

A conceptual framework for digital political communication to promote party-political issue ownership via an urban electioneering platform

by

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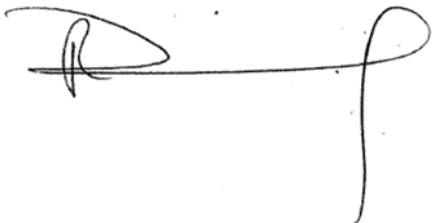
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A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Roneesh Dhawraj', written in a cursive style.

15 June 2019

SIGNATURE

DATE

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ABSTRACT

This Grounded Theory study focused on understanding how South Africa's two numerically-dominant political parties, the African National Congress (ANC) and Democratic Alliance (DA), used micro-blogging site, Twitter, as part of their electioneering arsenal in the 2016 municipal elections to promote party-political digital issue ownership within an urban context. Using each party's 2016 election manifesto and corpus of tweets, this three-phased study found that while both the ANC and DA used Twitter as a digital political communication platform to communicate their election campaigns, the DA notably leveraged the social networking site for intense 'focused' messaging of its negative campaign against the ANC while simultaneously promoting positive electoral messages around its *own* 'core' issues and metro mayoral candidates. 'Battleground' metros were identified by the DA in Ekurhuleni, Johannesburg, Tshwane and Nelson Mandela Bay, leading to an emphasised urban campaign here to either activate the party's own support base and/ or to suppress the ANC's turnout in these highly-contested areas. Additionally, it was found that both the ANC and DA used Twitter for explicit and implicit party-political issue ownership claiming in the 2016 municipal elections. Lastly, this study also culminated in the proposal of three but interconnected different elements of a conceptual framework for digital political communication that political parties could use to promote digital party-political issue ownership within a pronounced urban electioneering setting. These elements – 'coordinating and managing how an election is tweeted', 'focus' messaging the election' and 'audience-segmenting as a message-tailoring strategy' – when used in unison can help political parties communicate better and ultimately more effectively in a highly mediated technological media landscape.

Keywords

Political communication; digital political communication; urban politics; urban communication; urbanisation; digital urban political communication; political persuasion; issue ownership; digital issue ownership; social media; social networking sites; politics; political advertising; political marketing; political public relations; political PR; strategic communications; elections; rhetoric; political propaganda; earned media; owned media; paid media; African elections; Grounded Theory, Constructivist Grounded Theory; Donald Trump; NVivo Pro 12; NVivo

OPSOMMING

Hierdie Gegronde Teorie Studie fokus op die verduideliking hoe Suid-Afrika se twee numeriese dominante politieke partye, die African National Congress (ANC) en Demokratiese Alliansie (DA), van die mikro-blog platform, Twitter, gebruik gemaak het tydens hulle verkiessingsstrategie in die 2016 munisipale verkiessings om die party politieke digitale kwessie rondom eienaarskap binne 'n stedelike verband te bevorder. Deur elke party se 2016 verkiessings manifesto en arsenaal van twiets te gebruik, het hierdie drie-fase studie bevind dat beide die ANC en DA, Twitter gebruik het as 'n digitale politieke kommunikasie platform. Die DA het egter die sosiale media netwerk kenmerkend gebruik vir 'n intense gefokusde negatiewe veldtog teen die ANC terwyl hulle terselfdertyd 'n positiewe verkiessings boodskap rondom die party se eie kernkwessies en metro burgermeesters kandidate gesentreer het. 'Oorlogsgebied' metros is deur die DA in Ekurhuleni, Johannesburg, Tshwane en Nelson Mandela Bay geïdentifiseer wat 'n definitiewe stedelike veldtog tot gevolg gehad het om die party se eie ondersteuningsbasis te bevorder en/of die ANC se ondersteuning in hierdie hoogs betwiste areas te onderdruk. Daar was ook bevind dat beide die ANC en DA van Twitter gebruik gemaak het vir eksplisiete en implisiete party politieke kwessies rondom eiernaarskap tydens die 2016 munisipale verkiessings. Hierdie studie kan saamgevat word in drie onderskeie maar verwante elemente om 'n raamwerk te vorm van die digitale politieke kommunikasie wat politieke partye kan gebruik om digitale party politieke kwessies binne 'n stedelike verkiessings omgewing te bevorder. Wanneer hierdie elemente – 'koördinerende en bestuur van hoe twiets tydens 'n verkiesing gebruik word', "die fokus van die boodskap tydens die verkiessing" and "die gehoorsegmentasie van 'n boodskap strategie' – in 'n eenheid gebruik word kan dit politieke partye help om beter en meer effektief te kommunikeer binne 'n baie kompiterende en tegnologiese medialandskap.

Sleutelwoorde

Politiese kommunikasie, digitale politieke kommunikasie, stedelike politiek, stedelike kommunikasie, verstedeliking, digitale stedelike politieke kommunikasie, politieke oortuiging, kwessie eienaarskap, digitale kwessie eienaarskap, sosiale media, sosiale netwerk platforms, politiek, politieke advertensies, politieke bemerking, politieke publieke verhoudinge, politieke PR, strategiese kommunikasie, verkiessings, retoriek, politieke propaganda, verdiende media, betaalde media, Afrika verkiessings, gegronde teorie, konstruktiewe gegronde teorie, Donald Trump, NVivo Pro 12; NVivo

INGQIKITHI

Inkcazo-bungcali yesisifundo ibigxile ekuqondeni ukuba uMzantsi Africa lo unamaqela amakhulu amabini ezopolitiko, ukutsho, iAfrican National Congress (ANC) kunye ne Democratic Alliance (DA), la maqela asebenzise iwebhusayithi encinane uTwitter, njengenxalenye yezixhobo zonxibelelwano kunyulo loo masipala ngo-2016. Bekwenza oku ngelikhuthaza amaqela ezopolitiko nebango lawo kwimiba yezinto abathi bazithethe kwisithuba sedijithali, kumxholo wendawo zase dolophini. Esi sifundo sisebenzisa imanifesto kunye nothotho lwe tweets zeqela ngalinye, nesenziwe ngokwezigaba ezithathu, sifumanise ukuba nangona iANC kunye ne DA zisebenzise uTwitter njenge qonga lonxibelelwano lwezopolitiko zedijithali (ngokolwimi lwasemzini) ukunxibelelana namaphulo onyulo, iDA izibonakalise amandla kwindawo yokuncokola kwiqonga uTwitter, ngokuthi imiyalezo yayo igxile kwaye itsole. Miyalezo leyo ithe yagxila ngokungafanelekanga kumkhankaso weANC. Ngaxeshanye, imiyalezo yayo yona iDA ibeyeyakhayo, kwaye incedisana nephulo layo kwimiba ephambili kunye nabagqatswa bosodolophu bo masipala abambaxa. Oomasipala abambaxa abathi babenongquzulwano bachongwe yiDA Ekurhuleni, eRhawutini, eTshwane nase Bhayi. Lonto ibangele ukuba bagxininise ekukhokeleni iphulo ledolophu ukuze bavuselele inkxaso ye DA apho okanye bacinezele ukuvela kwe-ANC kwezi ndawo kuphikiswana kakhulu ngazo. Ukongeza, kufumaniseke ukuba iANC kunye neDA zisebenzise uTwitter ngokwendlela ecacileyo nengathanga ngqo kwimeko yobunini bemicimbi yepolitiki ukuze bafumane ibango kunyulo loomasipala lwango 2016. Okokugqibela, esisifundo sigqibele kwisindululo sezinto ezintathu azahlukeneyo kodwa ezidityaniswe yinkqubo-sikhokelo eqingqiweyo kunxibelelwano lwezopolitiko zedijithali. Ezi zinto zizinto ezisenakho ukusetyenziswa ngamaqela ezopolitiko ukukhuthaza ubunini bemicimbi yezopolitiko ngaphakathi kulungiselelo lonyulo lwedolophu olubhengeziweyo. Ezi zinto- 'ukulungelelanisa nokulawula indlela unyulo luthunyelwe ngayo kusetyenziswa uTwitter', 'kugxilwe' kwimiyalezo yonyulo kunye nokuhlukaniswa kwabaphulaphuli okanye ababukeli njengecebo lokulungisa umyalezo '- xa zisetyenziswa ngazwinye zinokuwanceda amaqela ezopolitiko anxibelelane ngcono kwaye ekugqibeleni ngokuyimpumelelo kakhulu kuxhamlo olunamandla kakhulu kubume beendaba kumhlaba wetekhnoloji (ngokolwimi lwesiNgesi).

Amagama asemqoka

Unxibelelwano kwezopolitiko; political communication; unxibelelwano lwezopolitiko zedijithali; ezopolitiko zasezidolophini; unxibelelwano lwedolophu; unxibelelwano lwezobupolitika lwedolophu yedijithali; ukweyisela kwezopolitiko; uku khupha ubunini bedijithali; isazisi sendaba sokuncokola; iindawo zothungelwano nezokuncokola zoluntu; ezopolitiko; intengiso yezopolitiko; ukuthengiswa kwezopolitiko; ubudlelwane boluntu kwezopolitiko; kwezopolitiko PR; unxibelelwano lobuchule; unyulo; i-rhetoric; ukusasaza kwezopolitiko; ukufumana iindaba; imithombo yendaba; imithombo yeendaba ehlawulelweyo; unyulo lwase-Afrika; ithiyori esekwe; inkcazo-bungcali esekwe; inkcazo-bungcali yeConstructivist; Donald Trump; NVivo Pro 12; NVivo

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ADDENDA

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ANC HEAD OF DIGITAL COMMUNICATIONS 2016 LGE**

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

AAP	Aam Admi Party
ANC	African National Congress
ANCWL	ANC Women's League
ANCYL	ANC Youth League
AU	African Union
BBEEE	Broad Based Black Economic Empowerment
CCTV	Closed circuit television
CIC	Commander-in-Chief
CNN	Cable News Network
GGA	Good Governance Africa
COO	Chief Operations Officer
COPE	Congress of the People
DA	Democratic Alliance
DP	Democratic Party
DM	Direct Message
DYK	Did You Know
EFF	Economic Freedom Fighters
E-MAIL	Electronic Mail
EWOM	Electronic Word of Mouth
FA	Federal Alliance
FNB	First National Bank
FPTP	First-Past-the-Post
ICASA	Independent Communications Authority of South Africa
IEC	Independent Electoral Commission
IFP	Inkatha Freedom Party
IOT	Issue Ownership Theory
ITU	International Telecommunications Union
LGE	Local Government Elections
NEC	National Executive Committee
NF	National Front
NGC	National General Council
NNP	New National Party
NPA	National Prosecuting Authority
NRF	National Research Foundation
PDF	Public Display Format
PRASA	Passenger Rail Agency Service Authority
PR	Proportional Representation
RO	Research Objective
RQ	Research Question
SAA	South African Airways
SABC	South African Broadcasting Corporation
SAHRC	South African Human Rights Commission
SARS	South African Revenue Services
SMS	Short Message Service
SNS	Social Networking Sites
SOCA	State of the City Address
SOE	State Owned Enterprises
UDM	United Democratic Movement
USP	Unique Selling Point
USSR	United Soviet Socialist Republics
WMD	Weapons of Mass Destruction
WWW	World Wide Web

CHAPTER 1: ORIENTATION AND MOTIVATION

1.1 INTRODUCTION

South Africans voted in their millions in the country's fifth Local Government Elections (LGE) held on Wednesday, 3 August 2016. Before the election, the political landscape had become fraught with a number of inter-party and intra-party contestations, including perceived public relations disasters for both the governing-African National Congress (ANC) and main opposition, the Democratic Alliance (DA) (see chapter 5, sections 5.5.1 and 5.5.2) (Dhawraj 2016). The bigger contest, however, was centered on a few of the country's bigger cities or metropolitan municipalities (metros). These larger 'urbanised' municipalities such as Ekurhuleni, Johannesburg and Tshwane (in Gauteng) and Nelson Mandela Bay (in the Eastern Cape) became synonymous with where the real electoral battles of the 2016 LGE were likely to play out – aided in part because of the ANC's successive electoral declines here; and the fact that major pre-election opinion polls had predicted tight races in these metros (see Brunette, Kotzen, Rampedi & Mukwedeya 2016; Berkowitz 2016; Dufour & Calland 2016).

Empirical surveys from research body Ipsos, for example, conducted in the lead-up to the August 3 election illustrated the possibility of the ANC losing several of these highly-urbanised 'battleground' councils to multi-party coalitions should the party cede its absolute majority post-August 3, 2016 (see Polls: ANC slightly ahead...2016; Polls: ANC and DA neck-and-neck...2016; POLLS: DA maintains strong lead...2016; Whittles 2016). For the ANC, suffering losses in some of South Africa's biggest cities in the 2016 LGE at the time meant more than just an electoral loss; it also translated into symbolical defeats in Africa's economic engine (Johannesburg), ousted in the country's administrative capital and national seat of government at the Union Buildings (Tshwane); and defeated in a municipality named after one of the party's most recognised anti-Apartheid icons, Mr Nelson Mandela (Nelson Mandela Bay) (see Dhawraj 2016; Letsoalo 2016).

For the DA, however, ideologically it had a distinct advantage going into the election in the ‘battleground’ metros by virtue of it being an ‘urban’ party, with its main constituency being the middle classes in South Africa’s metro spaces (see chapter 5, section 5.4.1). The ANC, on the other hand, had been consistently losing support among the country’s urban middle classes (see chapter 5, section 5.3.2); and retaining these ‘urbanised’ metros during the 2016 election was going to prove a mammoth task. The party had been repeatedly trying to court and win over the urban middle class voter which its own internal polling showed had become alienated from it over successive election cycles (see chapter 4, section 4.5) (ANC eyes middle class...2013; Southall 2015; Everatt 2014; Mantashe 2015; Mantashe 2017:14; KZN’s growing black middle class...2019). More importantly, while the DA mostly relies on town hall meetings and community gatherings to spread its campaign message during elections, part of the ANC’s communication charm offensive during any election cycle is mainly door-to-door and walkabout campaigns conducted across the length and breadth of South Africa’s nine provinces. Accessing gated communities and middle class audiences resident in high-walled homes within the metros, though, needed a different strategy because door-to-door visits would not work as potential metro voters were accustomed to accessing news about their communities and country through multiple media platforms (see Madia 2019). Younger middle class citizens, importantly, were now using social media platforms for criticising the party’s purported non-delivery; and this disconnect was beginning to worry the ANC. Also, the ANC itself lamented that the urban middle class was not a group that attended its rallies or other such party-political events (see ANC eyes middle class...2013; Everatt 2014:14; Southall 2015; Mantashe 2017: 14).

This ‘metros’ inaccessibility scenario meant that a new strategy was needed by the ANC, especially, because ‘battleground’ metros such as Ekurhuleni, Johannesburg, Tshwane and Nelson Mandela Bay were electorally vulnerable and on a proverbial ‘knife’s edge’ in terms of support – if the opinion polls were anything to go by (Madia 2019). A re-think and robust electioneering campaign was, thus, needed to access the forty-one-percent (41%) registered voter population within the entire metro urban space (Hogg 2016; Davis 2016; Nkosi 2019). One way of tapping into this ‘urban’

audience for the ANC and DA was through the use of a multiplicity of communication avenues to guarantee campaign messages were communicated to voters. Identified as an 'urban' gateway to millions of metro voters in the 2016 elections by each party's social media managers at the time, Franklin (2018) and Geleba (2018) confirmed that Twitter, did indeed become one of the important strategic communication tools to connect with urban constituencies. The microblogging site for the ANC and DA were, thus, aimed specifically at several 'battleground' metros in the 2016 LGE, with the ANC in fighting mode to retain these from falling to opposition parties (Dhawraj 2016).

Considering this 'battleground' scenario that played out during the 2016 municipal elections in several identified urban metros by the ANC and DA such as Ekurhuleni, Johannesburg, Tshwane and Nelson Mandela Bay, this thesis, henceforth, argues that political parties are encouraged to have an online presence on social networking site, Twitter, because aside from having multiple opportunities to digitally connect with electoral constituencies in real-time, parties can promote their party-political issue agendas; and leverage the micro-blogging site as an urban electioneering platform. Thus, this study proposes elements for a conceptual framework for digital political communication in order to address political communication from a digital perspective by means of an urban electioneering platform using Twitter. In doing so, the study will advance a relatively new perspective of the micro-blogging site, which will simultaneously provide digital political communication functionalities for political parties to promote their issues and embellish their branding and imaging. This will also provide political parties with an 'always-on' 24-hour synchronous and asynchronous visual medium - all of which can be done within a pronounced urban (electioneering) setting.

1.2 CONTEXT OF THE STUDY

The use of social media and social networking sites for political campaigning has been on a consistent rise since former US president; Mr Barack Obama pioneered their use for his two-term electoral victories to the White House. However, the reason

for Twitter's infamy nowadays is perhaps because of how US President Mr Donald Trump has been known to use it - notably how Twitter became his megaphone to communicate whatever was on his mind, including attacks on his then opponents in the US primaries; and the main campaign (Gaudin 2016). Mr Trump also used Twitter to attack mainstream media, often calling them out for their purported biased reporting at the time of his primaries and election (see Stelter & Disis 2016; McTernan 2016). Importantly, though, Buncombe (2018) argues, social media for Mr Trump at the time of his 2016 election functioned as the 'battleground'; and Twitter became his main communication 'weapon'.

Today, it is speculated that Mr Trump's tweets enjoy more currency than actual official White House statements and media briefings as whatever is communicated over his personal account is accepted as official presidential US policy and government speak (see Landers 2017; How tweets translate...2017; ABCNews 2019). As recent as 21 March 2019, it took just a single tweet from his account over America's stance on the Israeli-occupied (Syrian) Golan Heights to be considered as 'official' policy on the matter (see DonaldTrump 2019a, DonaldTrump 2019b, TRTWorld 2019). During a recent media briefing to inform the South African public of the rolling Eskom electricity blackouts, Public Enterprises minister, Mr Pravin Gordhan even jokingly remarked that despite South Africa's many problems, the US still remained a nation governed "through tweets" - in reference to Mr Trump and his penchant for *tweeting* major US policy decisions (MichelleCraig 2019).

