only residents of Windhoek would be able to make use of the online questionnaire. Party Coordinators would be purposively interviewed, and content analysis will be done on the three social media platforms in order to determine how the 2019 Presidential candidates used social media to campaign and participated in the Presidential Elections.

1.9 Definition of keywords

It is crucial to understand the terms and concepts used in this study therefore, this section defines all the key terms used in this study.

1.9.1 Social media

Davis (2015) refers to social media as the variety of collaborative cyberspace application (App) used to generate, curate, and distribute user-generated content. Social media has become more significant and part of our daily lives and it is therefore, crucial that we embrace it.

1.9.2 Presidential Candidates

Presidential candidates are political delegates who run for the office of the Presidency by participating in elections and congresses, with the candidate who receives the most votes chosen as the nation's leader and president (Hacker, 2004).

1.9.3 Party Coordinators

They are a small but powerful group of politicians also known as party group organizers (Kaeding & Obholzer, 2012). Political Coordinators are also known to be party

representatives who are in charge of promoting and organizing political activities while influencing organizations and interest groups in the legislative process, at the ballot.

1.9.4 Political engagement

Political engagement refers to a series of skills, behaviour, interests, or beliefs about politics including acts that are considered persuasive to the public's decisions such as demonstrating, joining or voting a political party (Barrett & Brunton-Smith, 2014).

1.9.5 Presidential elections

Presidential elections are procedures in which the general public votes for any political candidate of their choice that will occupy the office of the official head of state (Hacker, 2004).

1.9.6 Content analysis

Mahajan (2018, p. 72) defines content analysis as a "method of analysing written, verbal, or visual communication messages". Additionally, content analysis is referred to as the study of recorded human communication, contexts, meanings, subtexts, and objectives of the contents. Examples include diary entries, books, newspapers, videos, text messages, tweets, and Facebook updates (Showkat & Parveen, 2017).

1.10 Organisation of the thesis

This thesis is delineated into 6 different chapters.

Chapter One: Introduction and background of the study - This chapter serves as an introduction to the study. The primary goal of this chapter is to provide an overview background of the study, conceptual and contextual data, research questions, and statement of the problem. The significance of the study, as well as the limitations and delimitations of the study will also be outlined in this chapter.

Chapter Two: Theoretical Framework and Literature Review – This chapter offers a comprehensive explanation of the theoretical frameworks that drives the study. It also provides a comprehensive analysis of the hypothetical and empirical literature from journal articles, databases, books, and other sources. All gaps identified from the literature are underlined and the relevance to addressing them are highlighted.

Chapter Three: Research Methodology - This chapter presents an in-depth understanding of the research paradigm, research questions methodology, study population, research design, sampling technique, data collection techniques, sample size, data analysis, reliability and validity of data collection tools, and ethical issues.

Chapter Four: Data analysis and presentation of research findings – Based on the research questions, this chapter presents data findings from the study through the analysis and presentation of data.

Chapter Five: Discussion and interpretation of results – Using both existing literature and theoretical concepts that served as the study's framework, this chapter interprets and analyses findings from the study.

Chapter Six: Summary, conclusion, and Recommendations - This chapter summarizes, presents findings from the study, its recommendations, and conclusions.

1.11 Summary

This chapter presented a foundation and framework for this study. The chapter commenced by introducing the topic under study and the contemporary background of social media as a novel idea. Additionally, the chapter also elaborated on the application of social media during political events, and how it has been used in Namibia at both social and professional levels, notably by political leaders. The chapter further introduced the objectives of the study, definition of key terms, significance of the study, research assumptions, limitations, and delimitations of the study. The next chapter will review relevant literature and specify the theoretical framework adopted in this study.

CHAPTER 2

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Introduction

This chapter explores similar literature on the use of social media during political campaigns. One of the most crucial stages in research is the literature review because it assures an appropriate research design and findings. The study made use of the Social Media Engagement Theory (SMET) as a theoretical framework, which was used as a basis on which the study findings were explained. In the literature review, the study analysed previous studies and identified knowledge gaps, theoretical and methodological deficiencies by other scholars. The chapter further looked into how social media is globally used by political candidates during election campaigns, and the type of political content that is posted on social media platforms. The literature covered the political sphere in Africa, Europe, Eastern Europe, Asia, and the United States of America (USA).

2.2 Theoretical Framework

Creswell et al. (2018) defined a theoretical framework as a concise statement of theory addressing a specific issue that is generated by an analysis of prior research on the relevant variables. The theoretical framework serves as a basis from which a research project is built, and it assists the researcher in staying within the confines of a set of approved theories when doing research (Collins & Stockton, 2018).

The study employed the Social Media Engagement Theory (SMET) by Kietzmann et al. (2011). The SMET theory aims to discuss the role that technology plays as the fundamental base required to support interactions between users on social media (Frizzo-Barker et al., 2020). Other theories could have been used for this study such as the Model of Social Media and Political Engagement by Xenos and Moy (2007), the Diffusion of Innovation Theory by Gulati and Williams (2013), the Model of Streaming Social Media Events by Ratkiewicz, et al. (2011), the Social Network Theory by Kelman (1958), the Minimal Effects Model by Hong and Nadler (2012) (Qi, et al. (2018). However, they have all fallen short in addressing the objectives of this study.

SMET refers to an impression that people engage and communicate on different social media platforms through content sharing, active participation, and interaction (Kietzmann et al., 2011). Other forms of engagement can also include comments, likes and sharing, which permits users to express their feelings about content they encounter (Theory Hub, 2022, p. 1). The SMET is formed around the concept that social media users develop a social presence and a connection to the content posted on social media. In addition, the theory recognises the influence that social media has on individuals. The theory further speculates that the degree to which social media influences social media users depends on the type of platform used, the nature of the content that is posted, and the characteristics and interests of the social media user (Theory Hub, 2022).

The SMET theory was found to be applicable to this study due to its inherent to determine the level of interaction amongst the electorate and politicians. Moreover, the theory was used to describe the different features of voters' experience and the extent to which different social media platforms are driven by each functionality. Because the SMET theory employs a proactive and predictive approach, it enables drivers to be foreseen and considered in advance (Kapoor et al., 2021).

The theory holds the central idea that when the use of social media platforms increases, user engagement also increases. As social media platforms are used more often, their value and utilisation are interrelated, simultaneous participation on an individual level and personal meaning are recognised as crucial psychological elements of consumer engagement (Di Gangi & Wasko, 2016).

Moreover, the theory holds that the level of user engagement depends on two elements, the technical features of the social media platform and the level of social interactions among users. The social interactions are comprised of dimensions, including critical mass, personalisation, perceived risk, social accessibility, and transparency. The technical features are related to the completeness, flexibility, evolvability and integration of the social media platform. It is evident that social and technical elements positively influence social media usage, however, the perceived risk associated with social media usage negatively influences user engagement (see Figure 1 below) (Di Gangi & Wasko, 2016).

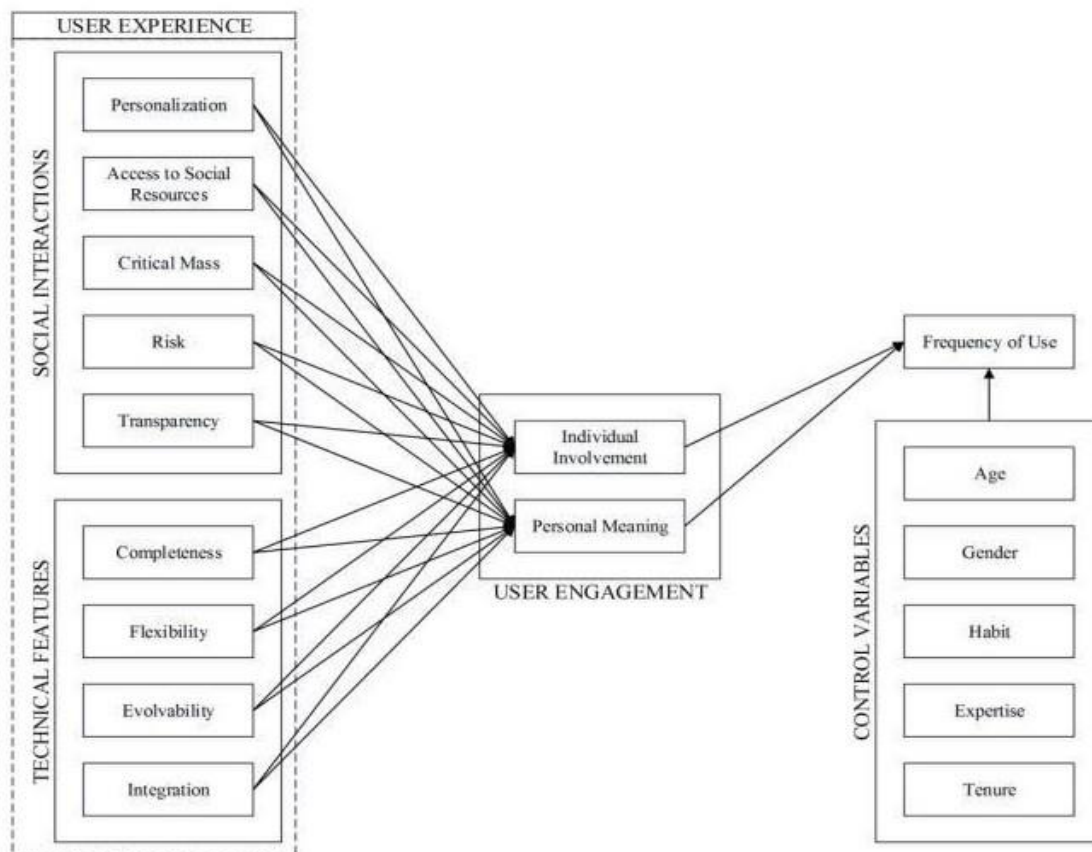


Figure 1: Social Media Engagement Theory (Di Gangi & Wasko, 2016).

2.2.1 The Social Media Engagement Theory and its relevance to the study

This study focused on the three dimensions of the Social Media Engagement Theory namely, social interactions, technical features, and user engagement.

2.2.1.1 Social Interactions of the Social Media Engagement Theory

Social interactions are comprised of five (5) dimensions, namely, personalization; access to social resources; critical mass; risk and transparency dimensions. The first dimension is the personalization dimension which refers to the degree of personal and individual attention that users perceive to have received from social media engagements. The theory hypothesizes that to increase user engagement and satisfaction, users must perceive that the interactions held online speak directly to their personal interests and relevance in their

lives. Furthermore, the theory holds that what motivates user engagement is the quality of the interactions and not the quantity of the interactions (Di Gangi & Wasko, 2016).

The second dimension is access to social resources, which refers to “the ability to access social resources to interact” (Di Gangi & Wasko, 2016, p. 5). Access to social resources is determined by two factors. Firstly, how easily can a social media user access information, and how social media users connect with other users.

Access to social resources is the third dimension which speaks about social media users and other social media acquaintances. Di Gangi & Wasko (2016) described the latter as how users perceive other users who are equally participating on similar social media platforms. Thus, social media platforms that allow users access to known acquaintances, including friends and family, are more attractive to users (Di Gangi & Wasko, 2016).

Risk is the fourth dimension of the SMET. Risk is associated with online interactions on social media platforms. Risk negatively influences user engagement and has the potential to discourage users from continuing to use social media. There have been increasing concerns of late on how social media platforms disclose the personal information of users. Other concerns of users include a lack of privacy, and increasing threats online under the guise of anonymity. The use of organizations to analyse user behaviour for use in advertisements has also been identified as a concern by users of social media (Di Gangi & Wasko, 2016).

The last dimension is transparency. Di Gangi & Wasko (2016, p. 6) characterised the dimension as the overall level of information symmetry across social media platforms. By increasing transparency on social media platforms, it reassesses the concerns of social media users on the concerns mentioned above and enables users to have trust when using the social media platform. Transparency can be ensured by granting users the right to give consent regarding the disclosure of personal information (Di Gangi & Wasko, 2016). As a result, these dimensions will be used to determine the extent to which social media enhanced engagement between political candidates and the public, the type of content shared and whether the shared political content had any influence on the decision-making of the respondents.

2.2.1.2 Technical features of the Social Media Engagement Theory

The technical features of social media platforms are important as they play a role in how users experience the social media platform and how users interact on the platforms. There are four technical features of the Social Media Engagement Theory, namely, flexibility, completeness, integration and evolvability (Di Gangi & Wasko, 2016).

The first dimension is that of completeness, which is described as the perception of the user in their ability to engage on the social media platforms. According to the theory, users need to be content with social media platforms, which can be measured by how easily users access information that is relevant to their personal needs. As such, social media platforms must be designed in such a way that their technical features speak directly to the preferences of the social media user. Hence, there will be increased user engagement if the social media platform meets the needs of the user. Alongside the personalisation dimension from the social interactions, the completeness dimension will also contribute to addressing the types of social media platforms and content used by presidential candidates during their election campaigns.

Flexibility is the second dimension of technical features. According to Di Gangi and Wasko (2016), flexibility is the extent to which the existing technical functions are experienced by the users. The theory holds that when users have flexibility over the social media platform, it enables users to follow their interests on social media, thus, increasing user engagement and positive experiences associated with the use of the social media platform(s). This dimension will be used to determine if social media had any influence on the decision-making of public members.

The third dimension is evolvability, which is the extent to which social media platforms evolve to meet the needs of their users. This means that social media platforms must provide guidelines on the use of the social media platform for their first-time users. The social media platform must evolve by adding new technical features, as the needs of the users change and their familiarity with the platform increases.

The last dimension is integration, which refers to the extent to which content is combined with different sources. It also involves users' ability to create content that holds personal significance for them. Integration facilitates social media users' access to content by removing barriers that hinder engagement (Di Gangi & Wasko, 2016). These theories will be used to identify which social media platforms were employed by presidential candidates to broadcast political content to residents of Windhoek during the 2019 Presidential elections campaigns, the type of content shared, the level of engagement and the level of persuasion on

2.2.1.3 User Engagement and the Social Media Engagement Theory

User engagement is comprised of two components namely, individual involvement and personal meaning. The theory holds that the involvement of users in social media depends on their interest and motivation to participate on social media platforms. There is a positive relationship between user engagement and the involvement of social media users on the platforms. The second component of personal meaning is related to the relevance of social media platforms to the user. Users who feel that social media platforms may have an essential function in their daily activities are more inclined to create, retrieve, and examine content. (Di Gangi & Wasko, 2016, p. 8).

2.3 Literature review

Winchester and Salji (2016) defined literature review as the in-depth analysis of the phenomenon under investigation. Because of the enormous popularity of social media platforms such as Twitter and Facebook, there is a strong desire to leverage social networking to increase communication between the various internet platforms such as internet forums, blogs, tweets, wikis, podcasts, images, or pictures. Other examples of social media may also include videos, ratings, and social bookmarks (Kapoor et al., 2018).

2.3.1 Understanding Social Media

Social media is defined as a social tool that, in accordance with Bishop (2019), makes it easier for people to disseminate information and political viewpoints with their friends, family, and co-workers, thus improving communication. According to Nations and Daniel (2021), it may as well be defined as web-primarily totally based communication that

permit people to engage with each other with the aid of using, sharing and consuming information. Social media has greatly improved communication and social units in societies, because of its fast transformation and extensive use (Bayer et. al., 2022). According to Cepal (2016), the digital revolution has altered many aspects of society, including democracy and how people respond to certain circumstances, hence why social media has an impact on people's lives in both negative and positive ways.

Social media is best explained using the Honeycomb model in Figure 2. The model is comprised of elements including conversations, identity, groups, sharing, presence, relationships, and reputation.

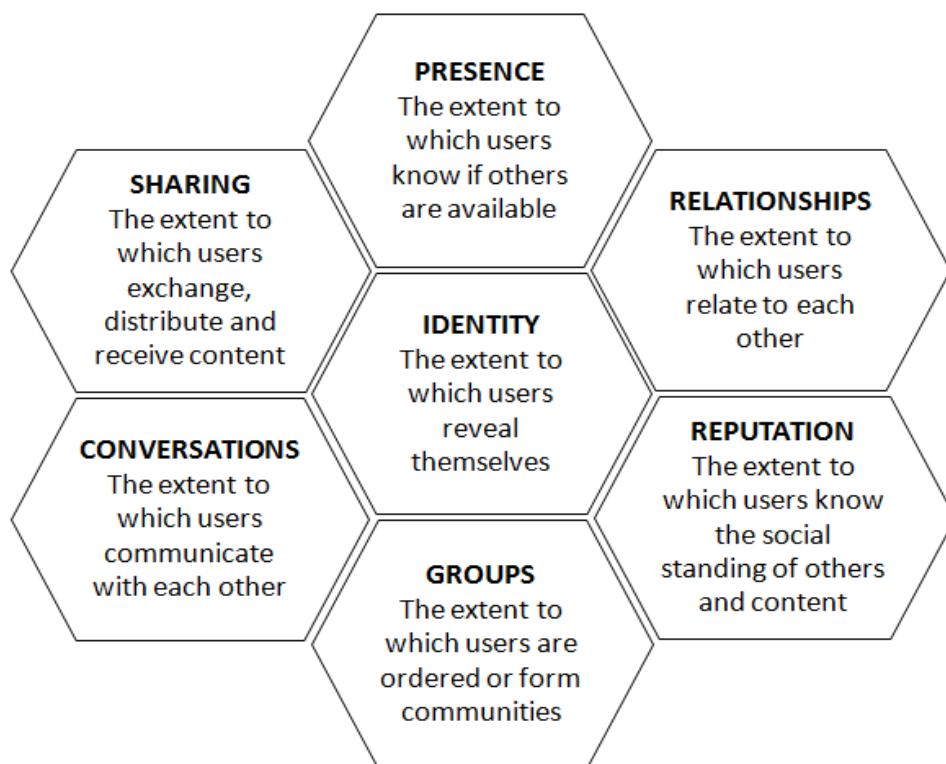


Figure 2: The honeycomb framework of social media (Adopted from Gaganjot & Singh (2019, p. 8341).

The element of conversations speaks on how social media is most effective as a communication medium, enabling users to share their ideas, thoughts, and feelings regarding changes in society. Moreover, social media has made it easier for users to find employment opportunities, build friendships and even find love (Gaganjot & Singh, 2019). Identity is the second element of social media. According to Gaganjot and Singh, (2019), social media is built on individualizing the experience of each user to their needs

and wants. Thus, information related to the identity of the user is required, this includes, age, gender, relationship status, professional occupation, and hobbies. The element of groups is the creation of groups of individuals that have specific elements in common. Hence, they come together on social media to share and interact regarding their common interests (Gaganjot & Singh, 2019). Sharing is the fourth element, which is the method of interacting on social media amongst users. Content that is regarded as appealing, increases user engagement. Moreover, the type of content shared, is dependent on the motivation of the user to gain self-satisfaction or to gain money and fame. Presence is “the extent to know the accessibility of users on various social media platforms” (Gaganjot & Singh, 2019, p. 8315). The element of relationships is the connection that develops amongst and between users, which can be a formal or informal relationship. The last element is that of reputation, which is the level of trust that the user has in the use of the social media platform. Taking into consideration that users post content that is of a personal nature, thus they need to feel safe when posting content (Gaganjot & Singh, 2019).

