

**THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE SOUTH AFRICAN GOVERNMENT NEWS
AGENCY KNOWN AS SA NEWS AS A TOOL FOR GOVERNMENT
COMMUNICATION IN SOUTH AFRICA.**

by

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THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE SOUTH AFRICAN GOVERNMENT NEWS AGENCY (SA NEWS) AS A TOOL FOR GOVERNMENT COMMUNICATION.

Keywords:

Media-State Relations, Stakeholder Relations, Propaganda, Strategic, Communication, Public information, Agenda Settings, Framing, Priming, Public Sector, Public Interest, Communication Management.

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ABSTRACT

The South African government uses Government Communication and Information System (GCIS) as a platform in which to interact with the public. As Pasquier (2012) defines it, this is a process where government shares information with the public in order to promote public participation while maintaining social bonds. To get government messages across with ease and as wide as possible, the South African government, under the Government Communication and Information System established a South African Government News Agency known as SA NEWS in 1998. Department of Communication (2012) postulates that through this agency, government was able interact with its citizenry in a manner that was under government's total control.

According to GCIS (2005), after SA NEWS was established, it saw an increased utilization of its services by many community and mainstream media. However, this seems to have steadily decreased in recent times. According to Mona (2020), this emerged after media fraternity began to realise that the news agency was only peddling propaganda. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to establish the effectiveness of this agency as a tool for government communication. That is, is it still providing the services which it intended to provide from the beginning?

The theoretical framework of this study is effective government media relations. Therefore, part of the study focused on media-state relations. In this case, *City Press*, *Sunday Times* and SA NEWS became primary role players. In search of relevant data, a mixed method approach was utilized where participants from both newspapers in question and those from the government news agency were interviewed. A content analysis process was also undertaken, where 200 articles from both newspapers in question were collated and analyzed. Tones, themes and news values were also used to properly analyze the articles.

The study concludes thus, that there is indeed room for improvement for the agency to be effective in its operations. This is especially due to the introduction of social media, amongst many other reasons. Social media extends the avenue through which SA NEWS may directly access citizens without the mediation of the media fraternity. Added to this is the decision taken by the agency to remove stringers in provinces and

most importantly, the name change from Bua News to SA NEWS, which exposed the agency purely as a propaganda tool. In terms of media state relations, data indicates that there is still a lot of gaps between the two, with instances where journalists are threatened with sanctions, while media houses are denied advertising.

Keywords: Propaganda, strategic communication. Public information, agenda settings, private sector, public sector, public interest, national security, media-state relations, communication management.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Government departments in South Africa use the Government Communication and Information System (GCIS) as a platform to liaise with the public in order to keep them informed of government's actions. Pasquier (2018:442) defines government communication as an activity of government aimed at sharing information for the purpose of explaining and disseminating government decisions and actions while promoting and maintaining social bonds. GCIS, known as the South African Communication Services (SACS) under the apartheid regime, was revamped after 1994 by the new democratic government, with the objective to be people-centred, whereby society is informed regularly on all developments (Strydom 2001:2).

Banda (2009:226) observes that the strategy adopted by the new government was an important one, as citizens must be able to access both their leaders and useful information from their government. To get government messages across with ease and as widely as possible, GCIS established a government news agency known as *SA News* in 1998. The purpose of this news agency was to influence the content of media with regard to the coverage of government-related news. According to the Department of Communication (2012:6), the agency was established to help government to interact with its public in a manner that was under government's total control.

GCIS, through the National Communication System Framework (NCSF), ensures that the mandate of government is communicated to the South African public as widely as possible. According to GCIS (2020:5), it is important for government to ensure that there is a smooth relationship with media as this allows for an efficient flow of information to the public. Even though there is an understanding that media needs to operate freely in a democratic state such as South Africa, those handling communication in government should ensure that media is treated fairly and with the respect it deserves.

Media-state relations is not negotiable as it is the only platform in which members of the public can easily access news from government (Department of Tourism 2020:7). Therefore, the use of media buying or media statements arranged by government

communicators, is prioritised in this regard. News articles are also written and placed on the SA News website and can be freely accessed by media and the public.

1.1.1 GOVERNMENT PROPAGANDA OR PUBLIC INFORMATION

Government communication is the most important tool in any administration, as it allows for leaders and the public to interact on a regular basis. Through this vehicle, leaders are able to share their successes and frustrations with the public so that there can be an understanding of the affairs of the country they live in. Lee (2007:4) concurs that communication is an important element that is on equal footing or even greater than others are and can be used to the benefit of the organisation. Pearson and Patching (2008:3) also concede that communication is very important as a tool that keeps the public abreast of government issues.

While this is the case, government communication with the public is often times seen as propaganda where politicians relay messages that are devoid of the truth in favour of votes. This is so because, as researched by Bajomi-Lázár and Horváth (2013:220), propaganda is normally compared with the act of brainwashing, manipulation and spin, amongst many others. Little (2017:226) posits that this is exacerbated by the fact that politicians have a tendency to lie and coerce those around them to lie on their behalf and this makes it difficult to believe them, even when they are telling the truth. Taylor (2003) argues that propaganda happens when one persuades the other to act or behave in a particular way. Although Kjellgren (2002:1) sees this as a good tool, which enables government to interact with its citizens, Edmond (2015:1) argues that such can be used by governments to manipulate information which does not favour them at that particular moment, without the knowledge of the public.

Gelders and Ihlen (2010:1) espouse that communication from government primarily aims to persuade citizens. Accordingly, the communication efforts by government may be viewed as a propaganda ploy, even in instances where messages are clearly informative. Gelders and Ihlen (2010:1) argue that government communication with the public is not necessarily aimed at uplifting any politician as the focus is on keeping the public informed.

1.1.2 GOVERNMENT AS A PUBLIC INFORMATION TOOL

Besides being viewed as mere propaganda, public information can be a critical tool on which government can rely. Taylor (2000:2) points out that this concept is a good tool and when used optimally, it can build relationships with both media and the public. It is through this platform that government is able to create a flow of information to and from members of the public. Alternative engagements are public relations management, which, according to Johansson and Larsson (2015:126), was established in order to steer media, stakeholders and the public in a desired direction. It is also done to promote the image of the organisation while promoting the awareness of all the good deeds done by a particular organisation. However, Kjellgren (2002:1) argues that although public communication can also be used as a good public relations tool, it is also prone to misuse. For example, Gelders and Ihlen (2010:2) lament that where democracy does not exist, the public have very little trust of any communication from government.

Seen by Vandebosch (2004:5), government communication is a public relations ploy where government wants to give the public information that is fair and balanced. However, this is always a challenge, especially for media as they view government news to be one-sided which seeks only to calm the nation rather than to encourage their thinking. This is made even more complicated by the inability of some government communicators to take advantage of all communication opportunities and who continue to disseminate reactive information (Wukich & Mergel 2015:708). While this is so, others have proven to make use of media to their advantage. However, this often results in a disagreement between media and government. This disagreement comes when government communicators push for coverage of their stories while media insists on covering stories that are newsworthy.

The biggest achievement of any government communicator is to have a good working relationship with media. In other words, it is critical for the government communicators to engage regularly with media and have a deep comprehension of the media environment. Taylor (2000:3) concurs that government communicators need to prioritise media relations since media exerts control over information that goes out to the public. This relationship will be enhanced when the public relations officer insists

on news that is true, accurate and transparent in order to have an informed public (Gelders & Ihlen 2010:3).

The relationship will be further enhanced when both parties understand each other and are able to reach common goals. Although it is quite difficult for the two to totally agree as they have differing mandates, it is expected that the two should have proper working relations, as their efforts are necessary for the public good. Kim and Yang (2008:57) state that in order to win the public relations battle, “organisations need to develop an effective function of media relations while also cultivating and managing positive relationships with media as one of the key factors of excellence in public relations.” DeLorme and Fedler (2003:100) argue that the basis of the relationship between media and communicators is mainly based on the communicator because media depends on such a person to get information from the organisation. In the instances of the study, the credibility of SA NEWS as a news agency for the government of South Africa will go a long way, as it will determine how media perceives its stories.

1.2 THE CONTEXT AND BACKGROUND OF THE RESEARCH PROBLEM

The conflicting views on media’s role in a democracy has caused many disagreements between South Africa’s democratic government and media. The democratic government sees media only as a partner, which should help to build a democratic state, one that is better than the previous apartheid government. By so doing, government’s belief is that media should only relay government stories as it is provided to them. As a result, government often complains that media only focuses on the negative news while there is a multitude of good deeds done for the public good (Fourie 2007).

Added to this is the continued perception by media that every time a politician or a government representative communicates something on a public platform, it is regarded only as propaganda rather than information sharing (Hopkins 2015). Accordingly, this relationship has become pressing, practically and academically, as both parties disagree regarding mandates and objectives of each other (Robinson 2001:524). On the one hand, media wants government to be transparent and provide necessary information, which would enable them to be critical and accurate in their

reporting while relaying government's programme of action, and on the other hand, government expects media to simply relay information that is made available to them without being critical nor analytical. Another element, which has been debated, is the issue of patriotism. Martindale (2002), states that in the South Africa government's view, criticism by media can be viewed as a lack of patriotism.

According to South African Press Association (SAPA 2010:1), news media has since fought against a movement that sought to restrict its operations. Sapa (2011:3) points out that restrictions imposed by the ruling party and government poses as a great threat to media freedom and freedom of expression. In addition to this, as maintained by SANEF (2019:5), these restrictions and a difficult political climate in the country has resulted in a toxic working environment where journalists were harassed and abused. Further, this also caused a rising crisis around the funding of media as government and many other institutions took away a big chunk of their marketing and advertising budgets.

So far, there has been a huge shrinking in advertising and online advertising shifted to Facebook, Amazon, Netflix and Google "the FANGs" - especially to Facebook and Google by various private and public organisations (SANEF 2019:5). This shows that there is an "us" versus "them" attitude towards these parties, which resulted in government deciding to withhold financial support to various media houses. Government did this in order to send a signal of their unhappiness with media. For example, in recent times, government terminated all tender and job application advertisements from Sunday papers and other dailies.

In an attempt to come up with a replacement, as Hunter et al (2015) state, government introduced a strategy that includes founding a television channel owned by government. This is in addition to making use of the other available government channels such as Vuk'zenzele, Ubuntu Radio and many others in order to control what goes out in the public domain from the perspective of government communication. In the same spirit and in the context of this study, government, through GCIS, established its own news agency, which seeks to create and avail free stories to media.

Media and government have always experienced tensions between themselves in South Africa. This was particularly the case after the advent of democracy, with the ANC as the ruling party. Joffé (2014:614) postulates that in its nature, this relationship

has the possibility of getting out of hand, because the two has never found common ground. For example, those representing media argue that their reporting is based on the public's needs and interest and that they are a voice for the public who may not otherwise have a voice.

They therefore refuse to be a mouthpiece of the government, as they argue that they exist in order to hold government to account by asking difficult questions, something an ordinary individual would not be able to do (Jooste & Booie 2012). Furthermore, those on the side of media, continue to argue that they are the fourth estate, with the purpose to uncover corruption while also acting on behalf of the public.

This study aims to establish the efficacy of SA News as a tool for government communication while also trying to understand the relationship between government and media in South Africa. It cuts across crucial elements, which assisted in answering the research question and helped to reach a sustaining conclusion. These elements are the context, the research problem, the objectives, sub-questions and their assumptions, theoretical background, purpose statement, as well as the methodologies of the study.

Government regularly updates the public on progress regarding their programme of action. It does so to have an informed and involved public. Although there are other communication channels such as Izimbizo, research has shown that the use of media is the most effective and is thus, mostly preferred.

Media disseminates information by expressing different voices and views in order for the public to formulate their own opinions. GCIS recruited experienced writers and journalists from various media houses to write quality stories from a government perspective. It was assumed that editors would be encouraged to publish the stories as professional writers wrote them (Department of Communication 2012).

According to GCIS (2005), after SA News was established, it saw an increased utilisation of its services by many community and mainstream media houses. However, this seems to have steadily decreased in recent times. According to Mona (2020), this emerged after the media fraternity began to realise that the news agency was only peddling propaganda. This news was only aimed at giving highlights of government's work and lacked critical elements, which would create dialogue and debates amongst social commentators and the public at large.

In addition, Segalwe (2020) states that, amongst many other things, the change of strategy, which included the changing of the agency's name from Bua News to SA News, contributed to the downfall of the agency. It became clear to editors and media owners that the agency was there as a propaganda machine. Segalwe (2020), laments that reporters used to see the agency as competing with the likes of Reuters and SAPA, but after it was renamed the South African Government News Agency, it was clear that the agency was just a channel used by government to communicate controlled propaganda messages to the public.

It is with this background that this study seeks to establish the effectiveness of SA News as a tool for government communication in South Africa. It will also look at the general relationship between the two parties.

1.3 DESCRIPTION OF THE STUDY'S PROBLEM

Existing studies have been as silent about media relations in South Africa as they have been about the effectiveness of SA News as a tool for government communication. Those in existence, primarily examine the relationship between media, power and politics in South Africa (Cloete 1999:293). Others such as Jonker (2018), looks at the effectiveness of crisis communication by government communicators, while Erasmus (2012), looks at the increased application of social media by various industries, including government. One by Netshitomboni (2007) focuses only on the management of participatory development communication by GCIS using Izimbizo; Selebi (2019) looks only at the communication framework aimed at communicating South Africa's National Development Plan (NDP). Strydom (2001) touches on the effectiveness of communication in government and Swart (2019) looks at the impact of social media on the existence of visitor information centres in South Africa.

However, in an ideal situation, the South African government, which is now more 25 years as a democratic state, should have had various effective tools in which to interact with the citizens. A news agency such as SA News, which has been in operation from 1998, should be at a point where it is the most trusted and preferred by both media and citizens. Instead of being the most trusted, the opposite is true, with media houses seeing the agency as a vessel in which to peddle propaganda. The use of propaganda, especially by governments has been problematic ever since and this does not show

any signs of stopping. For example, the use of fake social media posts by the Russian government has been seen as a propaganda tactic, which was used to influence the 2016 elections in the US (Nakashima, Demirjian, and Rucker (2017:6). Although the facts are yet to be proven, what is important to note is the power of propaganda, especially if governments use it. Although this is the case, the use of propaganda has not always succeeded. Since this is mostly used through the media, some media houses have stood their grounds and refused to participate in this. While this is so, it is unfortunate that governments still find other means to peddle propaganda through to citizens. In such situations where media as the mediator is absent, citizens are given news that are one-sided and only focusses on the good deed from government. This discourages participation from citizens, as they do not get a chance to engage on real issues because they are told that everything is fine while in some instances the opposite is actually true.

The point of entry for this study was to assess the effectiveness of SA NEWS as a tool for government communication. In this case, interviews with editors of selected newspapers and editors of SA News were conducted to investigate this relationship.

1.4 PURPOSE AND DEMARCATION OF THE STUDY

The main purpose of this study is to assess the effectiveness of the news agency known as SA News, as a tool for government communication in South Africa. As the two are interlinked, the study also assesses media-state relations in South Africa. That is, is SA News effective as a tool for government communication in South Africa? Interviews were held with editors and journalists from selected newspapers and role players from SA News were interviewed conducted. A content analysis process was also undertaken where 200 news articles from both *City Press* and *Sunday Times* were scrutinised.

Generally, government policy in South Africa concurs that the greatest recipe in successfully dealing with the flow of government information to the public is through proper maintenance of media relations. While it is important to regularly make use of media, it is equally important for government communicators to understand and appreciate the role played by the independent media, which exists not only to relay messages, but also to ask difficult questions as well (DoT 2020:7).

According to GCIS (2020), media relations is important as it allows for the flow of information from various government communication platforms to the public. That is, when media is consulted and made to feel as a key stakeholder in the information dissemination process, it plays its part without fail. In addition, GCIS (2020) stipulates in its communication policy, that for communicators to fully embrace media-state relations, they need to firstly understand the terrain within which media operates. This includes having a full understanding of media deadlines, audiences, funders and many others.

Although the agency falls within GCIS, the study did not necessarily look at the effectiveness of GCIS, and only that of SA News. It also does not look at the overall effectiveness of government communications, although the agency exists as another tool used by government to communicate with the public.

RESEARCH QUESTION

What is the nature of media relations in South Africa and how effective is SA News as a tool for government communication?

1.5 RESEARCH SUB-QUESTIONS

Sub-question 1: Which news values are prevalent in the stories about government and how have they changed throughout the decade (2009-2018)?

Sub-question 2: To what extent does SA NEWS influence the framing of government news stories?

Sub-question 3: What is the effectiveness of SA NEWS as measured by output and outtake indexes?

Sub-question 4: To what extent are SA NEWS services provided as public information or propaganda by government?

Sub-question 5: To what extent are SA NEWS services construed as public information or propaganda by the news media?

1.6 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The objectives of this study are as follows:

- To determine the news values that are prevalent in the stories about government and how have they changed throughout the decade (2009-2018).
- To establish the extent at which SA News influences the framing of government news stories.
- To gauge the effectiveness of SA News as measured by output and outtake indexes.
- To measure the extent of which SA News services provided as public information or propaganda by government.
- To gauge the extent of which SA News services are construed as public information or propaganda by the news media.

1.7 A CRITICAL REVIEW OF LITERATURE

While it is understood that much of the literature exposed the deep and sometimes desperate use of SA News and many other channels for propaganda purposes, this must be looked at differently. This notion is also supported by various theories, which agree, for example, that while media is able to set own governments can do agenda by covering certain news and leaving others out, the same. However, what the literature does not lay bare is the responsibility of government to interact with citizens. That is, many authors have gone to town to criticize governments for making use of media as their mouthpiece, with others actually forcing the media to do by either manipulating them or creating policies that force them to do so.

Added to this is the conspicuous absence of any literature around government as a public good. Again, literature condemns government as one that chooses to misunderstand the role of media while this should be understood and be looked at from both ways. Literature says government and media have been in loggerheads for many years; however, what is missing is what really lies in the middle of this problem.

1.8 THEORETICAL BACKGROUND (NORMATIVE MEDIA RELATIONS)

Fourie (2007:244) found that in a democratic state, media is the most reliable avenue of communication as it can be used to inform the public about developments while also giving them a voice. It is therefore not surprising that government, same as other institutions, prioritises the use of media in their interactions with the public. However, for government to succeed in utilizing media, the two must enjoy a fair relationship.

Fynes-Clinton (2015:14) indicates that a good working relationship between government and media is important, as it can have a significant impact on the overall perception of the public towards government as well as on who should govern. According to Tabane (2015), the relationship between government and media is one that is characterised by rigidity, which occasionally looks like dancers dancing a foxtrot and tango at the same time, sometimes awkward, but one where the two must work together.

As described by Curran (2011:8), media is an integral element in society and government in particular. It plays the role of building democratic societies while also affording a chance to the public to voice their opinions. Further, media is viewed as an astute tool in informing the public regarding governments' successes and failures (Curran 2011:18). Media is also important to ensure that citizens are knowledgeable about the country which they reside in. A dysfunctional relationship between media and government will be catastrophic and has a potential to poison society. In essence, in a democratic country such as South Africa, it is important for media to exist in order to hold government accountable (Zelizer 2004:3).

Kalantari (2008:7) points out that the watchdog role played by media, demands that it focuses its attention mainly on ensuring accountability of leaders in government, while at the same time also creating a space and an opportunity for society to debate and provoke their thinking. Although government may disagree with this approach, media is guarded by news values in their choice of news (Coombs 2008:276). However, this does not suggest that government should stop making use of media in their communication quest, nor stop their communication with the public. Liu et al (2012:942) maintain that public communication is critical as entities must communicate changes in laws and related matters, as these may often help to save lives.

1.9 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

A number of theories are being discussed throughout the study as they relate to, amongst others, the relationship between media and government. However, because the study looks at the effectiveness of SA NEWS as a tool for government communication as well as the overall media-state relations, the theoretical framework is the effectiveness of government media relations. This is discussed in detail in Chapter 3.

1.10 CRITICAL PERSPECTIVE FROM A VIEW POINT OF BOTH STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION AND MEDIA STUDIES

This study was approached from a critical perspective from a viewpoint of both strategic communication and media studies. The choice for the use of these two viewpoints emanated from an understanding that the study seeks to interrogate the effectiveness of SA News as a tool for government communication. Therefore, a viewpoint of strategic communication comes in, especially because of the wider findings through data, which indicates that the South African government make use of the news agency as a propaganda tool. This approach stems from an understanding of the Propaganda Model (PM) developed by Edward Herman and Noam Chomsky in *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media*, published in 1988 (Mullen and Klaehn, 2010:215).

While this is so, the study was also approached from a perspective of media studies, where the relationship between these two organs were looked at. Further, the study also looked at the role of media in society, with a particular glare on how society receives news from government as well as how such is received. Klaehn (2002:147) argues that media with its natural power, does not have to be controlled by any one as it is assumed that it exists for the community and a link to leaders in government.

The sentiments are maintained by Van Loon (2007:4) who submits that due its importance in our lives, we often feel lost without the use of the media in our daily lives. This is especially so in the new media era, as alluded to by Gauntlett and Horsely (2004), who postulate that new media and the theories around it has attracted a lot of interest because of its use in our lives. Bakardjieva (2005:37) support the sentiments

that the new media has brought in a range of disciplines, which forced the users, theorist and scholars to think out of the box.

Van Loon (2007:4) argues that we have reached a point that our thinking and the way we lead our lives is very dependent on what the media say we must do. For example, how we view other countries and their application of policies is based on what see and hear from the media. In other instances, we get to know more about a country without even setting a foot there. The same as with this study, government of South Africa has made use of this news agency as a tool in which news could be available to everyone freely. The approach is given an added impulse is government's ability to take an advantage of new media, which comes free and is able to reach the wider margin of audiences. Thompson (1995:44) concurs that the process of over reliance on media has since picked up speed during the Second World War, where many people and organisations alike became clued up on the existence and usage of some media platforms.

Moore (2005:18) argues that it is difficult to separate technological advances and their advantages when we refer to the rapid growth in the reliance of overall use of media by nations. This made it an important and compulsory phenomenon for media users and governments in this case, to ensure that in order to take an advantage of media and its powers, technology had to be understood at its fullest.

Media and politics can never be separated from media and government. This is because the very same politicians are in government or want to run for government and in their quest to do so, media becomes their cornerstone. Nevertheless, this does not always come easy as media also has its own agenda and goals, which in many instances differ from those of politicians. Similar to this study, literature as well as data exposed strong disagreements between these two parties and in the middle of it; all was a misalignment of each other's mandates. That is, the one expects the other to do what the other does not want. Van Loon (2007:4) concurs that much attention has been paid for a long time on media being used as an instrument in which political activities are being criticised.

From a strategic communication point of view, the study sought to identify various elements, which support the ideology that governments are out there to use every channel available to interact with the citizens. This is so even in democratic countries,

where media is said to be free. Hallahan et al (2007:4) concurs that governments make use of strategic communications, which in the main is seen as a deliberate use of communication and related channels by an organisation to deliver its mandate to stakeholders. The authors submit that for a strategic communication to be, aspects such as marketing, public relations, political communication, and social marketing campaigns need to be prioritised and be implemented with thorough (Hallahan et al 2007:5).

The study exposes several aspects relating to strategic communication from a standpoint of government communication. The study argues that using aspects such as reputation management, communication management and stakeholder management, it becomes clear that the South African government has identified and invested on strategic communication in their quest to interact with citizens. While literature has also seen this as propaganda, with some authors arguing about the use of force in the process, this process can also be seen as strategic communication. While many authors have looked at this in a bad light, the fact of the matter is that as an organisation, South African government qualifies to make use of strategic communication the same way others organisations use it. It remains their mandate as government to keep citizens informed and one other way they have done is using SA NEWS, with hopes that the media would use the articles. The use of differing methods of communication played a huge role in ensuring that messages are delivered across immediately. This was because government understood the difference between advertising and publicity and has in the process each communication activity from a strategic point of view (Hallahan 2007:5). An understanding from Deetz (2001:5) is important as it points out that it becomes a strategic communication only when organisations are able to see the economic value of their communication endeavours.

According to Holtzhausen (2002:252), the strategic communication perspective of government in their quest have an informed and engaged citizenry comes when concepts such a strategic message design, management of culture, and total quality management is guaranteed. That is, when elements that surround strategic communication have all be covered and are seen to be bringing results, then it will be noted that communication is succeeding. Wilson and Ogden (2004:61) submit that the aspect of strategic management is not foreign and it has become part of the syllabus in undergraduate programmes. Therefore, it becomes a way of life to apply the

communication in a strategic manner in effort to make it work better. In this instance, GCIS recruited all-rounded writers who either have been in the newsroom before or have the knowledge about. This was done to ensure that everything that is done has an element of goal setting, measurable outcomes and action plans (Austin and Pinkleton 2001:13).

1.11 CONTEXT AND UNIT OF ANALYSIS

The study was focused on SA News, an agency used by the South African government to interact with members of the public. Government does so through commissioning articles to be used mainly as a progress report made during a given period. For instance, when government builds a new school on a farm in Limpopo, this needs to be communicated so that the public can view government as a public good. Such information is then placed on the agency's website, which is available freely to media and the public. Therefore, units of analysis in this case are reporters who are working for the agency as well as those who used to work there. Another set of units is government and political writers as well as editors who work for both *City Press* and *Sunday Times*. In addition to this, other sets of unit of analysis are 200 newspaper articles from both *City Press* and *Sunday Times*.

1.12 DELIMITATIONS

The study excludes other channels used by GCIS to interact with members of the public on behalf of the South African government. These methods include public briefing sessions and consultations known as Izimbizo. GCIS also employs a government owned newspaper known as *Vuk'zenzele*, which carries socio-economic issues and is distributed monthly in peri-urban and deep rural areas country-wide (GCIS 2020).

Only writers and editors who work or ever worked for the news agency were considered, while those who work for the same organisation, namely *GCIS*, were excluded. The study does not necessarily look at the effectiveness of *GCIS* as an organisation, as there has already been quite a few of studies on this. These include, amongst others, one by Snyman (2017:1) which looks at optimising accessibility of Thusong Services Centre run by *GCIS* in rural areas, and one by Mmutle (2018:1) which looks at strategic communication management for governance and

sustainability, a participatory communication perspective for inclusive public engagement.

1.13 STUDY APPROACH AND DESIGN

Due to the wide-ranging basis of data available for this study, the combination of both qualitative and quantitative methods were applied. This is referred to as a mixed method research. According to Morgan (2007:48), a mixed method approach seeks to combine two methods during a research project. Olsen (2004:3) asserts that by mixing the two methods, the concept of mixed method research is born. Olsen (2004:3) defines this concept as mixing of data or methodology so that diverse viewpoints can cast light upon a particular research topic, which will help in validating the claims that might arise from an initial pilot study.

In this instance, the population for this study are newspapers and SA News, while units of analysis are editors and writers for *City Press*, *Sunday Times* as well as 200 news articles (**See Annexure F**) from the same newspapers, and role players from SA News. Ethical considerations were followed where permission was obtained from the University's Ethical Committee prior to commencement of data collection. Furthermore, consent forms were also signed between the researcher and the participants. A data analysis process was undertaken using themes, tones and news values.

1.14 DEFINITION OF KEY TERMS

Table 1: Definitions of terms used in the study

Term	Meaning
Media relations	Media relations is term commonly used when defining the relationship between government and media. That is, how the two parties depend on each for their day-to-day execution of their respective

	<p>mandates. Tisane (2015) defines the relationship between government and media as one characterised by rigidity which occasionally looks like dancers dancing a foxtrot and tango at the same time, sometimes awkward, but one where the two must work together.</p>
Public relations	<p>Public relations is a concept wherein organisations interact with their customers using strategic channels. It is also referred to as public information and it is a critical tool that governments and other institutions can rely on. Taylor (2000:2) points out that this concept is a good tool and when used optimally, it can build relationships with both media and the public.</p>
Propaganda	<p>Propaganda is a form of communication that attempts to achieve a response that furthers the desired intent of the propagandist (Jowett & O'Donnell 2018: 1).</p>
Government communications	<p>Government communication is a mechanism used by the state in order to communicate with the public in a proper and coordinated manner. Government communication is an activity of government aimed at sharing information for the purpose of explaining government</p>

	decisions and actions while promoting and maintaining social bonds.
Government communicators	Government communicators are individuals who are skilled and trained to relay the messages of government to the public. They do so through various means such as media platforms.
Media	Media are various channels, which are used to relay messages. It can also be used to entertain, inform and educate (McQuail 2010:1).
Public	Public are members of the public who in the context of this study, depend on government to be regularly kept in the know.
Newsworthiness	Newsworthiness is a concept used by media to decide on what news is and what is not. According to Howard and Matthews (2000:5), stories must be newsworthy in order to make it news in an environment where everyone is fighting for space and time.
News values	News values are a set of elements used by media as angles to make their news articles appeal to the audience. Harcup and Harcup and O'Neill (2017:1472) states that news values are important during news making.
Stakeholder management	Stakeholder management is a process in which an organisation regularly engages with its stakeholders. This could be the

	customers, funders and others, to create more mutually valuable strategies for both parties Mitchell et al (2017:25).
National security	This is a concept commonly used by governments to restrict information, which may be used to discredit them. According to Fourie (2017:6), government often uses this to restrict or limit media's criticism, citing national security.
State capture	State capture is a concept used when there was an enquiry about government spending, which is not in line with the rule and proper procurement policies. The concept brought many revelations out to the surface, some of which may have affected the flow of news between government and media.
Public interest	This is the concept commonly used by media to justify the way they report about government. That is, when government criticises media for negative reporting, media will always indicate that such is done in the interest of the public
Bua News	Bua News is the name given to the South African Government News Agency when it was established in 1998. Some people still believe that the name change from Bua News to SA NEWS had an impact in the effectiveness of the agency.

Table 2: Abbreviations

ABBREVIATIONS	Meaning
SA NEWS	South African Government News Agency
GCIS	Government Communication and Information System
ANC	African National Congress
COMTASK	Task Group on Government Communication
PR	Public Relations
SAPA	South African Press Association
SANEF	South African National Editors' Forum

1.15 CHAPTER OVERVIEW

Chapter 1: This chapter is an introduction to the research, which includes objectives as well as assumptions, amongst many others.

Chapter 2: This chapter introduces government communications. That is, it narrates a process of literature review, where key theories related to the government communications are discussed at length.

Chapter 3: This chapter provides a theoretical framework of the study. It also discusses role of media in society, which became one of the key areas and gave more impetus to the study.

Chapter 4: Here a thorough look is given to media relations. The chapter first looks at the broader picture of media-government relations before focusing on the South African case.

Chapter 5: This chapter provides the history of GCIS. It details how GCIS changed from the GIS during the apartheid era. This includes the processes followed in the formulation of Bua News, which is now referred to as South African Government News Agency.

Chapter 6: This chapter details the methodological concepts followed during this research process.

Chapter 7: This chapter looks at the findings, results and overall conclusion of the study. It details all the results from both the qualitative and quantitative methods used in the process.

Chapter 8: The chapter looks at the recommendations on how South African government can deal with government communication in a better way. Recommendations on media-state relationships are also outlined on this chapter.

1.16 CHAPTER SUMMARY

The chapter introduces the study, where a background and general orientation of the study is given. Furthermore, this chapter gives a thorough context in which this study is based while also expanding on the research problem.

It further gives details to the research questions, the objectives as well as the delimitation of the study. A brief theoretical framework is given, noting that a more detailed one will be discussed in chapters to follow.

The chapters also give a brief research design as well as definition of key terms. The next chapter introduces government communication and its role in society. Debates are held in this chapter about government communication as a public good or propaganda. Also in discussion in the chapter that follows is communication management and the difference between communication in the private and public sector.

CHAPTER 2: GOVERNMENT COMMUNICATION AND RELATED ASPECTS

2.1 INTRODUCTION

This is actually a conceptualization chapter about the nature of government communication. It firstly differentiates between communication in the public and private sector.

Key concepts such as *profit* versus *value* are discussed as they relate to the two notions in question. Also discussed are the differences between the two concepts as far as the communication efforts are concerned and how their stakeholders view these efforts. The reasons for the existence of communication in the two sectors differ significantly, and therefore the stakeholders view it differently.

The differences between government communication, information sharing and an act of propaganda are also examined in this chapter. Aspects such as government communication as a public information system, as a developmental tool, for service delivery, for legitimacy, building reputation and licence to operate as well as government communication as a strategic communication tool are clarified as pertaining to the roles and functions of government communications.

Furthermore, the chapter describes what communication management is and how important this machinery is in the running of government in a democratic country. It also touches on various aspects related to government communication, including stakeholder relations.

The chapter ends with an evaluation of communication, that is, how we know if communication is succeeding or failing, and how other governments have approached the evaluation of communication as compared to the South African government.

2.2 THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN COMMUNICATION IN THE PUBLIC AND THE PRIVATE SECTOR

The public sector does not market a physical product. It also does not earn profit from its communication. It however derives value from the public being informed about what their government is doing (Canel & Luoma-aho 2018:3) In this case, government cultivates a culture where the public becomes motivated to participate in the nation-

building process (Reynolds et al 2020:2). Government delivers services free of charge and therefore communication takes place mainly for the purposes of informing the public of progress made. Although the ruling party may attempt to entice voters through this machinery, communication is ultimately done to connect government and the public (McNair 2017:3). The opposite is true for the private sector, as its communication is driven by the idea of growing the organisation's reach in order to attract as many customers as possible (Ghosh 2015:6).

Graber and Dunaway (2017:5) states that there are various dimensions to public and private sector communication. The most important one is that communication in the public sector has no form of market competition (Bekkers & Tummers 2018:210). In other words, it does not make any form of profit and only takes place to have an informed public (Hansson 2017:327). Government is also more likely to be criticised for a communication effort in line with the expectations of the public than the private sector (Canel & Sanders 2012:92). It is, however rare that a business will receive any criticism, no matter how much they spend on communication. However, a business can receive criticism on its approach to communication. The case in point is the recent Clicks debacle, where the retail giant was forced to remove all TRESemme branded products from its shelves and suspend all employees who were involved in an advertising campaign, which was viewed as racist (Khanyile 2020:133). While communication in the private sector depends on creativity and strong jargon, the Clicks advert was viewed as controversial in depicting black women's hair as dry and damaged, while white women's hair was labelled as normal and fine (ENCA 2020).

Canel and Sanders (2012:93) postulate that one other element that distinguishes private and public sector communication is that political leadership mainly controls government communication, and it changes from time to time. Hence, there is a great chance that many projects will not be completed on time and that goals will not be met as promised. On the other hand, corporates, trusts or groups of people whose focus is on business continuity, growth and future returns (Bos & Millone 2015:29) lead private sector communication.

The key aim of communication in the private sector is to entice consumers with marketing or increasing sales of new products (Shaikh et al 2017:499). Essentially, private sector communication is driven by profit. Businesses exist because of support

from customers whilst government needs the public, who are also voters with the power to decide their fate (Teece & Linden 2017:3). People who are elected by the public to represent them for a certain period feel a sense of responsibility and need to communicate with their constituents from time to time. Therefore, government communication includes all the necessary efforts of government communication machineries to connect government with its people (Canel & Sanders 2012:92). It can be through various channels such as Izimbizo, traditional media and social media (Lee & VanDyke 2015:2). These platforms enable government to interact with its public. Regular interactions allow government to learn about the frustrations faced by the public and in response, they can speedily intervene.

However, communication in the public sector also makes it possible for the public to view government as a public good. That is, amidst all the criticism from media, government is also seen as an important vessel in people's lives and as such, communication becomes essential in order for the whole country to know the good deeds done by its government. For an example, government exercises a token of public good when it builds a new school in the dusty rural parts of Limpopo. It also plays a public good role when it increases the grants for pensioners and repairs a road that connects the community and a school. Thus, communication about service delivery itself is a public good.

Although the private and public sector maintains media relations, their approach to this aspect differs from one another. For an example, the public sector maintains media relations through various means. These include regular media briefings, media alerts, media statements, media engagements or media walkabouts (GCIS 2020:7). While the private sector may have the same approach, this would take place only when it is necessary. Public sector communicators approach media relations proactively as they need to regularly keep the public informed of any progress from government (Varghese & Rahman 2014:278). The opposite is however true in the private sector, as they can decide when and how messages can be relayed to customers (Wukich & Mergel 2015:708). Essentially, private sector can decide to buy space in media as opposed to using media statements, media alerts or media briefings.

Communication in the private sector usually takes place in a different format, and various means are used to maximise profit. While public sector communication takes place through platforms such as an Izimbizo, where government representatives inform the public on progress made, private sector communication exists through rigorous marketing campaigns which come with a high price tag (Agrawal 2016).

Gelders and Ihlen (2010:4), claim that there is reason to believe that both sectors increasingly rely on communication, albeit doing it for different reasons and results. For example, as argued by Editor (2011), South Africa's four leading cellular network giants spent nearly R1bn on advertising in the first eight months of 2011, with Vodacom leading the pack by spending about R348, 8m. This may appear excessive for a communication campaign, which ran for only eight months. However, the truth of the matter is that if this money were not spent, these companies would not survive. Unlike in the public sector where opposition parties would object if the ruling party spent such an amount of money on a communication campaign, the opposite is true in the private sector. This is because they are almost guaranteed to make a profit for every cent used for any communication, marketing and advertising campaign they enter into (Hassan et al 2015:262).

Gelders and Ihlen (2010:4) state that while the public sector has to justify budgets and timing used for communication campaigns, the private sector does not have to. This is because the private sector embarks on communication campaigns throughout their existence and it becomes their survival kit (Myers 2017). This is chiefly so since marketing and advertising is the only mechanism that can virtually guarantee success as organisations. It is what Thomas Jefferson was referring to when he said, "The man who stops advertising to save money is like the man who stops the clock to save time" (Sanches 2016). Accordingly, private sector communication has since become the backbone of any business, big or small. In the everyday-shared market, where everyone wants a share of the pie, it is important for a business to stand out above the rest (Myler 2017).

This is different for public sector communication, primarily because all the funds used for communication purposes come from the coffers of the public, which makes it a public affair (Wukich & Mergel 2015:709). In many instances, the public feel that these communication efforts are useless and that the money could have been better spent

elsewhere. Arenstein (2000) points out that government officials have been criticised for using state money for communication with messages that are unclear, and this includes helping the ruling party with its election campaigns.

2.3 GOVERNMENT COMMUNICATION AS A TOOL FOR COMMUNICATION

Governments all over the world need to communicate with the public to give them feedback on their programme of action. Veil (2007:337) concur that regular communication between governments and its public critical because it contributes towards an involved and well-informed public. DoC (2015:15) states that government has a responsibility to communicate to as wide an audience as possible in order to share information and build a sound knowledge base. However, this is not as straightforward as it sounds. Government communication must be properly coordinated since it needs to exist in an environment where good relationships with stakeholders should be created and maintained (Ismail 2019:3).

Recently, government communication has had its fair share of challenges, especially due to a serious drop in public trust (Ismail 2019:3). As a result, the South African government has developed various interventions to ensure public engagement and governance is boosted, through which the Freedom Charter clause ‘the people shall govern’ may be realised” (Brooks 2020:5). Despite this, as seen by DoC (2015:7), regular communication between government and the public continues to be a problem, regardless of so much available channels of communication. As a result, government communication must be very effective, in order to at least be perceived as delivering information that is unambiguous and reliable. The more government communication takes place, it results in clearing confusion for the public, (Jacobs & Hart 2014:1195), while increasing trust (Veil et al 2008:27).

Communication is a central pillar, which should allay public fears and uncertainties. For example, communication efforts such as the State of the Nation Address and Budgets Votes are important as they help carry the message of government to the people. According to Sherman et al (2006:3), being informed at all times about what goes on in the area you reside in, renders the social world and a person’s place within it relatively predictable and allows one to plan properly, avoid harm and know who to trust. Galvão and Shalders (2017:3) state that government and the public are mutually

dependent on each other as there is no one without the other. It is therefore a government communicator's task to regularly provide information to the public (Ruijter 2017:355). Although many authors such as Howlet (2009:5) still argue that a perfect government communication process cannot easily be achieved, the fact remains that if there is a regular interaction between the two parties, such communication can eventually be achieved.

Government communication is more than just a message from government. It is also communication when the public initiates it (Canel & Sanders 2012). For example, a discussion or debate on radio between a local councillor and the public is communication as well. It demonstrates that indeed government communicates with its people using all available platforms. It is however not government communication when the message comes from the legislative or the judicial arm of the state. In South Africa, for instance, there are three tiers of state, which work separately from one another in order to avoid conflict of interest (GCIS 2020:7). Some of these institutions are referred to as the Chapter Nine Institutions, which include the Auditor General, the Independent Electoral Commission, The Public Protector, amongst others (Gerber 2020). In this instance, it cannot be seen as government communication when these institutions speak. The Public Protector and Auditor-General are among those, which exist to hold government to account (Munusamy 2016). When these institutions communicate, it becomes a deliberative communication used by either the legislatures or the judiciary to communicate any finding from their investigations or from a decision made at that particular moment (Canel & Sander 2012:93). Although these institutions also use similar channels such as the private and public sector and that they communicate to inform the public about their decisions, their motives differ from both private and public sector communication.

Government should not only interact with the public to learn about their frustrations and problems. It should disseminate information that is custom-made for the public. This way, government is able to share successes of various programme of action by highlighting some of the activities done at a particular point in time. Government can also use communication to inform the public about their safety in the country. Ho and Cho (2017:7) postulate that if the public is informed about safety in their country, they become loyal. According to Epp et al (2014:6), the public should not only learn about

crime statistics and problems in the news. They should actually hear about these and many other important facts from their own government.

In recent times, government communication has evolved, and it has been made easy with the use of social media. Darwish (2017:44) concurs that many governments, including South Africa, has embraced social media in their communication quest and this has worked in their favour in many ways. Specifically, the South African governments and public health officials have successfully used various social media platforms to reach large numbers of people quickly and efficiently with information on how to stay healthy and how to limit the spread of the coronavirus (Sanny 2020). Government communication becomes effective when public programmes are communicated timeously and contribute to the quality of life of the public in general (Liu et al 2012:942). Therefore, the spread of coronavirus information from government using social media, amongst many other media platforms, was important and proved to be quite successful. This was especially so when President Cyril Ramaphosa also urged the public to download a coronavirus app, a suggestion, which was generally well received (Mailer-Lyons 2020).

As stated by Kang et al (2018:202), government communication exists because there is an important link between the left and the right. That is, the public and government. For this reason, when government meets the public through Izimbizo or makes use of SA News as a way of communication, this is seen as an interaction between the two parties. It becomes even more important when such a communication gives the public an opportunity to engage with government and raise their concerns. Canel and Sanders (2012:93) further posit that the concept of government communication should not always be seen as a public function, as leaders of government are also able to communicate privately with their peers. These leaders are also able to hold closed meetings with party members while ministers may privately brief journalists, or have a conversation with members from other opposition parties. Although such an act may be important for leaders, media or opposition parties may also see it as mere propaganda. A classic example is the recent visit by ANC leaders to Zimbabwe's Zanu-PF for a political discussion. This resulted in a negative media coverage for both the South African government and the ANC, due to the use of a military jet (Vivier 2020).

2.4 GOVERNMENT COMMUNICATION, INFORMATION SHARING OR AN ACT OF PROPAGANDA?

Government communication is the most important tool in any administration, as it allows for leaders and the public to interact on a regular basis. Leaders are able to share their successes and challenges with the public. For example, the South African government's communication machinery was tested during the coronavirus outbreak when the public had to be kept informed at all times (GCIS 2020:7). Through regular engagements, the public were kept updated of everything to do with the pandemic, including regular updates by the President and various ministers (SA News 2020). While this is so, other authors are still adamant that the communication machinery of the South African government can still be improved, as there are still instances where government speaks in conflicting voices. For instance, according to Makgale (2020), different ministers contradicted each other and others sent mixed messages during the COVID-19 pandemic.

According to February (2020), communication from government should have been clearer and more open when the pandemic hit the country because no one knew anything about it. The communication machinery of government was frequently criticised during the pandemic, with the President receiving the most disapproval. According to Business Tech (2020), the late Acting Minister of Communications, Jackson Mthembu, acknowledged that there has been a lot of criticism levelled against the President for communicating to the public less frequently than his counterpart in other countries communicates. Furthermore, as seen by Makgale (2020), the machinery of communication in the government of South Africa as led by GCIS is declining because of political interference which results in leadership tussles, loss of skills and deterioration of fragile relations between media and the government.

Jowett and O'Donnell (2018:2) defines propaganda as a considered, systematic attempt to shape perceptions, manipulate cognitions, and direct behaviour to achieve a response that furthers the desired intent of the propagandist. Shambaugh (2017:715) gives the example of the Chinese Communist Party propaganda system that was used to ensure votes in the earlier days of China. For Pearson and Patching (2008:4), communication, whether seen as propaganda or not, is very important as a tool that keeps the public abreast of government issues. Many companies made use

of an aggressive form of advertising when selling their products in the past and they were able to get what they were looking for without fail. This form of advertising was later referred to as propaganda, as people were told that they needed to buy a particular product in order to survive.

There is no denying that government communication with the public is often seen as propaganda. This form of communication takes place where politicians relay messages that are seen as devoid of the truth and are only done in favour of votes. Although Kjellgren (2002:1) sees this as a good tool, which enables government to interact with the public, others see these efforts as propaganda that are sometimes misleading and unjust (Rieger et al 2020:282). Many nations are as they are today due to the use of propaganda, where governments made use of every trick to mislead the public (MacDonald 2018:8).

Propaganda was very effective during times of war. With its powerful use of propaganda, America was able to intervene in South Vietnam with the aim of preventing “communist domination” while trying to create stability in that country (Chandler 2019:6). Taylor (2003) argues that propaganda happens when one persuades the other to act or behave in a particular way. Van den Berg (2017:5) submits that the “propaganda pamphlets used in the Korean and Vietnam wars” by the United States is an example of a perfect application of propaganda. Furthermore, Howard and Kollanyi (2016:1) submit that an increasing number of governments worldwide have resorted to the use of propaganda without the public noticing.

Taylor (2000:3) points out that the concept of government communication, often confused with propaganda, is a good tool and when used optimally, it can build relationships with both media and the public. Such engagements are known as public relations management and not necessarily as propaganda, although it is actually the case in many instances. Johansson and Larsson (2015:126) postulate that propaganda tactics lure media, stakeholders and the public to a desired direction by promoting the awareness of all the good deeds done by government. However, Kjellgren (2002:2) argues that although public communication can be used as a good public-relations tool, it is also prone to misuse. For instance, Gelders and Ihlen (2010:1) lament that where democracy does not exist, the public have very little trust

of any communication from government. In this instance, governments are able to get away with every form of propaganda, without being asked to account for their actions.

Gelders and Ihlen (2010:2) espouse that the primary aim of communication from government is to persuade the public. When communicating, a government could be doing this for the purposes of introducing a new policy or informing the public of some changes to a particular policy or legislation. In some instances, a government can use this public engagement to popularize a policy which is yet to be adopted by parliament, and this is referred to as policy considered or adopted (Gelders & Ihlen 2010:2). During this process, the public can add their inputs to a particular policy, which could later be signed into law. This way, government would be seen as not only persuading the public but also inviting their participation, and this is termed stakeholder engagement (Xia et al 2018:702).

Paul and Matthews (2019:286) found that the Russian government has been remarkably successful of late with their use of propaganda, especially with the use of the internet, where they can easily flood the public with government-controlled information. In this instance, the Russian government realised that one of the best ways in which a government can continually use propaganda tactics is through using the internet (Helmus et al 2018:1). This is especially so due to the high use of the internet by young people whom mainly prefer to use social media rather than traditional media (Freitas, 2017:1). Through the use of carefully and tailor-made articles, propaganda gets relayed with hopes of receiving and maintaining support from the public and most importantly the youth, who carry the highest power of votes (Gerl et al 2018:88).

The communication efforts by a government will always be viewed as a propaganda ploy, even in instances where messages are clearly informative. For example, when a president of the country talks about how the country is facing recession as well as his or her plans to help it recover, chances are that others would see this as a propaganda ploy (Gelders & Ihlen 2010:3). While this is so, it is important that those responsible for managing the communication machinery of government understand the role this component plays in connecting with the public. Without doing so, public information will not exist.

2.4.1 GOVERNMENT COMMUNICATION AS AN ACT OF PUBLIC INFORMATION

Deuze (2008:4) posits an idea contrary to the one above by stating that the model of an informed public is outdated as prescriptive and a rather elitist notion of how people make up their minds and what (political) representation means to them. As found by Voltmer and Schmitt-Beck (2006:199) the citizen of today is critical, self-expressive, and distinctly anti-hierarchical, who only scans through all kinds of news and information sources for the topics that matter to him or her personally. Although the authors may be right to a certain extent, this does not suggest that governments should be hesitant in sharing important information with its public. When people are informed, they become the most important elements in building the country as they become more involved, while also criticising and praising the bad and good work from government.

It may be the case that the public only commits limited time to engage in politics. This suggests that government communicators should entice the public to be interested in government news. Kent and Taylor (2002:22) point out that dialogue is a very important element between government and its public. A case in point is the annual crime statistics released by the South African Police Service for public consumption and scrutiny. Through this form of communication, the South African public is updated on crime statistics in order to protect themselves while also being invited to help the police in curbing crime, thereby playing their part in nation building. According to Sanina et al (2017:253), it is important to have optimized government and public communication as it is one of the most important tools for nation building.

When the public know facts about their country of residence, they become motivated and eager to participate in helping their country reach greater heights. This suggests that when the public knows about government and the political environment, they are able to ask difficult questions while also using their right to vote to install a government of their choice. This further suggests that government can make use of this opportunity by ensuring that even the slightest development in government is communicated to the public as soon as possible. By so doing, government is able to capture the interest of its public, while showing them that they did not make a mistake by voting them into power. This further implies that when the public is informed, government is held accountable as the public is given the freedom to interact with government. Another

case in point is the annual State of the Nation Address, when the President informs the public about how government fared in the previous year while outlining plans for the following year.

The public, unlike consumers, have a sense of ownership and a high level of patriotism about the country they call home. They are more concerned about the affairs of their country and will act swiftly on allegations of mismanagement of funds and corruption by those whom they have elected to power. According to Denhardt and Denhardt (2009:5), to achieve a good public administration, there is a greater need for government to increase its trust with the public to a point where the public participate in government programmes without distrust. This suggests that government should allow the public to play a role by providing them with information, which is important and relevant for them, and this can only be successful with the employment of an involved government communication tool, which ensures that the lacuna between government and the public is minimised.

According to Nip (2006:212), governments need to develop a communication tool that will help to ensure that they easily relay issues of concern to their communities. These “bread and butter” issues affect the public in many ways and if communicated thoroughly, can assist in branding government in a good way. For example, if the public know how many free houses were given to the poor and how many are yet to be given, they begin to have trust in their government and are able to be proud of it. According to Hamilton (2015:3), nothing is as self-defeating as not sharing information and letting the public live in uncertainty. It is therefore important to ensure that the public is informed of any decision taken by its government and where possible they should be involved in such a decision-making process. This also suggests that government is challenged to plan their communication in such a way that it keeps the public abreast of their work, while also addressing the needs of the public, and continually providing information that enables the people to act in their own interest (Nip 2006:212). Governments have a responsibility to ensure that the information given to the public does not only assist them to know what government is doing, but it should also educate them, especially young people.

The American Library Association (2000:1) defines information literacy as a set of abilities requiring individuals to recognise when information is needed and have the

ability to locate, evaluate, and effectively use the needed information. This further suggests that the public should be able to make use of the information they receive from government. Thus, this implies that government communicators should ensure that information is carefully selected while considering its consequences. Thus, information literacy is related to a broader implication for the individual, the educational system, and for society. Rowe and Frewer (2000:4) concur that communicators have to ensure that they understand the importance of involving the public in the decisions that affect them.

While authors like Clark (2017:5) strongly believe in the use of media as a perfect tool for governments and leading institutions to keep the public informed, others such as Mnguni (2018:2) advocates for the use of public participation (Imbizo) programmes. They reason that it is more participative and allow immediate response and resolving of issues at hand. Whether through the usage of media or through Izimbizo, what is important is to communicate government programmes and their progress to the public. This can also be used to advise the public about the challenges that may be faced by government at that particular time regarding a particular programme. Furthermore, this continual communication to the public by government ensures the transparency of government.