Twitter's relevance for the political world in 2019, thus, cannot be overstated as the micro-blogging site remains a "real time information network" (Trotman 2014), a place where "important stuff breaks"; and an avenue where conversations between key role-players and decision makers are facilitated (Kapko 2016). Twitter is also a place where politicians now openly interact with the "Average Joe" (in reference to ordinary voting citizens) in real-time sharing "political banter and opinions" on issues generally important to them (Johnson 2013). To illustrate, in mid-April, South African president, Mr Cyril Ramaphosa had his 'first' live Twitter interaction with potential voters (in the lead-up to the 2019 general election) where he prompted Twitter users to field questions about the state of the country. Suffice to say the invitation tweet

was amplified (retweeted) 762 times; and the president promised ordinary South Africans more such interactions in future (CyrilRamaphosa2019; Twitter Q&A with...2019). Mr Ramaphosa's voter interaction session over Twitter, however, is not novel as numerous global leaders are increasingly taking to the micro-blogging site to either interact with citizens, talk to other leaders or to communicate their stance on major governmental decisions. It is, therefore, fast becoming *the* communication tool of choice for many politicians, political parties and governments (to be discussed in more thorough detail in chapter 2, sections 2.14 and 2.17).

1.2.1 Purpose of the study

For South Africa's 2016 local government elections, both the ANC and DA leveraged a number of traditional media and non-traditional media platforms to access potential voters, including Twitter. The micro-blogging site, it is argued throughout this thesis, was used primarily to campaign in South Africa's eight urban centres but with the emphasis on a few metros classified as 'battleground' areas, namely Johannesburg, Tshwane, Ekurhuleni and Nelson Mandela Bay. This study, then, looks at how Twitter functions as an electioneering platform for political parties to promote their party-political issues (issue ownership) during elections, with the supplementary objective being how Twitter could be leveraged as an urban electioneering portal.

Although there have been many studies on Twitter, this study aims at adding a new theoretical perspective on how the micro-blogging portal is used by political parties because of the dynamic and evolving nature of social media. Moreover, there are still unexplored areas in Twitter research, including specifically how it is used in political election campaigning. For example, Harvey (2012: 277), rightly questions the importance of Twitter as a "growing component in the strategic media mix", how Twitter can be used in a political context; and "what was different" about it compared to other traditional media mediums. Chang (2014:31-33) helps to further this argument by suggesting that Twitter can be effective in being used as a *de facto* opinion poll to gauge the political mood of the time; and how the micro-blogging site reportedly mobilises voters when a 'buzz' is created online.

The purpose of this study, however, is to look at how Twitter functions as a digital political communication medium for political parties to promote party-political digital issue ownership; and to show that the micro-blogging site can be used to own/ claim issues directed at an urban audience. Looking at digital political communication, issue ownership theory and urban electioneering, this study anticipates proposing a conceptual framework for digital political communication that is likely to predict the behavioural patterns of political actors who use Twitter to authoritatively communicate on issues, using it simultaneously as an urban electioneering portal. Consequently, South Africa's 2016 LGE was selected for this study for a number of reasons, chief of which was that election-related data was available before, during and after said poll. Also, as illustrated earlier, the 2016 municipal elections pivots on the notion that Twitter has changed in a number of ways since the country's 2014 general elections, notably that the micro-blogging site has *inter alia* become more visual, using more images and live video streaming tools such as Periscope that fully integrates with other social networking tools.

1.2.2 Background of the study

Although social networking sites such as Facebook, Twitter, You Tube and Flickr were used to a limited degree in the 2009 South African general elections (Fakir, Bhengu & Larsen 2010: 112-117), the use of such platforms proved vital in the 2014 and 2016 elections. This study addresses the intersection between election campaigning and technology as part of a political party's media mix. This will be the first study, also, to understand how South Africa's two main political parties leveraged Twitter as an electioneering tool to promote their issues (issue ownership) within a pronounced 'urban' bias to contest the 2016 elections. Therefore, having evaluated this study against the broader context of digital political communication within a social media landscape, this study is original and likely to spur future cyclical research inquiry. This becomes even more challenging with the fast-changing technological environment and altering media landscape as researchers are forced to keep track of this evolution.

1.2.3 Relevance of the study

Social media and Twitter are evolving and dynamic. As a result of its recent adoption of Web 2.0 technologies (blogs, micro-blogs, social networking sites and photo and video-sharing websites), political campaigning using the Internet and social media/social networking sites such as Twitter has been a fairly “unexplored and under-researched” field within political communication (see MacNamara & Kenning 2011: 7; Dhawraj 2013; Mascheroni & Mattoni 2013: 224). In the case of South Africa, for example, what was available and reaching audiences before the 2014 general elections and eventually used in the 2016 municipal elections were completely different. It is, therefore, important to keep track of new media and developments in political communication and electioneering.

US President, Mr Donald Trump showed just how effective a brief 140-character tweet sent over Twitter can be. In most instances, whatever Mr Trump tweeted set the news agenda for a number of traditional and non-traditional media outlets. News outlets regard Mr Trump’s tweets as *de facto* media statements from the US president. Often, these would even be screen-grabbed and displayed on television screens to show that they have been communicated by Mr Trump (Kapko 2016). Other global leaders, too, first ‘break’ whatever they have to say in an official capacity over the micro-blogging site. News media, here too, quote these verbatim in their news reports (McTernan 2016; Von Drehle 2016:39-41).

Also, key to Mr Trump’s success in the 2016 US presidential elections was in part how he used Twitter to “disrupt the political sphere” by “cutting out the middlemen of politics” that included big media corporations, reporters, and other stakeholders considered essential for an election campaign, setting his own agenda instead – editorially and from a communication perspective (Kapko 2016). For Von Drehle (2016:39), Mr Trump’s electoral success was just the antidote needed to circumvent “the fabric of analog democracy”, a strategy to interrupt the political messaging of other media narratives around his 2016 election campaign.

For the 2016 municipal elections, Twitter became an important aspect of South Africa's electioneering picture – albeit without a proper understanding of how it fit and what the impact could be. It could be argued here that political parties and politicians used Twitter intuitively. With this doctoral study, there is a need to retrospectively explore the way the micro-blogging site was used, how issue ownership manifested in the use of Twitter; and how it functioned as an urban electioneering platform. Doing this, identifiable Twitter usage and communication trends can be better understood for future electoral contexts. In this respect, elements for a conceptual model for understanding and predicting future developments regarding the use of Twitter for political communication purposes can also be gauged. Furthermore, developing such a model will then make a contribution to the development of the sub-discipline in a way that has not been done before; thus providing for the current evolution of electioneering.

1.2.4 Relevance to communication science

The proposed topic relates to Communication Science as it addresses various fields, namely political communication, digital political communication and social media communication. Also, research in the study of political communication, political advertising and election campaigning is still in its infancy in this country as is evident in the lack of academic literature. As a result, there is an urgent need to add to the limited repository of academic enquiry into the subject matter. However, even more significant is how election campaigning is changing globally. Although traditional media is still being used to a large extent, social media and social networking sites are forming a major part of the electioneering communication strategy. Former US president, Mr Barack Obama showed the success of a hybrid mixed media arsenal in his 2008 and 2012 presidential campaigns; and current US president, Mr Trump, illustrated this in his 2016 bid for the White House (see Graham 2008: 248; Sen 2012: 490-492; Kapko 2016; World leaders...2018:1-20). South Africa, too, since the 2014 general elections seems to be gravitating in a similar direction with a social networking site such as Twitter being a huge part of the country's two biggest political parties (ANC and DA) media mix in the 2016 LGE. In this respect, social

media and social networking sites as part of the hybrid media amalgam for electioneering reasons cannot be ignored.

1.2.5 Other research in the field

A cursory glance at the National Research Foundation (NRF) and Nexus databases (2019) indicates that no other research is currently being conducted and has not been completed on the topic of this study.

1.3 DEFINING KEY CONCEPTS

Based on various definitions evident in the literature, the following concepts for political communication, social media and social networking sites, Twitter, digital political communication, issue ownership, digital issue ownership and digital urban electioneering platform have been developed for this thesis:

1.3.1 Political communication

For purposes of this thesis, political communication is defined as “an intentional communicative process by different actors such as political parties, ordinary citizens and the media involving rhetoric, propaganda, political advertising, political marketing and political public relations”. This all-encompassing definition is in concurrence with seminal authors such as Graber (1981); Denton and Woodward (1990); McNair (2011); Esser and Pfetsch (2016) and McNair (2018). Additionally, the researcher also agrees with Muhingi, Agonga, Mainye and Mong’are (2015:58) who proposed that any definition of political communication must consider ‘election campaigning’ as part of the definition, as elections by their very nature are elements of the entire political communication process (please see chapter 2, section 2.4).

1.3.2 Social media and social networking sites

Social media and social networking sites are not synonyms for the other. While social media is the enabling technology, social networking sites are the platforms using that technology. Boyd and Ellison (2008), further, highlight that social media itself comprises of 'social networks' (for the sharing of profession or personal experiences) and 'information networks' (for the distribution of information). In this respect, Parr (2010) considers micro-blogging site, Twitter, as an 'information network'. Social networking sites, on the other hand, first emerged as early as 1997 and were chiefly designed to draw people together (see Kirkpatrick 2010: 66-67; How the Internet...2019:19). Bohler-Muller and Van Der Merwe (2011:1-2), however, went further by classifying social networking sites as "web-based tools and services" which allowed users to "create, rate and share information". Important for social networking sites was the notion of 'interactivity' (see Nations 2012; Sweetser 2011: 298; Berrocal, Campos-Dominguez & Redondo 2014:66). Twitter for this study, then, is classified as a social networking site which allows for the generation and sharing of information (please see chapter 2, section 2.9).

1.3.3 Twitter

Furthermore, Twitter for this particular study is further defined as "a converged, multi-functional, multi-media broadcast platform for the synchronous and asynchronous communication of political ideas" (see Ahmed 2015a; Ahmed 2015b; Ahmed & Bath 2015) (please see chapter 2, section 2.13).

1.3.4 Digital political communication

Considering both the definitions of social networking sites and Twitter, digital political communication for this study is defined as "all political messages communicated over digital platforms by political parties and other relevant actors such as politicians,

ordinary citizens and the media to exchange political ideas”. The key aspects of digital political communication remains elements such as ‘interactivity’ which allows for earned media; and is appropriate because it captures the diverse communicative relationships and online sentiment that exist between individual political parties and their related constituencies. Moreover, for this study, this relationship is maintained over a single digital social networking platform, namely Twitter, where elements such as pictures, text, audio, video and live feeds will seek to complement each other in a single mass-disseminated message (please see chapter 2 section 2.8).

1.3.5 Issue ownership

Issue ownership for this study has concurrence with seminal author, Petrocik’s (1996:825) definition, in that “issue ownership is best suited to explain how political parties emphasise and downplay messages in election cycles”. Issue ownership is about ‘owning’ a set of issues and ‘handling’ these better than an opponent. It is this “handling” or “credibility” factor that seeks to eventually help political parties establish themselves as brands (Petrocik 1996: 826) (please see chapter 3, section 3.2).

1.3.6 Digital issue ownership

Digital issue ownership for purposes of this study is approached from how political parties control their electoral messages over micro-blogging site; Twitter (the digital aspect). Using permutations of repetitive messaging, hashtag-generation; and implicit and explicit political message-sharing, certain issues become identified with particular political parties over time (please see chapter 3 and chapter 7).

1.3.7 Digital urban electioneering platform

The idea of urban communication and digital urban communication refers to the seamless communicative relationships that tend to occur in densely-populated urban spaces. Technological instruments facilitate the diffusion of digital urban communication. Additionally, social networking sites such as Twitter and Facebook

are considered digital urban phenomena within this thesis through factors such as high Internet concentration, population density; and the communicative realities of the contemporary urban space. Political parties recognise this fact; and subsequently leverage social networking sites such as Twitter as a (digital) urban electioneering platform – especially around a major election (please see chapter 4, section 4.15).

1.4 RATIONALE FOR USING ONLY TWITTER FOR THIS STUDY

Today, it is near-to-impossible not to find a major global politician present on Twitter. Fast-emerging as the ideal political medium for the quick expression of political ideas, Ahmed (2018b) labels this use of Twitter by diplomats, heads of state and leaders of intergovernmental bodies for “outreach activities” *Twitter diplomacy*. Mr

Trump is perhaps the best illustration of this. Whatever Mr Trump says on Twitter is news, and becomes news, even if it is the coining of a new word ‘covefe’. Analysts even jokingly speculate that should Mr Trump cease to tweet, Twitter would lose as much US\$2-billion of its market value (Trump adds \$2bn...2017:4). Mr Trump himself confessed to the *Financial Times* that “without the tweets, I wouldn’t be here” – in reference to his winning of the November 2016 US presidential elections.ⁱ Apart from the Pope (Francis) (who heads the Catholic church and is technically the head of the world’s smallest country, Vatican City), Mr Trump is now the most followed politician on the micro-blogging site, with just over 59.3-million followers as at 25 March 2019 (DonaldTrump 2019a, DonaldTrump 2019b).

Fresh research by Marsteller (2017), furthermore, confirms that Twitter is now the social networking site of choice for 92% of all United Nations (UN) governing member states, with some 856 separate Twitter accounts - a cumulative 356-million followers identified to represent governments. Barring Germany’s Chancellor, Mrs Angela Merkel, every European government has a presence on Twitter. Of the other continents, Nicaragua remains the only Latin American nation that does not have a presence on the micro-blogging application. In Africa, Asia and the Pacific Rim string of nations, only 15 are not on the platform (Marsteller 2017).

South Africa (as a nation) has the distinct reputation of being the most active Twitter user on the African continent with more than eight million subscribers (Vermeulen 2018). Politicians here use Twitter for a plethora of reasons. For example, it took just a couple of tweets from current Western Cape premier, Mrs Helen Zille on the benefits of colonialism to raise the ire of the South African public; and that of her own party. Apart from Mrs Zille's tweets setting the news agenda for a good few months, they also became the catalyst for the politician's party, the Democratic Alliance, to take disciplinary action against her. Mrs Zille has also had to defend her views in the Western Cape legislature as a result, surviving a vote of no confidence there (see Villette 2018; Pillay & Villette 2017:1; Pillay 2016; Sesant 2017). Despite her party reining her in, Mrs Zille continued tweeting and was accused of suffering from an "empathy deficit" when she again tweeted something controversial, this time around the *Life Esidimeni* tragedy where hundreds of disabled patients were moved to ill-equipped health facilities in Gauteng only to die a few months later (MDIA & Khoza 2018). One prominent DA leader even quipped "Helen is uncontrollable...she seems to have superpowers", choosing to "just leave her be" and not take action against her continued tweeting (Madia & Khoza 2018). More recently, Mrs Zille was again thrust into the public spotlight for her tweets on a proposed tax revolt following details emerging from various sitting commissions of inquiries implicating prominent ANC politicians; and her subsequent understanding of Black and White privilege; and what this means for South Africa's politics (see Van Diemen 2019; Zille 2019).

The ANC, too, takes whatever is communicated over Twitter seriously. The party's now-suspended KwaZulu-Natal leadership – for example – unsuccessfully defended a case in the Pietermaritzburg High Court on the basis of what was tweeted in a highly-contested November 2015 leadership conference. The applicants in the case claim the current provincial leadership collective knew in advance who had won those contested elections by virtue of a controversial tweet sent out hours before voting had ended. In their defence, the KwaZulu-Natal leadership argued in court that the tweet was 'fake news' manufactured from a fake account at the time (Harper 2017).

Another high-ranking ANC politician who frequently relies on Twitter to relay her political communication ideas is Minister in the Presidency, Dr Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma. In early April 2017 when the anti-(Jacob) Zuma marches snowballed around the country, the former African Union (AU) Commission chairperson, drew the wrath of party partisans and the South African public when she allegedly tweeted, dismissing the democratic marches as “this rubbish”. To mitigate the backlash to her brand and the ANC, she insisted her account had been hacked (Did Dlamini-Zuma dismiss countrywide...2017). A year later, Dr Dlamini-Zuma again claimed that her Twitter account had been hacked when she controversially tweeted her thoughts on the destructive Mahikeng, North West protests, heaping blame on opposition party, the DA. The former ANC presidential hopeful, in subsequent tweets, had to apologise to the DA (Evans 2018; Lekabe 2018).

At the time of South Africa’s 2014 general elections, there were approximately nine-million Facebook and five-million Twitter users. It was this high penetration level of social networking sites coupled with accelerated smartphone adoption that made the 2014 elections perhaps the country’s first social media election. Hence, it was effectively dubbed the nation’s first “digital elections” (Social media fires up...2014). During that election, parties, for example, understood the potent power behind a single image. Voters only needed a camera-enabled smartphone to click a “thumbnail selfie” to show they had voted; which was then posted to Twitter (and Facebook) to ‘virally’ share the “uhuru of voting” (Nevill 2014). Notably, for Tarrant (2014), Twitter’s arrival, especially, into South African politics just before the 2014 general elections was a complete paradigm shift as it introduced the notion of a 24-hour news cycle. Real-time political coverage of election rallies, political gatherings and media briefings had now become a reality unlike past polls. If one had been following the correct people at the time, one would even get a 140-character quick analysis from prominent South African commentators – all courtesy of Twitter (see also Madeley 2014; Nevill 2014).

For the 2014 general elections, social media and social networking sites promised an Obama-esque flavor to campaigning with major parties such as the governing ANC and main opposition DA ‘seizing’ the opportunity to “engage” with supporters in

a “disintermediated way” (Tarrant 2014) - they were on Twitter tweeting, responding and creating conversations around their policies. At the time, the DA’s official Twitter handle only had 77 000 followers; and the ANC’s handle 120 000 followers (South Africa elections 2014...2014). Surprisingly, individual politicians such as the DA’s Mrs Zille had more followers (410 000) than her actual political party. She was beaten only by the EFF’s controversial Commander-in-Chief (CIC), Mr Julius Malema, who had a follower count of 447 000 before the 2014 poll – illustrating again that South African politics was very much still personality-driven.