On the other hand, the widespread use of social media in the workplace has smoothed organizational communication and knowledge sharing which was previously impossible (Kapoor et al., 2021). With the world amid a social media uprising, it is no surprise that social media platforms like Twitter and Facebook have become increasingly popular within a blink of an eye. Widyastuti et al. (2021) stated that, it is evident that social media has revolutionized the way its users interact and use internet-based sites when disseminating content. Kaushal and Patwardhan (2018) similarly added that, Facebook's influence on mankind was so great that in 2010, six years after the app's inception, it became a major global force and an effective socialization technique for all age groups.

Consequently, social media is now the new future of political mobilisation, campaign mobilisation, access to resources and, providing psychological involvement that influence political participation (George & Leidner, 2019). According to Bavel et al. (2020), experiments show that the use of social media, especially Facebook and Twitter, can have a knock-on effect in reaching users, their friends, and friends of friends. Thanks to this interpersonal social network, news does not only spread faster, but it is also cheaper and saves time. According to Bavel et al. (2020), political beneficiaries are more interested in producing a social effect that encourages more people to participate in the political

process or collective action. Tyson (2015) disagrees with Bravel et al. (2020) as he claimed that different people utilise social media for different reasons, as some are there to fish for drama, boredom and while some are there to make friends. There is no collective interest when it comes to social media users.

2.3.2 Social media in Namibia

Digital 2020 Namibia (2020) indicated that in January 2020, there were about 2.75 million mobile subscribers, 1.75 million internet users with 710 000 social media subscribers in Namibia. About 28.9% were active mobile phone users, 36.64% digital media, 28.47% Pinterest, 1.11% Twitter, 11.99% Instagram and 8.13% are YouTube users (www.datareportal.com). Digital Statistics in South Africa (2017) correspondingly revealed that in 2014, about 89% of the South African population had access to the Internet, 42% use social media meanwhile 54% are mobile marketing users. This concludes that 71.47% of the South African community could be social media active users (www.datareportal.com). This was supported by Tyson (2015) who found that about 90% of students from the University of Namibia's main campus were active internet users who preferred using Facebook as a social media platform to interact with others. Social media has made it easier for people to interact and participate in many aspects of social life (Araujo et al., 2020). This change has been seen in Namibia, where the percentage of daily internet users has increased from 16% to 39% between November 2012 and September 2014 (Stoman & Stoman, 2014). It can also be argued that social media could possibly be one of the best strategies that politicians can consider when preparing for a campaign because it is more likely to “gain sufficient momentum that can influence political decisions, systems and structures” compared to any other communication platform (Surya & Jha, 2021).

The growing number of social media users has attracted a variety of organisations to encompass net marketing in their advertising plans (Ton & Kim, 2016). Facebook has more than 2.70 billion active users, followed by WhatsApp and YouTube, which have about two billion active users each, and Twitter with close to three hundred million monthly users (www.datareportal.com). Meanwhile, Instagram, a company owned by Facebook, has one billion monthly users (www.datareportal.com).

Social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and WhatsApp have revolutionised Namibia's political campaign strategies and communication. According to Hafeni (2021), political parties and their political candidates utilise these platforms to connect with the public, provide information, and rally support. This transition has consequences for accountability and transparency, since the traditional press typically suffered coverage issues (Hafeni, 2021). During Namibia's 2019 presidential election campaigns, Presidential candidates used social media extensively to reach out to younger people and establish a more personal relationship (Käere, 2020). To a certain extent, Kaere (2020) disagreed with Hafeni (2021). According to Kaere (2020), Namibia's 2019 Presidential campaigns did not only focus on social media campaigns, but they also targeted commercials and social media influencers to boost their messages and participate in micro-targeting methods similar to those seen in other regions of Africa (Käere, 2020).

2.3.3 Social Media in Africa

Many African countries have unequal access to internet platforms. This digital gap has the potential to impact who has the ability to participate in political discourse and who may use social media for political benefit. Wealthier political groups of people frequently have more access to resources that enable more effective online campaigning, resulting in unequal representation (Kledja & Kasujja, 2022). This remark was validated by Shihomeka (2019), who discovered that people in rural areas are most known to be poor, compared to those in urban areas. As a result, they frequently endure internet access difficulties due to a lack of consistent internet connectivity. This prevents them from participating in online discussions, including political interactions. In addition to that, they are often excluded from most of the political events.

2.3.4 Social media marketing & content sharing

The rise of social media as the primary form of online communication sparked the current phenomena known as social media marketing (Olanrewaju et al., 2020). The study explored concerns around the use of social media as a communication tool during political campaigns in Namibia. Marketing, by extension, is a type of communication, which is why this section has been included as part of the relevant literature. Given that social media is increasingly being used for sharing and interacting with others, businesses are

prudent in creating and implementing sustainable social media strategies in order to easily and successfully capitalize its use (Agbim et al., 2021). Social media marketing requires constant social media interaction. On social networks, if you do not engage in two-way communication with other users, then you are simply just disseminating information with no engagement (Banjiwo & Irwansyah, 2022). As more people use online media, traditional media is declining, which is linked to urban migration and the economy. This is because most people now recognize the significance of the technology presence that is available (Chatterjee et al., 2020).

Namibia's 2019 Presidential election campaigns were prejudiced by #Fishrot as one of the main trending topics on social media. Another significant effect was the development of "trending topics" on social media (Matali, 2017). An algorithm monitoring trending topic determines trends based on who you follow and where you are based (Vanessa, 2012). According to Clark and Bacon (2018), maintaining a strong online and social media presence may be done in a variety of ways in order to be effective. Hence, the need for politicians to have qualified and seasoned marketing coordinators and managers who are familiar with marketing strategies.

Moreover, people use social media to connect and reconnect with old friends, exchange ideas, meet new people, share information, share photos, and do all other kind of different activities of their choice. Users of social media follow the latest local and international news, engage with other news readers, take part in the campaigns and other types of activities of their choice. Social media has also been recently used as a way of boosting careers and business prospects. Academics are also included in the use of social media, by aiding in the advancement of academic performance and communication abilities, students might work with their classmates, by communicating with individuals from other countries. In addition, one can gain knowledge of many cultures and societies (Fox et al., 2015).

Political candidates hardly get the opportunity to physically meet some of their supporters, which also applies to supporters, who only see their political candidates in the media. Social media creates a platform for the electorate to engage with their preferred political

candidates. Moreover, social media provides a platform for political candidates to develop lasting relationships with the public. Political candidates are free to use as many social media platforms as they wish to engage with the public, especially during campaigns. Interaction increases followers and helps establish trust, respect, and loyalty amongst the electorate (Clark & Bacon, 2018).

2.3.5 Social Media & Public Engagement

Literature observed in this thesis identified social media benefits as a significant tool for public engagement. According to Vesnic-Alujevic, Nascimento and Polvora (2020), the capacity to establish personal networks, greater freedom of expression, and interaction only exists in traditional media. Meanwhile, Vesnic-Alujevic et al. (2020) also pointed out that Members of Parliament (MP) would struggle with time restrictions when interacting with their constituents on social media. The only conclusion that can be drawn from this is that depending on how one views social media, it can either work for and against.

The use of social media is drastically increasing among European politicians and during online engagements with citizens (Fleishman-Hillard, 2011). As mentioned earlier, citizens can utilize social media for a variety of goals, such as organizing and coordinating their own interests on political or service delivery issues, revealing corruption, or sharing opportunities. This can be accomplished by convening with other members of the online community who are dealing with the same dilemma or those who share a similar interest in a certain issue. According to Matali (2017) in countries where democracy is detested, highly organised social media groups could pose significant threats to governments. These organizations have the capacity to overthrow governments by organizing and influencing the masses, as happened during the 2012 Arab uprisings (Matali, 2017).

In Africa, new media are promoting good governance culture in Africa" (Igwebuike & Chimunya, P.42, 2021). Therefore, politicians can make use of this chance to address voter issues as they arise, and voters can also interact with their representatives, closing the information gap and holding their governments more accountable (Igwebuike & Chimunya, 2021). According to Hamajoda (2016), the voters can get advantaged through

taking part in and influencing decisions and policy-making processes, especially during election campaigns. Ndlela and Mulwo (2017) listed more advantages and identified social media's great potential including the freedom of communication with everyone across generations through the sharing of information and opinions.

Alanezi (2021) expressed a similar opinion when he claimed that social media grants lawmakers new opportunities to connect, engage and communicate with the public, exercise legislation consultations, promote transparency and share educational resources. A study conducted in Nigeria concluded that, "media that is new plays a role in bringing a fresh perspective to political communication" (Igwebuike & Chimuanya, p.46, 2021).

According to researchers (McNamara *et al.*, 2012; Kingham, 2003; Power, 2012), in most cases, online communication platforms open up avenues of interaction between the public and lawmakers in real life, which will help legislators improve their communication and representatives' skills in both written, oral, and visual forms (Hamajoda, 2016).

2.3.6 The power and influence of social media

The power of social media in presidential elections was recognised during the 2008 election of Barack Obama. The campaign used the internet to provide information on the presidential candidate and to mobilise supporters. In addition, the campaign also made use of social media to interact with supporters (Gerodimos & Justinussen, 2015). Social media has also played a role in assisting society with organizing and consolidating their concerns regarding the government or shared opportunities. Social media has also been of late used to expose corruption, such as the Fishrot files that have gained attention for exposing major fraud involving the largest Icelandic fishing company, the Namibian Head of State, two ministers, and numerous other high-ranking individuals (Immanuel & Iikela, 2019). A paper by Enikolopov *et al.* (2018), has highlighted the importance of social media in ensuring accountability and promoting anti-corruption activities and major security concerns from governments in countries that repudiate democracy.

Social media-fuelled the Arab uprising in December 2010 that has since come to be known as the "Twitter Revolution". This Arab uprising resulted in the overthrow of

several governments in Arab States (Matali, 2017). According to Matali (2017), growing strategic plans like protests involving thousands have been organized through social media like Facebook and Twitter in nations such as Egypt, Tunisia, and Yemen. Matali (2017) argued that it is crucial to understand that new social media platforms did not cause the Arab Spring but instead played a role in communication that helped the uprisings in the long run. Many people in the Arab world now know they are not alone and that others are going through the same suffering, violence, and lack of justice as they are. Matali (2017), claims that social networks have shattered the psychological barrier of fear.

Namibia also had her share of social media movements, propelled by Activist Job Amupanda. In 2014, Job Amupanda and his associates occupied a piece of land in the upscale suburb of Kleine Kuppe in protest of the increase of Namibians living in deplorable conditions without proper housing. This propelled the establishment of the Affirmative Repositioning Movement (ARM), and subsequent Facebook account that had gained over 4 000 followers in just one day and has continued to grow exponentially (Amupanda, 2014). Today, ARM is one of the popular political movements, with a strong social media footprint in Namibia. Known as "Voice of the voiceless", the movement not only advocates for land rights for young Namibians, but they also use social media to expose corruption all over the country.

Chang (2010) highlighted President Barack Obama as having exploited social media during the 2008 United States of America presidential elections to generate funds and promote his political campaigns. Thus, propelling him to the White House and earning him the title of the most effective online politician. The success of Barack Obama's use of social media in the 2008 United States of America (USA) presidential election campaign serves as an example for political leaders all around the world. The Obama campaign was a revolution in new media technology and politics (Ahmad et al. 2019). In a similar vein, Navarro et al. (2020) claimed that Obama's actions had elevated political communication via social media to new heights. The successful use of social media during political campaigns had finally occurred in many countries including Namibia. During Namibia's 2019 Presidential election, the phenomenon of using social media in electoral campaigns became increasingly widespread. It is for this reason that Namibian leaders

including President Hage G. Geingob of the SWAPO party and his main opposition candidates McHenry Venaani, President of the Democratic Turnhalle Alliance (DTA) now called PDM, were active on social media (Stoman & Stoman, 2014).

According to Miller (2011), the introduction of social media platforms such as Facebook in 2004 was a huge revolution in the history of communication because this platform augmented in popularity, overtaking Google and became one of the most visited internet sites with over one billion members globally (Miller, 2011).

While for many, social media is a simple method of communication that allows them to remain in touch with friends and family, for others, it is a low-cost marketing tool that they can use to market and empower their businesses (Taprial & Kanwar, 2012). A variety of businesses use social media to market their products, establish consumer loyalty, and engage in a variety of other activities. Most business owners look forward to consumer engagement and feedback because it helps their businesses to understand the marketplace and fine-tune their products, services and strategies (Ryan, 2015). Several studies have revealed that the addiction of social media among employees in workplaces have caused British businesses billions of dollars in productivity each year (Ryan, 2015). Such that, employees are constantly on social media during working hours rather than executing their daily tasks and being productive.

According to a common myth, Twitter played a key role in the recent final results of both the American presidential elections and the United Kingdom's "Brexit" vote. Many believed that this was a result of social media's greater influence on political polarization and the rising popularity of populist leaders across many nations (NPR, 2020). Many believed that the impact of social media on political polarization and the rebirth of anti-elitist candidates in several states are a result of rising social media use. The U.S. Federal Election Commissioner further argued that Facebook's owners have no idea of how much this is hurting democracy (NPR, 2020).

Notably, Kenya, Zimbabwe and Ghana have had some success using social media in their political processes (Dzisah, 2018; Ndlela, 2015 & Mano, 2020). Emmerson Mnangagwa

established himself on Twitter, Facebook, and WhatsApp, becoming Zimbabwe's first "social media president". Adding that, in Zimbabwe, women were often expected to be socially invisible with their political choices as they were not allowed to take part in political activities. However, that has since changed, women now have the chance to interact directly with and even affect politics and public life through online social media platforms like Twitter (Ndlela & Mano, 2020).

The benefit of this ongoing virtual connection of exchanging ideas, information and opinions allows the public to be more self-expressive in multidisciplinary perspectives compared to traditional media. Ngai (2014), enumerated the influence and changes brought about by social media. Holmes (2015) also agreed that there is a relationship between power and social media. According to Tang et al. (2012) as cited in Kapoor et al. (2018), the benefits of participating and interacting on social media may help create reputations, bring up employment chances, and even provide direct monetary revenue. Siapera and Spyridou (2012) suggested that the advancement of communication devices such as mobile phones has had a significant influence on the growth and usage of social media. According to O'Reilly (2018), social networking has been swiftly adopted by young people all around the world, allowing them to show themselves, learn, and form relationships while worries about privacy, bullying, and dangerous conduct continue to increase.

Political candidates around the world are now becoming concerned about the increasing number of social media influence on voter's decisions (National Population Register, 2020). A study by Boxell et al. (2017) revealed that Twitter has lowered the Republican Party's vote share during the 2016 and 2020 USA Presidential elections. Boxell's study supported the widely held belief that social media was a disruption in Trump's victory during the 2016 presidential election, however, other studies demonstrated that social media users were more likely to support Trump.

As a tool for understanding and influencing customer perception and behaviour, as well as the capacity to bring people with similar interests together, social media offers a wealth of opportunities (Laroche et al., 2012). It is no more a question of whether businesses

should use social media to gain a competitive advantage in the marketplace, but rather how and to what extent they should. Today, political campaigns are depending closely on on-line communications structures to benefit in campaigning (Ton & Kim, 2016). Online campaigning has both positive and negative effects, but social media particularly has the power to promote or diminish one's reputation and social image.

Information movement, transmission speed, and transparency are all changing as a result of social media and new media (Mayfield, 2010). Social media platforms carry essential democratic ideals and are pillars of liberal democracy (Hesmondhalgh & Toynbee, 2008). In support is Li and Sakamoto (2014) who highlighted that social media sites like Facebook, Twitter and others have advantages of collective opinion that can affect people's behaviour.

Although political campaigns have changed throughout time, they still maintain a strong bond with the media. Political campaigns must consider the importance of media coverage since it increases audience reach. Because of the intimate connection between the media and politics, political communication techniques must be modified continuously and continue adapting just as the media did. The concepts and tactics that practitioners and theorists agreed upon merely 15 years ago are now largely ineffective since political campaigns have undergone such a profound upheaval (Trent & Friedenberg, 2010).

On the other hand, peer-to-peer information shared on social media may be less valuable, making learning more difficult. According to existing research, the information presented by the media can be more valuable, and trustworthy, it will also enable citizens to hold public officials responsible and make judgments that are more in line with their preferences (Ferraz & Finan, 2011; Da Silveira & De Mello, 2011 & Banerjee et al., 2020). Ryan (2015) supported this theory by adding that, creating and publishing content for social media includes making it engaging enough to motivate followers to share it right away and thus expanding the audience of people who are interested in the subject or business. In most cases, content that involves prominent people and politically exposed persons receives more attention and reactions from opposition parties. With all that said,

the study is yet to uncover how social media was used to influence the public's decisions at the ballot.

2.3.6 Social Media and Politics in Namibia

Since independence, the SWAPO party has been winning Presidential Elections and had a 2/3rd majority of seats in parliament (Tjipueja, 2014). In 2014, 80% of the votes were cast for SWAPO, in support of Hage G. Geingob (Tjipueja, 2014). In 2016, the country experienced a recession, which had a disastrous impact on socio-economic conditions and unemployment drastically rose (Melber, 2020 & Haidula, 2019). In 2019, Panduleni F. B. Iitula, a SWAPO member, unexpectedly registered to run for the Presidential Elections campaigns as an Independent Candidate (IC) by using provision of the nation's electoral system. In 2019, while busy with Presidential Election campaigns, the #Fishrot files started making news and since then revealing significant fraudulent transactions involving a large Icelandic fishing firm, the Namibian State House, two ministers and several other senior officials (Immanuel & Iikela, 2019). New discoveries were made, implicating SWAPO and President Hage G. Geingob as well as the party, his personal lawyer Sisa Namandje and other prominent business people in Namibia (Amakali, 2019).

By November 30, 2019, the final Presidential results were announced and the “majority of the 820,000 out of the 1.3 million registered voters (60.4%) exercised their right to say out loud and plainly that the honeymoon was over for SWAPO and its presidential candidate”. SWAPO lost its two-third majority that it held since independence (Melber,2020). All this information was shared on social media platforms, and that is when, for the first time, SWAPO experienced a decline in votes.