Abelson et al (2003: 239) indicates that a bonus motivation is the acceptance and the understanding that the more government engages their publics, the more they will find reason to be proud of their country and participate without reservations. This implies that the more government leaders participate in a communication process with the public, the more the public trusts their leadership, as they are being made aware of how and where their money is being spent. Powerful communication with the public also improves service delivery, as the public is able to engage leaders on the standards set regarding the delivery of their basic needs. Therefore, this further denotes that governments must earnestly communicate with the public in order to inform them about these developments.

Meinrath and Ammori (2012:921) state that, decades ago, civil right activists came to an understanding that the most effective route to ensure that governments are forced to run their countries well was through the implementation of constant communication, social movement and public participation. Initiatives such as these are very important

as they afford governments an opportunity to share critical information with the public while also gathering feedback.

Berko et al (2016:1) point out that communication is a systematic pattern centred primarily on who speaks, what the message is or what the message is not, the way in which the messages are sent and how those messages are responded to. Therefore, strategizing for communication in an organisation, especially in government, is quite crucial and calls for communicators to think outside the box during their planning. Hallahan et al (2007:4) defines this as a focused use of communication in an organisation in order to fulfil the intended mission. The authors focus on the six relevant disciplines within communication, which include the development, implementation and assessment of communications by organisations. These are management, marketing, public relations, technical communication, political communication, and information/social marketing campaigns (Hallahan et al 2007:4).

2.4.2 GOVERNMENT COMMUNICATION AS A DEVELOPMENTAL TOOL

Government communication plays a key role as a developmental communication platform as it enables the smooth flow of information from leaders to the public who are in many instances the electorate. If government succeeds in leading a well-oiled developmental communication programme, the social development of that particular country has the potential to grow. According to Wilkins et al (2014:1), developmental communication is a process in which communication is used in a strategic manner in order to alleviate social ills, including poverty and unemployment.

Government is considered to be using developmental communication optimally if, for example, it encourages its public to visit Thusong Services Centres to access information about bursaries, jobs and business opportunities (GCIS 2017:6). Better yet, in this day of social media, developmental communication can easily be conducted as the public can receive and interact with government immediately. Wilkins and Mody (2001:386) state that through proper implementation of developmental communication, promotion of social change takes place and this can be done quickly using social media amongst other strategic channels.

The South Africa government makes use of media and many other controlled communication products under GCIS to have an integrated developmental

communication. However, the use of Izimbizo is high on the list as it is not only interactive, but also affords government an opportunity to learn more about a particular community. This in turn helps government to tailor-make specific services for that particular community (Netshitomboni 2007:1). Although Izimbizo are very limiting as only a specific community can participate at a given time, the platform is very important as a tool for developmental communication as issues are addressed immediately. In this instance, government uses a developmental communication platform, which originates from listening to specific needs of a community and gives them exactly what is needed at that particular time.

2.4.3 GOVERNMENT COMMUNICATION FOR SERVICE DELIVERY

While government communication is seen as a tool for interaction with the public, it can also be seen as a tool for service delivery. According to GCIS (2020:5), it is the responsibility of government to keep the public of South Africa informed regarding the work done by government and about how they can participate. Therefore, it is important for government to use every platform available in order to have an involved and informed public.

The government communication machinery as a service delivery model has not been receiving good reviews lately. What is most concerning is that this criticism comes from media and social commentators. In recent times media houses have been blaming government communication and especially some communicators who hog headlines more than their ministers due to their inability to properly and professionally deal with communication in government. One of these media representatives is Hadebe (2020) who points out that a classic example of government's inability to effectively use government communication as a service delivery tool was during the government's COVID-19 pandemic lockdown regulation interaction. According to Hadebe (2020), government stands accused of not managing communication effectively, especially about prevention measures.

In a democratic state such as South Africa, it is important that government communicate its successes and challenges with its public. These regular interactions avoid uncertainty, which in many instances have led to unnecessary tension between leaders and communities. When the public is informed, even when government is not

doing well, they gain trust and belief in their government. This in turn helps in ensuring that government uses its machinery for communication as a tool for service delivery.

When the public is uninformed, they can think that government is not taking them seriously. For example, often media depicts government as not delivering on its mandate. This includes the coverage of news around water shortages and the continuous load shedding which angers the public, and because of not being informed, they express their anger through staging protests. According to Lancaster and Mtshali (2014), police officers were deployed to monitor 12 399 crowd-related events (34 incidents a day, on average) between April 2012 and March 2013. However, where the public is informed timeously, they understand what their government is doing and gives it a fair chance.

2.4.4 GOVERNMENT COMMUNICATION FOR LEGITIMACY, BUILDING REPUTATION AND LICENCE TO OPERATE

Transparency at all times ensures that a government is perceived as genuine and as operating without fear or favour. While Foster and Frieden (2017:512) concur that the public can easily lose trust in their government because of mistakes with government communication, the fact of the matter is that there is concrete proof that when government is genuine, it can gain back the trust it might have lost. In an effort to build its reputation, as seen by Gilad et al (2013:451), governments should ensure that its communication shapes the way in which the public view and trust their government. When the public sees its government in a positive light it allows them to govern in a constructive way, and to becoming involved with the public. Rimkuté (2020:386) states that this process of reputation building allows a government to be in the driving seat because they have gained trust and respect from the public.

2.4.5 GOVERNMENT COMMUNICATION AS A STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION TOOL

Governments need to be strategic in their communication endeavours to succeed, especially because they are competing with many other messages. According to Joon Lim (2015:2) strategic communication has to do with synchronizing words and deeds and for selected audiences. Adding to this, Paul (2011:3) submits that communication is only strategic when it is coordinated through structured and well-designed

messages and other forms of communication during an engagement process with the audience. The American strategic communication consultant, Emil Goldman, clearly defines strategic communication as “a strategy influencing attitude and behaviour” (Karagöz 2015:45).

According to Farinloye et al (2020:5), today communication is regarded strategic if it considers the use of social media. Svensson et al (2015:1086) suggest that the use of social media such as Twitter and Facebook is strategic as it carries the advantage of reaching wider audiences than with traditional media. According to Botan (2017:3), strategic communication is quite complex and needs to be better understood from the context of organisation and the public, where properly coordinated information is needed. Strategic communication is not a foreign concept as it relates to disciplines within the social sciences such as business management, psychology, and stakeholder theory (Lock et al 2020:2).

According to Paul (2011:4), strategic communication is based on the premise of informing, that is sharing messages and influencing, as well as how messages are packaged to persuade and change perceptions. Archetti (2019:82) posits that although strategic communication is a worldwide phenomenon, it remains a crucial element when it comes to defence and security as an environment that is increasingly transparent. As DoT (2015:8) states, for a strategic communication to be fully and successfully implemented, communicators must be fully aware of government communication policies, strategies as well as their individual roles and responsibilities. Allen (2016:12) suggests that the sustainability of organisations rely on the best implementation of a strategic communication process, where all avenues are used to benefit both organisations and the public. Sataøen and Wæraas (2016:167) concur that strategic communication in many instances has become a significant element of government as a platform to maintain the reputation of public sector entities.

Strategic communication challenges organisations to come up with creative ways of communication in order to cajole the consumers with news and ensuring that they come back for more. Clampitt (2012:6) maintains that the main perspectives are about focusing on the importance of the correct message at the right time, through the right channel. Once these actions are done correctly, communication is bound to take place properly and should yield the intended results. Archetti (2019:82) argues that while

“strategic communications play a vital role across counter-terrorism policy,” it equally important as a tool for communication between government and the public.

DoT (2015:9) emphasises that a communication strategy aims to deliver an effective and efficient communication solution. In addition to this, Netshitomboni (2007:21) concurs that “the communication strategy therefore defines how exactly the communication goals are going to be achieved.” Steyn (2007:138) states that this approach to communication as a function for management, seeks to work at the highest decision body of the organisation to properly manage all related aspects. Archetti (2019:88) substantiates that the importance of getting strategic communication correct cannot be over-emphasised, as failure to do this effectively reflects on government’s ability to carry its mandate across to the public. Özkan (2015:175) concedes that governments have no choice but to get their strategic communication plans in order as this may affect their plans in maintaining, managing and enhancing the nation’s brand.

In the context of this study, this infers that the government of South Africa should be strategic in their communication, bearing in mind that there are hundreds of voices from different angles fighting for attention on the same communication platforms, and it may have intentions contradictory to the one from government. This therefore suggests that efforts to communicate the government’s programme of action should be prioritised and should be done in a consistent and professional way. Added to this, it means that when communication takes place, communicators must do so in a strategic manner, while also looking at the intended audience versus the intended messages.

South African government departments, with the help of GCIS as the custodians of government communication, meet at least once a year in order to define a communication strategy for the individual departments, considering its specific mandate. In other words, a communication strategy for the Public Service Commission cannot be the same as that of the Department of Tourism, as their objectives, audience, communication challenges, mandate, mission and vision are not the same. Furthermore, as part of the strategy from government, GCIS included a couple of communications tools such as Vuk’sensele, SA News, Izimbizo and lately the use of social media, amongst others.

As is the subject of this study, it is yet to be scientifically tested whether these channels are effective. One of these channels is SA News, which has been in use for quite for a long time. This study seeks to establish if this agency, as part of GCIS's communication strategy, has yielded positive results since its inception in 1998.

According to the DoC (2015:9), effective communications leads to good governance, it improves internal and external public and stakeholders' morale, and contributes towards meeting government's aims and objectives. It also builds public trust and confidence as well as the integrity of government. When government communication is enhanced through robust usage of media and other communication channels, communities are empowered. Furthermore, proper and continual communication of activities from government reduces criticism by outside forces. On the other hand, if communication is not handled properly, it creates a perception that government is not delivering on its mandate of providing services to the public.

Grunig (2008:89) concurs that communicators have their greatest value when they take information out of the organisation, more than when they bring it in. According to Murphy (2009), the concept of strategic communication is hard to understand, but once communicators become proficient at it, they get the desired results. Özkan (2015:174) cautions that organisations face difficulties in influencing audiences due to widespread technological advances, as this may make the audience smarter than the message itself. In this study, the improvement of a strategic approach to communication by government by means of social media and the professionalization of communication, will be considered. Once this is achieved, strategic communication can easily coordinate government's communication activities in a coherent manner (Ekşi 2014). This will make it easy for communicators to fully understand the role of communication in government.

2.5 ROLE OF COMMUNICATION IN GOVERNMENT

Communication plays a vital role as it enables government to engage with stakeholders, and to deliver the necessary information to keep the public informed and involved. Ho and Cho (2017:7) lament that it becomes a recipe for disaster if the public is not considered and are not informed about what their government is doing. However, in instances where government communication is used optimally, it makes

it possible for government to hear and understand concerns from the public and how such can be handled. Canel and Sanders (2015:3) concur that through communication, government is able to have a controlled flow of information, indirectly or directly, while addressing the public's concerns.

According to Tagliacozzo (2018), the role of communication in government has been touted as one of the best tools in a democratic state, because it enhances public participation. Grimmelikhuijsen and Meijer (2015:599) submit that the importance of government communication should never be overlooked as it ensures that the public is fully equipped with information, thereby inviting them to participate along every step of the way. Accordingly, government's use of communication to engage the public can be beneficial as it can trigger feedback in a way of a nation-building process (Bazzi et al 2019:3979). When the public feels involved, they play their part in building their country (Charbonneau & Van Rysin 2015:290). Proper handling of government communication creates an environment where there is a participatory public responsiveness to government issues (Delli Carpini & Keester 2002:129).

It is important for government to disseminate information in a systematic manner in order to avoid rumours, which may at times be dangerous and may cause unnecessary panic. There is little doubt that the way the public consumes political and public affairs information calls for a government to improve and increase their visibility within communities (Yuan & Gascó 2018:2). Therefore, government should be strategic in managing government communication. Liu et al (2012:293) writes that when government communication is handled properly, it enables governments to disseminate public programmes, which in turn improve the livelihoods of those who are in need of it.

The role of communication in government does not only exist to relay messages to and from the public and stakeholders. Its primary role is also to create a platform where trust is built in the process. That is, when proper and sound messages are shared with the public on a regular basis and such messages are followed by concrete action, trust develops. Quinn et al (2013:99) state that the proper handling of government communication leads to trust from stakeholders and the public. Once trust is earned, stakeholders, the public and government as a whole, are able to work together, thus creating a smooth running of public information. This in turn creates an environment

in which the public feel the need to participate in building their nation as it is a trusted one.

2.6 MANAGING COMMUNICATION IN AN ORGANISATION

Managing communication is not an easy task as it involves many processes. However, if this is done correctly, organisations are able to excel and prosper while delivering on their mandates. Accordingly, Van Riel and Charles (2007:777) state that communication management is critical as it entails a process where communication is planned in detail, with the aim of synchronizing channels, plans and resources. The authors argue that of all the clusters mentioned, communication management is possibly the most important aspect (Van Riel & Charles 2007:777).

Communication management in an organisation refers to the strategic approach during the dissemination of information from one source to the other. Therefore, many large corporations these days are making significant investment in policies and communication management systems in order to ensure that their interaction with their stakeholders and public is prioritised. Grunig (2013) submits that proper management of communication by those involved has a potential to impact on the organisational goals and objectives, while also enhancing its productivity. That is, the process of managing communication is quite important in an organisation and should be placed in the highest hierarchy due to its ability to keep stakeholders engaged, thus keeping the organisation afloat (Monteiro de Carvalho 2013:38). While this is so, Teryima and Sunday (2015:112) caution that in the age where communication and information sharing has escalated, there is a greater need for those who manage communication, to be hands-on and remain informed of all the changes that come with technology.

In the context of this study, communication management takes place when GCIS, as custodians of government communication, is involved in the interaction and delivery of messages to the public through various communication channels. In order to get this function right, as stated by DoC (2015:9), it is the prerogative of the GCIS to ensure that communicators in government are effective and fully aware of the communication policies, strategies as well as their roles and responsibilities. Likewise, Longstaff and Yang (2008:3) state that during the unfortunate incidents, which may result in public danger, such as natural disasters or health emergencies, the greatest

weapon any country can employ is its communication systems, which should always be ready to disseminate important and factual information to the public. In this case, it is extremely necessary for such a country to have an excellent communication system, able to manage communication properly in order to release seamless and timely updates to public who might be stressed at that particular time. A case in point is the recent coronavirus pandemic.

One other critical element is trust, especially by organisations such as government. This is because the public depends entirely on government regarding information and the happenings within the country they live in. Longstaff and Yang (2008:3) support the assertions by stipulating that in structures where those in control of communication machinery fail to check the facts of the information being released, there is a greater threat that this may lead to a lack of confidence. In this regard, it is a requirement that the sender of the information be trusted.

According to Dawkins (2004:108), organisations are increasingly realizing the importance of identifying the reputational risks and opportunities associated with regular interactions with the stakeholders. Organisational charts can act as the formal representation of the place communication occupies in the decision-making processes. Grunig et al (2009) observe that organisations are effective when they have the necessary communication expertise needed to respond to any communication-related threats and opportunities in their environment. Although the necessary knowledge varies from situation to situation, organisations should typically maintain such expertise, especially in several crucial management functions.

Managing communication decorously and effectively entails having a plan, which details various approaches to be followed during the process of information dissemination. Added to this is the capacity and training needed for personnel involved in this process of information dissemination. Also important to note is the financial backing that is needed in order to manage the flow of information while allowing a facilitation of dialogue between an organisation and its stakeholders. Longstaff and Yang (2008:4) state that in order to manage communication appropriately, especially in government, those involved in the planning and implementation process should avoid assuming that handing out brochures or broadcasting government-approved updates during a communication process is the only way to go. This therefore calls for

communicators to get involved in order to understand the needs of the people. Once there is some knowledge of the need of the audience, a targeted form of communication will be effected which will enable communication to speak directly to the audience.

Netshitomboni (2007) found that one of the greatest factors to be considered before, during and after the communication process takes place, is a thorough environmental scan, which would allow communicators to know the environment in which they operate. Scanning the environment is vital in the process of information dissemination as those involved get to know whom they are communicating with as well as the mood and perceptions they hold against the communicator in question. This also submits that when the environment is thoroughly scanned, the communicator is empowered with information, which would be helpful during the strategy development process while also allowing planners to know the capacity needed. This process will result in a proper management of communication, as by so doing, for example, public relations professionals and communicators will be able to find out what the public is thinking, relay that to management and formulate some communication programmes which will increase public understanding towards the organisation or issue.

Employees can be the unofficial spokespersons of an organisation. This empowerment enables staff to be ambassadors for the organisation that they work for, while it also increases their productivity. Moreover, this will also play a significant role in helping the organisation to disseminate necessary messages to its stakeholders in a timeous and professional manner.

2.7 STAKEHOLDER MANAGEMENT AS A KEY ELEMENT OF COMMUNICATION

The first aspect into understanding stakeholder management is to fully understand what a stakeholder is. According to Rondinelli and London (2017:211) the concept came to the surface in the early 1960s, and it was seen as any form of alliances or personalities whose existence are important for an organisation to survive. As defined by Freeman (1984:25) and Freeman et al (2010:9), stakeholders are “those groups and individuals who can affect or be affected” by the actions connected to value creation and trade. It is stated, “a stakeholder is someone or a company with vested

interest in what a particular company is doing. A stakeholder is an important individual or a group of people or an organisation whose existence is so important to an organisation that any failure to engage them may affect the organisation's optimal performance" (Rondinelli & London 2017:212).

A stakeholder is a person or group of companies whose involvement in an organisation affects it in its growth. This suggests that both this individual and company may have interests, which differ from interests held by other individuals or companies connected to the same organisation. That is, a stakeholder can also be an employee of the organisation, the board member, the customer, government, shareholders and media, just to mention a few. All these stakeholders may have an interest in one organisation, yet their interests may differ from one another. Buysse and Verbeke (2003:455) postulate that there is a greater need for government to conduct a more inclusive stakeholder management, which will see them, get closer to the public. The purpose of this section is not to discuss the stakeholder theory, but to discuss stakeholder management. As a communication management function, this is essential in managing the relationship between government and media in society as two of its vital stakeholders.

Through this approach, government is able to understand the concerns of the stakeholders as well as their opinions while also using the platform to determine whether they think of them positively or negatively. For example, government needs to regularly engage with media in order to get their buy-in on many of their programmes. It would be highly impossible for government to expect that media would take any form of information, either in the form of a media statement or an article, without having engaged with media first. Furthermore, it is equally important for government to regularly engage with media, even though they do not expect any favours from them.

Stakeholder management is a complex issue and demands to be fully understood before it can be implemented. According to Harrison et al (2015:18), stakeholder management becomes a practical theory because it is in the interest of every organisation to properly manage its stakeholders. Therefore, stakeholder management becomes efficient "because stakeholders that are treated well tend to reciprocate with positive attitudes and behaviours towards the organisation, such as

sharing valuable information (all stakeholders), buying more products or services (customers), providing tax breaks or other incentives (communities), providing better financial terms (financiers), buying more stock (shareholders), or working hard and remaining loyal to the organisation, even during difficult times (employees),” (Harrison et al 2015:859).

Stakeholder management becomes a process in which stakeholders are managed or are supposed to be managed by organisations, noting that organisations differ in shape and size. Stakeholders are key individuals playing a role in a particular process. Stakeholder management is the process within which these stakeholders are attracted, are involved, either informed or motivated in order to continue playing their roles. According to Mitchell et al (2017:25), stakeholder management can be defined as a concept that makes it easy for organisations to create more mutually valuable strategies to its most powerful, legitimate and urgent constituents, which in turn will help in the process. Further to this, there is a slight difference between stakeholder management and stakeholder relations. Although the two are interrelated, stakeholder management seeks to thoroughly manage the stakeholders completely, while stakeholder relations seeks to increase what is already being managed (Mona 2020:14). On other hand, there is stakeholder engagement, which seeks to ensure that stakeholders are engaged through every decision taken and that their participation is sought where necessary.

There are no stakeholder relations before stakeholder management. Management begins with making sure that all key stakeholders are identified, classified and continually involved in all aspects of the company’s concern. Stakeholder relations are established when there is a need for an element of branding and reputation management for an organisation. It is through a rigorous engagement with stakeholders that organisations succeed, because this platform acts as a bridge between the organisation and its customers (Mona 2020:14).

In the context of this study, key stakeholders would be media and the public of South Africa. In this case, it is important for government to ensure that both media and public are engaged regularly, with an aim of bringing them closer to government. This engagement can be conducted in various ways, especially noting that not all stakeholders have the same interests. Therefore, the stakeholder engagement plan

from government will not be a one size fits all. It is equally important to note that when dealing with stakeholder engagement, it is important that one needs to classify them in order of their priorities, influence, interest and importance (Mona 2020:15). Therefore, for government, important stakeholders would be the public who are accessed through media; for that reason, media also becomes a very important stakeholder.

The process of classifying stakeholders is referred to as stakeholder mapping (Raum 2018). This assists government to direct relevant priorities to relevant stakeholders. Further to this, it is important to develop specific stakeholder engagement plans, which speaks directly to particular stakeholders and their interests.

Because government is a service delivery-driven organisation, thorough stakeholder engagement or failure thereof has the biggest impact on their achievement and by extension, the growth and development of the country. In the context of this study, this may happen even if there is enough evidence that government has actually done a good job. This could however be a problem if such good work is not communicated to the public.

Stakeholder management can go beyond interactions with key stakeholders. It can also help the organisation get out of trouble, especially where key stakeholders such as media are concerned. It is important for big organisations and corporates to familiarise themselves with media and to develop a strategy that would help them to periodically interact with them. Prioritising this interaction will make it easy for the executive management of such organisations to avoid a media crisis. Such can be made through tough yet possible negotiations with media. It will result in one of the best stakeholder relation management actions because the two parties would have found common ground. Freeman (2010:13) says that maintaining good stakeholder relations with media is very important because nothing is as painful as being labelled and attacked on various media platforms without a chance to respond to the issues at hand. Furthermore, the author states that more than before, big corporates and governments exists at a time where any form of action is being scrutinised from all angles (Freeman 2010:13).

There are other organisations that place their employees on the highest hierarchy level of their stakeholder mapping, while others place board members, shareholders and other interested parties high on the hierarchy. Mok et al (2015:447) says this helps organisations accommodate various key stakeholders and their varying interests, which in turn helps the organisation to achieve its goals on the best possible terms. Harrison and Wicks (2013:4) states that by so doing, organisations make stakeholder relations a part of their strategy. Treating stakeholders in a positive way will result, in turn, in benefits for the organisation, and it will influence their financial performance and growth in general. According to Harrison and Wicks (2013:5), this process is termed a strategic stakeholder management model, which by nature and extent is concerned with stakeholder grouping with the aim to improve financial performance.

According to Mok et al (2015:447), stakeholder management is best understood when it is categorised in four major themes. These are stakeholder interest and influence, stakeholder management process, stakeholder analysis methods and lastly, stakeholder engagement. These four themes make it easy for those who are studying stakeholder management to separate the related functions with ease, because each theme has its own relevance. For example, stakeholder interest and influence deals more with how organisations should be selective in their approach to the whole concept of stakeholder relations. Furthermore, it suggests that stakeholder interest and influence in one organisation may not mean the same to the other. Li et al (2014:2) write that there are a number of stakeholder interests in the public sector, which mainly focus on improving international reputation as well as maintaining construction sustainability and enhancing infrastructure facilities in communities.

In government, for example, interests differ from companies dealing with construction, finance, shareholding and any other business interests. This is because government's stakeholder management strategy deals mainly with drawing international investment, maintaining good relations with the private sector as well as media while also ensuring that the public is also on board. A two-way relation between stakeholders would continually engage government through rigorous actions and sometime harsh debates in order to safeguard their interest. Mok et al (2015:451) concur that stakeholders protect what is important to them, which implies that what may be important to one stakeholder may not be the same for the other. According to Mok et al (2015:451), "in

order to satisfy individual vested interests, stakeholders often apply strategies to affect project decision-making in a way that matches their specific objectives.” For example, in South Africa, the interest placed by media on government cannot be the same as the interest placed on the private sector. Besides the fact that media plays their role as the fourth estate to scrutinise the affairs of government on behalf of the society, media has more interest in government because they expect a lot from them. Therefore, acknowledging the importance of media as well as its influence on society at large, government prioritises media in all its engagement. This include massive spending on advertising and general media bulk buying, and quick responses to questions that are posed by media. Ahola et al (2014:1322) state that for organisations to be successful when it comes to stakeholder management, influencing strategies such as resource building, credibility building, direction action, coalition building and communication must be adopted in order to satisfy the individual interests of the stakeholders.

Aapaoja and Haapasalo (2014:44) note stakeholder identification, classification analysis and strategy development as key elements are to be taken into consideration in the stakeholder management process. When dealing with stakeholders, the first point of departure is the identification process, which enables an organisation to identify stakeholders attached to the organisation. This process will be followed by the mapping of stakeholders, which would see key stakeholders placed in a hierarchical order on the pyramid. This process can also be referred to as stakeholder classification. According to Yang and Shen (2015:3), the best way to deal with this important element of stakeholder management is through the prioritisation of education, communication, mitigation and compensation. Once these elements are prioritised, organisations are able to draw their stakeholders closer and encourage participation.

Stakeholder proximity is another important element in dealing with stakeholder management (Schons & Steinmeier 2016:519). There will always be a difference between stakeholders located closer to the organisation’s concern and those far away. This suggests that key stakeholders gain more interest due to their proximity and that they are able to easily interact with the organisation concerned in order to raise their concerns.

Aaltonen (2011:166) points out that when doing stakeholder analysis, it is important for the organisations to analyse the stakeholder environment. This enables the organisation to understand the type of a stakeholder they are dealing with. Therefore, the organisation is able to classify these stakeholders accordingly. Nguyen et al (2018:2) posit that in this classification process, the attitude of the stakeholder is considered in order to identify whether such a stakeholder is an advocate or adversary. Such a process is key, as it will help the organisation to speedily deal with anything untoward that may threaten its success.

In this case, such stakeholders would be brought closer so that they can be better informed of the mandate and goals of the organisation with the view of ensuring their trust and ultimate contributions where it matters the most. The same happens in friendships and relationships. One can only form a proper relationship with an individual that shares common dreams and ambitions with him or her. As researched by Mojtahedi and Oo (2014:357) such an approach helps organisations to determine the direction and the influence of the stakeholders by classifying them accordingly, while ensuring that those with minimal contribution or interest are given more attention so they can have a better understanding of the organisation in question.

Fliaster and Kolloch (2017:3) argue that the stakeholder classification process is only the beginning as it helps only in identifying which stakeholders an organisation is dealing with, but it does not assist in guiding the organisation to allocate stakeholders to appropriate positions in the hierarchical structure. While classification of stakeholders is an important element in this process, it is equally important to know the attitude of such stakeholders. The greatest mistake an organisation can ever make is to place a stakeholder with less interest high on the hierarchical structure as this may have negative consequences, and this can damage the reputation of the organisation. Accordingly, stakeholders should be scanned thoroughly in order to establish which interests they hold in the organisation, including various other issues such as stakeholder's expected outcomes and contributions towards that particular organisation.

Bourne (2016:433) maintains that the best evaluation process to use is a stakeholder circle, which provides some visuals. This is a kind of pre-screening of stakeholders, a check of the background and legitimacy of such stakeholders while also checking

whether they can indeed make a considerable contribution towards the organisation. Although Nguyen et al (2009:2) identify some weaknesses in this strategy, which include its lack of indication of stakeholder attitude; this approach nonetheless shows some sort of stakeholder direction, even if there is no indication of whether they think positively or negatively about the objectives of the organisation.

Mok et al (2015:452) propose that when approaching stakeholder management through traditional methods, one is bound to realise their individual attributes, attitudes, roles and predictability. Organisations are then able to identify with the said stakeholders, which empowers them to know what they could possibly contribute. Sometimes a source could identify with certain media houses who have shown their support through various engagements. These media houses will be brought closer to such a source with the view of gaining more coverage that is positive. For this to be maintained, such a source should regularly interact with media house in order to create synergy between the two. This process would benefit both parties, as media would be receiving news that may be relevant to the audience, while the source would be receiving media exposure. This briefly speaks about the importance of stakeholder engagement, which remains the key element during the process of stakeholder management.

Stakeholder engagement is an important element in dealing with stakeholder management. When stakeholders are fully engaged and involved in every step of the way they feel recognised and thus contribute towards the reaching of the objectives of the organisation. Such stakeholders could be shareholders, sponsors or funders, whose contribution to the organisation could be in a form of money. In other instances, the stakeholders could be board members or council members, who form part of a bigger structure of the organisation although not particularly involved in running such an organisation.

Therefore, it is extremely important to involve these stakeholders in every process of the organisation. They should also form part of every major decision taken by the organisation so that they have the greatest interest on the direction taken by such an organisation. Accordingly, as highlighted by Deegan and Parkin (2011:4), the stakeholder engagement process is an important element as it prioritises the involvement of stakeholders in all planning, decision-making and implementation of

tasks of that particular organisation, as outlined in its mandate, without any risks of conflicts while also establishing clear priorities. This process becomes the greatest asset that any organisation can have.

When stakeholders are informed and involved, they are happy and effectively become part of the organisational family. Leal Filho and Brandli (2016) concede that when this process is prioritised, stakeholders carry the responsibility of sharing the same goals, which in turn create oneness in the process. Stakeholder engagement is therefore the pillar of success for many organisations. It is through the involvement and engagement of funders, decision makers and related stakeholders that organisations yield growth to surpass their expectations. Nonetheless, stakeholder engagement does not only end there. It is important to indicate that there is a huge difference between stakeholder involvement and stakeholder participation. As argued by Deegan and Parkin (2011:4), stakeholder involvement goes hand in hand with consultation and information sharing with key stakeholders, while stakeholder participation is a process of stakeholders taking part during the project at hand.

Deegan and Parkin (2011:5) further says that stakeholder participation remains the highest form of stakeholder engagement as it sees stakeholders not only knowing what the organisation is doing, but getting involved within the running of the project and offering their advice, suggestions or even the financial support in the process. Such an approach is quite important, as stakeholders do not play a role of an observer, but actually get involved in the process of crafting policies and strategies, with the view of seeing the organisation succeed.

Shropshire and Hillman (2007:66) indicate that stakeholder management is related to the corporate social responsibility function of the organisation. McWilliams (2015:2) sees corporate social responsibility as a situation where organisations make use of available resources to contribute positively to society without looking for profit. Three elements make this possible, which are legitimacy, public responsibilities and individual choices (Wood 1991:692). Although organisations differ strongly in their stakeholder management strategies (Hillman & Keim 2001:126), it is important to note that many of them see the element of social responsibility as very significant in the process of stakeholder management.

The third element of stakeholder management, namely the individual choice, refers to the choices that are made usually by the executive management of these organisations concerning stakeholder management. Lim and Greenwood (2017:768) refer to this concept as management discretion, which suggests that while the other two elements are as important, everything relies on the decision taken by managers when dealing with stakeholders. Of course, it is important to consider other elements such as the community and peer pressure, but what remains a fact is the manager's discretion. Shropshire and Hillman (2007:73) argue that a "decision that affects stakeholders depend entirely on the firm's specific level of discretion."

Organisations exist for varying purposes. Nevertheless, they all exist with the help of stakeholders, who in many instances mean a lot to the organisations. As seen by Tongur and Engwall (2014:527), these organisations survive because of their continued nurturing of key stakeholders such as customers. This would include the public in the case of governments, suppliers, sponsors, media, and direct competitors as well as new entrants or disruptors who may pose a danger to their existence. Where possible, they will try to influence them in its favour. Galbreath (2006:4) states that the main objective of these organisations is to limit competition "so as to be in a better position to seize and keep as much profit for itself as possible." Such organisation make sure that their strategies are of the highest standard and that their interaction with stakeholders is prioritised in such a way that no other organisation can compare or compete.

According to Khanyile (2018:133), many organisations have developed a comprehensive stakeholder management strategy, which consist mainly of how they deal with their stakeholders, with the primary stakeholders being at the highest level of this strategy. In order for organisations to survive and thrive, they need to maintain good relationships with their primary stakeholders (Crane & Livesey 2003:3; Bourne & Walker 2005:650). The primary stakeholders are the essential individuals or companies that either have the most shares in a particular organisation or simply own the whole organisation because they may have funded it completely.

Classification of stakeholders has always been critical in stakeholder management. Apart from the fact that it helps organisations to know whom it is dealing with, it also helps them to know which stakeholder deserves attention and which kind. Clemens

and Gallagher (2017:3) suggest that in many instances classification of stakeholders makes it easy for them to pay more attention to those that matter the most as well as who are in control of valuable resources that would easily make the organisation crumble if it is neglected. It is really about determining who brings better benefits and how such benefits can be maintained going forward. Mona (2019:5) posits that in the world of stakeholder management, we have social stakeholders who are members of the community, whose environment may have attracted companies, and there are financial stakeholders whose interest are profit. Clemens and Gallagher (2017:3) indicate that classification of stakeholders does not automatically happen; it is dependent on the size of the organisation, its reach, stakeholder size as well as its life cycle. Kolk and Pinkse (2007:4) argue, “Other factors, such as pressure from regulation and technological innovation or industry membership, lead companies to deal with certain stakeholders more than others. Through proper handling of stakeholder management organisations and in this case, government, is able to build and manage trust, reputation and its brand.”

2.8 THE QUESTION OF GOVERNMENT REPUTATION

Government communication is a fundamental part of reputation and brand management of government. Through various engagements with the public and key stakeholders, government is able to set an agenda, while also using the government communication machinery to showcase some of the good work done at that particular time. Sataøen and Wæraas (2016:166) state that the services delivered by the public sector have put them at risk of being lampooned by those watching from a distance; this is why there is a great need to promote and protect its reputation. Wæraas (2015:2) concedes that since public sector organisations are associated with wastefulness and rigidity, it is important for them to make efforts in positively building their reputation.

While the main audience would be public, in this case the ruling party may also use such a platform to boast about some of their achievements to the opposition parties. Canel and Sanders (2012:162) note that like any other organisation, government's success is dependent on how key stakeholders view their achievements and how they deal with crisis. In this case, key stakeholders of government are the public as well as opposition parties. It is therefore necessary for government to ensure that these

stakeholders remain happy at all times and that their voices are heard. This is a process of reputation and brand management, which, according to Cornelissen et al (2006:115) has over the years gained importance, and governments rely heavily on it.

The ruling party has the obligation to become a legitimate government able to connect with its public. It is important to note that issues such as bureaucracy, lack of trust as well as continued negative reporting from media could become an everyday occurrence, which will test the reputation management of government (Wæraas 2015:2). For example, while every effort is being made to differentiate President Cyril Ramaphosa's presidency with that of his predecessor, former president Jacob Zuma's presidency, outrage keeps on surfacing. According to Mvumvu (2019), damaging reports became known about how Ramaphosa's son Andile's relationship with Bosasa benefited his father's election campaign and the ANC in general. Although the presidency disputed this, the reputation was already damaged and needed fixing as soon as possible.

Government should be able to deliver on its promises to the public in order to not only remain in office, but also to become a trusted government. In instances where government is transparent and provides necessary services to its people, the people are happy and feel the need to get involved. This process is known as citizen participation, wherein the public organise themselves and form part of an extended work of government through voluntary work. By so doing, the public displays its pleasure to government of the day by encouraging them to do more. According to Wæraas (2015:327), when this happens, public organisations enjoy strong reputations. Whereas this is the case, "the negative shared reputation represents a challenge for public organisations that seek to improve their reputation", that is, negative reporting and criticism may also be necessary for the public sector to improve their services (Wæraas 2015:327).

Slaughter (2017) indicates that government has the obligation to support its public in many ways, some of which include ensuring that there is enough provision and protection. That is, it is the responsibility of government to ensure that the environment is conducive for the public to flourish in their business ventures as well as other endeavours. At the same time, government needs to ensure that its public is safe and that they feel protected from external elements. Similar to a household where a father

remains responsible for providing protection to his family, government is also there to protect its people.

According to Slaughter (2017), it is government's obligation to search for talent from its public and invest in it. Members of the public must feel appreciated and supported by their government. When this happens, they will be happy to flourish and be proud of their government. When government understands its people and includes them through every decision taken, harmony prevails. Members of the public in turn would go an extra mile in building their country.

When there is no legitimacy and that government does not take care of its people, there are bound to be problems, as the public would rather want to retaliate against the very same people they have elected. Hurd (2009:287) postulates that legitimacy in the political spectrum talks about a power struggle. In many cases, the ruling party comes under pressure to provide exceptional service delivery to the voter. The pressure does not necessarily come from the public but from the opposition parties who want to hold them to account or remove them from office. Furthermore, as seen by Peter (2010:1), political legitimacy comes when governments are tested on their service-delivery to their public as promised. It is important and helpful to evaluate how government is doing. The only way to see how government fares in delivering on its promises is to make use of the communication machinery, where the public can have their say.

2.9 EVALUATING GOVERNMENT COMMUNICATION

Evaluation of performance helps to establish if communication served its purpose. From time to time, plans need to be developed in order to check whether the strategy is delivering on its mandate as set out initially. Communication is the machinery that helps government to connect with the public. This connection takes place in various forms, with each form applied to different situations. It is therefore incumbent to government to evaluate this process so that it remains relevant and able to deliver on its mandate.

Canel and Sander (2012:162) indicate that this is an area that needs to be studied more. Many governments have begun to take notice of the importance of evaluating communication, mainly because they are beginning to see the gains of the existence

of communications. Issues such as public feedback mechanisms, are being thoroughly prioritised in such a way that the public can interact directly with the executives. These interactions help the leaders to understand the challenges faced by the public while also finding ways to surmount such frustrations. Government communication machinery has also been given the powers to make far-reaching communication decisions and through research conducted by communicators, government is able to understand what their public is thinking.

While these evaluations have been helpful as it helps them track the public mood and lead them to communication opportunities, some governments are not entirely convinced about the evaluation that is done by the public on their leaders. While this is so, it has been the opposite in the South African government setting. Government has since opened its doors for more interaction with the public. This in turn helps in evaluating government communication because through this, efforts are developed to improve communication (GCIS 2020:5).

For example, the constant opinions about the president or a particular minister by the public, although welcomed at times, can be seen as a very dangerous thing, as it can influence negatively on such a leader and, by extension, the results of the elections. On the other hand, as researched by Rimmerman (2018:10), allowing such perceptions by the public creates a smooth and long-lasting relationship between the public and the leaders, while holding them to account on promises made during electioneering. Canel and Sanders (2012:92) concur that “thus, examining public perceptions of government may be considered a helpful input into policy development.”

2.10 CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter assessed available and relevant literature on government communication. This literature has managed to reveal that indeed there is information regarding government information and how they relate to the public. Furthermore, the literature shows that of all the channels available at the disposal of government, media is most favoured because of its ability to speak to anyone at any time.

While this is the case, the literature further shows that there is a need for government communication to be well managed and properly coordinated and, as stated by Ismail

(2019), this is not easy, since government communication needs to exist in an environment where strong relationships exist.

In addition, the chapter also deals with aspects such as communication management, stakeholder management where the role of communication in government, amongst others, are discussed at length.

The next chapter deals with a thorough explanation of the role of media in society. Literature is found and demonstrates relevant information on media relations in South Africa. Additionally, the chapter discusses key theories, which are related to media relations, such as gatekeeping and framing.

CHAPTER 3: THEORIES OF MEDIA, GOVERNMENT AND SOCIETY

3.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter introduces the role of media in society by presenting some of the most important indicators that exist, in both theory and practice. It looks at its general role in society and how it influences people and how it can change behaviour. Different points of view are presented, many of which agree that media is the most important cord that connects society (Croteau & Hoynes 2018:2).

Media as a fourth estate is examined, wherein issues such as accountability and government transparency as part of a greater debate, comes to the fore. It is inferred that in a democratic state, media is seen as fulfilling its role as the fourth estate when it investigates and reports on issues aimed at keeping government accountable (Felle 2016:86).

Various key theories interrelated to media-state relations are discussed. Amongst these are agenda-setting, framing, priming and gatekeeping. Agenda-settings, for example, according to Miller and Krosnick (2000:302) is defined, as a situation wherein media attention increases an issue's perceived national importance at a particular point. Cacciatore et al (2016:8) argue that the focus of framing is on the assumption that the more coverage is given to a particular matter, the more it influences how it is understood.

The chapter concludes with a discussion of two of the most important concepts relating to media-state relations, namely newsworthiness and sunshine news. In this case, as argued by Iggers (2018:5) if news does not excite, agitate or even exasperate, it is probably an advertorial and thus should be paid for.

3.2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK OF THE STUDY

Although a number of theories are discussed in this chapter as pertaining to the relationship between media, government and society, this section discusses the theoretical framework of the study. Some of these theories are discussed in other chapters. The study looks at the effectiveness of SA News as a tool for government communication. It further looks at the overall media-state relations. Therefore, the

study's theoretical framework is the effectiveness of government media relations. In line with this study, the effectiveness of media relations is discussed in detail. Additionally, agenda setting, framing and priming theories are also discussed.

Media state relations is only effective when government prioritises media as a key stakeholder in the information dissemination process. Therefore, when government realises that there will be no proper interaction with the public without the use of media, they will begin to prioritise media relations and even formulate it as a policy. According to GCIS (2020:9), as a custodian of government communication in the South African government, government is able to communicate with millions of people by using the print and broadcast media, amongst others. It would therefore not be possible for the organisation to communicate with the public if it was not through the effective relations it has with media. Therefore, it is important to forge media relations as this goes beyond calls and sending media statements. Johnston (2020) states that the effectiveness of media relations should include the forming of a professional relationship with media, understanding their operational environment, timeframes, deadlines, varied formats, their clientele, and their funders, amongst many other aspects.

Lindenmann (1993:7; 1997:26) developed a public relations effectiveness yardstick outlining a straightforward set of guidelines or standards to be used in the assessment and measure of effectiveness. Three different levels are identified: level one, output; level two, outgrowths/outtakes; and level three, outcomes. According to Lindenmann (2003), level 1, output, refers to the results of particular public relations programmes, which include press releases, articles or placement. Further, he defines level two, outtakes, as ways of ensuring that the communication products are actually received by the targeted audience and whether such a message has resulted in any form of behavioural change from audiences. Lastly, Lindenmann (2002) describes level three, outcomes, as way to measure the outcome after making use of the public relations efforts, that is, has there been a change brought about in the organisation since implementing the public relations efforts?

Many of communication evaluations are pitched on the final level. The focus for this study was on the first two levels of analysis: outputs and outtakes. Outputs are usually the immediate results of a PR strategy such as the amount of exposure that the

organisation receives. Media content analysis is one of the principal methodologies used to measure media outputs. Both quality and quantity of outputs can be measured and evaluated. PR outtakes are more specific such as determining if “key audiences actually received the message, paid attention, understood (apprehended and retained), and recalled the message” (Watson & Noble 2007: 87).

A mixture of qualitative and quantitative research techniques are often used to measure PR outtakes and PR outcomes. Surveys, attitude surveys, focus groups, interviews and ethnographic research may be used for this purpose. An additional method to gauge the effectiveness of media relations function of government through SA News was in the use of the framing index as part of agenda-setting, as the study sought to establish the extent to which SA News (as a government news agency) influences the framing of governmental stories in the news media (selected newspapers). The framing index is about how information is presented and it determines how it is consumed. Therefore, this assisted in seeing how media perceives information/media statements released by government and whether they see these as relevant for their audience. The efficacy of this determined whether media accepted articles provided by SA News by publishing them in newspapers or not.

3.3 ROLE OF MEDIA IN SOCIETY

Media plays a vital role in society as it has an ability to influence people to see things differently from how they would ordinarily see them. It forms an important part of our lives as it enables us to have particular interests in something and allows us to have debates on issues in our daily lives (Croteau & Hoynes 2018:2). Media illuminates issues that inflame our minds, and lead us to be more curious about the world we live in. It is through media that people socialise with each another, while also connecting those staying very far from each other. Media connects people in such a way that they become part of the bigger social network. Moreover, it enhances democracy by holding leaders to account while creating a platform for a public voice (Whitten-Woodring & James 2012:115). In democratic states where media operates somewhat freely, it is able to hold government to account. It does so by ensuring that the democratic principles, including those that involve transparency of government, are upheld.

According to McQuail (2015), media has the social effect of disseminating information and expressing different voices and views. It helps the public to form opinions on issues while facilitating debates. According to Mcombs et al (2011:9), public opinion refers to the feedback given by the public to those in leadership regarding the affairs of the country. Machaka (2010) postulates that media serves as a force multiplier, as it can reach communities that leaders may find difficult to reach. Politicians and various organisations depend on the power of media to be able to interact with their customers, public and stakeholders. Organisations engage and sell their products to their customers through media, albeit at a cost. It also provides the public with the power to voice their frustrations about their political leadership and enable them to engage leaders through various media platforms. This has been made easier of late with the advent of social media where the public are able to have discussions and debates with politicians on platforms such Twitter and Facebook.

According to Perse and Lambe (2016:1), news and happenings are passed on to society through the mass media and influence people to make decisions about aspects of their lives as well as to teach them about values and opinions. Regardless of whether the influence is positive or negative, media continues to change people's perception towards certain things and it has succeeded in this regard over time. As posited by Hampton (2010), the predominant model in the nineteenth-century Britain, which may be called an "educational" ideal, suggested that media serves as an agency of public discussion in which rival ideas and interests compete with each other until, ideally, the "truth" or the "common good" prevails. Media facilitates a situation where people discuss and question things that surround them.

3.4 MEDIA AS A FOURTH ESTATE

Amodu et al (2014:1) theorises that for media to be seen as fourth estate, it must fulfil the vitally important aspects, which include being "the guardians of democracy and defenders of the public interest." Felle (2016:88) states that in a democratic state, media is seen as playing its role as the fourth estate when it investigates and reports on issues aimed at keeping leaders accountable.

Media as the fourth estate is a concept first initiated by Schultz (1998) and has been one of the core debates in media-state-relation studies. According to Felle (2016:88),

the role played by media as a fourth estate has gained momentum and support from many developed countries, with some even offering some privileges to media. Felle and Mair (2015:4) concur that only media as the fourth estate has ever received such protection, while investigating and criticising government, and this is especially so in many advanced democracies. Kovach and Rosenstiel (2001:1) substantiate that it is referred to as the fourth estate because media is supposed to serve as a watchdog, which exists to hold government accountable on behalf of the public. This means that news media should be independent to continuously ensure that government remains responsible to the public.

Rodny-Gumede (2017:11) maintains that media must operate as the fourth estate and play their significant role in a democratic state. Whitten-Woodring and James (2012:114) argue that the element of media as the fourth estate is only accepted in developed countries, and in countries where repression is dominant which includes the worst forms of punishment such as political imprisonment, torture, murder and disappearance. In many of the latter countries, though, media has been able to get away with criticising government by using the concept of “in the interest of the public” a claim that has stood the test of time and has become a powerful drive in nation and institution building (Rodny-Gumede 2017:11).

Ideally, media should be able to be critical of government and its leaders. It should be able to act as a mouthpiece and ears of the community, most of which are not able to raise critical questions against its government, even where it is necessary. Coetzee (2016:3) points out that media, as the fourth estate is important as it keeps government and big corporations in check on behalf of the customers and the public.

Media as a fourth estate is not necessarily involved in the deeper sense of politics, but it is able to influence policy and political direction (Hersel 2020:1). Media power is enormous although sometimes underrated. It remains the single most important source of reliable information for the public even if it sometimes gets some of the things wrong. Media has become an important element in society with the ability to influence change (Hersel, 2020:1). Peer et al (2003) maintain that although it must still follow proper principles when breaking news, media as fourth estate is often allowed to break rules when playing the role of political actor. While this is so, Ibrahim (2020:27) continues to caution that media must exercise its democratic right as fourth estate and

a watchdog that criticises government on any issue, as long as it is done with fairness and honesty. McNair (2017:3) concedes that the role of media as fourth estate is necessary in a democratic state and should be encouraged.

Mediation

Couldry (2008:374) defines mediation as a process wherein media supports a discourse process in society. This concept, as researched by Mattoni and Treré (2014:253), has been touted as far back as the 1980s in the Latin-American tradition where the move from media to mediation was under discussion. According to Martín-Barbero (2006:281), a communication process takes place through mediation as a means to deliver, amongst others, political messages. Therefore, media becomes a platform entangled with the constitution of political subjects (Mattoni & Treré 2014:255). As pointed out by Mazzoleni (2014:43), mediation denotes an unbiased action in which media messages are being sent to an audience through various platforms and it triggers some influence. Shehata and Strömbäck (2009) posit that people depend on media for information about their society and everything around them. This is so in the same sense as governments and other entities depend on media to deliver their messages. The section that follows deals with agenda-setting, which happens when media gives a lot of attention to a particular issue, and advances it to be seen as of national importance.

3.5 AGENDA-SETTING

Government, as with other institutions, rely on media to set their agenda and for this reason, the agenda setting theory is essential to understand media relations in general and media-state relations in particular. Fourie (2007:244) states that, “the basic assumption of the agenda-setting theory is that, consciously or unconsciously, media create a particular image of reality.” Watson and Hill (2015:158) defines it simply as a wish list with the most important at the top of the list. Miller and Krosnick (2000:302) defines agenda-setting as a situation wherein media attention increases an issue’s perceived national importance at a particular point. Scheufele (2000:298) concurs that with agenda-setting, media influence society. Media has the power to influence a particular agenda, often with a justification that it is in the public’s interest (Soroka 2002:266). Agenda-setting focuses on topics selected by media; however, of

importance is how such a topic is presented to an audience. Carroll and McCombs (2013:38) state that when mass media emphasises a topic, the audience or the public at large who are receiving the message are likely to consider the topic as important. Therefore, through its unlimited powers, media is able to influence an audience to like or dislike something.

Media can shift an audience's attention from a particular issue to another. One example is the death of the struggle icon and first democratically elected president of South Africa, Nelson Mandela, on 5 December 2013, which coincided with the passing of the flyweight and light flyweight champion and former boxer, Baby Jake Matlala, on 7 December 2013. Although both deaths were a great loss to the country, the only one that attracted media attention, for obvious reasons, both locally and abroad, was that of Nelson Mandela. This is an example of agenda-setting at play as the audience's focus was placed only on the old man's death while the one of the former boxers received less or no coverage at all. Baran and Davis (2003:293) argue that agenda-setting is a situation where only few issues are highlighted and treated as more important.

Davis (2003:294) states that whether media influence exists or not, this can only be the case for those who have access. That is, media cannot influence those who rarely interact with it, such as the illiterate members of society. While relatives and family can influence them, media's influence on them is not as clear as those that directly have access to media.

There are positives and negatives to the agenda-setting theory, which must be appreciated accordingly. For example, Baran and Davis (2003:293) argue that on the positive side, it is clear that media influences people's views on public issues. However, it also has its own problems. The biggest problem is that it focuses its attention on very few issues, which are viewed by media as important only at that specific time. Furthermore, it makes it difficult for the public to focus on any issues that may be equally important to them as those identified as important by media. Issues that are not covered by media are taken lightly, yet they may have the same consequences.

Watson and Hill (2015:159) argue that reporters may choose to write a particular story, but media owners who may have other ideas can stop them from publishing it. This would mean that reporters are controlled and directed by media owners and their agendas, which in turn may be subject to aspects such as the preferences of advertisers, the government and others. Hoynes et al (2012:4) concedes that in a traditional situation, the agenda-setting approach has always been concerned with who sets the agenda for the public and, although evidence points to media, the question remains, who then sets the agenda for media? Lukin (2013:99) maintains that although many people may disagree, in many instances both government and large corporations with the intention to protect the rich and the powerful set media's agenda.

Other scholarly writers argue that although media has the power to influence and set their own agenda, this may not entirely be the case. One of these writers is Borchers (2012:7), who argues that in some instances the public choose to believe what they want without any influence from media. The public may stand their ground on what they consider good for them, no matter how much coverage the issue is given by media. There are a few instances where media has failed to convince the public to pay attention to what it believes is important. An example is a story about President Ramaphosa, during his election campaign, when it was alleged that he "has been financially supporting some [of the] women and has received naked pictures from others" (Sefularo 2017). The opposition parties also saw this as an opportunity to defeat the then presidential designate. However, the public refused to accept the agenda set by media and supported Ramaphosa to be the president of the ruling party and later the country. This illustrates that the public is able to choose what they want to believe, no matter how much media tries to sway them otherwise. Watson and Hill (2015:160) indicate that, although agenda-setting is powerful, it is not absolute as there are some members of the public who still resist change. In many instances the public may have their own agenda and own priorities. They may decide not to read the news that has been identified as important by media.