With the 2016 South African local government elections – the focus of this study - South Africa’s intersection with social networking sites; and its many benefits for election campaigning was, however, accentuated. While television, radio, print and other forms of traditional media still occupied a dominant position within a tried-and-tested media campaign toolkit, parties and political leaders could no longer afford to ignore the germination of political discourse that mediums such as Facebook and Twitter injected into overall campaign messages. For purposes of this current study, Twitter – especially - noted a significant spike in the ANC and DA’s followers leading up to the 2016 local government elections. Within two years, the ANC’s follower base on the micro-blogging site had grown 144% from 120 000 in 2014 to 293 000 followers. The DA, too, grew its database on Twitter from 77 300 followers in 2014 to 209 000, an increase of 170%. More importantly, Twitter was so impactful on both parties’ media mix that each had increased their tweets by approximately 150% in just two years (between 2014 and 2016) (see chapter five of this thesis for more statistical evidence in this regard).

Since the August, 3, 2016 local elections, a cursory glance at the ANC and DA’s social media footprint (in 2017) reveals more proof supporting the rationale for choosing just Twitter for further scientific inquiry. Although the ANC had various social media accounts set up for the 2016 elections, it used Twitter and Facebook more extensively than the others. The party’s Facebook page (@MyANCza) had 416 549 ‘followers’ and was ‘liked’ by 416 686 people as at October 2017. This means that approximately one million people had access to the ANC’s updates, regardless of them being ‘friends’ with the ANC account. ‘Liking’ a Facebook account

automatically entitles you to that person or organisation's updates. Presently, the ANC uses its Facebook platform to simultaneously post images, videos and media releases on developments around the party. Importantly, it also uses the page to promote its government-related activities. Examples include pictures and videos posted relating to international diplomatic visits and local (ANC) leaders on national campaign trails. Another observation made on the ANC's official Facebook page is the absence of interactive two-way communication. This is evident in the party's multiple updates. Although posts are made frequently, no dialogue is created between the account and user's comments. Additionally, when one messages the party using the inbox facility, an impersonal forwarded message directs the person to the party's website (My ANC Facebook page...2016).

In contrast, the ANC's Instagram account (myanc_) – for example – presently boasts 86 700 followers and the account followed back 7483 users. Since signing on to the social media site, it published 6108 posts or 'pictures', including videos which were simultaneously shared on other platforms such as its website, Facebook, Twitter and You Tube channel. By design, Instagram accounts do not offer entities such as political parties much feedback in terms of constructive two-way communication between itself and its followers list. Also, because Instagram thrives on the use of hashtags (or subject categorisations), the party's posts (of mainly images and videos) are easily accessible to anyone regardless of geographic location. In this respect, the ANC's Instagram account could miss its target audience through segmentation with its posts. Data costs for getting onto Instagram are much more than other social networking sites, too, because of image and video browsing – speaking to the issue of access, affordability and digital literacy (African National Congress Instagram page...2016). The ANC's You Tube channel - by comparison - had a mere 1283 subscribers, with the party posting an average of four (4) videos per month in 2016. Here too, watching online videos is costly. Perhaps, this is why the ANC used Instagram and You Tube sparingly (My ANC You Tube page...2016).

Like the ANC, the DA is present on social media sites such as Instagram, Facebook, Twitter and You Tube. On Instagram, the party has just over 22 200 followers but has posted only 397 posts (Our DA Instagram page...2016). When it came to You

Tube, the party boasted 7938 You Tube subscribers as at October 2017, posting an average of eleven (11) videos annually. During the time of the 2016 local government elections, the DA posted 74 election-related You Tube videos (Democratic Alliance You Tube page...2016). The DA's Facebook account – in contrast – was a much more active platform for the party's engagement with its followers and potential voters. As at October 2017, the party's Facebook account had 493 027 'followers' and had been 'liked' by 499 840 people. In effect, nearly a million people have access to DA posts such as media announcements. Like the ANC, the DA too uses its Facebook account for party-related publicity drives such as the promotion of DA events in DA-governed municipalities. Additionally, the platform is used to demonstrate DA successes in DA-administered governments. For example, the party would issue a media statement on Facebook, together with images and videos to illustrate how the party has been “transforming the Johannesburg inner city” or how “Wesgro had brought in R17-billion worth of investment” into the Western Cape in the past year (Democratic Alliance Facebook page...2016). Significantly, the party actively uses the platform for engagement with users. On the side bar, the party even states that the DA would “typically reply within a day” (Democratic Alliance Facebook page...2016). Evidence of this two-way communication is evident in the message threads, in response to its posts. Most conversations and replies are detailed – in stark contrast to the ANC's Facebook wall posts (Democratic Alliance Facebook page...2016).

In this section, reasons were provided for only selecting micro-blogging site, Twitter, for this study. The researcher recounted how and why the medium remains popular with contemporary global and local politicians. Overviews of both the ANC and DA's social media footprint in the 2014 general elections; and the 2016 local elections were then given. Cost factors and adequate feedback mechanisms were understood as reasons for the limited use of sites such as You Tube and Instagram in the 2016 municipal polls. Twitter, on the other hand, was used extensively for the party's messages in said poll.

1.5 FORMULATION OF THE RESEARCH GOALS, RESEARCH OBJECTIVES, RESEARCH PROBLEM AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS OF THE STUDY

Fouche and De Vos (2011: 94) say that while research goals can be equated to a “dream”, research objectives are those steps researchers take within a stipulated time frame to attain that “dream”. The goal of this study is *applied communication research* because the aim is to solve a specific practical problem (Mouton 1996: 103). In this case, the aim is to understand how South Africa’s governing-ANC and official opposition, the DA, leveraged micro-blogging website, Twitter, as an urban digital political communication medium to establish issue ownership for its political issues in the 2016 municipal elections.

Research objectives – in contrast – illustrate what a researcher intends finding out using several specific steps, in combination with the research question (Fouché & De Vos 2011:94-99). These research objectives can be exploratory, descriptive or explanatory (see Babbie & Mouton 2010:79-84; Babbie 2013:42-43). The research objective for this study is exploratory – in agreement with the Grounded Theory method as the researcher explores the characteristics of party-political issue ownership viewed through the lens of digital political communication to understand how the ANC and DA leverage Twitter as a digital political communication tool to claim ownership of election issues. Lastly, the researcher explores proposed elements for a conceptual framework that associates digital political communication, issue ownership and urban electioneering through the use of micro-blogging website Twitter – which can only be done with Grounded Theory coding.

These are the five research objectives (RO) for this study:

RO 1: To explore the characteristics of party-political issue ownership viewed through the lens of digital political communication over micro-blogging site Twitter.

RO 2: To explore the extent to which urban electioneering can be enhanced using micro-blogging site such as Twitter.

RO 3: To explore what issues the ANC and DA chose to focus on in their 2016 LGE manifestos.

RO 4: To explore how the ANC and DA leverage Twitter as a digital political communication tool to claim party-political issue ownership in the 2016 LGE.

RO 5: To explore proposed elements for a conceptual framework that associates digital political communication, issue ownership and urban electioneering through the use of micro-blogging website Twitter.

Several authors (see Babbie & Mouton 2010; Monette, Sullivan & DeJong 2011; Royse 2011; Rubin & Babbie 2010; Thyer 2010) assert that the research process comprises six steps. These involve writing out an unambiguous problem statement and related research questions, choosing a clear research method, data collection, data analysis, the interpretation of data collected; and a final written report. Bryman (2007:5-20) defines a research problem as one that captures “an area of concern”, a “condition to be improved”; or a “troubling question” that demands academic enquiry to understand the issue better. An ideal research problem should not be “vague” or ambiguous; it should instead offer tangible propositions to solve a matter empirically. The proposed elements of the conceptual framework aim to address how political parties and politicians would be able to leverage Twitter as a digital political communication tool for the ownership of party-political issues, notably around election campaigning. Moreover, audience segmentation can be achieved by using Twitter as part of a broader electioneering toolkit to micro-target urban voters in dense urban-city spaces.

1.5.1 The research problem statement

There are three main purposes of an effective research problem statement. These include introducing the reader to the importance of the subject under investigation; it provides the necessary context of the study; and it should ideally give some direction in terms of the framework for the results to be reported (Bryman 2007:5-20). The research problem statement formulated for this study is as follows: to explore by

means of a cross-sectional study how South Africa's governing-ANC and the official opposition, the DA, leveraged micro-blogging website, Twitter, as an urban digital political communication platform to claim party-political issue ownership during the 2016 Local Government Elections in order to propose and confirm elements for a conceptual framework. The proposed elements of this conceptual framework aim to address how political parties are able to use Twitter as a digital political communication tool for the ownership of party-political issues, notably around election campaigning. Audience segmentation, too, can be achieved by using Twitter as part of a broader electioneering toolkit to micro-target urban voters.

The research problem statement can be further explicated as follows:

- The research design is qualitative and hence mainly exploratory.
- The time dimension is cross-sectional as the researcher is only interested in the South African 2016 local government elections for measurement.
- The action required is to explore (in agreement with the objectives of Grounded Theory).
- The geographic location is not confined to any territorial or geographic borders because there are no boundaries in digital spaces. However, for the interviews with the social media managers of the ANC and DA as part of the literature review in chapter 5, South Africa would be applicable in terms of geographic location.
- The extent of the problem remains the digital political communication campaigns (via Twitter) of the ANC and DA in the 2016 local government elections.
- The method of inquiry is anchored in Grounded Theory.

1.5.2 Research questions

The purpose of this section is to provide a rationale for this investigation. Research questions form an integral part of any scientific enquiry as they tend to “guide”, “centre” and “address” issues in the main research problem. When formulating research questions, the researcher needs to be “clear and focused” (Patten & Newhart 2013). The formulation of a good research question should ideally steer the research journey towards the most apt research methods for the study; this includes the purpose and design of said study (Gilbert 2008:58). In this regard, five research questions (RQ) addressed the research problem of this study:

RQ 1: What are the theoretical criteria of party-political ownership within the context of digital political communication over micro-blogging site, Twitter?

RQ 2: What are the theoretical criteria for urban electioneering promoted using micro-blogging site, Twitter?

RQ 3: What issues did the ANC and DA choose to focus on in their 2016 LGE manifestos?

RQ 4: How did the ANC and DA leverage Twitter as a digital political communication tool to claim party-political issue ownership in the 2016 LGE?

RQ 5: How can the findings be used to propose elements for a conceptual framework that associates digital political communication, issue ownership and urban electioneering through the use of micro-blogging website Twitter?

1.6 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In this section, the researcher introduces the methodology to be leveraged for this

study, including the chosen research paradigm, research design, research method, targeted and accessible populations, population parameters, sampling, data collection and data analyses phases.

1.6.1 Worldview adopted for this study

Social constructionism as the worldview (research paradigm) was adopted for this study. Aside from complementing the inductive theory-building aspects of Grounded Theory – the main research method selected for this study - social constructionism is about how people ‘construct’ their world – as opposed to a world being “created” (Charmaz 2008: 397). For the social constructionist, the social world, thus, is viewed both objectively and subjectively (see also chapter 6, section 6.4.1).

1.6.2 Research design

Babbie and Mouton (2008:74) define a research design as the “total plan” researchers adopt to answer a research question. Ideally, it should include the main research question, what evidence is needed to solve that question; where the researcher intends finding that evidence from; and how that data is to be ultimately analysed and verified. For this study, a qualitative research design was employed, in agreement with Grounded Theory and the exploratory outlook of this exercise (see also chapter 6, section 6.4.2).

1.6.3 Research method

Grounded Theory was the main research method used for this study because it permits theory to “emerge” from the data; invariably leading to “new ideas” inductively to build theory, in agreement with Dey (1999: 63). In this respect, data from a corpus of election-related tweets of the ANC and DA and each party’s 2016 election manifestos were accessed and analysed. Furthermore, Grounded Theory

was the appropriate method because it fit the five research questions identified by the researcher who sought to take a fresh look at the phenomenon.

Complementing the Grounded Theory method, two semi-structured interviews involving the ANC and DA's social media managers were used to verify the findings of this study; and served also a primary data source for chapter 5. With regard to the election manifesto analyses in chapter 5 (as part of the researcher's critical reading), this was done to identify issues the ANC and DA chose to focus on in their respective 2016 LGE manifestos – a data source that merely sought to complement the Grounded Theory analyses of the documents in chapters 7 and chapter 8.

1.6.4 Target population, accessible populations and population parameters

In qualitative research, Asiamah, Mensah and Oteng-Abayie (2017:1613 – 1616) say that pre-determined population parameters refine the general population to a target and accessible population. For this study, each party's 2016 LGE tweets served as both the accessible and target populations. When it came to the 2016 LGE manifestos of both parties, each was theoretically sampled, in accordance with Grounded Theory (Charmaz 2014). Both manifestos were, thus, purposively sampled by the researcher, and served as the accessible and target populations. The only population parameter applicable to the election manifestos was that they had to be from the 2016 poll. The study corpus of accessed tweets only from the ANC and DA Twitter handles within a specified timeframe, namely 1 May 2016 until 31 August 2016 – both demarcated as population parameters. When it came to the manifestos, the single population parameter was both documents had to be from each party and for the 2016 election year. A population parameter merely focuses the sample from a larger population (see Asiamah *et al* 2017).

1.6.5 Sample method and unit of analysis

For this study, a non-probability, purposive sample of the ANC and DA's 2016

election-related tweets from 1 May 2016 until 31 August 2016 was used. This purposively selected corpus of tweets from the ANC and DA's official Twitter handles - @MyANC and @Our_DA - formed the non-probability, purposive sample. Each tweet then served as units of analyses (or social artefacts). Importantly, only written text within a tweet and no click-throughs to external shared links, videos or images were analysed. When it came to the ANC and DA's 2016 election manifestos (social artefacts), a purposive sample was again used. Each word, sentence, paragraph, table and graphic in this instance served as the units of analyses (Neuman 2011:69).

1.6.6 Data collection

For the ANC and DA's 2016 LGE corpus of tweets, these were manually collected by the researcher in the lead-up to said poll because voluminous data over the Internet tends to disappear quickly (see Wigston 2010); and there would have been a cost (in foreign currency) to retrieve this data set later on from third parties. Once the vast data sets of the ANC and DA's 2016 LGE corpus of tweets were saved into public display format (PDF) files, they were stored onto the researcher's laptop; and migrated to the NVivo Pro 12 computer software programme.

The initial corpus of tweets manually collected and saved comprised some 36 PDF files, with the ANC's total tweets amounting to 5400 and the DA's 7200 for the 1 May 2016 – 31 August 2016 measurement period. During the initial open coding phase, 'data cleaning' further reduced this sample as not all tweets were relevant (see Baruffa 2018; Ryklief 2018). Apart from better data organisation, 'data cleaning' allowed for superfluous tweets to be eliminated from the final corpus of tweets for analysis. Eliminated tweets such as congratulatory messages to South Africa's 2016 Olympic stars were excluded from the final corpus. This 'cleaning' of the ANC and DA's 2016 LGE corpus of tweets was minimal, though, and did not affect each party's final sample size in any large proportion.

Access to the ANC and DA's 2016 LGE manifestos was not difficult as both documents were publically available from each party's website. These manifestos

were retrieved from the ANC and DA website once they had been officially launched in the run-up to the 2016 LGE campaign – in April 2016 to be specific.

1.6.7 Data analysis

Neuman (2011) says that data analysis is essentially about a systematic reduction of raw data into workable and meaningful data sets to find some form of pattern and trend. With Grounded Theory, the main aim of the various iterative data analysis coding processes (open coding, axial coding and theoretical coding) is about “selection, simplification, abstraction and transformation” (Adu 2019). Both data sets (corpus of ANC and DA 2016 LGE tweets and ANC and DA 2016 LGE manifestos) went through a rigorous three-tiered coding process using NVivo Pro 12. Open codes were narrowed down to more focused codes through abstraction; and repeated distillation of resulted in a number of theoretical codes for the ANC and DA (Adu 2019) (please see chapter 6, section 6.10.6 and chapter 7).

1.7 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

To ensure highest levels of scholarly integrity and ethical behavior was adhered to during this doctoral study as per the Policy on Research Ethics of the University of South Africa (UNISA), ethical clearance was needed for the empirical part of the research. UNISA’s ethical policy addresses a number of ethical considerations during the research process, including the gathering, interpreting, reporting, and publishing of the information obtained. The researcher acknowledges UNISA’s ethical policy, with ethical clearance obtained in July 2018. Please refer to Annexure D for the ethical clearance certificate.

The term ethics can be defined as a set of “moral principles” put forward by either a group or an individual that predetermines “widely accepted” rules and behaviours and “correct conduct” when dealing with multiple research environments (De Vos 2005: 57). When human subjects participate in any type of research by “adjusting”

their daily routine - even by merely accommodating a researcher - due recognition should be afforded (Marshall & Rossman 1990: 90). The researcher agrees with both these statements and thus finds the following ethical considerations relevant to the study at hand:

Informed consent: Mark (1996: 40) says informed consent in essence is about participation in any research study being “truly voluntary”. This study proposed using two semi-structured interviews (as a data source) with the ANC and DA’s 2016 LGE social media managers to provide verification of the final results. Consistent with the principle of ‘informed consent’, the researcher informed both participants beforehand on the nature of the study and purposes of the information generated so that they themselves could make an informed choice whether to participate or not. Additionally, the researcher obtained a signed letter from each interviewee stipulating that they indeed volunteered information without coercion towards the realisation of this study.

Confidentiality: The researcher also adhered to the principle of confidentiality, as outlined by Mark (1996: 48). All information generated from each political party social media manager interviews was kept confidential; and only made public once written permission was obtained from each interviewee. The researcher also gave the assurance that any personal information obtained would be used only for study purposes. Also, interviewees were made aware that all interview information would only be accessible to the researcher and the researcher’s supervisors. Furthermore, the principle of ‘confidentiality’ was strengthened by communicating to each interviewee that all original data obtained from the study would be stored safely and destroyed once the research study was completed (Mark 1996).

Lastly, this study did not in any way include vulnerable groups such as minors (those aged 18 and under), people with cognitive or mental challenges, the elderly; and people with limited or no education.