Pătruț and Pătruț (2014) indicated that, social media can mobilize riot-like behaviours, due to the dialogue of politics, inclusive of debatable subjects and conversations are reachable with the usage of on-line communication. By allowing instant access to political information, social media may also influence how people perceive political candidates. In contrast to traditional marketing of products and services in commercial organizations, political marketing focuses on selling a political party's ideas, belief, and candidates (O'Shaughnessy et al., 2012). According to O'Shaughnessy et al. (2012), marketing in

politics has to do with the party's political offerings, policies, leaders, and issues that the voters can relate to, depending on the party's chosen strategic stance and what is regarded to be the public's and electorate's orientation. Consequently, to win the hearts and minds of the public, political candidates must be able to connect and interact directly with them especially through social media or in person, during their campaigns. Media and politics have always worked intimately. Politicians rely more on the media for coverage and promotional activities, while the media derives news from politicians. The media is responsible for disseminating information, connecting the gap between politicians and the public, conveying messages of all political events, educating the public, and awakening public awareness on topics that are significant to society at large (O'Shaughnessy et al., 2012).

Both from a Namibian and South African perspective, the use of social media has increased over the years, however, the question remains unanswered as to how social media was used in 2019 by Namibian Presidential Candidates during their political campaigns.

2.3.7 Money, Politics and Social Media

According to Malan (2021), just like other African countries, Namibian political parties frequently sought support from affluent individuals and companies, resulting in possible conflicts of interest. This was also supported by Dunning and Stasavage (2021) who directed that in many African countries, political finance is frequently a combination of official support, corporate donations, and contributions from wealthy residents. They further indicated that these financial resources have a significant impact on influencing the political environment, particularly during and after elections (Dunning & Stasavage, 2021).

This reliance on money can distort political representation, as individuals with larger wallets have more clout over party agendas and policymaking (Malan, 2021). Maundeni (2020) emphasized that the growing number of digital payment channels has made things less complicated to fund political campaigns through social media. The possibility of anonymous donations, as well as a lack of strong campaign funding rules, have

contributed to unethical behaviour, resulting in concerns about the political procedures' honesty and transparency (Maundeni, 2020). The spread of social media has also resulted in the emergence of misinformation operations, which are frequently financed by political players looking to intimidate and undermine their opponents. The capacity to pay for targeted adverts enables the propagation of false information that can influence public opinion in a negative or positive way (Adebayo & Dube, 2022).

2.3.8 Social Media and the Future

Since the invention of the telephone, social media has advanced significantly with new applications that allow free international calls (Fox et al., 2015). Considering how fast social media sites are currently flourishing, it can be said that social media is not just another passing technology trend (El-Aydi, 2018). It is obvious that social media will continue to develop into something much greater with time and continuous technological advancements. Therefore, predicting the state of social media in 10 years is difficult. Given the dominance of YouTube now, it can be asserted with surety that videos will be the forthcoming big thing on social media.

2.3.9 Methods for Sustaining a strong Internet and Social Media Presence.

Bacon (2011) asserts that there are several methods for sustaining a strong internet and social media presence that have been proven to be successful. These are as follows.

- **Content:** This is the fundamental principle of social media. Depending on the social media platform, most if not all require new and pertinent material to be posted for the audience to consume. When social media platforms and accounts do not post new content, they are seen as decomposing (Bacon, 2011).
- **Engagement:** Audience engagement is the second factor to consider when creating a successful social media campaign. When businesses and individuals interact with their online audience, they are perceived as approachable and responsive in addition to many other positive perceptions. All of which translates into new supporters, goodwill, brand affiliation, and loyalty. Therefore, they are more inclined to take extreme measures to support or defend a reputation, name, brand, item, service, or cause (Bacon, 2011).

- **Skills:** A guaranteed path to virtual unconsciousness or disaster is not understanding which skill to deploy, when to deploy it, how to use it and how to use it correctly. According to Bacon (2011), technical abilities such as designs, research, graphics, back-end management, optimization, monitoring, analytics, and other things are needed to support a dynamic social media presence. In support of Bacon is Colliander and Dahlen (2011) who discovered that, the majority of entrepreneurs claimed that their social media boosted awareness for their companies. Almost all marketers who have used social media marketing for at least a year were of the opinion that it has increased awareness of their brands.
- **Consistency:** Colliander and Dahlen (2011), found that the majority of marketers use social media to gain market intellect and develop loyal fans. Such information, if supported by continuous efforts and the commitment to execute it constantly can lead to a successful endeavour (Bacon, 2011). Bacon (2011) attributed the lack of consistency as the reason behind the failure of public personalities, whom, despite possessing both financial resources and time, do not take advantage of the power of social media.

Fox et al. (2025) disagreed with all the praise given to social media employment in the society. He claims that social media is very addictive and has a huge influence on young people as they want to emulate the "prominent, glamorous role models they observe in the media". Such negative media influences can distort the morals and behaviour required to guide young people in the proper way (Fox et al., 2015).

2.4 Summary

This chapter provided a background on the study by reviewing existing literature on the topic of interest. The chapter further provided the theoretical framework that is applicable to this study, the SMET theory. Including, its characteristics and how they can be applied to the study. The literature review indicated that social media is widely used to enhance political participation not only in Africa but worldwide. It also shows that a variety of authors see more potential in social media and their thoughts were on encouraging political candidates to use it to the best level of their capabilities. Moreover, this chapter looked at how social media can be used to motivate political agendas, organise political

demonstrations and share government frustration in different parts of the world. The chapter provided more information on understanding social media; social media as a marketing tool; social media and presidential elections. The next chapter presents the methodological approach used in data collection.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the research methods, data collection procedures and tools of analysis adopted in this work. Mohajan (2018) defined research design as the blueprint for conducting a study in which the researcher has ultimate control over the factors that have the potential to influence the findings. This suggests that the research methodology expresses the researcher's views about what to examine, which procedures to apply, and the suitable data collection and analytic tools to rely on during the planning and execution stages of a research endeavour. This chapter elaborates on the research design, data collection methods, population, sampling size, and research instruments.

3.2 Research paradigm

A paradigm is described as a collection of assumptions regarding how certain problems arise and the multitude of agreements regarding how such problems might be addressed (Kamal, 2019). According to Mhatre and Mehta (2023), research paradigms are the basic belief of systems and theoretical frameworks coupled with assumptions about ontology, epistemology, methodology and methods.

There are five (5) research paradigms: post-positivist/postmodernism, positivist, interpretivist, pragmatic and critical (Kivinja & Kuyuni, 2017). The study adopted the post-positivist because, it agrees that scientific research can give useful knowledge about reality but cannot attain absolute certainty or objective truth (Kivinja & Kuyuni, 2017). The post-positivist paradigm is a research strategy that acknowledges the complexities of social phenomena as well as the fact that knowledge is not completely objective or absolute. Unlike positivism, which is mainly based on observable and quantifiable facts, post-positivism acknowledges that all observation is flawed and theory-laden, implying that researchers' biases, views, and cultural settings can impact their understanding of reality (Parker, 1994). The researcher employed a post-positivist approach to investigate a variety of ways in which social media influenced election dynamics, public debate, and political involvement. Embedding post-positivist concepts throughout the thesis provided

a strong, critical, and reflective approach that recognises the complex nature of social reality while making relevant contributions to the subject matter between social media and politics.

Post-positivism holds that, while researchers aim for truthfulness, their conclusions are unavoidably impacted by their personal experiences, political sphere and cultural settings (Stuart, 2010). This study adopted the pragmatic research paradigm based on an explanatory sequential mixed method design involving a three-phase data collection process. The pragmatic paradigm was selected as it allows the data collection and analysis for both quantitative and qualitative data. The paradigm provides for the acceptance of multiple realities that can be interpreted to give answers to the research objectives. Moreover, post-positivist is grounded in the idea that there is an objective reality that exists separate from the existence of individuals and holds that all beliefs are socially constructed (Kaushik & Walsh, 2019).

3.3 Research approach

Research methods refers to the strategies and tactics used in every study encompassing everything from general hypotheses to specific strategies for gathering, analysing, and interpreting data (Creswell and Plano-Clark, 2018). The research methodologies, strategies, and assumptions employed differ depending on the underlying theories and philosophical perspectives. The three (3) research approaches for this study are mainly distinguished as qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods.

3.3.1 Quantitative approach

Bryman (2012) described quantitative methodology as a research technique that emphasizes quantification in the data gathering and analysis process and is supported by the positivist paradigm in his book "Social Research Methods". Quantitative methodology makes use of numerical data; hence, data is collected in such a manner to produce measurable data to which statistical processes can be applied. Data can be collected through experiments, surveys, or observations (Rahman, 2020). The objective of the quantitative approach to social research is to find patterns in people's daily lives by compartmentalising the social environment into variables that can be expressed numerically, allowing the

connection between the variables to be investigated using statistical methods. The strategy also emphasises social behaviour components that may be measured and mimicked (Rahman, 2020). The advantage of quantitative methodology is that the results can be extrapolated to cover larger populations or areas (Rahman, 2020). However, the approach has limitations. Firstly, the approach fails to determine the deeper meanings and explanations behind the variables. Secondly, the positivism paradigm which it is based on cannot account for the shape and maintenance of social reality or how humans interpret their actions and those of others. Thirdly, the quantitative approach tends to take a small snippet of the phenomenon under investigation. Lastly, it disregards variables that do not follow a specific pattern or are out of the wanted range or scope (Rahman, 2020).

3.3.2 Qualitative approach

Qualitative methodology is defined by Aspers and Corte (2019) as a combination of an interpretative and naturalistic approach to study phenomena in their natural settings in an attempt to make sense of and/or interpret phenomena in terms of humans. Subsequently, it also applies to studies that are investigating the relationships between individuals; human interactions with their external environments or the external factors that drive human behaviour and reactions (Gullen, 2016). It is useful in the analysis and evaluation of non-numerical data (Aspers & Corte, 2019). Data that may be analysed using qualitative methodology may be collected in a number of ways, including case studies, ethnographic narratives or phenomenology. The advantage of taking the qualitative approach lies in it being flexible to accommodate any changes in the process as the patterns emerge from the data (Gullen, 2016). Rahman (2020) discovered that the qualitative methodology approach has several limitations. Firstly, it has limited capacity to include contextual sensitivities as the approach focuses more on individuals and experiences. Secondly, policymakers and managers tend to give low credibility to results that are derived from a qualitative approach instead of a quantitative approach. Thirdly, in terms of the research methodology, smaller sample size raises the issue of generalizability to the whole population of the research as the results can only be generalized in a limited manner. Fourthly, in regard to data interpretation and analysis, it can be a complex and time-consuming process.

3.3.3 Mixed method approach

Lastly, the mixed method approach makes use of both the qualitative and quantitative approaches. As a methodological approach for this study, it involves making theoretical assumptions that guide the direction of the data collection and the analysis of the data using a combination of both qualitative and quantitative approaches during the research process (Gullen, 2016). The approach is useful in study designs such as the convergent design, explanatory sequential design, exploratory sequential design, embedded design, and a multi-phase design. The convergent design compares the findings from both qualitative and quantitative data sources. The explanatory sequential design involves using qualitative data to investigate and explore the quantitative findings. Exploratory sequential design involves collecting qualitative exploratory data, analysing the information, and lastly using the findings to develop a survey instrument that will assist in finding answers to the research questions. The embedded design involves the analysis of both quantitative and qualitative data sources to determine the outcome. In addition to that, the multi-phase design is concerned with involving community participants during the quantitative and qualitative phases of research to bring about the required change (Dawadi, Shrestha & Giri, 2021). The approach is focused on collecting and analysing both quantitative and qualitative data. Its advantage lies in getting the best of both approaches, which provides a better understanding of the research problem instead of relying on either approach alone (Gullen, 2016). In addition, the approach fosters interaction between the researchers; it is flexible and adaptable in many study designs, and enables researchers to collect comprehensive data (Dawadi et al., 2021). The methodology has a number of limitations that have been investigated by Dawadi et al. (2021), which found that, firstly, the approach is complex to plan and to conduct, and thus it requires careful planning at all aspects of the research, such as study population, timing and data integration. Secondly, a qualified multidisciplinary team of researchers is required to conduct a study using this approach. Lastly, the approach is labour-intensive and requires many resources and time to conduct a study with the approach.

3.3.4 Justification of methods

The study used the mixed method approach, using the convergent parallel design whereby, data collected through qualitative and quantitative was analysed, interpreted, and compared against one another in order to find a relationship or dissimilarity. The

approach was found to be applicable to this study as it combined the strengths of both the quantitative and qualitative approaches and compensated for the flaws in each approach. Furthermore, the convergent parallel design was found to be applicable to this study as it allows the findings from the quantitative and qualitative data to be merged and analysed to determine the similarities and/or differences as seen in Figure 3. The study began with a quantitative questionnaire which was used to collect data from the Windhoek residents, followed by a qualitative instrument. The qualitative approach was used to collect data from the three (3) party coordinators namely, SWAPO, IPC and PDM using interviews. It was also used to collect data from the three (3) social media platforms namely, Facebook, Instagram and Twitter, in which a content analysis scheme was used to observe and collect comprehensive data using content analysis (Creswell et al., 2018).

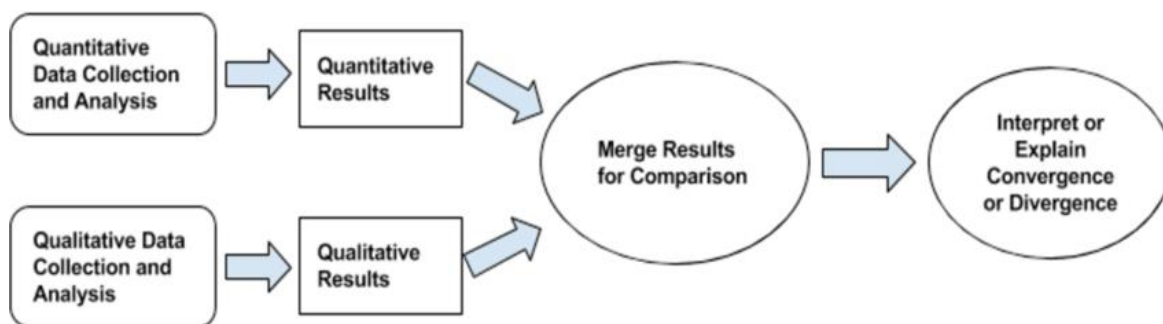


Figure 3: Convergent Parallel Design (Adopted from Creswell and Plano-Clark, 2018, p.124)

3.4 Population of the study

The population of a study, according to Ntuli et al. (2020), is the group of persons from which the researcher intends to draw conclusions. Creswell and Plano-Clark (2018) also defined population as the total number of people who share a specific characteristic with the researcher. The population of this study were all Windhoek residents estimated at 470, 000, with a population density of 62.8/km² (World Population Review, 2023). The population of Windhoek was chosen for this study because Windhoek has more people than any other town, it is also the main district and the political and economic centre of Namibia and where all the seventeen (17) registered political parties have their headquarters (<http://www.windhoekcc.org.na>), hence their relevance in the study. In addition, Windhoek has a 99.97% Internet uptime (Digital Namibia ,2020), meaning that the majority of Windhoek residents had access to the internet for the purpose of this study

(World Bank, 2021). Therefore, all existing social media platforms were perceived relevant to this study.

Table 1 provides a comprehensive overview of Namibia's population distribution per region, with Khomas and Ohangwena Regions leading the pack (NSA, 2021).

Table 1: Population distribution in Namibia

| Region Population | Population Estimate |
|-------------------|---------------------|
| Khomas | 342,141 |
| Erongo | 150,809 |
| Otjozondjupa | 143,903 |
| Oshana | 176,674 |
| Ohangwena | 245,446 |
| Omusati | 243,166 |
| Kavango East | 136,823 |
| Kavango West | 86,529 |
| Zambezi | 90,596 |
| Kunene | 86,856 |
| Hardap | 79,507 |
| //Kharas | 77,421 |
| Omaheke | 71,233 |
| Oshikoto | 181,973 |

Sources: Namibia Statistics Agency (2019)

About 15 Political parties took part in the November 2019 presidential elections however, only 11 made it to the National Assembly. Table 2 illustrates the names of political parties, their presidential candidates, and the number of seats obtained in the National Assembly.

Table 2: Political parties, Presidential Candidates and their number of seats in parliament

| Political party | Presidential Candidates | Number of seats in Parliament |
|---|--------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| South West Africa People's Organization (SWAPO) | Hage Gottfried Geingob | 63 |
| Popular Democratic Movement (PDM) | McHenry Venaani | 16 |
| Namibia Economic Freedom Fighters (NEFF) | Mukwiilongo Jan | 2 |
| Landless People's Movement (LPM) | Swartbooi Bernardus | 4 |
| All People's Party (APP) | Shixwameni Ignatius | 2 |
| National Unity Democratic Organisation (NUDO) | Muinjangue Esther | 2 |
| Christian Democratic Voice Party (CDV) | Faustus Thomas | 1 |
| Rally for Democratic and Progress | Kavekatora Kamboto | 1 |
| Republican Party of Namibia (RP) | Mudge Henry | 2 |
| SWANU of Namibia (SWANU) | Iijambo Tangeni | 1 |
| United Democratic Front of Namibia (UDF) | Auchan Apius | 2 |
| Congress of Democrats (CoD) | Ben Ulenga | 0 |

| | | |
|-----------------------------------|--------------------|---|
| Namibia Democratic Party (NDP) | Cornelius Tuhafeni | 0 |
| Namibia Patriotic Front | Uaripuka Papama | 0 |
| Workers Revolutionary Party (WRP) | Hewat Beukes | 0 |

Sources: National Electoral Commission of Namibia, Namibia Political Party Database (2019).

In addition to that, Namibia has seen a substantial increase in social media usage. The Namibian communities heavily rely on these platforms for social connection and information transmission such as Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram, Twitter, TikTok, Telegram, LinkedIn and YouTube.

3.5 Sampling procedures

A paper by Majid (2018) defined sampling as a process of selecting a sample of individuals from the population of interest that is a true statistical representative. Sampling allows the researcher to pick individuals that will be representatives of the large population. Hence, the need to determine a statistical representation of the population of interest that is large enough to answer the research questions and for the purpose of generalization. There are two main types of sampling methods namely probability and nonprobability sampling methods (Majid (2018)). This study used both probability and nonprobability sampling methods. Probability sampling technique used a Raosoft calculator to randomly select the 385 Windhoek residents, while non-probability was purposely used to select the three (3) party coordinators and the three social media platforms. Equally important, the study also used theoretical sampling which occurs in studies where the sampling criteria for sampling is not predetermined, but rather emerges as the investigation goes on (Koerber & Thombre, 2021). Notably, the sampling method is used to find the most acceptable number of representatives of the population in the study.