Feezell (2018:483) argues that during the era of broadcasting, there were fewer media houses, and this made it easy for them to tailor programmes to reach broad audiences and therefore influence the public agenda. However, the emergence of social media

has interrupted the flow as messages are tailored to suit particular audiences, and this has threatened the long-held ability of the mass media to shape the public agenda (Conway et al 2015:365). However, Harder et al (2017:2) argue that, “legacy media organisations remain important players”. According to Conway et al (2015:366), established media houses are still able to push their agenda, as they are able to evolve with technological advances, which include taking the advantage of the powers of social media.

Social media has become the most powerful medium of the day and this is because it has transformed itself as a platform in which all kinds of content and participants can play (Vaccari et al 2015:1041). That is, everyone can participate regardless of his or her age and locality. The public do not have to wait for breaking news as they can upload news themselves. Because of this status quo, traditional media has lost its ability to set its agenda. This is because the emergence of social media has changed the practices of journalism and limited the total reliance of the public on traditional media (Skogerbø et al 2016:105). Despite being a new phenomenon, social media has been incorporated into political communication and it has played a huge role in changing local and national public spheres (Skogerbø & Krumsvik 2015:351).

Mcombs et al (2011:3) submit that media agenda-setting effects are not universal as it depends on the audience’s experience, which are objective issues. These are issues where the public have direct experience with as well as those they have little or no direct experience. This implies that due to a variety of experiences by the audience, they would experience agenda-setting differently. Those that are more familiar with the topic at hand will be affected while those less familiar will not be affected. With agenda-setting, the aim is to paint a picture that is believable and attractive to the audience. Through creative methods media decides the public’s focus and ensures that they have some level of attachment to the issue at hand. For instance, there is no other way for the public to know how seriously government takes service delivery if it is not through media, and how it portrays this to the public will determine how they will understand it (Kreppel & Oztas 2017:1119).

Vliegenthart and Walgrave (2008:322) observe that media is also able to set an agenda for one another. That is, as they convince audiences to focus on a particular issue, they too can convince each other to focus on an issue at hand. Seen by Mcombs

et al (2011:3), this is because an audience has an opportunity to use more than one source of information in order to be informed. This suggests that an audience may prefer a particular media source that they are comfortable with, while others may hop from one media source to another in search of news that is of relevance to them. Therefore, it is important for particular media houses to know their audience and provide them with relatable topics. Using illustrious headlines and leads, some media houses break news while others fail. When a media house breaks a story and it raises many debates in society, other media houses are bound to follow up on the story and make it even more interesting. This is also agenda-setting which leads to media conformity. According to Vliegenthart and Walgrave (2008:322), media copies from one another when it comes to issues of national importance. Although this form of the agenda-setting process has not really been studied thoroughly, research indicates that an agenda-setting of one media house for others do exist (Vliegenthart & Walgrave, 2008:323). Due to the power and influence held by social media, traditional media houses have also resorted to making use of social media as sources for relevant and current stories (Broersma & Graham 2013:446).

The advent of new media and in particular social media, is slowly threatening the powers media have as well as their ability to choose news for the public. This new way of communicating is also making it difficult for media to set their own agenda. This is because what goes out in the public domain these days no longer rest in media's hands. Happer and Philo (2013:322) concur that an "effective flow of information between the various distinct groups in the public sphere has historically been made possible by the mass media, which systematically edits and interprets the mass of information, making some sense of the world for audiences." Conversely, the arrival of social media has disturbed this process, as nowadays, everyone is able to receive any kind of information at the click on the button. Furthermore, the public themselves are able to break the news and inform everyone in the world, without any intervention or involvement of media, thereby demining the notion of public interest which media depends on. Although Happer and Philo (2013:322) argue that the advent of social media has distracted media's progress in ensuring that it pushes an element of public interest, other authors still dispute that media can still fight for its space. For example, Couldry et al (2016:157) maintain that similar to democracies, politics and government,

media is faced with the battle of maintaining its audience and this is done through creating of news that seeks to draw their attention.

Not many studies have been done on agenda-setting from government's perspective; however, this study argues that similarly to media, governments can set their own agenda. Government interacts with the public for many reasons, such as to sway and influence the public thinking. For government to succeed in such an attempt, the public needs to be exposed to certain types of information, which shows the good deeds of government. In this context, this study seeks to establish whether the South African government, through the employment of SA News as one of the channels to distribute information to the public, has succeeded in their agenda-setting approach.

Government, as with other institutions, rely on media to set their agenda. Petrocik et al (2001:4) state that government has made use of agenda-setting as part of their agenda building process. In this instance, the process of agenda building takes place when government makes use of any possible process to build their agenda. Government uses media through the buying of space and airtime to get a particular message across, thereby setting their agenda. In fact, government, in some instances, has resorted to making use of advertising rather than merely using public relations tactics such as media statements, especially on issues not necessarily seen as newsworthy by media.

Walgrave and Van Aelst (2006:88) argue that during an agenda-setting process, there are endogenous political factors, which must be considered. That is, one political actor's (minister) influence of agenda-setting is attributed to the influence of another (president). For example, a minister responsible for water and sanitation could think of declaring a national crisis after realising that the water levels have dropped drastically. The minister would be within his or her rights to push a particular agenda, which will sway media, and by extension, the public to a particular direction. However, another political actor, the president, could influence the minister's agenda-setting exercise. In this instance, the president may see the issue in a different light and thus decide to push another agenda. Thus, instead of declaring a national crisis, the president may ask help from neighbouring countries or add more money for boreholes. Although all these would have been agenda-setting approaches, they differ from various angles. The president will have the last say in terms of an approach towards

such a crisis. In a government structure, for example, the president will take the lead in terms of setting an agenda. Besides, it is natural that the public in any country would rather listen to the president than any other individual, as his or her voice creates direction and leads to policy development. Through this process, the powers that the president holds can easily be compared with those of media, as it can make or break a country. Therefore, it is important for government to speak in one voice, especially on issues of national importance, which have an impact on the well-being of the public.

Governments are also able to influence the debate in media and the public by selecting and releasing self-interest news in the public domain. GCIS (2020:9) states that government communication machineries from all departments should ensure that media is flooded with information at all times in order to influence what information goes out into the public domain. Further, DoT (2019:8) states that every opportunity that exists should be used to ensure that government's positive image is maintained, and one of the ways to do this is to ensure that well-researched information is given to media. Van Aelst and Vliegthart (2014:395) argue that government is able to influence what goes out in the public domain by carefully selecting news that depicts success and those that make them look good. In addition to this approach, the South African government has since introduced the newspaper, *Vuk'zenzele*, which is seen as competitor to various print media houses as it publishes weekly and is distributed to over 1.7 million people, even those in the deepest rural areas of the country (William, 2013:8). Therefore, government is trying to set its own agenda through uncontrolled media.

Shehata and Strömbäck (2014:98) state that the relationship between mass media, the public and policymakers in government are at the centre of both political communications and the every-day running of government and by extension, the country. Therefore, it is important that government creates and nurtures a good relationship with media in order to be able to set the agenda that requires being set. On the extreme, some governments seek to curb the freedom of media to say and do what they like in the name of the people whom they represent. Nevertheless, media also claim to represent people. Although Vliegthart and Walgrave (2011:322) found that mass media is rather attracted to simple and unworthy agendas as opposed to substantial political agendas, and that some issues are more conducive to political

agenda-setting than others. This study argues that through a tighter and robust relationship between government and media, government can change the face of things and successfully set their own agenda.

Agenda-setting by government is not akin to propaganda. Leaders have the powers to ignore difficult topics in order to focus on those that make them look good. The government of South Africa has employed the use of the SA News. It was established with the aim of making the voice of government heard to the people of South Africa in a manner that focuses only on good news. Established writers who follow politicians around the country and abroad in order to write good stories about government do this. This public relations effort was established to channel media into reporting on only positive things from government, thereby helping government in its agenda-setting course. Through this attempt, the South African government parachuted a particular agenda into media in order to sway both media and the public to see government only in a good light.

The agenda-setting process cannot be separated from framing. Entman (2007:163) states that systematic agenda-setting and framing under a conceptual umbrella has the power to succeed. The next session deals with framing, which according to Entman (2003:416) is when media influences audience opinion through selective highlighting and elaborating on certain aspects of the issues at hand.

3.6 FRAMING

Bateson (1972:280), in his essay on play and fantasy, postulated that a play activity is observed and framed differently from a real life situation. Although it is an introductory platform to framing, many authors have since extended Bateson's initial logic and closed the gaps in his theory. Such authors include Allen (2014:91) who points out that editors' grapple with the information and opinions received daily, and how to frame it as news. Chuma (2007:1) maintains that media operates based on framing because they empower their reporters to place events and issues into specific groupings defined partly by how they have covered it in the past. This includes issues such as policies. As seen by Cacciatore et al (2016:9), framing is really focused on the assumption that the more coverage is given to a particular matter, the more it influences how the public understands it. Therefore, it is also no wonder that

government has taken an advantage of framing in their communication strategies with the public.

Geisler (2010:8) argues that media acts as an intermediary between government and public as they open opportunities for debates between the two parties. Framing is noticeable during the collaborative campaigns between media and government. This is when media, especially through platforms such as television and radio, invites politicians to participate in a debate with the intention of attracting many viewers. Politicians also make use of such interviews to frame their messages to their advantage. Porto (2007:21) laments that during election times, framing is at its highest as candidates and political parties are given time to frame their messages and influence their audience. They apply these tactics as they are given extensive access to prime-time television a few days prior to the elections.

Institutions, and in particular governments, depend on the power of media to frame their messages. Borah (2013:458) states that politicians like the use of framing, as it allows them to add powerful 'selling points' to their statements and to hide irrelevant or damaging information. It empowers a government to highlight only the encouraging information through various propaganda campaigns.

This study examines how the government of South Africa, through GCIS, has brought in SA News with the aim to select and deliver good news stories to the audience. They also make use of platforms such as Izimbizo, media bulk buying and Vuk'zenzele, amongst others. Rickman (2001:230) found that framing allows communicators to emphasise certain messages with the aim of influencing the audience to pay attention only to selected messages. Borah (2013:457) concurs that framing influences an audience to pay more attention to politicians when the message is framed. The communication machinery of government exists to bring hope and calm to society, even when things are not going smoothly, which is why framing is used extensively. For example, during disasters, government communicators and political representatives will ensure that messages are chosen in order to reduce panic.

Governments also employ strategies such as rhetoric, and as Herrick (2020:1) sees it, it is any available means of audience persuasion using the three rhetorical proofs namely the logical, emotional and ethical. Government uses such strategies to frame

their messages to ensure that their achievements are profiled and documented. Such achievements are used as proof that government has done everything possible to help its people. Government uses rhetoric approaches and strategic frames, which, as seen by Bora (2013:456), entail the use of strong, persuasive language, which focuses on the ruling party.

Government is also empowered to employ value framing, which are discussions on policy in conflict with basic values (Borah, 2013:456). On this front, instead of making use of noise and language of war, government focuses on which policy is more favourable and is likely to be received well by the audience. Put differently, government would frame various values so that the politicians can debate them thoroughly. Sniderman and Theriault (2004:134) argue that there is a greater need for communicators in general to choose between competing values. It is both political in nature and sometimes could have dire consequences for the public. All these are framed positively and it is meant to sway the thinking of the audience. In addition, such are done in the presence of media or with the knowledge that media will cover it and make it part of the debate in society.

Gärtner (2013:220) writes that framing originated largely in Austria during the coalition government by both the People's Party, the Österreichische Volkspartei (ÖVP), and FPÖ 2000-2007 when there was a robust debate on an anti-immigration policy, which resulted in many media reporting. These serve as an example that framing does not only happen when media focuses on certain topics, it also happens when government influences media to report on something they may not necessarily deem important. This further suggests that media is seen by government as a vehicle to influence the audience about their understanding of government (Gärtner, 2013:223). According to Scheufele and Tewksbury (2007:9), in institutions such as governments, framing is accompanied by social factors such as politicians, advocacy organisations and corporations. Although these factors sometimes compete, they are important as they form part of the whole chain. Put differently, there will be no government without politicians and the same would apply to advocacy. Government depends on advocacy sessions, which in many instances are led by politicians, in order to frame their messages to influence their audience.

Nisbet et al (2013:766) argue that there has been a lot of debate on the influence of framed messages on audience attitude and behaviour. Although these debates have tried to cast doubt on this issue, it remains a fact that framing and its effects are powerful propaganda tools, which media and government in particular have managed to use. For example, in South Africa government has pushed various framed messages in order to influence the attitude of the public such as the government's stance on corruption and its seriousness in fighting unemployment, poverty and inequality. However, Nisbet et al (2013:766) maintain that most governments, similarly to that of South Africa, have only exposed their audience to one side of the message. This would not ideally promote the competitive environment of more messages, from which an audience can choose. There is a need for more research around this area to establish audience reaction on framing (Nisbet et al 2013 767).

Various government departments in South Africa frame their messages in order to attract and influence the public. There are more than 30 departments in the South African government, some of which operate closer to one another, and all these departments make use of various channels to frame their messaging. In addition, as is the subject of this study, departments make use of GCIS reporters, who would capture their stories on SA News. Through this, media and the audience at large are faced with multiple framed messages. Through these strategies, government and those representing it go through a lot of trouble to influence the reactions of the audience, while also trying to sway them to think in a certain way.

Lim and Seo (2009:205) point out that government may go to great lengths to influence public opinion. However, this depends on the way in which the framed topic is approached by both government and media. It is important to note that framing by government and media is a powerful tool that can have a serious impact on the public and how they react. Therefore, both parties are dependent on the other in order to set their agendas. Media needs government in order to operate freely, while government needs media to frame their messages. Norris (2000:84) argue though, that while criticism and negative news reporting has the potential to damage the reputation and by extension the support of government and its leaders by the public, generally those listening to news have knowledge and trust the political system as a whole.

Nevertheless, framing, as with propaganda and agenda-setting, is a very powerful tool and can change the audience's beliefs. Giorgi and Weber (2015) argue that media is able to frame messages and often leaves audiences faced with numerous messages, most of which come from repeated messages (Loewenstein et al 2012:44).

The way in which an audience processes information and make sense of the news depends on how it is packaged in media (Moy et al 2016:3). The exposure to media has a way of discouraging political trust (Avery 2009:423). Politicians undeniably depend on media to frame their messages, especially during electioneering. As they do so, they need to deal with their past so that it does not haunt them during the process. Media can use a politician's past to frame messages, which could work against such a politician.

De Vreese et al (2006:8) argue that although media is allowed to be creative in how they approach their stories, several scholarly investigations have discovered a range of features where journalists resort to questionable tactics when framing issues and events. There is a clear distinction between "issue-specific news frames" and "generic news frames" (De Vreese et al 2001:109). Put differently, media is able to assess an issue and decide on what level of framing to employ. Some issues will be given specific frames while others will be generic due to their nature and how they appear to the audience. Although this limits the audience's knowledge of news and happenings, media has been able to do this. Therefore, issue framing has potential to influence public opinion in a certain direction (Druckman, 2001:225). The process of framing could not be possible without the use of priming as the two are interlinked processes. The next chapter discusses priming. The definition of priming in the seminal work of Iyengar and Kinder (1987:63) is "calling attention to some matters while ignoring others."

3.7 PRIMING

Miller and Krosnic (2000:302) defines it as "occasions when an event increases the accessibility of a construct in people's memories and this is presumed to enhance the impact of the construct of relevant judgments made subsequently." Thus, priming occurs when news content suggests to audiences that they ought to use specific

issues as benchmarks for evaluating the performance of leaders in government (Scheufele & Tewksbury 2007:10).

Priming takes place when more attention is given to the party leaders in general, and they are evaluated better during elections (Takens et al 2015:250). According to Curtice and Holmberg (2005: 235), "it would seem quite rational to decide how to vote on an assessment of the overall trustworthiness and competence of a party leader rather than the detailed promises made by a party at election time." Therefore, as seen by Walgrave and Van Aelst (2006:89), politicians apply a lot of priming tactics when campaigning for office by highlighting their successes during their term in order to convince voters to give them a second chance. They know they can count on the help of media as they focus attention on themselves. Leaders who have not been in office before use the strategies as well to showcase their abilities.

According to Walgrave and Van Aelst (2006:89), this approach implies that politicians make use of the communications campaigns of political parties, which constitute a determinant of individual voter choice, but it depends on various independent, structural and sequential conditions. These are Party Agendas → Media Agendas → Public Salience → Voting Agenda Building (Brandenburg 2002:35). Media is able to report either positively or negatively on the ruling party in order to influence the way the public see their political leadership. Through their reporting media is able to determine who the leaders will be. They are able to uplift or demote the status of a particular leader.

For politicians to have absolute confidence that priming is successful, they start with the party agenda, which contains the manifesto of the party. Then they need to also have a media agenda. They need to be able to attract media for the right reasons and be able to pull a crowd. This is referred to as public salience. The public salience or prominence of these politicians would then assist them to be able to draw voters to their party, which then builds towards a voting agenda. In essence, politicians have to cross all the dots throughout the process until they are elected.

Through the government-owned newspaper, similarly to SA News, there is a careful selection of news, which is seen as selling the good side of government. In essence,

it is true that government and political actors do influence the agenda, in both media and the public. On the other side though, as argued by Walgrave and Van Aelst (2016:90), while some political actors are only affected by events, other actors are affected by the agenda-setting from media coverage. Thus, in as much as the agenda-setting tactics from government influence media and the public at large, the same can be said about government and in particular, the politicians.

Politicians are indeed influenced by what media says about them, because they understand that media can either break or make them. Soroka (2002:267) concurs that politicians know that media has all the powers to influence the public, thus have no choice but to conform. Politicians understand that in order to be voted in office, they depend on media to make them appear good in front of the public. Humphreys and John (2000) postulate that there is a need for political parties to have a thorough understanding of the priming principles. Therefore, media priming is having the ability to influence the policy agenda because politicians know that any decision they take is under the watchful eye of media.

It is not possible for priming to take place without gatekeeping. According to Funk (2016:122), this is a process, which goes beyond the creativity of journalists, as the idea is to choose the best news for an audience. The following section discusses gatekeeping, which is a process that involves selecting the news, subject to the limitations of space and time (Kim & Yang 2008:53).

3.8 GATEKEEPING

Lewin (1947:144), in his seminal work on gatekeeping, states that a news article goes through various channels and depends highly on the functionality of their gates. Stone et al (1999:10) argue that although many see gatekeeping in a negative light, it should not be the case as gatekeeping is desirable. Without it, audiences would be overwhelmed with too much information, some of which may not be relevant. Media is there to serve society. It does so by informing, entertaining and educating society. Tsfaty et al (2014:5) maintain that media influences audience to have particular perceptions, whether accurate or not. To achieve this, media embarks on a daily process of filtering and selecting news deemed newsworthy and relevant to the audience.

Borchers (2012:6) says that gatekeeping is one of the critical elements in the world of making news. A gatekeeping process helps to ensure the relevant flow of information to the public. This is due to many newsworthy activities happening in the world, some of which happen at the same time. These activities affect people in different ways because of differing cultural backgrounds, beliefs and countries of origin. Therefore, it is highly impossible for media to cover all these activities at the same time and satisfy the complete audience. Although gatekeepers may be seen as biased in their selection of news, they are very important in the newsroom as they curtail what they think is unnecessary news and only provide news that will provoke thinking amongst the public.

Media receives a lot of information on a daily basis, some of which are urgent while others are soft and thus longitudinal. Due to this high volume of information media has no choice but to come up with a plan of choosing what needs to be aired and what needs to be packed. In a newsroom, there are several layers where this information is selected until it makes it to the television screens or into the newspapers the next day. It also depends on the size of the news media outlets; some have more than one gatekeeper while others just have one. In the community-based media, for example, the journalist, who is also an owner of the outlet, is also the gatekeeper. In essence, gatekeepers are the people that make the final decision on which news are seen by the public and which news are not. Vos (2015:17) posits that journalistic objectivity is challenged in this process, but most importantly, making news becomes an organised concept, where gatekeepers can choose what news is and what is not.

According to Şerban (2015:8), gatekeeping is based on two main statements, namely that there are a huge number of activities happening in the world at the same time and that media can only accommodate a few of these happenings due to space and capacity. In order for media to attempt to cover these complex happenings, they created beats, which are specialised areas where journalists can focus on specific stories.

According to Funk (2016:122), journalists find good stories through the beat system, which also helps them to identify stories according to their categories, for instance, crime, politics, government or sport. Şerban (2015:9) submits that the beat system makes it possible for media to easily practice gatekeeping, as each beat has its own

line of editors. Therefore, because there is too much information and media can only cover a portion of it, the audience is exposed to selected news only, which has several levels of influence (Shoemaker & Vos 2014:90).

Gatekeepers are the decision-makers who decide which stories need to be covered and as such, they have the knowledge regarding the selection of certain aspects of reality, which becomes news (Schwarz 2006:46). Some gatekeepers are guided by the norms and standards of their organisations, while others are guided merely by the space and time limit. All media houses have their own set of rules and editorial policies about news selection and approaches. For example, the editorial policy applied by the *Mail & Guardian* is not to be the same as the one applied by the *Sunday Times*.

The newspapers both cover government and politics, but their gatekeeping approach to stories are different. This means that the journalists are forced to abide by a particular code of conduct, which stipulates the do's and don'ts at their specific news platforms. Şerban (2015:9) observes that just as an individual could be forced to learn and get used to a particular lifestyle; journalists can be forced to abide by the principles of a particular news media.

Norms and standards becomes a guide for journalists regarding the type of news articles accepted by a particular news outlet. Such a news outlet can also set specific news values, which also becomes guidelines for their journalists. For example, a newspaper such as the *Mail & Guardian* is more investigative and aims to probe corruption related stories more than other newspapers. Therefore, as Funk (2016:123) indicates, journalists are guided by various principles and codes of conduct, which determines what news is and what non-news is. This way a gatekeeping process becomes focused for that particular news outlet. There is no one-size-fits-all in this process as news outlets differ in influence and policy application.

Funk (2016:123) writes that it is incumbent on the journalists to follow these principles and only then will his or her association with that particular news outlet be confirmed. This further highlights that, as per the gatekeeping theory, whichever story makes it to the newscast comes as a result of a series of debates and decisions made between a journalist and various other media players such as the gatekeepers, who are, in most instances, the editor-producers (Singer 2014:56).

Shoemaker and Vos (2014:90) points out that gatekeeping is divided into five levels of analysis, which begins at the individual, followed by the communication routines, the organisational, the social institutional, and lastly the social system level. According to Shoemaker and Reese (2014:90), the individual level consists of journalists and how they make news. The communication routines level is concern with the actual practices and processes that guide the daily running of news. Shoemaker and Vos (2014:89) concurs that these levels are important as journalists put information they possess through several gates. Shoemaker and Vos (2014:89) also concur that in the media space, gatekeepers are very important.

In the context of this study, though, it can be argued that government communicators and public relations officers also play the role of gatekeepers, as they decide what information is released to the public. Shoemaker and Vos (2014:90) states that in such a process the news becomes a propaganda tool of government, because they can decide what becomes newsworthy. In the context of the South African government, GCIS through SA News has recruited news writers and researchers who criss-cross the country in search of good news from government. While collecting this information, they filter irrelevant news or news that may cause problems for government by focusing on good news that show government as successful. Shoemaker and Vos (2014:91) concurs that gatekeepers within government keep unappealing news from media and the public at large as it would result in negative coverage for government and those involved, who may be in the highest hierarchy of government.

The emergence of social media has made it difficult for gatekeepers to remain the only people who decide on what news is released. These days anyone can propagate news without permission or any form of editorial interference. A breaking story can be shared throughout the world within a matter of seconds through social media. Garimella et al (2018:914) concur that because of social media, unlike in traditional media, anybody can become a gatekeeper as the power lies with whoever breaks news at a particular time. Thus, the work, and in many instances, the power of gatekeepers in the traditional media has become less. Because this is so, traditional media finds itself in a situation where they need to adapt or die.

In order to ensure survival while making sure that their gatekeeping function still makes sense, traditional media has adjusted and has started to make their presence felt in

social media (Paulussen & Harder 2014:543). In addition to this, Tandoc Jr, and Vos (2016:951) concede that the fear of possibly being made redundant by the alternative sources of information, newsrooms have had no choice but to incorporate social media in their work to keep their audience from completely forsaking them. While media is doing this for the sake of survival, authors such as Tandoc (2014:560) posits that media is caught between audience considerations and editorial judgment.

According to Shoemaker and Vos (2009), the theory of gatekeeping places the audience in both the routine and social institution levels of influence. Therefore, the audience's use of social media to disseminate news contributes to social influence. On the other hand, gatekeepers end up being forced to tailor their messages as influenced by audience behaviour through social media (Shoemaker & Vos 2009). Whereas gatekeepers are forced by the current circumstances to satisfy their audience, they still have to apply the concept of newsworthiness in their news gathering approach.

3.9 THE CONCEPT OF NEWSWORTHINESS

Government information is amongst the most important news covered by media. Actually, the biggest percentage of news consists of government news. According to Branston and Stafford (2010), gathering news is not easy as it is a complicated journey involving strict evaluation and selection of a myriad of news stories. Newsgathering includes following various news values and it needs to provoke thinking and interest.

Iggers (2018:5) submits that media is not interested in reporting good news as it does not sell newspapers. This is because as a business, it focuses on selling units to make profit. This implies that there is a greater need for government communicators to realise that media wants stories that sell and not editorials. If the news does not excite, agitate or even exasperate, it is probably an advertorial and thus should be paid for (Weitzer & Kubrin 2004:498). Therefore, communicators must ensure that their stories are newsworthy and that they can be acceptable by any editor. Many organisations and especially those in government fail to get their good news stories covered, not because media has a particular agenda, but because they do not know how to package their stories (Hernandez & Rue 2015:1).

Bednarek and Caple (2017:27) postulates that this state of affairs is exacerbated by the thinking that everything sent to media should successively not only be newsworthy, but should actually make it straight to the front page. This adds to the notion of sunshine journalism, which many organisations seem to believe in. Furthermore, Nolte (2016:49) argues that what makes matters worse are badly written media releases which are in many instances prepared by junior communicators, or sometimes by people who do not know how media and the public relations works.

Harcup and O’neill (2017:1470) found that “identifying and recording the news values found within published pieces of journalism cannot provide a complete explanation of the journalistic process, but that does not mean such a study is without value”. The fact of the matter is, news values are the most important elements in the process of news making and newsgathering.

The news values listed below are without fail direction giving and news-making, according to Harcup and O’neill (2017:1470):

1. **The power elite:** Stories concerning powerful individuals, organisations or institutions.
2. **Celebrity:** Stories concerning people who are already famous.
3. **Entertainment:** Stories concerning sex, show business, human interest, animals, an unfolding drama, or offering opportunities for humorous treatment, entertaining photographs or witty headlines.
4. **Surprise:** Stories that have an element of surprise and/or contrast.
5. **Bad news:** Stories with particularly negative overtones, such as conflict or tragedy.
6. **Good news:** Stories with particularly positive overtones, such as rescues and cures.
7. **Magnitude:** Stories that are perceived as sufficiently significant either in the numbers of people involved or in potential impact.
8. **Relevance:** Stories about issues, groups and nations perceived to be relevant to the audience.

9. **Follow-up:** Stories about subjects already in the news.

10. **Newspaper agenda:** Stories that set or fit the news organisation's own agenda.

In the context of this study the government of South Africa, through GCIS, has in 1998 established SA News, with the aim to do exactly what media has always been calling for, namely, providing well-written and deeply researched government stories. SA News approached well-established writers and journalists who would write these stories. However, as argued by Zoch and Supa (2014:1), it is not enough to make use of well-established writers only, as stories must always consider the element of newsworthiness. Stories from government should be presented well to the desire of the editors.

In her definition of news, Shoemaker (2006:105) points out that the "term news is a primitive construct, one that requires no definition in ordinary conversation, because everyone knows what it is. A primitive construct is so integrated into our lives that we do not question its existence. News is what comes in the newspaper every day. It is what those television and radio news programmes talk about." In addition, Howard and Matthews (2000:5) state that in order for stories to make it to media where everyone is fighting for space and time, they must be very newsworthy as per the standards set by the receiving editors and journalists and not from the perspectives of communicators. This hints that the stories written by government representatives should not only be newsworthy to them, but they must also appeal to the editors and journalists who are going to make use of them.

In order for government communicators to be successful in their communication, they need to understand the terrain in which journalists operate, and this includes understanding the deadlines of various media houses as well as the type of issues that specific media houses focus on. For example, there are media houses that deal with finances; others deal with politics, while others deal with sport. Therefore, it is important to construct stories in such a way that they become relevant to media houses. Understanding the terrain within which journalists operate also calls for communicators to understand the working of the newsroom, the trending topics at a particular time and mainly what journalists and media considers newsworthy at that time.

Zoch and Supa (2014:2) contend that once communicators understand what media sees as newsworthy, they will be able to implement it practically and theoretically. There is a dire need for communicators to visit various newsrooms that they work with as well as to regularly engage them in and outside the working environment. Such approaches are crucial, as they would help the communicators to get to know the journalists and editors better and understand what newsworthiness means to them. Fynes-Clinton (2015:14) concurs that it is very important for the communicators to have efficient plans and operations as the public coffers fund it.

Government, in their communication endeavours, should seek to inform their audience. As a result, as seen by Zoch and Supa (2014:3), the development process of such stories should have the public at the top of the agenda, especially if such information will be relayed via media, as media would first assess if the story has an element of public interest and newsworthiness. Government communicators need to understand which kinds of stories are important in the media's news selection process (Kim & Kreps 2020:1).

The biggest problem regarding stories written by government representatives is that it usually depicts only what government does well. They tell readers what government has achieved in a certain area, but fail to go deeper into pertinent selling points, which is what journalists look for. These stories are a form of propaganda to bring hope and calmness in the country, and most of them are not newsworthy (Zoch & Supa 2014:4).

Phamodi (2016) writes that the transformed public broadcaster in post-apartheid South Africa became a fearless and vibrant independent source of information. Nevill (2018), states that the newly structured SABC with the catchphrase "independence and impartial" keeps its audience, media and commentators happy. The SABC (2020) declares that the public broadcaster was able to grow from a low 14.7% audience share four years ago, to a good 42%. The SABC now runs stories that are sometimes highly critical of government, and only pursue news releases in the interest of the public and not the government. Although government has been trying to persuade media to cover their stories, media insists on stories that are of the interest to them and the public. Stories generated by government should cover all angles so that it can be used as is. The *Mail & Guardian* (2019) states, however, that the quality of government communication is currently on an all-time low as communicators resort to

sending unedited and endless press statements and videos to WhatsApp groups presenting politicians as unblemished and only in a positive light.

Meissner (2015) concurs that although the notion of newsworthiness has been a thorn in the side of politicians and government, media in general continues to state that negative news attracts more of an audience. This proposes that in the eyes of media only “bad news” sells. Negative news provides sensation and drama and fulfils the needs of the audience, and such news creates and evokes interest (Meissner 2015). As long as governments and other institutions provide media with propaganda stories that are primarily one-sided, there will always be issues with coverage. One of the biggest challenges faced by the news media is time and space limitations and it is thus very important for them to make use of gatekeeping principles regarding newsworthy information (Bro 2019). For media to survive as a voice of reason, it must ensure that the concept of sunshine news, predominantly a propaganda tool of governments, should not be considered. The next chapter focuses on the concept of sunshine news. Parks (2018) submits that positive news/journalism is devoid of value and importance to society, as it only includes the kind of “*agh shame*” stories, such as when a firefighter rescues a cat stuck in a tree.

3.10 THE CONCEPT OF SUNSHINE NEWS

Politicians and businesspeople want good publicity in order to be portrayed as great. They depend on such an approach in order to shine. This concept is referred to as sunshine news. The concept of sunshine news has always been used in the South African government setup. This was so even before of the advent of democracy when Government Information Services (GIS) made sure that those under segregation only knew good things about the government. This continued after democracy when SA News, as one of government communication machineries, was introduced. An agency provides media with snapshots of government’s extensive programme of action and how this improves the lives of individuals and communities (DoC 2012:19). This strategy allows government to write their own stories, using their preferred angles and leads. It also gives them control of what goes out into the public domain, and pushing the agenda of a controlled media. Stories that are published on SA News are thoroughly scrutinised so that the story truly represents the position of government.

Nevill (2015) postulates that government of South Africa, under the leadership of former President Jacob Zuma, called for South Africa's media to tell only a "good story" about the country and to not focus on the corruption and crime, that is a feature of life in the country. Government wanted media to practice what is scathingly called "sunshine journalism" and this is unfortunately very different from constructive journalism (Nevill 2015). This suggests that while government of South Africa supports freedom of the press, which implies that media can report what they want, ideally, the government wants to see a media that is supportive of government's programme of action and report only on the positive things.

Constructive news/journalism has a high value to society as it serves a watchdog; it disseminates information, and it alerts the public to threats. However, it does not just focus on the negative, but also puts forward solutions as well. This may be difficult to comprehend by many organisations, especially government. When media reports only good news stories, the public is robbed off their most important necessity, namely information. Where the public is not informed of corruption and maladministration in government, they are not able to voice their concerns, nor make informed decisions during elections. They will not be able to challenge their leaders, as they will not know enough about public affairs.

Wasserman (2017) points out that the South African media should be more aware of the dangers of being a voice for only some, so that they do not peddle sunshine journalism. The author mentions media Freedom Day which marks the day in 1977 when the apartheid government banned two newspapers, the *World* and *Weekend World*, and a church journal, *Pro Veritate*, along with about eighteen black consciousness organisations, and numerous journalists were detained (Wasserman 2017).

According to Wasserman (2017), undivided credit should be given to media, as the South African public would otherwise not have known the mess that the country. The public should be grateful to the tireless efforts of investigative journalists that uncovered widespread corruption brought by the Nkandla and Guptaleaks, and they exposed Bell Pottinger's complicity in stirring up racial tensions. If only sunshine journalism was practiced, the South African public would not have known about it and their impact on the economy and their livelihoods. This further implies that the more

the public knows about such things and the extent in which they can damage the country's reputation, the more they are empowered to voice their concerns through protests or any other form of objection.

As part of pushing the sunshine journalism strategy, Hunter et al (2015), claim that the SABC's journalists and government communicators were told to ensure that former President Jacob Zuma is firmly in the limelight on the public broadcaster's channels. This is after the spin-doctors expressed fear that the African National Congress is losing its propaganda battle. They therefore wanted the SABC to tell government's "good story", and ensure that it shows "positive coverage" of Zuma and the government and is "unapologetic" about it (Hunter et al 2015). In this instance, government made sure that the SABC plays the role of only showing sunshine news from government, since government did not have the power to meddle in the affairs of the commercial media. This was done by ensuring that Hlaudi Motsoeneng, who was seen as pro-government and pro-Zuma, had the powers to stop the airing of bad stories about government which led to the introduction of the 70% good news phenomenon.

A former SABC journalist, Kgaogelo Magolego, recently testified at the inquiry relating to the meddling of editorials by the executive how the former Minister of Communication, Faith Muthambi, interfered with editorial decisions and referred to those who refused to abide by her decisions as EFF moles (Mabotja 2018). It is clear that the former minister's mandate was to ensure that the SABC works in favour of government and only focusses on sunshine news to help government gain popularity.

It is worth noting, however, that the difference between the SABC and SA NEWS is huge. The SABC is the public broadcaster, operating in the interest of the public and should therefore operate independently. Unlike SA NEWS, who publishes only positive news on their website, the SABC interacts directly with the public.

According to Netshitenzhe (2000:13), there is a widespread view held by the new government that media in a new democracy should serve the state by giving them the platform to show only good news. This suggests that the thinking from government is that media should play a patriotic role and help to build the country. In other words, government expects media to act boldly and yet sometimes speak softly in the context

of the fragile new democracy that has emerged after a long period of authoritarian rule (Kuper & Kuper 2001:355). This also implies that the expectations from government is that media knows the history of this country and in order to go forward and rebuild it, they should be sympathetic towards government.

Many governments across Africa continues to criticise media, accusing it of being unpatriotic by focusing on negative reporting, and feeding the international media with slanted information to portray the continent in a bad light. Amongst many of these is South Africa. The fact of the matter is that governments, as with any other organisation, needs good coverage in order to gain respect and trust from stakeholders who are, in this case, the public. In other countries media, when reporting negatively about their government, is constantly under attack or are denied advertising, as they are seen as being anti-government. These governments make use of their public broadcaster to relay their messages to the public.

3.11 CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter gives an overall presentation on the role of media in society. Literature displaying how important media is in influencing the minds of individuals is highlighted, such as Croteau and Hoynes (2018:2), who claim that media is the most important cord that connects society. The chapter also demonstrates how important it is for government to connect with media and use its powers to communicate their programmes with the public. Important theories such as media as a fourth estate are discussed. Authors such as Rodny-Gumede (2017:11) maintain that media must operate as the fourth estate and play a significant role in a democratic state. Gatekeeping as a function of decision-making about which stories are to be covered or not (Schwarz 2006:46) is also discussed.

Shoemaker (2014) maintains that, unlike in authoritarian countries where freedom of speech is non-existent and where the role of media becomes clouded by dictatorship, things are better in democratic societies. In these countries media becomes a fourth estate and gatekeepers play a big role in deciding on news that is values-based. Schwarz (2006:46) concurs that in this case, choosing news that is newsworthy and in the public's interest becomes a process controlled by the gatekeepers.

This chapter also emphasises the ways in which government navigates its way through media world, where political leaders and government communicators continue to leverage available opportunities. This is despite the many instances where media continues to advance their own agenda.

The next chapter deals with media-state relations, particularly media-state relations in South Africa. It draws contributions from many authors who agree that government and media needs each other, especially in a democratic state such as South Africa (Wasserman & De Beer 2005). At the end, the chapter explores the effectiveness of media relations in the context of government communication.

CHAPTER 4: MEDIA-STATE RELATIONS IN SOUTH AFRICA

4.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter looks at media-state relations in general, with an in-depth look at the South African context. This chapter also focusses on the theoretical framework of the study.

A discussion is also held about the working relationship between media and government, which is sometimes awkward, but there is a need for the two to co-exist (Tabane 2015).

Government communication and whether this can be viewed as public information, to keep the public informed, or whether it is just a propaganda ploy, is examined. Debates from various authors are presented with some, such as Brown (2003:230), stating that government communicators normally lead the public information ploys that can be viewed as propaganda by some in society.

Aspects such as media landscape, that is an overview of media ownership in the country, and aspects such as media audience, which speaks to issues such as different cultural backgrounds in South Africa, are also discussed.

Further discussed are issues pertaining to press freedom, the current state of media relations in the country, public interest versus national security, state capture as well as media capture.

The effects of social media on government and media is scrutinised, with authors such as Dlamini and Johnston (2018:199) noting that the South African government and media are amongst many other organisations that have no choice but to opt for the use of social media, as this is to their advantage.

The chapter concludes with a discussion on the effectiveness of media relations, which is the most important element for any organisation's success Bland et al (2005:5).

4.2 MEDIA-STATE RELATIONS

Researchers such as Netshitomboni (2007:1) and Deane (2015:265) assent that in a democratic state, media is the most trusted channel of communication by governments. This is because media is used to inform the public about political developments to guide public opinion about political decisions, and to express different views about political developments and decisions (Prot et al 2015:2).

One of the most critical elements of the relationship with media is that professional communicators have to draft communication policies supporting the prioritisation of media relations (Chen 2008:39). For governments to succeed in making use of media there has to be some form of relationship between the two parties. This relationship has an impact on how the public views government as well as media, but most importantly, how they elect their leaders (Fynes-Clinton 2015:14). For example, a decision to vote for a particular party is influenced by the news received from media (Tresch et al 2013:897).

Takens et al (2015:250) state that media has made it possible for political leaders to be known by their followers and it makes it easy for them to choose whom to vote into power. The relationship between the government communicators and media goes a long way and thus deserves to be studied thoroughly (Pearson & Patching 2008:4). A non-existent relationship between the two parties could be disastrous and has the potential to poison society. In essence, it is important for media to exist in order to hold government accountable (Zelizer 2004:3), while government uses media to relay their messages to an informed public.

DeLorme and Fedler (2003:100) maintain that the basis of the relationship between media and communicators is mainly the perceived credibility of the communicator as a source of information, because media depends on such a person to get information from the organisation. However, Kim and Yang (2008:49) argue that while this may be the case, there is a greater need for organisations to create a tight relationship with media in order to influence what goes out in the public domain. Croteau and Hoynes (2018:2) postulate that while it is understood that the two parties will always be at loggerheads, it is in the interest of both to work together as one cannot operate without the other.

Makinana (2013) observes that the former president of South Africa, Jacob Zuma, expressed that during a discussion he held with media owners it was clear to him that their interest is to make profit no matter how they report. This resulted in many squabbles between the two parties as government felt victimised. This is because media became free from the oppression of the past in 1994 and gained momentum to criticise government without any fear whatsoever. Consequently, as seen by Netshitomboni (2007:1), the political leaders, especially those from the ruling ANC, became worried that there is a trend from media of avoiding reporting on the good deeds done by the government and only focusing on the negative things.

Hadland (2013:34) submits that this was because expectations from government about how media should report became too high and it affected the overall relationship between the press and government. Schneider (2020:8) concedes that while media freedom in South Africa has been better since 1996, there are disturbing instances where government used the State Security Agency to spy on some journalists and tap their phones, while others were being harassed and subjected to intimidation for covering the ruling party negatively.

According to Daniels (2019), the country was placed at a satisfactorily level when it comes to media freedom and this is because, while media and government continues to have a cordial relationship, they simply do not agree in many ways. This is so because regardless of numerous good deeds by government, not many of them have been reported about. Instead, “there was also a perception that media seem to enjoy highlighting stories of perceived black incompetence and that ANC leaders were not receiving fair media coverage” (Netshitomboni 2007:1).

There is no denying that the two parties need each other. However, they are both fighting to protect their territories, and this is centred on media’s public interest vis-à-vis government’s national interest (Wasserman & De Beer 2005). These two concepts have given birth to too many altercations between media and government to a point where, in many countries, media is not allowed to report on anything they want to. For instance, in South Africa, as Wasserman (2010) sees it, the role of media is influenced by problems of the past as well as the challenges of the present, which came with the new era.

Canel and Sanders (2012:92) posit that it is not surprising that there will always be a scuffle between government and media, since government communication happens in a mediated environment. The bond between these two, although very necessary, will always be an issue as they share different views, but one audience. Couldry (2008:374) concurs that media is focussed on seeing itself at work, which makes it easy for the public and all media users alike to have a clear comprehension on how media operates.

Media plays a vital role in government communication and it will be disastrous if one day we wake up to find all media houses gone. It is through media that the public learn about how government plans to fight crime, unemployment and other related social aspects. However, media chooses suitable ways in which to package its news and it is not always to government's liking. Whichever way it is packaged though, the fact remains that it will reach the ears of the most important stakeholder in the value chain, namely the public.

The two parties are in this relationship for self-interested reasons, which often clash. As seen by Canel and Sander (2012:88), "generally speaking, politicians seek control, journalists seek novelty and revelation." It is for this reason that the two continue to clash as they have differing motives. While this is the case, both parties need to maintain the relationship. For example, media needs accurate and regular information from government communicators. Government cannot do without media and media cannot do without government and, as described by Tabane (2015), the relationship between government and media is one characterised by rigidity; it sometimes looks like one is dancing a foxtrot while the other is dancing a tango, often awkward, while dancing together.

The relationship between these two parties goes beyond greetings and phone calls, as the information flow between government and society depends heavily on a functional and free media within a given country. Media should be accorded the freedom to operate freely in order to perform optimally. Once media is free to operate, it will also feel the need to cooperate with government. For instance, once China realised the importance of media relations and the effectiveness of this relationship in information dissemination, it consequently switched from the forceful propaganda style of media treatment to a modern public relations approach (Zhang 2012:684).

In an ideal situation, therefore, it is important for governments to capacitate its government communicators to be able to relate with media professionally while upholding the integrity of the offices they represent. This capacitation may take the form of training on various elements such as social media use, writing for media, dealing with media, and how to conduct interviews and related aspects. Similar skills are expected of public office bearers who, in many instances, are politicians who conduct interviews and interact with media.

Media relations can assist government in their messaging while the public would access the much-needed government information on a regular basis. In instances where a country is faced with disasters, government can rely on media to disseminate important information to the public. Such information, if carried through properly and speedily, may save lives while allowing the public to trust and have confidence in their government.

Events of the magnitude such as COVID-19, “natural disasters as well as major accidents and terrorist activities, create an intense and immediate need for information regarding what happened, who is in danger, and what is being done” (Veil 2012: 290). Consequently, where government has good relations with media, such information can flow out easily to the relevant public, as media would be encouraged to play their part in the country. However, in instances where media relations with government are strained, information about disasters can become very difficult to obtain and relay to the public. This has the potential to lead to rumours or fake news, which may be dangerous to the members of the public (Veil 2012:290).

It is incumbent of government to foster the relationship with media, as it will allow for a smooth working cooperation between the two. As a result, if the relationship is prioritised and media is given time and space to work, the public would be informed at all times. Furthermore, the public would also see the need to engage their government through media and offer their advice where necessary. This in turn will help government in particular. A professional communication relationship with media has the potential to create an environment where there is a participatory public response to government issues (Delli Carpini & Keester 2002:129).

By using the phrase “in the public interest” media is able to argue that their reporting is in line with the public’s right to know about their government and its affairs. They are therefore empowered to prioritise this notion in order to report fully on government affairs. In South Africa, such robust reporting has however continually enraged the already fractured relationship between media and government. As seen by Maunder (2012), many senior officials in government grumble that media is not playing their critical role of building the country as a brand.

Gelders and Ihlen (2010:3) maintain that the biggest achievement of a government communicator will be to foster a working relationship between government and media while ensuring a concrete relationship. Therefore, as found by Garland et al (2018:496), government will always position media in an integrated long-term plan through which they can be used as a vehicle to interact with society. It is therefore critical for the government communicators to engage regularly with media and understand them deeply. Taylor (2000:3) concurs that government communicators need to prioritise media relations since media have control over information that goes out to the public.

4.3 GOVERNMENT MEDIA RELATIONS AS PROPAGANDA

Government communication is a public relations manoeuvre where government wants to give the public information on developments that is fair and balanced (Vandebosch 2004:5). However, this is always a challenge, especially for media, as it views government news as only highlighting the good deeds, which seeks only to calm the nation rather than to provoke their thinking. Brown (2003:230) concurs that government communicators normally lead these public relation ploys, which is also viewed as propaganda. However, this often results in a disagreement between media and government. It stems from government’s perseverance to seek favourable coverage while media maintains that it needs stories that are newsworthy.

Garland et al (2018:496) argue that although the two may disagree at all times, government is influenced by what media does. According to Zoch and Supa (2014:4), it is not enough to resort to making use of well-established writers, as stories written by those responsible for public information must always consider the element of newsworthiness.

According to Liu et al (2012:293), government must communicate issues of national importance to the public in a manner that is effective yet timeous. While doing this, government is forced by circumstances to bring calmness in the country and by so doing, ends up spinning the news or resorting to the use of propaganda messages. Hoynes et al (2012:2) submit that the process of spinning the news involves making use of diffusion, which is used to garner support from the audience. By so doing, government shares only half of the news with the public and in most cases, only news that is positive.

The news is usually delivered by the public relations experts whose mandate is to ensure that government speaks only news that bring hope to the public, as media knows all too well (Hoynes et al 2012:2). It is therefore fitting to assume that since governments throughout the world have a responsibility to communicate with the public, they do so mostly in order to push a particular propaganda messages. These governments make use of various propaganda messages in order to influence the public. One critical channel favoured by these governments is media, as they are easily accessible by the public and allows them to make decisions on critical aspects of life (Morka & Okere 2020:103).

It is not easy to spot propagandists or a propaganda-driven message at first glance and in many instances, they go unnoticed. One of the tactics which gained popularity is the phrase “fake news” and this has been making rounds in media space since 2016 (Vargo et al 2018:2028). According to Google Trends (2017), the public uses the search engine, Google more and more. What makes it difficult to deal with this concept is that even media has not been able to proactively fight fake news (Vargo et al 2018:2028). Therefore, governments can always use this as a propaganda tool as they can always indicate that what was reported was actually fake news. What makes this worse is that even media is vulnerable to its influence (Collins 2016).

In many instances, propagandists do not realise that they are doing it. For example, government spokespersons are trusted to communicate issues that are meant to bring harmony in the country at all times. They are hence careful and selective in their communication to ensure that what comes out represents government in a good way. This is propaganda, as they only select news that is good while omitting negative news.

Watson and Hill (2015:159) found that governments realised that there is certain information that must be controlled. This suggests that through the power of propaganda, governments are able to limit how much the public knows about their surroundings, in order to protect them. This further suggests that the less the public know about their surroundings, the better, as they can be easily influenced in their daily lives. Hanson (2016) espouses that this approach has been applied throughout the world by governments.

Accordingly, propaganda and the limiting of news to the public enables government to control the public by allowing them to access news that is only positive (Benkler et al 2018). During World War II, as seen by Hanson (2016), only images of soldiers hugging their wives and children were commonly used to attract more participation from young men. This way it was clear that propaganda does happen between not only government and its people between a government and another government. One case in point is the toppling of former Egyptian leader, Hosni Mubarak, where it was implied that the public toppled the leader, while it was actually the army who did it (El-Khalili, 2013). This propaganda tactic made it possible for many throughout the world to believe that the public has the power to remove a leader they do not want. Boyd-Barrett (2015) substantiates therefore that the act of propaganda can go beyond government.

In many instances, government messages have good intentions; however, the opposition parties especially always see it as propaganda. This enables opposition parties to boast about what they could do differently should they be given the chance to run the country. This, alas, diminishes the initial intention of communication, which exists to ensure that members of the public are kept abreast of the achievements of their government. Cheeseman (2020) posits that opposition parties have had enough of being defeated and are now taking matters into their own hands, and the best way to do it is to launch campaigns to discredit the ruling party's message, calling it propaganda. According to *Citizen* (2020), both the Democratic Alliance and the Economic Freedom Fighters have accused the ANC of planning to spend R50 million in a propaganda plot targeted at disempowering them during 2016 local government elections. The ANC hit back, accusing the opposition parties of using propaganda tactics and grandstanding to gain votes. Gerber (2019) also states that the ANC did not take the Democratic Alliance's criticism of the National Health Insurance (NHI)

lightly, calling it another form of grandstanding and twisting its message into propaganda. The ANC has slammed the DA for sending its former leader on a trip to Israel, calling it a propaganda tactic and accused the party of not standing in solidarity with Palestine (Gallens, 2017).

One of the most critical elements that governments have considered and prioritised is the trust the audience usually gives to media. In fact, the audience believe what media says more than what government says. Perse and Lambe (2016:1) agrees that the public trusts media more than their own government. Due to this, many governments have prioritised the use of propaganda strategies through the use of media in order to attract the audience that only receive media messages because they do not have an alternative (Sha & Meyer 2002:63). This suggests that governments can use the power that media have over society to their advantage and advance its agenda. This also implies that government is only interested in delivering positive information. In some countries, governments have introduced laws that limit the freedom of media and as such, they control what goes out in the public space to influence the minds and opinions of the public. A case in point is the then Ecuadorian president, Rafael Correa, who in 2011, sued Ecuador's largest paper, *El Universo*, for criminal , for criticising him about how he handled the police uprising that turned deadly, and referred to him as "the dictator," (Kellam & Stein 2016:2). This made it difficult for other media houses in Ecuador to report freely and to criticise government in fear for being arrested or taken out of business (House 2018:2). According to Hearn (2016:16), such governments' main strategy is to maintain their position of authority and keep control over the narrative of events to guide public opinion, and this is done chiefly through the prioritising of propaganda.