1.8 DEMARCATION AND OPERATIONALISATION OF THE STUDY

It must be emphasised that this study was executed in three different phases. In phase one, a thorough literature review of academic and other literature was undertaken for chapters 2, 3, 4 and 5 to provide a theoretical point of departure for the Grounded Theory study. Interviews with the ANC and DA's social media managers formed part of the literature review for chapter 5 and to also corroborate the study's findings. A critical reading of the manifestos as part of the literature review in chapter 5 was also done to identify the political issues as a theoretical point of departure for the different coding processes during the Grounded Theory part.

For phase 2 – in chapters 6 and 7 - Grounded Theory was conducted as part of the main methodology with the ANC and DA's 2016 LGE corpus of tweets and 2016 election manifestos serving as data sources. In phase 3, the researcher in chapter 8 answers the five research questions of this study coupled with proposing the different elements of the conceptual framework for digital political communication using micro-blogging website, Twitter. Thus, this study involved three different but complementary phases, allowing for a detailed study of the topic.

Please refer to Table 1.1 below for a clearer understanding of the approach adopted to realise the research objectives, including which research question addressed which chapter.

CHAPTER 1: ORIENTATION AND MOTIVATION

Table 1.1: Demarcation and operationalisation of the study			
PHASE	CONTENT	PURPOSE	PLACE IN THESIS
LITERATURE REVIEW	Exploring political communication; social media and social networking sites; and micro-blogging site, Twitter.	To answer Research Question 1: What are the theoretical criteria of party-political ownership within the context of digital political communication over micro-blogging site, Twitter?	CHAPTER 2: POLITICAL COMMUNICATION WITHIN THE DIGITAL AND SOCIAL MEDIA LANDSCAPES
	Exploring party-political issue ownership	To answer Research Question 1: What are the theoretical criteria of party-political ownership within the context of digital political communication over micro-blogging site, Twitter?	CHAPTER 3: CONCEPTUALISING ISSUE OWNERSHIP THEORY WITHIN THE CONTEXT OF THE STUDY
	Exploring urban electioneering platform	To answer Research Question 2: What are the theoretical criteria for urban electioneering promoted using micro-blogging site, Twitter?	CHAPTER 4: CONCEPTUALISING A DIGITAL URBAN ELECTIONEERING PLATFORM
	Critical reading of ANC and DA 2016 LGE manifestos	To answer Research Question 3: What issues did the ANC and DA choose to focus on in their 2016 LGE manifestos?	CHAPTER 5: DELINEATING ISSUE OWNERSHIP STRATEGIES AND SOCIAL MEDIA WITHIN THE CONTEXT OF THIS STUDY
EMPIRICAL RESEARCH	Grounded Theory and two semi-structured interviews with the ANC and DA social media managers	To provide verification of final results of study	CHAPTER 6: METHODOLOGY AND OPERATIONALISATION
	Findings and interpretation	To answer Research Question 4: How did the ANC and DA leverage Twitter as a digital political communication tool to claim party-political issue ownership in the 2016 LGE?	CHAPTER 7: FINDINGS AND INTERPRETATION
FRAMEWORK	Presentation of the different elements for a conceptual framework	To answer Research Question 5: How can the findings be used to propose elements for a conceptual framework that associates digital political communication, issue ownership and urban electioneering through the use of micro-blogging website Twitter?	CHAPTER 8: CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Table 1.1: Demarcation and operationalisation of the study

1.9 SUMMARY

This chapter introduced the thesis as a whole, outlining the overall context, rationale, key definitions, research problem, research methodology, ethical considerations and demarcation of this study. The main thrust of this doctoral thesis remains how South Africa's two biggest political parties recognised that a number of the country's metros in the 2016 municipal elections were regarded as 'battleground' areas electorally. Opinion polls by research body, Ipsos, showed the closeness of electoral races between the ANC and DA in places like Ekurhuleni, Johannesburg, Tshwane and Nelson Mandela Bay; and both parties needed a different communication strategy to win the support of these metros. Twitter, for the ANC and DA, assumed that strategic 'urban' electioneering tool. What is not known, however, is if both parties leveraged Twitter as a digital political communication tool to campaign on party-political issues, while simultaneously using the social networking site as an urban electioneering portal (to be proven and illustrated in detail in chapters 6, 7 and 8 of this thesis).

Next, in chapter two, the first part of an expansive literature review begins by focusing on the multi-stage historical development of political communication; and its relevance for the study at hand. A detailed discussion is also introduced around the changing social media landscape, its applicability to the political world; and Twitter's overall currency to this study.

ⁱ While Mr Trump won the 2016 US presidential election, he did not win the popular vote. In fact, Democratic Party candidate, Mrs Hillary Clinton, won this by approximately three million votes. However, integral to Mr Trump's win was the audience segmentation of those key states he knew he needed to secure to achieve that psychological 270-Electoral College votes to seal his ticket to the White House.

CHAPTER 2: POLITICAL COMMUNICATION WITHIN THE DIGITAL AND SOCIAL MEDIA LANDSCAPES

2.1 INTRODUCTION

Chapter 2 of this thesis aims to address RESEARCH QUESTION 1, namely: what are the theoretical criteria of party-political issue ownership within the context of digital political communication over micro-blogging site, Twitter?

Political communication has undergone immense transformation in both nature and scope since the Second World War. This chapter provides an explanation of political communication, tracing its evolution through what seminal author Jay Blumler (2015) labels the four ages of its development, namely the period after World War 2 when voting trends were much more predictable; the age of television when political advertising gained more prominence; a third age of many media choices; and a still-developing fourth age primarily defined by technology. It is this fourth age of political communication where this present doctoral study posits itself.

This chapter begins by conceptualising political communication within the broader context of the communication science discipline. Various models and theories of political communication are explored. Political communication's relation to rhetoric and propaganda is then brought within the purview of this chapter to illustrate its many shapes and forms. Additionally, it is indicated where political communication fits into the digital and social media landscapes; and its location within the fourth age of political communication highlighted earlier. The chapter ends with an overview of micro-blogging and social networking site, Twitter; and its relevance for politics and political communication. A new working definition of *digital political communication* will subsequently be coined.

The broader argument underpinning this thesis remains that South Africa's main political players, the ANC (government) and DA (official main opposition), embraced

digital political communication through Twitter, for election campaigning purposes in the country's 2016 municipal elections. Importantly, this was done to digitally communicate its political issues, to take ownership of these issues; and to use the platform as an urban electioneering platform for its urban constituency. This chapter, then, presents a broad conceptual and theoretical framework of political communication. In preparation for subsequent chapters, political communication as it relates to politics, election campaigns and social media is defined and conceptualised as a broad construct. First though, an overview of political communication is presented in section 2.2 to appraise the reader of the genesis and development of the construct.

2.2 POLITICAL COMMUNICATION AS AN INTER-DISCIPLINARY CONCEPT

Political communication is an interdisciplinary concept and a subfield of both the communication and political sciences disciplines (see Perloff 2018; Mutsvairo & Karam 2018:3-23). As a result, numerous definitions exist that illustrate the various views of different Schools of Thought. These definitions range from its strategic communication nature to its tactical role in government departments with no universally accepted definition. The focus of this study will foremost be on its strategic communication role in election campaigns.

Political communication as a concept seems to be fairly straightforward, a term which marries politics, diplomacy and how politics is persuasively communicated to citizens. Greek society was the first to advocate for the promotion of skilled human communication forms in order to facilitate a functional participatory democracy. Persuasion in this regard ensured the smooth running of city-state society, which would in turn guarantee consensus political decisions based on the strength of competing arguments. One of the earliest models of persuasive communication was generated by the Greek philosopher, Aristotle, who diagnosed that the communication process was one initiated by a speaker who made arguments through speech which was received by a listening audience (see Aristotle 1941;

Romarheim 2005). The ancient Greeks believed that language when used optimally could be a powerful form of persuasion. Aristotle was thus one such proponent who made the connection between rhetoric and persuasion in his seminal writings called *On Rhetoric*. For Aristotle, rhetoric comprised five elements, namely that speech-making was firstly an art; it was persuasive; language had to be used tactically; it should demonstrate the skill of the rhetor; and the communication process should be underpinned by strategic human communication (Radakovic 2010).

Aristotle's ideas were not free of criticism. Plato, for example, dismissed Aristotle's consensus theory of political persuasion as "immoral...a vicious form of flattery" and "opportunistic pandering to the masses" (Radakovic 2010). Despite Plato's opposition, Aristotle insisted that rhetoric and persuasion were knowledge-based art forms; and introduced three preconditions for successful persuasion in this regard (Aristotle 1941). There needed to be truth and logic in the argument (logos); the speaker needed to win over his/ her audience by being a credible orator (ethos); and sufficient emotions needed to populate the speaker's speech to make any kind of connect (pathos) (Radakovic 2010).

The relevance of Aristotle's political ideas for contemporary political communicators cannot be over-emphasised. Its utility lay in the fact that political actors need to stand out in a sea of competing information sources. Only the most persuasive communicators who constructed logical arguments using their own credibility and emotional appeal would more than likely connect with audiences. Likewise, before any political candidate or party can win the confidence of an electorate, persuasive political communication needs to take place. In this sense, present-day political parties and candidates need to select policy and argumentative positions "strategically" to maximise any chance of being voted into power (Wagner 2012: 64).

Persuasive political communication in contemporary politics can be achieved through a multiplicity of avenues, namely party and leader speeches, election manifestos, parliamentary debates, media releases; paid and free political advertising and media appearances (Kluver & Sagarzazu 2015: 384) – elements which all represent

different aspects of the current party political communication process. In the case of South Africa's governing party, the ANC, for example, much of the party's electoral success can be attributed to mass rallies, home visits and grass root mobilisation. Moving from Aristotle's idea of persuasive political communication, political communication as a form of rhetoric and propaganda is explored more in section 2.3.

2.3 RHETORIC AND PROPAGANDA AS FORMS OF POLITICAL COMMUNICATION

To appreciate the multi-level dimensionality of political communication, it is important at this juncture to make the distinction between rhetoric and propaganda. While rhetoric involves a two-way persuasive communication process; coupled with genuine relevant arguments (see Andersson & Furberg 1973: 33; Jowett & O'Donnell 1999: 28), the propagandist does not seek intentional interactive two-way communication. Dialogue, dissent or discussion is not tolerated (Taithe & Thornton 1993: 3). The person or organisation generating the propaganda aims to persuasively influence the behaviours of their chosen audience through the strategic selection of a mass communication medium (Romarheim 2005: 5).

Notwithstanding the negative connotations that have accompanied the term, propaganda can be both good and bad. As proven during the Cold War, propaganda was used by the 'West' to mount a mind war against Communism and the onslaught of the powerful Communist regimes such as the former United Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) – now Russia (McNair 2011: 175-181). In the sixties, Page (1966: 41), too, highlighted how "war predetermines the use of propaganda". Perhaps one of the most noteworthy records of propaganda being employed was US President Mr George Bush's framing of the so-called War on Terror in the early 2000s. Mr Bush together with his British counterpart at the time, Labour Prime Minister Mr Tony Blair, successfully propagated a communication strategy that alleged Iraq possessed WMDs or weapons of mass destruction. In the ensuing months, this propaganda was used to "choke the opposition" and all forms of criticism against the 2003 invasion of the oil-rich state in 2003 (McNair 2011: 183-186).

For present-day politics, election campaigning has morphed into a public relations exercise, a subtle form of propaganda. As the political world transitions from the third to the fourth age of political communication, political actors are fast realising there are substantial costs to high political office (McNair 2011: 37), resulting in this spawning of ‘political spin’ or the careful packaging of politics by parties and its leaders. The objective is to sell the politician in a positive light; and often involves “manipulation” as Romarheim (2005: 12) argues. This “coordinated strategy” seeks to build the image of the party and/ or its leaders through the “spinning” of information by professional media practitioners such as the “spin doctor” – or a public relations expert who ensures that all negativity around the party/ person is managed pro-actively (Jowett & O’Donnell 1999: 3; Romarheim 2005). Still, regardless of these carefully-staged media briefings or ‘free media’ events injecting the “believability” factor into the equation, they are viewed as “manufactured political advertisements” (McNair 2011: 119). Any political advertising outside these publicity-generating ad hoc events will additionally tend to be viewed suspiciously; it is after all paid-for “politically-loaded” propaganda (McNair 2011: 118).

In section 2.4, political communication is defined, recognising its multi-dimensionality and its overall relation to politics.

2.4 POLITICAL COMMUNICATION IS A PROCESS INVOLVING MULTIPLE ACTORS

Before going into the merits of political communication, it is important to delineate the field by presenting a multi-pronged definition of said concept. Political communication as a pliable concept in its infancy was seminally described by Chaffee (1975: 15) as the “role of communication in the political process”. Denton and Woodward (1990:4), however, argue it is not that simple, suggesting political communication is about the “pure discussion” of state matters. While this definition includes both verbal and written communication forms, it stops short of considering ‘symbolic communication acts’ (Denton & Woodward 1990) - or politically-inclined

messages that fall outside the verbal and written communication ambit. In the early eighties, Graber (1981) proposed a definition of political communication as “political language” whose multi-layered texture included political rhetoric and “paralinguistic” elements such as non-verbal cues such as body language and symbolic events like protests, boycotts and popular marches.

Going back to what Denton and Woodward (1990) said, political communication has to be intentional with the broader objective of impacting the political landscape. Concurring with the intention aspect, McNair (2011:5) argued in favour of political communication being the “purposeful communication about politics”. Importantly, McNair (2011:5-10) highlights that political communication should ideally include “all forms of inward and outward communication” by politicians and political actors - in other words “all political discourse” which may or may not include news reports, editorials and media conversations addressed specifically to and around politicians. In his diagnosis, however, McNair (2011) argued that political communication at the time failed to recognise the changed multi-media environment of social media avenues such as blogs and information-sharing outlets. This was rectified though in later editions of his seminal literature on political communication when the term digital political communication first surfaced as a literary concept (McNair 2018).

When viewed through the postmodern lens, political communication is increasingly being viewed firstly as a process which involves several key stakeholders; and secondly that such communication occurs within a system. As a process, political communication involves three key actors, namely political organisations (political parties, governments, public organisations, terrorist groups and pressure groups), the media and ordinary citizens who serve as audiences to and for political communication transactions (McNair 2011: 5-7; Nisbet & Feldman 2010). Relationships between and among these actors are not equal - according to Gurevitch and Blumler (2000: 25) and Jackson (2010: 1) and pivot primarily on three dimensions, namely horizontal, upward and downward trajectories. While the horizontal dimension refers to communication patterns between equal partners such as the media and political parties, upward relationships are characterised by their

citizen-to-elected official pattern; and downward communicative relationships are focused more on government speaking to citizens.

More recently, Esser and Pfetsch (2016: 1-2) argue in favour of collapsing these into just two dimensions, namely the horizontal and vertical. Within the horizontal dimension, politicians communicate using the media and the media in turn provides a public space for the circulation of political ideas. The vertical dimension on the other hand links political figures and media elites to citizens in a somewhat chaotic top-down, bottom-up interplay. This decentralised nature of message exchange now permits audiences to be both the senders and receivers of content - all symptoms of what Esser and Pfetsch (2016:2) observe as the technological change to the communication landscape; and the “creation” of multiple “political public spheres” which clearly illustrates that political communication is ordered systemically within a “political system” comprising of governmental, non-governmental and societal institutions. This is in concurrence with what Blumler (2016) earlier observed: that political communication was not merely about the winning and losing of political power; it has moved beyond that in the 21st century. Political communication is indeed informed by varying actors, multi-dimensional processes and a malleable political system that considers “other elements of politics” such as the peaceful and non-peaceful demonstration of interests and the subsequent legitimation and de-legitimation of political authority (Blumer 2013; 2015; 2016).

Since this study focuses on political communication as a subfield within the communication science discipline, it is also necessary to explain its position when it comes to other communication subfields such as organisational communication to clarify the theoretical position of this thesis. Thus, for purposes of better understanding political communication as a multi-textured process in today's fragmented multimedia landscape, one needs only examine the field from a political marketing, political public relations (political PR) and political advertising perspective. Also, because the main focus of this thesis is on the election campaigns of the ANC and DA in the 2016 local government elections, elements such as political advertising, political marketing and political public relations will be approached from

a more nuanced angle. In other words, political advertising, political marketing and political public relations are viewed from a party political communication lens (see Mutsvairo & Karam 2018).

Political marketing, put simply, is the “marriage” of politics and marketing (Lees-Marshment 2001: 693), with Newman and Perloff (2004: 18) seeing it as the “application of marketing principles and procedures” to the political campaigning processes by individuals and organisations. Any definition of political marketing should include an “explicit association between politics and consumer situations”; and achieving “political goals” O’Shaughnessy (1999: 726) states. Like the marketing process, political parties and politicians are brands in the political marketplace: they need to stand out from competitors through branding, signage and differentiation (Cook 2008: 114). Political marketing by inference is about selling a political party and/ or political candidate coupled with his/ her political ideas in a “political marketplace” (Kotler & Kotler 1999: 6). The electorate is considered the consumer who would use his/ her vote in an election to either accept or reject that political party/ candidate’s message (Ward 2011: 167). A typical “political consumer” is “resourceful, highly educated and affluent” with a clear bias towards political understanding (Ward 2011: 170).

Similar to the marketing of goods and services, for political parties and/ or candidates to make any impression within a political marketplace, “positioning” was integral (Harrop 1990: 277-291). The “positioning” or marketing strategy of a political party is primarily achieved through the successful blending of the traditional marketing mix’s four Ps, namely the product (the party’s image and manifesto of policy promises), promotion (party communication), place (canvassing of political support through a multitude of campaigning initiatives); and price (may involve economic and psychological elements through political advertising) to achieve party objectives (Aguirre & Hyman 2015: 1-4). There is, however, a School of Thought within political marketing literature that perceives the concepts of marketing applied to politics to some extent as inappropriate. These scholars argue that applying marketing techniques to politics produces negative connotations, which in turn

inevitably damages the political process. Calling this a “political malaise” which “subverts” democracy, Lees-Marshment (2011:6) says this ultimately leads to more disconnect with political processes (see also Lilleker 2005; Coleman 2007). Using findings from qualitative interviews with government advisors from the UK, US, Australia, Canada and New Zealand, Lees-Marshment (2011:6), however, verified that marketing and politics could be reconciled in a “principled” manner.