3.5.1 Simple random sampling

Simple random sampling is a probability sampling technique which, according to Gay (2012), is a method of choosing a sample in which every member of the defined population has an equal and independent chance of being chosen to take part in the study. In contrast, simple random sampling is used to prevent selection bias and compensate for the possible impact of known and unknown variables. It also assists in guaranteeing the generalization of results (Doyle et al., 2020). Furthermore, the study wanted to find out what type of social media platforms were used by political parties and their presidential candidates to interact and engage with Windhoek residents and, to discover if social media had any influence on their political choice. The study then employed a simple random sampling to select 385 Windhoek residents. In addition, the sampling method has several benefits attached to it, including being easy to use and less time-consuming (Stratton, 2021). This sample size was determined by using a Raosoft calculator (Raosoft, 2021). The Raosoft sample size calculator is a popular online tool that helps researchers assess how many participants are required for a survey to get statistically reliable findings. Raosoft, Inc. introduced this calculator to help users calculate sample sizes depending on a variety of characteristics such as population size, margin of error, confidence level, and response distribution (Babbie, 2016).

The following variables were provided as inputs in the calculator: population size, which is 470 000 Windhoek residents; a 5% margin error; a 95% confidence level and a 50% response distribution. The Raosoft calculator provided a sample size of 385 respondents out of a population of 470 000 Windhoek residents. The study itself collected 416 respondents in total using the online Google Forms questionnaire however, only the first 385 respondents were selected and considered as eligible subjects to the study.

3.5.2 Purposive sampling

Purposive sampling is a nonprobability sampling strategy used in qualitative research to identify and select information-rich that contains an excessive amount of data so that the limited resources are used as efficiently as possible (Mullet, 2018). This entails locating and selecting individuals or teams of persons who have expertise in or experience with a topic of interest (Levitt et al., 2018). Firstly, the study aimed to find out whether political

parties do have existing social media platforms, what type of content they shared during the 2019 Presidential election campaigns, whether their party candidates interacted with public members and whether they think social media had an influence on the party's final results and the political choices of the public. A purposive sampling method was then used to select three Party Coordinators from the top three political parties namely, SWAPO, IPC and PDM (ECN, 2019).

After converging the data derived from the Windhoek residents through the simple random sampling method and the data that was purposively derived from the three Party Coordinators, findings consequently led the researcher to content analysis. The study further purposively selected the top three most used social media platforms in Namibia namely, Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter (Tyson, 2015) in order to determine and confirm the authenticity of data derived from Windhoek residents and the party coordinators. The study aimed to discover the existence of social media platforms, the type of content shared, and the type of reaction received from the public after sharing political content.

3.6 Data collection methods and instruments

Data collection is the process of gathering and analysing information about relevant variables in a planned, scientific manner that will allow the researcher to respond to the research questions. It is of utmost importance to ensure that the data collection process is done in accordance with the relevant principles to maintain the integrity of research and to produce accurate results, and hence the need for quality assurance and quality control measures (Cooke & Charnas, 2021). In this current study, data was collected in three (3) sequential phases using online-based Google Forms questionnaires, structured interviews, and a content analysis schemer. The online questionnaire was used to collect data from the 385 Windhoek residents who were selected using the simple random sampling method (see Appendix D). The structured interview guide was used to collect in-depth data from the three (3) Party coordinators (See Appendix C), meanwhile, data from the three (3) social media platforms of the political parties was derived using a content analysis schemer (See Appendix E).

3.6.1 Online questionnaire

A self-administered online questionnaire (see Appendix D) was used to collect data information from 385 Windhoek residents. The link to the online questionnaire ([Google.Forms](#)) for the Windhoek residents was shared on four social media platforms namely Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram, and LinkedIn. An online questionnaire was selected as a data collection method because it is free from the interviewer's bias. The respondents will answer questions on their own and they have enough time to give well thought-out answers. A questionnaire also allows the interviewer to reach many respondents even those who are said to be difficult to reach (White et al, 2005, p. 425). Online (web-based) surveys provide significant benefits over traditional survey techniques in terms of cost, speed, appearance, flexibility, usefulness, and usability (Lumsden & Morgan, 2017). There are numerous advantages associated with conducting questionnaires over social media, firstly, they are shorter, and respondents tend to enjoy responding to them. There is no need for data entry unlike with paper-based questionnaires. In addition, less mistakes are expected, and the respondents' anonymity can be guaranteed (Nayak & Narayan, 2019).

3.6.2 Structured Interviews

Paradis et al. (2016) stated that interviews are used to gather information from individuals on a one-on-one basis, through a series of predetermined questions in either a structured or unstructured format. The study used structured interviews to collect data from the three Party coordinators from the top three political parties namely, SWAPO, IPC and PDM. Questions were prepared in advance, all respondents were asked the same questions in the same order and in the same manner to make it easier to compare answers (See Appendix E). Structured interviews were found to be applicable to the study as they generated in-depth data that is rich and provides contextual description of the participants' experiences and perceptions (Jöhnk, Weißert, & Wyrski, 2021). This method is advantageous for a study because when a responder does not understand a question, the researcher could assist in clarifying it, minimizing the return of many unanswered questions, and increasing the response rate (DeJonckheere & Vaughn, 2019). The responses of the participants were transcribed using Zoom® to allow for data analysis (Adhabi & Anozie, 2017).

3.6.3 Content analysis schemer

Content analysis is defined as a data analysis technique that makes inferences on how individuals perceive the phenomena in question by identifying specific characteristics in the texts. The technique focuses on retrieving the contextual meaning behind a phenomenon using existing text (Renz, Carrington & Badger, 2018). The process of content analysis requires breaking down the data into concepts that describe the phenomena in detail, which is done by creating categories that are guided by the research coding scheme questionnaire (Lindgren et al., 2020). A paper by Groenland and Dana (2020) highlighted the benefits of using a content analysis schemer and clearly indicated that it is easily applicable to any written document; it is easy to use and understand, it can be easily replicated, it is inexpensive, and it can be used to interpret trends in groups or individuals.

In order for the study to confirm the authenticity of data derived from the Windhoek residents and the party coordinators in terms of the existence of social media platforms, the type of content shared and the type of reactions received from the public after sharing political content, a content analysis schemer was used to do in-depth content analysis on the three social media platforms (Facebook, Instagram, Twitter) that belongs to the top three political parties (SWAPO, IPC and PDM).

3.7 Research procedure

The data collection process began after the researcher obtained the Ethical Clearance Certificate (see Appendix A) and permission to conduct the study from the University of Namibia (UNAM). Using a convergent parallel design, the online questionnaire was designed in Google Forms and a link was produced. The link was disseminated on the following social media platforms namely, Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, LinkedIn, and WhatsApp. A report was drawn up every week, and respondents who were not based in Windhoek were removed. The online data collection ran for three months in which 385 responses were gathered for the study. However, after the online questionnaires were filtered to include only Windhoek residents, it contained 411 responses, the researcher then selected the first 385 respondents, and the remaining 26 responses were discarded.

In the second phase, the data collection process was done through online structured interviews with the three Party Coordinators. Before the structured interviews could begin, the researcher called the Party Coordinators, provided a description of the study, and set an appointment based on the agreed date and time. Through email, the researcher first explained the purpose of the study, attached the ethical clearance and the permission letter received from the University. The researcher also attached a copy of the structured interview questions that were designed for the interview. The researcher further explained the rights of the participants in accordance with the research ethics. This included the objection to any question they felt was personal and the withdrawal from the interviews anytime with no consequences imposed on them. The guarantee of their confidentiality and anonymity throughout the study was also discussed. At the end of the interviews, the participants were thanked for their participation and the interviews were stopped.

In the third phase, data was collected using a content analysis scheme which was used to do content analysis on the top three most used social media platforms in Namibia namely, Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram (Tyson, 2015). The study concurrently monitored and analysed the social media content and communication behaviour of the three political parties starting from January 2019 to December 2019. Using a content analysis scheme, the study was able to obtain all data outlined in the coding scheme and present consistent content analysis figures. The study further used this data to compare to data received from the Windhoek residents and the Party coordinators.

3.8 Reliability and validity

Validity refers to the extent to which the data collection instrument performs its function (Sürücü & Maslakçi, 2020). Whereas reliability describes the degree to which a particular measurement technique consistently yields the same results over several trials (Scott et al., 2019, p. 1121). A pilot test was conducted to further improve validity and reliability. Five copies of pilot questionnaires for Windhoek residents were given to five co-workers, meanwhile, two interview questionnaires for Party Coordinators were pretested and practised on two co-workers as well. Minor changes were suggested and made before the actual data collection began. The questions in the questionnaire were developed based on the literature review, to assess the study's objectives and ensure the study findings fulfil the requirements for validity (Adedoyin, 2020).

3.9 Data Analysis

Data analysis is a systematic procedure that employs logical and statistical techniques to describe, present, condense, evaluate, and compare data (Responsible Conduct in Data Management, 2016). The method of analysing data depends on the type of data. Hence quantitative and qualitative data analysis methods were used as follows:

3.9.1 Quantitative Data Analysis Methods

Quantitative data analysis is a systematic process of collecting and evaluating data that is measurable and verifiable. There are two types of data analysis namely, descriptive statistics and inferential statistics. Descriptive statistics are used to describe and/or present data in a manner that is easily accessible. Descriptive statistics converts observations into numerical figures. Thus, it provides for the generalizability of the results through a sample of the population within a specific geographical area (Ali, 2020). Meanwhile, inferential statistics helps to analyse data and draw inferences about the population from a sample of data.

This study used quantitative descriptive analysis to analyse data derived from the 385 Windhoek respondents, data was organized into restricted groups and the restricted groups were measured for distribution. Descriptive analysis included measuring the total mean and the range. The results were translated into graphs to easily display the relationship between the measured variables. (Ali, 2020).

3.9.2 Qualitative Data Analysis

Qualitative analysis focuses on comprehending the meaning, traits, and experiences of social phenomena. It entails gathering non-numerical data text, audio, and visuals in order to decipher and examine underlying themes, patterns, and insights (Archer, 2018). A paper by Archer (2018) described multiple approaches to qualitative data analysis which included interviews and content analysis. In this study, codes and themes were used to analyse data derived from the three (3) Party Coordinators through interviews. There are three (3) types of coding namely, open coding, axial coding and selective coding (Babbie and Mouton, 2001:500). This study made use of open coding. Transcribing was done manually, where each respondent was given a new name in order to protect their identity, meanwhile codes

and themes were created in accordance with each question. The results were translated into short summaries and graphs to easily display and describe the relationship between the measured variables (Ali, 2020). Qualitative technique is unique as it focuses on retrieving the contextual meaning behind the study subject (Renz, Carrington & Badger, 2018). When transcribing, the researcher specifically looked for keywords that would answer the research questions (Lindgren et al., 2020).

Furthermore, a content analysis coding scheme was used to analyse data derived from the three social media platforms. In a paper by Mills, Durepos and Wiebe (2010), open coding is the process of questioning, reflecting, and placing into categories the actions, perspectives, and statements of the participants in the study. Open coding is regarded as the first level of analysis, in which the data was organized by expressing it in other forms of units, with classifying expressions, in the form of short sequences of words (Williams & Moser, 2018). A paper by Groenland and Dana (2020) highlighted the benefits of using content analysis as that which is easily applicable to any written document; is easy to use and understand; can be easily replicated; is inexpensive, and can be used to interpret trends in groups or individuals.

3.10 Research Ethics

An Ethical Clearance Certificate was obtained from the UNAM Decentralised Ethics Committee (See Appendix “A”). A research permission letter was issued by the post-graduate research support services (See Appendix “B”). The evaluation of ethical dilemmas is a crucial aspect of research, and researchers must safeguard and protect respondents while maintaining the study's authenticity, legitimacy, and integrity (Creswell, 2006).

The researcher ensured that the research was ethically sound as per the ethical values, respecting fundamental research principles of ethics and scientific integrity as outlined in the UNAM Research Ethics Policy (University of Namibia, 2018). The first fundamental principle of research ethics states that participants should not be harmed, and that participation should be informed and voluntary (Denscombe, 2017). Denscombe (2017), added the four key principles of ethics which are, protection of respondents' interests, voluntary participation based on informed consent, upholding scientific integrity, and

avoiding deception, and finally, research compliance with local laws. Neuman (2011, p. 149) further clarified that “it is not enough to obtain permission; people need to know what they are being asked to participate in, only then can they make an informed decision”. As a result, respondents should always be given sufficient information to empower them to evaluate and determine whether to engage in a survey or not (Denscombe, 2017).

Participants were informed about their rights, the purpose of the study and that participation would be voluntary, with the option to withdraw at any time they chose. The researcher maintained respondents' anonymity with Windhoek locals and Party Coordinators and did not infringe on the respondents' private information that could lead to their identification. The data collected was kept in a safe place that was only available to the researcher, and it will only be destroyed after five years. For those who refused to participate, their rights were respected.

3.11 Summary

This chapter provided an extensive overview of the study's methods used to assess the use of social media by political candidates and Windhoek residents in Namibia. This study employed a mixed-method approach to gather data through an online Google Forms questionnaire, structured interviews, and content analysis. The study population was made up of Windhoek residents, registered political parties with a social media presence and three social media platforms namely Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter. Using purposive sampling and convenience sampling, the study had a sample size of three (3) political parties and 385 respondents. The study employed a convergent parallel design informed by a mixed methods approach. A pilot study was done to test the validity and reliability of the research instruments. The data from the pilot studies were included in the main study. In the next chapter, the research findings will be presented.

CHAPTER 4

PRESENTATION OF RESEARCH FINDINGS

4.1 Introduction

The chapter presents the results and findings of the study obtained from the online questionnaire, structured interviews, and content analyses. The research findings were presented on the following research questions:

- Which of the selected social media platforms were used by the top three political parties to communicate information about their Presidential candidates to Windhoek residents during the 2019 Presidential elections?
- What type of Political content was shared on the selected social media platforms by Political parties about their Presidential candidates during the 2019 Presidential elections?
- To what extent did the selected social media platforms enhance public engagement between political parties and Presidential candidates during the 2019 Presidential elections?
- Did the selected social media platforms have any influence on Windhoek residents' decision-making on political parties during the 2019 Presidential elections?

Data was presented using statistical visualisations, including graphs and charts. All data is presented in percentages (%) in order to make it easier for the reader. A summary concluded the chapter.

4.2 Background and characteristics of respondents

Table 3 presents the demographic information of the 385 Windhoek respondents and the top 3 Political parties from the 2019 presidential election results. Presenting demographic data is crucial in this study as it establishes the validity and relevance of the study findings. It also provides a clear picture of who participated in the Study by detailing their age, gender, education, and occupation, including the specific segments of the population that were studied. Stoman and Stoman (2014) also supported the idea of presenting

demographic information, as they believe it helps readers link the demographic characteristics of the respondents to the study findings.

Table 3: Background and Characteristics of Respondents

| Demographic Information | Windhoek Respondents (N=385) | Party Coordinators (N=3) |
|--------------------------------|-------------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| AGE GROUPS | | |
| 18-25 years | 11 % | 0 |
| 26-35 years | 69 % | 66.7 % |
| 36-45 years | 17 % | 33.3 % |
| 46-55 years | 0 | 0 |
| 56 years and above | 0 | 0 |
| GENDER | | |
| Female | 55 % | 33.3 % |
| Male | 44 % | 66.7 % |
| Other | 1 % | 0 |
| LEVEL OF EDUCATION | | |
| Primary education | 0 | N/A |
| Secondary education | 16 % | N/A |
| Tertiary education | 84% | N/A |
| EMPLOYMENT STATUS | | |
| Employed | 71 % | N/A |
| Unemployed | 20 % | N/A |

| | | |
|-----------------------------------|------|-----|
| Self-employed | 2 % | N/A |
| Student | 7 % | N/A |
| POLITICAL PARTY PREFERENCE | | |
| IPC | 45 % | N/A |
| SWAPO | 17 % | N/A |
| PDM | 33% | N/A |
| OTHER Political parties | 33 % | N/A |

As presented in Table 3, the demographic profile of the 385 respondents was dominated by the 26-35 age group, which constituted a significant majority at 69%. This was followed by the 36-45 age group, representing 17% of the sample. The youngest cohort, aged 18-25, made up 11% of the respondents, while individuals over 56 years did not take part in the study. The demographic profile of the 385 respondents showed a gender distribution largely consistent with established statistics for Windhoek, with 55% of the sample being female, 44% male, and the remaining 1% belonging to other genders. In terms of education, the participants were highly educated, as 84% had attained a tertiary level, while 16% had completed secondary education. None of the respondents had primary or no formal education. In regard to employment, the data indicated that 71% of the respondents were employed, 20% were unemployed, and the remaining 9% consisted of students (7%) and the self-employed (2%). In addition to that, 45% of the respondents identified the Independent Patriots for Change (IPC) as their party of choice in the 2019 Presidential elections. Support for the SWAPO Party and the Popular Democratic Movement (PDM) stood at 17% and 5%, respectively. The remaining 33% of respondents indicated support for other political parties not explicitly listed, which is neither IPC, SWAPO, nor PDM.

According to Klass (2012), social science research is built on evidence, including comparisons between demographic categories such as age, education, and occupation. On the grounds of population representation of the study, 71% of the respondents were in their youth category. This aligns with NSA (2011), which discovered that Namibia has a more

young population between the ages of 18 to 35 years (Namibia Statistics Agency, 2011). In terms of gender composition, the study revealed that the majority of respondents were females compared to males, and there was also a 1% recorded under others which could be members of the transgender community. The majority of the respondents had attained either tertiary or secondary education and 16% had secondary education. In addition, the majority of the respondents were employed. The findings of the study can be further explained by the Social Media Engagement Theory (SMET), which stated that the ages, gender, and expertise of the study participants influenced their frequency of social media use. Findings of this study concur with Matali (2017) who previously discovered that, in Namibia, the majority of social media users were young people aged between 18 to 35 years. These findings prove that the age group of 18 to 35 years age must be the key focus of political parties when creating political content. A paper by Vesnic-Alujevic (2013) emphasized the importance of having political conversations on social media to encourage the inclusion of the younger generation in political matters.

The study also had to determine the use of social media platforms by the Presidential candidates during the 2019 Presidential election campaign and the way it was used. The study discovered that various social media platforms were used as campaign strategies and the most used social media platforms during the campaigns were (in order of popularity), Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter. An analysis of the social media accounts of the respective parties indicated that PDM created their Facebook account in 2018 and Instagram in 2020 respectively. Similarly, the SWAPO party created their Facebook account in 2019 and their Instagram in 2021 which was after the 2019 presidential elections however, the Twitter accounts of both PDM and SWAPO were only created after the 2019 Presidential election campaigns. As for the IPC party, their Twitter account was created in 2016 which was before the party's existence and way before the 2019 presidential elections. The IPC party was officially created in 2020 well after the 2019 Presidential elections campaigns, making their Presidential candidate run as an independent candidate during the 2019 Presidential elections.