Whenever government speaks, it does so to deliver a message of hope while illustrating that things are running smoothly. Even during disasters such as 911 in the US and the Tsunami in Mozambique, for example, government communication machinery functioned with the aim of bringing hope and calmness in those countries. In South Africa, for example, during the reign of former President Jacob Zuma, the government communication machinery was used to protect the president during the Nkandla scandal. According to Ponono (2019), media peddled the Nkandla debacle and it was expected that the ANC would lose the elections after being forced to go into

the elections with this blight. However this was not so, as every government communication effort was used to whitewash the allegations. Media was accused of conducting a witch-hunt on the president and this idea was sold to the public. In fact, the ruling party, using propaganda tactics through government communication platforms, made sure to cast Zuma as the “victim of political conspiracy”, (*Daily Dispatch* 2014). Although the Nkandla scandal was later exposed, the fact of the matter is that government attempted to cover up the issue by selling a good story to the unsuspecting members of the public.

Government communicators contend that their communication with the public is merely a form of keeping them abreast of the happenings within the country they live in. They further argue that they communicate in order to educate and encourage the public to participate in the programmes that enable the country to grow. As Sha and Meyer (2002:64) submit, governments argue that the greatest aim in their communication endeavours is to ensure that the public is informed and not necessarily to feed them propaganda. This is expected, since propaganda has been viewed the world over as influencing audiences to believe something they would not ordinarily believe. Propaganda may be viewed as either positive or negative communication efforts (Sha & Meyer 2002:64), in that the suggestions made by propagandists may be to the benefit or detriment of the audience. However, in many cases, those associated with propaganda do not differ much from those that perpetuate lies (Brennen 2017:179).

The notion of propaganda is worsened by the nature of the political spectrum in many democracies where political parties are given a specific amount of years to run the country (Jowett & O'Donnell 2018:2). In this process the ruling party would, as an obvious fact, come up with any form of propaganda in order to persuade voters to grant them another chance (Woolley & Howard, 2018). Politicians would in many instances make use of government communication platforms as a way of illustrating what they have done during their term of office and what the shortfalls were. They would also make use of these platforms to encourage voters to give them a second chance so that they improve on the shortfalls (Stanley 2015:27). Many pundits have however questioned who actually funds the political parties in their lobbying, as the suspicion is that some of the resources may be from government. Hence experts such

as February (2016), asks who exactly pays for all the ruling party's rallies, interviews, opinion pieces, posters and free t-shirts, all of which amount to pure propaganda and persuasion.

The use or better yet, the misuse of resources by ruling parties in pursuit of propaganda is not uncommon. It has been seen as a way to take stock of what the ruling party has done and what else needs to be done. February (2016) argues that it is easy if you are the party in government to host large scale gatherings as "report back" sessions in communities under the guise of just doing the work of government and not electioneering as such. In South Africa, for example, food parcels have been a familiar way in which the ANC has garnered support over successive elections. In other instances, government also makes use of bulk buying of airtime and advertising space to report on the progress of various programmes of action. Politicians with the hopes that media would heed the call to deliver some sort of a progress report of the five years in power, would arrange media conferences.

The South African government makes use of SA NEWS as a propaganda platform. According to GCIS (2018:12), the agency "was established to provide quick and easy access to articles and feature stories aimed at keeping the public informed about the implementation of government's mandate." This platform was created with an aim of being a direct link between government and media. Government writers would draft articles and place them on the agency's website, with the hope that media would pick them up and write about them. This can be viewed as a propaganda approach rather than a pure communication approach, as only success stories from government are placed on the website. Apart from this, the South African government also established another alternative avenue of delivering messages to the public by launching a fortnightly newspaper called *Vuk'uzenzele*, which spreads government news in all nine provinces for free (DoC 2012:14). The writers from SA News would coincide with those of this government owned newspaper and share government-owned stories. Government knows that such a platform has the potential to deliver clean messages from its perspective and is meant to provide progress reports on all their projects. To ensure that these stories are captured correctly, senior members from government would check them for accuracy.

Williams (2013:13) concurs that South Africans have begun to receive a wider range of information about government services, policies and plans across a broad range of communication platforms such as SA News and *Vuk'uzenzele*. The critical question remains whether this communication machinery is essentially a propaganda tool or is merely viewed as such by the commentators and observers who have other sinister motives. Can government communication be free of self-interest in the interest of the public?

Answering this question is not a simple task and requires a deeper analysis of the phenomenon. The fact that government typically has issues when media uncovers embarrassing things such as corruption, scandals and the likes, leaves much to be desired. In addition, by trying against all odds to defend such scandals, even where they are clearly indefensible, it leaves one with so many more questions than answers. Sha and Meyer (2002:64) posit that, similarly to when the previous governments would use propaganda during the days of war, there is no reason why today's government cannot not use public communication campaigns to encourage its people to behave in ways that political leaders perceive to be socially desirable, or to educate the population, thus acting as propagandist.

4.3.1 NATIONAL SECURITY AS PROPAGANDA

Government and media are always engaged in conflict. For example, the South African government argues that media should tone down their negative coverage, as some of its reporting may compromise the national security of the country. When media asks for information of a sensitive nature, it is often told that such is of national importance and thus cannot be shared with media (Banks 2016:513). The government of South Africa has since highlighted that media is not working with them to uplift the country and to transform society (Maunder 2012). Instead, they focus their attention on issues that may hamper the security of the country and that of the public (Yoon 2015:5). Government argues that media should work with them since they communicate easily with the public and, through this information dissemination; they also draw benefit from the public and government. Therefore, media should help government to find its feet without questioning anything. Government and, in this case, the ruling party, expects media to support its political agenda and ideology. Media's view is that of reporting on stories as they appear so that the public can be allowed to

judge for themselves (Fourie 2007:244). In addition, as seen by Steel (2012), it is wrong to perceive media as a pure government mouthpiece as it exists to do the opposite.

Government often has the powers to restrict or limit the media's criticism, citing national security. Media in turn assumes a surveillance role on behalf of society. Therefore, tensions between government and media is natural and to be expected. This discord resulted in pressure on many black editors and journalists in South Africa to remember where the country comes from by defending the gains of April 1994 and to act in the "national interest" by supporting the current regime (Jacobs 1999). Government further took actions, some of which include the recent proposal of the Protection of Information Bill and Media Appeals Tribunal, which, according to media practitioners, if passed into law, will mark the end of critical, independent and investigative journalism in South Africa in favour of censorship (Seokoma 2010).

The next section takes a look at the South African media landscape, in particular media ownership in the country. Media-state relations are narrowed down to the South African context, where a thorough study is made of how the South African government and media relate with one another on a daily basis.

4.4 MEDIA-STATE RELATIONS (THE SOUTH AFRICAN CONTEXT/CASE)

This section examines media landscape in the South African context. It discusses the ownership of various media platforms before and after 1994. It also discusses how ownership of these media houses has influenced the relationship between media and government. The chapter also touches on press freedom in the country, amid proposals of a media tribunal, which are yet to be considered by cabinet.

4.4.1 MEDIA LANDSCAPE IN SOUTH AFRICA

South Africa has a fair amount of media outlets that are able to cater for the public in a reasonable way although more can still be done on this front in order to create a little competition. Audiences still only have a few choices of media that they can call their favourites. For example, the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC) offers radio services in eleven official languages. This makes them the biggest consumed media in the country. This is because even the most remote members of the public can access these services. These services can also reach the illiterate members of

the public as they broadcast in indigenous languages (SABC, 2020). The SABC also provides a number of television channels, namely SABC 1, 2, 3 and SABC News Channel, all of which offer a daily dose of hard and soft news, drama, kiddies' programmes and many others, for the benefit of a wider audience (SABC 2020).

With the SABC recently bringing in a 24-hours news channel, offering a variety of news, it was able to also play a competing role with the likes of eNCA and Newzroom Afrika (News24 2013). The programmes provided on these channels range from politics, sports, entertainment, food and international analysis. Icasa has since issued various licences, which gave rise to the likes of eNCA as well as the recently launched Newzroom Afrika (Cilliers 2019). The free to air channel, e.tv, also has a role to play when it comes to the news arena, with its primetime space for all viewers to enjoy (Mochiko 2017).

The introduction of SABC's 24-hour news channel has, however, not allayed the doubts still held by many commentators about the broadcaster's independence. The SABC receives revenue through adverts and television licences amongst other means. While this is so, the national broadcaster recently requested a bailout of about R3.2bn from government (Magubane 2019). It was paid half in 2019, with the remaining amount of R1.1 billion paid in the beginning of 2020 (Business Tech 2020). While this is so, President Cyril Ramaphosa recently announced that government will ensure the independence of the SABC and that bailouts will not interfere with it in any way (Kimani, 2019). Added to this is the recent announcement by the ANC reiterating that the independence of the SABC must be protected against any outside influence, be it political or commercial (Mabuza 2018). Meanwhile, other commentators indicate that it is difficult to believe that the same SABC will bite the hand that feeds it by reporting negatively on government affairs. Nevertheless, many others indicate that it is necessary to give the national broadcaster a chance, especially with its new slogan, "independent and impartial" (Nevill 2018).

South Africa has also done well in the print media space. Although there has not been much growth since of the inception of the new democracy, there has been a significant growth in the tabloid market, with the recent emergence of *Daily Sun*, *Sunday Sun* and the likes (Media Club South Africa, 2018). According to OMD Media facts (2019) there are 21 daily newspapers, 27 major weeklies, 660 consumer magazines, 735 business-

to-business publications, 470 community newspapers and magazines, 92 television stations, 137 radio stations, and over 65 DStv audio channels. This amounts to a sizeable number of media, especially when looking at a population of just over 50 million. Further, as found by Media Club South Africa (2018), there is about 10.9% of internet users per 100 people, 8.5% of which are using personal computers, while 72.4% of them are subscribed on their cell phones. Regarding news consumption, it is estimated that at least 49% of adults in South Africa consume news in their daily lives, making them one of the most informed publics in Africa (Media Club South Africa, 2018). This is largely based on ease of access to news by the public and media's freedom of expression. What puts the South African public at an advantage is that even the poorest communities can access important information from their government and elsewhere using community media (GCIS 2020:8). As seen by SA News (2019), government, through the Minister in the Presidency, Jackson Mthembu, used community media houses for government communication and this is a living proof that government is playing its part to support the growth of the country while ensuring that the poorest of the public are kept informed.

The South African government makes use of various publications, which are distributed through various Thusong Centres throughout the country as part of developmental communication (GCIS 2020:7). Amongst these publications is *Vuk'uzenzele*, which according to the South African government, has become an unapologetic medium for government stories to be transmitted to the public. This came as part of the South African government's strategy to win the hearts of their audience. *Vuk'uzenzele* remains a vehicle for government to provide reliable and timely information to the public about government services, policies and plans (Williams, 2013:13). Government also makes use of SA NEWS, also a news agency of government, where media, the public and key stakeholders can access news from government with a click of a button.

It is difficult not to assume that a large chunk of media in South Africa will support the white political parties. Also difficult to comprehend is how they would employ all their expensive resources and support a black-led government fully while they can simply criticise or just watch silently. Wasserman (2020) maintains that while the South African media played an important political and social role in the two and a half

decades since the end of apartheid, it also voiced its views on the black-led government.

Voltmer (2010:137) submits that media frequently gets involved in conflict, as they try to balance profit, democracy, transformation and a new South Africa under a black leader. Having benefited from new constitutional assurances of freedom of expression and protection, media saw an opportunity to play its part in democratic discussions while at the same time playing a watchdog role, something the ruling African National Congress still battles to come to terms with up until today (Wasserman, 2020). Therefore, the connection between media-state relations, conflict, democratisation and society has become an important field of scholarly research (Voltmer et al 2019:36).

Naspers indicates that all the newspapers in their group are impartial and serve the public (Mosime, 2014), but what is felt on the ground is different. Firstly, during the build-up toward the 1994 and 2004 elections, there was a clear contradiction in media coverage. During the 1994 elections, the African National Congress, a party led by former president Nelson Mandela who was the first democratically elected president of the country, received quite favourable coverage. This was influenced by the fact that media needed a change from the apartheid regime to a new era. Although this did not necessarily mean that they would automatically be in full support of a black-led government, they did this in order to escape sanctions as well as other punitive measures experienced during the days of apartheid in South Africa.

In 2004, when South Africa held its third democratic election, most English-language titles supported the Democratic Party (Silke & Schrire 1994:122), which included “the biggest newspaper company in the country, Independent Newspapers.” The favourable reporting towards the Democratic Party became evident although owners denied that their reporting is influenced by their political affiliation. Although Hadland (2007:34) argues that the South African media has become increasingly reluctant to nail its political colours to the mast in the post-1994 period, evidence states otherwise. For example, the big media players in South Africa whose audience are the elite and educated have produced news agendas that are attractive to consumers and advertisers and these include holding the ruling party to account, (Wasserman, 2020). To this end, all leaders of the ruling party have had a tough encounter with media, with

some calling for them to be regulated. This was so because media continued its role as critical and a watchdog of a democratic government, while government wanted it to be on their side (Wasserman, 2020).

The next section deals with South Africa's complex media audience due to its diverse cultures, languages and traditions.

4.4.2 SOUTH AFRICA'S MEDIA AUDIENCE

With its diverse cultures and groups, there is no doubt that the South African media audience is amongst the toughest in the world (Versi, 2017). South Africa has one of the most unequal societies in the world, but democracy demands that all the people in the country need to be recognised (Webster 2019). That is, when government disseminates information, everyone, including those on the periphery of the country should hear and receive the message (DoC 2020:12). Therefore, as seen by Wasserman (2020), the South African media audience can be reached by three tiers of media, which are public media, commercial media and community media. Although this is so, media audience in the country, especially those in the commercial media, have shown their reception and participation in media space. Gil de Zúñiga et al (2014:613) concur that the audience of today is an active audience as sharing of political information has become an increasingly important aspect.

Although the post-1994 government made strides for every culture and group to gain access to many things, including its own media, this has become increasingly difficult to comprehend (Lieberman 2019). The South African audience, consisting largely of a black majority, most of whom voted in the 1994 elections, continuously find it difficult to access or participate in media space (Mail & Guardian 2019).

Ross and Playdon (2017) submit that one way or the other a conversation needs to be held about race, minority, media and audience, where many feel that they are still being portrayed differently, negatively or not at all. Nightingale (2013) argues that the concept of audiences has shifted from the focus purely on media and audiences to ratings and how media influences business.

According to Pillay et al (2006:40), in areas with the lowest amount of media access the levels of support for the ANC and the degree of trust in which people hold the

formal political institutions are very high. This is because a large portion of these audiences cannot read and write and the only form of media they can access is radio, which is only accessible in their mother tongue. These audiences are mainly pensioners who believe that the ANC is the only government in the country capable of understanding their challenges, primarily because the party is led by blacks who liberated them from apartheid. While this is so, Malila and Garman (2016:65) argue that the South African media audience is changing, especially with the so-called born-frees, who question the status quo and, unlike the older population, are playing their part as an audience.

According to Malila and Garman (2016: 65), “the youth were also at the forefront of many of the xenophobic attacks that took place in South Africa during 2008.” They suggest that they have chosen to become an audience that listens and wants to be heard. Malila (2019:91) concurs that these and many other tactics made it possible for the South African media and even the political landscape at large to prioritise the voices of the youth, elite, middleclass South Africans and everyone else, instead of only themselves. Lacey states that, “listening is at the heart of what it means to be in the world, to be active, to be political” (2013: 163). Therefore, more time should be given to listening to the audience than just merely bombarding them with information.

Hadland (2007:34) contends that the majority of parties continue to enjoy the bigger portion of the pie in the South African media scenario, and that the minority interests are not represented by specific newspaper titles or particular television channels. Bosch (2016:159) brings another element to the fore, namely that while minority interests are being represented, the majority is being kept in the dark and this has led to a lot of confusion, with many deciding to engage in service delivery protests. This has led to a situation where many South Africans, especially those in the rural areas, continued to see government enjoying coverage, while there was nothing to show on the ground. The continued triple challenges of unemployment, poverty and inequality, coupled with lack of housing, water and sanitation, electricity, corruption and municipal administration, health and crime, became a daily occurrence (Pieterse & Van Donk 2013:99). The audiences’ participation in the protests about service delivery is a way of showing that they also want to be heard and be consulted so that they can play a role in building their country and be active participants.

4.4.3 PRESS FREEDOM IN SOUTH AFRICA

Daniels (2019) indicates that the World Press Freedom Index places the South Africa country at a satisfactorily level. However, it is not where it is supposed to be when considering the length of time the country has been a democratic state. According to House (2017), South Africa has a huge and diverse media, and it has support from various press freedom organisations. However, concerns about press freedom has always been present due to government's constant interference in media space.

Plaut (2018:152) submits that the hope and promises that the South African media would be better off after the installation of a democratic state has never materialized. Nonetheless, it is important to note that, while there is still a lot that needs to be done, more has been done in the democratic South Africa concerning press freedom than in other African countries (Daniels 2020). While this is so, there are still instances where journalists have been intimidated and harassed for covering certain subjects involving the ruling party and the government (Phakathi 2019). Through the freedom of the press, the feeling of social responsibility and duty are easily evoked in individual's lives.

According to Van der Bank (2014:265), media freedom has the capability to build a stable society, one that feels involved and wants to participate. In places where media freedom does not exist, society and media are reluctant to voice opinions. Freedom of press can be a very good thing for democracy (Nkundakozera 2012:1). In South Africa, for example, although more still needs to be done, media has been able to operate fairly well. As watchdogs, media is able to hold the South African government accountable (Wasserman 2017). Media is also held accountable through both statutory and self-regulation (Jordan 2012). While South Africa may not be where it wants to be in terms of press freedom, the country should be proud as it scores quite high as compared to its BRICS partners, or even the US and UK, where media freedom was considered beacons of hope in the past (Ebrahim 2019).

Players in the media space still feel that the country can do better in terms of media freedom. Some feel that the country continues to drop its standing, having experienced its worst drop in the press freedom ranking from 31 to 44 between 2005 to 2006, and only improved its ranking again to 36 in 2008 (Media Club South Africa, 2018). Plaut

(2018:152) concurs that South Africa has been dropping in press freedom rankings due to the decline in media-state relations, which include the fact that access to information by media has been slow and is often hampered by bureaucracy. In addition, in only a few cases have access to information applications resulted in full disclosure of information due to the continued restrictions many governments, particularly around Africa, continue to have over media (Conroy-Krutz & Sanny 2019:3).

Granting that there are many pieces of legislations and documents that support media and its freedom of expression in South Africa, these appear to be good on paper but not very visible on the ground (Kruger 2017). These include the Promotion of Access to Information Act, which provides for access to any information held by the State or private person, while also allowing for freedom of the press (GCIS 2020:8).

4.5. CURRENT STATE OF MEDIA RELATIONS IN SOUTH AFRICA

The DoC (2019:14) submits that GCIS, through the National Communication System Framework (NCSF) ensures that the mandate of government is communicated to the South African population as frequently and honestly as possible. In the context of this study, the South African government, through GCIS and SA NEWS maintains a relationship with media. They do this by holding periodic media engagements aimed at sharing news from the perspective of government (GCIS 2020:9). This news becomes part of the government's propaganda, as they only carry information that puts government in the limelight. Taylor (2000:4) postulates that the relationship between government and media has to focus on more than just the relaying of news releases and opinion pieces. It has to be further extended so that both parties can understand each other and can be able to reach common goals (DoT 2019:14). Although it is quite difficult for the two to agree, as they have differing mandates, it is expected that the two should have a proper working relationship.

Kim and Yang (2008:242) submit that in order to win the public relations battle, "organisations need to develop an effective function of media relations while also cultivating and managing positive relationships with media as one of the key factors of excellence in public relations." DeLorme and Fedler (2003:100) express that the basis of the relationship between media and communicators is based on the communicator.

This is because media depends on such a person to extract information from the organisation. Guo and Wei (2019:39) postulate that communicators need to be as organised as possible and ensure that media is flooded with information. Kang et al (2018:202) submit that in many governments, the public depends on government to survive and this is why communicators must use media optimally to disseminate government news.

Wasserman and De Beer (2005) observe that media-state relations in South Africa has not been the greatest since 1994. Johnson (1994) found that during apartheid, mainstream print media pushed the ideological thinking of the apartheid state, and this happened not because they wanted to, but because they needed to survive. Danso and McDonald (2001:115) state that even just after the end of apartheid in 1994, and where there were a number of black owned media and journalists, media-state relations did not evolve as it should have. However, while the new government kept on criticising media for not helping in nation building, other authors such Zegeye and Harris (2003:3), disagreed as they state that media not only became a public information channel, but it helped to convey identities and interests of different social groups, especially in 1994 when it was seriously needed. While this is so, Chuma et al (2017:104) postulate that the bad relationship between media and the state emanates from the dark days of apartheid when, amongst other things, the government banned *World* and *Weekend World* and a church journal, *Pro Veritate*, along with eighteen black consciousness organisations.

It is understood that media exists mainly to hold government accountable and to communicate information, which is essentially intended to build the nation (Bertrand 2018:7). While this is the case, in many instances media is nevertheless blamed for anything that goes wrong. Maunder (2012) points out that government of South Africa has since highlighted that media is not working with them in trying to uplift the country and transform society. These assertions emanate from the expectation that since media is able to communicate easily with the public and that they draw profit from the public, they should help government in its communication quest (Britton 2015).

Fourie (2007:245) expands that the problem is that media openly criticises government for not performing, thereby threatening their power and popularity. Government expects media to support them and their political agenda and ideology; while media

argues that, its mandate is to report the facts of stories as they happen so that the public can judge for themselves (Fourie 2007:245). In addition, the South African government expects media to safeguard the gains from democracy, which has a far-reaching impact on the freedom of speech and, by extension, the freedom of the press (Steel 2012).

Conflict between the South African government and media seems to have become more intense after the instalment of the ANC led government in 1994. Netshitomboni (2007:2) submits that after the dispensation of this government there was a general feeling that media only display and pursue stories that show black leaders as incompetent and unworthy to lead the country. A former political leader, Nelson Mandela, indicated that this might be due to that fact that media is dominated by whites, (Mandela 1994). Added to this is the belief of Mandela's successor, Thabo Mbeki, that media perpetuates colonial stereotypes of Africans (Mbeki, 2003). Thabo Mbeki's successor, Jacob Zuma, also had quarrels with media, (Makinana 2013). The former political leader launched a scathing attack on the South African media, saying that their reporting is so negative that he sometimes felt like fleeing the country. South Africa's current president, Cyril Ramaphosa, has been touted as a darling of media, because of his broad smile and always acknowledging members of media by name (Bratt 2017).

There are conflicting views on media's role and their commitment to transformation in the country, which arises from the assumption from government that media should relay government stories as they are provided to them, but this added to the increased disagreements between the two parties (Mda 2015). Media is also blamed for every wrong thing that happens in the country and this frequently occurs because leaders accuse media of misinterpreting them or wrongfully criticising them, even in the presence of concrete facts (Msimang 2018).

The disagreements between the two parties gave birth to the proposal of the Protection of Information Bill and media Appeals Tribunal, which, according to media practitioners, if passed into law, will mark the end of critical, independent and investigative journalism in South Africa (Seokoma 2010). If endorsed, the bill will not only discourage investigative journalism within government and its entities, but will also promote censorship, leaving media with no room to manoeuvre and report on

stories that are not pro-government (Seokoma 2010). Although this is still before parliament for consideration, it may have an impact on the already strained rapport between the two parties. In addition, as found by Shaw (2010), the fears of an onslaught against media was highlighted by the arrest of a former reporter, Mzilikazi wa Afrika, who wrote a series of articles for the *Sunday Times* on the alleged corruption by senior officials and police commanders.

Although this may appear to be an isolated case, those who want to widen the distance between the two parties have viewed it as a good thing. According to Tabane (2015), the relationship between government and media has worsened and what is more disturbing is that information from government is so now highly protected that informers and whistle-blowers are threatened anonymously. Because information must be hidden particularly from media, whistle-blowers are sometimes even murdered (Tabane 2015). The *Mail and Guardian* is constantly threatened with legal action because of their investigation of government corruption, such as the Oilgate and Nkandla scandals, which shows that any action against government is dangerous (Tabane 2015). The fact that government has gone as far as to intimidate journalists with legal action shows that there is a high level of expectations for media to become mouthpieces of government by leaders and politicians (Muchena 2020).

According to Sapa (2010), South African journalists have since launched a campaign aimed at fighting what they say is an attempt to curtail media freedom in a nation known for one of Africa's freest and most open constitutions. Sapa (2010) postulates that according to the South African National Editors' Forum media restrictions proposed by the ruling government threatens the freedom of expression that used to be the "lifeblood" of the country's democracy since the end of apartheid era rule in 1994. In its attempt to increase direct government communication, the South African government has a new propaganda plan that includes establishing a government TV news channel while also making use of the other available government channels to market and advertise progress on its programme of action (Hunter et al 2015).

Gore (2018) submits that it is tempting to feel that journalism is under the cosh as never before. This is as journalists are forever accused of lying by the politicians and those holding public office. Added to this, are assertions of fake news by public officials. This is something that has in recent times discouraged people to have an

interest in government news while increasing the number of those who want to undermine the authority of traditional news publishers (Gore 2018). However, the relationship between media and government has and never will be steady (Yüksel 2013:57).

Government relies on media for their communication with the public (Hansen 2018). Without the use of media, government would find it impossible to spread information to millions of citizens instantly. This is because other methods of communication such as public participation programmes are impractical as they can only focus on one area with less than 600 participants at a time (DoC 2020:9). These types of communications are limiting and are not easy to handle and are mostly disorderly.

This study also wants to examine the government's plan to counter the perceived negativity of media. The South African government came up with a strategy in which government stories can be directly accessed by media and the public at large (GCIS 2020:7). This was done by firstly recruiting journalists and well-established writers from various media houses to research and package positive stories from government (SA News 2020). These stories would be made available free of charge on the government agency website. This plan kicked off very well with media houses both at the community level, commercially and internationally using government stories (DoC 2017:29).

Through this, government wanted to influence what goes out into the public realm by flooding media with information seen as important for public consumption. Government also believed that media would be pleased with the information given to them, as it would have been researched and written well and ready for publishing. They also believed that their working relationship with media would improve as media had access to news they needed for their daily bulletins and publishing (Wasserman, 2020).

4.5.1 STATE CAPTURE

The investigation of state capture has brought many revelations out to the surface. Some of these have affected the flow of news between government and media. According to Cowan (2018), at the state capture enquiry, led by Deputy Justice Zondo, Phumla Williams, who held the acting Director General position at the GCIS during

Mzwanele Manyi's tenure at the agency, said Manyi made many changes. These changes, although still alleged, made a significant dent in how news and media buying was handled by the agency (Cowan 2018). It is a known fact that the agency acts as a bridge between government communication and media, either through pure news releases or through buying of space. It therefore poses a significant worry to hear the allegations as attested by Cowan (2018), that a huge restructuring as well as the disbandment of the bid adjudication committee, including the tempering of media bulk-buying unit, took place.

Manyathela (2018) espouses that the Zondo commission's investigation arm found that there is enough information to prove Manyi's conduct concerning an irregular procurement process, which continually went the Gupta family's way. These include the shifting of the budget to be used on the now defunct *The New Age* (TNA) as well as *African News Network 7* (ANN7), which was later known as Afro Worldview. In addition, there is a link between the utilisation of budget on the infamous TNA media breakfasts, spearheaded by the Gupta-owned companies. This and many other related aspects had and continue to have a huge bearing on the relationship between government, especially government communication, and media. Media fraternity felt ignored as only the Gupta-owned media were given advertising budgets and in some instances, news. Makhafola (2018) concurs that it became evident that only the now defunct TNA and ANN7 were favoured by former government communication CEO, Mzwanele Manyi. He was accused of channelling millions in government advertising spend to the two companies formerly owned by the controversial Gupta family (Cowan, 2018). Manyi took over after Thamba Maseko was fired in 2011 for refusing to do the bidding for the Guptas. According to Chabalala (2019), Manyi denied any ties between himself and the Gupta family prior to his move to GCIS in February 2011.

According to Feketha (2016), Thabo Maseko, the then Chief Executive Officer of GCIS, whose occupation of the seat was rescinded in 2011, was instructed by the Gupta family to channel government advertising to their then soon to be established newspaper, the TNA, which he refused. Chabalala (2019) highlights that former GCIS CEO, Mzwanele Manyi, insisted that the agency's spending of over R6 million at the Gupta newspaper was justified because the new media realised the "beauty of disseminating government information". The fact that TNA was determined to ensure

that every page of the newspaper was reserved for news from all nine provincial governments made it easy to notice that there was an influence. It was clear that the newspaper had an agenda to set and become a mouthpiece of government. Many denied this by telling the Commission that, "with TNA, when I was there, I had a particular interest ... my interest was to disseminate government information," (Chabalala 2019).

It is well known that GCIS has a huge budget for advertising as well as other media engagements. The organisation is the only machinery of government within which all South African government news is shared with media and the public as a whole. It is understood that there are some level of difficulties for GCIS to easily distribute the news when SA News and *Vuk'uzenzele* are the only tools to distribute the news. However, the government news would later be altered by media or not be considered for dissemination at all. Shai (2017) writes the Gupta family hoped that by forming a newspaper, they would benefit from the budget from GCIS under the control of then CEO, Maseko, with their ambitions receiving the blessing of President Zuma.

Makhafola (2019), during his testimony at the State Capture Commission in June 2019, points out that former ANN7 editor, Rajesh Sundaram, said that former President Jacob Zuma played a huge role in the formation of ANN7. According to Umraw (2019), Zuma played a role of a shareholder during the establishment of the news channel by influencing policies, which would favour him and the ruling party. Although others saw this in a different light, the fact remains that the influence by the president was mainly based on selfish reasons. It was clear that there was an agenda that needed to be achieved. At the centre of this agenda was the ability for government to communicate its news to the people of South Africa. This was with the understanding that there were other methods such as Izimbizo and public hearings, but something more effective and powerful was also needed to inject more energy into government information dissemination.

Although former GCIS CEO, Mzwanele Manyi, continues to deny wrongdoing, the fact remains that money was given to the Gupta family's then-owned TNA. Umraw (2018) points out that GCIS budget skyrocketed from 2013, just when TNA and ANN7 were established. Figures by Treasury official, Jan Gilliland, at the State Capture Inquiry, indicated that Gupta-owned media companies, The TNA Media and Infinity Media,

pocketed about R260 million from government from 2004 (Unraw, 2018). Further, more and more evidence became known indicating that the Guptas had a huge influence on the South African government and in this instance, GCIS. According to Smit (2018), it became known during Phumla William's testimony that one of the brothers, Ajay, tried to persuade Maseko to spend the GCIS's R600 million in media buying on the Gupta-owned newspaper, *The New Age* (TNA).

4.5.2 MEDIA CAPTURE

There is absolutely no way one can successfully discuss state capture without discussing the existence of a media capture. That is, where the state is captured, there is a likelihood is that media is also captured. This is so especially in situations where media depends on government for funding or in instances where there is public broadcaster, which derives its mandate from the ruling party.

There have been many instances during which media in South Africa was perceived to have been captured. This has in many ways dented the independence of media as a watchdog and a mouthpiece through which society can feed its curiosity. According to Wasserman (2017), while the move was very important to transform the face of media in South Africa, the procurement of the then Gupta-owned television station, ANN7, as well as its sister newspaper, *The New Age*, by Mzwanele Jimmy Manyi, was viewed as media capture. This was so because Mzwanele Jimmy Manyi was one of the many people from the ruling party who had a hostile relationship with media and the purchasing of the news networks was viewed as a strategy to hit back. Instead of doing well, the transaction only achieved to give media transformation a bad name (Wasserman 2017).

Meanwhile, in recent events when Piet Rampedi questioned the voices and involvement of black journalists, it simply cannot be ignored. According to Khoabane (2016), the continued tussle between journalist Piet Rampedi and an alleged cabal of white journalists requires black journalists to stand up for themselves. Further, continued public spats between Piet Rampedi and Anton Harber made it clear that calls for media transformation has never been more necessary than now, especially as there still is tension between whites and blacks in newsrooms (Nevill 2016). These tussles forced the likes of Piet Rampedi and Mzilikazi wa Afrika, who have now joined

forces with Iqbal Survé, to form what is called the Independent Media Investigations Unit (Herbst 2019). Jimmy Manyi's attempt to have a black-owned media house was not successful. However, it remains necessary, especially in recent times where media continues to be controlled by a minority and powerful white institutions.

De Vos (2017) indicates that it is not true that Manyi's purchase of the then Gupta-owned television media was in the name of media transformation because he had no experience in running any media businesses. Thamm (2017) argues that the purchase was only a plot to hit back at the mainstream media by Manyi and Mxintama, who formed a faction who set out to discredit media houses while touting the name of ANN7 and *The New Age*. Grootes (2011) states that while Manyi is confident and very astute, with the skills of understanding communication, he lacks credibility and therefore there was no way he was going to be able to run a news network, and it suggests that his purchase was merely a media capture tactic.

The face of media capture also took shape in the form of capturing in the SABC. The public broadcaster was in many instances embroiled in media capture instances and the only solution was to restructure everything, including how they run their news. According to Manyathela et al (2017), many ANC leaders continually raised concerns about the appointment of the chairpersons of the SABC board by the then president, Jacob Zuma, suspecting his intention to capture media. Wasserman (2017) concedes that the political meddling in the running of the SABC by the then President Jacob Zuma was a clear sign that the public broadcaster was captured. This was so during the days of Hlaudi Motsoeneng, who brought about controversial policies, including the 90% local music quota, the cutting of news footage of services delivery protests and the request for a R3.2 billion government guarantee to stay afloat (Umraw 2019).

4.6 THE EFFECTS OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON GOVERNMENT COMMUNICATION AND MEDIA

The advent of new media (social media) has brought about many changes in the media space. Social media use by ordinary members of the public, big corporates, governments and other non-governmental groups who use Facebook, Twitter and YouTube as part of their daily use in their communication ventures, has grown

massively (Rutsaert et al 2013:85). This form of communication gave rise to new ways of communication and interaction with stakeholders.

The changes in communication also suggest that organisations need to adapt in order to take full advantage of the new media. Mergel and Bretschneider (2013:390) concur that in every situation, a new movement of any kind often has the ability to be seen as a game changer.

What exactly is social media? According to Pew Internet and American Life Project (2010), this phenomenon is an overall term, which refers to the new era of communication, which is web-based and operates around user manipulation of content, which include Facebook, Twitter and blogs. Further, Heldman et al (2013:2) found that social media is a platform that facilitates engagements, interaction and other means of communication with technology.

Although there are negative connotations attached to it, social media has also brought advantages, which have been beneficial to organisations. News can be accessed and debated speedily. Gone are the days when audiences had to wait for the next news bulletin or the next print run in order to access a news article. Instead, they can now access the news article within minutes. Kitchen et al (2007:150) concede that with social media, communicators must accept that they must be prepared to go beyond the communication of old.

The effects of this new media are not only confusing, but also unclear. For example, some media houses, especially those whose audience is internet-based, has welcomed and embraced the advent of social media. News agencies such as News 24, Sapa, Reuters and others are in fact amongst the few, which have viewed the advent of social media as an advantage for them, since big chunks of their audience is internet-based (Tandoc Jr & Vos 2016:951).

According to GCIS (2020), since SA News is also internet-based, this new media platform has made it easy for government to interact directly with their audiences, most of whom are the public. With social media, a writer from SA News no longer has to wait for news to be accessed by media and the public on the agency's website. Although a writer is still required to place an article on the website, the same article can be shared on social media with media around the country as well as those abroad.

A writer can also share an article with the public as is, without it being altered by an editor of a particular media house (SA News 2020). Due to the recent mass usage of new media, the public can access news at any time. This also affords government communicators and the public to debate about a particular topic on social media, without being censored (GCIS 2020:12). Therefore, while it has its disadvantages, social media has been used to the advantage of the government of South Africa, as government information can be sent to the public immediately (Elvira et al 2014:153).

Machan (2013) states that while social media is yet to be fully understood, government has taken an advantage of its power and used it to create dialogue with the public. That is, government is able to send information to the public and immediately engage in a discussion with the public, improving transparency. Although Zaharia et al (2013:190) indicate that while managing social media has its own challenges; it has really created cordial relations between government, media and the public.

Dlamini and Johnston (2018:199) concur that the South African government, amongst many other organisations, has made use of social media to their advantage. This is especially because through this platform, government is in control of what goes out to the public domain, as well as how and when. According to Bosch et al (2018:18), the South African government has taken advantage of the availability and free use of social media as a primary method of communicating with the public, especially due to the limited space provided by the mainstream media. Rambe (2017:411) points out that by using social media marketing, the South African tourism industry was able to successfully promote various tourism products to both international and the domestic market, free of charge. Thus, Ainin et al (2015:571) concurs that the use of social media by government has now become necessary. This is so, as seen by Eyrich et al (2008:412), because organisations, including government, are beginning to use social media for maintaining an interactive relationship with the public. Unlike through the mainstream media, government can control what messages to relay to the public.

Safiullah et al (2017:12) found that currently when social media has become the means and end of all communication, even “government, political parties and other organisations are also considering social media for their marketing and advertising purposes.” This is so because through social media, organisations can become their own writers and editors at the same time. They have a channel for speaking to their

customers without any interventions. Luo and Zhang (2013:214) concurs that with social media, those generating news can share it without any hindrances and can receive and provide feedback at the same time. It is therefore important for government to take advantage of its power and abilities to send instant messages. Safiullah et al (2017:12) state that social media is a powerful tool where views and opinions are expressed, with simultaneous feedback.

Due to this massive use of social media as a platform, many media houses have followed suit and have thus prioritised the use of social media in their news flow. Media houses, which primarily focussed on print-based newspapers before, have also had a mind shift as they came to realise that that the dawn of social media has taken the world by storm. Many have since developed online publications, which made it possible for their audience to still access the news through social media (Boumans et al 2018:22). This also assisted them to remain relevant and to participate alongside others.

Some governments have realised that through social media they are able to have access to the youth, who have always been a difficult audience to reach through traditional media (Song & Lee 2016:430). Organisations' reliance on social media is increasing rapidly (Treem & Leonardi 2013:144). This indicates that although the changes social media brought about were not easy to master at first, organisations are beginning to see the actual rewards that can come with it. As it is beneficial to other organisations, it can also benefit government, especially during times of crisis, as it is fast. Veil et al (2011:110) found that through social media, crisis news could be shared with millions in the blink of an eye without the involvement of media.

The same message can be spread throughout the country and be debated by the commentators, media and relevant stakeholder in no time. For example, if South Africa was to experience floods, government can quickly alert the nation as well as relevant institutions who would activate help as soon as possible. This would be done the same way it was conducted during the outbreak of the coronavirus (GCIS 2020:12). Further, "the urgency of providing reliable information to the public is especially acute during a crisis," (Freberg 2012:1). The use of social media thus has many advantages due to its huge audience. Therefore, as seen by Jin et al (2014), such examples highlight that the public interest in using social media is growing and this calls for communicators to

make plans for how to best strategically optimise these tools. This submits that in today's life, organisations need to prioritise the use of social media while also aligning their strategies to cater for the use of social media. Jin et al (2014) concur that the introduction of social media has forced organisations to use social media, especially during times of crisis and disasters.

The increased use of social media by government can also help them to attend to concerns raised by the public. This also means that the public can gain trust in government, due to open and transparent communication. With social media, government is able to directly interact with the public and share information that is not diluted in any way. The same information could also be released through other platforms such as websites, government owned magazines and newsletters. The public generally have a negative attitude towards government, and this is generally based on the lack of regular interaction from leaders. This is worse in countries without press freedom, and where the voice of government is final. Voltmer (2010:138) concurs that where there is no information forthcoming, the public is not empowered to participate in government's programme of action and thus will become stubborn. However, in countries with freedom of speech, government does share information and interact with the public easily through social media (Haro-de-Rosario et al 2018:29). The public is also empowered to voice their opinions through the same platform. With social media as tools for government and stakeholder engagements, government is able to reap the benefits quicker and experience easier communication (Manetti & Bellucci 2016:986).

According to Macnamara and Zerfass (2012:288), the benefits of social media have made it easy for private and public sector organisations to trust it. Its popularity made it possible for them to nowadays be the most preferred mode of communication by both private and public sector organisations (Wigand 2010:564). Organisations have stopped worrying about the high costs of advertising as they can easily use social media freely. Best and Krueger (2005:412) maintain that gone are the days when government communicators would worry about the usually long production cycle of the print media, because with social media messaging has been made easy and is constantly updated.

Westerman et al (2014:172) argue that social media has made it easy to accommodate people and organisations who want information faster. Kushin and Yamamoto (2010:609) point out that through social media platforms, a huge mass of information can be sent out to the world within a minute and through this, members of the public are easily and quickly exposed to political news and are thus given more opportunities to also express their opinions. In particular, the collaborative styles of social media are able to augment the impact of various expressions by members of the public on a particular topic, which can be shared with the world in a short space of time (Gil de Zúñiga et al 2014:613). The speed of social media also made it possible for members of the public to be able to be considered active participants of messages from government and elsewhere. This suggests that proposals from members of the public matters as they would be received quicker and would be responded to sooner. Therefore, there is no reason why government and other organisations should not make use of social media in their communication (Bonsón et al 2015:53).

Gil de Zúñiga et al (2014:614) argue that the use of social media should not only be focussed on information seeking as their powers allow a chance for dialogue between the sender and the receiver. Through social media, organisations can solve clients' problems in a matter of minutes (He et al 2017). In case of governments, for example, members of the public can easily relay their problems through the social media page of a particular department. In turn, such a problem can be relayed to the relevant units within the department, who could give an immediate solution to the problem. This way, government becomes a reliable and trustworthy source, as it is able to engage and attend to the issues faced by its citizens (Loukis et al 2017:100).

Colley and Collier (2009:35) maintain that word-of-mouth news, usually through social media has become more influential than mainstream media. The fact that an ordinary member of the public is able to verify the facts of a breaking news story without buying a newspaper is immensely empowering. Added to this is the fact that such a member of the public can actually engage and hold debates with other commentators about that breaking news. Rettberg (2009:452) argues that social media is a platform where members of the public can have a two-way form of communication in order to build some sort of a personal identity through self-presentation and dialogue with others.

Social media empowers the public to not only become commentators of the news that is already created, but also to become part of those that are creating news, wherever they may be. As found by Tilley and Cokley (2008:95), the dawn of the social media era has made it possible for the public to become eyewitness reporters. In today's life, members of the public can break a news story on social media and actually spread it through the country within minutes. Gil de Zúñiga et al (2014: 613) state that this is because of the fact that people these days make use of social media "not only to access online versions of offline content, but also to generate original content themselves, thus creating new forms of political participation."

4.7 EFFECTIVENESS OF MEDIA RELATIONS

According to Sanina et al (2017:254), governments need to improve the way in which they handle their communication, as it is the most important element for their success. Lindenmann (1993:1) is one of the few researchers who is determined in the affirmation that although there are critics and cynics, "it is possible to measure public relations effectiveness". The critics against the possibilities of measuring the effectiveness of communication management in general and media relations in particular are dwindling because of pressure to demonstrate the value of communication management and more accountability. It is essential to contribute to the academic discussion and theoretical engagement pertaining to what is effectiveness in media relations in general with regard to the public sector. This study looks at parameters for documenting media-state relations successes and failures. What are the opportunities and challenges for achieving effectiveness in media relations within the public sector?

According to Hon (1998:104), effectiveness in public relations occurs when communication activities achieves its goals in a cost-efficient manner. Johnston (2020) points out that it is not the ultimate achievement for media relations effectiveness when public relations practitioners manage coverage in media, as this should also include establishing professional relations, knowing how media operates and understanding and adhering to their deadlines. Howard and Mathews (2000:5) concur that for media relations to be perceived as effective, role players need to have a full understanding of their roles and their organisation's objectives. That is, communicators must know what needs to be achieved through media and how maintaining media relations would

help. Howard and Mathews (2000:6) state that communicators should assess the objectives of their organisations and advise on whether to make use of a passive and proactive approach towards dealing with media. According to Howard and Mathews (2000:6), passively dealing with media means avoiding media attention and it can frustrate and damage media relations. However, if the organisation wants to be proactive in dealing with media, it is important for communicators to understand that maintaining good media relations should go beyond sending a tweet or a media statement. It means that proper planning needs to be initiated and this should support all the objectives (Howard & Mathews 2000:7).

According to Onyiengo (2014:108), for an organisation to be viewed as practising effective public relations, it needs to recognise the following principles:

- The company needs to promote its products and services more effectively at the local, state, national and international levels.
- Through effective public relations, activities a company can let everyone know about the positive things the company is doing.
- Through effective public relations, the company can effectively handle any negative perceptions those outside the company may have.

For public relations to succeed in media-state relations, a positive public opinion must be maintained at all times (Jethwaney & Sarkar 2000). Another dimension is, according to Muriithi (2000), that the best way to achieve media relations effectiveness is that an organisation should ensure that proper channels are used to keep employees informed as they are automatic ambassadors of that organisation. A proper public relations policy ensures an all-inclusive interface between government and organisations, staff, media and the public (Iacob & Rădulescu 2017:26).

Hon (1998:103) acknowledges difficulties in defining the terminology of effectiveness from literature as few researchers have engaged the subject. Some have defined it as the value that media relations brings to the organisation. While others such as Bernays (1971:297) sees it as a phenomenon where organisations have an opportunity to inform and persuade their customers, as it is something that is necessary for society to function properly. However, this definition limits the other avenues from which effectiveness can be measured such as on the programme and the practitioner's level.

Lindemann (1993; 1997) developed a public relations effectiveness yardstick outlining a straightforward set of guidelines or standard to be used in the assessment and measurement of effectiveness. Three different levels are identified: level one: output, level two: outgrowths/outrights, and level three: outcomes. Many of communication evaluations are pitched on this final level.

The focus for this study is on the first two levels of analysis: outputs and outrights. Outputs are usually the immediate results of a PR strategy such as the amount of exposure that the organisation receives. Media content analysis is one of the principal methodologies used to measure media outputs. Both quality and quantity of outputs can be measured and evaluated. PR outrights are more specific, namely determining whether “key audiences actually received the message, paid attention, understood (apprehended and retained), and recalled the message” (Watson & Noble 2007:87).

PR outcomes measure effects such as opinion change and behavioural change. It is more difficult and more expensive to measure PR outcomes, as data-gathering research tools and techniques are required (Lindemann 2003:10). A mixture of qualitative and quantitative research techniques is often used to measure PR outrights and outcomes. Surveys, attitude surveys, focus groups, interviews and ethnographic research may be used for this purpose.

An additional method to gauge the effectiveness of media relations function of government through SA News is in the use of the framing index as part of agenda setting. This study seeks to establish the extent to which SA NEWS (as a government news agency) influences the framing of governmental stories in the news media (selected newspapers).

Watson and Noble (2007:87) posit that, in order for government communicators to determine the effectiveness of their messaging, research is an unavoidable phenomenon as it would assist in checking and tracking the audience reactions. Cutlip et al (2006) concur that even though research may not be ultimate indication when it comes to public relations effectiveness; it has a role to play as it gives scientific answers on whether their messages have an impact and if so, what they mean. Darwish (2017:44) states that communication effectiveness relies on the understanding that communication does not just happen; it does so in a planned

manner so that feedback can be evaluated. That is, in order for government to succeed in its communication venture, it needs to use a strategic approach so that the public are able to feel engaged.

4.8 CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter offers a synopsis of literature on media-state relations in general while going deep into the South African context. It further looks at literature that debates whether the South African government uses public information in their communication quest or whether it is actually propaganda.

The chapter depicts the media landscape in the country and the impact it has on media-states relations. Issues such as media ownership and press freedom come to the fore, where it is established that the World Press Freedom Index has recently placed the country at a satisfactorily level (Daniels 2019). Although this may appear to be good, the country can do better, as there are instances where journalists are still threatened for reporting negatively on government (Phakathi 2019).

The current state of media-state relations in the country is discussed in depth and this is interlinked with state capture, and media capture. In this instance, damaging allegations are revealed about the formation of ANN7 and *The New Age* (TNA), when it was discovered that they received help from government through GCIS (Cowan 2018). Also discussed is the impact of social media on media and government as well as media capture, because similar allegations surfaced and GCIS's budget skyrocketed in 2013 just after TNA and ANN7 was established (Umraw 2018). It was discovered that this contributed to the strained media-state relations in the country, because other media houses felt left out from advertising and other financial opportunities. This chapter concludes with a discussion of the effectiveness of media-state relations, which according to Johnston (2020), should go beyond releasing media statements.

The next chapter details the history of GIS, which later gave birth to GCIS. It also looks at SA NEWS, its history and its current mandate as the government news agency.

CHAPTER 5: GOVERNMENT COMMUNICATION AND INFORMATION SYSTEMS (GCIS)

5.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter introduces the formation of government communication platforms, both pre- and post-1994. The apartheid government formed a structured communication platform to communicate with the public, media and the international community. Known as the South African Communication Service (SACS), it operated as a propaganda and persuasion tool since the 1940s, under the National Party rule (Hurwitz 2001).

The people-centered changes under the democratic government since 1994 (Strydom, 2001) are discussed. How the Comtask was formulated is also discussed. It was formed under the order of the then deputy president, Thabo Mbeki, and gave rise to the formation of a newly revamped government communication machinery known as the GCIS. The chapter outlines the mandate that was given to the task group, as well as the first conference of communicators, which took place on 25 August 1995 at Waenuiskrans. For the first time, it became a turning point in government communication that showed it cared for its people (Strydom 2001:2).

The GCIS today is showcased in this chapter and various components that form part of this government communication structure are discussed. Its mission, vision, roles and responsibilities are also discussed. The debates around the formulation of SA NEWS, referred to as Bua News in 1998, is highlighted. Its history, roles and responsibilities are also outlined.

5.2 GCIS (Pre-1994)

According to Hurwitz (2001), the South African Communication Service (SACS) began operating as the apartheid government's propaganda and persuasion tool back in the 1940s, under the wing and leadership of the National Party. This was initially referred to as the Bureau for Information until 1 May 1991. Strydom (2001:5) points out that the organisation felt the need to have a name change after discovering that the old name failed to reflect the function of the organisation adequately. As a result, it was causing confusion with other information bureaus, especially those in the regions.

Strydom (2001:4) postulates that added to this was an important development for SACS in 1991, which saw Cabinet making a decision to remove responsibilities for the promotion of inter-community relations from the Department of Planning and Provincial Affairs and the provinces and making them responsibilities of SACS. The change made it easy for the then government to shift propaganda activities to one organisation, which helped to avoid duplication and confusion. The change also justified the decision to make SACS an independent organisation with clear responsibilities.

As indicated by Strydom (2001:93), the addition of extra duties resulted in the decision to rename the bureau to the South African Communication Service on 1 May 1991. This made it easy to be distinguished from other bureaus and to garner support not only from the National Party members, but also from key stakeholders and in particular members of the public. Later the organisation was formally referred to as SACS, and it was tasked to help the then government with the running of various communication and media liaison programmes. It also ensured that there was one voice from government and that media houses reporting negatively on government's affairs were identified and subsequently reprimanded.

SACS's duties became more than just mere propaganda tactics. They became the eyes and ears of government and maintained positive media coverage by suppressing those who deviated from the plan (Strydom, 2001:97). The organisation played a big role in closing down many media houses, who reported negatively about government. Through the support from the then government, they reprimanded a number of journalists and media who did not play within the set rules. Strydom (2001:99) further states that, in 1991, the mission, aim and main function were as follows:

Mission

To promote South Africa's national goals by providing cost-effective communication services, products and expertise to government.

Main Function

The SACS's main function was to provide to government and government departments those communication services and products, which could be rendered

most cost-effectively on a centralised basis. It could also play an important role with regard to the coordination of government communication and to the implementation of government's National Communication Policy and Strategy.

Hadland (2007:34) writes that various pundits are still today confused over the question of "whether the newspaper industry was helpful or harmful to the establishment or maintenance of the apartheid system," but one can conclude that those who needed to operate freely without banishment from government had to dance to their tune, and, thus, some of them were indeed working in favour of the then government, under the directions of SACS.