Conversely, there has been the argument that political marketing has had to alter with the changing nature of campaigns. The “permanent campaign” is very much a present reality; a new era of “political impression management” and “perception politics” (see De Landtsheere, De Vries & Vertessen 2008: 217-238). Political parties as a result needed to be vigilant, managing public perceptions of its image and brand on an ongoing basis. This becomes especially true when technology and social networking sites are considered (see Dhawraj 2013; O’Shaughnessy 2001: 1048; Smith & Hirst 2001: 1058-1073).

This leads the discussion to the idea of *political public relations* or political PR. The political public relations process is defined by Stromback and Kiouisis (2011: 1-23) as a “political management process” used purposively to generate “beneficial” relationships with stakeholders. The main aims of political PR is to inform, persuade; and facilitate dialogue using “rich interactions” (Holtz-Bacha 2008: 677; Jackson 2010: 1-4). Seminal author Kelley (1956: 4) compares political PR to “lobbying” with the media occupying a key role in the political PR transaction. Politicians and political parties alike nowadays have to navigate their way through a “chaotic information environment” (McNair 2004: 327), giving them more reason to use “policy, personality and presentation” to attract the media’s glare and the attention of potential voters (Moloney & Colmer 2001: 965). It is this “performance politics” (Holly 2008: 323-324) that has embedded itself as “pseudo-events”, famously coined by Boorstin (1961: 16-20) that is now posing a threat to the political world. For authors such as McNair (2004: 325-326) and Nimmo (1999: 74), the subsequent emergence of the “permanent campaign” and spin doctors to manage the public relations processes was the problem as it alone threatened democracy (Steger 1999: 661-

681). Spin communication or “control freakery” as Heffernan (2006: 582-598) labeled it, was merely fuelling voters’ disillusionment with politics because such political public relations exercises were often viewed as “propagandistic” (see also De Vreese & Elenblaas 2011: 76; Jackson 2010: 16).

As far as *political advertising* is concerned, it is still viewed as an “American invention” because it was in that country where the idea first originated in the 1950s as a direct response to making politics fashionable to voting electorates (Kaid 2004: 155-157; Kaid & Holtz-Bacha 2006: 37). In order for scholars to understand what exactly political advertising entails, it is essential that one defines advertising. Earlier definitions such as by Bolland (1989: 10) regards advertising as the “paid placement of organizational messages in the media”, concurring partly with Thomas (1996: 211) who earlier said advertising was about communicating a brand’s positive attributes that may or may not include pictures, stories and music. Political advertising, then, involved some form of political-related message whose primary purpose was to inform and persuade potential voters about a political party and/ or candidate’s advantageous characteristics.

In the early years of media development, these political advertising messages were typically communicated using mass communication platforms such as radio, television and print (see Berger 2004: 87; Kaid & Holtz-Bacha 2006: 37-38; Tak, Kaid & Lee 1997: 175). Seminal literature by Kaid (1981), one of the most prolific scholars on the subject matter, classified political advertising as a “communication process” where a political player “purchases the opportunity” to reach a mass media audience in order to “influence their political attitudes, beliefs and/ or behaviors”. Kaid (1999: 423) improved on this definition in 1999 by stipulating that political advertisements should include “control of the message” by the paying or purchasing political party. This is perhaps the key element: through the ages this has been the primary motive for all advertising and political advertising, to have control over the message. Like political marketing and political PR, political advertising, too, was viewed suspiciously as “subverting” democratic processes in “overt and covert ways”, so argues Misra (2015: 71-75). Adamant that political advertising remains a bad thing as it “undermines the democratic process”; Misra (2015: 78) urges the

media to vigorously play their watchdog role, diluting the effects of political advertising by providing in-depth, impartial analyses.

The Internet's arrival in the 1990s, however, ushered in change to the universally-accepted definition of political advertising. For Kaid (2004: 180) and Johnson (1999: 719), the World Wide Web (WWW) as a new forum for the expression of political advertising was the "most talked about political phenomena" which gave politicians control over messages which could be consumed by larger audiences at much cheaper rates than traditional platforms. Aside from offering political players "information density" (Denis & Dahmen 2010: 315-316) which radio, television and print could not offer, the Internet was also about targeted political persuasion. This, though, was a largely "open question" as there have not been concrete studies that tested Internet advertisements on voter perceptions and vote choice (Broockman & Green 2014: 263). For instance, questioning voter awareness policies and get-out-the-vote campaigns in the construction of an informative political advertising model, Degan (2013: 531-564) found inconclusive evidence that political advertising necessarily aided the chances of a competing candidate.

With that said, this study will use Devlin's (1986: 21-55) political advertising model as a theoretical point of departure to better understand the types of advertising both the ANC and DA used in South Africa's 2016 Local Government Elections. It will be complemented with other available current models to reflect the paradigm shift in election advertisements; and the changing orientation from traditional advertisements to those supported by modern technology such as those individual-to-party-centric encompassing narrow-reach to broad-reach with the help of technology (social media and social networking sites). In the late eighties, Devlin (1986) conceptualised the following political advertising types which are still recognised today: primitive (rehearsed advertisements); talking heads (candidates explain how he/ she will better handle policy issues); negative (political candidates detail the disadvantageous attributes of a rival); concept (messages that relay attributes of a particular candidate); *cinema verite* (real life interactions with voters); personal witness (testimonials involving ordinary voters); testimonials (celebrities endorsing a party and/ or candidate); and the neutral reporter (where voters

themselves provide information about a candidate and vote choice depends on how positively that information is received).

Additionally, Schnur's (1999) and Kaid and Holtz-Bacha's (2006) typologies of paid (controlled) and free media (uncontrolled) will be interrogated more. Paid or uncontrolled media refers to paid-for advertisements where the paying politician has full editorial control over what is broadcast or published. Unpaid or uncontrolled media are those unplanned media events which the politician has no editorial control over. These can be media briefings, unplanned interviews and unplanned media events which can be extremely harmful to a party or politician's image if not handled correctly. To mitigate the possible damaging effects of such free media, the trend nowadays is to outsource such political PR to public relations firms, led by spin doctors and image consultants.

With traditional political advertising campaigns now increasingly migrating to non-traditional platforms such as the Internet and social media avenues where control is less in the hands of politicians and their political PR teams, political parties are forced to be administered like corporate identities or separate business units, each with its own idiosyncrasies that need to be carefully managed. Reputational damage to the image and brand could mean a loss of donor funding and more importantly electoral support (Hallahan *et al* 2007). For this reason, political parties have had to fast understand the highly-technological and fragmented media environment they find themselves in; and are thus forced to dedicate what one calls 'corporate communications' teams to manage its name, brand and image to both its internal and external stakeholders.

To borrow the term from the business world, corporate communication essentially deals with the management of a company/ organisation's reputation; and how it is perceived by its internal (employees) and external (investors, general public, media) stakeholders. An organisation's 'corporate communication' essentially focuses on the formal communication function of the entity and is the organisation's voice and image and how it projects itself. Previously known as 'public relations' or 'public affairs', the

function of corporate communications attained fresh relevance only recently due to the increased incidence of corporate scandals (Fredrick 2016).

Historically, corporate communications developed in parallel with a number of other fields, especially public relations. It must be said that public relations and corporate communications are not synonyms for each other as they are different when it comes to their origins and emphasis. While public relations has its genesis in journalism, publicity and communication, corporate communications originated in 'business'. It is usually called corporate communications, but can also be seen as a subfield of public relations, communication management or organisational communication. In a typical corporate communications set-up, the department will attend to matters such as the organisation's overall message strategy, media relations, communication during times of crises and its overall marketing outreach programmes so that the entity enjoys a positive image in the public domain (Mazzei 2014). In this vein, corporate communications is often referred to as the "conscience" of the particular organisation (Christensen & Cornelissen 2011:387).

Closely related the idea of corporate communications, is strategic communications, a term that first surfaced in the 1990s. Strategic communication refers to communication with a purpose (see Smith 2009:11; Cornelissen 2008; Cornelissen 2011). This "agenda" and "master plan" is geared towards buoying the name of that organisation through the "pushing" of information using public relations, marketing and "delivering" this information through mediators such as journalists and producers (Hallahan *et al* 2007:3). Strategic communications in addition is about relaying an organisation's "best message" through the "right channels": in other words it is well-planned, well-timed and deliberately "orchestrated" action to "move and influence public policy" or "to promote an agenda" (Hallahan *et al* 2007: 24). Strategic communications takes the idea of corporate communications further by making an organisation more responsive to outside shocks, framing discourses to its advantage, positioning it while nourishing its brand, reputation and credibility for the long term (see Mutsvairo & Karam 2018; Hallahan *et al.* 2007).

Strategic communication in a political context - as argued by Norris *et al.* (1999) - involves a well thought out plan where electoral objectives are set, voter segments targeted, issues identified, election themes singled out and organisational and financial resources laid out. This all forms part of the “professionalisation” and “modernisation” of the overall campaign, with mainly technical experts steering the project through recruited campaign staff whose main job is to write the speeches, conduct market research; and to ensure political marketing, public relations and political advertising place the party and/ or politician in the best light (Norris *et al.* 1999: 1-2). In their earlier well-cited work, Swanson and Mancini (1996) concur, adding that this is the reality present-day political parties need to consider if they are indeed serious about image-building in the quest to ultimately secure political power.

In a political propaganda context, more recently the term strategic communications or ‘stratcom’ - as it had become known - gained overnight notoriety when ANC struggle icon, Mrs Winnie Madikizela-Mandela died in April 2018. The term was used to describe the apartheid state’s deliberate use of propaganda and propaganda agents in the guise of journalists to mount a negative campaign to defame Mrs Mandela (Rewriting history: Twitter’s reinvention of Winnie...2018). Just before her emotive funeral on Saturday, 14 April 2018, the names of journalists such as Professor Anton Harber and Mrs Thandeka Gqubule-Mbeki were splashed across morning newspapers alleging that they were part of this ‘list’ of apartheid era operatives (Kekana & Ritchie 2018). This ‘stratcom’ initiative was reputed to be the brainchild of South Africa’s former police commissioner, Mr George Fivaz. Its ultimate goal was demonise Mrs Mandela on all fronts, including dashing any chance of her becoming the nation’s First Lady and possibly president.

Political parties, in sum then, can be compared and possibly equated to corporate identities. As stand-alone entities which are wholly reliant on donor funding and voter support, matters such as image management, brand development, positioning in the electoral market; and being pro-reactive to outside framing of its reputation will come only naturally to these political parties (Hallahan *et al.* 2007: 6). They will do everything possible to correctly frame its image in the media to potential investors;

and other external stakeholders so it too – like corporations – can enjoy a long lifespan amongst the voting electorate. Avenues such as advertising, media briefings, social outreach initiatives and press releases will be used. Corporate communications, in this instance, will take the form of strategic communications – both of which aim for positive political communication around the party concerned.

In summary, while one agrees with all four seminal authors (Graber 1981, Denton & Woodward 1990, McNair 2011, McNair 2018; Esser & Pfetsch 2016) and their respective understanding of political communication, for the purpose of this thesis, *political communication* is defined by the researcher as “an intentional communicative process by different actors such as political parties, ordinary citizens and the media. It will sometimes involve rhetoric, propaganda, political advertising, political marketing and political public relations”. Importantly, the researcher agrees with Muhingi, Agonga, Mainye and Mong’are (2015:58) who posit that no definition of political communication is complete without considering that the election campaigning process and actual elections are manifestations of political communication itself.

In this section, the changing, multi-nuanced nature of political communication; and how political entities and their public figures have had to adjust to the altering technological landscape to remain relevant was discussed. Next, in section 2.5, the gradual development of political communication as an academic area of enquiry; and its present-day usefulness for political actors will be explicated.

2.5 MODELS AND THEORIES OF POLITICAL COMMUNICATION

Political communication as an academic area of inquiry originated in the US in the 1960s and 1970s (Nielsen 2014: 8). Its main purpose at the time was to understand how voting publics interacted with political messages emanating from political parties and political candidates; and beamed using mass media outlets such as radio, television and print. Political communication over multiple decades has proven to be

anything but constant. It continues to be in a state of movement, primarily informed by the context it finds itself in. To understand the discipline, one has to consider its multi-dimensionality.

As elucidated earlier in section 2.2, political communication is firstly a process pollinated by diverse actors (politicians, journalists, citizens, political and nonpolitical entities) and systems (social, political). Secondly, it is not static: it alters with the prevailing socio-political and technological mood of the time. Thirdly, it is intricately woven into society in the guise of a politically-informed process. As a fourth observation, political communication discourses “pivots on a structured yet volatile politics-media axis” (Blumler 2015: 426). In other words, politics needs the media as much as the media needs politics to be relevant.

Scholarly research into media studies and political communication birthed seminal terms such as agenda-setting, framing, priming, public opinion and media effects (Nielsen 2014: 11). Blumler (2015: 427), firstly, refers to these as “foundational theories” of general media studies and later applied to political communication. Agenda-setting theory puts an emphasis on the daily issues the media – as a political actor – highlights in the hope the citizenry will consider these as important (over other non-covered less-important issues). Closely related to agenda-setting theory, secondly, is priming theory which singles out particular issues for more attention by receptive audiences. These audiences then will evaluate parties on how they address these ‘primed’ matters. Taking the discourse a little farther, thirdly, is framing theory which indirectly tells citizens “what to think about” and “what to think about it” (Blumler 2015: 427-428). Considering that this study focuses on how the ANC and DA used Twitter to campaign in the 2016 Local Government Elections, there is a possibility there will be an intersection of these mentioned foundational theories of political communication. In other words, when examining the issue typologies both disseminated on Twitter during the observed period (1 April 2016 – 31 August 2016), it is envisaged that these political players used the medium for agenda-setting, priming and framing purposes.

A fourth foundational theory of political communication speaks to the growing disenchantment with the political process by citizens. Dubbed the media malaise theory, this branch of thinking heaps blame on the media for feeding the negative narrative around politicians, government institutions and general mistrust of the political – to less-literate segments of the voting population especially. An antidote to the media malaise theory has been Mazzoleni, Stewart and Horsfield's (2003: 1) suggestion of more scholarly attention being paid to how the news media tackles issues of "neo-populism of contemporary democracies". Another quick-fix solution suggestion is Keane's (2013) theory of monitorial democracy which propels the idea of new media arresting the problem by keeping politicians and their organisations more on-guard and accountable.

There has been a number of subsequent theorising aimed at capturing the media's interfacing with politics, notably how political parties leveraged the mass media for election campaigning. All three models – professionalised advocacy model (Blumler & Gurevitch 1995), strategic communication model (Bennett & Manheim 2006) and going public model (Kernell 1997) – brought into focus the rising disillusionment with election campaigning and how the media was accentuating elements such as negativity, attack campaigning and cynicism towards political processes. Zaller's (2001) theory of product substitution sought to remedy this by arguing that news editorial teams could counter news management's interfering ways by "fashioning" more original stories with minimal gate-keeping (Blumler 2015: 429). Bennett's (1990) indexing theory or theory of press-state relations and Esser and Stromback's (2014) mediatization of politics theory were provided as possible solutions to the academic dilemma posed by the earlier theories mentioned. Blumler (2015: 430), however, is quick to caution that mediatization theory needs to recognise technology's impact on the political world as politics was no longer a "one way street" but one reciprocal in nature.

It is this change which has compelled political communication scholars to originate what Blumler (2015) calls "freshly minted theories" for the digital age. In his understanding, these newer theories would consider theories of voice and actors'

roles. Under the former, new media provides previously-marginalised voices a new lease on life by amplifying their expression, displacing elites' monopoly on communication processes. Examples include Turow and Tsui's (2008) hyperlinked society theory (hyperlinks on web-mediated technologies aids access to information and networks); Bennett and Segerberg's (2012) logic of connective action (networks over the web will form as common information is shared with and by groups sharing similar persuasions); Pfetsch, Adam and Bennett's (2003) spill-over effects theory (how online conversation agendas permeate traditional mass media agendas and its corresponding effect on public opinion); and Chadwick's (2013) hybrid media system theory (which advocates a new thinking beyond arbitrary classifications of old and new media because political communication constituted more than just a "dichotomous" way of thinking). Examples of the latter – actors' roles – include the pre-modern, modern and post-modern phases of election campaigning; and how politicians and their organisations have responded.

When political communication is viewed through a 'holistic' lens, Jurgen Habermas' (1989) idea of the public sphere is the first to be cited. The concept of the public sphere has its origins in Habermas' (1989) *Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*. According to Habermas, the public sphere is that open space where the thoughts and opinions of a country's citizenry are brought together using "rational discussion" (Habermas 1989: 1-3). This forum is informed by the "private, public and shared experiences" of its population (Borchers 2006: 185-187). The public sphere should ideally be accessible to many people as possible; the media in this regard is an integral stakeholder. For Habermas (1992: 89), the media facilitates these discussions within the public sphere and thus becomes a "buffer zone" between citizens and the government. These deliberations then transform into public opinion, which over time become essential for a government's legitimacy and power. The public sphere in this sense generates public opinion that becomes "crucial for politics" (see also Blumler & Gurevitch 1995; Hume 1994: 16). Walter Lippmann (1922: 16-17) in his seminal work on public opinion coined the term "manufacture of consent" to illustrate how democratic orders achieve order and consensus through the "manipulation" of their populations using the media and its messages. Herman and Chomsky (1988: 2) refer to this as "filters" in their propaganda model, showing

how society's elite tend to "control" the media to "manufacture" power structures to preserve their positions. For Habermas (1989), three criteria need to be satisfied for a public sphere to exist: disregard of status and rank, issues of common concern and the forum needs to be inclusive.