The study further uncovered that Facebook was the most effective social media platform for use during the 2019 electoral campaigns meanwhile, Telegram and YouTube were the least used and deemed ineffective as they were not user-friendly. Similar results were found by the New Era (2019) and Matali (2017) who learned that Facebook was the most popular

social media network in Namibia, followed by Twitter and Instagram. However, they additionally found that WhatsApp was also commonly used in election campaigns, which was contrary to the findings of this study. Mate (2020) who conducted a similar study in Namibia discovered that WhatsApp was the most used social media platform to distribute political content. According to the data analysis, both the top three political parties (SWAPO, IPC, and PDM) had Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter accounts however, they did not make use of them efficiently to garner votes. Facebook was mostly used by the PDM party, while Instagram and YouTube were used by the IPC party. The SWAPO party made the least use of social media during the elections. A similar study by Brito and Adeodato (2022) conducted in Latin America found that there is a correlation between social media interactions and votes. Moreover, Brito and Adeodato (2022) further discovered that Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter were the most effective social media platforms to advance political agendas. A study by Iwata (2015) also attributed that the use of social media in the political sphere is very sufficient in data communication infrastructure and coverage. The findings of this illustrated the need for political parties to make use of social media platforms including Facebook and Twitter during political campaigns.

4.3 Most used social media platforms

Under this subsection, the study sought to discover the existence and most used pre-selected social media platforms of the three political parties. In addition to that, the data presented indicates the level of efficiency of the use of Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter as mediums during Namibia's 2019 Presidential election campaigns.

4.3.1 Existence of social media accounts

According to Figure 4, the majority (83%) of the respondents indicated that their party's candidate had social media accounts during the 2019 Presidential election campaigns. Meanwhile, 17% indicated that their party's candidates did not have social media accounts and therefore, they did not make use of social media during the 2019 Presidential election campaigns.

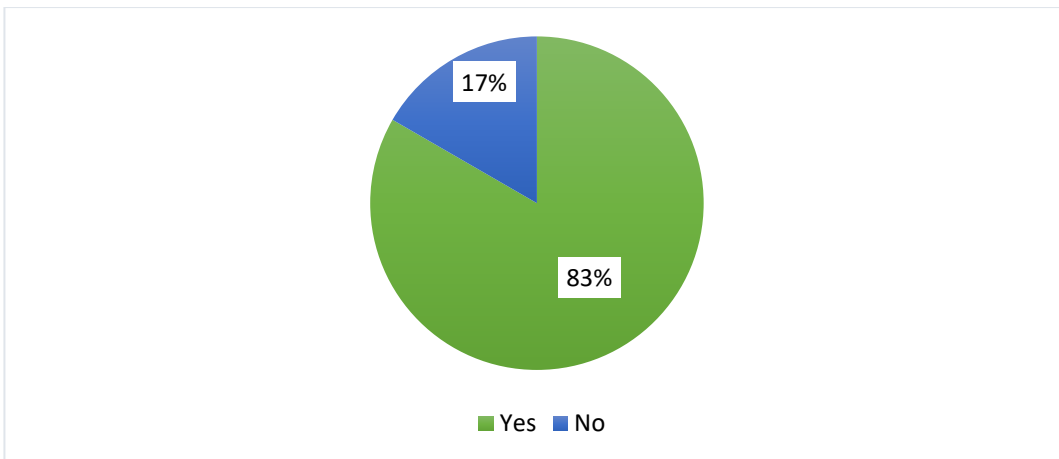


Figure 4: Respondents’ knowledge of social media accounts of Political parties

Correspondingly, all three (3) of the Party Coordinators agreed that their party candidates had social media accounts during the 2019 Presidential campaigns. The Party Coordinators further expanded on the management of their respective parties’ social media accounts and the study found that these social media accounts were managed by the party spokesperson or the party’s Press Secretary. The study further discovered that some of the parties’ social media accounts were at times used to spread fake news about other political candidates, which was done in efforts to derail the political campaigns and images of other political candidates.

The following are recommendations from the three-party coordinators:

“Yes, our candidate had social media accounts and it was not only one, there were quite a lot, Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp and many others but, these social media accounts were not run by the candidate himself, no, they were mostly run by the Press Secretary or the party’s spokesperson but, the candidate also had access to these platforms himself.”

[Party Coordinator 1]

“Of course, he did have social media accounts, we had quite a few, Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and others. We also need to understand that there are numerous social media accounts and pages that are not owned by us as a party but, by the general public. These pages bear the name of the political party; however, the party has no control over the content shared on these platforms because we often do not know who created them. Also, some of these accounts are established with the goal of defaming other candidates and

their reputations (propaganda) but, some are created with the intention of supporting that particular political party”. [Party Coordinator 2]

“Yes, we did have a few social media accounts in place. I know we had Facebook and Instagram but, I’m not so sure about the rest because they were mostly run by the party’s campaign manager and some party coordinators. Unfortunately, I was not one of them, but I know, there was more than one person who ran a page”. [Party Coordinator 3].

Table 1 indicates the dates on which the social media platforms (Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter) were created for the three (3) political parties, respectively. As indicated in Table 1, the Facebook account for IPC party was only created in 2020 which was after the 2019 Presidential elections meanwhile their Twitter account was created in 2013 which was before the existence of IPC and its Independent Candidate. The Instagram account for PDM party was created in 2020 meanwhile the Twitter account was established in 2022 which was after the Presidential elections.

Table 4: Establishment dates of social media accounts

| <i>Political parties</i> | | | |
|-------------------------------|--------------|---------------|--------------|
| SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS | SWAPO | PDM | IPC |
| Facebook | October 2019 | July 2018 | October 2020 |
| Instagram | March 2021 | November 2020 | October 2019 |
| Twitter (X) | June 2020 | February 2022 | October 2013 |

The Namibian Presidential election took place in November 2019 after which SWAPO and PDM established their Instagram and Twitter (X) accounts. Only IPC had established accounts on the two pre-selected social media platforms namely Twitter (X) and Instagram. SWAPO and PDM’s Facebook accounts were established prior to the presidential elections on November 27, 2019, except for IPC which was established after elections. SWAPO party’s 2019 content sharing only started in October 2019 however, all the content shared since had an error reading "content is not available" or "this post is empty" as seen in Figure 5. This made it impossible for the researcher to identify exactly

what kind of information was shared under these specific errors. This error means that the item was either removed by the administrator of the page or deleted by the original author who shared it.

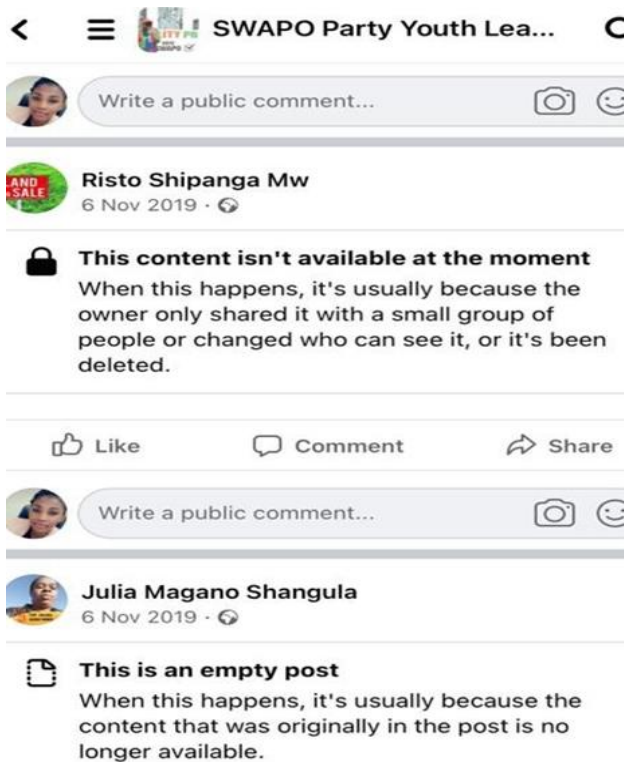


Figure 5: SWAPO party’s Facebook page error (From SWAPO Party Youth League (SPYL) Branch, Facebook page (2012))

4.3.2 Commonly used social media platforms

Figure 6 visually depicts the most commonly used social media platforms by political parties during the 2019 Presidential election campaigns. The most commonly used social media platform during the 2019 Presidential election campaigns was Facebook with 78%, followed by Twitter and Instagram which were indicated by the 13% and 7%, respectively. Youtube was indicated as being used by only 1% of the respondents, while 2% of the respondents indicated other. Telegram was not used at all during the 2019 Presidential election campaigns.

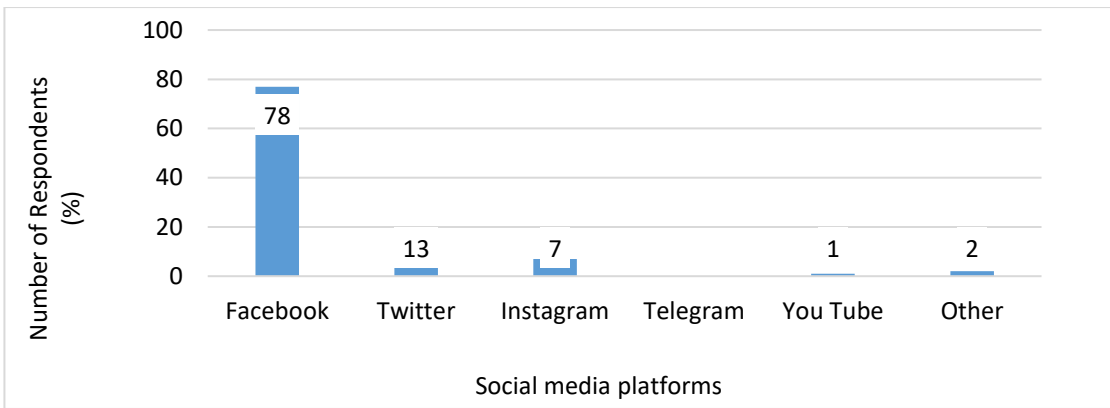


Figure 6: Most used pre-selected social media platforms during the 2019 Presidential Election campaigns.

Data obtained from the respondents correspondingly revealed the same, with Facebook being the top-used social media platform, followed by Twitter and Instagram. Facebook emerged as the most popular social media platform.

According to Participant 1,

“I will definitely go with Facebook and Twitter because we all know already that 90% of the Namibian population is young and, young people like Facebook and Twitter”.

Participant 2 highlighted the interactions between users as a contributing factor, stating:

“I think Facebook was most used because nowadays, everyone is on Facebook especially young people, but even elder people are now there, on Facebook, because they want to chat and interact with the young ones for their own personal interests”. [Participant 2].

“I think Facebook and Instagram were the most used platforms compared to any other platform, maybe we can also add Twitter because some people prefer it these days”.

[Participant 3].

4.3.3 Most Effective Social Media Platforms

The efficiency of a social media platform is related to its technical and social dimensions. Figure 7 below indicates the most effective social media platforms used during the 2019 Presidential election campaigns. The majority (83%) of the respondents indicated that Facebook was the most effective social media platform. The respondents indicated that Twitter (11%) and Instagram (6%) were the second and third most used during the 2019 Presidential election campaigns, respectively. Telegram, YouTube and other social media platforms were not indicated by the respondents.

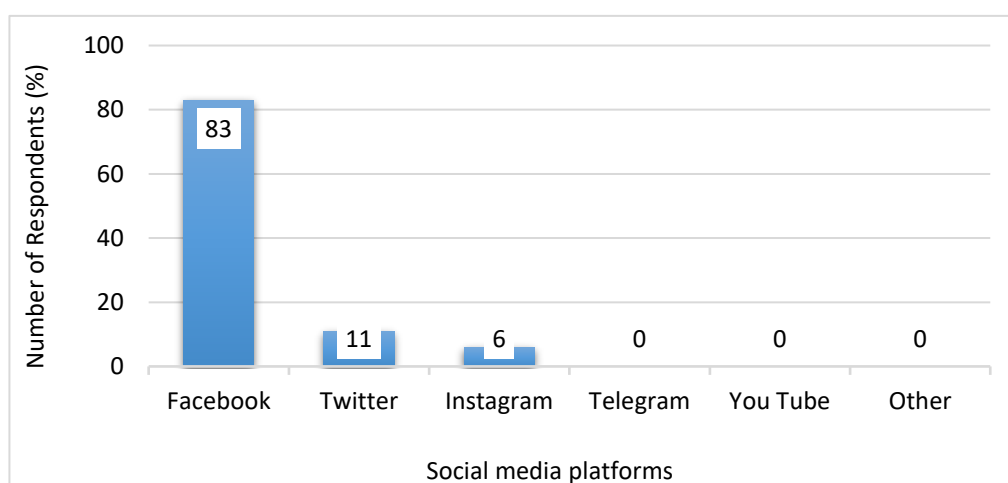


Figure 7: Most effective social media platform

The findings were supported by the participants, who stated that Facebook is the most common and effective social media platform for use in politics. The following were the responses of the participants;

“I still feel like Facebook and Twitter were the most effective, no doubt about it”.
[Participant 1].

“I’m still standing with Facebook and Twitter because you can never go wrong with Facebook and Twitter or even Instagram”. [Participant 2].

“It’s still Facebook and Instagram because, if something is frequently used than definitely it is because it is effective in a way”. Participant 3].

4.3.4 Less effective social media platforms

Figure 8 indicates the least effective social media platforms during the 2019 Presidential election campaigns. The study found that Telegram and Youtube were the least effective social media platforms, respectively.

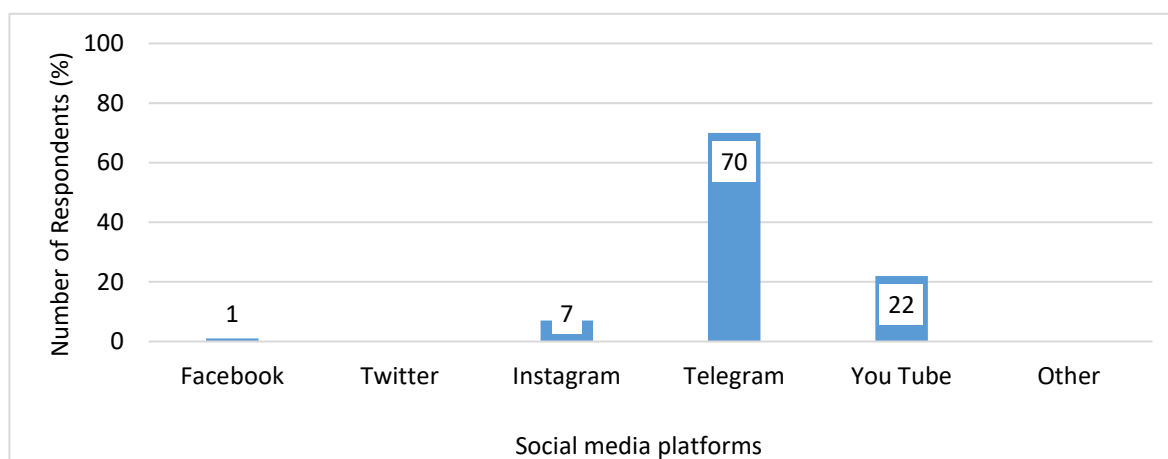


Figure 8: Least effective social media platforms.

The findings were corroborated by the participants, who attributed the findings to the social media platforms being more applicable to the younger persons. The participants further stated that the ineffectiveness of Telegram and YouTube is due to a lack of awareness and being non-user friendly. Responses from the Party Coordinators were as follows:

“I would say Telegram, I think it’s one of the new Apps that I have recently come across and there is nothing really happening on them plus a lot of people are aware about it but nobody even talks about it”. [Participant 1].

“Instagram and YouTube because, these platforms especially Instagram is mostly used by young people and it’s all about posting cute pictures and videos, its not a political affiliated platform, I don’t even like them myself because it’s too many young people showing off their dressing styles and new hairstyles”. [Participant 2].

“Telegram and YouTube because, these are the only Apps that even I myself struggle with”. [Participant 3].

4.4. Sharing of political content

The study sought to determine the type of political content disseminated by the political parties and the residents of Windhoek on the selected social media platforms. The findings also included the frequency and the type of reaction from the public.

4.4.1 Type of political content shared on social media

Table 2 shows the frequency of political content shared by the three political parties. The study also revealed that IPC shared more political information than SWAPO and PDM, with the majority being tied to campaign announcements and gatherings. Likewise, PDM shared little political content tied to a campaign announcement meanwhile, SWAPO shared none.

Table 5: Type of political content shared by the political parties on all social media platforms

| Type of messaging | Not at all | Little | Occasionally | More Often/ All the time |
|---|------------|--------|--------------|-----------------------------|
| IPC | | | | |
| Political candidate manifesto announcements | X | | | |
| Government related news | X | | | |
| General news (Non-political related) | X | | | |
| Campaign announcement | | | | X |
| Comparison between parties | X | | | |
| PDM | | | | |
| Political candidate manifesto announcements | X | | | |

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|--|--|
| Government related news | X | | | |
| General news (Non-political related) | X | | | |
| Campaign announcement | | X | | |
| Comparison between parties | X | | | |
| SWAPO | | | | |
| Political candidate manifesto announcements | X | | | |
| Government related news | X | | | |
| General news (Non-political related) | X | | | |
| Campaign announcement | X | | | |
| Comparison between parties | X | | | |

4.4.2 Frequency of political content disseminated.

Figure 9 indicates the frequency of political content shared on the social media accounts of the three respective parties. Data indicates that the majority (50%) of respondents perceived their party's Presidential Candidate to be very active on social media as they frequently posted political content on their social media accounts. About 30% of the respondents indicated that their party's Presidential candidate only shared political-related content frequently. Apart from the 16% of respondents who indicated that their party's Presidential candidate only shared political-related content occasionally, the minority 4% indicated that their party's Presidential candidate rarely shared political-related content during the 2019 Presidential election campaigns.

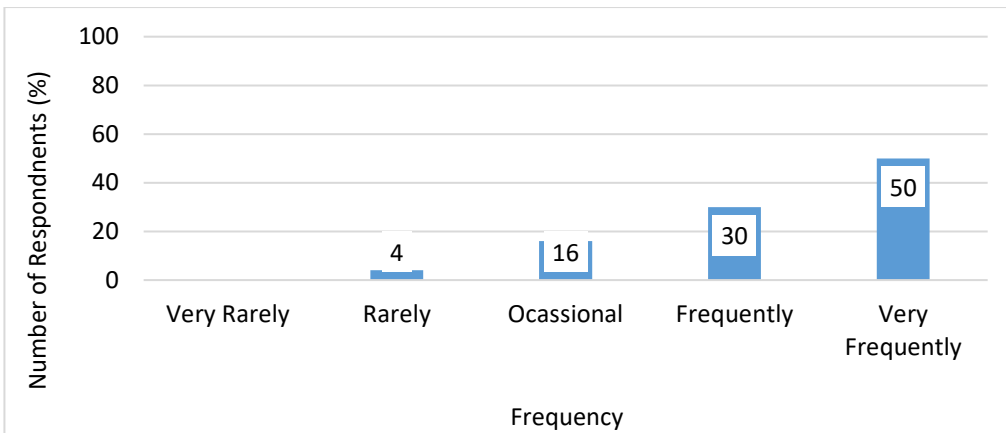


Figure 9: Frequency of political content shared on the pre-selected social media platforms by Presidential candidates in 2019.