Netshitomboni (2007:21) states that SACS was mandated by the then government to ensure a positive perception and image of government by the local and international media, especially because of the fierce criticism they received for their apartheid practices. The then government also needed SACS to help it gain trust from corporations and acceptance by the international community who had withdrawn support to the country because of apartheid. Therefore, the then SACS interpreted and reported on events during emergencies, especially during unrests. This was largely because it was one of the only entities legally permitted to report in areas of unrest (Nethitomboni 2007:20).

The international community withdrew their funding of the print media and the country operated with "two major Afrikaans newspaper companies, Nasionale Pers and Perskor, and two English ones, Times Media Limited and the Argus Publishing and Printing Company" only, which were also seen as pro-government (Hadland 2007:10). This suggests that SACS was doing a good job by eliminating or making it difficult for anti-government media to operate in the country. In addition, because only government could interact with the international community through diplomatic relations, it was easy for them to identify the so-called disobedient media houses and deny them access to international funding.

Besides its role as the then government's propaganda machinery, SACS also ensured that various departments communicated with the public through various communication means. One of these was through usage of the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC) as the national broadcaster, which was funded by

government and thus operated on its terms. Apart from this, they also introduced draconian laws which “forbade newspapers and magazines from reporting on black political leaders or parties or even from covering important political and social developments if they occurred in zones designated as black living areas,” (Hadland, 2007:10).

However, the 1994 election and the unbanning of the ANC in 1990 introduced massive changes, with the SABC and SACS undergoing fundamental transformation (Hurwitz, 2001). Although SACS tried to remain a neutral agency, which sought to introduce engagement between government and communities, its endeavours did not succeed, as talks emerged for it to be disbanded (Netshitomboni, 2007:20). Part of the main aim for its disbandment was the thinking by the newly democratically elected government that SACS has a bad reputation of using forceful communication and also made it difficult for media to operate freely, thus they needed to start on a clean slate.

5.3 GCIS (POST-1994)

The installation of the then new government dispensation introduced many changes in South Africa. This included the reintroduction of media houses such as *Post Transvaal*, *Saturday Post*, *Sunday Post* and the *Sowetan*. These were all banned during the apartheid regime, which included the times when they were liberated from various political prisoners, and the historic appointment of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. However, the one change, which had the most profound impact, was the new government’s stance of putting people first (Batho Pele). Batho Pele means People first. Strydom (2001:99) concurs that the country’s second democratically elected president, Thabo Mbeki, emphasised the point of being a people-centered government where society is informed regularly of any development, policy change and the direction taken by government.

5.4 COMMUNICATION TASK GROUP (COMTASK)

The democratic government has realised that there is a dire need for a people-centered approach and needed to make plans for such an idea to unfold. It was because of the struggle of the majority of black people under the National Party rule. The people were denied access to vote, to voice their opinion, and had no access to a government of their leaders. The denial of these services to black people was seen

as a way of ensuring that there is a continued segregation and separation between black and white in terms of access to jobs, schools and hospitals. It ensured that blacks were kept very far from economic emancipation.

Because of these hardships of the people, the new democratic government established a plan to ensure that government speaks in one voice and that the people of South Africa have access to their leaders, government services, job creation opportunities and business opportunities, amongst many others. It meant that government became an employer of choice and attracted suitable experts to help ensure that the people of South Africa could believe in the new government. Media had just come out of a very stressful environment, but they also began to trust that the changes brought about by the new black-led government would yield desired results.

Hurwitz (2001) points out that the new dispensation brought hope to media and gave them added energy in their reporting especially compared to the previous situation. Because of their freedom, media began to find fault with the new government and started to cast doubt on the leadership and its ability to take the country from the dark days of apartheid to the brighter days as promised during the elections. Due to their hunger for an environment of free writing and broadcasting, they began to pick their own leads and fulfilled their position as the fourth estate, keeping the new government on its toes.

The new government, through its promises of a peaceful and free country, could not stop them in their reporting. However, it gave rise to a critical need for government to think twice and come up with a plan to also make their voice heard, especially during those fragile times when the democracy was still in its infancy. Politicians began to register their concerns that government's good deeds were not covered positively and that media only focused on the perceived black incompetence (Netshitomboni, 2007). Due to this and many other concerns, it was clear that government communication needed an impetus in order for them to be positioned and to be enabled to put their perspective forward.

To achieve this, the democratic government called for a Conference of Government Communicators, which was held at Waenhuiskrans on 25 August 1995. According to Strydom (2001:98), the conference was seen as the first step towards the much-

needed change within government communication, aimed at meeting the needs of the democratic dispensation as well as the new challenges of the country. Therefore, at the order of the then deputy president of South Africa, Thabo Mbeki, a task group charged with responsibilities of bringing about a change in ways government communicates with the public, was developed. It was seen as the groundbreaking phenomenon, which will bring about harmony in government and how it interacts with the public. The group would be used to bring a breath of fresh air where issues affecting the public would be handled appropriately. It also suggested that there would be an opportunity to increase ways in which government communicates with its public while also looking at ways in which the same public can give feedback and initiate communication from their side. Government would not be the only one to initiate communication, as the public could also talk to government when there was anything that they needed. The task group was also charged with bringing government and media closer together and to work together without any mischief.

After the group was constructed, various specialists and experts did research and made comparisons between South African and other countries. The group found that there is great need for a new approach to communication to enable government to connect with its public, while also allowing and facilitating an interaction between the two parties. The main purpose of this new approach was to provide a platform through which the country can provide the public with the information required to live by and to manage their lives (Communication 2000:13). Furthermore, the Task Group, according to Communication (2000:13) established that:

The new government communication and information system need to be better coordinated and more focused in its messages. It should strengthen the capability of government to communicate its policies to the people, and be streamlined, credible, cost-effective and highly professional. To do this it will need to engage better with civil society, creating a dialogue between government and the public.

After thorough work was done by the task group, a new Government Communication and Information System (GCIS) as a government department was established. It was charged with the responsibility of ensuring that all government interactions with the public are done accordingly and regularly.

Through this platform, any government department is able to transmit intended messages to the public making use of media. This organisation provides communication and information services to the domestic and foreign media to improve their knowledge of government-related issues (GCIS 2010:12). As the Department of Communication (2017:16) points out, GCIS's mission is to deliver effective and strategic government communication including setting standards while also influencing other government departments to adhere to these standards and coherence of messages and proactively communicating with the public about government policies, plans, programmes and achievements. Through GCIS, various workshops were held with communication representatives from other government departments in order to ensure that government messages are aligned and that there is synergy in this regard.

GCIS serves to provide people with well researched and synergised information which South Africans can use to improve their lives, based on their needs; and encourages them to participate in shaping the policies of government while keeping them informed of programmes and progress in implementing them (School of Government 2016:18).

5.5 GCIS TODAY

GCIS is the government department that deals primarily with the liaison between government and the public. It is done through many avenues, some of which include media and Izimbizo. The department is mainly charged with responsibilities of connecting government and the public of South Africa (Montsho 2013:15). Although many efforts are made to connect government and media, the truth is that more focus is placed on developmental communication that focuses on direct interaction with the poor people of South Africa. This is achieved through various focused Imbizo weeks where ministers and deputy ministers interact with various communities according to their portfolios.

5.5.1 VISION, MISSION, VALUES AND OBJECTIVES OF GCIS

VISSION

The pulse of communication excellence in government.

MISSION

To deliver effective strategic government communication as well as to set and influence adherence to standards and coherence of messaging while proactively communicating with the public about government policies, plans, programmes and achievements.

VALUES

Professionalism

- ✓ The organisation strives to operate at the highest level of professionalism in all business dealings, at all times.
- ✓ Professionalism is embodied in friendly, polite and business-like behaviour. It drives a person's appearance, demeanour and professional interactions, providing others with a positive first impression.
- ✓ Officials should demonstrate professionalism by being courteous, honest and behaving responsibly when dealing with clients and representing the organisation.
- ✓ Officials should demonstrate a level of excellence that goes beyond the department's normal work and official requirements.

Diversity

- ✓ The department contributes to democracy and equality by promoting a safe, positive and nurturing environment for everyone.
- ✓ Officials should recognise and respect that each person is different. This difference can refer to race, ethnicity, gender, gender preference, age, religious beliefs, socioeconomic status or other ideologies.
- ✓ Officials should strive to understand and embrace each other's points of view, beyond simple tolerance, giving everyone the opportunity to express themselves. This attitude should be extended to the public.
- ✓ The organisation should always be open with its communications, disclose

all relevant information, and be accountable for its actions.

- ✓ Officials should be straightforward and honest in their dealings at all times.
- ✓ Officials should provide colleagues and clients with access to accurate, relevant and timely information.
- ✓ The department recognises that transparency and accountability are essential for good governance.
- ✓ The department strives to be receptive to new ideas and adopt a flexible approach to problem solving.
- ✓ Officials are encouraged to think beyond the norm.
- ✓ Officials are encouraged to help each other and address issues that cannot be addressed by a person working in isolation.

Honesty and integrity

- ✓ Officials should exercise honesty in all their business dealings and strive to protect the department's integrity at all times.
- ✓ Officials should commit to the actions they have undertaken on behalf of their clients.
- ✓ The department strives for equity, fairness and good ethics in its decision-making and expects its officials to do the same with one another.
- ✓ The department honours its commitments to build a foundation for trust. (GCIS 2018:16).

5.6 VARIOUS COMPONENTS FOUND AT GCIS

Various components help the organisation execute its duties effectively and efficiently. These components are structured in such a way that they are connected to one another and would cross each other from time to time as they continue to make South Africa better.

5.6.1 Policy and Research

According to GCIS (2018:16), this component deals mainly with all the research and policy work for the organisation. This is where information is managed. In other words, it is through this section that the organisation is kept abreast on the external environment where communication will take place. One of the main principles of a good communication strategy is the scanning of the environment. If done correctly, it will influence the way communication takes place, because information on the mood of the audience as well as the external factors would have been collected through thorough research. This unit conducts communication research in order to provide advice on communication in support of government's entire programme of action. This unit consist of two directorates, namely Policy and Research. It is also connected to the Media Development Diversity Agency (MDDA) by rendering institutional support (Montsho 2013:14).

5.6.2 Communication Service Agency

All forms of communication takes places through this unit, and it is often referred to as the nerve centre of government communication (Montsho 2013:16). The unit remains the only one that is able to liaise directly with the presidency and various other departments as well as state-owned enterprises in pursuit of their programme of action. It is through this unit that core government communication in general takes place. Information is formulated, packaged and sent to the public through various channels. The unit consists of three directorates, namely: Product and Content Development, Marketing and Advertising and Distribution. The unit comprises many other services aimed at delivering government messages for the consumption of the South African public. Amongst others these are:

- ✓ Bulk media buying on behalf of government
- ✓ Conceptualisation, designing and producing information that meets the communication needs of government
- ✓ Producing video and radio programmes, graphics design as well as the provision of official photographs

- ✓ Distribution of information products
- ✓ Managing the corporate identity of government (Montsho, 2013: 39).

5.6.3 Corporate Services

This unit within GCIS plays a supportive role to all other units. It is commonly referred to as the engine of every organisation as it consists of Human Resource Management, where specialists and other employees are recruited. This unit also provides employee health and wellness programmes.

5.6.4 Provincial Coordination and Programme Support

This unit exists to extend the information of government to the public through a partnership with provincial and local governments. Because of facilities such as Thusong Service Centres, government information is carried through to the relevant audience and is easily accessible to community members. This is also made possible because of the work done by the provincial liaison officers who are a solid bridge between the main office and the public.

5.6.5 Government and Media Liaison

Since GCIS is the custodian of government communication in the country, there needs to be a strong liaison between them and other government departments. This liaison also helps to ensure that there is one message from government and that no contradicting messages are sent through to media and to the people of South Africa. This unit also helps with providing professional media services. All government departments align their communication strategies with the framework of the national communication strategy. It is also through this unit that media, whether community, local, mainstream or international, receive timeous and accurate information from government.

Another channel that is primarily used for this purpose is SA News a government news agency that ensures that news from government is available timeously and in an acceptable way. They use information packaged by professional writers, most of whom were journalists before or who have an extensive journalistic background either through training or education.

5.6.6 Information Management and Technology

This unit helps GCIS with its technological needs in order for them to operate smoothly in their communication drive. This is a strategic resource needed by all organisations to execute its functions effectively and efficiently.

5.6.7 Vuk'uzenzele

This is a government newspaper that highlights the good work of the various government departments at a given time. It is a pure government propaganda newspaper, and it publishes only pro-government news. In the same way as SA NEWS, this newspaper also acts as an economic vehicle for government as it often carries job and related opportunities that are available to the public of South Africa. According to Williams (2013:14), about 1, 7 million copies of *South Vuk'uzenzele* are distributed monthly in peri-urban and deep rural areas country-wide.

5.6.8 Internal Audit

In order to achieve its goals in a seamless way, GCIS has implemented an internal audit unit. The unit helps with a systematic and disciplined approach to evaluate work done while also checking if there are any risks in the process.

5.6.9 Finance, Supply Chain Management and Auxiliary Services

The unit helps GCIS with procurement of necessary resources, which enables them to achieve targeted goals. Through this unit, procurement for media bulk buying, marketing and advertising is done.

5.6.10 Project Desk

This area deals with project management and coordination of information to and from various departments.

5.6.11 The role of GCIS as a custodian of government communication

The constitution of South Africa mandates and empowers GCIS to be the sole leader of all government departments in relation to the provision of information to the public.

It further empowers them to do so in a timely fashion, with accuracy and to be easily accessible by the public at all time (GCIS, 2018).

5.7 THE FORMULATION OF BUA-NEWS/ SA NEWS

This section discusses the formation of SA NEWS in 1998. This agency was formulated as a tool to provide the media and the public at large with news about happenings from government. Bua is a Tswana word, which means, “speak”. In the context of this study, Bua refers to speaking to a wider audience in order to deliver a particular message, while relying on specific tools for a targeted result.

Bua news is a government-led news agency founded a few years after the dawn of democracy in South Africa. The agency was founded with the main aim of providing media with snapshots of government’s extensive programme of action and how this improves the lives of individuals and communities (DoC 2012:20).

Bua News is a South African news service, formulated to provide quick and easy access to ready-to-publish articles and stories aimed at keeping the public informed about the implementation of government's mandate. GCIS established Bua News to enable members of the public, community radio stations, newspapers and other forms of media to have easy and fast access to fresh government information, news and current affairs. Bua News was established and led by the directorate of media within GCIS, which according to DoC (2005:148), was needed to fulfil, amongst others, the following objectives:

- Provide liaison between government communicators by convening cluster communication forums to ensure that government communicates in a single voice
- Ensure that departments develop their own communication strategies and that media is timeously informed of government’s programmes
- Provide a comprehensive and coherent media and government liaison service for South Africa
- Convene a number of coordination and planning forums, nationally and provincially, to enhance the integration of government communication and

improve the communication environment

- Provide a government news service on development information to community and mainstream media, locally and internationally, and to coordinate an international marketing programme for South Africa
- Enhance the Government Communication and Information System in collaboration with stakeholders by providing a professional and accessible media support service for government
- Arrange parliamentary briefings and provide daily news coverage from Parliament

Further, as described by SA News (2018), “The South African Government News Agency known as SA News is a news service, published by the Department of Communications. It aims to make government news available to everyone. The people of South Africa and those from the neighbouring countries have a right to information, irrespective of their class, colour or creed. Since it is the mandate of government to ensure that all its people have access to information, the agency stepped in to do just that. In order to make this possible, SA News was established to provide quick and easy access to articles and feature stories aimed at keeping the public informed about the implementation of government's mandate (SA News 2018).

SA NEWS Mission:

Its mission is to continuously striving towards becoming the most efficient and dedicated channel through which information reaches the most disadvantaged communities in South Africa.

SA NEWS Vision:

To create an awareness of news events, educate and disseminate information to those who do not have access to the mainstream media in an attempt to empower and provoke thought.

The agency provides news that has been fully researched and is ready to be consumed by the public while also making it easy for media to use for their various

communications. The agency also makes use of professional writers to give progress of government's mandate within a given period. Although media sees these stories as only highlighting the good deeds from government, many media platforms still choose these stories for their audience. "It helps ensure wider dissemination of government information to provide public with the opportunity to gain access to development information and qualitative content to ensure that they are better informed to become active participants in the evolving process of social change" (SA News 2018).

This news agency also provides media and the public with information related to developmental issues, health, education, service delivery, finance, government transformation, transport, defence, and welfare, among others. In addition, the agency features articles on community and people-centred initiatives that are aimed at improving or uplifting the quality of lives of the public (SA News 2018). Through this news agency, the public are able to benefit as they can speedily access the news from their government and without having to pay anything.

As indicated by SA News (2018) the agency has become a fast, reliable and accurate government news and information service. It benefits communities in the following ways:

- It creates an awareness on day-to-day issues
- It informs people of that which will have an impact on their lives.
- It educates people on various issues that are predominant in society
- It empowers people by constantly making them aware of their human rights and their constitutional rights, etc.

Coverage of news events focusses on the promotion of interactive governance and unmediated communication between government and the people. SA News is posted online and emailed to community radio stations and print media. It is also sent to government communicators, freelance writers, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), and news editors of the mainstream media, both print and electronic, news agencies, missions and foreign media. Continuous updates are also posted on Facebook and Twitter (SA News 2018).

According to SA NEWS (2018), these are some of the notable questions and answers:

- **Do I have to pay in order to access news through the agency?**
 - ✓ Our clients receive information of the highest quality and standard at no cost. SA NEWS is not profit-orientated and functions without advertising.

- **What do I need to do in order to receive SAnews.gov.za?**
 - ✓ If you would like to subscribe to receive your free SA NEWS editions via e-mail or if you would like to send us valuable information that we can use in our editions, please contact us. Any questions, comments and or suggestions on how we can improve our news service will be appreciated.

- **Is SAnews.gov.za a government propaganda tool?**
 - ✓ Certainly not. The public's right to have access to government information is firmly entrenched in the constitution. Therefore, government is duty-bound and obliged to communicate its policies, implementation of its mandate and its impact on the quality of life of the public.

SA News (2018) states that, the SAnews.gov.za strives to fulfil government's mandate to make information accessible to the people of South Africa. Accordingly, SA NEWS states that informed people are better equipped with knowledge to improve or uplift their standard of life. Through this platform, development information enables the public to become active participants in the evolving process of social change.

5.8 CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter details the history of communication in South Africa, both before and after 1994 when the democratic government was elected. In this chapter, details emerge on how the apartheid government used SACS as not only a platform for communication, but also one that made sure that media houses, which did not play by their rules, were suppressed (Strydom 2001:90).

The formulation of a Comtask, which gave birth to GCIS under the order of the then deputy president, Thabo Mbeki, is discussed. The processes that were followed, including the first conference of communicators held at Waenhuiskrans, are detailed in this chapter.

The chapter details the mission and vision of GCIS, its mandate and most importantly, how it fares as a custodian of government communication in South Africa. Detail of various structures which form GCIS are discussed, such as the Government and Media Liaison unit, which deals with a liaison between government departments and media.

The chapter concludes with the formulation of SA News as the first government news agency in the country. Here, the history of the agency, its mandate, mission and vision are thoroughly discussed.

The next chapter discusses the overall research methodology and design of the study. A thorough discussion is held on the use of a mixed methodology approach. A qualitative method was used through interviews. Also discussed is the quantitative method in which content analysis was used.

CHAPTER 6: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND DESIGN

6.1 INTRODUCTION

The previous chapters provide the theoretical framework of the study. The background, the rationale and the context of this study as well as the objectives are discussed in detail in chapter 1. This is followed by a literature review on government communication, media-state relations, the role of media in society, state capture as well as media capture. Chapter 5 deals with the formulation of GCIS and SA News.

In this chapter, the overall research, design of the study, namely mixed method, is detailed. Specifics on the data collection methods, including the use of interviews (qualitatively) and content analysis (quantitatively) are presented. Also in discussion are different types of interviews and their advantages and disadvantages. The chapter details important factors such as the research horizon, research paradigm, sampling strategy, population and sampling, target population, accessible population and most importantly, unit of analysis, which, according to Babbie (2016:12) is what a study needs in order to be labelled or enlightened.

The chapter describes how ethical considerations such as anonymity, confidentiality and informed consent were applied. Also explained is the data analysis process applied in this study, including data coding and transcribing. Key elements such as validity and rigour, conformity and credibility are explored. The chapter concludes with a discussion of flexibility, which, according to Lincoln & Guba (1985), is about the possibilities of replicating findings of a particular study into another.

6.2 RESEARCH DESIGN

The research question of this study is, “the effectiveness of a South African Government News Agency known as SA News as a tool for government communication in South Africa”. Out of the three types of research methods in the academic field, namely, quantitative, qualitative and mixed methods (Creswell & Creswell, 2017:10). The most suitable method was chosen for this study, namely the mixed method approach. A mixed method approach combines two methods during a research project (Morgan 2007:49). Olsen (2004:4) defines this concept as mixing of

data or methodology so that diverse viewpoints can cast light upon a particular research topic.

Although a primarily qualitative data collection method was used, a quantitative data collection method was added in order to validate the data that was received through the qualitative method. The reason why a mixed method was preferred is that the data was too much such that that neither quantitative nor qualitative methods were enough to deal with it properly (Ivankova, Creswell & Stick 2006).

Tashakkori and Teddlie (2003:16) submit that there are more than thirty mixed-methods research designs in the arena of research, with each designed for a particular research type. However, Creswell et al (2003) preferred the frequent use of the six. In this instance, the type of mixed method design used for this study is the embedded design. This is because the study needed to be looked at from both the perspective of government communicators and well as from the perspectives of the journalists. Added to this was the need to use content analysis method by analysing 200 articles news articles. This was done in order to observe the outcome of the media-state relations. The embedded design often has a predominant method that guides the study and in this case, such a method was the interviews.

6.3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY: DATA COLLECTION TECHNIQUES

The main data collection method of this study was a qualitative method, where the researcher interacted with various role players such as the editors and writers of both the *Sunday Times*, *City Press* as well as SA News. Creswell (2014:6) explains that qualitative research starts when an assumption is made within sets of theoretical frameworks, which inform the study of research problems and deals with the solution to a human problem. As seen by Salkind (2018:2), qualitative research is a broad methodological approach to human actions from the viewpoint of providing answers to behavioural science questions.

The data collection process of this study took place when the world and the country was under the attack of the COVID-19 pandemic. This made it difficult to access participants as government had introduced restrictions, which included a forced lockdown as well as social distancing, amongst others. This has nevertheless not deterred the researcher and many other avenues were used to collect qualitative data.

These included the use of WhatsApp calls, Skype, normal calls as well as emails. As per the initial research design of this study, 16 participants were identified as critical to this study. Negotiations took place between the researcher and participants and this led to six out of 16 participants agreeing to in-depth interviews. In order to get this right, social distance and many other practices such as wearing of masks and sanitising took place. The rest of the participants were interviewed through other avenues. It must also be noted that these protocols did not hinder these processes of data collection in any way, as quality and relevant answers were still received.

The second stage of the data collection process was done through a content analysis method. The researcher purely made use of a qualitative method in an attempt to capture as much information as possible in this regard. However, it should be noted that as a secondary source and with the aim to validate what was captured during the qualitative process, a content analysis process was also undertaken. In this instance, the electronic versions of the newspapers in question were accessed in order to identify stories about the government of South Africa. Most importantly though, this was done to track the tone used by the newspapers in question. Thus, a qualitative as well as a quantitative content analysis was conducted on various newspaper articles within the sample frame.

Qualitative content analysis was done through developing themes, with reference to the newspapers' reporting on government. This was done by evaluating positive, neutral or negative news, which became helpful in quantitatively gauging the mood while examining the rise and decline of the SA News. These themes were used as trends, which were also identified as codes that were similar in all articles. As expected, the use of a mixed method research became instrumental in improving the findings of the study, while also allowing the researcher to potentially identify important information. Through this method, sufficient data was received from both methods.

6.4 PHILOSOPHICAL POSITIONING OF THE RESEARCH

The philosophical positioning of this research is pragmatism. The purpose of pragmatism is to "relieve and benefit the condition of man" (Rorty 1991:27). Menand (2001:124) states that the American philosophers Charles Sanders Peirce and William James found this type of philosophy in the late 19th century. Many researchers and

authors throughout the academic field have recognised pragmatism as one that is best fitted for mixed method research and this study was no exception (Morgan 2014:25).

Biesta (2010:96) posits that a general perception held by mixed methodology specialists has always been that this is the best-suited form of philosophical positioning. Therefore, the choice of pragmatism as a philosophical positioning of this research was also based on the understanding that it is able to deal with contrasts “and is able to contend with the divergent arguments of qualitative and quantitative philosophy,” while giving results that fit both ways (Johnson, de Waal, Stefurak, and Hildebrand, 2017:4). Further, the researcher’s focus was placed on ensuring that the research question is given the best attention and this why a mixed method research became an option. It was understood that while a qualitative method was in the lead, it was also required that a quantitative method, through content analysis be used to validate what was found qualitatively. Seen by Mackenzie and Knipe (2006:194), pragmatists mostly pay attention on what the research question or problem is and to deal with it. Powell (2001:884) concurs that, “to a pragmatist, the mandate of science is not to find truth or reality, the existence of which are perpetually in dispute, but to facilitate human problem-solving’.

6.5 RESEARCH PARADIGM

Neuman (2011) and Nieuwenhuis (2007b) submit that a research paradigm is a set of views about real life essentials dealing with reality, as well as the relationship between the known and unknown, using relevant methods in looking for answers to research questions. According to Creswell et al (2017:10), three methods of research paradigm exist, namely post-positivism, constructivism and pragmatism. Ponelis (2015:525) also postulates that the research paradigm comprehends the world and life in general because of its origins from a subjective point of view as opposed to the objective point of view. Therefore, this study was approached from the interpretivist point of view. As seen by Okeke and van Wyk (2016: 22), interpretivism is of the view that knowledge is formed by words rather than numbers. Matthews and Ross (2010:7) argue that interpretivism allows people to interpret and understand social phenomena as seen through the lens of the people under investigation. This suggests that the world is seen through the eyes of the people who are part of the investigation.

In this case, the researcher made appointments with editors (past and present) from *City Press* and *Sunday Times* and conducted in-depth interviews with them. In addition, the researcher conducted in-depth interviews with government and political beat reporters from the same media houses. An editor and writers from SA News were also interviewed on the same basis. However, as indicated earlier, in-depth interactions were in some instances not possible due to lockdown regulations. WhatsApp calls and emails were used for data collection instead. According to Cohen and Crabtree (2006:101), an interpretivist paradigm is explained as the sharing of beliefs about nature and reality. It employs relativist ontology (which proposes that reality is constructed inter-subjectively through meaning and understanding) and transactional or subjectivist epistemology, which assumes that we cannot separate ourselves from what we know (Cohen & Crabtree 2006:101).

6.6 DATA COLLECTION: IN-DEPTH INTERVIEWS

According to Antwi and Hamza (2015:219), through the employment of qualitative research and, in particular, the use of in-depth interviews, one is able to collect as much rich data as possible while also being able to quote actual conversations. This method of data collection made it easy for the researcher to go deeper into the questions while also getting sufficiently useful information. In this instance, in-depth interviews with editors and beat reporters as well as personnel who played a part at the SA NEWS during the period under review were prepared (qualitatively). Mills and Gay (2016) states that the researcher is able to collect, analyse and interpret a huge number of data through in-depth interviews, in order to have a particular understanding.

While Alshengeeti (2014) submits that although interviews have some level of inconsistencies as the interviewees may only give what they are prepared and able to give at that point, the researcher was able to thoroughly deal with this perception. This was done through follow-up questions where it was established that more information was needed. Consent forms were also prepared, discussed and signed with the participants in order to get them to participate freely knowing that their information will be kept safe.

In addition, the researcher assured the participants of the highest level of confidentiality. The environment for the interviews was also very conducive and the participants were made to feel very comfortable and relaxed (Montoya 2016:812). According to Mohajan (2018), by using in-depth interviews, the researcher is able to determine people's knowledge, views, attitudes and deeds within a given setting. In-depth interviews took place in varying venues according to the availability and at some points, busy schedules of the participants. This means that in most cases the researcher had to visit the participants at their places of residence to conduct interviews. This was also directed by the lockdown restrictions, where other places of residence, pubs, restaurants and schooling facilities were closed. While this was the case, it was not necessarily a challenge since most of these participants live in homes and not in housing complexes. As discussed above, some interviews were held telephonically, while others preferred to answer the questions via email.

To make things easier, while also trying to make the participants at ease, the researcher made appointments according to the participants' availability. By so doing, the researcher was able to build trust with participants as well as to draw their interest, particularly when participants looked at the overall research question, which is "the effectiveness of SA News as a tool for government communication in South Africa".

The themes were drawn from the literature review (Emmel 2015:865) already prepared by the researcher prior to the interviews. The same themes also became relevant when the researcher was analysing the data from in-depth interviews. This also helped a great significantly, as participants had a basic understanding about the interviews. However, the researcher made sure that only he knew the questions. This was because the researcher needed to receive rich data straight from the participants on the spot without them having the opportunity to prepare for it. This was however not possible for participants who wished to answer the questions through email as they had enough time to think their answers through. Nevertheless, the answers received were enough to draw a conclusion.

6.6.1 Types of interviews

✓ **The structured (standardised) interview:**

According to Leedy (1997:17), when employing this interview type the researcher assumes that the questions scheduled will uncover relevant and comprehensive information to the study's topics. The researcher is able to add a series of closed-form questions in order to allow the participant to have the same impetus so that the answers are almost the same. According to Alsaawi (2014:150), in this type of an interview, the researcher is in control.

✓ **The semi-structured (semi-standardised) interview:**

These types of interviews allow for a set of follow-up questions in order to open the closed-form question (Leedy 1997:18). That is, more can be asked on the closed-form questions with probes designed to obtain additional, clarifying information. The advantage of these interviews is that participants are able to answer beyond what has been asked. The researcher made use of this interview format for all participants. This interview type was chosen because the researcher needed to have a chance to ask follow-up questions where necessary in order to obtain comprehensive data.

✓ **The in-depth interviews:**

These interviews are employed when a researcher wants to undertake explorative research. It seeks to identify important variables in a particular area, to formulate penetrating questions on them and to generate hypotheses for further investigation, (Welman & Kruger 1999:196). According to Fontana and Frey (2000:20), this is mostly applied when the researcher needs an in-depth understanding of complex behaviour of the interviewees without imposing any prior categorisation that may limit the field of inquiry. Bryman (2008:197) posits that in this instance, a discussion takes place and the interviewee has a choice to extend the answer further or leave it as is.

✓ **Ethical issues in interview inquiry**

In order to avoid ethical issues during the in-depth interview the researcher followed certain procedures. These include the use of proper informed consent and a confidentiality clause. In addition, the researcher ensured that no harm is done to participants. Privacy and confidentiality were applied at all times and the researcher made it clear to participants that they can opt out at any time. Allmark et al (2009:49) concur that since in-depth interviews deal with people, it is important that informed

consent and confidentiality be given enough attention. In this case, all participants were requested to sign consent forms. The participants were government and political beat reporters from both *City Press* and *Sunday Times*, which included editors. On the other hand, there were role players from SA News, which included past and present writers and editors of the agency. The participants were identified because of the nature of their work and how it relates to the study.

✓ **The role of the interviewer**

Alsaawi (2014) submits that as people, we unknowingly engage in interviews with people who we interact with on a daily basis. Therefore, it is necessary that an interviewer understands that conducting interviews should not be seen as something out of the ordinary, as it takes place every day. An interview is really an interactive, intimate connection between the interviewer and the interviewee with an understanding to achieving particular answers. It is therefore important for the interviewer to take control of the interview so that it gives necessary information, which will be helpful in the research process.

6.6.2 Benefits of in-depth interviews

As substantiated by Schultze and Avital (2011:5), in-depth interviews were chosen as suitable methods of collecting data because of their ability to allow a direct interaction between the researcher and participants. Moreover, Creswell (2003) submits that by using in-depth interviews, the researcher is able to ask a couple of questions from participants using open-ended questions while recording the conversations.

6.6.3 Why in-depth interviews are important

The use of in-depth interviews is quite important when conducting qualitative research. While other methods such as focus groups are also important and beneficial, using the in-depth interviews techniques provides the researcher with an opportunity to be at the coalface of the discussion. In this case, interactive discussions can be held between the two participants as if it is just a normal everyday engagement between the two. Claasen-Veldsman (2007) submits that in-depth interviews allow the gathering of rich data from the participants, while exploring specific issues. This is possible because it allows for further probing if necessary. Participants can also ask

for clarity seeking questions in the process, in order to answer correctly and factually. Watt (2007:87) concurs that data collection through employing in-depth interviews is like a basic human interaction where discussions define understandings of the world from the respondent's viewpoint.

6.6.4 Advantages of interviews

Gorman et al (2005:125) mentions advantages of in-depth interviews:

- Interviewing is a personal way of data collection and links to, for example, the participatory and reader-focused (user-focused) approaches where it is important to understand the meaning the participants derive from messages and to take them into account within their greater social context.
- Interviewing is appropriate in settings where the literacy skills of participants are open to question. As the effectiveness of the print brochures and associated literacy skills were investigated in this study, it was also decided to use interviewing as a data collection method to gain as much data as possible. Data collection would have been more limited if questionnaires were used.
- Interviewing as personal and oral communication may also be appropriate and suitable within the cultural framework of orality.
- Interviewing allows for immediate responses to questions.

6.7 RESEARCH TIME HORIZON

The periods chosen for examining of data for this study is 2009 to 2018. This was because it was during this time that the disputes between government and media became more visible. For example, government proposed a Tribunal Bill during this time (Seokoma 2010). It was also the time when government introduced cost-cutting measures by reducing advertisements in various newspapers. Moreover, the aim was to provide a longitudinal study of the government media content.

6.8 SAMPLING STRATEGY

The main research question together with the purposeful sampling method of the study and the overall purpose of this study was employed to choose participants for this study. Babbie (2016:13) espouses that in most cases researchers, due to their knowledge of the population or due to their study, usually prefer the use of purposive or judgemental sampling. The same approach was used in this case. Participants were editors from both *Sunday Times and City Press*, who worked at these papers between 2009 and 2018. The two newspapers were selected because of the nature of their news coverage, which contains a high percentage of politics and government news.

Government and political beat reporters from the same media houses, who also participated during the same period, were also identified and interviewed. One editor and five writers from SA News also participated. Content analysis, using archived *City Press* and *Sunday Times* newspapers, was also conducted. According to Creswell (2015), the sample size of quantitative data should be large enough so that it becomes representative of the wider population. Therefore, the sample size of this study was 200 newspaper articles ranging from 2009 to 2018 and this, according to (Eiselen et al 2007) is a large enough sample size. A stratified method was used. Ten articles from each newspaper were identified per year, over a ten-year span, which resulted in 200 articles. This was done in a form of themes, with reference to the newspapers' coverage of government news. An evaluation of positive, neutral or negative news, helped in quantitatively gauging the mood, while capturing the rise and decline of the SA News.

Although it may appear that the participants were few, they were actually sufficient and gave credible and relevant information, which made it possible for the researcher to achieve intended results. Data saturation was reached in the responses of the research questions. It was also not going to be possible for the researcher to interview more than the amount of participants due to time limitations and resources. Besides, in order for the study to be researchable, only two newspapers, identified by the researcher as relevant for this study, were chosen. Participants, all of whom either work or worked for the newspapers (*Sunday Times and City Press*) and SA NEWS, provided valuable information, which was also referred to as rich and thick data (Cleary et al 2014:474). The choice and the number of participants was also with an

understanding that the emphasis of the study was not necessarily on the size of the sample, but rather on its adequacy (Bowen 2008:138).

6.9 POPULATION AND SAMPLING

According to Neuman (2011), sampling exists in order to deepen and clarify understanding. In this study, therefore, the editors (past and present) from *City Press* and *Sunday Times* were used as the population for the study. Since the main method of collecting data in this study was qualitative, purposive sampling was used, which empowered the researcher to identify relevant participants who had the capacity to give valuable answers to the research question. Miles et al (2014:30) posit that qualitative research sampling generally tends to be purposive rather than random.

It was impossible for the researcher to interview everyone, which is why only participants seen as relevant to answer the research questions, were considered. This approach empowered the researcher to make use of his discretion to identify relevant participants. Cohen et al (2011:209) agree that when using purposive sampling, the researcher is endowed to choose the participants based on his judgement of their suitability. The participants were chosen purposefully by the researcher because of their direct involvement in what the researcher was looking for. Leedy and Ormrod (2010) concur that purposeful sampling is a situation where participants are selected on the basis that they have the capacity to give valuable data regarding the research question. For content analysis, the population is government stories written in these newspapers

6.10 TARGET POPULATION

According to Bless and Higson-Smith (2000:29), the target population of a study is the set of rudiments and fundamentals that are the focal point at that particular time. Since this is a mixed method study, the target population are two editors from each newspaper identified. This is because in these newspapers there was more than one editor who edited the newspapers during the period of review. Three government/political beat reporters from each newspaper were also interviewed. On the other hand, one editor and three writers from the SA News were similarly interviewed. Therefore, sixteen participants were interviewed for this proposed study.

Quantitatively and qualitatively, ten articles from each newspaper were identified per year over ten years, which resulted in 200 articles.

6.10.1 ACCESSIBLE POPULATION

The accessible population consisted of editors and government/political beat reporters from the two identified newspapers who were at the helm during the period under review. This also included the editor and five writers of the SA News.

6.10.2 UNIT OF ANALYSIS

Babbie (2016:14) defines the unit of analysis as something, which a study needs in order to be labelled or enlightened. The study's unit of analysis were editors from both *Sunday Times* and *City Press* who worked at these papers from 2009 to 2018. In addition, government and political beat reporters from the same media houses who also participated during the same period were chosen. One editor and three writers from SA News were also interviewed. Newspaper articles archived *City Press* and *Sunday Times* newspapers, also became units of analysis for this study. Ten articles from each newspaper were identified per year, over ten years, which resulted in 200 articles.

6.11 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Ponterotto (2010:551) accedes that the issues of ethics have a lot to do with self-awareness, amongst other critical issues. Henceforth, in this instance, all ethical aspects and principles were considered and accordingly applied. These include anonymity confidentiality, informed consent, and protection from harm from friends, families and colleagues (Leedy & Omrod 2005). In particular, protection from harm was highly considered in this instance because of COVID-19. Therefore, the researcher agreed to the use of other alternative methods with participants in order to avoid the spread of the virus. Proper precautions were applied with those who agreed to hold in-depth and in person interviews. These include, amongst others, the use of masks and social distancing. In addition, the UNISA ethical policy was read and understood in order to ensure that all the ethical aspects and principles are followed throughout the research.

Strydom (2011:113) defines ethics as sets of moral principles, which offer rules and behavioural expectations about a particular subject. In this case, an ethical clearance certificate was obtained from the Ethical Clearance Committee of the University. According to Babbie (2011:14), all those who are involved in social science research needs to know that there is a general agreement amongst researchers about what is proper and improper when it comes to ethical issues.

6.12 ANONYMITY, CONFIDENTIALITY AND INFORMED CONSENT

In order to maintain anonymity throughout the data collection process, participants' names were replaced with the words participant 1, 2 or 3. In some instances, answers were also paraphrased in order to hide its origination. According to Strydom (2011:114), confidentiality is an addition of secrecy wherein two parties come to an agreement that limits others access to secretive information. Names and organisations represented by participants were also kept confidential. All data collected during the process was kept in a locked safe. Participants were informed that their participation and that the information to be gathered is for research purposes. Furthermore, an informed consent questionnaire memorandum of understanding was also developed and signed by all parties. Cohen et al (2007) submit that the origin of informed consent comes from the fact that participants, like anyone, also have the right to freedom, which must not be unduly limited in any way.

6.13 DATA ANALYSIS

Data analysis is a process of analysing data as collected during the collection course. As noted by Ho (2006), once data has been collected, the frequency of the data found in the process would be calculated. Sekayi and Strong (2017) concurs that the process of analysing data helps in guiding the researcher to create meaning out of the data generated. This process entails making logic of what has been collected in order to reach a conclusion or draw an opinion about the researched topic. It is a procedure that refers to the evaluation of the collected data, while establishing the legitimacy of the sources (Burns & Bush 2000:78). Additionally, Leedy and Ormrod (2010) points out that data is like manifestation of the truth, rather than the truth itself. This is because there is yet to be an individual who would look upon truth itself as pure, undisguised, naked truth.

In this case, a mixed research methodology was used. Firstly, a qualitative method was used and as described by Tesch (2013: 4) it is merely a “process of making sense of the narrative data”. Although two types of research methods were used for research, qualitative research was used as a primary method, while a quantitative method was used as secondary method mainly to validate data received from the primary method.

A recorder was used to capture the responses. Data was then transcribed so that it could easily be analysed. This was done on both data that was collected telephonically as well as those collected through in-depth interviews, with the exception of the few which were gathered through email. Therefore, it was important to transcribe data to easily present it while identifying meaning of units and similarities of each transcript before they could be interpreted into particular meaning (Graneheim & Lundman 2004:105). Therefore, an inductive method was employed in this case, which, according to Saunders et al (2016), has a lot do with involving the tracking of similarities from a pot full of data and then developing explanations from those similarities using a sequence of assumptions.

Secondly, a quantitative research analysis was conducted through the analysis of newspaper articles from the *Sunday Time* and *City Press*. This was done by identifying ten articles per year over ten years from 2009 to 2018. This resulted in 200 articles. Since some of these periods have long passed, electronic versions of these two newspapers articles were accessed through the Unisa Library on News bank. This process is referred to as content analysis.

6.13.1 QUALITATIVE DATA ANALYSIS

After the data was transcribed and similarities were identified, it was analysed and interpreted through the identification of codes and themes. The initial codes were changed into themes with narratives drawn from the participants’ responses and were to be done in two-fold. Firstly, narratives from the editors and beat reporters were used from the two newspapers in question. Secondly, different narratives of the responses from the role players from the SA News were also used. As a way of validating if the data from interviews was sufficient, content analysis of articles was also applied. This approach also helped to quantitatively gauge the themes of content, mood and to capture the rise and decline of the SA News.

6.13.2 QUANTITATIVE DATA ANALYSIS THROUGH CONTENT ANALYSIS

In order for the numbers to be easily understood, the researcher separated them into yearly increments. This was done by analysing ten articles per year and making use of the same determining factors such as positive, neutral and negative reporting. While it was established that this section seeks to interrogate objective one of the study, it must also be mentioned that it also helps interrogate objective two, three and four. For example, objective two seeks to establish if SA News influences the framing of government news stories. While objective three seeks to establish if SA News is effective as measured by output and outtakes indexes. Further, objective four seeks to establish the extent to which SA NEWS services are provided as public information, persuasion or propaganda by government and to what extent such is construed as public information, persuasion or propaganda by the news media.

6.13.2.1 Authenticity, Credibility and Representativeness

During the process of analysing data, the researcher made use of authenticity, credibility, representativeness and meaning (Viswambharan & Priya 2016:44). Primarily, the researcher needed to make sure that the documents were 100 percent pure and authentic. This was done by making sure that the newspapers or rather articles which were identified for analysis were received straight from the archives of both *City Press* and *Sunday Times* and not from anywhere else.

In order to ensure that the data is credible the researcher took time to scrutinise the newspaper articles thoroughly and ensured that they were not tampered with in any way. Since these were electronic versions of the newspapers, the researcher ensured that they were authentic.

According to Ahmed (2010:6), representativeness is about checking whether the data in the document is typical of that kind of document. The researcher compared the electronic versions of the newspaper articles with those accessed online. Where possible, the researcher used the search engine, Google to also search all the articles, which were identified in order to compare them with one another. There was however nothing untoward that was identified during this process.

6.14 DATA CODING AND TRANSCRIBING

In-depth interviews were employed in this process, during which 16 participants were identified. The population of this study included editors, journalists and government writers. In order to keep records while ensuring that data is stored safely for future use, the researcher made use of a voice recorder. Participants were however notified beforehand so that they could relax and not suspect otherwise.

Recording of interviews came in handy as it could be played repeatedly during the transcription period. As maintained by Silverman (2016:12), there is an advantage in the use of audiotapes because they can always be referred to at a later stage and that an analysis can be made as many times as possible without it being tampered with. When transcribing, every word from the interview was listened to and transcribed using a pen and paper. This was then later typed and saved onto the computer. In this instance and as indicated above, due to regulations and restrictions introduced by government because of COVID-19, other participants requested the use of email. In this case, albeit in very few cases, the researcher sent questions to the participants, who later responded with the answers.

While this was the case, a very large amount of data had to still be transcribed. The transcribing was quite demanding. It would take over three hours to transcribe only one interview. Nonetheless, the researcher persisted and completed all of them.

6.15 DATA CODING

Qualitative data for this study was collected via in-depth interviews where a face-to-face setup was created, while only a few responses were received via email and phone. Although this is the case, all data needed to firstly be coded in order to make sense out of it. Blair (2015:15) submits that in the history of qualitative research, there comes a time when scholars see data and asks what to do with it. This is because in many instances, data becomes so much that one does not know where to start. In this case, 16 participants were consulted, resulting in quite a large amount of data. As seen by Robson (2002), prior to reaching conclusion of the findings, there is a greater need for researchers to carefully tease out information that is of common interest.

Stemler (2001:2) indicates that there are actually two types of coding, which include emergent coding whereby codes are taken from text, and a prior coding, which involves the creation of codes beforehand and applying them to the text. The emergent coding method was used in this instance. That is, the researcher transcribed data first and created codes from the text. Meanwhile, Faherty (2010:59) maintains that there are actually “no absolute hard-and-fast rules” when coding, the researcher opted for the use of emergent coding. As such, the researcher did not become confused when themes were created from coding.

When coding data from this study, both inductive and deductive methods were employed. The use of this coding method was advantageous as issues not known to the researcher emerged in the process. Therefore, as found by Braun and Clarke (2012:58), the process continued without trying to build it into a pre-existing code frame.

This means that data was captured through the recorder in a fresh format and demanded that it be broken into smaller units, which are called codes. According to Blair (2015:15), the best way of dealing with raw data is to create what is known as labels or codes so that data can be developed into understandable units that can easily be analysed. These were extracted from the objectives of the study, literature review, as well as, the overall research question. After codes were created, the researcher also developed and made use of themes, which were helpful in finding areas of common interests throughout the process. A similar pattern was used in the answers of all the participants.

6.15.1 CODE SCHEME FOR CONTENT ANALYSIS

According to Wu and Neuendorf (2011) codes can be located everywhere as long as researchers knows what they are looking for and this could even include information found on eBay auction pages. However, Neuendorf and Kumar (2015:3) argues that in most cases, content analysts no longer prefer the old paper coding forms as they have not resorted to electronic coding forms, such as Excel files. The same scheme was applied in this study, where an electronic format was preferred. This made it easy as opposed to what would have been the case if paper were used. Neuendorf and

Kumar (2015:4) concurs that this format of coding confirms reliability and is able to give checks to researcher and subsequently make analysing data easier.

6.15.2 TRAINING OF CODERS

Although it is encouraged that the researcher should train coders, the opposite was chosen as an option. This is was with an understanding that the researcher became more embedded in the data that it was only purely understood better by him. Therefore, it was rather easy for the researcher to code himself than to get someone who may not have the same understanding as the researcher. This also made it easy for the researcher to analyse data as he became more familiar with it in the process of coding.

6.15.3 RELIABILITY

Lacy, Watson, Riffe and Lovejoy (2015:791) indicate the necessity of reliability that although it is not sufficient, it remains a condition in which for content analysis data would be see as been valid. The researcher made certain that reliability was ensured at all time during this process. As seen by Lacy et al (2015:791), “minimally, content analysis requires that intercoder reliability must be tested and reported.” As such, the researcher was able to tackle any issues in this regard, especially due his full understanding and comprehension of data.

6.16 QUANTITATIVE RIGOUR MEASURES

Creswell and Miller (2000, in Creswell, 2014) opine that validity is actually the strongest point of qualitative research and it is built on making sure that the findings are precise from the standpoint of the researcher, the participant or the overall point of the final product. Validity refers to the degree to which the methods measure accurately what it set out to measure.

Krippendorff (2008:16) opines that reliability is an important element in research as it deals with the reliability of data. Once data is reliable, it can be easily utilised in a trustworthy way and can be effective during a research process. Joppe (2000:1) understands reliability as, “the extent to which results are consistent over time and an

accurate representation of the total population under study is referred to as reliability and if the results of a study can be reproduced under a similar methodology, then the research instrument is considered to be reliable.” In this instance, the population identified were helpful in ensuring that the data is reliable for this study. Golafshani (2003:598) found that reliability is often used to test quantitative research and while this is the case, it can be used in other methods of research such as the mixed method. Therefore, reliability was relevant in this study, as it was necessary to check the quality of the study. In an attempt to deal with this issue, the researcher ensured that although not all articles were displayed on the quantitative content analysis an overall explanation is given. Further, headlines of all the articles and dates are also displayed in pages that follow. The reason why some articles were displayed as opposed to all is that it would have just become a space filler as data saturation was reached in the process. That is, the researcher read and understood all the articles and grouped them accordingly and explained in the analysis. The researcher also did not use the second coder in the process of analysing data. This is because it was easy for the researcher to read and analyse data because of familiarity of the subject as well as the content of the articles. This made it easy to know which article would be placed in which category and why such is the case. This way the issue of reliability was attended to as it would not have been the case if someone who might not be familiar with the subject had used. In terms of sequencing, the qualitative interviews came before the quantitative content analysis.

6.17. QUALITATIVE RIGOUR MEASURES

Four criteria were used to ensure that rigour is established in this research. These are credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability (Noble & Smith 2015:35).

6.17.1 Confirmability

In ensuring the study’s objectivity, the researcher made sure that there is thorough documentation and recording of data every step of the way. With the help of technological advances such as iCloud and emails, data was kept safe at all times and was audited all the time to check its conformity. The researcher also made use of guidance from the supervisor who provided support every step of the way (Creswell, 2015).

6.17.2 Dependability

Noble and Smith (2015:35) espouse that dependability comes when there is a high level of consistency or reliability. That is, data collected, or better yet, the final product, which the researcher presents to the readers, should be reliable and that the issues of consistency should apply throughout the document. In this process, the researcher ensured that data is thoroughly audited and kept clean at all times. The recordings were kept safe in a locked safe so that they could not be tampered with. All information collected in the process of data collection, including data articles collected during content analysis, were kept safe. Polit and Beck (2008:145) concur that through the application of dependability one is able obtain data which is stable over time.

6.17.3 Credibility

Polit and Beck (2008:144) espouse that when it comes to credibility, the value of the study as well as its authenticity is of paramount importance. In this instance, the researcher ensured that interviews were conducted properly and that the data deducted from the interviews was analysed thoroughly. When it comes to content analysis, the researcher ensured that a plan was drawn up wherein analysis took place evaluating whether the articles were positive, neutral or negative articles.

6.17.4 Transferability

Graneheim and Lundman (2004:105) found that there are some difficulties with qualitative research as conclusions are not easily transferred. Lincoln and Guba (1985) further noted that it is not for the researcher to give an index of transferability. It is however his or her job to provide a big enough database to make it easy for others to make transferability judgements (Lincoln and Guba 1985). Therefore, there is a sufficient database for this study, to allow others to make transferability judgements.

6.18 FLEXIBILITY

Flexibility in research is about the possibility of the findings of a particular study to be transferred to another situation. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), transferability remains the responsibility of an individual who wants to transfer the findings to another situation, as opposed to the original researcher. Similarly, it will be the responsibility

of any individual wanting to transfer findings from this study and not the original researcher.

6.19 CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter gave an overview of the research methodology and design of the study. A systematic process was discussed which indicated how both qualitative and quantitative approaches were used and the reasons why these were used.

Details of data collection techniques, used in the study, namely in-depth interviews, and the content analysis techniques were explained. The advantages of using interviews were also deliberated, with clear indications on why in-depth interviews were used for this study.

Amongst many aspects, the chapter touches on elements such as the research horizon and the population and sampling strategy of the study, which, as described by Miles et al (2014), generally tends to be purposive rather than random. The chapter also detailed the data analysis process followed in this study, where quantitatively, 200 articles from the *Sunday Times* and *City Press* were examined. Ethical considerations applied in the study were also discussed and details were given on signed consents, which the researcher signed with the participants prior to interviewing them.