Technology was now driving a new digital public sphere underpinned by "money, people and ideas" travelling in real time at a faster speed than previous times. At least this is what Koller and Vodak (2008) argue. This "global forum" where a global community could now access a still-emerging public sphere underscored by technological leaps had the potential of creating a dialogue of ideas on a scale not seen before (Ubayasiri 2006: 4). Access to this "global public sphere" where citizens of any country could propel their views, thoughts and feelings on any subject matter without fear of third party gatekeeping was a democratic panacea in a sense – a "deliberative public sphere" – that would ultimately spur transnational public engagement (Sen 2012: 490).

The question of access distorting this global public sphere remains though. For the politically-engaged, the Internet signifies the "ultimate democratizing technology" as no "digital walls" to information-seeking exists on the WWW (Boyd 2008: 114). Authors such as Crick (2009: 495) and Corrado and Firestone (1996: 17) share this optimism: that the Internet demonstrates infinite potential of being a global public forum that will eventually lead to a "conversational democracy". Social networking sites, in this sense, would augment this exercise. In sum, both political communication and the public sphere share an almost symbiotic relationship; it is the multi-dimensionality of political communication conversations that "lubricate" the public sphere (see also Blumler 2015: 435-436; McNair 2011: 17-20).

Despite the great academic strides the field of political communication has made since its first emergence, Nielsen (2014: 5) worries it has reached an "intellectual impasse" – a logjam or state of inertia. To overcome this, Nielsen (2014) suggests broader political communication should acclimatise with developments on the media front, notably the genesis of social networking (and new media) sites – which this study will address. Bennett and Iyengar (2008: 707) similarly raised concerns about

how the field had fallen short in developing new methodologies and theoretical constructs to confront the “new realities” of “audience fragmentation, information overload and the spread of newer technologies”. Barnhurst (2011: 573-593) voices concern over the possible dissonance of key political communication terms such as agenda-setting, framing and public opinion, dismissing them as “zombie concepts”. For Barnhurst (2011), these political and communication terms have been hollowed out; and were no longer “in tune” with present day political communication developments. Other like-minded authors raised identical concerns (please see Chaffee & Metzger 2001: 370; Karpf 2012; Kreiss 2012; Sampedro 2011; Webster & Ksiazek 2012). The researcher is in agreement because the aim of this doctoral study is to develop a more nuanced definition of political communication and digital political communication using social networking site Twitter as an online urban electioneering platform.

Following the end of the Second World War in the 1940s, political communication has undergone four major realignment processes – the four ages as cited in section 2.1. The first age was dominated by the press only to be replaced by a limited but dominant television phase; the next seminal juncture was multi-channel television and radio offerings; and the fourth phase or age is easily identified by its affinity for technology reshaping communication processes (Blumler 2013; 2015). The digital age of political communication brings with it the concept of the “new Influencer” where ordinary citizens are challenging bodies of authority and the political administration of the time. How political communication has undergone four stages of development since the 1940s, moving almost in tandem with how election campaigning has evolved is accounted for in section 2.6 below.

2.6 THE EVOLUTION OF ELECTION CAMPAIGNS AND THE FOUR STAGES OF POLITICAL COMMUNICATION DEVELOPMENT

A vast reading of relevant literature reveals there is much synchronisation when it comes to the three phases of election campaigning development; and the four ages of political communication academic enquiry. Norris’ (2000) conceptualises three key phases of the election campaign: the pre-modern, modern and post-modern. The

pre-modern phase involved more interpersonal communication between voter and politician, including the planning which typically comprised local community meetings, door-to-door canvassing and planned rallies. The media was a partisan actor acting as that integral link between the local candidate and citizen. In the modern phase, election planning was more of a coordinated affair with leaders at the upper rungs strategising on how the look and feel of the campaign should be. Consultants such as opinion pollsters would also be used. Television during this era dominated the media space; and voter loyalties began to slowly de-link as the citizenry became a mere passive audience observing the spectacle of elections. The post-modern phase is one in which election campaigning assumed a more professionalised aura. Using media professionals such as spin doctors and public relations consultants, the post-modern era is one of media surplus or many media channels – ultimately leading to fragmented media audiences and the concept of choice. Voter apathy and general skepticism of the political process is another defining feature of the post-modern typology. Despite voter de-alignment being on the increase, this phase holds promise of more interactivity between politician and citizen through the diversification of the public sphere punctuated by a plethora of channels (traditional and new media combined) (Norris 2000).

In democratic societies, the field of political communication is said to have undergone three very distinguishable phases or ages since World War 2. During the first age – in the 1940s and 1950s – political attitudes were subservient to strong societal institutions, making political choices fairly predictable for competing political parties with minimal effort. Politics during this “golden age of parties” (Janda & Colman 1998: 612) more or less was a reflection of how society was constructed. Citizens rarely questioned what was targeted at them; political information acted as mere reinforcing voting cues. It was during this age that group-based voting was at its strongest (Blumler & Kavanagh 1999: 211-213). From the 1960’s onward, this scenario began to slowly change with television assuming a bigger role in communicating political choices to the masses. Stoic political choices began altering as a direct consequence. Manifestations of these include the increase in voting apathy and declining turnout at the ballot box (Graham 2008: 248). Political parties

responded by professionalising their communications to mirror the news values and formats of the scant but very important dominant television (media) then.

Unlike the previous two ages, the third age of political communication is one defined by a much more liberal media landscape, giving rise to an era of “media abundance” – as Blumler and Kavanagh (1999: 209) and Blumler (2015: 426) diagnosed. Apart from the third age injecting the media environment with a plethora of television and radio channels – mostly through satellite technology – this was an age where audiences now had access to multiple media channels which could be accessed through mediums such as video recorders, compact disc players, video cameras and decoders. For authors Blumler and Kavanagh (1999: 213), the third age was “more complex” than its predecessors. Politicians, too, attest to this changed reality. For them, it posed more problems than solutions as this new media architecture resembled a “hydra-headed beast” whose “many mouths” yearned to be nourished with constant news and updates (in terms of political communication) (Blumler & Kavanagh 1999: 213). With these new channels came the added responsibility of catering for different audiences who had now been segmented as a result. This reduction in the “size of the mass audience” translated into politicians needing to keep their eye on many proverbial balls in the air. One positive, however, remained how this diversification of the media ecology – especially through the Internet - introduced the voice of the marginalised into the public sphere (to be discussed later) (Blumler & Kavanagh 1999: 221).

With the onset of technological advances, the third age witnessed the “professionalisation” of political communication (Lilleker 2006: 197-199); today it has transformed into a “highly technical” and “professional field”. Brants and Voltmer (2011: 5-6) label this the “third age” of political communication where the media is playing an ever-increasing role in the “shaping” of political processes. The media is thus viewed as a key political actor in this matrix of political communication and is courted for its highly influential role in moulding the public sphere. Another term for this rapid mutation is “mediacracy” or “mediatization” (see also Brants & Voltmer 2011: 5-6; Holly 2008: 317; Nielsen 2014: 10). Mediatization brings with it a renewed

affirmation that the media remains an important political actor in the shaping of political opinion. Its significance in election campaigns cannot be understated. Today, the concept of mediatised politics is not uncommon as it points to a sobering reality of the political process being outsourced only to be managed by professionals who will then ensure the political narrative is packaged (see Mancini & Swanson 1996; Zaller 1999; Esser & Spanier 2005 also).

Seminal author Blumler (2013) argues there is a fourth age which has taken its cue from the third age; and thus shares many commonalities with it. With liberalisation having swept the modern world and the subsequent deregularisation of the media industry globally, there has been a marked increase in radio, television, print and satellite channels. These platforms were now forced to compete for audiences in a highly fragmented media landscape. Digital communications and the audience's ability to receive communication signals on a whole range of devices add to this dilemma. For Hallahan *et al.* (2007: 27), this once tamed media space had transformed into one noisy place with too many channels. This change had also signaled the arrival of the fourth age of political communication, according to Blumler (2013) where this media "abundance" brings with it its own set of positives and negatives as audiences can now actively choose what they want to consume.

Audience segmentation – as a result – becomes imperative. By micro-targeting audiences, the clearness and conciseness of messaging is ensured (The importance of audience...2015). Audience segmentation relates to dividing audiences into different sub-groups according to a permutation of basic demographics, psychographics and other relevant parameters which ensures targeted messages reach the right audience with maximum impact (Manning 2015). As a consequence of audience segmentation going "real-time" through media fragmentation, the risk of marketing units missing the mark by disseminating "the wrong message to the wrong audience" is a high probability. (Manning 2015). This is why research units with organisations such as political parties need to constantly and consistently "track, segment and revamp" outgoing messages to match audience needs – as specified by Manning (2015). Cartright (2016) supports this idea: that money and time will be wasted if proper audience segmentation is not done. Segmentation for Cartright

(2016) was about ensuring content had value, was relevant, consistent; and audiences were clearly defined to avert any wastage of precious resources. It alone remains an integral aspect of the marketing drive.

From the discussion above, it is clear that the old model of political communication is now “kaput” and one “hobbling round on two amputated legs”, aided mainly by the Internet’s arrival which has ushered in a new wave of thinking powered primarily by informed ordinary citizens (Blumler 2013:1-3). This new power relations configuration between leader and citizen is, thus, behind the fourth age of political communication. The Arab Spring is a good example of how these unequal relationships are challenged at times. The Arab Spring is a name given to a wave of democratisation revolts that began in North Africa in late 2010/ early 2011. Ignited in Tunisia when a 27-year old, well-educated but frustrated vegetable vendor set himself alight, the incident quickly captured the imagination of an on-looking, well-connected world (Weinberg 2018). The mass protests caught on in neighbouring countries, forcing autocratic leaders in countries such as Egypt and Libya to either flee or hand over decades-long power to more democratic forms of government (see Ahmed 2018b; Klaas 2014: 19). Other popular pro-democracy protests greatly aided by technology include the ones in Thailand, Brazil and Ukraine. Mass events such as those witnessed in North Africa in 2011 - where technology played a pivotal role in getting like-minded citizens out onto the streets – prove yet again that political communication has changed since World War 2 (Weinberg 2018).

Technology is playing an increasingly decisive role in propelling this change from the third age to a still-developing fourth age of political communication. This fourth age can be dubbed the digital age of personal computers, hand-held mobile devices and other communications-enabled equipment charged with rearranging power relations between institutions of authority and citizenry they are supposed to administer. In section 2.7, the researcher deals with the development of political communication in South Africa, expanding on how it has altered over the years in a highly-politicised South African pre-1994 and post-apartheid political landscape.

2.7 POLITICAL COMMUNICATION IN A SOUTH AFRICAN CONTEXT

South Africa, too, is proving fertile ground for mass-based protest activity as seen in other parts of the developed and developing world. The common denominator underpinning protests such as the *Fees Must Fall* and *Rhodes Must Fall* campaigns is technology; and how web-enabled smartphone technology mobilises activists to proverbially 'spread the word' (see Gumede 2017; Habib 2019). This thesis will go into more discussion within this chapter and other chapters, showing how this country is not immune to the technological political communication revolution engulfing other maturing states - democratic or otherwise. The focus, this time around, will be South Africa's 2016 Local Government Elections and how issues were digitally communicated on Twitter by the country's governing-party, the ANC and the main opposition, the DA.

It must be stated from the onset that South Africa has been a fairly closed political society before 1994. Despite allowing limited political freedoms to population groups such as Indians and Coloureds, only political parties catering for a minority White population were permitted to campaign for political office before democracy. The majority Black African population was systematically shut out of national, provincial and local government politics. Instead, they were segmented into different geographic independent Bantustans or homelands (Booyesen 2015). The country only became a free, democratic political administration after the 27 April 1994 all-race elections. It is for this reason scholarly inquiry into political communication and political advertising is severely limited. A few authors have, however, pursued academic literature into both fields, namely Mutsvairo and Karam (2018); Karam (2018), Fourie and Froneman (2003), Teer-Tomaselli (2006), Fourie (2008), Duncan (2009) and Dhawraj (2013). Still, more investigative academic research into these fields needs to be pursued more vigorously. Furthermore, prior to the 2009 general elections, political advertising in South Africa was only permitted using radio and print media (see Dhawraj 2013). Television advertising materialised only during and after the 2009 poll (Political parties tune into...2009; Teer-Tomaselli 2006: 432-437).

When it comes to a lack of political communication as an area of study here, South Africa is not alone. Scholars on the African continent have consistently lamented how it has fallen behind compared to other more developed parts of the world. Chibuwe (2013: 130), for example, who took issue with both political communication and political advertising “lagging behind” in Africa, proposed a new theory on political communication and political advertising. Using Zimbabwe as a case study, Chibuwe (2013: 116-139) argues the only way Africans could generate “capacious new theory” on political communication here is to factor in the continent’s post-colonial histories (Chibuwe 2013: 131). Kaid (2012: 37) lends support to Chibuwe (2013) saying that political advertising literature - being developed in the West – is “not enough” to comprehend political advertising situations in Africa and elsewhere. Elements such as differences in cultural, governmental, media, regulatory and language structures need to be considered. Likewise, Mutsvairo and Karam (2018:3-6) argue that Western models of political communication are simply insufficient to address a “complex African political terrain” comprising of one continent but “many countries”. This is why Karam (2018:29-37) legitimately argues for the “decolonisation” and “retheorising” of political communication to fully come to terms with studying it in Africa.

In section 2.8, the discussion moves to how political communication has taken a transversal strategy with the diffusion of multimedia technologies within the fourth age of political communication; and what this means for political campaigning. Based on the discussions thus far, the researcher also provides a working definition for *digital political communication* to capture this changing landscape.

2.8 POLITICAL COMMUNICATION IN A DIGITAL AGE

The Internet first became an important “additional tool” for political campaigns in the 1990s (Medina & Munoz 2014), enabling “more political ideas to be circulated” (Sparks 2015). Shah, Cho, Eveland and Kwak (2005: 531) showed that American and European voters were politically engaging with digital technologies as early as 2005. It was former US president Mr Barack Obama, though, who is regarded as the

pioneer of Internet campaigning for using the web extensively for both his 2008 and 2012 primary and presidential campaigns. Today, having an online presence is almost non-negotiable for political parties. In this regard, Gibson and Ward (2009) offer three reasons why political parties choose to be online: for intra-party communication among its members; to stimulate conversations between itself and other political parties; and for systemic reasons where it like any other progressive organisation desire to capitalise on the Internet's great mobilising potential. An ongoing criticism, however, of the Internet for web campaigning is that it persists to be a medium for the "already-engaged". The WWW was merely converting the "information rich" into the "information super rich" when it comes to consumption of political information (see Carlisle & Patton 2013: 884; Johnson 2008). Patten (2013: 25) labels this a "reinforcement effect", in agreement with Johnson (2008: 708) who earlier said the Internet was an "extraordinary tool" for already-engaged citizens.

The significance of the Internet's wide reach lay in the fact that it is said to be highly prized for its reach of the younger demographic - a key target group especially during elections. Authors such as Benoit and Benoit (2005), Bimber and Copeland (2011), Gil de Zuniga *et al* (2010) and Hargittai and Hinnant (2008) support this thought. Katz (1998) first named this group the "digital citizen" or someone *au fait* with technology; and was "optimistic, tolerant, civic-minded and radically committed to change". For Katz (1998), this "digital citizen" was distinguishable by three factors: this potential voter was educated, had the means of accessing and using technology; and probably boasts the ability to use all these elements to communicate. Bohler-Muller and Van Der Merwe (2011: 9) agree, arguing that not only is today's youth "globally connected", they are also a group that can lay claim to basic political rights as part of their inherent "identity". The 2011 Arab Spring revolutions provide testament to this assertion. In those historic developments that birthed on the African continent, a new prototype of "digital activism" or "technosociality" sprouted when technology and social behaviour intersected (Bohler-Muller & Van Der Merwe 2011: 8). Moreover, these younger "digital natives" were accustomed to fast Internet access; and possessed the requisite skills to make their online experience a swift one (see Sims & Jorenstein 201; Sweeney 2005: 169). Additionally, an important aspect underscoring the 2011 Arab Spring revolutions was how mobile telephony

was used to communicate developments from inside these alleged corrupt regimes such as Libya, Tunisia and Egypt (to be expanded upon later in chapter three of this thesis).

Based on the above discussion, a working definition of the concept digital political communication is, thus, proposed for purposes of this study. Although the field of political communication is punctuated with multiple variations of what the term encapsulates, there remains a lack of definitions which fully capture the changing political ecology, fuelled mainly by technological leaps. This thesis proposes that the concept digital political communication provides a dynamic way in which to interpret how political parties and politicians leverage web 2.0 technologies to communicate in a networked digital public sphere. Furthermore, the concept offers an analytical framework for the study of a still-developing fourth age of political communication, primarily defined by an explosion of web-based technologies such as social media and social networking sites.

Digital political communication, then, is defined by the researcher as “all political messages communicated over digital platforms by political parties and other relevant actors such as politicians, ordinary citizens and the media to exchange political ideas”. Supplementary to traditional political communication, digital political communication pivots on elements such as interactivity which allows for earned media. The definition is appropriate because it captures the diverse communicative relationships and online sentiment that exist between individual political parties and their related constituencies. The main elements of digital political communication include interactive Internet-based communication that is not unidirectional but two-way. This relationship is maintained over a single digital social networking platform such as Twitter, where elements such as pictures, text, audio, video and live feeds will seek to complement each other in a single mass-disseminated message.

In practical terms, this definition of digital political communication is in concurrence with McNair’s (2011:5) original (and amended) definition that includes “all political discourse”. The only exception is that because this study is quite large in scope and wholly focused on Twitter, “all political discourse” considers all communication made

by the ANC and DA using Twitter during the 2016 local government elections pre and post campaigning phase (1 May 2016 - 31 August 2016). All discourse includes tweets and retweets by each party known as earned media. In coming to some consensus on this definition, the researcher acknowledges seminal political communication literature as proposed by Graber (1981), Denton and Woodward (1990) and more recently Blumler (2016). By arguing and demonstrating the use of social networking site Twitter as an urban electioneering platform in South Africa's 2016 elections (to be argued in chapter four of this thesis), one expects to develop a deeper, nuanced definition for digital political communication as a concept.

In section 2.9, detail is provided on the current social media landscape, globally and locally, which will seek to offer contextualisation for this study.