The findings from the participants support the findings derived from the respondents. The participants stated that their political parties frequently posted political content on their social media pages, even daily at times. The type of political content posted is related to campaign announcements and other general news affecting the Namibian society. The following were the responses of the participants:

“As for my party, we shared information very frequently, sometimes even daily”. [Participant 1].

“I would say political content was shared very frequently, because we used to update every day, there is not a day when we did not really say something about the elections or about what was happening in the country at that time. So much happened and everyone was talking about it”. [Participant 2].

“Very frequently, because the party itself was a very busy party, always up and down doing things and whatever we were doing, we must put it on our social media pages. I can say that a lot was happening so every time we always had something to update, be it campaigns, visits, corruption news and many more”. [Participant 3].

The findings derived from the social media accounts of the political parties disapproved the findings of the respondents and participants though. Table 3 indicates that IPC only posted 26 political contents on its Instagram page, the PDM party only made one political

post on its Facebook page meanwhile the SWAPO party did not share any political content on its social media accounts.

Table 6: Number of political content posted on the pre-selected social media by the political parties

| Facebook | |
|------------------|-----------|
| Party | Frequency |
| IPC | 0 |
| PDM | 1 |
| SWAPO | 0 |
| Instagram | |
| IPC | 26 |
| PDM | 0 |
| SWAPO | 0 |
| Twitter | |
| IPC | 0 |
| PDM | 0 |
| SWAPO | 0 |

4.5 Social media and public engagement

This section presents the findings related to how social media was used by political parties for public engagement during the 2019 Presidential election campaigns.

4.5.1 Public reaction from the posted political content

The study's third objective was to determine the extent of public engagement between Presidential candidates and social media users. According to Figure 4.6, the majority (53%) of respondents indicated that their party's candidate very frequently encountered public reaction after sharing political-related content during the 2019 Presidential Elections.

About 20% indicated that their party's candidate frequently got public reactions after sharing political content. Around 12% of the respondents indicated that their party's candidate only received public reaction occasionally. 11% of the respondents believed that their party candidate rarely received public reaction, and 4% very rarely received any public reaction.

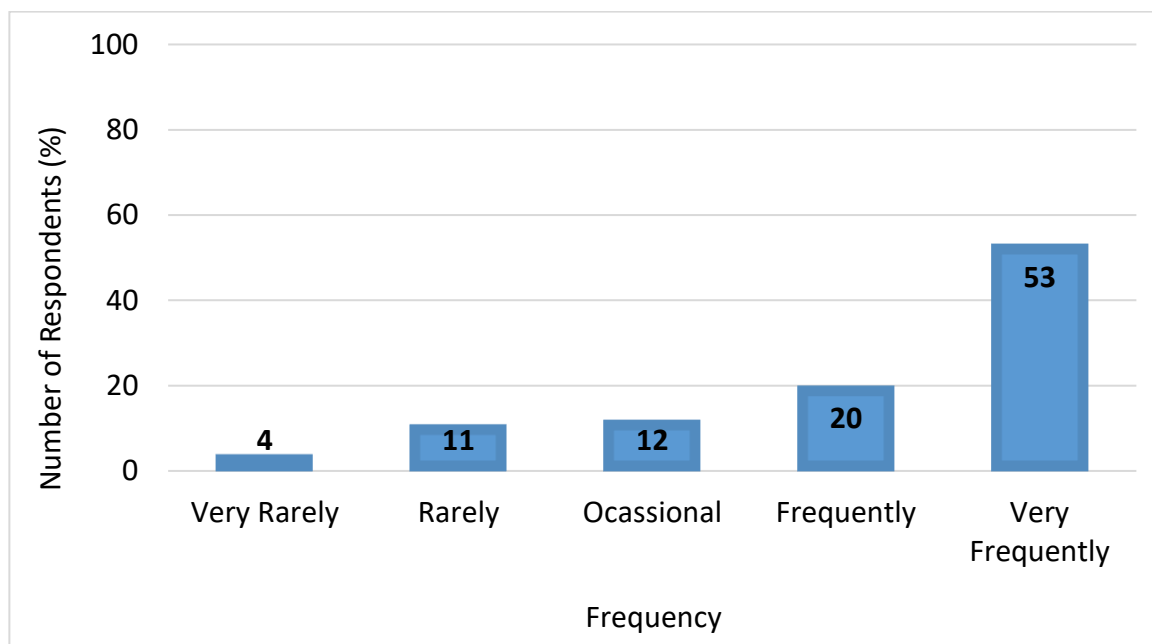


Figure 10: Public reaction on political content shared by political candidates in 2019.

Findings from the respondents were similar to those of the participants, who stated that political content cannot be shared with no public reaction. Furthermore, the findings from the participants indicated that political parties frequently received public reaction in the form of likes, when political content was shared on social media, although some reactions were negative. The responses of the participants were as follows:

“It is very impossible to post something on social media and not get any reaction such as Likes, Comments and sometimes people even share what you have posted especially if it’s political relate, you will always get a reaction.” [Participant 1].

“I think Likes where more than comments. The previous campaigns where very interesting because the moment you just post something, you will get a reaction, it can be

a Like, comment or even a share. Sometimes we even posted more than 5 times in a day especially when there are campaigns taking place” [Participant 2].

“As I said before, our party was very busy and we always had something to post about, so, whenever we update this information, people will always comment and like our things. Yes, some comments where bad but we ignore the enemy and focus on the goal because we had a goal, to educate the Namibian nation on what was happening behind closed doors so they could make a better choice at the ballot.” [Participant 3].

The findings of the respondents and participants corroborate with the analysis of the social media pages of the respective political parties. On Facebook, PDM received the most likes and views, with 54 and 200, respectively. The political content shared also received four (4) comments with 200 views and was shared three (3) times. On the other hand, the Instagram account for the IPC party received 549 likes, 17 comments and 1581 views from the posted political content. SWAPO did not receive any public reaction as it did not post any political content on its social media pages. Equally important, the number of followers that each party has on their respective social media platforms varied depending on the social media platform. On Facebook, PDM was the most active and engaging, hence the 33,000 followers. Similarly, IPC was engaging on Instagram thus the party had 5383 followers respectively.

Table 7: Public reaction of the political content shared

| Facebook | | | | | |
|-----------|-----------|-------|----------|--------|-------|
| Party | Followers | Likes | Comments | Shares | Views |
| IPC | 19 000 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| PDM | 33 000 | 54 | 4 | 3 | 200 |
| SWAPO | 6522 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Instagram | | | | | |
| IPC | 5383 | 549 | 17 | 0 | 1581 |
| PDM | 446 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| SWAPO | 793 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |

| Twitter | | | | | |
|---------|------|---|---|---|---|
| IPC | 250 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| PDM | 84 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| SWAPO | 1199 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |

4.5.2 Public and Social Media Engagement

The study sought to determine the extent to which the public engaged with the presidential candidates of their respective political parties, during the 2019 Presidential election campaigns.

The study further sought to discover which social media platform is ideal for public engagement. Figure 11 indicates that out of the 385 respondents, 38% specified that their party's candidate engaged very frequently meanwhile, and 33% indicated that their political party’s candidate engaged occasionally with the public. Similarly, 19% of the respondents also indicated that their presidential candidate frequently engaged with the residents. Although this finding is unsupported by Tables 2 and 3, the two minority groups (5/5%) disagreed with the rest of the respondents by indicating that, their party candidates rarely engaged with the public.

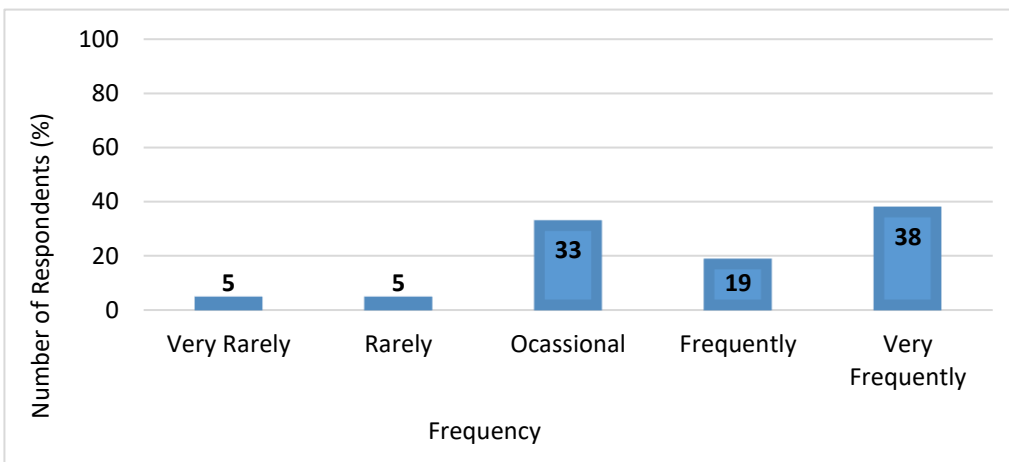


Figure 10: Frequency of public engagement on social media

The findings from the Windhoek respondents mirrored those derived from the participants, who indicated that their respective political parties frequently engaged with the public on social media. However, the presidential candidates of IPC and PDM were

less engaging with the public on social media. This was attributed to time constraints and the preference to physically engage with the public. The participants added:

“I would say very frequently, you find him responding to some comments on social media, sometimes”. [Participant 1]

“I would say occasionally because, he is a very busy man and does not have time to sit and chit chat on social media”. [Participant 2]

“I don’t want to lie I have never seen him participate on social media discussions. He is a man of “If you want me, you know where to get me” which is true because he is very accessible and lives in a location that anyone can have access to. I have only seen him engage with the public during campaigns or political events and it’s mostly after he is done addressing whatever he was addressing”. [Participant 3]

4.5.3 Recommended social media platforms

Figure 12 depicts the preferred social media platforms for political engagement. The study found that 56% and 31% of the respondents would prefer to engage on Facebook and Twitter, respectively. Only 1% of the respondents would prefer to engage on Whatsapp and Youtube, respectively.

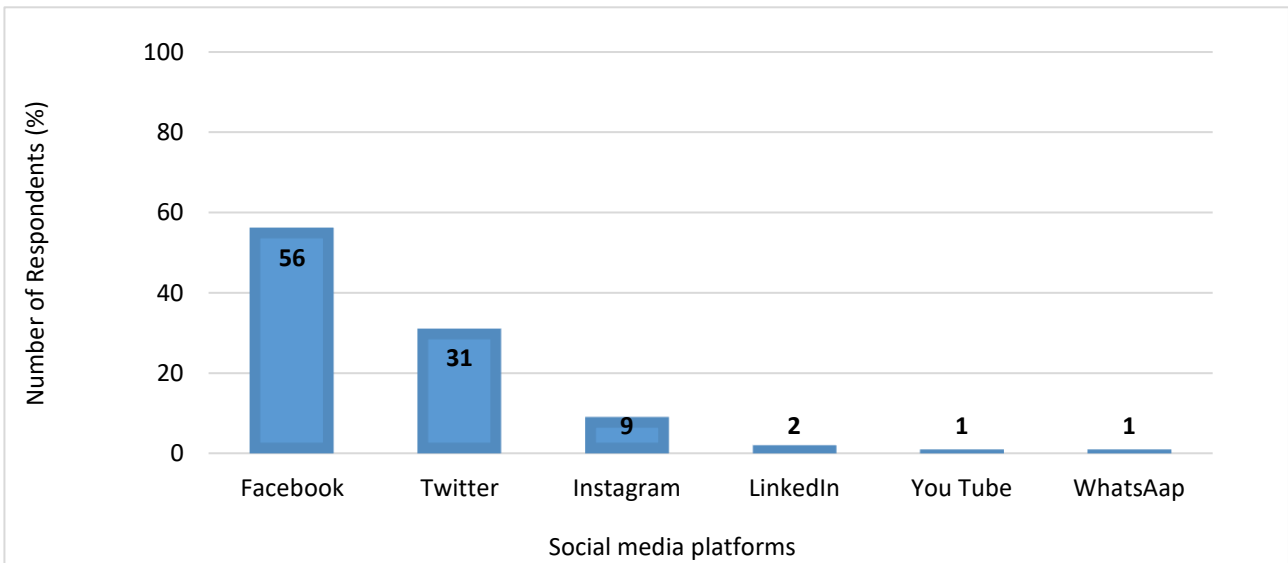


Figure 12: Recommended social media platforms for political content.

The findings derived from the participants, indicated that Facebook and Twitter were the preferred social media platforms for public engagement. The responses of the participants were as follows:

“Of course, I would recommend it, especially Facebook because that is where majority of people are in Namibia, especially the youth. I would first go for Facebook, then Instagram and Twitter because, we need to start involving the youth in Political discussions, so we need to go to where they are.” [Participant 1]

“Yes, I would recommend social media because social media is the new television and newspapers nowadays. For me, Facebook is number one, followed by Twitter and then Instagram. We must not forget WhatsApp because it’s also one of the fastest and reliable platforms nowadays.” [Participant 2]

“Yes, I would recommend social media, especially Facebook is still topping the list for me, followed by Twitter and then Instagram. If you look at it, Facebook is where you find majority of the youth and people are also free to express themselves and how they really feel about certain situations without fear.” [Participant 3].

4.6 The influence of social media

The data presented in this section addresses queries to the extent of which social media influences voters' political choices and decision-making mechanisms. It also investigated how the political parties made use of the social media platforms to influence voters' decisions.

4.6.1 Drivers of political choices during electoral campaigns

The final objective of this study was to determine whether social media had the potential to influence and motivate the political choices of the Windhoek residents. Figure 4.9 indicates that 76% of the respondents believed that social media had the potential to influence the political choices of voters.

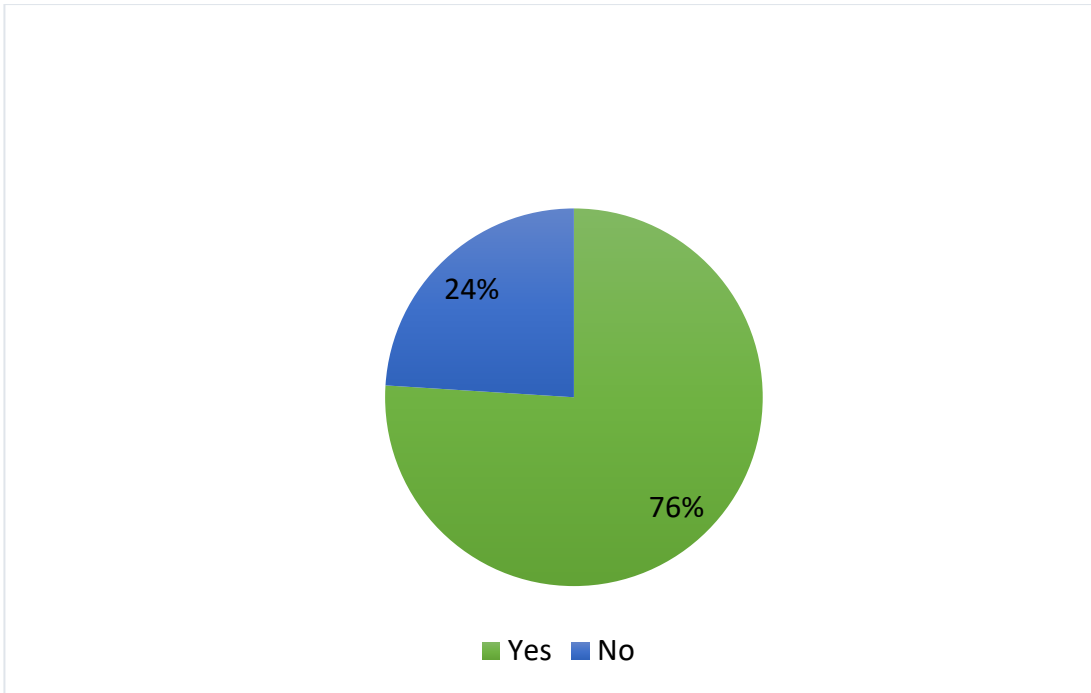


Figure 13: Potential influence of social media on political choice

The findings from the Windhoek participants do not correspond with those derived from the participants, who indicated that social media has no influence on their political decisions. However, the participants did recognize and acknowledge the power that social media had in influencing the decisions of voters. The participants stated the following:

“No, it did not have any influence on me, I am not a small child to be influenced by social media, I know where I stand, what I want and, what I believe in. only confused people can be influenced by social media”. [Participant 1]

“No, it did not for me because, this is where I was born and is where I will die, no influence can ever win me over”. [Participant 2]

“Of course, it did, if it was not for social media, I could have still voted for the same corrupt party that I have been voting for all these years, social media has opened my eyes” [Participant 3].

The study discovered that, despite the influence of social media, there is high political understanding that further influenced the political decisions of the electorates. Family

background also drove the political choices of the electorates as illustrated in Figure 14 below.

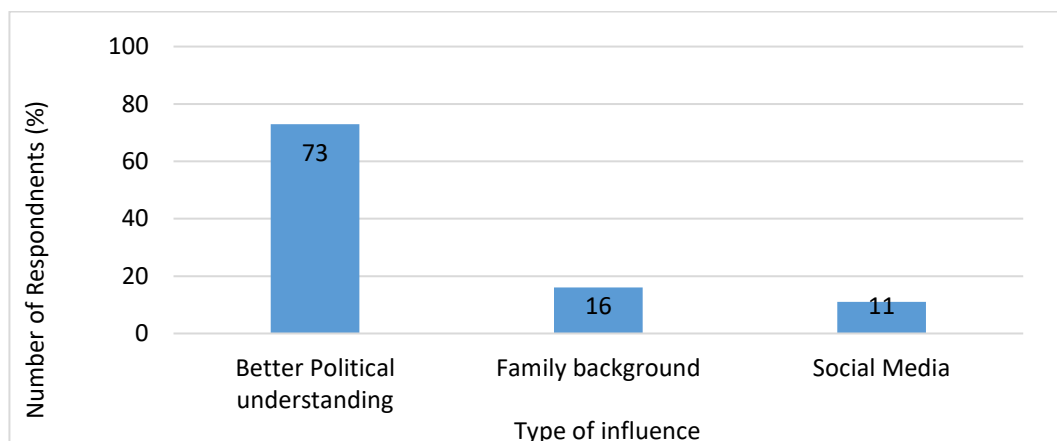


Figure 14: Drivers of political choices

Respondents further added that political choices of the participants were driven by better political understanding and loyalty to a specific party. The study also found that the major corruption scandal referred to as #Fishrot also influenced the political choices of the electorate during the 2019 Presidential electoral campaign. The respondents had the following to say:

“My choice comes from better political understanding and loyalty; I am a loyal SWAPO member and that will never change. So much have happened during the 2019 election campaigns through social media and I believe a lot of people were influenced and this led to the reduction of the ruling party’s 2/3rd majority”. [Participant 1]

“Better political understanding because, for the first time in Namibia, social media was used to the maximum in 2019 for Presidential campaigns, we also got to know a lot of things through social media and with that being said, all I can say is that, young people can be easily manipulated and influenced through social media because they are too addicted to social media and there is so much going on, on social media but, loyal and elderly people like us can never be influenced by social media just like that”. [Participant 2]

“Social media might have played a role to a certain extend but, all I know is that, through social media, I understood politics better. Social media is very powerful you know, there were so many things happening on social media that we did not know about, for example the #Fishrot guys that are now in prison, when they got exposed through social media and this is what opened the eyes of many Namibians who decided to vote for change.”