A data coding and transcribing process was detailed in this chapter and the use of audiotapes was necessary because the data can always be referred to at a later stage (Silverman 2016). The chapter also detailed very important aspects such as conformity, dependability and most importantly, flexibility.

The next chapter deals with the results and findings of the study. It details findings from the interview process between participants in media and those in government. Also discussed in this chapter are the findings from a content analysis process, where 200 newspapers articles were analysed.

CHAPTER 7: A RESULTS AND FINDINGS: QUALITATIVE DATA

7.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter deals with the qualitative findings of the study. The application of codes as well as the contributions from participants from both media and government are also presented and applied qualitatively throughout.

Some of these codes include *state of readiness of articles from SA NEWS, influence in the framing of government news by SA NEWS, credibility of SA NEWS as a news agency and skills and writing capacity of SA NEWS writers.*

7.2 IN-DEPTH INTERVIEW DATA FINDINGS

This section explains the process that was followed with findings from data extracted from interviews. Data was transcribed, after which codes and themes were formed. As indicated above, in order to thoroughly interrogate the data received from interviews, themes had to be created and these were guided by the objectives of the study, the literature findings as well the overall research question.

7.2.1 STATE OF READINESS OF ARTICLES FROM SA NEWS

This section entails the newsworthiness of articles from SA NEWS. That is, how ready the news articles are to be adopted “as is” by media as well as the public. The section looks at how much alteration, if any, is made to messages received from government by media. Also, it discusses whether such alteration gives new meaning to what was initially intended in such messages, or whether such are mere cosmetic editing, which include grammar and language preferences.

According to Harcup and O’Neill (2017:1471), it is important for media writers to apply and consider news values when writing for the masses. This suggests that anyone wishing to see a story in the news media should ensure that such is newsworthy. Government communicators have to ensure that their stories will be acceptable to any editor. In this case, many participants from media agreed that the news media relies on newsworthy stories and that if a story is not newsworthy, it will not be considered.

Journalists were asked about the state of readiness of news articles from SA News. The researcher needs to establish if stories written by SA News writers are ready for use by media and whether or not they are angled in such a way that media can simply place them in the newspapers. Participant 2 (P2 - Government and Beat Reporter) submitted that he has never made use of stories retrieved from SA NEWS as they are. Instead, a lot of modification has to take place before such can be regarded as a story. Sometimes the whole article has to be changed into a new story. P2 states that:

You have to go an extra mile. This is because press releases and news from SA NEWS are actually announcements. It is PR material, they make an announcement and you make it public as a journalist.

Many other participants from media echo the same sentiments as they collectively agreed that news provided by government platforms such as SA NEWS are not useful. For example, Participant 3 (P3 - Government and Beat Reporter) indicated that they will occasionally make use of stories from SA NEWS but it will only make it to the online edition of the newspaper. Further, P3 states:

We would access at least two or three and these would be changed into different angles or with more comments and more background and context on how it relates to the greater scheme of things. If there have been prior projects involved, for example, from the same department or under the same government agency. Therefore, we would then highlight that and say this is the second or third project that is similar in nature.

In addition, P4 (Government and Beat Reporter) also agrees that quite a lot still needs to be done with stories retrieved through SA NEWS. P4 maintains that, in fact, this is not only the case with SA NEWS, but also with many other avenues such as press releases and press conferences. These platforms are only used to make a particular announcement about the launching of new projects. The news is actually behind the project and not the launch itself.

P4 submits that:

With City Press, they prioritise stories that are very exclusive. Therefore, you have to build on it. Let me not say they are not accepted entirely, but you have to build on the story. When you get something from SA NEWS, you need to get further information, like an angle that is going to set you apart from other media houses.

For government communicators, what is important is to provide media with news. Modification of government articles by the mainstream media is not bothersome to them. Their idea is that the message of government should reach the public. This is asserted by P6 who as a government communicator stipulates that:

Media houses can add what they feel is lacking or missing from our news articles.

However, P1, answering from the perspective of government as a former writer for SA News, indicates that things were different when he was still employed at the agency when it just started. He indicated that he made sure that all angles of the story were presented. He maintains that newsworthiness and news values were critical in every story that he and the other writers wrote.

P1 says:

Well, we did not do much of the sunshine journalism or praise singing. We confronted issues and reported on them objectively. As a result, those articles would be used as they were because we never necessarily used the voice of government. We measured on third part endorsements and we; spoke to experts on those subjects. In addition, when you do that, you make sure that you are ticking the objectivity box.

This is maintained by P7 (former writer from SA NEWS), who states that:

Obviously, the writing from Bua News and other media houses was different. The angle might not change a lot at the time when you send stories to them or when they follow up on the story. They only change

the language and the style of writing on the same story. However, they were ready-made stories that we would write, and they would place it on their website and the online version of their newspapers.

P5 (former writer from SA NEWS) also emphasises that they made sure that they applied prerequisite skills on an article and packaged it in a way that media would not even think twice about using it as it is.

Furthermore, as reporters from government, they were at an advantage because all the resources were at their disposal. P5 adds:

Firstly, it is important to note that Bua News had a better footprint as compared to the mainstream media. For instance, when I was based as a correspondent in Mafikeng, I think it was the Sowetan and City Press that had bureau offices there, and of course the SABC, which is in another sector, that is broadcasting. Nevertheless, none of the any other titles had any representation in Mafikeng, which is the capital city of North West's administration. Therefore, we were at an advantage because we could reach places that they could not reach.

This section indicates that, in many instances, media would make many alterations to news articles provided by SA NEWS. What is even more concerning is that such alterations could result in changes to the meaning of the original article and as such could mean that it became a new article altogether. In these instances, media would develop an article in such a way that it involved deeper investigations. Such an investigation would uncover further information and as a result, a news article that was meant to be positive, could become negative towards government. While this is the case, P1, who has been involved in Bua News in its early days, indicates that when the agency had just begun, they would write stories without adding an element of propaganda. Although this was the case and was embraced by media, such an approach was quickly changed as it was viewed as self-destructive. A news approach was implemented which saw government communicators focusing on and highlighting only the good news from government.

7.2.2 THE INFLUENCE OF FRAMING OF GOVERNMENT NEWS STORIES BY SA NEWS

This section seeks to indicate that through the process of communicating with the public, government is involved in framing their own messages. This is done in order to ensure that only positive messages are carried through to the public at all times. In this instance the South African government makes use of SA NEWS, amongst many other avenues, in order to influence what goes out in the public domain. The model of the Government Communication and Information System (GCIS) in terms of SA NEWS, previously referred to as Bua News, as an agency, was to bridge the communication gap and increase the government's voice in the communication environment. In fact, the project of Bua News was critical in ensuring that the government's voice is not lost in the process of communication.

For example, P1 (former writer from SA NEWS) elaborates on this by indicating that:

We had to be as objective as possible while making sure that government's position is reflected.

This suggests that although it can be argued that stories are objective, at the end of the day, the position of government needs to be brought into a good light. That is, government cannot criticise itself, so writers and editors have to ensure that what goes out in the public domain really represents government well.

Further, P7 elaborates that their biggest focus was on ensuring that the voice of government is "out there", and this should be done in only a positive way. In other words, they were engaged in public relations work every day. P7 maintains that:

My beat was on feature writing and to write news on the presidency. I was also mentoring some of the junior journalists whom I would normally assign stories to as one of the three assistant editors there.

P6 concurs:

Since I work for a Government News Agency (SA NEWS), I write about government activities, reporting about activities in the various government departments.

In order for this to properly take shape, SA NEWS spreads the work accordingly, so that every government sector has a well-vested and trained writer who will write positively about government. This strategy was employed to also ensure that these articles influences the thinking of the electorates in various communities. The key criteria in this case is to ensure that the voice of government is spread across communities at all time.

P1 concurs that:

We divided stories according to beats. I mean in the traditional newspaper you will have beats as entertainment reporter, as a political reporter and general news reporter. In our context, we looked at the structure of government departments. For example, I will do the presidency, the tourism department and the environment departments. Therefore, we divided ourselves in terms of department of government.

South Africa is a multi-party state. Although only one party rules in government, many other parties would do anything to change the ruling party. Therefore, those in government now will make sure that those who elected them see their good deeds. In this case, it becomes clear that government will go all the way to ensure that their good work is popularised and spread to the public.

Thus, P1 supports the assertions that,

We had to position South Africa as a country with possibilities to the international media houses as well as international communities as an agency. I remember one day I went to Addis Ababa and came across a newspaper at the hotel and when I looked at the newspaper, I saw my story. I was like, wow, so this is the impact that we have. I wrote a story and I never even imaged that somebody sitting in Ethiopia would be reading the story. However, boom, in a hotel room, I see my story. So that was the impact of the stories we did as an agency.”

P1 adds:

In addition, our existence as an agency played a very huge role as a feeder of news because as issues of capacity in terms of personnel and equipment confronted more newspapers, they will then rely on us. Therefore, we would become a reliable and credible source of government news. As a result, the newspapers would know that they could rely on us. I remember at the time we would have SAPA (South Africa Press Association), but it later died, which was one of the leading news agencies in the country. So when it died around 2010 we remained the main feeder of news in the country.”

Reporters working for government in the 1990's were at an advantage because of sufficient resources at their disposal. That is, they could go wherever they wanted to go and even reach rural peripheries, which other mainstream media could not do. This gave them an upper hand in influencing the framing of government news as they could report on exclusive stories, which no other media house could do. However, this does not appear to be the case any longer in the 2000's, because government has since reduced such resources. P5 submits that:

I think the fact that they have killed stringers in the provinces has a lot to do with that, because mainstream media is based in Gauteng, largely. Therefore, chances are that, they will be able to attend the government events that happen in this area.

In its quest to communicate with media and the public at large, government makes use of various channels. While this is the case, all these channels are meant to ensure that a positive stance from government is maintained at all times. That is, government frames its messages in a way that projects them to be coping, even when they are not. In the South African context for example, government makes use of its communication channels, one of which is SA News, to give a projection to the public that its machinery is free of corruption and that actions are taken against those found to have been involved in corrupt activities. Therefore, SA News becomes a vehicle through which government messages are coined in a direction that would place government in power and in control of all problems faced by the public. Through the

use of these messages, which are placed and made available freely on SA News, government believes that media and the public will accept government, as is and without questions.

7.2.3 THE USEFULNESS AND THE CREDIBILITY OF SA NEWS AS A NEWS AGENCY

This section seeks to establish the usefulness of SA NEWS as a news agency. That is, while it is a fact that the agency continues to frame messages and make them available to media and the public, the question is, do these messages find an audience? The section also deals with the usefulness and the credibility of SA NEWS as viewed by media and by SA NEWS reporters themselves.

The agency became a vehicle with which government could communicate with the masses in a very short space of time. It became a force to be reckoned with in that the only way to receive credible information from government was through the agency. It became available as a source of reliable and factual news from government. That is, it was clear that government could not fabricate or release incorrect information about itself. However, this information also became a stepping-stone for media to build on in their own stories, which could eventually become negative or neutral towards government. That is, the fact that the agency was useful only when media needed to verify facts was enough.

The agency was, however, useful from a government point of view, as P1 substantiates:

Our job was to take government's programme of action, which is derived from the State of the Nation Address. We will look at that as that will become our Bible, it will become our blueprint for the entire year. So, everything that will happen from government will be looked at from the perspectives of government's programme of action.

P1 further elaborates:

What made it easier for us is that the articles were of quality, they were of substance and they were ready to use. I remember we would have relationships with the newspapers and we would lobby them to make use of our articles, and they would come be punished exactly as we would have written them.

When asked if the agency was useful, journalists also agreed that in some instances it was. Conversely, this was only the case when they had to verify certain facts, as P4 concedes that the agency was actually helpful:

The fact that it is coming from government means that you know it is a credible organisation. So as much as we build on it, we know that it is trustworthy.

The sentiments were reinforced by both P2 (Government and Political Beat Writer) and P3, who found that the agency was quite useful, albeit in things other than they what they were actually looking for. For example, when asked if the agency was useful in his daily duties as a new reporter, P3 said:

Actually, I did find it useful. I think for consolidation, because, remember, you do not want government speaking in different voices. The announcements are credible. They have access to the entire cabinet. Therefore, the announcements are the final word from government. Generally, if there was an issue where a municipality says one thing and GCIS says another, you will probably believe GCIS because they are the authority. So they are useful in that sense.

The agency is at some point useful in media space. This is backed up by many instances and as stated by P7 who submits that:

For instance, I know I wrote some story and it was carried in Mail & Guardian as is and other United Nations publication, UNICEF. Therefore, they would carry it as is, but it was not always. They will tweak it around some of the time.

On the other hand, while agreeing with the fact that the news agency was helpful in some ways, P2 (Government and Political Beat Writer) also indicated that:

Of course, yes, because I guess government needs to praise itself largely as any other organisation. That is what happens in those platforms. Therefore, those platforms are very important to the national discourse. However, as a media agency who tries to and strives to be objective and to be a lot more informative to the electorate, the only way to do that is to give context. And I think the only problem with government news agency is that they do not give context.

While this is the case, though, there are reporters who have never found SA NEWS articles useful in any way. While others may make use of the agency to verify news and build up their stories, others like P8 (Government and Political Beat writer) indicates that they have never even opened the agency's website. P8 highlights that:

I mean press conferences, yes, where there is an opportunity to ask questions, especially now during the COVID-19 pandemic, or there were in the beginning at least. Therefore, we used those for online purposes. Then we take the story forward by way of an interview or digging around for more information or from sources from the departments that are in government.

According to P8, only press conferences are at times useful during the sourcing of news, as they are interpersonal and offer clarity. There has, however, never been a situation where SA News content was used as the only source of news. Journalists are more reliant on conducting their own investigations rather than any other methods

P10 (Government and Political Beat Writer) adds:

I do not access news via SA NEWS. I get government statements via email from government Information and Communication Systems (GCIS).

P13 (Newspaper Editor) states:

We hardly make use of government news. We prefer making use of our own sources. This way we have concrete information that is not only readable, but credible as well. You will never receive this information through a news release.

While government continues to use SA NEWS to populate positive messages to media and the public, the question remains as to whether this is received well, in particular by media. This section shares two-pronged findings, one being that media does not really see the usefulness and credibility of messages from government. This is so because media finds these messages as only carrying positive highlights from government, which lack thorough interrogation, which is necessary for media audience.

The second part of the finding is that while such messages are not as helpful “as is” from government, they are not necessarily useless as media is able to carry them through by building up on the story, which would involve other necessary parties and information. For example, a story about government building a multi-million Rand school on a particular farm in Limpopo may not necessarily be useful to media “as is”, but such a story could be built into a newsworthy article through a thorough investigation which could involve the exact amount of money used, the contractor used, the time spent to build school, the reason why such a school was built on the farm instead of a township, and many other such questions.

7.2.4 SKILLS AND WRITING CAPACITY POSSESSED BY SA NEWS WRITERS

This section deals with the recruitment strategy used by SA NEWS to attract writers. This includes the skills and educational capacity which these writers would have, added to skills given by SA NEWS in the process. The understanding is that the agency was built through the employment of highly skilled writers from all over the country. Proper recruitments strategies, which included high salaries and benefits, were used to attract some of the established journalists already in the news media environment. Training opportunities were also made available for young and fresh writers who may not have the experience in media, but possessed the skill in writing.

P1 substantiates that:

I think there was a strategic recruitment strategy employed by the chief editor then. She targeted people who came from the newspaper background. As I said, when I joined, I was coming from City Press. Therefore, she targeted people who understood what news is and who had the writing capacity. People who knew, coming from a media background, what elements media required in a story.

SA News made use of a strategic recruitment process, which ensured that only experienced writers would make it through to their employ. In order to get the agency going and be at a level of others such as Sapa and Reuters at the time, the agency recruited young and fresh writers from university and brought in experienced writers and journalists from various media houses who already had newsroom experience and were able to easily write good stories. These individuals came in to help with writing good quality stories from a government perspective, which editors from various media houses would find easy to publish. These stories would be fed to or accessed freely by media in South Africa and abroad (DoC, 2012).

According to P7 (Former SA NEWS Writer), Bua News made sure that only the cream in media space where recruited. P7 states that:

I qualified as a journalist. I have got an honours degree in journalism. I joined Bua News from the City Press newspaper. Workwise I was writing general news. I was then promoted to be a financial journalist. My background as financial and business journalist at City Press helped me to get in at the government communications newsletter, Bua News. I was then appointed as Assistant Director there, responsible for writing feature stories. I was also responsible for stories that are on the presidency's activities list at the time. So basically, that is what I was doing at the time at City Press and Bua News.

P5 confirms this:

Before I joined Bua News, I was a junior news reporter at a community newspaper in Mafikeng, where I spent less than a year before I was recruited to Bua News. Prior to the stint at the community newspaper, I was an intern at the provincial government in North West at the Department of Public Works, in particular. There my job entailed writing for the internal and external newsletter for the department. Prior to that, while I was studying towards a qualification in journalism, I was actively involved in the activities of a campus newspaper, which we used to call Update. There was another one, which was known as the baby of journalism students, which was called the College Road Chronicle. So, that is as much experience as I had prior to joining Bua News in 2006.

It goes to show that the agency targets high-end and talented writers in the country, as confirmed by P6 (current SA News reporter) who stipulates that:

I studied Journalism at the then Technikon Northern Transvaal (TNT) and now known as Tshwane University of Technology (TUT). For more than 20 years, I have been working as a journalist. In as far as writing is concerned, I write/report about government activities and compile reports when requested to do so.

P12 (former SA News editor):

I was privileged to work with journalists who were experienced and always willing to learn more – to sharpen their skills. They displayed a great understanding of issues and had formed relations with communities and leaders at different levels.

The section provides clear findings that the government communication machinery has skilled and educated personnel in its stable, some of which have been recruited from the media environment. While this is so, the challenge remains that these well-trained writers are forced to change their perspective towards news and are made to only focus on writing stories, which aim to project government in a positive light. The fact of the matter is that no matter how good a writer could be, government would

never allow a situation where its communicator writes a negative story about its affairs. The government communication machinery exists to chase positive reporting about government. This is why part of its recruitment involves journalists who have been in media space for some time. Through this approach, government hopes to use their experience in media to advice on how to create and maintain positive reporting of government by media.

7.2.5 SA NEWS SERVICES PROVIDED AS PUBLIC INFORMATION OR PROPAGANDA BY GOVERNMENT

This section seeks to investigate two things: Firstly, whether SA News messages are provided as a form of public information which is there to inform the public about what government does on a daily basis, and secondly, whether such messages are provided as a form of propaganda, that exists to change the mind-sets and influence the thinking of the public and media towards government.

The South African government developed SA News as a government-controlled news agency to share highlights of government programmes. P5 corroborates this by stating:

But when you say it's SA government news, you are saying to the person who is reading that, this is propaganda first and foremost and I don't think people will warm up to that. We know that Bua News was a propaganda machine. That is true. However, the way it was branded, it was not immediately obvious that it is a propaganda machine. But the way it is now, you don't even have to think hard to know what it is, and that for me is a problem."

For an even wider reach, as stated by the DoC (2012), the agency created reciprocal agreements with a range of government news agencies outside the country in order to strengthen the flow of information between South Africa and its international partners. This was also done to increase the relationship with the neighbouring countries by keeping them up to date of news and happenings from South Africa, especially because the stories were written from the perspective of the government.

P5 adds:

Bua News and SA government news is called sunshine journalism. The reason they call it sunshine journalism is that it paints everything as hunky-dory, and everything is all fine. If there is a negative story on government, the angle that Bua News takes will not be that of exposing corruption. No, it would come as that these are major things that government intends to do to deal with corruption. We despise corruption, it must be uprooted and all of that. Therefore, it is sunshine in that sense, but it is also sunshine in that it talks about government's initiatives that are aimed at helping people.

The sentiments are held by P1, who points out:

I remember some of the stories that I would never forget when you had the privilege of doing stories in the presidency. Where you get to follow the president around and then travel to African Union Summits in Addis Ababa. So, you were present to ensure that you report on the position of the South African government on African issues.

However, P12 (former SA News editor) disagreed with the view that SA News stories were only used as propaganda.

P12 states:

Our news stories were of good quality; we subscribed and practiced high ethical standards and good quality news writing. A high percentage of us came with a wealth of experience having worked for other news organisations before and— we were able to share that experience with young journalists.”

P15 (Newspaper Editor) states:

As indicated before, no one can ever say or tell you something that incriminates them at a later stage. Same as government, it will only provide information that will show them in a good light. Not that there is no other information that is not good. There is. You just won't receive

it as formal media release from government. So in answering the question, the machinery of government exists to push propaganda.

P13 (Newspaper Editor):

Government communications machinery, like any other household or organisation, exists to carry programmes of government to the people, through either media or any other information. Whether this is seen as propaganda is another topic. In many instances news and activities of government, carry what the public needs to hear.

This section found that while it may be blurry sometimes, the government communication machinery exists as a propaganda tool, which is used to influence the perception of government by media and the public. Although sometimes such machinery is useful as a public information tool, such as during situations such the COVID-19 pandemic, the general use of this machinery remains for propagating propaganda messages.

7.2.6 HOW SERVICES OF SA NEWS ARE CONSTRUED: AS PUBLIC INFORMATION, PERSUASION OR PROPAGANDA BY THE NEWS MEDIA

This section deals with the perception by media towards the government communication machinery. That is, whether media views this machinery as either a public information tool, which can be useful in feeding media with useful information to be relayed to the public, or whether this machinery only exists to provide messages that only highlight the good deeds of the government.

Organisations such as the government and the private sector rely on media to interact with their audience. However, media has always refused to be used as a mouthpiece of government. They have maintained their status as a watchdog and fourth estate, which exists to hold government and the private sector to account.

P5 concurs that:

When a journalist from the mainstream media receives a press statement, they would say, but why should we praise a fish for swimming? I come when they squander the money that they are

supposed to use to building schools. I come in when they say this tender was inflated.

Media's view is to go beyond the story. That is, for example, there is always something to look for behind a R12-million project that has been launched by government. Either this could be flaws in supply chain processes or the service provider appointed might not possess requisite skills to perform such a job. Therefore, media argues that instead of carrying news as received from government, thus being relegated into a government mouthpiece, they should go beyond what appears to be rosy, and cover the context so that the public can be allowed to judge for themselves (Fourie 2007:245). In addition, as seen by Steel (2012), it is wrong to perceive media as a pure government mouthpieces as it exists to do the opposite.

P3 (Government and Political Beat Writer) backs the statement by maintaining that instead of just using government articles as they are, thus helping to peddle propaganda, they would look for:

More comments and more background and context and how does it relate to the greater scheme of things. If there have been prior projects involved, for example, from the same department or under the same government agency, we would then highlight that and say, this is the second or third project that is similar in nature.

P15 (Newspaper Editor) states that:

It has always been difficult to make use of any information from government. No matter what is. The fact of the matter is that they have an agenda to while push and media has its own. You will never receive a media statement that tells how government money has been squandered. However, as media, we can take that piece of information and do a lot with it. Therefore, briefly, government information machinery will always be a propaganda machine.

P16 (Newspaper Editor) also submits that:

Government cannot self-destruct. It cannot, while fighting for positive media coverage, release news that will give them a negative report. This is why its becomes a struggle to receive media enquiries from government. It is because such questions go through a rigorous interrogation, as they battle to look for a suitable and positive answer.

P14 (Former Newspaper Editor) states:

Having been found on both sides of the scenarios where I was a newspaper editor and government spokesperson, I understand that it is quite a tough one. However, the fact of the matter remains that government programmes need to be communicated. Whether they have been construed as propaganda and persuasion is a discussion for the other day. My principle is that, as long as those programmes are not lies, they need to be communicated and thoroughly communicated.

P13 (Newspaper Editor) stipulated:

I hardly agree on anything that comes as is from government from my journalists. Either it is thrown away immediately or it is used to build a story that can be used later on.

The section confirms that media sees the government communication machinery merely as a propaganda tool that exists to ensure that government is seen as doing great. Although the machinery becomes important and useful in some instances, the fact remains that it exists to only bring messages of hope to the public. Therefore, media ensures that it scans messages, which can be useful for future use while avoiding those that only sing praises for government.

7.2.7 MEDIA-STATE RELATIONS

This section seeks to examine the relationship between the media and government communicators, especially when it comes to the exchanging of information, as well as the availability of such communicators when media seek clarity. The chapter also looks

at how such a relationship is important to ensure a smooth working relationship between the two.

From the data collected through interviews, no one indicated that there is a smooth relationship between government and media. Many of them defined the relationship as cordial, while others indicated that there is actually no relationship at all.

For example, media needs accurate and regular information from government communicators. While government cannot do without media, media cannot do without government, and, as described by Tabane (2015), the relationship between government and media, is one, which is characterised by rigidity.

When asked what the relationship between media and government communication is, P8 indicates that:

It depends, most of the government communicators are in over their heads. They do not get what their job is. Most of them are quite protective and defensive of their principals. Moreover, it is quite a struggle to get proper information. It is, however, not the case with all of them. However, it is quite a difficult working relationship for most of them.

While both participants were asked the same questions, that is, journalists and government communicators, government communicators got the most blame. Many participants representing the journalists alleged that government communicators are not professional and that they take them from pillar to post when they have to provide information.

P2 says:

I think the ones that I have a relationship with are very responsive. Trying to access a government communicator when you do not know them or when you have not been put in contact with them from somebody who does know them, is difficult. I feel like many government communicators are very petty if they do not know you or they do not know your name.

P4 (Government and Political Beat Reporter) says:

It very difficult to extract any information from a government communicator. Therefore, you build a relationship with a particular individual; thereafter you are likely to get information. In general, it is very hard, because you have to literally push and continuously push just to get a comment. Therefore, communicating with government is quite hard.

While the two find it hard to see eye to eye, many others participants, especially those representing government, agreed that media should be independent and hold leaders accountable. Many participants agree that if it were not for media freedom in South Africa, the country would not be where it is right now.

P5 (Former SA News Writer) says:

Well, the South African media is vibrant. It is independent, some people may say too independent. However, I suppose that is what our constitution advocates when they say there must be a free press and the right to freedom of expression. Therefore, it is vibrant and it is independent. In addition, it plays an important role in informing the public so that they can make an informed decision when it comes to taking informed decisions on whatever they want to do with their lives. However, it also playing a critical role in terms of keeping watch over government, private sector, civil society and holding them to account.

In addition, others further admit that although the relationship between media and government is always up and down and in a state of flux, it must actually be so in order to have transparency. As a watchdog in particular over government's resources, media plays a vital role to ensure that leaders lead to the best of their ability.

P1 says:

I think the best way to describe South Africa's media relationship with government is that it is bittersweet. It continues to be like that and it must be like that in a democracy. Therefore, you cannot have media

that is embedded in government. Otherwise, it means the role of media as a watchdog is compromised. However, we have found as government, that media is more likely to swerve to the negative side of things. As their primary roles are that of watchdogs, they want to write about what is not done. So journalism is about what is not done and what is not good enough for the broader good of the public.

Unlike others who see media as the enemy, some participants state the opposite. According to data, some state that due to their background as former journalists their relationship with media was not as bad as it appeared to be to others.

P12 says:

Personally, I had a good relationship as I had worked with the national broadcaster and other media outlets before. I think other journalists had a great relationship as well – we were not viewed as a government mouthpiece that churned out propaganda.

P13 states:

The relationship is how it should be. Media and government should have a cordial working relationship, one that is there only for the two to work with each other, lest another one asks favours from the other.”

P14 points out that:

The relationship can be better. Especially in instances where journalists are threatened, while others even get harassed. This only erodes the fierceness of media as an independent source.”

P15 agrees that:

Although not as smooth as it is supposed to be, it is better than when it is referred to other African countries. Nevertheless, it needs to improve, especially where government still expects media to be their mouthpiece.

P16 posits:

As things stand, the media-state relationship is something that needs to be thoroughly looked at in this country.

This section provides clarity regarding the relationship between the media and government communicators. While this is an important factor in ensuring synergy between the two parties, the section indicates that there are still instances where the two parties struggle to find each other. Media blames government communicators and the same happens the other way around. What makes this even more difficult is that in other instances, government communicators do not have the broader experience and understanding of communication and this creates difficulties when it comes to deadlines and many other key necessities, which would enable a smooth transition of news from government to the public via media.

7.2.8 MEDIA'S WIDER PERSPECTIVE OF COMMUNICATIONS IN GOVERNMENT

This section details the broader perspective of government communications by media. That is, how media perceives communications in the government environment. The idea here is not to necessarily look at communicators, but mainly look into communication in government and how such is being operated, as viewed by media. This is because, similarly to the public, media plays a huge role in the success of communication in government.

From data received during the process, all participants did not even think twice on this issue. When asked how they viewed their relationship with government communications from where they were sitting as journalists, many spoke plainly about their views.

P8 states:

I think it's quite poor and lacks professionalism. It is very difficult to find information. They are selective of who they respond to and maybe based on personal relationships. I just think the main part is professionalism. Not everyone understands his or her jobs or what their role is. I think it is more of a defence of their political principals. It

is not about getting information out there. Therefore, it is very difficult to get a hold of some of them. When you do get hold of them, they do not respond on time or adequately. They are rude, most of them. I think there is a lot of conflation between political role and their professional one. It's just not a pleasant working relationship.

Many other participants, who submitted that government communication is very diverse, echoed the sentiments.

P2 states:

When I say diverse, I mean there are a lot of government communicators who are doing very similar jobs. In addition, it is not being condensed into very easy, accessible and usable formats. By that, I mean you might have a communicator of a department but you might have five communicators, for example. So the one will not be able to answer your question, they will refer you to the other one, and the other one will refer you to another. By that time, you have already spoken to four different communicators who all should have at least given you one issue or response.

In addition, others argued that government communicators are not skilled and that they lack professionalism.

P3 indicates:

I don't think they are skilled. Government communicators in South Africa are not effective communicators. They should be more proactive than reactive. Most government communicators only work when a journalist picks up a phone. That is the time they earn their salary. Other than that, they do not.

This section found that media is not entirely satisfied with how communication is operated in government. Amongst many other frustrations is the chain of command within which an approval must be sought just for one particular comment. This in turn threatens media deadline. Further to this is the situation where there are many people

who are in communication and are basically doing the same thing. This leads to confusion and it is not clear on who needs to be contacted for what.

7.2.9 A COMPARISON BETWEEN SA NEWS AND BUA NEWS BY FORMER WRITERS AND EDITORS

This section seeks to compare the now defunct Bua News with SA News. This is done from a perspective of a former writer at Bua News and their views on what used to work in the past and what could work in the present. The idea here is to identify what methods were used when Bua News was introduced and how these methods changed in the process. What is also important to note, is that such could be brought back in order to return the agency back to its glory days. According to the data received on this front, it became clear that SA News is no longer, what it used to be. When asked about their view of the current SA News as opposed to the previous Bua News, most participants were clear that the agency no longer carried the same attraction as before.

Many participants agreed that one of the many aspects that led to the downfall of SA News was the change of brand. Although it is not disputed that organisations need to change strategies, which may also include the change of brand, it clearly did not work in this case.

P5 posits:

Bua News has evolved. Even from a branding perspective. They are now called SA News, as opposed to Bua News. Then their models have been overhauled. When you see Bua News, you did not get a sense that it was government. It was just like Reuters, Sapa, or another agency. At first glance, when you see an article at the newspaper credited to Bua News you would not immediately notice or know that it came from government.

The strength of Bua News has always been in stringers who would be out in the rural peripheries where the mainstream media could not reach. The mainstream media cannot be everywhere due to budgetary constraints. This is worse now because mainstream media has been hit by the economic turmoil to a point of shedding jobs, and advertising revenues being at its lowest.

P5 says:

I don't think they still have stringers in provinces. Everyone who works for that newsroom publication is based in Pretoria, at the headquarters in GCIS. That, for me, has contributed to its downfall, if you like. In addition, I am saying downfall because I do not think their content is being carried through to the mainstream newspapers as it used to be in my time. I think the fact that they have killed stringers in the provinces has a lot to do with that because mainstream media is based in Gauteng, largely. Therefore, chances are that they will not be able to attend government events in this area. Therefore, they have no reason to use copy from Bua News when they can deploy their own person there.

In addition, many others agreed that, as compared to when it was still at the beginning, the standard has dropped drastically.

P15 says:

In comparison to before, I don't think they are doing better. I do not remember the last time I paged through the newspaper and I saw an article that was attributed to Bua News. I think the umbilical cord between government news agency and media has been cut and that needs to be revived. In the past, the same way you see the overseas agencies in different newspapers, you would definitely see a by-line from Bua News daily. However, for years now, I have never seen it. So I think there has been a cut of the umbilical cord in terms of the relationship between government agency and media.”

P12 states:

I think critical questions need to be asked whether there is a role to be played by such a news agency and, if so, what would that role be? The emergence of social media has forced major news organisations to rethink their strategies, and focus, to, in essence, adapt or die. The same questions should be posed to SA News.

This section gives a glimpse of data collected through interviews. It provides perspectives from participants on either side of the coin (media and government). This section provided an understanding of how the government communication machinery is construed as a propaganda tool while also indicating the relationship between government communication and media. In the end, the section provides views from a Bua News writer, who indicates that although change is necessary, it is sometimes not the greatest strategy, especially when change replaces things that are working with those that do not work.

The next section deals with quantitative findings. These findings emanate from a content analysis approach, which involves the use of 200 newspaper articles.

7.3 QUALITATIVE DATA ANALYSIS

This section seeks to detail the data analysis process, which was undertaken on data collected from qualitative methods. In this section, clear indications are displayed on how analysis was done for data collected through interviews.

7.3.1 STATE OF READINESS OF ARTICLES FROM SA NEWS

According to the data collected on this point, it became clear that articles from SA News/Bua News were not ready to be used by media immediately, especially by the two media houses who are the subjects of this study (*City Press* and *Sunday Times*). While other participants, especially those who worked for SA News before, indicated that, in most cases, their articles were used as it was submitted, it became clear that the articles were only highlighting the good deeds from government and lacked both sides of the story. This would always prompt media to carry the article forward through more interviews and investigations. This is supported by many authors, such as Coombs (200:267) and Funk (2016:122), who found that although government may disagree with this approach, media is guarded by news values and their choices of news, is dependent on readability based on the article's newsworthiness.

Authors such as Sindiso (2016) found that government-prepared news is one sided and this becomes problematic when media needs to interpret it as news ready for an audience. This is the stage where the alteration takes place, sometimes leading to a loss of meaning from the original message, or worse, the uncovering of new

information that creates an about-turn from the original message, thus becoming negative towards government.

The alteration of news from government is becoming the normal of late. This was not the case when Bua News just began its operations. Many participants who agree that part of the change in strategy by SA News was changing the way articles were written attest to this. This change affected the effectiveness of SA News as an agency because media became involved in altering news from government more, which resulted in missed deadlines as well as the stretching of resources. As a result, many media houses decided to implement their own approaches when seeking information from government. This was the opposite to making use of SA News writers, as was the case before.

Whereas the question of the state of readiness of news articles from SA News was identified in the literature process, a perspective from participants, especially those from media environment, was important. In this instance, many agreed that while they sometimes found articles from SA News useful, it was only to verify certain facts so that they could carry the story forward. Zoch and Supa (2014:2) posit that in this instance, media will always build on the articles from government as it is not enough to only use good writers but the stories must always be newsworthy as well. Mabote (2013) concurs that if the news does not excite, agitate or even exasperate, then it is probably an advertorial and thus should be paid for.

7.3.2 INFLUENCE IN THE FRAMING OF GOVERNMENT NEWS STORIES BY SA NEWS

Data received on this point reveals that, indeed, government communication through SA News and many other avenues exists to influence the framing of government news. According to the GCIS (2018:13), the agency was established to provide quick and easy access to articles and feature stories, aimed at keeping the public informed about the implementation of government's mandate. The DoC (2012:18) also elaborates that the agency was formed to help government interact with the public through writing news and making it available free of charge. This suggests that their primary role is to influence the framing of government news.

Most participants from media environment agreed that news articles from SA News about government seek to set the government's agenda. Croteau and Milan (2012:2) submit that the process of spinning the news involves making use of diffusion, usually to garner support from the audience. Data further reveals that the agency was built mainly to sing praises to government. Therefore, as Druckman (2001:230) found, using a framing approach allows government to emphasise certain messages in order to influence the public. SA News writers have the advantage of access to political leaders and coverage of broader and remote areas. Thus, the agency has the great advantage of being able to influence the framing of news from government as they have first-hand information from political leaders. In other instances, a particular message would be rehearsed repeatedly with in-house journalists before it is released to mainstream journalists. Shoemaker (2014) states that in such cases, the news becomes a propaganda tool of government.

Johansson and Larsson (2015:126) postulate that it is easy to lure media, stakeholders and the public to a desired message when promoting the awareness of all the good deeds done by government. SA News journalists can change the message and make it more user-friendly and relevant before it is made available to media. Therefore, it is easy to conclude that the propaganda theory was applied in this sense, as seen by Jowett and O'Donnell (2018:2), that such is a systematic attempt to shape perceptions, manipulate cognitions, and direct behaviour to achieve a response that furthers the desired intent of the propagandist.

7.3.3 SKILLS AND WRITING CAPACITY POSSESSED BY SA NEWS WRITERS

According to data, the agency was established with a strategic process to ensure that only the best writers are recruited. In so doing, the agency became competitive and relevant, especially because it formed part of the very few avenues for media and the public to consume news from government. While this is so, many authors argue that, for as long as government communication machinery exists to highlight the good deed from government, it will be difficult for media to accept this information. Some amongst many of these authors are Zoch and Supa (2014:2), who argue that it is not enough to only resort to making use of well-established writers, as, in the main, stories written by those responsible for the public information must always consider the element of newsworthiness. Mabote (2013) also postulates that no matter how good a writer you

are, for as long as the article is not newsworthy media will not consider it. Branston and Stafford (2010) maintain that there should be a greater understanding by government communicators that newsgathering is not as easy as it looks, as it is a complicated journey involving strict evaluation and selection of news. Therefore, if an article does not have these qualities, no matter where it comes from or by whom it is written, it will not be published anywhere.

The study found that very experienced writers were recruited to join the agency, while young, upcoming journalists without portfolios were also attracted. However, while the plan was good, it failed to bring about desired results. Seen by Zoch and Supa (2014:4), this is because government communicators are only concerned with the good deeds of government and this is mostly not considered as being newsworthy by media.

7.3.4 SA NEWS SERVICES PROVIDED AS PUBLIC INFORMATION OR PROPAGANDA BY GOVERNMENT

Data revealed that articles provided by government are aimed mainly at providing propaganda to the public. This was found to be the case after an investigation with mainly journalists who have worked with government for a while. However, some agree that SA News can sometimes be used as information the public, albeit in only a few instances. For example, when the country and the world at large was faced with the COVID-19 pandemic, SA News became quite important, in conjunction with media, to release important information to the public.

While this is the case, media views SA News as a machinery that exists only to provide one-sided propaganda messages. This is frustrating for media, as it is not able to use such articles for its audience. As such, media either ignores these messages or changes them to suit their audience, something that causes quarrels between the two parties in many instances.

Some participants from SA News see the release of only good news to the public domain as a perfect approach, but the reality is that the opposite is true. Media has, in many instances, refused to release news articles, which only show good things done by government, even when elections approach. Therefore, the propaganda tactics

used by SA News has begun to fail, particularly in terms of making sure that news articles are carried through by media.

In this instance, data revealed that media does indeed see government news articles as only being used as propaganda and public information. Jooste and Booie (2012) argue that, in most cases, information provided by government only seeks to achieve a propaganda strategy and this is why the two are always at loggerheads, as media exists to hold government to account. Kovach and Rosenstiel (2001:1) concur that media is referred to as the fourth estate and is there to hold government accountable. It is therefore not there to become a mouthpiece of government (Steel 2012).

7.3.5 SOUTH AFRICA MEDIA MAIN SOURCE OF NEWS

South Africa's government relies heavily on the media to relay their messages to the public. This is why, amongst many strategies, the government introduced the use of Bua News/SA NEWS to ensure that as much information as possible is given to media, so that they can easily help to communicate government's programmes of action. While this is the case, media seldom makes use of the channels provided by government. Media use their own channels as it views channels such as Bua News/SA NEWS as being biased and only providing news that favour government. While being highly dependent on government for a high percentage of news, media prefers to use its own sources, most of whom consists of anonymous government employees as well as people who feel morally obliged to give news to media.

7.3.6 SECTION A SUMMATION

This chapter deals only with the findings and analysis of the qualitative data collated for this study. Details of interviews and feedback from participants are explored and these are further analysed in order to get to a substantive conclusion. The next chapter deals with the findings of content data analysis in a quantitative format as it relates to the study.

SECTION B: FINDINGS AND RESULTS: CONTENT ANALYSIS FINDINGS AND RELATED DISCUSSIONS

This chapter deals with the quantitative findings of the study. As discussed earlier in the document, the quantitative side of this study was conducted in a content analysis format.

This chapter also displays various themes, tones and news values, which was used to qualitatively and quantitatively arrive at the findings and the analysis thereof. Findings are also linked to the literature, theoretical framework as well as the objectives of the study.

Quantitatively, a *negative*, *neutral* and *positive* tone analysis is employed wherein 200 articles from *City Press* and *Sunday Times* are individually analysed. Also displayed in this chapter are various types of newsvalues used by newspapers when reporting about government.

The chapter concludes with extended discussions of the findings of the study. Similarities and contrasts are identified between concepts such as agenda-setting, framing, newsworthiness, news values, government as a developmental state, legitimacy, reputation building and many others. These similarities are used as part of the extended discussions, which gives further meaning and overall findings of the study.

7.4 CONTENT ANALYSIS

A content analysis research method as embraced by Fico et al (2009:114), was used where two types of content analysis was predominantly used, namely qualitative and quantitative content analysis.

The first content analysis approach assisted significantly by ensuring that added data is collected, which was used to supplement what was already collected. This was done in the form of themes (what the researcher had termed as determining factors): with reference to newspapers' use of news produced by SA News, and an overall coverage of the South African government by the newspapers in question. In this instance, an

evaluation of positive, neutral or negative news was employed in qualitatively gauging the mood while capturing the rise and decline of SA News. Added to this were newsvalues as well as themes, which were used by the newspapers in question in their coverage of government. This method of data collection is one that ensures that relevant materials are collected and studied thoroughly in order to identify patterns of similar approaches (Yin 2015).

While a quantitative content analysis concerns itself with the numbers, a qualitative one is focused on the opposite and mostly looks at latent messages (Wigston 2009). In this instance, therefore, 10 articles from each newspaper were identified per year over 10 years. This resulted in 200 articles. An inductive approach for content analysis was used in this study. Both these methods exist for a reason and were suitable for this study. This was because the study sought to investigate the effectiveness of SA News as a tool for government communication in South Africa, thereby necessitating that the researcher look at the quantity of newspaper articles as well as their quality.

7.5 QUALITATIVE CONTENT ANALYSIS FINDINGS

This section seeks to give an overall response to objectives two and three of the study. Objective two investigates the extent to which SA News influences the framing of government news stories. Objective three seeks to establish the effectiveness of SA News by output and outtakes indexes. Objective four seeks to establish the extent to which SA NEWS services are provided as public information, persuasion or propaganda by the government and the extent to which SA News services are construed as the public information, persuasion or propaganda by the news media. Objective five seeks to measure the extent at which SA NEWS services provided as public information or propaganda by government. Objective six wants to gage the extent at which SA NEWS services are construed as public information or propaganda by the news media. Meanwhile, objective seven seeks to determine the general relation between government and media in South Africa.

Therefore, the purpose of this study is to establish, whether media makes use of news stories written and provided by government, through either SA News, media releases or any other avenue. This is maintained by the DoC (2012:17), which states that the

agency was formed to help government interact with the public through stories written by government writers and made available freely to media and the public.

Although 200 articles were administered in order to understand and arrive on a sustained qualitative content analysis, articles became too many and a saturation was reached. As such, only few results were picked up and placed on the study while others are referred to in absentia. It was understood that placing all the articles and referring to each would take up too much space and this is why the researcher only opted for the use of headlines and dates of each article, as stated pages that follow. The approach has not in any way compromised the results or the analysis process as every article was looked at and analysed accordingly.

7.5.1 EVALUATING NEWSPAPER ARTICLES USING TONE AND NEWS VALUES

➤ Tones

These are determining factors, which were used to gauge the rise and fall of SA NEWS as a tool for government communication. In order to find the underlying cause of this, understanding tones such as positive, neutral and negative had to be put in place and through this, a proper evaluation was done.

➤ News values

Primarily, the researcher was driven by Objective one of this study, which looks at news values prevalent in the news stories selected by media to report on government and how such have changed during the period under review. In measuring this, the researcher looked at the number of news articles written as an initiative from government, either through media statements, media briefings, media invites or many other avenues used by government to communicate its news through media. There is a deeper understanding that most of the articles used by the newspapers could have come because of news releases and through press conferences organised by government communicators. Therefore, while this study focuses on SA NEWS as a platform used by government to release its news, it is important to note that all sorts of channels used by government to relay news through to media were equally important for this study.

- **An evaluation on positive, neutral or negative reporting by *City Press* and**

Sunday Times: 2009 to 2018

Firstly, an analysis of 100 *City Press* articles was done to look at differing tones, which are positive, neutral or negative reporting trends by the newspaper on the government of South Africa. Secondly, the same process was followed with 100 *Sunday Times* newspaper articles. In order to find synergy and logic in the articles as stated in the research design, the researcher looked at the articles per year, starting with 2009 and ending in 2018, where ten articles were analysed.

- **Positive coverage on government by *City Press***

During the analysis process, a meagre amount of news articles was found to be positive towards government. Out of the 100 articles from *City Press*, only 35 of them were positive towards government between 2009 and 2018. This is 35%.

For example, the researcher found an article dated September 13, 2009, which indicates that, *The European Commission and the UK Department for International Development have given the South African government R1.3 billion for a programme to find “innovative ways” of creating jobs.* Although the article speaks about the global financial turmoil, which affected the world, it was noted that it was written in a positive light as it sought to indicate that there is a good relationship between the United Kingdom’s government and that of South Africa. The article indicates that there is some hope that the South African government can be trusted to use the money given by the UK government to create jobs, reproaching the notion that the South African government cannot be trusted, which means the public can also trust it (*City Press* 2009).

The trend of positive reporting towards government continued in 2010. Such articles include one dated 9 December 2010, which reports about workers receiving an early Christmas gift. The article has a positive spin as it indicates that South Africa’s then president, Jacob Zuma, had a good heart and cared about the working class. It indicated that Zuma *unveiled sweeping changes to labour legislation that could see the practice of labour broking scrapped, or severely restricted,* (Mofokeng & Ndlangisa 2010: 8) This was seen as positive because many employees had asked for some time that government help them by abolishing the labour-broking system in many employment facilities in South Africa.

Another article with positive reporting towards government is the one dated 7 November 2010, about economic growth, which was key to a cabinet shake-up. This article suggests that although many have cast doubt on the reason behind the reshuffling of the Zuma cabinet, others have seen this as a desire to drive the economic growth. The article also states: *Through this growth plan, Zuma hopes to deliver on the five key priorities contained in the ANC's manifesto and incorporated into government's plan of action, (City Press 2010:27).*

In addition, more articles were also found to be positive. These are:

- One titled “Cycle, run and walk for Madiba” is dated 16 November 2014. It portrayed two leading politicians, Zuma and Ramaphosa, sharing the responsibility of celebrating the life of the world icon through running and walking respectively (Mseleku 2014:13).
- Another article is “10 tips to get a government tender” dated 26 April 2015. It encourages South Africans to do business with their own government through a tendering system. It also shows that government does not only ensure job opportunities for its people, but business opportunities as well (Maqungo 2015).
- A second article in the same year is, “Rosatom is fired up”, dated 25 October 2015. The article reports on the nuclear energy contract between the South African government and a Russian company called Rosatom. The Russian nuclear energy corporation was to be *given the contract for the full 9 600 megawatts of new capacity envisioned by the South African government by 2030* (Groenewald 2015:4). Although the contract did not materialise, the article shows the South African government in a good light as it intended to build more power capacity for its people.
- On 18 December 2016, an article titled “Initiates died from the heat” depicts a government that ensures constant communication with the public. Although the article reports about initiates who died in the Eastern Cape, this came after government warned the authorities not go ahead with the initiation schools due to an expected heat wave (Manona & Ngcukana 2016:15).

- Another one titled “Medical dagga offers alternative” is dated 14 December 2016. This article is positive coverage on government as it reports on a long overdue discussion on cannabis as a medical alternative that should be prescribed by medical facilities. It portrayed a government that cares about the needs of its people, even those that are in a minority (*City Press* 2016).
- An article titled “GEPF changes its benefits” is dated 12 November 2017. It reports on changes made to the Government Employees’ Pension Fund (GEPF) when it comes to divorces. It reports that the issues of divorce “has been addressed as part of a review of the GEPF benefits along with other important benefit changes, including when a child qualifies for their parent’s pension,” (*City Press* 2017).
- On 26 November 2017, an article “Must you ... mediate or” portrays a government that cares for its citizens, especially because this took place during the sixteen days of activism for no violence against women and children.
- “Government’s bold public-private partnership,” is dated 10 December 2017. The article reports on a bold move by the Gauteng government to have a public-private partnership aimed at fighting corruption. It depicts a government that believes in the involvement of the private sector in the fight against corruption, while working together to build a better economy for all (*City Press* 2017).

In order to achieve a wider and comprehensive conclusion and understanding, an integration was done where a number of articles (quantitatively) were analysed. In this instance, a quantitative analysis depicted a number of articles, which were positive versus those, which were neutral, and those which were negative. This is because this section only deals with analysis from a content point of view. Bowen (2009:139) states that when dealing with content analysis, the researcher gets involved in a process of browsing and interpreting content.

- **Below is an evaluation of positive coverage on government by the *Sunday Times* during the period under review**

Similar to newspaper articles from *City Press*, a thorough analysis was also conducted on articles from *Sunday Times*. The same approach was employed in this instance, where attention was given to the ten-year period as stated in the research design. Consideration was given to the articles per year, starting with 2009 and ending in 2018, with ten articles, which were analysed. Out of the 100 from *Sunday Times*; only 26 of them were positive towards government. This is 26%.

- ✓ In 2010, few articles are viewed as positive. The first article is one headlined, “ANC members have a right to tender”, and is dated 15 August 2010. The article reports on assertions made by Fikile Mbalula that ANC members have the right to do business with the state through a tender system. The article also indicates that although this happens, those who are found to be corrupt will face the might of the law (Mabuza 2010).
- ✓ The second positive article was headlined “Department of Transport”, dated 17 January 2010. The article provides a profile of former minister of transport, Sbu Ndebele, who was MEC of Transport in KZN before becoming Minister of Transport (*Sunday Times* 2010).
- ✓ “Boost for SMMEs”, dated 28 August 2011, reports on the level of optimism amongst South Africa’s small, medium and micro enterprises towards government’s implementation of Black Economic Empowerment policies (Biyase 2011). Another is “SA contacts rebels over lensman’s body”, dated 22 May 2011, which looked at the relationship and good cooperation between the South African government and that of Libya. This emanated from talks between the two countries in a bid to find the body of slain photographer Anton Hammerl (Govender 2011).
- ✓ A further analysis discovered more positive articles, including one headlined “Drug mule hopes SA plea will save his life”, dated 18 October 2015. The article carried positive coverage towards government as it depicted the effort by the South Africa government in pleading with the Malaysian jailers not to execute Deon Cornelius (Govender 2015).
- ✓ Another positive one included “Hits and Misses – Inflation slows, SAA gets bailout”, dated 25 January 2015. The article reports on an additional loan

guarantee of R6.488 billion which was approved by the South African government for South African Airways (*Sunday Times* 2015).

- ✓ Upon deeper analysis, the researcher furthermore discovered others such as one titled “Depressed business in no mood to spend”, dated 20 March 2016. It applauds the South African government’s belt-tightening exercise, *which it has promised to accelerate in order to stabilise its debt and ward off a sovereign rating downgrade* (Nxedlana 2016).
- ✓ Another article dated 28 August 2016 is “I’m prepared to die to save SA from the thieves”. It provides a positive spin on government as it reported a stance taken by Finance Minister, Pravin Gordhan, who vowed to save the country (Hofstatter et al 2016).