2.9 UNDERSTANDING THE CURRENT SOCIAL MEDIA LANDSCAPE

This study is concerned with micro-blogging application Twitter and its utility for the 2016 South African local government elections. Within a section later in this chapter, it will be illustrated why the micro-blogging site is classified as a multi-dimensional social networking site capable of multimedia functionalities. At this juncture, it is useful though to provide some background into social media as a concept to better understand Twitter's relevance within this vast academic ambit.

In their efforts to define social media, Coelho, Correia and Medina (2017:150-151) say that one needs to isolate 'social' and 'media' to understand the concept better. For Coelho *et al.* (2017:150-151), social media, as the name suggests, literally refers to how people and groups of people interact with each other inter-dependently; the media is just the communication medium through which a larger audience is reached. Media, in this context, refers to any form of mass media, namely television, radio and web media (the Internet) (Dwivedi & Pandey 2013). Thus, social media is the "means of communication based on relationships built around communities made possible through the Internet" or 'web media' (Coelho *et al.* 2017:150-151).

The current new media landscape is one defined by the diffusion of interactive web-based and mobile-enabled technologies. Grouped broadly under what one calls social media today, it refers to the proliferation of content-sharing platforms available over the Internet; and encompasses content-sharing websites, blogs, wikis and social networking avenues (see Kaplan & Haenlein 2010: 59-68; Kietzmann, Hermkens, McCarthy & Silvestre 2011: 241). Social media websites are thus distinguishable through their scope and functionality offered. For example, users log onto MySpace, YouTube, Flickr and Instagram for photo and video sharing, LinkedIn for professional networking, Twitter for the sharing of images, audio, video and text; and Facebook for images, audio, video and text. Owing to these sites pivoting on the element of interactivity, users engage in a number of information-sharing activities, with most being content generators themselves. During these one-to-one and one-to-many processes, discussions may be facilitated with other like-minded users who would have formed groups or online communities (Kaplan & Haenlein 2010: 59-68).

To fully comprehend the nature of social media, however, there is a need to firstly understand two basic sets of terminology, namely *Web 2.0 technologies* and *user-generated content*. While the former refers mainly to users being empowered to publish content over the Internet using a browser and connection with a minimal capital investment, the latter points to how users are free to publish comments, share content and contribute to conversations using an array of different methods and platforms such as social networking sites, blogs, websites and other like-minded mediums. Of course, a number of factors have aided this gradual gravitation including increased bandwidth (larger files can be uploaded to platforms); technological tools have become better and more streamlined (content can be posted quickly and much more easily); Internet connectivity has improved since its arrival in the 1990s; and the advent of social networking sites has made interaction with online content more of a natural phenomenon. For Kaplan and Haenlein (2010:61) Web 2.0 technologies facilitate the “evolution of social media” while user-generated content illustrates how end-users have taken to different platforms through being content creators. Social media, in summary then, can best be described as a cluster of net-based applications deeply rooted in the “ideological and

technological foundations” laid down by Web 2.0, making the creating, modifying and sharing of user-generated content (Kaplan & Haenlein 2010:61).

To better understand the social media landscape, Kietzmann *et al.* (2011: 241-251) classified this changed media environment as one comprising of seven different “building blocks”, namely identity, conversations, sharing, presence, relationships, reputation and groups. While all seven “constructs” are not mutually-exclusive, they do allow for a better understanding of the chaotic social media world.

Table 2.1 below summarises this social media framework:

Table 2.1: The seven building blocks of social media	
BUILDING BLOCK	FUNCTIONALITY DETAIL
Identity	Extent to which users reveal their true identity online
Conversations	Refers to the flow of information on these sites
Sharing	As a result of social media being a ‘social’ platform, users’ indulge in sharing information, be it in receiving such information, distributing it and exchanging such detail.
Presence	Refers mainly to when another user is available to other users in both the real and online world.
Relationships	There is a common factor that brings like-minded users on a particular social media platform.
Reputation	This building block deals more a user’s credibility or “trust factor” as perceived by other users.
Groups	Refers more to how users come online to form communities and sub-groups around causes common to each.
Source: Kietzmann <i>et al.</i> (2011:241-251)	

It is important to state that while social media is the enabling technology, a social networking site is the platform using that technology. Social media in this regard consists of “social networks” and “information networks” (Parr 2010). While “social networks” are about “sharing professional or personal experiences together”, “information networks” are more about distributing information. Facebook and MySpace are examples of the former (it must be stated though that MySpace is now about music streaming and artists) (Boyd & Ellison 2008). Examples of the latter include micro-blogging website Twitter and video-sharing channel YouTube (Parr 2010). Kirkpatrick (2010: 66-67) argues that the concept of social networking is not new; its first emergence can be traced back to 1997; and were designed to bring people together on multiple levels (see How the Internet 2019:19). Another definition of social networking sites is provided by Bohler-Muller and Van Der Merwe (2011:1-2) who classified them as “web-based tools and services” that permit users to “create, rate and share information”. The unique selling point (USP) of social networking sites is its level of interactivity (see Nations 2012; Sweetser 2011: 298). Berrocal, Campos-Dominguez and Redondo (2014:66) say this interactivity was manifest in users consuming information while simultaneously responding and reproducing the original message.

South Africans, too, have joined the social media conversation. The *2017 SA Social Media Landscape report* produced by technology companies World Wide Worx and Ornico corroborates this. Social media websites such as Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and LinkedIn have all become an “indispensable” reality to the South African consumer. According to Guerrio (2015), contributing to the rapid social media consumption patterns in this country is the idea of mobile Smartphone technologies fuelling this accessibility. Guerrio (2015:15) defines a Smartphone “as a mobile/ cellular device that can access the Internet and its various applications (apps)”. Its main advantage remains that it can function as a handheld computer “capable of running general-purpose applications” such as accessing emails and responding to online networks whilst on the move. (Guerrio 2015:14-15). A ‘feature phone’ by comparison offers the user basic Internet access but is limited in its “advanced functionality of a Smartphone”. Guerrio (2015:14) draws attention to a

third type of mobile device, the “basic phone” which boasts just two main functions – voice and the capability to send short messages (SMS) (Guerrio 2015:14). A Pew Research Centre study by Poushter (2016a:16-18) found that only 37% of South Africans owned a Smartphone – as compared to 72% of Americans, 77% of Australians or 68% of people in the UK. Furthermore, only 10% owned no mobile device altogether.

In section 2.9, a brief background was provided on the prevailing social media landscape to provide more context for subsequent sections within this thesis. Distinctions were made between Web 2.0 technologies and user-generated content over the Internet. Cognisance was also taken of the many building blocks that constitute social media. The section concluded by referring to South Africa’s social media landscape, including the dominant platforms. The researcher in section 2.10 makes the all-important link with social networking sites and political campaigns to illustrate how the traditional notion of political communication is fast altering.

2.10 SOCIAL MEDIA AND SOCIAL NETWORKING SITE USE IN ELECTIONS

Social media and social networking sites have, over the years, elevated the importance of political communication and political campaigning over the Internet. Primarily driven by content (Du Plessis 2013), social networking sites began offering politicians a one-stop campaigning avenue to create connections, facilitate conversations; and stimulate feedback mechanisms with electoral constituencies. These sites assumed a more central role in election campaigns when former US President Mr Barack Obama pioneered their utility for his 2008 and 2012 presidential campaigns. Within this “new digital media culture” (Graham 2008:248), Mr Obama demonstrated that social networking sites could begin “challenging” traditional communication patterns of “top-down bottom-up” hierarchies (Sen 2012:490-492).

Additionally, Mr Obama’s hands-on approach, using these sites, illustrated that social networking portals could turn into “relationship-building” avenues where political organisations and leaders could “meet and connect with publics where one

might meet a friend” (Sweetser 2011: 308). The phenomenon of “impulse politics” was injected into the political transaction, meaning that social networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter, as part of a “new digital framework”, had introduced the notion of ‘now politics’ into the system (Harvey 2012: 276). For the first time, politicians, supporters and detractors were actively engaging in real-time, two-way political dialogue, exchanging “digital assets” such as political opinions in the process (Washington *et al* 2013: 2). In their study of 450 local municipalities in the US, Avery and Graham (2013: 274-275), for example, found that social networking sites aided the citizen communication process. Understood as a “more open form of government public relations”, the authors showed that using social networking media helped government officials foster better and more transparent relations with local voters. This new type of “participative communication” was not possible before, this time permitting more open ‘two-way flow of information’ between elected government and voters (Kruikemeier, Van Noort, Vliegenthart & De Vreese 2013:54-55). Mr Obama’s 2008 and 2012 election campaigns showed, also, that fundraising and keeping abreast with campaign developments became easier, simpler and more efficient to execute (Scherer 2012).

The ubiquitous nature of social networking sites also mean that information-sharing, including proposed policies, for example, can be consumed faster but with more critical eyes. Users can engage with policies; and voice resistance to certain aspects simultaneously and instantly in real-time. Conversely, these digital avenues also afford publics to manipulate information distributed to them by tailoring it according to their specifications through the clever use of online editing tools. Political advertisements, for example, can now be “subverted” by being “mashed” together to convey an altogether different meaning – possibly even back to the message source too. Another example of how citizens are seizing the instantaneous, mass communication advantages of social networking sites to shape public discourses and organise is through the use of hashtags (metadata tag used on social networking sites to group discussions around a topic) (see Edwards 2017; Milani 2016). These hashtags are then used to mobilise *en masse*, regardless of spatial and geographic location. The *Arab Spring* (of 2011) in Egypt is another illustration of this (Ahmed

2018b). South Africa's *Fees Must Fall*, *Rhodes Must Fall* and *Zuma Must Fall* movements are prime examples of this shift.

The #RhodesMustFall protest first ignited in March 2015 when University of Cape Town student, Mr Chumani Maxwele, in frustration flung human waste at the on-campus statue of Cecil John Rhodes to vent his anger at the latent White racism and colonial reminders of that racism, which he argued, was still very much part of South African democratic, post-colonial society. This one act in no time quickly spread to other South African institutions of higher learning, including the University of the Witwatersrand (Desai 2019). The University of Witwatersrand was also the site where the #FeesMustFall protest movement started when the mostly Black student population staged a sit-in on campus premises demanding a freeze on tuition fees; amid an ever-increasing call for the abolition of historical student debt. Like the #RhodesMustFall movement, the #FeesMustFall protest fast gathered momentum and transformed into a rolling nationwide student rebellion (Habib 2019).

Recent US elections attest to the fact that those politicians who fervently embrace mobile and social media usually win an electoral contest. Mr Barack Obama leveraged social media and social networking sites extensively for his 2008 and 2012 presidential campaigns, including the preceding primaries (Arulchelvan 2014: 127). Current US president Mr Donald Trump, too, attributes his 2016 White House victory to a media mix that involved social media/ social networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter. Both these sites played a huge role in Mr Trump's election by getting his message out compared to traditional media outlets whom he accused of bias towards his candidacy (Frier 2016a). Although Facebook, for example, may have given Mr Trump access to "echo chambers" where groups and communities spread the politician's message, Twitter on the other hand paved the way for the politician to consistently "reach American voters" minus a filtering gatekeeper (Seetharaman 2016). Labeling traditional media outlets such as Cable News Network (CNN) and the New York Times as disseminators of "fake news", Mr Trump consistently used Twitter as his primary political communication message mechanism. To go back to the Facebook issue, the social networking site has since

come in for severe criticism with regards to the sharing of approximately 87-million American users' Facebook data with Cambridge Analytica. Consequently, in early May 2018, Cambridge Analytica announced it would shut down its operations in wake of the Facebook data controversy (Robertson 2018; Watkins & Sutton 2018). Mr Trump's 2016 election campaign was not spared, too, when the leader was, again, criticised for employing so-called underhanded tactics to secure him the White House in November 2016 (see also Bratt 2018; Hedley 2018; Mzekandaba 2018; Robinson 2018).

Even after taking up his position as the 45th President of the US, Mr Trump continues to use micro-blogging application Twitter (and Facebook) as primary communication tools to relay important policy proposals and to announce important political appointments (see Ohlheiser 2016:7; Tsukayama 2016:7). The November 2016 presidential election was also reportedly the world's first all-out Twitter election, with the site offering real-time live-streaming of the election - arguably a first for modern-day election campaigning (Twitter and Bloomberg...2016).

When it comes to Facebook, it too has been gaining global currency as a tool to gauge political communication and its relative penetration (see Wen 2014; Jevtovic & Aracki 2015; Mukurunge & Bhila 2018). In his study of the 2012 Taiwanese presidential elections, Wen (2014:19-20), for example, discovered the use of Facebook as a campaigning tool had "shifted" in dynamic terms with the advent of both Web 1.0 and Web 2.0 technologies. While the former mostly facilitated one-way communication, the latter allowed for more interaction between candidate and potential voter. Candidate posts were now being dictated to by the altering roles between voter and politician in the overall campaign, effectively challenging the idea of the "permanent campaign" and what Wen (2014:22) called "continuousness". Social networking sites - as a result - were now compelling politicians to be on the offensive and defensive 24-hours a day with no break. Authors such as Jevtovic and Aracki (2015:16) and Wen (2014:19), therefore, suggest social networking sites are changing the rules of how elections are being fought; it for them is facilitating a "political awakening" of sorts.

Questions have, however, been raised regarding the democratising effect of social networking sites when it comes to their usefulness during elections. Segard and Nielsen (2013:300) in their research, for example, found there was “little evidence” that social media/ social networking sites were a “democratic arena” for elections. Additionally, Carlisle and Patton (2013:883) observed that there existed scant empirical investigation into the actual “nature of political engagement” taking place on sites such as Twitter and Facebook. Johnson and Perlmutter (2010: 557), too, question the idea of social networking sites breathing a new form of “unstructured digital democracy” into the equation. Buckland (2011) is another author who raises doubts around these sites, arguing that these mediums can actually pose a threat to social cohesion by introducing a “silo-ing effect” into an already “fragmented world”; and such echo chambers, can never be a good thing for nurturing the circulation of varied opinions.

There is also the assertion of the “invisible imposing of issues” being put forth by Jevtovic and Aracki (2015: 15) – which is in agreement with Buckland’s (2011) sentiments that audiences are now being told what they “should” be thinking about. This global deluge of media channels, notably social networks and the WWW, was resulting in the altering of peoples’ thought processes resulting in electorates conceptualising the political world in “media pictures”. New media technologies and digital avenues, by implication, are producing too much information resulting in superficial engagement and less recall ability, attributable chiefly to the rapid speed of communication permitting information to be “scattered all around” (Jevtovic & Aracki 2015:12-20). Commenting on social networking site Twitter’s effect on political discourse specifically, Dewey (2016), for example, says the SNS had “*slashed our attention spans, torpedoed our ability to read long or think deep, bewitched us with false signals of our own social importance and otherwise “rewired” our well-evolved cognitive processes*”.

On the positive side, Johnson and Perlmutter (2010:557) prove that social networking sites are partly responsible for lowering a perennial campaign worry, that of political cynicism. Facebook, for example, was examined and flagged for

genuinely understanding how it fostered political engagement (Carlisle & Patton 2013:884). Similarly, Franch (2013:59) argues that Facebook was being used for political reasons; and focused primarily on individual candidates and how the social networking site was employed to win votes and to mobilise supporters. Dhawraj (2013), too, demonstrated that Facebook, if used optimally, can be used to successfully bolster the image of individual politicians in an electoral contest.

In this section, the researcher expanded on the many uses of social media and social networking sites; and its utility for electoral politics. Internet campaigning was shown to have forced political leaders to cede control to online shaped discourses over web-enabled devices, including portable mobile phones. It was also illustrated how politicians could no longer afford to ignore the wide reach and potential of the web. Brand damage in the age of viral videos is a reality. Politicians could, however, elect to opportunistically contribute to the moulding of these web-based forums. In this way, they will be seen to be more attuned to their supporters and other onlookers who could be potential pockets of support. After introducing how technology and especially social media is impacting daily life and politics, section 2.11 moves the discussion to earned, owned, paid and converged media and how political parties as brands tend to exploit them over social media and social networking sites for maximum electoral mileage.

2.11 EARNED, OWNED, PAID AND CONVERGED MEDIA

No discussion on social networking sites and political communication is complete without mentioning three types of media engagement, namely earned, owned and paid media (see Corcoran 2009; Du Plessis 2013). Within a digital political environment, political parties seek the publicity provided by free, paid and earned media to get their issues seen, heard and read by a potential voting electorate. Earned media is essentially free media that a brand earns through promotional actions that include views, social media mentions, sharing of content, reposting of brand content and reviewing of such content. Earned media has assumed the status of being the new social 'word of mouth' or a new form of electronic word of mouth

(EWOM). Owned media, on the other hand, involves a brand's control over its content on platforms such as blogs, its website and various social media avenues. It must be added, though, that social media platforms are only partially owned. Lastly, paid media - as its name suggests - involves some form of payment for a brand-related advertisement. These can trigger "more earned media" and invariably more clicks and views to a brand's media portals (Du Plessis 2013).

Converged media, on the other hand, has been described as a "technological phenomenon" where the aim is to access content on multiple platforms and devices - or "diverged channels" - anytime and anywhere (Membrillo 2013). Facilitating interaction between users and content providers, this "digitisation" allows for a "participatory culture" to slowly develop where everyone now becomes a potential producer from the bottom-up (Membrillo 2013). Twitter is an excellent example of a converged media platform where text, image, audio, video and live developments can be broadcast simultaneously in real time.

This 'converged media' reality provides political organisations such as the ANC and DA fertile ground to promote its brand through earned, owned and paid media in a variety of ways. For example, the ANC may include an image of its president, Mr Cyril Ramaphosa, hugging old people on a campaign trail, coupled with a 30-second audio and video clip (owned media). Using the same example, the ANC president's announcing of an increase in the old age social grant (a key policy imperative of the party) in that very same video clip may make headlines; and go viral. Additionally, the fact that such a video clip is coming from the governing party and country's first citizen makes the story more credible, permitting it to be trusted and multiplied through mass dissemination (earned media). Lastly, because the party has been receiving so much negative publicity around its officials involved in corruption, the ANC as the ruling party with finite financial resources may take out paid media advertisements to supplement what the president had earlier promised regarding social grant increases (paid media).