[Participant 3]

4.6.2 Delivery of political objectives and freedom of expression

Table 6 illustrates the respondents' perceptions of how well the political parties performed in terms of achieving their political goals, freedom of expression and clear message delivery during the 2019 Presidential election campaigns. In terms of the political parties providing information on their political objectives, a total of 66% of the respondents were of the opinion that the political parties did not provide enough information on their political objectives however, the majority (84%) of the respondents were free to express their opinions and views on social media. With regards to the use of social media tactics to attract voters, 77% of the respondents were of the opinion that the political parties did employ good tactics. However, 77% of the respondents felt the political content posted on social media was neither clear nor understandable.

Table 8: Respondents’ opinions on Political objectives, freedom of expression and clear message delivery from political parties

| Objectives | Agree % | Disagree % | Total % |
|--|--------------------|-----------------------|--------------------|
| Parties provided enough information about their objectives. | 34% | 66% | |
| I was free to express my political views on social media. | 84% | 16% | |
| Parties used good social media tactics to capture the attention of the general public. | 77% | 23% | |
| The message provided on social media by the parties was clear and understandable. | 23% | 77% | |

4.7 Summary

This chapter presented the findings from the study including the demographic information of the respondents and participants. The findings of the study were presented as per the objectives, starting with the types of social media platforms, the type of political content shared, and the frequency thereof was presented in this chapter. The findings related to the extent of political influence from social media and the drivers of political choices were also presented in this chapter. In the next chapter, the researcher presents a discussion and interpretation of the results and findings.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION AND INTERPRETATION OF RESEARCH FINDINGS

5.1 Introduction

The fundamental objective of this chapter is to discuss and interpret findings presented in Chapter Four. The interpretation and discussion of findings were based on the conceptual and empirical data collected as per Chapter Three. The researcher drew correlations between the study findings and the theoretical framework of the SMET theory and other related literature. The findings were also presented as per the research questions, which were as follows:

- Which of the selected social media platforms were used by the top three political parties to communicate information about their Presidential candidates to Windhoek residents during the 2019 Presidential elections?
- What type of Political content was shared on the selected social media platforms by Political parties about their Presidential candidates during the 2019 Presidential elections?
- To what extent did the selected social media platforms enhance public engagement between political parties and Presidential candidates during the 2019 Presidential elections?
- Did the selected social media platforms have any influence on Windhoek residents' decision-making on political parties during the 2019 Presidential elections?

5.2 Most used social media platforms

The study had to determine the use of social media platforms by the Presidential candidates during the 2019 Presidential election campaign and the way it was used. The study discovered that various social media platforms were used as campaign strategies and the most used social media platforms during the campaigns were (in order of popularity), Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter. An analysis of the social media accounts of the

respective parties indicated that PDM created their Facebook account in 2018 and Instagram in 2020 respectively. Similarly, the SWAPO party created their Facebook account in 2019 and their Instagram in 2021 which was after the 2019 presidential elections however, the Twitter accounts of both PDM and SWAPO were only created after the 2019 Presidential election campaigns. As for the IPC party, their Twitter account was created in 2016 which was before the party's existence and way before the 2019 presidential elections. The IPC party was officially created in 2020 well after the 2019 Presidential elections campaigns, making their Presidential candidate run as an independent candidate during the 2019 Presidential elections.

The study further uncovered that Facebook was the most effective social media platform for use during the 2019 electoral campaigns meanwhile, Telegram and YouTube were the least used and deemed ineffective as they were not user-friendly. Similar results were found by the New Era (2019) and Matali (2017) who learned that Facebook was the most popular social media network in Namibia, followed by Twitter and Instagram. They additionally found that WhatsApp was also commonly used in election campaigns, which was contrary to the findings of this study. Mate (2020) who conducted a similar study in Namibia discovered that WhatsApp was the most used social media platform to distribute political content. According to the data analysis, both the top three political parties (SWAPO, IPC, and PDM) have Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter accounts however, they did not make use of them efficiently to garner votes. Facebook was mostly used by the PDM party, while Instagram and YouTube were used by the IPC party. The SWAPO party made the least use of social media during the elections. A similar study by Brito and Adeodato (2022) conducted in Latin America found that there is a correlation between social media interactions and votes. Moreover, Brito and Adeodato (2022) further discovered that Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter were the most effective social media platforms to advance political agendas. A study by Iwata (2015) also attributed that the use of social media in the political sphere is very sufficient in data communication infrastructure and coverage. The findings of this study illustrate the need for political parties to make use of social media platforms including Facebook and Twitter during political campaigns.

5.3 Sharing of political content

This subsection explores the political content that was shared on the pre-selected social media platforms during the 2019 Presidential election campaigns. The study uncovered that respondents and participants believed that their respective political parties frequently made use of their social media accounts to post political content. According to the study participants, the political content that was posted was related to news about the elections and general ground-breaking news in Namibia. Participants further stated that the respective political parties posted all their political activities on their social media platforms. The findings derived from the study participants and respondents were dispelled by the web analytics, which revealed that the only political content that political parties produced was in the form of campaign announcements, which is to say that there was very little other political information provided. The study further discovered that Windhoek residents re-shared political content on social media platforms during the Namibian presidential election of November 2019. the shared political content

Likewise, the frequency of political content shared on social media was also analysed in this study. According to the respondents, political parties posted political content very frequently however, these findings were dispelled by the web analytics which found that on Facebook, PDM was the only political party that shared one (1) political content meanwhile, on Instagram only the IPC was active and shared 26 political posts. According to web analytics, Twitter was not used by any of the three political parties to share political content during the 2019 Presidential election campaigns meanwhile, SWAPO did not post any political content on either social media platform. The study further revealed that political parties under-utilised social media to push their political agenda, which could be attributed to a lack of understanding of the power of social media in the political sphere. The study further discovered that only IPC and PDM achieved minor successes in using their social media to share political content that assisted in their political campaigns, despite the fact that the IPC's Presidential candidate ran as an Independent Candidate during the 2019 Presidential elections. According to the study findings, the IPC and PDM were the only political parties that maintained momentum and performance in line with the SMET theory under user engagement.

According to the SMET theory, the effectiveness of social media lies in its ability to allow users to exchange, share, and receive content (Bacarrella et al., 2018). Henceforth, to be successful on social media, political parties needed to understand how to build user motivations and interest by sharing interesting content, forming relationships, and creating groups. They also need to share content that is appropriate and relevant to the current situation (Bacarrella et al., 2018). According to a study by Ennsner-Jedenastick et al. (2022), the political content posted by political parties during elections aims to reinforce their political agenda by promoting their manifestos. Alternatively, political parties may also post content aimed at voters' education hence why this study dispelled the findings of Ennsner-Jedenastick et al. (2022).

5.4 Social media and public engagement

According to findings from the study, political parties posted a narrow range of political content. Political parties ought to have used social media to advance their political agendas and promote their manifestos. Findings showed that respondents reacted very frequently to the political content shared by political parties during the 2019 Presidential Elections. The reaction was mostly in the form of likes, shares, and views, and the number of followers were also regarded as part of the public's reaction. Findings, however, showed that there was hardly any response to questions posted to the presidential candidates from public members. Although some electorates commented on the political content shared by the political parties, the study discovered that most of them hardly responded to public comments because some comments were negative, which can be a contributing factor to low public engagement. There is however a positive correlation between the number of political content posted and the public reaction. The PDM was the most active political party on Facebook with 33 000 followers. Similarly, IPC was highly active on Instagram hence the high number of followers. However, the number of followers did not correspond to the public reaction to the posted political content. According to the study findings, Facebook was used mostly by PDM, who shared one post that provided details on the upcoming campaign held in the Ohangwena region. The shared content had public reactions in the form of 54 likes, 4 comments and 3 shares, and these findings can be attributed to the user-friendliness of Facebook.

Regarding Instagram, which was mostly used by IPC, the study discovered that the party shared 26 posts that received 549 likes, 17 comments and was viewed 1581 times. Instagram was used to share content related to the Presidential candidate addressing and engaging with the public at election campaign gatherings and election campaign details. The popularity of Instagram to IPC is a clear indication of the implementation of campaign strategies that aimed to attract young people. This notion was confirmed by the study's findings, which indicated that IPC was popular with females who were aged between 18 to 35 years, employed, and had attained tertiary education, which is similar to the target audience of Instagram.

The analysis of Twitter accounts belonging to the three political parties indicated that, despite having these social media accounts, they were only used after the 2019 Presidential elections. In regards to public engagement, the respondents thought that the Presidential candidates frequently engaged with the public on social media. However, the findings from the participants did not correlate. Instead, the study noted that there was minimal public engagement on social media. The lack of public engagement was attributed to a preference for physical public engagement and busy schedules.

According to the SMET theory, social media facilitated the development and revealing of relationships that led to various forms of social engagement (Bacarella et al., 2018). Findings from the study indicated that there was no relationship nor connection between the Presidential candidates and the public during the 2019 Presidential elections campaigns. According to the SMET theory, people who used social media might establish or join groups of friends or communities that are centred around a common activity or interest (Bacarella et al., 2018). Followers have joined political groups for different reasons such as entertainment, socializing status seeking, spying and information statuses. However, the study found that the political parties did not take full advantage of social media to engage with the public and develop political content that speaks directly to their voters.

In regards to public engagement, a paper by Hendriks and Kay (2019) stated that low public engagement can be attributed to a lack of time; low satisfaction, low interest, and a lack of knowledge of the political landscape. The study found that there were social media

platforms that were more suitable for public engagement than others. Facebook and Twitter were found to be well suited for public engagement, as they are popularly used amongst the youth in Namibia. In addition, social media platforms provided a platform for individuals to freely express themselves with no concern for repercussions. A study by Ennsner-Jedenastick et al. (2020) found that Facebook remains the best social media platform for public engagement as it reaches a broader and larger audience in comparison to Twitter. Though the study found that public engagement was not held in high esteem by the political parties, Ennsner-Jedenastick et al. (2020) highlighted the importance of public engagement on social media, as providing an opportunity for political parties to receive feedback from voters. Such feedback can be used to improve campaign strategies and to be informed of issues that are normally neglected by political parties during election campaigns. According to Anderson (2020), public engagement depends on political interest, the age of the electorate, political social media exposure, political knowledge, and political efficacy.

The political parties did not realize the importance of using social media as an inexpensive and easy tool for public engagement. Contrary to hosting rallies that are expensive and do not provide for a one-on-one engagement with the public.

5.5 The Influence of social media on political choices

The study findings revealed that 76% of the respondents believed social media does have the potential to influence the political choices of the electorate. This was in part due to the role that the media played in uncovering political scandals. The study analysed how the electorate in Windhoek perceived the manner in which the political parties delivered their political objectives on social media. The study further discovered that the majority of the respondents believed that the political parties did not provide the necessary information in regard to their political objectives. However, more than 80% felt they had the freedom to express their opinions and views on social media in regard to the political parties and their objectives. On the use of social media tactics to attract voters, the majority of the respondents believed that the political parties employed good tactics. However, the electorate of Windhoek did not understand the political content that was posted by the

political parties, nor did the political parties present their political content clearly and concisely.

An application of the SMET theory to the study findings explained that the influence that social media will have on the political choices of voters, depends on the type of social media platform. Politicians ought to use social media platforms that are user-friendly and that users can easily access information that speaks directly to their needs and expertise (Di Gangi & Wasko, 2016). In addition, the theory holds true that the political content must spark the interest and motivation of the electorate (Baccarella et al., 2019).

Similar results were found in an experimental study by Li and Sakamoto (2014) who found that social media platforms, including Facebook and Twitter, have the advantage of collective opinion that might influence people's behaviour. Despite the recognition of the influencing power of social media, the study found that the political choices of the electorate were heavily influenced by political understanding and family background. Only 11% of the respondents stated their political choices were influenced by social media. However, the study found a link between political understanding and social media. The study findings were confirmed in an exploratory study by Rathi, Ghosh, Kumari, Sarkar, and Das (2021) conducted in India. The study found that out of 444 respondents, 62.6% stated that social media does not influence their political choices. The study further found that there was a distrust between the electorate and social media. This was attributed to the belief that social media propagates hatred and fear, and circulates fake political news (Rathi et al., 2021). The influential power of social media in spreading information quickly was described in a qualitative study by Barakat and Fakihi (2021) as the driver of the Arab Spring. In the same light, a paper by Mayfield III (2008) highlighted the attributes of social media as being behind the information movement, that spread the news in real time as it happened and with a certain degree of transparency. The unravelling of the #Fishrot scandal, a few weeks before the 2019 national elections was cited as having provided better political understanding. The #Fishrot scandal can be cited as a practical example of the power of social media in promoting democratic principles and the promotion of liberal democracy as described in a study conducted in the United States by Hesmondhalgh and Toynbee (2008). A review study by Abid et al. (2023) corroborated the study findings, in which they found that politicians still make use of a traditional approach that ensures that

promote themselves to the electorate. Instead of adopting an approach that is interactive and takes into consideration the demographic differences of the electorate.

The study did find that social media has the power to influence the political choices of the electorate. However, political parties have a duty to quell the proliferation of fake news that fuel distrust in using social media. Hence, political parties must ensure that they post political content that is verified as authentic.

5.6 Summary

In line with the research questions, this chapter presented geometric data and commentary on how Presidential candidates used social media throughout the 2019 Presidential election campaigns. According to findings from the study, the use of social media in politics is very crucial because it promotes transparency and enhances communication. Social media engagement is also vital as it promotes trust and relationships however, the study found that there was social disengagement between the 2019 Presidential candidates and the public. The study further discovered that political parties have underutilised their social media platforms. Moreover, politicians were inconsistent when it came to content sharing. Findings from the study clearly indicated that social media was the biggest influencer and the biggest decision maker in young people's lives. It is highly recommended that politicians start implementing social media as their communication medium during their political activities. The next chapter (Chapter Six) presents the summary, conclusion, and study recommendations.

CHAPTER 6

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE STUDY

6.1 Introduction

The study aimed to investigate the extent to which social media was used by the top three presidential candidates to broadcast and promote political activities during the last Presidential election campaigns. The data was collected using online questionnaires and structured face-to-face interviews. The collected data was subjected to content analysis.

6.2 Conclusion of the study from the study findings

The study findings were presented per research question.

6.2.1 Most Used Social Media Platforms

The first research question was meant to determine the types of social media platforms that political parties used most during the 2019 Presidential election campaigns. The study also discovered that Facebook was the most used social media platform during the 2019 electoral campaigns, as it was deemed user-friendly and could reach a wider audience because of its popularity amongst the young and older generations. The study further uncovered that social media could be the "new future of political mobilisation" and that young people are a significant part of the online audience. However, the study did not fully explore the concept of digital citizenship and its link to political accountability.

6.2.2 Sharing of political content

The second research question posed by the study was to explore the type of political content that was shared by political parties on social media and the frequency thereof. The findings from the study discovered that Facebook was predominantly used by PDM, while IPC posted more political content on Instagram. SWAPO did not post any political content on

either social media platforms. However, the study did not critically analyse the shared content.

6.2.3 Social media and public engagement

The third research question was to determine the extent of public engagement between political candidates and the public on social media platforms. In this regard, the study found that there was a reaction from the public to the political content posted. The study further discovered that the presidential candidates hardly responded to public comments, mainly because some comments were negative, while some preferred to engage with the public during public events, including rallies.

6.2.4 The Influence of social media on political choices

The last question of the study was to determine if social media had any influence on the political choices and decision making of the electorate in Windhoek. The study found that most of the respondents believed that social media could influence the political choices of the electorate. However, the study participants were more influenced by political understanding rather than social media itself.

On the use of social media tactics to attract voters, the majority of the respondents believed that the political parties employed good tactics. However, the electorate of Windhoek did not understand the political content that was posted by the political parties. Nor did the political parties present their political content clearly and concisely. Consequently, social media may be the new future of political mobilisation, campaign recruitment, psychological involvement, and access to resources that influences political participation (Vitak et al., 2011). According to Bond et al. (2012), experiments show that the use of social media, especially Twitter and Facebook, can have a knock-on effect in reaching users, their friends, and friends of friends.

6.3 Recommendations from Study Findings

Social media is becoming an essential part of politicians' lives especially during political campaigns. It allows candidates to interact with voters on a more personal basis by utilizing social media platforms, including reaching out to a wider audience and exchange messages

in real time. Social media is literally the “New Town Hall”. For political parties to maximise their use of social media in attracting new voters and reaching a wider audience, the following measures can be implemented as derived from the study:

6.3.1 Most used Social Media Platforms

Political parties must make more use of social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and WhatsApp to disseminate information related to their campaigns and communicate their political objectives. Party Coordinators should develop comprehensive social media strategies and put plans in place that will outline how social media will be used and the type of content that will be disseminated, in an effort to attract more voters. Such a strategy will prevent political parties from disseminating irrelevant and fake political news to the dissatisfaction of voters. Future studies could analyse social media posts and comments to see if citizens are using social media platforms to call out corruption, question government policies, or challenge political leaders, and if so, how.

6.3.2 Sharing of Political Content

Political parties must share frequent political content related to their campaigns to attract more voters. Political parties may also post content related to how to use the ballot papers or Electoral Voting Machines (EVM) during elections as their contribution towards voters’ education. Political parties should also have people specifically for monitoring social media sentiment by tracking social media conversations around the candidate. That way, they will know what to share and be ready to handle and answer unexpected queries from the public. It is also recommended that candidates should share content often and keep their message consistent across all media platforms. The study recommends that followers should be encouraged or incentivized to share and re-share political content on parties’ social media platforms. Based on such benefits, people will be motivated to share, re-share, un-share, tweak-share, and multi-share accessed information on social media. Future studies could investigate whether young Namibians utilise social media to hold politicians accountable, demand transparency, or mobilise for specific causes beyond simply voting.

6.3.3 Social Media and Public Engagement

Election candidates will attract more voters if they engage more on social media with the electorates, therefore they must ensure to promptly respond to comments, queries, and messages from the electorate. Candidates should also be able to respond promptly to important social media events and provide valid information with evidence, if possible, to gain public trust. Political candidates should also frequently engage both online and physically with the public and show them that they understand their concerns, and care about addressing them. Future studies could delve deeper into the strategic rationale behind this lack of online engagement and its long-term effects on political trust.