In this analysis process quite a number of positive stories were revealed. As one looks closer and closer, one realises that stories which were carried as positive coverage for government by both *Sunday Times* and *City Press* carried almost the same theme. These are stories, which do not necessarily cover a particular individual in government or the ruling party, but only refer to such in the process. For example, the story on “Depressed business in no mood to spend”, dated 20 March 2016, covers an intervention made by government to tighten its belt while trying to avoid a downgrade. A second example is “Drug mule hopes SA plea will save his life”, dated 18 October 2015. The initial story in the article is not about government, but about a drug mule who was arrested outside the borders of South Africa. Therefore, it is the intervention by the South African government that turned the article into a positive portrayal of government, that is, the processes followed by government until the conclusion of the matter. Therefore, the theme used by the newspaper in question when reporting positively on government is when there is a government intervention on something. In this case, it is easy to conclude that the positive reports are in the public interest. It is also important to note that through this analysis it was discovered that both newspapers were following the same theme, namely, coverage of when government does not praise itself for doing good, but when other stakeholders and individuals are praising them. One news value predominantly applied, is, **Follow-up**. This includes stories about subjects already in the news, where more information is given in a follow-up article, (Harcup & O’Neill 2017: 1470).

- **Below is an evaluation on neutral coverage on government by the *Sunday Times* during the period under review**

As above, neutral reporting of government news was used as a determining factor to gauge the level of effectiveness of SA News as a tool for government communication. Such a determining factor was used to gauge the mood while capturing the rise and decline of SA News. It was also through this content analysis process that the relationship between media and the South African government was assessed. Out of the 100 articles from *Sunday Times*; only nineteen of them were positive towards government. This is 19%.

- ✓ Some articles were found to be neutral to government, like one dated 31 October 2010 by Haffajee (2010:8), about how to get South Africa up and working. Although the article reports that the president committed *his government to creating five million jobs, the release of official employment statistics shows how these plans might be frustrated*. This was because of a number of people who had given up looking for jobs. The article depicts that there is a plan in place for government to create jobs. However, these plans are likely to fail because of a number of people who are no longer interested. What makes this even worse is that those who have given up might actually be those who were qualified for such jobs.
- ✓ Another is dated 19 December 2010, titled “Zuma moves to fill holes before 2010 ends”. Although many may suggest outright that the article is negative, the research saw this article as neutral because the president filled strategic positions in government in order to allow the smooth running of the services in key departments. The move is seen both as negative and positive as these positions were left vacant for a long time (Nting 2010).
- ✓ An article by Rossouw (2012) headlined, “SA refuses to join the protest against Syria”, dated 3 June 2012 is judged as neutral. This is because while the South African government did well to refuse to make any diplomatic moves against Syria, it looked badly in the eyes of others countries in doing so.

- ✓ An article by Du Plessis titled, “SA mends Harare fences – State moves to heal bruised relations after fallout in the run-up to Zimbabwe’s elections”, dated 4 August 2013, and is seen as neutral. This came about because although the South African government *was preparing to mend the relations bruised in the rush to get everything in place on time for this week’s elections in Zimbabwe*. Opposition parties, including those in the Zimbabwe, saw this in a bad light. This is especially because for the first time the country’s Zanu-PF was sharing power with the MDC. The involvement of the South African government came across as if they needed to support the bruising of the ruling party, especially because they were forced to share power with the opposition.

- ✓ An article titled “Fight for an inclusive ICC, don’t abandon it”, dated 21 June 2015, reports on the South African government being urged to *fight for all nations to join the International Criminal Court (ICC), instead of abandoning it (City Press 2015:2)*. It is neutral because it shows that the South African government wanted to withdraw from the ICC and this shows a government is that is decisive.

- ✓ Another named, “Politics vs Justice”, dated 28 June 2015, reports on a firm decision taken by the South African government to not arrest former Sudanese president, Omar al-Bashir. While this is the case, it was also *caught between its continental obligations to the African Union (AU) – which resolved that International Criminal Court (ICC) warrants against sitting heads of state should not be acted upon – and its global obligations under the Rome Statute (City Press 2015:1)*.

- ✓ The article headlined, “Poverty is causing ANC fights – Mabuza”, dated 10 December 2017 was also neutral. The article reports about the premier of Mpumalanga at the time, David Mabuza’s call on government to shift from social grants to other means geared towards business development. Although the idea appears to be great, the article indicates that such is only possible on paper, especially because the country’s social grant recipients are

predominantly old with no more appetite or energy to run businesses (Yende 2017).

- ✓ Another one is headlined “Power: provincial versus municipal”, dated 12 November 2017. Although the article reports on service delivery protests in the Midvaal municipal area, such created an opportunity for both national and local government to create working relations together (Baloyi 2017).
- ✓ The article titled “SA’s failed leadership has been its downfall” is dated 17 December 2017 and reports how the democratic government under the leadership of the ANC was hard-fought and inherited structural and racial inequalities. While this is the case though, it criticises the current government for having taken too long to remedy this situation (Matsohi 2017).
- **Below is an evaluation on neutral coverage on government by *City Press* during the period under review**

City Press’s neutral reporting of government news was also used as a determining factor to gauge the level of effectiveness of SA News as a tool of government communication. Out of the 100 articles from the *City Press*, only seventeen of them were positive towards government. This is 17%.

- ✓ One example, dated 27 September 2009, speaks about Cosatu’s strike against modern slavery. The article paints the government of South Africa in a negative light as it suggests that there is not appetite from government to scrap the use of labour brokers. The article states, *Cosatu deputy general secretary, Bheki Ntshalintshali, said the federation wants members of the portfolio committee – who might not understand the plight of workers employed through labour brokers – to listen to the painful testimonies of these workers.* This suggests that there is a broken trust between the government and the labour union. The article says a lot to a nonprofessional who may have read it and concludes that government does not care about the working conditions of South Africans, particularly those employed through labour brokers, (Oliphant et al 2009:1).
- ✓ Another article in the sample, dated 22 March 2009, speaks about the Dalai Lama not being allowed to speak in South Africa. The article painted the South

African government in a bad light because it scuppered plans by the organisers of a peace conference to bring the Tibetan spiritual leader, the Dalai Lama, to these shores. The article states, *Sonam Tenzing, a representative of His Holiness the Dalai Lama in SA, told City Press yesterday that the South African High Commissioner in New Delhi, India, has asked the Dalai Lama to postpone his visit to the country. Tenzing said no reasons were given.* Although there may have been sufficient reason for this to happen, communicators from government did not advance these reasons on time or at all, which led to the story being so negative (Molobi 2009:2). This has raised questions on the competencies of government communicators as well as an overall respect for deadlines set by media.

- ✓ Another one dated 14 November 2010 by Ndlangisa, is headlined, “Cosatu slams 5% pay raise for ministers”. It depicts government in a negative light as it suggests that while the country is reeling with unemployment and inequality, government is considering a pay raise for ministers who are already considered earning more than required. The article suggests that the money should rather be used to create employment than to be given to those who already have enough.

In analysing these articles, a certain theme was discovered. The pattern in these articles looks mainly at the good intentions of government as whole, but that a few individuals in government diminish these intentions. That is, government has good policies in place, but certain individuals flout these policies. One of the many examples of these articles include “Poverty is causing ANC fights – Mabuza”, dated 10 December 2017, and it was evaluated as neutral. This article calls for the scrapping of social grants and to be replaced with other means geared towards business development. While this is a good idea, it is not practical in South Africa, which is predominantly made up of older people with no more appetite nor energy to run businesses or even find employment. In this case, the two newspapers reported in the public interest, as they made it possible for the public to discover things they would not have ordinarily discovered. In this instance, some of the news values applied by the two newspapers include **Magnitude** – these include stories that are perceived as sufficiently significant either in the numbers of people involved or in potential impact.

The other is **Relevance** – these include stories about issues, groups and nations perceived to be relevant to the audience (Harcup & O'Neill 2017:1470).

- **Below is an evaluation on negative coverage on government by the *Sunday Times* and *City Press* during the period under review**

An analysis of negative reporting was employed on 100 *City Press* articles and 100 *Sunday Times* articles. In this instance, a huge number of articles reported negatively on government. Out of 100 *City Press* articles, 46 were negative. This is 46%. Meanwhile, out of 100 *Sunday Times* articles, 57 were negative. This is 57%.

- ✓ During this process, Objective one was pursued. The objective seeks to establish news values that are prevalent in stories the news media selects to cover government. Therefore, through the employment of negative reporting as a strategy and a determining factor for this objective, it was established that media would make changes to government stories in order to find a balance. Media is doing so to ensure that stories can provoke thinking and debate within an audience.
- ✓ In addition to the above, Objective four of the study was also put to the test and in particular with the employment of negative reporting as a determining factor. The objective seeks to establish the extent to which SA News services are provided as the public information, persuasion or propaganda by government. Consequently, during the process of analysis of articles with the negative reporting perspective, it was established that this was indeed the case. That is, all articles provided through SA News and many other government channels were carrying a propaganda message seeking to portray government in a good light. Secondly, this determining factor (negative reporting) also provided an opportunity to interrogate Objective two of the study, which seeks to establish the extent to which SA News influences the framing of news stories. The purpose of SA News as a government news agency was an attempt to influence the content of media with regard to the coverage of government-related news. Accordingly, as seen by the DoC (2012:12), the agency was formed to help government interact with the public through the framing of government news stories as well as advancing persuasion and propaganda by government.

- ✓ While this was found to be the case, SA News's strategy of trying to influence the framing of government news stories has not been successful, as the news media would modify these articles by digging deeper until they found something untoward about a particular piece of information, which came initially as a positive and propaganda piece from government. One of many examples is an article in the *Sunday Times* (2010), "World Cup: ministers can start by curbing SAA", dated 24 January 2010. While the initial concept by government was to empower local businesses, and in particular, SMME's during the hosting of the World Cup, the initiative was viewed as negative by media. In this article, government is criticised for turning the World Cup into a source of income. The article further reports about *the slow uptake of reservations experienced by many operators, which has been blamed not only on ridiculously inflated accommodation rates but also on perceptions of outrageous air fares charged, primarily by SAA, on international and domestic routes.*

- ✓ Another example of an article, initially intended to be persuasion and propaganda from government, but was later viewed and reported as negative, is one by Qoka (2010: 1), headlined, "BEE has flopped in its finer hour – just like Bafana". The primary objective of Black Economic Empowerment (BEE) came as an intervention by government to bring to parallel the previously disadvantaged groups with those who benefited during the apartheid era. That is, the strategy needed to empower black people through access to business opportunities so that employment can be created in the country. As such, government would talk about how effective the strategy is through various media engagements. However, the article in question reported negatively towards government. This emerged after thorough interrogation of the strategy and the implementation thereof, which according to the article was lacklustre, especially after so many years into democracy. This article is negative toward government as it depicts government's plan to advance previously disadvantaged groups through BEE as having failed. Although the plan was good, it needed to narrow the gap between rich and poor, and this has not been

the case. The article states: *This year, black economic empowerment (BEE) was a bit like Bafana. It started the year full of promise after President Jacob Zuma appointed the BEE Council, long regarded as the missing link in the effective transformation of South Africa's economy. However, alas, just like Bafana in the World Cup, BEE bombed out in its finest hour (Sunday Times 2010:11).*

The theme and pattern identified in all these negative articles is corruption and maladministration. These articles were mostly about the wrongdoing by government through its quest to do well. One amongst many of these articles is one by Qoka (2010:11) and headlined, "BEE has flopped in its finer hour – just like Bafana". Although the objective of BEE was good, the implementation of the policy was not good. The pattern was the same in both newspapers and the articles were mainly in the public interest. What is also important to note, is that the two newspapers applied various news values, as influenced by their audience. Some of the news values applied in this case include **The Power Elite**, which include stories concerning powerful individuals, organisations or institutions. In this case, it is the government of South Africa, as run by the ruling party, the ANC. Another is **Bad News**, and includes stories with particularly negative overtones, such as conflict or tragedy. In this case, bad news refers to many promises made by the leader, only to deliver to the contrary. Another news value is **Newspaper Agenda**. These include stories that set or fit the news organisation's own agenda. In this instance, the two newspapers chose stories looking at the calibre of their audience and their influence in society, (Harcup & O'Neill (2017:1470)

7.5 QUANTITATIVE ANALYSIS OF NEWSPAPER ARTICLES USING TONES, NEWS VALUES AND THEMES

According to Fico et al (2009:114), this type of analysis is quite important when the documents are more than the researcher can comprehend. Similar to qualitative content analysis, determining factors were used to measure the coverage towards government by media. In this section analysis was used both qualitatively and quantitatively in order to arrive at a full understanding, looking in particular at news values, tones and themes used by media to cover news from the government of South Africa.

The study however did not use a survey in quantitatively looking at the 200 articles. Instead, three themes (positive, negative and neutral) were developed to capture all articles in question. As it has been alluded to before, the aim was to gauge the level of happiness by the newspapers in question with regard to government news. Therefore, how they report these news items would be one of the indicators in this regard. The researcher engaged each article and arrived at determination of whether such was negative, positive or neutral. The process involved looking at the tone that was used by an article in question and whether it was generally praising the good deed from government or merely criticising. For example, some articles referred to how former president Jacob Zuma used his power as the president to build his homestead in Nkandla. Such an article was seen as a negative light as it did not only paint former president bad, but government as well. The researcher preferred to analyse the articles alone as it would have been difficult to make use of other coders who may not have the same understanding of both the subject and the articles at hand. The process made it easy for the researcher to fully comprehend what the articles meant and which side they would be grouped.

- The figure below gives an understanding of how media covered government with **tones**, namely: positive, neutral and negative.

City Press 2009 – 2018

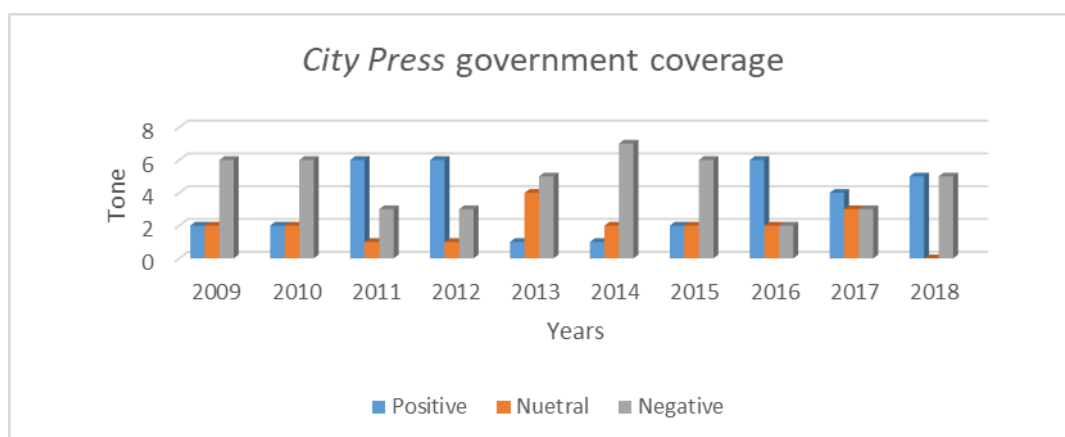


Figure 1: Tone analysis (City Press 2009-2018)

Tone	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
Positive	2	2	6	6	1	1	2	6	4	5
Neutral	2	2	1	1	4	2	2	2	3	0
Negative	6	6	3	3	5	7	6	2	3	5

positive	2	2	6	6	1	1	2	6	4	5
neutral	2	2	1	1	4	2	2	2	3	0
negative	6	6	3	3	5	7	6	2	3	5

Figure 2: Graphic representation of City Press government coverage

Figure 2 provides an understanding that positive, neutral and negative trends were not stable. This trend went up and down and it is attributed to what was happening in government in that particular year.

Sunday Times 2009 - 2018

Tone	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
positive	3	4	6	1	1	1	5	2	2	1
neutral	1	3	2	3	4	1	1	0	0	2
negative	6	3	2	6	5	8	4	8	8	7

Figure 3: Tone analysis (Sunday Times 2009 – 2018)

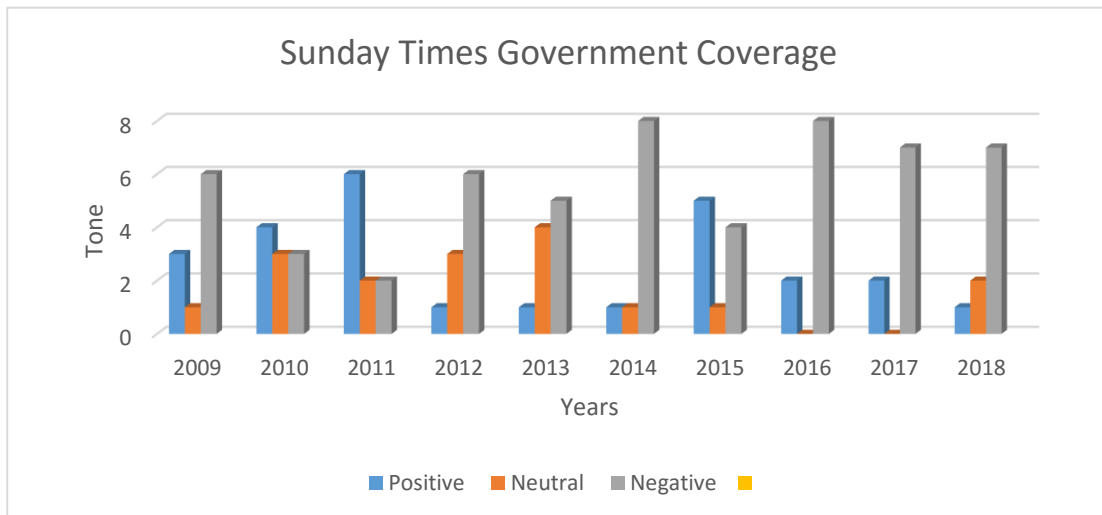


Figure 4: Graphic representation of Sunday Times government coverage

Similar to Figure 2 above, Figure 4 provides an understanding that positive, neutral and negative trends were not stable. This trend went up and down and it is attributed to what was happening in government in that particular year.

➤ **Analysis on tones**

In assessing the effectiveness of SA News, a thorough look was given to the quantitative indices as established during the data analysis process. That is, tones on positive, neutral and negative were used against the articles analysed. Starting with *City Press*, it was discovered that out of the 100 articles from *City Press*, only 35 of them were positive towards government; this is 35 %. Out of the 100 articles from *Sunday Times*, only 26 of them were positive towards government; this is 26%. Out of 100 *City Press* articles, 46 of there were negative; this is 46%. Out of 100 *Sunday Times* articles, 57 of them were negative; this is 57%. Out of the 100 articles from *City Press*, 19 of them were neutral towards government; this is 19%. Out of 100 articles from *Sunday Times*, 17 were neutral towards government, amounting to 17%.

This assessment concludes that government is been covered negatively by media. Although there are instances where news coverage on government is neutral and positive, the general assessment is that media covers government in a negative light.

As stated above, the numbers indicate that SA News has not been effective as a tool for government communication. According to Sanina et al (2017:254), governments need to improve the way in which they handle their communication, as it is the most important element for its success. Johnston (2020) points out that for a government communication machinery to be effective, those involved need to realise that they need to establish professional relations, which include knowing how media operates, and understanding and adhering to their deadlines.

According to the GCIS (2005:5), the agency was able to see an increased utilisation of SA News stories by community and mainstream media houses, largely because the stories were prepared in a way that would easily keep an ordinary citizen well informed of the government's programme of action. Most participants who worked for SA News between 1998, the year in which it was established, until 2009, indicated that they

indeed received a huge coverage from various media houses, including the two newspapers under review.

While this is so, the figure above (Figure 1: *City Press* government coverage) illustrates an up and down trend, which can be credited to many aspects. For example, between 2009 and 2010, only two positive articles were retrieved respectively for the two years under review. The low number of positive stories can be attributed to the installation of former President Jacob Zuma, who led government in 2009. This is so because the former president came into the leadership position of government with allegations ranging from corruption to rape. Therefore, no matter how government communicators tried to portray a positive picture of government, it was going to be difficult to convince media otherwise. This became clearer when it was compared to the negative coverage in the same period, which recorded six articles respectively.

There was, however, an upward trend between 2011 and 2012, where six positive articles were retrieved, while three negative articles were found. This was qualified by the fact that at that moment, media and the public were applauding government for its support to the country for hosting a successful world cup event.

The trend for positive coverage towards government, however, became worse between 2013 up until 2015, when negative reporting increased. While assessing the articles, it was discovered that this was attributed to the news of the former president's homestead, known to media as Nkandla. The Nkandla debacle shot to notoriety in 2012 and this was the case until late in 2018. Opposition parties, civil society, the public and many within the ANC, made noise about Nkandla. This was made even worse after it was discovered that over R246 millions of taxpayers' money was used in the process, from the initial R65 million (Roper 2013). What made it even worse is that the government communication machinery, together with the executive members of the ANC, who were also leaders in government, defended the debacle (Monama &

Seale 2014). While this was so, media continued to investigate and gave a negative coverage towards government, especially of the former president.

It is also important to note that the up and down trend can be ascribed to the fact that only 100 articles were analysed during the period under review. The study only looks at two mainstream media out of the many in the country.

Figure 2, which indicates the *Sunday Times* government coverage, illustrates coverage from *the Sunday Times* during the same period under review. In this instance, only three articles assessed provided positive coverage in 2009, while only four was recorded in 2010. This is opposed to six negative articles in 2009, while only three was recorded in 2010. Similar to *City Press's* coverage, this is attributed to the installation of former president Zuma. Unlike *City Press*, although not very different, the trend for positive coverage went down from 2012 until 2018. This was attributed to, amongst many other issues, the Nkandla debacle, the emergence of the Gupta family and its allegations around state capture, as well as a call from many other individuals for former president Zuma to be recalled. In addition, this monopolised the headlines because of the allegations that the Gupta family had links to senior government and state entity officials, which made it easy for them to access tenders (Mahajan 2019). The up and down trend can also be ascribed to the fact that only 100 articles were analysed during the period under review. The study only looks at two mainstream media out of over twenty media houses in the country.

Therefore, it is possible to conclude that, while SA News was seen as a force to be reckoned with; sadly, the agency's influence seems to have steadily decreased in recent times. This ostensible steady decrease of the use of SA News stories is supposed to have resulted in, amongst other things, the announcement by Arts and Culture Minister Nathi Mthethwa to withdraw advertising in newspapers and other media institutions reporting negatively about the ANC government and the then president of South Africa, Jacob Zuma (Hans 2017).

According to data collected, it became clear that, in addition to the above, a new approach adopted by the agency, including the name change, also played a role in the course of SA News's downfall. Although change is necessary in many settings, data made it clear that some changes were not necessary in this case, and this is why

the agency has dropped its standard. Another change that had a great impact on the performance of the agency was their decision to get rid of provincial stringers.

- The figure below gives an understanding of how media covered government with **news values**, amongst which include the power of elite, proximity, magnitude, relevance, personal, bad news and public good.

News Values	The power elite	Proximity	Magnitude	Relevance	Timelines	Conflicts and Taboo	Personal	Public Good	News Paper Agenda	Bad News
2009	5	0	2	0	0	0	5	1	3	4
2010	4	0	3	0	0	0	4	0	4	5
2011	5	0	4	0	0	0	4	1	3	3
2012	5	0	4	0	0	0	6	0	0	5
2013	6	0	3	0	0	0	5	0	1	5
2014	4	0	4	0	2	0	6	1	0	3
2015	7	0	3	0	0	0	5	0	0	5
2016	6	0	4	0	0	0	6	0	0	4
2017	5	0	6	0	0	0	3	0	0	6
2018	6	0	4	0	0	0	4	0	0	6
Total	52	0	37	0	0	0	48	3	11	46

Figure 5: Media coverage of government according to News Values

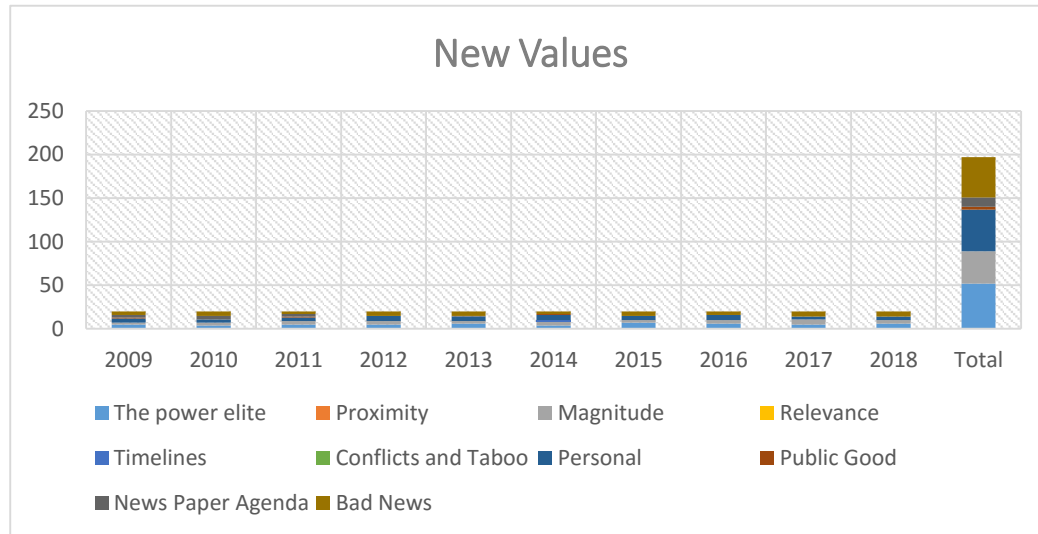


Figure 6: Graphic representation of coverage of government in terms of News Values

➤ Analysis on News Values

The figures above illustrate coverage of government news by both *City Press* and *Sunday Times* looking at the news values used by the newspapers in question. The researcher placed both newspapers in one figure in order to give a better perspective and understanding, particularly because of the likelihood of the two papers using the same news values in their coverage of government news. However, every article has been accounted for and has thus been identified in the figure.

It is important to note that ten articles were assessed from each newspaper per year. That is, ten *City Press* newspaper articles and ten *Sunday Times* newspaper articles in a specific period were reviewed. About the first news value, namely **The Power Elite**, there were 52 stories from both newspapers which covered government, and in particular the ruling ANC. This is primarily because in the eyes of media, there is no clear distinction between government and the ruling party. Also important to note is that the two are powerful organisations whose daily activities affect the public and stakeholders at large. The coverage was also fuelled by the fact that what government does is in the interest of the public. The other notable news value mainly used by media is **Personal**. Judging from the highest number of these stories, especially during the tenure of former president Zuma, it was easy to conclude that media looked particularly at an individual and focused their coverage on him. For example, coverage of Nkandla took centre stage in many newspapers articles and, while it is understood that many other individuals were involved in the process, Zuma's name was touted

higher than others were. The other distinguished news values used primarily by media in the period under review is the **Newspaper Agenda**. This came up strongly because the two newspapers in question have their own agenda and it is to hold government to account by investigating any irregularity committed. Another outstanding news value that came up strongly is **Bad News**. This emerged from many other articles in which government or the ruling party was found to have either disappointed the public or mismanaged issues in the process of their leadership. This news value does not differ a lot from all the above as it only focuses on negative implications of government led by mismanagement in government. Only few stories were seen as offering an element of **Public Good**, as one of the news values in the eyes of media. This is the case because even when the researcher made use of tone as a determining factor, many articles were either negative or neutral towards government, with those that are neutral mostly leaning more towards the negative side than the positive. Not much was reported in terms of **Timeliness, Conflict and Taboo** as well as **Proximity**. It is, however, safe to indicate that news values such as **Magnitude** and **Relevance** became entangled in the process as they are more similar to **The Power Elite** and **Bad News**.

- The figure below gives an understanding of how media covered government with **themes**, amongst which include, service delivery, development, public information, nation building and democracy.

Themes	Service delivery	Development	Reputation/legitimacy	Public information	Nation building	Democracy	Politics
2009	3	3	2	4	1	4	3
2010	3	1	2	3	2	4	5
2011	1	1	2	3	2	4	7
2012	1	1	3	2	3	4	6
2013	1	2	3	4	3	3	4
2014	1	1	3	2	2	3	8
2015	1	1	1	3	4	4	6
2016	1	1	2	4	2	5	5
2017	2	1	1	2	4	4	6

2018	1	2	3	4	2	3	5
Total	15	14	22	31	25	38	55

Figure 7: Media coverage of government in terms of Themes

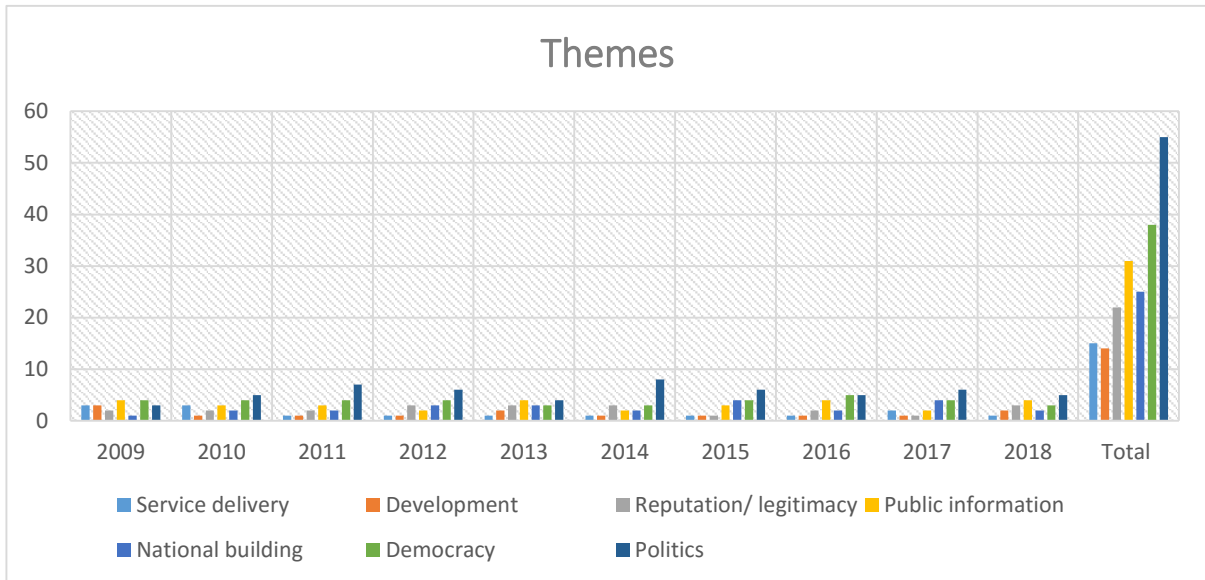


Figure 8: Graphic representation of coverage of government in terms of Themes

➤ Analysis on Themes

The figures above illustrate coverage of government news by both *City Press* and *Sunday Times* looking at the themes used by the newspapers in question. Similar to the one above, the researcher decided to put the two newspapers in one figure in order to have one overall understanding as opposed to separating them.

Although many news articles about government were reported in a negative light by media, it is important to note that government exists for public good. That is, whatever government is involved in is done to help the public. The negativity, as usually seen by media would normally come when individuals involved in the process of government's public good do wrong things. One example, amongst the many, is the introduction of Broad-Based Black Economic Empowerment (B-BBEE). This was an initiative, which carried a **Public Good** theme. However, this was diminished by how it was implemented by those who were involved. This is the same with **Service Delivery**. Many news articles by the two newspapers were focussed on service delivery, albeit in a negative manner. For an example, there have been instances where services were promised to the public but such was not delivered as it was supposed to have been. Government also exists as a **Legitimacy**, being there to ensure that services are rendered properly to the members of the public. Therefore, it

is encouraging to note that there are stories, albeit few, which were seen to be proving the legitimacy of government to its public. Most importantly to note is that from the newspaper articles assessed, many of them carried an element of **Public Information**. This was irrespective of the fact that this public information came straight from government or media and that these articles, carried good news or bad news. The fact of the matter is that such articles carried an element of public information, which would trigger a **Nation Building** process from the public and stakeholders at large.

Although many newspapers were more negative, it is important to note that articles were mostly carried in a **Nation Building** approach. This, albeit seen by media as controversial, existed to ensure that members of the public were involved in a nation building process. The argument from media, even during the interview process (qualitatively), is that if all government activities were reported “as is” without further investigations, then the public, civil society, organised labour, international society and many others, would have been robbed of an opportunity to play a role in nation building. That is, if all were reported by media to appear to be bright in government, chances are that stakeholders would take a back seat and not see the need to play a role.

Stories on **Development** as one of the key themes were also identified and this included one where government initiated the B-BBEE initiative, aimed at bridging the gap between the rich and poor. Meanwhile, stories, which focused on Politics and Reputation, led the pack. This became evident because of the negative connotations about government activities, which were carried through by media. Most stories were written with an element of cut down the reputation of the government, especially because it is black-led. While many of these stories pointed to actual occurrences that could not be denied, the fact remains that they were damaging and were more focused on **Politics** and **Reputation** and thus impacted on the reputation of a black leader. Another notable theme used primarily is **Democracy**, which embraces the fact that government of the ANC came with democracy and as such, a lot is expected from them to deal with corruption and maladministration, something that significantly delays the unfolding of the democratic process.

7.6 EXTENDED DISCUSSIONS: SIMILARITIES AND CONTRASTS

During the process of analysing both qualitative and quantitative data, it is important to note some indicators that have emerged in the process of either literature review or purely from the researcher's point of view. For example, an aspect such as **Stakeholder Management** became one of the key issues discussed at length during the literature review and has thus become an important indicator to be discussed, as it has bearing on the findings and overall analysis of this study. The importance of media-state relations, especially from government's side, was debated repeatedly. This process is known as stakeholder relations. A process of stakeholder relations between government and media would ordinarily involve the use of press conferences, media site visits, media days, and the regular release of media statements. Accordingly, the researcher has found that SA News has not been successful on this front. This is because the organisation does not necessarily interact with media. The mother body, namely the GCIS, primarily does the interaction. Therefore, SA News's voice is not heard as it should be and if GCIS does not mention SA News when media is engaged, then SA News's involvement becomes even more silenced. Furthermore, when the GCIS does not hold these briefings for a while for some reason, SA News is left with the opportunity to send articles on the website only and then to "hope for the best". While it is a structural issue where SA News is controlled by the GCIS, SA News should also be given its voice and powers to do certain things, including engaging with media themselves if it is required to be effective as a government news agency. While this is so, the engagement of media should go beyond calling and the sending of repeated media releases on WhatsApp and email. It should involve a process that makes media personnel feel valued and part of the value chain. Amongst many other avenues to be considered, one could be a regular invitation for media to take a walk in a government department for orientation. Another avenue could be an invitation where media is involved in one of the strategic planning meetings of government. This way, media will feel involved and will be able to voice their frustrations and ideas in the process.

The issue of **Newsworthiness** also came up strongly in the process of the study. The fact is, media is dependent on news values in order to consider a news article for publication. This has caused many problems between government and media,

because to government any news article is carried as a public information token, which needs to be known by the public. However, this is not as easy, because media has news values to follow as well as an agenda to set. Furthermore, media is driven by profit and such profit is driven by audience followership. Therefore, media will report news that focusses on their type of audience and, largely, the sponsors. This is why news from government would either be ignored or be changed in order to carry the news values as ascribed by media. In addition to the above, the concept of **Gatekeeping** also came into focus, wherein the editors of various media houses became very important vessels to take a decision on what goes to print and what does not, as driven by the newsworthiness of an article. As elaborated by literature, gatekeepers are very important in the selection of news and as such are the most feared and at some point, the most disliked individuals in the process of making news.

Framing of news by government also appeared strongly during the discussions. In this instance, the understanding is that any news that comes from government is framed in a way that depicts a government that is able to provide service delivery, a government that is **Legitimate**, a government that **Develops Communities** and most importantly, a government that is interested in **Nation Building**. Therefore, government's communication machinery is designed in a way that ensures that when communication takes place, it does so to promote the spirit of inclusivity. This is where framing of messages takes place, where only positive sides are carried through and in other instances, where government is seen as taking actions on those who are found to have flouted the law. This will show that government cares and will take action against those who seek to transgress. However, this does not sit well with media, as doing so will only be seen as media being a mouthpiece of government. While government argues that everything it says is **Public Information**, media argues that if such an approach is taken, then media does not function as a **Fourth Estate**, there to hold government to account. Media argues that its fourth estate function does not only exist to punish government, but it also exists to help in a nation-building process.

One other issue that is notable is the concept of **Public Good** versus **News Values**. In the context of this study, the government communication machinery exists for the public good. It exists to communicate what government has done for the public, as it is the mandate of any government to have an informed citizenry. Therefore, when

government builds a new school in Limpopo, this becomes a public good; as the public will use such a school. In addition, this becomes a public good because government wants other communities to see what it has done to the community members in Limpopo. Nevertheless, good as this can be, it does not mean it is newsworthy for media. As such, media would argue that it “cannot praise a fish that swims”. In other words, such a school was supposed to have been built and that this is not news because the mandate of government is to provide services to the public. What becomes newsworthy is the amount of money spent in the building process as compared to the amount budgeted initially. What is of further interest to media is the contractor that was appointed to build such a school as well as the time taken to build that school. Therefore, what is of public good for government may not necessarily mean it is public good for media.

It is also important to highlight the **Role of media in Society** as compared to what government expects from it. Firstly, it is important to note that media is not a mouthpiece of any organisation and that, unless such a message is paid for, media has the right to change the message in order to suit its audience, or to simply not cover such a message.

Literature shows that indeed media plays a huge role in society as it exists to educate, entertain and inform. However, media is often blamed for everything that goes wrong. For example, when a politician loses votes or better yet, when the governing party loses its seats to another party, the first stakeholder to be blamed is media.

Agenda Setting also appeared in many instances during the study. This was the case when literature indicated that both media and government had their own agendas to set. While this is so, it is important to indicate that similar to framing, government could have its own agenda, however such an agenda partly depends on media to be realised. That is, while government could still use other avenues such as Izimbizo, Thusong Service Centres, SA News and many others, it still relies on media for the wider reach of its messages. Therefore, in as much as government can have its own agenda, the media usually succeeds on this front as it is considered the most powerful organ in any country.

The emergence of **Social Media** has also come out as one of the biggest discussions in the study. This was the case because this emergence caused changes on how both media and government handle news. While these changes were viewed in a bad light, they also brought advantages. For an example, the government of South Africa, through GCIS and SA News, is now able to communicate directly with the public through social media. This gave government an advantage because they are now able to engage in an **Unmediated Communication** with the public. In addition, since SA News is predominantly internet-based, its reach became even wider using social media as articles would simply be placed on Twitter and Facebook. Therefore, a **Mediated Communication**, where media would decide what goes into the public domain, became somehow minimal. However, this did not mean that all SA News's problems were solved, as they still needed the help of media to carry its news forward. This is so because a large amount of public members still relies on traditional media for their daily news coverage, primarily the older generation. Even the younger generation do not necessarily use social media to access news, but rather for entertainment. Therefore, a larger element of traditional media still needs to be used by SA News in order for government activities and news to be delivered to the public.

What was also important is the discussion around whether a government communication was **Propaganda** or **Public Information**. The fact of the matter is firstly to understand that government communication machinery exists as a propaganda tool. Once this fact is understood, it is easy to note that its messages would come out as originally intended. It should however be noted that while propaganda sometimes carries bad connotations, it was not the case in this study. That is, propaganda in this study was used as a public information tool rather than dark propaganda where, for example, people are forced to join the army in the name of protecting their country. In this case, propaganda becomes a tool through which the public good is communication in the form of public information. For example, when government donates news shoes to a school somewhere in a rural area, such a public good is communicated as public information and is then seen as another step taken in the service delivery process. Although media would see this as just a propaganda ploy and in many instances would not cover it, it remains a public good from government's perspective.

Media-State Relations is also one of the most important elements of this study as it highlights some of the processes followed by government in engaging media. As captured sufficiently through data collected, the researcher can confidently indicate that this was one of the most critical parts of the study and this is why it has been expanded through a theoretical framework of this study, which is the effective government media relations. As things stand, data has revealed that the relationship between government and media remains cordial, and sometimes even strained as media still struggles to be understood as a fourth estate. What makes the relationship even more difficult is the high expectations from government for media to play its role in nation building, rather than being critical.

The structure of government communication makes it difficult for media to meet deadlines because media houses have to wait for a long time to receive a comment or an interview with senior management or political heads. Accordingly, data as well as the framework of the study has found that this bad relationship is worsened by how SA News, as a news agency, is placed on the pyramid of news in government. As such, the framework proposes changes to the status quo. As things stand, the GCIS, together with all other levels of government and entities have a direct interaction with media, leaving SA News in the dark. What makes it even more difficult for SA News is that during media engagements held by all these other institutions; there is no mention of SA News in the process, even though SA News is expected to carry the articles through to the same media and members of the public successfully.

During the data-collection process, when the researcher was interviewing members of media, many of them frowned upon the mention of SA News, while others simply did not know of the existence of the agency. They only knew of the GCIS and the researcher had to remind them of it repeatedly until such time they could realise what SA News is. This is a clear indicator that SA News has been forgotten, yet a lot is expected from it as a news agency from government.

7.7 CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter gives an overview of findings of the study and it does this in two parts. First, in part one, the chapter introduces qualitative quotes through which the researcher was able to place contributions from participants. These quotes made it possible for the researcher to connect contributions from participants with literature and the objectives of the study.

The chapter also displays findings from a quantitative perspective, where 200 newspapers articles were analysed looking at positive, neutral and negative trends. Also discussed are various news values, which were used to report on government news by the newspaper under review.

Secondly, in part two, the chapter provided an overview of specific objectives of the study. Amongst these objectives, is establishing which news values are prevalent in the stories that the news media select to cover about government and how have they been changing throughout the decade (2009-2018). In this part, findings for a quantitative and qualitative content analysis were displayed as suggested by Fico et al. (2009), and two types of content analysis was used, namely qualitative and quantitative content analysis.

The next chapter deals with the chapter summation of the whole study. It does this by detailing which chapter entails what and why. It also tables the general idea of the findings. The chapter also deals with research-specific objectives and its findings as well as recommendations. It details opportunities for more research in the future while also focusing on theoretical conclusions, the study's contribution to the body of knowledge and concludes with the study's limitations.

CHAPTER 8: CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

8.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents the overall synopsis of this study. Apart from providing an overview of the main research objective, which was to establish the effectiveness of SA NEWS as a tool for government communication, it also gives a conclusive overview of other supporting objectives. The chapter further looks at the general conclusion and recommendations for government communications while also opening avenues for future research.

This chapter begins with the aims and specific objectives of the study. This is followed by a summation of all previous chapters. The researcher understands that much more has been said in this entire study, thereby deciding to highlight the key areas of each chapter. The chapter further provides the general findings. In this case, apart from many other findings, the chapter demonstrate that government depends on media for their communication with the public. The assertions are maintained by Van Cuilenburg, Schoeman and Noomen (in Fourie 2007:244), who postulate that in a democratic state, media is the most trusted channel of communication as it can be used to inform the public about political developments.

The chapter also details the research questions and its findings. Recommendations are also applied in this chapter and these involve the overall improvement of SA NEWS, which include the use of social media while considering bringing back provincial stringers, and placing SA NEWS properly in the hierarchy of government communication. The chapter also entails opportunities for more future research as well as theoretical conclusion of the study, the study's contribution to the body of knowledge as well its limitations.

8.2 OVERALL AIM AND SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The findings for this section are divided in both qualitative and quantitative contents analysis, where 200 newspaper articles from *City Press* and *Sunday Times* were analysed.

This section provides an overall aim of the study as reflected in the earlier chapters, which mainly seeks to establish the effectiveness of SA NEWS as a tool for

government communication in South Africa. The following specific objectives were set in order to achieve the results:

- To determine the news values that are prevalent in the stories about government.
- To assess how these news values have changed throughout the decade (2009-2018).
- To establish the extent at which SA News influences the framing of government news stories.
- To gauge the effectiveness of SA News as measured by output and outtake indexes.
- To measure the extent at which SA News services provided as public information or propaganda by government.
- To gauge the extent at which SA News services are construed as public information or propaganda by the news media.
- To determine the general relation between government and media in South Africa.

8.3 CHAPTER SUMMATION

Chapter 1: This chapter is an introduction to the research. It gives the overall background and broader direction of the study, which includes, amongst others, the hypotheses, problem statement, objectives of the study and key abbreviations. The overall question of the study is also in this chapter, which is *the efficacy of SA News as a tool for government communication in South Africa*. In order to find the underlying cause of this question, specific objectives and questions were developed. Aspects such as the research methodology design as well the delimitation form part of the bigger picture in this chapter. The study's theoretical framework is also introduced in this chapter.

Chapter 2: This chapter discusses government communication and related aspects. It also provides an overview of literature where key theories related to the study are discussed. These theories include propaganda, which became a building block for the

study. The chapter takes the reader through other key concepts of the study, including government communication, stakeholder relations and public relations, which form a greater discussion around the research question. These and many other concepts became relevant when the researcher needed to discover aspects that would be helpful in answering the research question.

Chapter 3: This chapter provides a theoretical framework of the study, which is effective *government-media relations*. Amongst the theories mentioned are agenda-setting, framing, gatekeeping and priming. It further details literature in the role of media in society, which became one of the key areas and gave more impetus to the study. A broader look at media's role is investigated and this leads to issues such as media as a fourth estate, and theories such as agenda-setting, framing and gatekeeping. It is this chapter where it is argued that media should not be seen as a mouthpiece for government, but as a watchdog which exists to hold the public and private sector to account.

Chapter 4: The chapter deals with media-state relations. The chapter firstly looks at the broader picture of media-government relations before focusing on the South African case. It details the importance of media relations and how lost organisations are if they fail to properly manage it. In particular, the chapter looks at the cordial relationship between media and the South African government, with some scholars referring to it as "give and take". According to Tabane (2015), the relationship between government and media is characterised by rigidity.

This chapter also concentrates on media, government and society. That is, both media and government have a responsibility towards society. Government needs to interact with the public in order to keep them knowledgeable, while also encouraging them to be a nation-building partner. The government does this in many ways, with the most effective being through media. Media communicates news to the public in order for them to be informed about their electorate and their leaders. However, the two often clash about what qualifies to be communicated and what does not. Thus, the chapter details concepts such as newsworthiness, news values and sunshine news, amongst others.

Chapter 5: This chapter narrates the history of the GCIS. It details how the organisation changed from GIS during the apartheid era to the current GCIS, which is currently responsible for all government communication. It provides the mission, vision, aim and main function of the organisation. It details the various components found in the organisation and how they ensure that the overall government communication is supported. The chapter also examines the processes followed in the formulation of Bua News, which is now referred to as the South African Government News Agency. Details regarding the mission, vision and aim of the agency is also provided in this chapter, together with its background.

Chapter 6: This chapter details the methodological concepts, which were focussed on during the research process. It indicates that a mixed-methods research methodology was used, and it gives reasons why. It focusses on issues such as mixed-methods, which in this case was achieved by making use of two types of research methods at the same time. In addition, the chapter details the analysis process followed during the course of this study.

Chapter 7: This chapter looks at the findings and results of the study. It details all the results from both the qualitative and quantitative methods used in the process.

Chapter 8: The chapter gives an overall conclusion to the study, while also making recommendations on how the South African government can deal with government communication in a more effective way. Recommendations for media-state relationships will also be outlined in this chapter.

8.4 GENERAL FINDINGS

Governments all over the world need to communicate with the public in order to give them feedback on their programmes of action, and to have an informed and involved public. Although there are other communication channels such as Izimbizo, public hearings and door-to-door campaigns, research has shown that the use of media is the most effective platform and it is thus preferred. Such research includes that of Van Cuilenburg, Schoeman and Noomen (in Fourie, 2007:245), who postulate that in a democratic state media is the most trusted channel of communication as they can be used to inform the public about political developments, to guide public opinion about political decisions, and to express different views about political developments and

decisions. However, for government to succeed in making use of media there has to be some level of relationship between the two parties. Fynes-Clinton (2015:13) laments that “the products of the relationship between political journalists and political media advisors have implications for the whole of society in a common law democracy, as they can have impacts on public perceptions of politics and politicians, understanding of news events, and ultimately the way people vote.” Therefore, the relationship between the two parties has an impact on how the public views government, but most importantly, on how they elect their leaders.

The first main finding in this case was the discovery that there are considerable clashes between South Africa’s media and the South African government. The two are reliant on one another, as stated by Tabane (2015), however, their relationship is characterised by conflict. This is because no matter what happens between them, the two parties will always remain interlinked. This is especially because the two newspapers involved in this study are Sunday newspapers whose emphasis is government news. That is, their attention is on holding government to account through rigorous investigations. Therefore, data collected through a mixed-method research methodology confirmed literature observations that the media-state relationship in the country is at its lowest. Although this is the case, some participants agreed that in fact, this is how it should be in a democracy.

When interrogating this aspect deeper, the researcher found it hard to find the actual cause of the conflict between the two parties. Media blames government communicators for unprofessionalism and of doing anything to protect and defend their political principals and then totally forgetting the most important thing, namely, to communicate. It was further expressed by some government communicators that media in South Africa exists to damage the reputation of the government, especially after the dawn of democracy. Due to the newly introduced media freedom when the ANC came into power, media began to find weaknesses in the new government and started to cast doubt on the leadership and its ability to take the country from the dark days of apartheid to the greener and better days as promised during the elections. Due to media’s hunger for free writing and broadcasting, it began to choose their leads and took up their position as the fourth estate to keep the new government on its toes at all times.

While this was the case, the government could not stop media in its reporting. However, this gave rise to a critical need for government to ensure that their position should also be heard. This came to the surface after the ruling political party complained that media did not give the black-led government a chance to lead.

The second main finding concerns the use of SA News articles by media. According to the literature, after the new dispensation, South Africa's government brought about new ways in which to engage with the public. Through the Government Communication and Information System (GCIS), the government made use of channels such as Izimbizo, public hearings, door-to-door campaigns, with the use of media being most important channel. The GCIS used Bua News, now referred to as the South African Government News Agency (SA News). It is through this platform that the government was able to relay government news and happenings to the public in order to avoiding a lacuna between government and its people.

Regrettably, the practice has steadily decreased in recent times. This decrease of the use of SA News stories is supposed to have resulted, amongst other things, in the announcement by the government to withdraw advertising in newspapers (Hans 2017). This is sustained by wider literature review and findings from both qualitative and quantitative data, which was obtained during the course of this study. During the quantitative analysis, it was discovered that none of two newspapers printed the stories that were supplied by SA News in an unaltered form.

In addition to the above, findings from the qualitative research revealed that articles that were retrieved from SA News were used only for the verification of facts and not necessarily to be published in the newspaper. This was because media believed that government would never put out negative facts about themselves. Thus, media sourced additional information from other sources in government. Some participants declared that they sometimes do use articles from SA News to verify facts to build a bigger and more revealing article, while others indicated the contrary.

The third finding concerns the current effectiveness of SA News as a tool for government communication. The greater part of the literature review was concentrated on this area, as it is the main question for this study. Through this process, it was

discovered that while SA News has been one of the best news agencies in the country, having surpassed others such as SAPA, it has currently lost its power.

This is a clear indication that SA News started out very well and media trusted them as the only trustworthy source to receive news from government. What made things easier was that news articles were written in a way that would be attractive to media as it carried all the required angles that a story should be carrying. That is, they were all newsworthy and carried all the news values.

While this was the case, findings indicate that this is no longer the case. The standard of SA News has dropped, with media houses referring to it as a propaganda machine. The claim it is there to only praise the government every step of the way. This prompted media to either alter articles from SA News altogether, or not use them at all.

Further findings on this suggests that the agency has indeed lost its teeth and is no longer doing what it is supposed to be doing. Many participants, in particular those who worked for the agency when it had just begun, maintain that the agency is no longer what it used to be.

The general findings of this study from both methods used, together with the results from literature, revealed that media-state relationship is very important. It further revealed that even though the two organisations need one another, government should step up to the plate as it has the responsibility to have an informed public. It was therefore important for government to ensure that its relationship with media improves, because of the two; government has a lot to lose.

8.5 Research specific objectives and its findings

As indicated in previous chapters, the study has five hypotheses that needed to be clarified throughout. All these hypotheses and questions were developed to help address the wider question of the study, which was to establish the effectiveness of SA News as a tool for government communication in South Africa. The section below gives an overview of this.