6.3.4 Influence of Social Media

Social media has grown into an essential weapon for political campaigns in recent years, generating concerns about how this may affect the political attitudes, choices, or behaviours of the Namibian people. Falsehoods, hate speech, propaganda, and disinformation spread easily on social media therefore, the disadvantage of social media in Namibian politics cannot be overlooked. Moreover, political disinformation, fake news, hate speech, and manipulation are all risks that can have a significant impact on citizens' political choices and behaviours. However, Political parties and their candidates need to understand that not everything is worth responding to. Some gossip and rumours are meant to be ignored.

Equally important, measuring the success of social media activities requires considering both their performance and impact. To assess the effectiveness of their social media strategy and make the necessary adjustments, political parties and candidates should monitor Facebook metrics like reach, engagement, and conversion rates. The study mentioned the #Fishrot scandal as an example of social media's influence. New studies could broaden this to examine whether social media is effective at conveying positive or policy-oriented information, and not just negative news. This would provide a more nuanced understanding of social media's role in political education. Further studies could examine how a group of young Namibians consume media over a period of months and determine how their exposure to social media affects their understanding of current affairs, political campaigns, and political issues.

6.3.5 Recommendations for Future Studies

The interactions of money, politics, and social media in Namibia, particularly during political campaigns, mirrors wider tendencies found across the African continent. While social media opens up new avenues for political participation, it also raises concerns about funding, transparency, and electoral integrity.

The study discovered that political content attrition is driven by a combination of factors, including lower baseline engagement for political posts compared to non-political content, and the active avoidance of political discourse by users. Studies have shown that individuals may "unfriend or unfollow" accounts specifically to avoid engaging with political topics, regardless of ideological alignment (Skoric et al., 2018). Therefore, political content attrition represents a significant challenge to sustained online political engagement, as it reflects a conscious retreat from political topics by a portion of the audience.

The study also found that the SMET theory was not supported by this study's findings. Results from the study instead uncovered disengagement between political candidates and public members.

As a result, future studies should consider the following;

- Investigating the mechanisms of content attrition: The study identified that users may actively avoid political engagement by ignoring them, unfollowing or unfriending these political accounts. Future studies could utilise a more granular, longitudinal approach to track the specific moments and content types that trigger these disengagement behaviours. This could involve an ethnographic study of a small, diverse group of social media users, combined with a diary method to log their reactions to political posts in real time.
- Exploring the role of algorithmic bias in disengagement: The study discovered a decrease in interaction with political postings, raising the possibility that platform algorithms may deprioritise political material. A follow-up study could experimentally test this hypothesis by comparing the reach and engagement of

identical political posts on different social media platforms. Researchers could also analyse how algorithms interpret the "unfriend" or "unfollow" signals and whether they contribute to a feedback loop that further diminishes the visibility of political content for all users.

- The impact of public disengagement: Since findings from the study did not support the SMET theory, future studies may focus on the specific reasons for this disengagement. A study could analyse the content of comments and direct messages to understand voter frustration with candidates' communication styles. This could be done through natural language processing (NLP) to identify key themes and sentiments, providing a quantitative measure of voter dissatisfaction.
- Comparative study of political communication in different African contexts: Since the study focused on Namibia, a valuable next step would be to conduct a similar analysis in other African countries with different political landscapes and social media penetration rates. Comparing the findings across countries could reveal whether political content attrition is a universal phenomenon or if it is influenced by specific national political cultures or media ecosystems.
- Developing New Models of Digital Political Engagement: Given the disproven SMET theory, there is a need for new theoretical frameworks. Future studies could focus on developing a new model that accounts for user avoidance and content attrition. This model could incorporate concepts from psychology (e.g., selective exposure, motivated reasoning) and media studies (e.g., platform affordances, algorithmic gatekeeping) to better explain the complex dynamics of modern digital political engagement.
- Investigate whether young Namibians utilise social media to hold politicians accountable, demand transparency, or mobilise for specific causes beyond simply voting.

- Analyse social media posts and comments to see if citizens are using social media platforms to call out corruption, question government policies, or challenge political leaders and their manifestos, and if so, how.

6.4 Summary

This study found that the 2019 Presidential election was the first to make use of social media to campaign for votes, and all the Presidential candidates had accounts on three of the major social media platforms, namely, Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter. However, only IPC made efficient use of their social media platforms by posting information related to campaigns. The study further found that political decisions of the electorate were driven by better political understanding, which can be attained by getting more information on the political party through social media. The study found that social media users reacted to the political content shared by liking and making comments. However, there was no evidence of political parties engaging with the public on social media. The study recommended developing a social media strategy that will guide the type of political content to be shared, on which social media platform and the extent to which public engagement may occur. Future studies may include an analysis on the impact of social media on the political choices of the electorate.

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APPENDIX A: ETHICAL CLEARANCE



ETHICAL CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE

Ethical Clearance Reference Number: SHS 0023 Date: 10 March 2022

This Ethical Clearance Certificate is issued by the University of Namibia Decentralized Ethics Committee (DEC) in accordance with the University of Namibia's Research Ethics Policy and Guidelines. Ethical approval is given in respect of undertakings contained in the Research Project outlined below. This Certificate is issued on the recommendations of the ethical evaluation done by the School of Humanities, Society & Development Decentralized Ethics Committee.

Title of Project: The Use of Social Media by Presidential Candidates during Namibia's 2019 Election Campaigns in Windhoek

Researcher: Agnes S. Ilukuyu

Student Number: 201307634

Supervisor(s): Prof. T. Kalusopa

Centre for Research Services

Take note of the following:

1. Any significant changes in the conditions or undertakings outlined in the approved Proposal must be communicated to the ethics committee. An application to make amendments may be necessary.
2. Any breaches of ethical undertakings or practices that have an impact on ethical conduct of the research must be reported to the ethics committee
3. The Principal Researcher must report issues of ethical compliance to the ethics committee (through the Chairperson) at the end of the Project or as may be requested by the ethics committee
4. The ethics committee retains the right to:
 - i) Withdraw or amend this Ethical Clearance if any unethical practices (as outlined in the Research Ethics Policy) have been detected or suspected.
 - ii) Request for an ethical compliance report at any point during the course of the research.

The ethics committee wishes you the best in your research.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "A. Nhemachena".

Dr. A. Nhemachena (Vice Chairperson, Decentralised Ethics Committee)

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Davis Mumbengegwi".

Prof. Davis Mumbengegwi (Head, Multidisciplinary Research)

APPENDIX B: PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH STUDY

CENTRE FOR RESEARCH SERVICES

Office of the Pro-Vice Chancellor: Research, Innovation & Development

University of Namibia, Private Bag 13301, Windhoek, Namibia
340 Mandume Ndemufayo Avenue, Pioneers Park, Office F223 - Fblock, Second Floor
☎ +264 61 206 4673; E-mail:kmbulur@unam.na; URL: http://www.unam.edu.na



RESEARCH PERMISSION LETTER

Date: 17/08/2023

Student Name: Agnes Iikuyu

Student Number: 201307634

Programme: Master of Arts in Media studies

Approved Research Title: The use of social media by presidential candidate during Namibia's 2019 election campaigns in Windhoek.

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN:

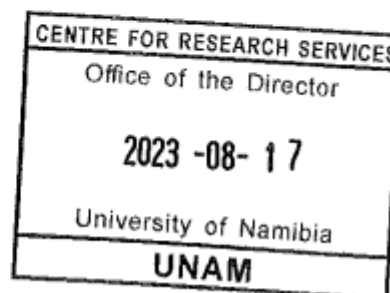
I hereby confirm that the above-mentioned student is registered at the University of Namibia for the programme indicated. The proposed study met all the requirements as stipulated in the University guidelines and has been approved by the relevant committees.

The proposal adheres to ethical principles as per attached Ethical Clearance Certificate. Permission is hereby granted to carry out the research as described in the approved proposal.

Best Regards

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'AEE', is written over a horizontal line.

Dr. AEE Shikongo
Head: Postgraduate Research Support Services
Tel: +264 61 206 3129
E-mail: aeshikongo@unam.na



APPENDIX C: ONLINE QUESTIONNAIRE



| | |
|----------------------|---|
| Questionnaire Number | 1 |
|----------------------|---|

WINDHOEK RESIDENT'S QUESTIONNAIRE

CONFIDENTIAL

INTRODUCTION

Dear Respondent,

I am Agnes S. Iikuyu, a final year Masters student at the University of Namibia currently studying for a Masters of Arts in Media Studies. I am on a mission to gather data that will allow me to complete my thesis titled: *The use of social media by presidential candidates during Namibia's 2019 election campaigns in Windhoek*. The aim of the study is to explore how social media was used as a communication platform by presidential candidates during the 2019 presidential campaigns. Kindly be assured that your information will be handled with strict confidentiality and your identity will be highly protected. Thank you very much for accepting to take part in this survey, your participation will be very crucial and essential to the entire public at large.

CONSENT

A1. I hereby consent that I have voluntarily taken part in this Study

RESULT OF QUESTIONNAIRE: 1 = Completed 2 = Partially completed

| PART A: BIOGRAPHIC INFORMATION | |
|---|---|
| QUESTIONS | CODING CATEGORIES <i>(Please tick appropriate box)</i> |
| 1 Which town do you stay? | <input type="checkbox"/> Windhoek <input type="checkbox"/> Other |
| 2 What is your age range? | <input type="checkbox"/> 18- <input type="checkbox"/> 26- <input type="checkbox"/> 36-45 <input type="checkbox"/> 46-55 <input type="checkbox"/> Above 56 |
| 3 What is your Gender? | <input type="checkbox"/> Female <input type="checkbox"/> Male <input type="checkbox"/> Other |
| 4 What is your Level of education? | <input type="checkbox"/> Primary <input type="checkbox"/> Secondary <input type="checkbox"/> Tertiary <input type="checkbox"/> None |
| 5 What is your occupation? | <input type="checkbox"/> Student <input type="checkbox"/> Employed <input type="checkbox"/> Self Employed <input type="checkbox"/> Unemployed <input type="checkbox"/> Other |
| 6 Which political party have you voted for during the 2019 Presidential elections? | <input type="checkbox"/> IPC <input type="checkbox"/> PDM <input type="checkbox"/> SWAPO <input type="checkbox"/> OTHER |
| PART B: SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS | |
| 1 Did your party's candidate have a social media page during the 2019 Presidential campaigns? | <input type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO |
| 2 Which social media platform was most used by Political Candidates during the 2019 Presidential campaigns? | <input type="checkbox"/> FACEBOOK <input type="checkbox"/> INSTAGRAM <input type="checkbox"/> TWITTER <input type="checkbox"/> TELEGRAM <input type="checkbox"/> YOUTUBE <input type="checkbox"/> OTHER |
| 3 Which social media platform was most effective during the 2019 Presidential campaigns? | <input type="checkbox"/> FACEBOOK <input type="checkbox"/> INSTAGRAM <input type="checkbox"/> TWITTER <input type="checkbox"/> TELEGRAM <input type="checkbox"/> YOUTUBE <input type="checkbox"/> OTHER |
| 4 Which social media platform was NOT effective during the 2019 Presidential campaign? | <input type="checkbox"/> FACEBOOK <input type="checkbox"/> INSTAGRAM <input type="checkbox"/> TWITTER <input type="checkbox"/> TELEGRAM <input type="checkbox"/> YOUTUBE <input type="checkbox"/> OTHER |
| PART C: SOCIAL MEDIA CONTENT DISSERMINATION | |

| | |
|--|---|
| 1 How frequently did your President Candidate share political content during the 2019 Presidential campaign? | <input type="checkbox"/> Very Rarely <input type="checkbox"/> Rarely <input type="checkbox"/> Occasional <input type="checkbox"/> Frequently <input type="checkbox"/> Very |
| 2 Which reaction did your Presidential Candidate mostly receive from the public [Likes, Comments and Share]? | <input type="checkbox"/> Like <input type="checkbox"/> Comment <input type="checkbox"/> Share <input type="checkbox"/> None |

PART E: SOCIAL MEDIA AND PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

| | | |
|-----------|--|--|
| D1 | During the 2019 Presidential campaigns, how often did your party’s candidate participate in online Political activities such as debates? | <input type="checkbox"/> Very Rarely <input type="checkbox"/> Rarely <input type="checkbox"/> Occasional <input type="checkbox"/> Frequently <input type="checkbox"/> Very frequently |
| D2 | Would you recommend social media to your Political party? | <input type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO |
| D3 | Which social media platform would you recommend to your Political party’s candidate? | Please specify |

PART E: SOCIAL MEDIA AND INFLUENCE

| | | |
|-----------|--|---|
| E1 | Did social media have any influence on your Political choice during the 2019 Presidential Elections? | <input type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO |
| E2 | What motivated your political choice/decision? | <input type="checkbox"/> Family background <input type="checkbox"/> Social <input type="checkbox"/> Better Political understanding |

| Mark with an X next to the correct answer of your choice (X) | | Yes | No |
|---|---|------------|-----------|
| E1 | Parties provided enough information about their objectives. | | |
| E2 | Parties treated people fairly and unbiased on social media. | | |
| E3 | I was free to express my political views on social media. | | |
| E4 | The message provided on social media by parties was clear and understandable. | | |

THANK YOU FOR YOUR TIME AND COOPERATION!!!

APPENDIX D: STRUCTURED INTERVIEW GUIDE



| | |
|-------------------------|---|
| Questionnaire Number | 1 |
|-------------------------|---|

STRUCTURED INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR PARTY COORDINATORS

CONFIDENTIAL

INTRODUCTION

Dear Respondent,

I am Agnes S. Iikuyu, a final year Masters student at the University of Namibia currently studying for a Masters of Arts in Media Studies. I am on a mission to gather data that will allow me to complete my thesis titled *The Use of social media by presidential candidates during Namibia's 2019 election campaigns in Windhoek*. The aim of the study is to explore how social media was used as a communication platform by presidential candidates during the 2019 presidential campaigns. Kindly be assured that your information will be handled with strict confidentiality and your identity will be highly protected. Thank you very much for accepting to take part in this survey, your participation will be very crucial and essential to the entire public at large.

CONSENT

A1. Do you have any questions before we begin with the interview?

A2. With your permission, would you kindly permit me to record this interview?

RESULT OF INTERVIEW: (1 = Completed 2 = Partially completed 3 = Refused Other)

| PART A: BIOGRAPHIC INFORMATION | | |
|--|--|---|
| | QUESTIONS | CODING CATEGORIES <i>(Please tick appropriate box)</i> |
| A1 | Which town do you stay? | <input type="checkbox"/> Windhoe <input type="checkbox"/> Other |
| A2 | What is your age range? | <input type="checkbox"/> 18- <input type="checkbox"/> 26- <input type="checkbox"/> 36-45 <input type="checkbox"/> 46-55 <input type="checkbox"/> Above |
| A3 | What is your Gender? | <input type="checkbox"/> Female <input type="checkbox"/> Male <input type="checkbox"/> Othe |
| PART B: SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS | | |
| B1 | Did your Presidential Candidate have a social media page during the 2019 Presidential Election campaigns? | <input type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO |
| B2 | Choose one social media platform that was mostly used by your party's candidate during the 2019 Presidential Election campaigns. | <input type="checkbox"/> FACEBOO <input type="checkbox"/> INSTAGRA <input type="checkbox"/> TWITTE <input type="checkbox"/> TELEGRA <input type="checkbox"/> YOUTUB <input type="checkbox"/> OTHER |
| B3 | Which social media platform was most effective during the 2019 Presidential Election campaigns? | <input type="checkbox"/> FACEBOO <input type="checkbox"/> INSTAGRA <input type="checkbox"/> TWITTE <input type="checkbox"/> TELEGRA <input type="checkbox"/> YOUTUB <input type="checkbox"/> OTHER |
| B4 | Which social media platform was less effective during the 2019 Presidential Election campaigns? | <input type="checkbox"/> FACEBOO <input type="checkbox"/> INSTAGRA <input type="checkbox"/> TWITTE <input type="checkbox"/> TELEGRA <input type="checkbox"/> YOUTUB <input type="checkbox"/> OTHER |
| PART C: SOCIAL MEDIA CONTENT DISSERMINATION | | |
| C1 | How often did your party's candidate share Politically related content on social media during the 2019 Presidential Election campaigns?? | |

| | |
|--|---|
| C2 | What type of reaction did your party's candidate mostly receive after sharing political content on social media? (Share, like, comment) |
| C3 | Who is responsible for managing your candidate's social media accounts? |
| PART D: SOCIAL MEDIA ENGAGEMENT | |
| D1 | How frequently did your candidate interact with the public on social media during the 2019 Presidential Election campaigns? |
| PART E: SOCIAL MEDIA INFLUENCE | |
| E1 | Did social media have any influence on your Political choice during the 2019 Presidential Elections? |
| E2 | What motivated your political choice/decision in 2019? (Better Political understanding, Family back ground, Social media) |
| E3 | Do you think social media had any influence on voters' Political choices/decisions during the 2019 Presidential Elections? Please motivate your answer. |
| E4 | Which social media platform would you recommend to your Political party and why? |

THANK YOU FOR YOUR TIME AND COOPERATION!!

APPENDIX E: INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Dear participant,

My name is Agnes S. Iikuyu, studying towards a Masters of Arts in Media Studies at the University of Namibia. My study is titled: **“The use of social media by political campaigns during Namibia’s 2019 Presidential election campaigns in Windhoek”**. Based on the descriptive analysis of how political parties and their political candidates in Windhoek used social media to conduct their 2019 presidential campaigns and agendas, you were purposefully selected based on your relevance to this study.

Purpose of the study

This study seeks to discover and analyse which social media platforms were used, what type of political content was shared between January-December 2019, if social media enhanced engagement between the political candidates and the public by any chance and, whether social media had any influence on the political choices of the Windhoek residents.

Your responses to the study will be treated anonymous and with high confidentiality therefore, if you agree to participate, no one will know whether you participated in this study. Equally important, you are free to withdraw at any time of your choice should you have second thought about taking part in this study. Moreover, if you have any question regarding the research, please feel free to contact me at iikuyuagnes22@gmail.com

or my supervisor Prof Kalusopa at tkalusopa@unam.na

Thank you for your time

Agnes S. Iikuyu

APPENDIX F: CONSENT FORM

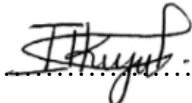
I have read and understand the information provided and had an opportunity to ask questions. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw from the study at any time without giving any reason and without cost.

Voice recording

I understand that my voice will be recorded, and I voluntarily give consent for my voice to be recorded during face to face interview, telephonic interview or through other platform such as Zoom or WhatsApp.

I understand that anonymity will be ensured in the write-up by disguising my identity.

Participants signature..... Date.....

Researchers signature.....  Date: August 2022