- **News values that are prevalent in the stories about government**

Data revealed that not all news values were used to cover government news. Only a selected few that were relevant to the newspapers in question were used in this regard. As such, a decision is taken in consideration of the audience of the newspaper. Of the many news values available, one that came out on top is the **Power of Elite**. This news value became prevalent because, during the time under review, the government of South Africa had just transitioned from the leadership of two presidents who were held in high regard to one who came to power with allegations of corruption. Therefore, the entire government, President Zuma and the ruling party became the source of **Bad News** and then the second news value came into play. Furthermore, data also revealed the primary use of another news value, namely **Personal**. That is, it became clear that the news coverage about government was more about the president than what the government does as a public good.

- **How these news values have changed throughout the decade (2009-2018).**

According to data collected, the mainstream media's use of news values have changed over time. Many participants indicated that when they began as news writers at SA News their news articles were used exclusively by various media houses, with the mainstream media in the lead. Although a few changes were made to the original articles, the fact remains that many of the articles submitted by government were used optimally. Further data revealed that media's approach changed drastically from 2009 to 2018, where less of the government's articles appeared in the mainstream media. That is, media started to focus on various news values, such as **Personal** and **Bad News**, from the news articles received from government. Because of the fact that government news is more focused on public good rather than on news values such as **Bad News**, this resulted in little usage of articles from SA News, as, according to media, they were one-sided and no longer relevant to their audience.

- **The extent which SA News influence the framing of government news stories?**

Data revealed that there is sufficient evidence of the framing of government news stories by SA News. It has been found that due to its proximity as a government news agency, SA News exists to provide a positive spin on government for communities.

This means that every article provided through this platform, ensures that it influences the image of the government. Meanwhile media has continually refused to merely be a mouthpiece of government and insists on newsworthy articles, unless such a message is paid for as an advertisement. Therefore, the framing of news by the government can happen, but it can only happen to a certain extent, as media insists on articles that suits their audience.

Since SA News operates as a government communication machinery, one can attest that, to a certain extent, it has done well in ensuring a positive spin on government. This is because, apart from the media, members of the public can easily and freely access news from government through the mere click of a button. It also becomes a direct link between government and the public because members of the public have access to unmediated and unaltered news which comes straight from their government. Furthermore, with the advent of social media, as extensively alluded to by the literature, SA News is also able to extend its footprint by making use of Twitter, YouTube and Facebook to release news. While this is the case, data revealed that there is still lot to be done for the agency to fully find its feet in respect of social media usage. One still finds a situation where only one or two news articles are found on social media by SA News as compared to mainstream media, which uploads as much as five news articles in a space of thirty minutes.

- **The efficacy of SA News as measured by output and outtakes indexes.**

In order to get sufficient and balanced data, both parties were interviewed, that is, those representing media and those representing the government. While this was done, it was discovered that SA News was no longer effective as a tool for government communication. Few journalists concurred that they only make use of it to check the reliability of information, especially when it comes to statistics. Nevertheless, they hardly make use of information that is provided through this platform. When they do, they build on the story by interviewing many more parties while making more investigations. While this is the case though, it is important to note even if media houses either ignore these articles or build on them, these messages are still accessible by members of the public, organised labour, civil society, the private sector and many other organisations. As such, while media has chosen to not use these

articles, these messages still receive some sort of an audience, albeit not as it would be if media were fully involved.

- **The extent which SA News services are provided as public information or propaganda by government**

Data found that government news is provided purely as public information and propaganda by government. The fact remains that no organisation will speak badly about itself, media included. Accordingly, and as indicated previously, the South African government makes use of various channels such as Izimbizo and SA News to populate the government's programme of action. Therefore, through SA News, government provides propaganda to the public through articles that are positive and carry through the good messages.

- **The extent which SA News services are construed as public information, persuasion or propaganda by the news media**

According to data, media sees services by SA News as public information and as propaganda. Many participants maintain this, in particular, journalists who attest that news articles from SA News are quite difficult to use unchanged, as they are self-praising and lack substance. Journalists argued that this has resulted in them making use of other sources such as informants and channels such as Twitter and Facebook to access news. This is because news from SA News is seen as notices about what government has done and are thus far removed from being relevant to their audience, thereby only pushing propaganda. While this is so, journalists have agreed that there are times when messages from the government are so important that they do not have a choice but to use them as is. Therefore, in this case, media sees government as an entity, which provides effective and reliable public information. Furthermore, it is important to also understand that government communication exists for the public good. This is because, for example, a school that has been opened, or a hall that has been opened, or a road that has been tarred is done for the public good. This is why even during the analysis of newspaper articles, data revealed that there was a significant number of news articles, which were positive. This shows that even media understands that government communication and, largely, government is there for the

public good. Therefore, some positive coverage from government, although with an element of newsworthiness, will be carried through by media to the public.

8.6 A practical Framework for Effective Government Media Relations

Fig 1: Government-Media Relations: The Current State of Affairs

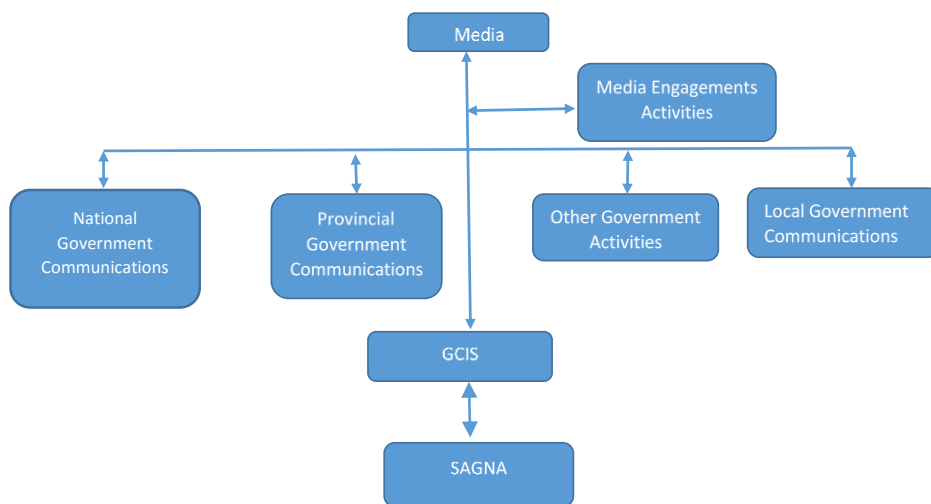
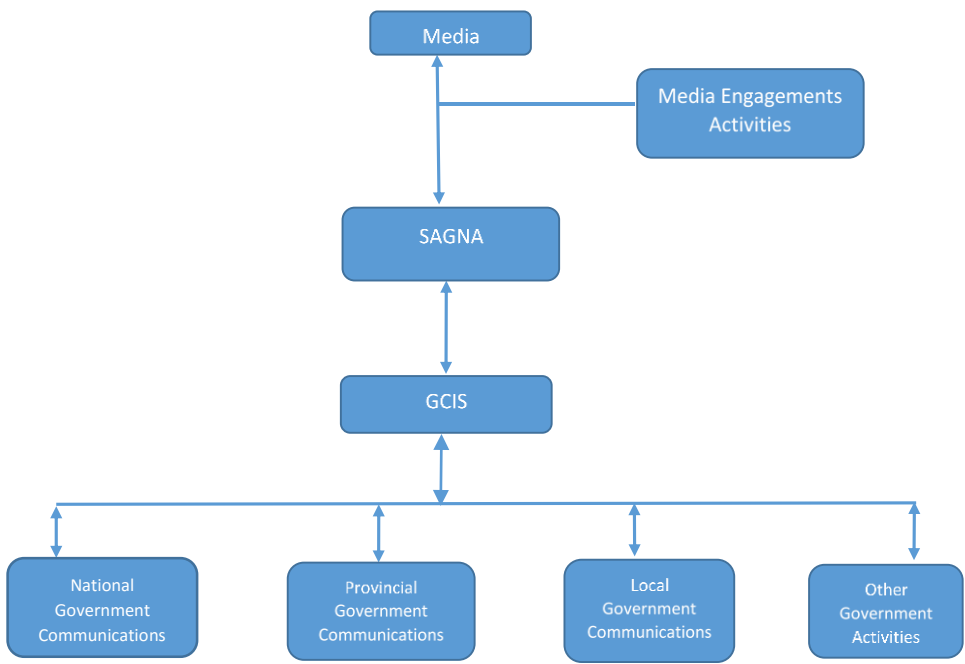


Fig 2: Government-Media Relations: The Ideal State of Affairs



The framework for effective government media relations was designed with due considerations of both specific and general findings of the study. Considerations were given to findings from participants from government and media as well as findings from the 200 articles from *City Press* and *Sunday Times*, which were analyzed through a content analysis approach. In addition to the above, literature findings also played a huge role in the process and as such, gave a clear direction of some pointers, which became necessary in the formulation of this framework.

The researcher further grouped these findings under extended discussions, where similarities and contrasts were identified. For example, government communication is usually viewed more as propaganda than a public good by media. However, literature has in contrast found that actually, government information is a ‘public good’ that is why there is higher media and public scrutiny when government does anything for the public. For instance, government information as a public good is important to many members of the public – meaning that it defies news values – such as handing over shoes to a community. While this may not fit as a media news value, it is important news for that community, especially as government does public good. As such, these aspects were combined to formulate the framework for effective government and

media relations. While the framework still needs to be properly put to the test and strengthened, it is important to indicate that all aspects pertaining to media-state relationship have been utilised in the formulation of the framework. Further to this discussion, is the theory of agenda-setting which, as discussed earlier in the Chapter 3 suggests that government, similarly to media, has an agenda to set. That it, any engagement with the public by government is done is done in order to set an agenda.

What is even more interesting about the framework is that on one hand, it gives the current state of affairs regarding how the South African government relates with the media, with particular interest to SA News. Currently, SA News does not interact with the media and only relies on GCIS. **See Figure 1.** What is even worse is that other government departments both at the national, provincial and local levels, as well as other government entities, interact with media more than what SA News does. All these are happening in the presence of a government news agency, which is entrusted with the responsibility to disseminate government news to the public and media.

On the other hand, the framework gives the ideal state of affairs, which if considered, would see SA News becoming not only an effective tool for government communication, but it would also create an environment where there is an effective government media relations in the country. **See figure 2.** This is because SA News as a news agency would be at the forefront of media interaction and such would not necessarily only be focussed on regular news releases, but other team building engagements as well.

The framework therefore shows SA News as merely a partner in the process of media relations, with GCIS taking the lead in the process. Therefore, SA News becomes weakened and voiceless and does not offer anything in the process of media relations. That is, only GCIS as the mother-body as well as all other levels of government and entities can engage with media and seldom mention SA News in this process, thereby continually rendering it redundant and unable to stand-alone. While this has been the case for a long time, the study, and by extension, the framework endeavors to introduce and propose elements, which can be used to improve the SA News-media relations as it were. Amongst many other elements are aspects that limit the exposure and participation of SA NEWS as an independent government news agency.

Therefore, the framework needed to be extended and be directed more towards this news agency.

A conceptualization of SA News in the framework of the study

It is an undeniable truth that SA News is a very important vessel in the process of government communication. It is through this platform that most messages from government are relayed to the public, media, stakeholders, private sector as well as the international community. Therefore, its full participation in media engagement is essential. That is, media needs to know the people behind SA News, more than they know people from GCIS and many other entities of government. As things stand, the opposite is true. As such, the framework undertakes to give a graphic understanding of the current media-state relations and how SA News is on the hierarchy, **See Figure 1** as well as the ideal media-state relation **See Figure 2**.

Figure 1 illustrates that while SA News is regarded as the most important lever between government and media, there are other entities and government departments that appear to be more important than SA News and this needs to be corrected, if this agency is to be effective. Once the position of SA News as a government communication is fully understood, government should begin a process of positioning it correctly. This should be done in a strategic manner without giving an impression that other means of communication such as Vuk'zenzele are not as important. What should however be noted is that while Vuk'zenzele is equally important in disseminating news from government, it is an unmediated platform which requires no form of interaction with media. Therefore, focus should be placed on SA News as a news agency of government and be placed high up where it is recognised. The agency should be seen firstly as a link between government and media and secondly as an independent entity, that is able to make its own decisions. In addition, it should be seen as an element which provide news that is ready for publication by mainstream media and for the public consumption. A discussion should also be held in government wherein all media-related aspects should be released through SA News. This way, the agency is not only focused on a few national departments, but the entirety of government, including local and provincial used of the platform. This will also mean that government communication is centralized and easily controlled. This way, media knows where to go when seeking government news. As such, media-state relations

improves as media does not have to run around looking for information and this will also help in reaching deadlines and an overall media coverage of government as a whole.

8.7 RECOMMENDATIONS

This section provides recommendations aimed at assisting the overall arena of the South African government communication. These will benefit every communicator in government as well as those who aspire to become one in future. As with the study, these recommendations are directed to the management and everyone involved in SA News.

Through this research process, several gaps were identified, particularly in media-state relations as well as many other elements such as media's perception of SA NEWS as a tool for government communication. Through data received, it was discovered that media-state relations in South Africa is at its lowest. Although government recognises media and its freedom of expression, they are far from happy about how media reports on government. As found through the literature process, government has in many instances complained that media is not playing its part in nation building. However, media refuses to be seen as a mouthpiece for government and vows to do its bit in ensuring government and, in particular, its leaders, are held to account. Furthermore, media will continue to rather expose what government does not do and look away from what has already been done, because it is the responsibility of leaders in government to do what it is elected to do.

What is important, however, is that the two parties must realise that they exist for different functions and they need to perform their functions without fear or favour. Although government needs media for exposure, it should not only perform its duties because media is watching. Government should perform its work diligently and professionally so that it does not depend on media to reveal its good work. That is, if government wishes to open a multi-million rand school on a farm, where disadvantaged children will benefit. It must start by appointing properly qualified suppliers. This should be followed by a suitable period for construction and should end with the appropriate use of public funds. If these approaches were followed, the government would not need to sing its praises, as the people who have benefitted,

would do so. Moreover, media would dig and conduct investigations and find nothing untoward, thereby having no choice but to write a positive story. Kim and Yang (2008:56) maintain that, in order to win the public relations battle, “organisations need to develop the effective function of media relations; the cultivation and management of positive relationships with media is one of the key factors of excellence in public relations. That is, if media coverage is favourable about a country, global audiences will create positive perceptions of the country.”

According to the findings, media feel used by government as they are being called to cover news about what the government has done. Media argues that while it exists to inform, entertain and educate the community, it also exists to be a voice for the voiceless. That is, as a collective media industry, they are not only there to relay what government has done, they are also there to ask why it has been done and why it has been done now as opposed to the previous year. Therefore, government needs to realise that it will not be automatic for media to carry news from government as it is presented. Media will ask a few questions which an ordinary public would have liked to ask but could not. Media should also be given the freedom to operate freely, in order for them to perform optimally. Once media is free to operate, it will also feel the need to cooperate with the government.

8.9.1 Recommendations directed at SA News

- ✓ **The return of stringers in provinces.** As it has already been found in the collection of data, SA News is not as effective as it used to be, and something needs to be done for it to go back to its glory days. For this to happen, one of the critical things they should consider doing is to go back to what used to work. This is bringing back stringers in provinces. Stringers who were employed in provinces, used to give the agency an added advantage, as they would cover stories in the deeper peripheries of the communities, where mainstream media would not go.
- ✓ **Consider all the news values in their news articles.** Mainstream media does not hate government. What they cannot tolerate is the news articles, which only highlight the good deeds from government, without any news values. As indicated by many participants, SA News needs to go back to its earlier days and allow their

reporters to write news articles as if they were journalists. It is a known fact that SA News is an agency government, which exists to provide public information and propaganda. Although this is known, news articles should not appear to be obviously praise singing of government for everything that they do. That is, they must take off their government writers' hats and write a story objectively as journalists. This way, the mainstream media would use government's articles without fail. Better yet, SA News writers can be used as tools to self-critique government, so that various departments can improve their service delivery.

- ✓ **Take an inner look at their reasons for existence.** An introspective exercise needs to be done on the existence of SA News as a news agency and why it exists. In other words, there should be a distinguished role for SA News to play that differs from what other communicators from various departments play. This is so because of the emergence of social media, which forces various mainstream media houses to rethink their strategies and approach towards news. Many media platforms have been forced to close down while others are adapting to the new ways of doing things. Therefore, it is important for SA News to think about a new approach, which includes the significant use of social media. This way, they would not entirely depend on the mainstream media for their news to be consumed as they could easily send their news via social media for everybody to access.
- ✓ **Improve SA News's relationship with media.** Data discovered that the structure of government communication makes it difficult for SA News to be recognised as a news agency for government. Actually, many journalists did not know what SA News is. They only knew that there was only one entity which controlled government news and that was the GCIS. Therefore, it is important for government to invest in promoting SA News in the media. Government must allow SA News to be independent and make its own appearances in the media space. It must also be mentioned at every news conference, but most importantly, it should be placed at the highest grading of news production in government. That way, it will be able to have direct interaction with media, and in turn, media would know who to talk to for clarity or for news in general.
- ✓ **Recruitment of writers from Media Fraternity.** Data also revealed that many journalists who are recruited to SA News end up being ordinary public servants

and forget that they were recruited to help government communication to connect easily with media. Therefore, it is important that journalists continue to play their rightful roles of advising government on the newsroom rules and setup as well as keeping the relationship going.

- **Recommendations directed at media-state relations**

- ✓ The first point of departure in this case is the employment of highly skilled communicators in government who are able to be more proactive than reactive. Most government communicators only work when a journalist contacts them.
- ✓ Communicators must earn their respect from their media counterparts by focussing on their jobs and doing it diligently and with integrity. Most participants agreed that many communicators want to act like their principals. That is, they display lack of proper communication like their principals.
- ✓ Many participants complained about how inaccessible government communicators are and this works against the purpose they are employed to uphold. Therefore, it is important for them to adhere to deadlines set by media houses and to be available when media needs a comment or clarity on an issue. The only way government communication can ever improve is for the two parties to be in constant contact. This way confusion will be avoided, and media will not be forced to run a story without any comment from government.
- ✓ The other critical issues to be thoroughly looked at are the government communicators' professionalism. Many participants raised concerns about how unprofessional many government communicators are. In other words, they need to put their work first and make sure they actually understand how the news industry and different news platforms work.
- ✓ Lack of creativity has also been identified as a recurring problem. It is therefore important to ensure that government communicators think "outside the box" in order to ensure communication with the public. Therefore, a statement repeated multiple times on the entire platform will not achieve intended results. There must be a way in which a particular piece of information is broken into pieces and made relevant for different platforms.

- ✓ Play an advisory role to the principals. The reason why qualified communicators should be appointed in government is that they need to be able to advise their principals on what communication is all about. That is, they must anticipate how a particular aspect will attract negative media attention before it even starts so that they can advise against it. This has, however, not been the case, as attested by journalists. According to journalists, most government communicators have failed to play a critical role of either sourcing necessary information on time or making their principals available for comments. The main concern is that many of these communicators are not necessarily trained as professional communicators. They are mostly appointed on recommendation of the ruling party and by the current minister of a particular portfolio. What makes media even more confused is that when such a minister leaves for another portfolio permanently exits government; the communicator also disappears and, as such disappears with important information and media contacts. Media is then forced to make new contacts and try to navigate the portfolio until they can get hold of necessary information at that time. Therefore, the recommendation is that government should rather invest in the employment of professionally trained communicators who will ensure that communication operates smoothly. Politically appointed communicators should be avoided at all costs, as they normally end up wearing the boots of their political principals and tend to defend rather than to communicate.

8.10 OPPORTUNITIES FOR MORE RESEARCH IN THE FUTURE

It is important for the government to communicate with the public. This happens because those in government are seen as leaders who have the answers to everything. It is because of this perception, which is held by the public, that those in the leadership must ensure regular interaction with them.

It is therefore incumbent on the leaders in government to ensure that more ways are created where the public is engaged. Proper and regular use of channels such as Izimbizo, public hearings, door-to-door campaigns and media are amongst those that are encouraged. While this is the case, the use of media is preferred, as it affords immediate feedback and two-way communication. However, SA News should also start investing in direct communication or unmediated communication with citizens through avenues such as social media that can easily be accessed by members of the

public. Therefore, future studies could investigate the adoption, uses and effectiveness of SA News's direct communication with the public in social media spaces.

Amongst many other results for this study, is the lack of understanding between government and media of each other's mandates. That is, government wants media to relay their messages as is and have in most cases blamed them for everything that goes wrong. This frequently occurs because politicians accuse media of misinterpreting them or wrongfully criticising them and not helping them in their nation building quest. Fourie (2007:246) also posits that organisations and government often complain that media only focus on the negative news about them. On the other hand, media argues that their role is that of being a watchdog and that they are there to hold leaders in government accountable.

The results also established that SA News is no longer as effective as it used to be. This has resulted in a decision by the mainstream media to not use its articles or only refer to them for verification of facts. It is, however, important to note that this study looks at only two mainstream media houses. Therefore, there is an opportunity for future studies to investigate the influence of SA News on government news in the community media.

Results of this study found that the state-media relationship in South Africa is at its lowest. This is so because government communicators are seen as being unprofessional and constantly unavailable to give comments, even when they have initiated the conversation. Results further established that media always find it difficult to have cooperation from government communicators, because instead of performing their roles as communicators, they rather play a protective and defensive role. At the end, as seen by Pearson and Patching (2008:4), the concept of media-state relations goes a long way and thus deserves to be studied thoroughly, as it plays a crucial role in the future of both parties.

8.11 THEORETICAL CONCLUSION

The current study has managed to combine various elements in order to arrive at a proper theoretical understanding. The study's theoretical framework was based on the effectiveness of media relations. In this case, this was based on SA News' effectiveness as a tool for government communication. There are many aspects that

can be used to gauge the level of effectiveness of media relations, According to Johnston (2020), media-state relations is effective when public relations practitioners have managed positive coverage in media, but most importantly, it is about establishing professional relations, knowing how media operates, and understanding and adhering to their deadlines. Therefore, the researcher consulted many authors and through this, the study concluded that SA News was not successful in organisational effectiveness. Howard and Mathews (2000:6) concur that for media-state relations to be perceived as being effective, role players need to have a full understanding of their roles and their organisation's objectives. It was, however, discovered that this was not the case as many government communicators were either inaccessible, responding late to media enquiries and were acting more like politicians than communicators.

The South African government uses SA News as part of their advocacy campaign and largely through framing. Thus, government has powers to frame topics and influence media and its audience to focus mainly on certain topics. Through SA News, government frames stories that are meant to bring harmony by depicting some of the successes achieved. Accordingly, government also use agenda-setting in advancing their positioning as they engage with media and the public. In this process, government would only ensure that messages of hope are displayed in the public domain, even when things are not going well. A recent example of agenda-setting by government is when the pandemic had just erupted in the country. Government made use of every avenue to ensure that apart from calming the country down; they also appeared to be in control of the situation in front the media and other key stakeholders. Although the opposite sometimes surfaced in the process, where ministers spoke against each other, the South African government was largely successful in implementing framing.

Authors such as Benford and Snow (2000:611), Scheufele, and Tewksbury (2007:10) concede that the process of framing sees those in the leadership of government trying hard to shape public attitudes about a particular issue, topic or event, while also spurring public mobilisation and influence. Framing, as with propaganda and agenda-setting, is a very powerful tool and can change the audience's beliefs. Politicians in government attempt to use policy to influence their priming. It can be argued that

government communicators and public relations officers also play the role of gatekeepers, as they decide what information is released to the public. In this process, the government of South Africa continually makes use of laws and legislations, which prohibit some of information to be used by the media. Some of the information is referred to as classified and this can easily be referred to as gatekeeping. While gatekeeping is understood from the context media, where editors decide on what makes news, government has also prohibited the use of information and thus became gatekeepers.

8.12 CONTRIBUTION OF THE THESIS TO THE BODY OF KNOWLEDGE

This study will contribute to the body of knowledge in many ways. There are many aspects, some of which were indicated as recommendations, which can be expanded into new body of research by future researchers. Chief amongst these are those related to media-state relations, which is the core factor on which government communication's success depends. Therefore, the study has opened many avenues that can be used by both government communicators and media to mend their relations. One amongst these avenues is to professionalise government communication in such a way that people fulfilling these roles are capacitated and is able to easily navigate through media relations.

Another element is understanding government communication from an organisational perspective. As was the case with this study, the theoretical framework looked at the effectiveness of government communication in an organisation, which in this case was SA News. Therefore, the study adds this understanding from a practice perspective, which is seen as a requirement in the South African perspective. Understanding government communication from the practice perspective calls for future researchers to be vigilant on the issues of media-state relations, which insists that the relationship between media and communicators should go beyond email contacts.

In addition, the study also took time to thoroughly understand strategic communication from the perspective of organisational effectiveness. The key concept identified in this study, amongst many, on strategic communication was stakeholder management. As discussed during the findings, it became clear that there is a need for SA News to increase its stance on media relations. As it stands, its strategic communication plan

does not work. SA News relied on GCIS for any form of engagement with media, and if GCIS does not engage media, SA News remains in the dark. Therefore, SA News should develop its stakeholder engagement, which will allow its own interaction with media. This may also be extended to social media professionals as well as other players in media industry.

This way, key concepts such as stakeholder engagements, unmediated communication and related matters would be brought together to give sense to the understanding and application of strategic communication by SA News and, by extension, government. That is, for communication to be effective it should be applied strategically and this amongst others means that SA News must be capacitated to be an independent government communication news agency.

The study contributes to expose a gap about the understanding of the application of communication in the public sector and in the private sector. In this case, the study indicates the difference, namely that communication in the public sector takes place based on interaction with the leader, while one in the private sector takes place for the purposes of profit. It is important to note that government communication is a public good, which takes place for the public and making use of the public coffers. As such, it automatically draws higher media attention as well as media and public scrutiny. What is unfortunate is that the scrutiny from media ends up becoming negative news because, in most cases, as media investigates further, more anomalies are discovered in the process. For example, the Nkandla debacle was initially a public good because by law, the sitting president has a right to upgrade security in his or her household. However, this became bad news when media started to realise that more money than usual was spent in the process. Therefore, what began as public good, ended monopolising headlines and eroded the image of government communication for many years to come.

Meanwhile, the literature argues that government communication continues to be a public good. This suggests that government information is important to some public somewhere – meaning that it defies news values. Giving shoes to a community or building a school for a community may not fit media as news values, but it is important news for that community. This is why government communication as a public good still

finds recognition in the public sphere because of the good that happens there.

8.13 LIMITATIONS

The limitations of the study had a lot to do the researcher's struggle to contact the editors of both *City Press* and *Sunday Times*. What proved to be even more difficult was getting hold of the editors who were no longer with the newspapers but were involved with the newspapers during the period under review.

In addition, it must be noted that the data collection process of this study took place when the world, and in particular South Africa, was faced with the novel coronavirus pandemic, known to many as COVID-19. During this period, most scholars were faced with quite a number of challenges, and in particular researchers and students who were severely affected by the decision of government to introduce lockdown regulations. Besides not being able to travel to various places due to the regulations, one of the biggest hindrances was the stay-at-home instruction and social distancing concepts.

This created many problems, as few participants were not comfortable to conduct in-depth interviews. Besides, many companies, restaurants and residential areas, which the researcher had planned to use for meeting participants, had also introduced restricted entry due to the virus. Another limitation was that during the process of analysis using themes, the researcher only used the themes from media's perspective and not necessarily from SA News.

8.14 CONCLUSION

Government communication is the most important element of a democratic state. It plays a huge role in ensuring that government and the public are on the same page, and that they engage each other in a nation-building process. Through this process the public feel important and become even more encouraged because they feel valued and included. The public become happier when they are able to access the leaders they have chosen through the polls.

It is vital for leaders to engage the public through all available channels, which will enable the two parties to get to know each other. Therefore, it is crucial that channels

such as SA NEWS be improved in order to achieve the intended result of ensuring that messages of government get across to the public without fail. This means that proper resources should be invested in this agency, including training and retraining of reporters in order to help them write attractive news. Most importantly, the use of social media is key currently as this will ensure that SA NEWS justify its existence without interference from gatekeepers. Further, an overall remodelling of the agency is necessary, as it will help bring back the vigour, which it used to have as the propaganda machinery of government.

ANNEXURE A: INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW

(Participant: Government and Politics Beat Reporters)

Que 1 How do you access your daily news; is it via SA NEWS, Media statements on your own investigations?

Que 2. How many of your news do you access via SA NEWS, if any?

Que.3 How many of these news accessed via SA NEWS are accepted and approved for print by your editors?

Que 4. How much more do you still need to do with news articles accessed via SA NEWS if at all, or do you use them as they are?

Que 5. Do you find the news agency helpful in your news search or you have to rely on other avenues?

Que 6. How is the relationship between you and the government communicators?

ANNEXURE B: INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW

Participants 2 – Previous editors

Que 1. As the previous editor, how much of government stories did you assign to your reporters?

Que 2. How much of these stories did you find fit and ready for print? How much alteration (if any) did you have to do in order for these stories to suit your audience?

Que 3. Which avenue was the most preferred when sourcing government news? Media Statements, Bua News or own investigations?

Que 4. Bua News has been in existence since 1998. Would you say the agency was doing enough in providing much-needed updates from government, especially to you as news service providers then? Did you find these updates useful?

Que 5. What was your general perception of Bua News as a government news agency in South Africa? Did you sometimes feel that news provided through this platform was mere persuasion and propaganda from government, but were construed as news?

Que 6. What was your general perception of media state relations in South Africa, especially as an editor?

ANNEXURE C: INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW

(Participants 4. SA NEWS Editor)

Que 1. What was the initial mandate of SA NEWS when was established?

Que 2. Do you feel that this mandate has been reached so far?

Que 3. Would you honestly say SA NEWS has been an effective tool for government communication since its inception? If yes, please elaborate.

Que 4. Would you say that the news agency is the most reliable source of information from government to members of the public and in particular media?

Que 5. According to your records, how much of the stories sourced from SA NEWS make it to print or any broadcast?

Que 6. Since its inception, do you feel that the agency has been consistent in its quest to provide news to the citizens and media in general?

Que 7. Do you think your news articles are ready to print materials or media still need to bring other elements in order to balance them?

Que 8. Who writes these news articles and what criteria do you use to recruit them?

Que 9. Do you agree with the notion that your articles merely push persuasion and propaganda?

Que 10. How do you take notion that media do not really use the articles from SA NEWS?

Que 11. Do you find it easy to work with media or the relationship is not good?

Que 12. If not good, what do you think should be done to create that much needed relationship between government and media, particularly because the two need one another?

ANNEXURE D: INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW

Participants: (Writers for SA NEWS)

Que 1. What is your writing background?

Que 2. How long have you been with SA NEWS and how do you find it so far?

Que 3. What type of news do you get assigned to do and how do you find them?

Que 4. Do you feel that the articles you write are ready to use or lack another elements which media must still add?

Que 5. According to your records, does media use the articles you have written and if so, how much modifications do they do on your original articles?

Que 6. How is the relationship between you as a government writer and media?

Que 7. Do you think your news agency has done well as the tool for government communication so far? If not, what do they need to do to get to an acceptable level?

ANNEXURE E: INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW

Participants: Editors from Sunday Times and City Press) –Current editors

Que 1. As an editor, how many government stories do you assign to your reporters daily/weekly?

Que 2. How many of these stories do you find ready for print?

Que 3 Which Avenue is the most reliable for you? Media Statements, SA NEWS or investigations initiated by you, or any other avenue?

Que 4. Have you ever accepted a story from your reporter, which was sourced through SA NEWS?

Que 5. If so, how much adjustments did you have to do on the story? In other words, did you find the story well balanced and ready for print or you had to dig deeper?

Que 6. The agency has been under operation since 1998. Do you feel that it has done well in providing much needed updates from government, especially to you as news service providers?

Que 7. Do you find the agency to be a reliable source for news? In other words, do you find the agency as an effective source of information from government to you?

Que 8. Do you find the news provided by the agency relevant to your audience or you have to do a lot of modifications to make it work?

Que 9. Is the news agency something you can rely on in your newsgathering or you would rather find the news yourself?

Que 10. Do you sometimes feel that news provided through this platform is a mere persuasion and propaganda from government and construed as news?

Que 11. If so, what do you do about this; do you accept them as they are or you use them to help you dig for more news, or you simply do not use them?

Que 11. What advice if any would you give those responsible for this platform?

ANNEXURE F NEWSPAPER HEADLINES (*CITY PRESS AND SUNDAY TIMES*)

CITY PRESS 2009

- Cosatu to strike against 'modern slavery - City Press (Johannesburg, South Africa) - September 27, 2009
- Dalai Lama not allowed to speak peace in SA - City Press (Johannesburg, South Africa) - March 22, 2009
- Europe, UK donate R1.3bn to kickstart SA's job - City Press (Johannesburg, South Africa) - September 13, 2009
- Fifa, SA give nod for new Safa boss - Nematandani - City Press (Johannesburg, South Africa) - October 4, 2009
- 'Fraudulent' top civil servant sent - City Press (Johannesburg, South Africa) - August 16, 2009
- Huntley and Canada deserve each other - City Press (Johannesburg, South Africa) - September 6, 2009
- 'Lift 2010 higher, legalise dagga - City Press (Johannesburg, South Africa) - June 7, 2009
- Salga, municipalities riven to the core - City Press (Johannesburg, South Africa) - August 30, 2009
- 'We must protect our foreigners - City Press (Johannesburg, South Africa) - December 13, 2009
- Zuma's key adviser named in Equatorial Guinea - City Press (Johannesburg, South Africa) - November 29, 2009

CITY PRESS 2010

- BEE flopped in its finest hour - Just like Bafana - City Press (Johannesburg, South Africa) - December 26, 2010
- Cosatu slams 5% pay rise for ministers - 'It's - City Press (Johannesburg, South Africa) - November 14, 2010

- Court bid fails to call a halt to municipal strike - City Press (Johannesburg, South Africa) - April 11, 2010
- Economy growth key to Cabinet shake-up - City Press (Johannesburg, South Africa) - November 7, 2010
- HIV-positive women sterilised against their will - City Press (Johannesburg, South Africa) - June 6, 2010
- Strikers pin their hopes on Zuma - Unions reject - City Press (Johannesburg, South Africa) - August 15, 2010
- We are funding the ANC's kleptocracy - City Press (Johannesburg, South Africa) - May 2, 2010
- Zuma moves to fill holes before 2010 ends - City Press (Johannesburg, South Africa) - December 19, 2010
- Zuma showers workers with early Xmas gift - City Press (Johannesburg, South Africa) - December 19, 2010

CITY PRESS 2011

- Beijing 'saved' SA from recession - Document - City Press (Johannesburg, South Africa) - October 9, 2011
- Cowboy drivers blamed for festive season roads - City Press (Johannesburg, South Africa) - January 9, 2011
- FOCUS ON SALGANo-nonsense declaration adopted - City Press (Johannesburg, South Africa) - September 11, 2011
- From clients to citizens - City Press (Johannesburg, South Africa) - February 13, 2011
- Gold and foreign exchange reserves climb 1.1 - City Press (Johannesburg, South Africa) - January 9, 2011
- Government, Lotto, SABC bail out Saba - Frantic - City Press (Johannesburg, South Africa) - April 17, 2011

- How health plan could hit you - Taxpayers might - City Press (Johannesburg, South Africa) - August 21, 2011
- R700000000000 - Arms deal cost SA's - City Press (Johannesburg, South Africa) - April 10, 2011
- Rwanda hits out at SA - Justice minister says - City Press (Johannesburg, South Africa) - July 31, 2011
- Vast majority unhappy with local government - City Press (Johannesburg, South Africa) - April 3, 2011

CITY PRESS 2012

- Inferiority complex is no policy - City Press (Johannesburg, South Africa) - March 11, 2012
- Investing in retail savings bonds - Be smart and - City Press (Johannesburg, South Africa) - October 14, 2012
- Mittal in the firing line - ArcelorMittal - City Press (Johannesburg, South Africa) - December 2, 2012
- SA on a mission to find funding for Brics summit - City Press (Johannesburg, South Africa) - October 14, 2012
- SA refuses to join the protest against Syria - City Press (Johannesburg, South Africa) - June 3, 2012
- SA should give Assange asylum - City Press (Johannesburg, South Africa) - August 5, 2012
- SA turns up the pressure on Israel - Minister - City Press (Johannesburg, South Africa) - December 9, 2012
- TENDER FLAWS - City Press (Johannesburg, South Africa) - September 16, 2012
- The public service is broken - Officials in - City Press (Johannesburg, South Africa) - August 12, 2012

- Unearthing SA's ultimate employee - City Press (Johannesburg, South Africa) - September 9, 2012

CITY PRESS 2013

- ANC and its leaders in government likely to delay - City Press (Johannesburg, South Africa) - December 1, 2013
- JZ WILL PAY NOTHING - » Security cluster - City Press (Johannesburg, South Africa) - December 22, 2013
- Operation Blackwash - For nearly five decades, the - City Press (Johannesburg, South Africa) - August 25, 2013
- SA MENDS HARARE FENCES - State moves to heal - City Press (Johannesburg, South Africa) - August 4, 2013
- SA soldiers 'turned refugees away' - But - City Press (Johannesburg, South Africa) - May 26, 2013
- SA to continue sending troops - City Press (Johannesburg, South Africa) - April 7, 2013
- STEM programme aims to make science fun for - City Press (Johannesburg, South Africa) - November 10, 2013
- The horror of xenophobia revisited - City Press (Johannesburg, South Africa) - June 2, 2013
- When conspiracy theories ring true - City Press (Johannesburg, South Africa) - September 1, 2013
- Zuma's Banda moment looms - SADC summit starts - City Press (Johannesburg, South Africa) - October 27, 2013

CITY PRESS 2014

- Bank, Treasury in BATTLE for control of R9bn - City Press (Johannesburg, South Africa) - November 30, 2014
- Cycle, run and walk for Madiba - City Press (Johannesburg, South Africa) - November 16, 2014

- Look whose load doesn't get shed - City Press (Johannesburg, South Africa) - December 14, 2014
- EWS ANALYSIS DID NKANDLA SPARK SARS war - City Press (Johannesburg, South Africa) - December 14, 2014
- NKANDLA FALL GUYS TAKE WAR TO CABINET - " - City Press (Johannesburg, South Africa) - November 2, 2014
- POLICE AND MARIKANA'S LEGACY - City Press (Johannesburg, South Africa) - November 23, 2014
- Taxpayers responsible for Nkandla maintenance - City Press (Johannesburg, South Africa) - December 28, 2014
- TWO MONTHS FOR R246 MILLION - City Press (Johannesburg, South Africa) - December 28, 2014
- Zuma brokers Limpopo deal - City Press (Johannesburg, South Africa) - December 21, 2014
- Zuma still not safe at Nkandla, says ad hoc - City Press (Johannesburg, South Africa) - November 9, 2014

CITY PRESS 2015

- 10 tips to get a government tender - City Press (Johannesburg, South Africa) - April 26, 2015
- Consider yourself schooled - City Press (Johannesburg, South Africa) - December 20, 2015
- Fight for an inclusive ICC, don't abandon it - City Press (Johannesburg, South Africa) - June 21, 2015
- I support Zuma, says Ramaphosa - City Press (Johannesburg, South Africa) - December 20, 2015
- Meltdown of 2008 still here - City Press (Johannesburg, South Africa) - September 6, 2015

- MTN plot thickens - City Press (Johannesburg, South Africa) - November 8, 2015
- POLITICS vs JUSTICE - City Press (Johannesburg, South Africa) - June 28, 2015
- Rosatom is fired up - City Press (Johannesburg, South Africa) - October 25, 2015
- State hauls out dusty deals to fend off nuclear - City Press (Johannesburg, South Africa) - October 18, 2015
- Stop the third force conspiracy theories - City Press (Johannesburg, South Africa) - November 8, 2015

CITY PRESS 2016

- CSIR fracking report shows the downside - City Press (Johannesburg, South Africa) - November 27, 2016
- IN DECEMBER - 4 DAYS - A CITY PRESS SPECIAL - City Press (Johannesburg, South Africa) - December 4, 2016
- 'Initiates died from the heat - City Press (Johannesburg, South Africa) - December 18, 2016
- Medical dagga offers alternative - City Press (Johannesburg, South Africa) - December 4, 2016
- SA hires Bain, Abacus to advise on ailing state- - City Press (Johannesburg, South Africa) - November 27, 2016
- SA TO SEE MORE ELECTRIC VEHICLES - City Press (Johannesburg, South Africa) - December 11, 2016
- SA's 'continuing obligation' to ICC - City Press (Johannesburg, South Africa) - December 11, 2016
- The universal PENSION - City Press (Johannesburg, South Africa) - December 4, 2016

- Think big and prosper - City Press (Johannesburg, South Africa) - December 11, 2016
- Unity and cohesion will lead to success - City Press (Johannesburg, South Africa) - December 11, 2016

CITY PRESS 2017

- FUNERAL SPREE: WHO TO BLAME - City Press (Johannesburg, South Africa) - December 10, 2017
- GEFP changes its benefits - City Press (Johannesburg, South Africa) - November 12, 2017
- GETTING DIVORCED? MUST YOU ... MEDIATE OR - City Press (Johannesburg, South Africa) - November 26, 2017
- GOVERNMENT'S BOLD PUBLIC-PRIVATE PARTNERSHIP - City Press (Johannesburg, South Africa) - December 10, 2017
- Listeriosis still a riddle - City Press (Johannesburg, South Africa) - December 17, 2017
- Poverty is causing ANC fights – Mabuza - City Press (Johannesburg, South Africa) - December 10, 2017
- Power: provincial versus municipal - City Press (Johannesburg, South Africa) - November 12, 2017
- Sachs heads to Gauteng - City Press (Johannesburg, South Africa) - November 19, 2017
- SA's failed leadership has been its downfall - City Press (Johannesburg, South Africa) - December 17, 2017
- State drags its feet on wage offer decision - City Press (Johannesburg, South Africa) - November 12, 2017

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- 13th CLEAN AUDIT FOR THE NEF - SOME KEY NEF - City Press (Johannesburg, South Africa) - November 11, 2018
- Eastern Cape MEC blames budget losses on - City Press (Johannesburg, South Africa) - December 16, 2018
- Free State in a financial CRISIS - City Press (Johannesburg, South Africa) - October 28, 2018
- Full Afcon details or no go, says Xasa - City Press (Johannesburg, South Africa) - December 16, 2018
- It must be the start of a process - City Press (Johannesburg, South Africa) - October 28, 2018
- Kganyago: Bad times grow better policies, not - City Press (Johannesburg, South Africa) - November 4, 2018
- Missing middle students thrown to the wolves - City Press (Johannesburg, South Africa) - December 16, 2018
- Pensioners demand 13th cheque - City Press (Johannesburg, South Africa) - November 18, 2018
- R20BN BACK INTO THE ECONOMY THROUGH VAT REFUNDS - City Press (Johannesburg, South Africa) - October 28, 2018
- SAA CEO CALLS ON STATE TO TAKE CLEAR, BOLD action - City Press (Johannesburg, South Africa) - December 16, 2018

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- ✓ GOVERNMENT FOR ALL SOUTH AFRICANS - Sunday Times (Johannesburg, South Africa) - May 10, 2009
- ✓ Airwaves of discontent - Sunday Times (Johannesburg, South Africa) - July 5, 2009
- ✓ Clinton denies military agenda - Sunday Times (Johannesburg, South Africa) - August 9, 2009
- ✓ EXCLUSIVE - The report Mbeki and Zuma hid from - Sunday Times (Johannesburg, South Africa) - August 23, 2009
- ✓ EXCLUSIVE: The report Mbeki and Zuma hid from you - Sunday Times (Johannesburg, South Africa) - August 23, 2009
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- ✓ FRAUD FEEDS AT THE TOP - Sunday Times (Johannesburg, South Africa) - March 22, 2009
- ✓ HOGARTH - Sunday Times (Johannesburg, South Africa) - May 17, 2009
- ✓ In transit - Sunday Times (Johannesburg, South Africa) - November 22, 2009
- ✓ SA girds for new strike wave - Sunday Times (Johannesburg, South Africa) - July 26, 2009

SUNDAY TIMES 2010

- ✓ ANC members 'have a right to tender, but must - Sunday Times (Johannesburg, South Africa) - August 15, 2010
- ✓ Department of Transport - Sunday Times (Johannesburg, South Africa) - January 17, 2010
- ✓ Government mind shift to create jobs - Sunday Times (Johannesburg, South Africa) - October 31, 2010
- ✓ Helping hand for young entrepreneurs - Sunday Times (Johannesburg, South Africa) - January 31, 2010

- ✓ R1.3bn for World Cup safety - Sunday Times (Johannesburg, South Africa) - January 24, 2010
- ✓ Shame on you - Sunday Times (Johannesburg, South Africa) - November 14, 2010
- ✓ SPIT 'N POLISH - Sunday Times (Johannesburg, South Africa) - September 19, 2010
- ✓ World Cup: ministers can start by curbing SAA - Sunday Times (Johannesburg, South Africa) - January 24, 2010
- ✓ Zuma pushes harder - Sunday Times (Johannesburg, South Africa) - August 8, 2010
- ✓ Zuma to facilitate Zim round table talk sessions - Sunday Times (Johannesburg, South Africa) - July 25, 2010

SUNDAY TIMES 2011

- ✓ Boost for SMMEs - Sunday Times (Johannesburg, South Africa) - August 28, 2011
- ✓ Cash-strapped sports body needs more support - Sunday Times (Johannesburg, South Africa) - May 22, 2011
- ✓ Fisheries fling mud as tender row escalates - Sunday Times (Johannesburg, South Africa) - December 25, 2011
- ✓ SA contacts rebels over lensman's body - Sunday Times (Johannesburg, South Africa) - May 22, 2011
- ✓ SA Greenpeace leader held - Sunday Times (Johannesburg, South Africa) - June 19, 2011
- ✓ 'SA is on brink of an upheaval - Sunday Times (Johannesburg, South Africa) - June 26, 2011
- ✓ SADC meeting critical to avert political crisis, - Sunday Times (Johannesburg, South Africa) - March 20, 2011

- ✓ Shanduka deal seals China-SA relations - Sunday Times (Johannesburg, South Africa) - December 25, 2011
- ✓ Tell kids, teachers, playschool's over - Sunday Times (Johannesburg, South Africa) - January 30, 2011
- ✓ Zuma's mediation no longer makes headlines - Sunday Times (Johannesburg, South Africa) - January 23, 2011

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- ✓ Death at Paris home of diplomat remains under - Sunday Times (Johannesburg, South Africa) - September 9, 2012
- ✓ Let's hear other voices on strategic projects - Sunday Times (Johannesburg, South Africa) - February 12, 2012
- ✓ Mining is declining as debate drags on - Sunday Times (Johannesburg, South Africa) - June 10, 2012
- ✓ Nestlé in plant research deal - Sunday Times (Johannesburg, South Africa) - April 22, 2012
- ✓ Prosecution chief asked for special leave, says - Sunday Times (Johannesburg, South Africa) - January 1, 2012
- ✓ SACP enjoys growing influence in government - Sunday Times (Johannesburg, South Africa) - July 8, 2012
- ✓ Salga calls for more pay and risk cover - Sunday Times (Johannesburg, South Africa) - August 5, 2012
- ✓ So many questions - Sunday Times (Johannesburg, South Africa) - May 27, 2012
- ✓ The Bad. Producer inflation eases — but major - Sunday Times (Johannesburg, South Africa) - January 29, 2012
- ✓ We got chaff when we needed wheat - Sunday Times (Johannesburg, South Africa) - February 12, 2012

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- ✓ CAR rebels want to mend fences with SA - Sunday Times (Johannesburg, South Africa) - April 28, 2013
- ✓ Get back to the business of growing South Africa - Sunday Times (Johannesburg, South Africa) - October 13, 2013
- ✓ Measuring the hazard overhead - Sunday Times (Johannesburg, South Africa) - April 21, 2013
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- ✓ Cabinet tonic for parastatals must provide healing - Sunday Times (Johannesburg, South Africa) - December 14, 2014
- ✓ Eskom may gain from state sell-off of Vodacom - Sunday Times (Johannesburg, South Africa) - October 19, 2014
- ✓ French arms dealer 'kept Jacob Zuma in - Sunday Times (Johannesburg, South Africa) - September 28, 2014

- ✓ Madonsela draws a line in the sand for Zuma -- and - Sunday Times (Johannesburg, South Africa) - August 24, 2014
- ✓ How Zuma ducks the tough nuke questions - Sunday Times (Johannesburg, South Africa) - October 5, 2014
- ✓ SABC ruling shows way on Nkandla - Sunday Times (Johannesburg, South Africa) - October 26, 2014
- ✓ So many pledges, but so little fulfilment - Sunday Times (Johannesburg, South Africa) - January 12, 2014
- ✓ So Many Questions. Ronnie Kasrils - Sunday Times (Johannesburg, South Africa) - September 14, 2014
- ✓ Zuma and energy minister at odds over nuclear - Sunday Times (Johannesburg, South Africa) - December 21, 2014
- ✓ Zuma calls for Jesus to speed up return - Sunday Times (Johannesburg, South Africa) - December 28, 2014

SUNDAY TIMES 2015

- ✓ Drug mule hopes SA plea will save his life - Sunday Times (Johannesburg, South Africa) - October 18, 2015
- ✓ Has R40bn subsidy just evaporated - Sunday Times (Johannesburg, South Africa) - April 19, 2015
- ✓ Hits & Misses - Inflation slows, SAA gets - Sunday Times (Johannesburg, South Africa) - January 25, 2015
- ✓ In search of MK's 'struggle ship - Sunday Times (Johannesburg, South Africa) - November 1, 2015
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- ✓ After a week of shocks, let's pray that Zuma - Sunday Times (Johannesburg, South Africa) - October 16, 2016
- ✓ Another Zuma pal lands him in the poo - Sunday Times (Johannesburg, South Africa) - September 4, 2016
- ✓ Busting the banks to protect the Guptas - Sunday Times (Johannesburg, South Africa) - October 30, 2016
- ✓ Critics of Zuma fear losing out in his revolution - Sunday Times (Johannesburg, South Africa) - November 20, 2016
- ✓ D-day for president at key NEC meeting - Sunday Times (Johannesburg, South Africa) - November 27, 2016
- ✓ Depressed business in no mood to spend - Sunday Times (Johannesburg, South Africa) - March 20, 2016
- ✓ Forget Zuma, other leaders must step in - Sunday Times (Johannesburg, South Africa) - August 28, 2016
- ✓ I'm prepared to die to save SA from the thieves - Sunday Times (Johannesburg, South Africa) - August 28, 2016
- ✓ It's halftime in good guys v lamebrains - Sunday Times (Johannesburg, South Africa) - October 16, 2016

- ✓ Parties ramp up the battle for Nkandla - Sunday Times (Johannesburg, South Africa) - July 31, 2016

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- ✓ A wealthy country bled dry by maladministration - Sunday Times (Johannesburg, South Africa) - October 1, 2017
- ✓ Churches demand snap election - Sunday Times (Johannesburg, South Africa) - June 11, 2017
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- ✓ Rants and Sense. State failure widens our yawning - Sunday Times (Johannesburg, South Africa) - February 5, 2017
- ✓ Readers' Views.No shelter in South Africa for - Sunday Times (Johannesburg, South Africa) - November 26, 2017
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- ✓ After the fire - Sunday Times (Johannesburg, South Africa) - March 18, 2018
- ✓ Crisis of unknown proportions - Sunday Times (Johannesburg, South Africa) - December 2, 2018
- ✓ Drama as court and state thwart Ndebele king rite - Sunday Times (Johannesburg, South Africa) - March 4, 2018
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- ✓ Jacob Zuma invited to testify at inquiry into - Sunday Times (Johannesburg, South Africa) - August 19, 2018
- ✓ Mkhwebane must stop being frivolous - Sunday Times (Johannesburg, South Africa) - December 23, 2018
- ✓ 'SA bankrolls PAP head's fancy taste - Sunday Times (Johannesburg, South Africa) - May 20, 2018
- ✓ The bureaucratic buffer that can save a state - Sunday Times (Johannesburg, South Africa) - April 22, 2018
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