Social listening is ordinarily used to measure earned media. Wronski (2015) argues that social media analytics and social media listening comprise an important part of the brand value chain. Political brands need to measure social media sentiment to keep ahead of their game. It is about gauging what works for one's brand and what does not; and concomitantly adapting one's overall strategy. Successful strategising will ultimately feed into both the input and output processes of brand management. There is the added argument that social media has "democratised" corporate brand communications. As a result of the unstructured nature of social media and its related platforms, controlling what users say about one's brand is virtually impossible. Marketing and public relations teams have thus been rendered powerless. What is possible though through instruments such as social media analytics and social media listening marketing teams can anticipate communication crises by observing what is being discussed online; and responding appropriately (Kietzmann *et al* 2011: 242).

Having discussed social media, social networking sites, their applicability to electoral politics; and how political parties as political brands utilise such platforms for paid, owned, earned and converged media, the researcher in sections 2.12 and 2.13 provides an in-depth discussion of Twitter, the main focus of this academic inquiry. The researcher, firstly, provides a brief background on Twitter and how it operates, its many functionalities and why it can be classified as a multi-functional digital communication platform. Secondly, Twitter's connection with politics is explored to show how and why it proves popular with the political world.

2.12 UNDERSTANDING HOW TWITTER FUNCTIONS

Micro-blogging can be defined as "the sharing of short personal posts with users of a common online platform using the concept of instant messaging" (Ahmed 2018). Tumbler, Plurk and Twitter are examples of this social media feature (Nations 2012). To begin tweeting on the micro-blogging application, Twitter users first have to sign up using an electronic mail (email) address. This requirement implies an unspoken

technological literacy that each user needs to possess before joining the Twitter community. Once signed up, users are provided with a Twitter handle; and the platform prompts you to create a mini profile, provide a picture and short biography of yourself. The user is of course free to decide which accounts to follow and which to un-follow without the other account holder's knowledge. Once the user has created his/ her online profile, these become public automatically, accessible to Twitter's 331-million global subscriber database. Users may, however, elect to render their accounts private by adjusting the privacy settings so that only their followers have access to their updates (see Jungherr 2015; Ahmed 2018).

Until recently, Twitter users were afforded only 140-characters to post an update/status. This has since been increased to 280-characters (Ahmed 2018). At some point, there was even talk about increasing the character limit to as much as 10 000 for thorough updates (Twitter planning 10 000...2016). A status update is called a 'tweet'. When an update is tweeted, followers of that user can choose to do one of several things. This includes reading the tweet without acting on it: this tweet now forms part of the user's timeline. The user can read the tweet and re-tweet it. A retweet is when the follower merely presses a button on the panel to distribute the message to his/ her network of followers without any alteration to the original sender's message. Kwak, Lee, Park and Moon (2010: 1) refer to this as "information diffusion". In other words, once a tweet is retweeted, it instantly moves on to other networks or "next hops" that illustrate just how instantaneous the spread of information can be. Another option is for the user to read the tweet and add some text from his/ her side. This is commonly referred to as a 'mention' or a 'Quote Tweet' until recently. This allows for more context especially when one has not been following the digital conversation. To facilitate this 'getting the full picture', the micro-blogging site has introduced the idea of a tweet 'thread' to follow the so-called full conversation. Some users may choose not to contribute to a tweet by either retweeting or adding their input on that tweet. Twitter users could in the past 'favorite' these tweets; this changed to 'like' recently. It is represented with a red heart symbol. This type of action could indicate one of many things, including identifying with the content of the tweet concerned or perhaps showing acknowledgement to the user without necessarily acting on it (see also Jungherr 2015:11-21).

If two users follow each other, Twitter provides more interaction by allocating a 'direct message' (DM) tool for private messages. There was once a 140-character limit on DMs; this also altered recently. Users who follow each other can now DM each other without worrying about a character limit. Also, Indian Prime Minister Mr Narendra Modi used another feature of this facility with great success post his election to that country's highest office in 2014. Twitter afforded the politician to DM his followers without him necessarily following that particular follower. Such an account is, however, only permitted 1000 DMs in a 24-hour cycle. For politics, this will prove a great asset because political parties and politicians need only accumulate followers on the micro-blogging site after which this database could be accessed without restrictions, allowing for its political messages to reach this constituency. Whether these messages are read, acted upon and not dismissed as a new form of digital spam remains a mystery (Jungherr 2015).

Twitter also affords users a 'block' feature on their accounts. For political parties and politicians, this becomes even more effective especially when that party or politician needs to control negative sentiment from troublesome users on their timeline. This in effect is a type of informal censorship or positive public relations that all political parties can tap into. The converse could also be true where political parties can justifiably elect to use this feature to thwart attempts by political rivals to discredit their campaigns on such public platforms. US president, Mr Trump provides an excellent example of this. In a May 2018 judgment, Mr Trump was prohibited from blocking followers because it 'violated' "their first amendment rights to participate in a public forum" (Wolfson 2018). The District Court added that because Mr Trump's Twitter account was an "official political channel", it could not be leveraged for personal reasons of censoring certain users when Mr Trump did not agree with them (Wolfson 2018).

Users are also afforded an option of making their Twitter accounts private. In other words, any prospective follower – like Facebook does with friend requests – will need prior approval from the user concerned. The tweets of 'private' Twitter users

are just that: private and not accessible. Additionally, they cannot be re-distributed by means of a retweet. These private tweets are also only visible to their select followers. Private accounts are mainly created to protect an individual's 'private' opinions and posts; they cannot be retrieved by non-followers (Jungherr 2015).

As part of its service, Twitter additionally offers users basic analytics to gain more insight on the effectiveness of their tweets. Functionalities provided include the top tweet and top mention of each month, number of followers, how many times the user's handle has been visited, the number of times the user has tweeted and 'impressions' associated with the account. These analytics will, hopefully, spur the user to note the strengths and weaknesses of their account; and make the necessary behavioural changes to get more followers and possibly more people to read and interact with their content. For political parties, this is an excellent resource to gauge the efficacy of content they tweet as such invaluable research would be very expensive in terms of budgets and human resource capacity. Another feature Twitter affords its users is the opportunity of conducting live polls, with users free to determine the question, answers and duration of the said poll. For the politician and political party, this could be an invaluable resource to gauge public sentiment on proposed policies and/ or electoral decisions. These polls are cost free also, permitting election funds to be dedicated to other elements of the campaign. Results of these voter mood measurements can then be factored into the party' election manifesto for wider public appeal and approval (see Kim 2019; How to use Twitter analytics: analyse your tweets...2019).

Most social networking sites like Twitter thrive on a facility called 'hashtags' or subject-related categories. All users of the micro-blogging website are free to use 'hashtags' with every tweet sent from their handle. Hashtags make it easier for other Twitter users - local and global - to find the user's tweets categorised according to a particular topic. If voluminous, these topics can begin to 'trend'—or be talked about on Twitter (see Edwards 2017; Milani 2016). Crudely put, it is a popularity survey illustrating which are the most talked about topics at any particular given time (Smith 2012). Here in South Africa, hashtags proved instrumental during the

#RhodesMustFall, *#FeesMustFall*, *#ZumaMustFall* and *#RacismMustFall* campaigns. The *#FeesMustFall* campaign was so successful that former Higher Education and Training Minister, Dr Blade Nzimande even quipped during a *#FeesMustFall* media briefing that *#StudentsMustFall* as a witty comeback to calls for *#BladeMustFall* – a reference to his removal from office (Findlay 2015; Hunter & Mataboge 2015: 4-5). The latest hashtag to catch onto popular social networking sites is the *#ZuptaMustFall* one, a reference to the name of former South African President Jacob Zuma and his close relations with the infamous Gupta family (Zupta) (Named: Van Rooyen's...2016; SONA debate...2016).

Twitter and posts in the form of tweets are not only about text. The micro-blogging application allows users to add anything from audio, video, images and live-streaming to anything tweeted, making the experience a multi-media one. This is exactly what will be explained in the next sub-section: that Twitter is a multi-functional tool permitting its massive database of users to use all types of communication tools and methods to relay a message. For the political world, this becomes especially significant because modern-day politics is fast becoming about the visual spectacle of text, image, video, audio and now event live streaming.

2.13 TWITTER IS A MULTI-FUNCTIONAL, SYNCHRONOUS AND ASYNCHRONOUS TOOL

Twitter can also be considered a multi-functional, converged communication tool because it allows for simultaneous multimedia capabilities such as sharing text, images, audio, video and information-laden links to external websites. As observed in the 2016 US presidential election, the micro-blogging site added live-streaming, illustrating it could possibly be the chosen medium for politicians. Users, for example, are now enabled to post live videos using Periscope - a live-streaming application that allows real-time streaming of events. These videos are broadcast “free of charge” from Smartphones Android or Apple IOS software but are only available for 24-hours, after which they disappear (Twitter's live video app...2016).

Another useful video-capturing application is Vine which allows users to record six-second looping videos to Twitter. Innovative journalists like South African reporter, Mr Yusuf Omar, leverage it mostly for live on-site mobile journalism (De Villiers 2018). A distinct advantage of Periscope is its ability to show the user how many people are viewing the stream as it is happens, using just a handheld mobile. Periscope can also be cleverly used by government agencies and diplomats to publicise media briefings. Depending on a user's handset brand, Periscope and Vine can be downloaded from the Apple i-Store or Google Playstore.

A unique feature of Web 2.0 technologies such as Twitter is also its ability to provide for both synchronous and asynchronous communication. While synchronous communication occurs in real time, asynchronous interactions boast a time lapse. For example, a Twitter user might retweet a statement from their favourite politician immediately in real time but that very same user may elect to delay a reply. For Twitter users, asynchronous communications means that such delays may take up as much as a day, month or even a year. Twitter, nowadays, is slowly adopting a mix of both these types of communications. If one is not on the micro-blogging site to react and interact with a tweet in real time, Twitter affords users 'delayed' tweets from a few hours or a few days before on their timeline. Reactions, in this regard, are delayed too (Saylor 2012).

In this section, the researcher confirmed that Twitter is a multi-functional communication tool which can be used for multimedia messaging such as text, images, audio, video and live-streaming. Twitter also provides for both synchronous (real time) and asynchronous communications (delayed messages). Despite the micro-blogging site's many positive traits, researchers still grapple to decipher its true value; and where exactly it fits within the political communication transaction. In sections 2.14 and 2.15, the researcher attempts to de-mystify this conundrum.

2.14 TWITTER AND THE POLITICAL COMMUNICATION CONNECTION

While global academic study into the many uses of Twitter is still developing, one of the earliest Twitter studies by Java, Song, Finn and Teseng in 2007 found that the micro-blogging site was used primarily for news, social conversations and sharing website addresses. Other studies that have since noted the utility of the micro-blogging site include Huberman, Romero and Wu (2008), Krishnamurthy, Gill and Arlitt (2008), Cetina (2008), Riemer and Richter (2010), Galer-Unti (2009), Honeycutt and Herring (2009), Hughes and Palen (2009), Boyd, Golder and Lotan (2010), Hoffman and Ford (2010); and Parmelee and Bichard (2011) who added a political dimension to Twitter by using it to study how individual politicians used the medium to connect with constituencies using sentiment analysis. Perhaps one of the most comprehensive Twitter studies was by Kwak, Lee, Park and Moon (2010:6-10) who questioned its classification as a social networking site and news media platform. In research involving 41.7 million user profiles, 1.47 billion social relations, 4262 trending topics and 106 million tweets, results revealed that Twitter could be categorised as a media form for the breaking of news stories; likening it to closed circuit television (CCTV) in terms of “collective intelligence”. The authors subsequently supported the notion of Twitter being a social network as it facilitated the “diffusion of information” on a “large scale” through tweets and retweets (Kwak *et al.* 2010:6-10).

One of the foremost studies to have used Twitter in a strictly political communication sense was Aragon, Kappler, Kaltenbrunner, Laniado and Volkovich (2013) who observed the Spanish elections of that year. Kononova and Ashkanani (2013) also used Twitter to study the Kuwaiti parliamentary elections. To date, few subsequent studies have since corroborated the idea of the micro-blogging site functioning as a political mobilisation tool. Phillipose (2015:11-12) confirmed this with his expansive study of India’s 2014 general elections where Twitter was indeed found to be an effective mobilisation tool. Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) leader Mr Arvind Kejriwal, for example in that nationwide poll involving hundreds of millions of voters, activated the micro-blogging site to set his own campaign agenda, attack his opponents and to

“enthuse its base of volunteers and supporters” - tweets which at the time reportedly amounted to “verbal swordplay” (Phillipose 2015:11-12).

One of the more prolific authors dismissive of criticisms against Twitter acting as a mobilising agent, however, was Chang (2014:33) who dispelled the myth of voters being “isolated”, arguing that Twitter injected “stable networks” into the equation where people could now discuss, deliberate and circulate political ideas. Using the example of “photo evidence” or “*injungshat nori*” (in South Korean), Chang (2014) illustrates how voters clicked pictures of themselves outside polling stations soon after voting. These were then posted to Twitter encouraging others to exercise their right; Chang (2014: 33) dubbed this “social approval”. So effective was this gesture that Chang (2014: 31) noted in his research (on the South Korean polls) that Twitter had indeed displayed a mobilising effect, recognising how the site had encouraged young people in their 20s and 30s to go and vote two hours before closing time. Recently, de Zúñiga, Bachmann and Hsu (2014) and Riad, Metwaly, Negm and Gouda (2017:18) showed that interacting on platforms such as Twitter provides the necessary impetus for active political expression and political participation in the offline world – providing further evidence to what Bermingham and Smeaton (2011), Franch (2013) and Chang (2014) had observed earlier.

Much earlier, there was swirling debate around Twitter’s efficacy on predicting actual electoral outcomes. Franch (2013: 59), for example, argues that Twitter acts as a “successful” barometer to “predict electoral outcomes”. Early in the development of Twitter literature, Gayo-Avello, Metaxas and Mustafaraj (2011: 6) found in their observation of the 2010 US midterm elections that Twitter cannot predict election outcomes. Bermingham and Smeaton (2011) disagreed, proving in their studies that Twitter possessed “predictive qualities” when it came to elections. In subsequent studies, ample evidence surfaced showing how Twitter created ‘noise’ around events such as elections. DiGrazia, McKelvey, Bollen and Rojas (2013: 4), for example, concurred saying there was evidence that social media “creates buzz” and activities taking place on its multiple platforms provided a “valid indicator of political decision making”. In their reasoning, DiGrazia *et al* (2013:4) argued that these sites served as

“alternative polling data” that could be used to ascertain “public attitudes and behaviors”. For Franch (2013), Twitter was, thus, sufficient to provide a “valid snapshot” with which to measure “political feeling of the public”; showing what was transpiring politically also. This sentiment is in agreement with Washington *et al.* (2013:4) who deduced that Twitter could be equated to an opinion poll. The difference - the authors’ caution – was, however, in the “scale, synchrony and selection” as Twitter “surpasses” ordinary opinion surveys in scale.

Section 2.14 in this chapter showed how Twitter relates to the idea of political communication; and how politicians were now leveraging this medium more than ever before because of its wide reach, mobilising potential and (electoral) predictive qualities. In addition, in section 2.15, this discussion seeks to bring in the notion that a politician’s presence on Twitter might be related to the news cycle.

2.15 TWITTER AND THE NEWS CYCLE

Perhaps one of the most under-studied aspects of Twitter’s relation to politics is how the micro-blogging application’s synchronous and asynchronous design allows for its value to be exploited by the political world. Apart from personal Twitter accounts giving politicians access to other politicians and potential voters, the micro-blogging application, more importantly, gives politicians unbridled access to news agenda-setting journalists. For example, a 2016 Swiss study by Rauchfleisch and Metag (2016) found that politicians were more communicative towards journalists and the media over Twitter; and this more than justified their rationale for being on such a platform. The assumption is that while journalists need content to fill up precious airtime and expensive broadsheets, politicians view the relationship as a “symbiotic” one where any coverage is good, free publicity – earned media in another sense (see Jacobs & Wasserman 2018).

Twitter has, thus, become synonymous with the place where major new stories first break, feeding the rest of the news cycle across traditional and non-traditional mediums. When Mrs Hillary Clinton needed to share the news of her impending run for the US presidency in 2016, her media conference was nothing more than a

simple 140-character tweet. Choosing the immediate, synchronous communicative power of Twitter to confirm “I’m running for president...everyday Americans need a champion, and I want to be that champion” (Gunn 2017:5); Mrs Clinton’s single tweet shaped media stories across a wide cross-section of media platforms that day. This 2015 event proves again that a political connection exists between Twitter and the news cycle process and why politicians increasingly use Twitter more than other media avenues to communicate fresh and sometimes ‘breaking’ news stories. In the case of current US President Mr Donald Trump, Twitter became that news agenda-setting medium, one that could challenge mainstream media narratives; and one that could instead generate altogether different news feeds minus editorial gatekeeping (Guzman 2016; Ingram 2017).

Earlier, Twitter was confirmed to be a mobilising platform for potential voters and a portal that could possibly predict voter sentiment (see section 2.14). Diehl, Weeks and Zuniga (2015:15), however, added another important element to the picture: that of possible political persuasion among both political and apolitical users. For the political world, this is ground-breaking: that news consumption over Twitter directly correlates with political persuasion - with many online political discussions leading to offline conversations. Valeriani and Vaccari (2015:29-30), additionally, show that even “accidental exposure” to news derived over social media platforms like Twitter has an impact on users’ online and offline political participation. Using empirical evidence from their study involving Germany, Italy and the United Kingdom in the 2014 European Parliament elections, the authors show that voter apathy and general disillusionment with voting processes have been further reduced with this online “accidental exposure” capable of stirring political interest even in the disinterested. Remarkably, this idea received much support in the early stages of Twitter research. Parmelee and Bichard’s (2012: 141-166) study, for example, found that Twitter conversations were the “most popular” for engaging in political persuasion. Topics usually brought up in the so-called twitter-sphere were followed through on talk shows, news stories and other fora. Parmelee (2013:2-17) later demonstrated that Twitter has a track record of “being persuasive” to shape public opinion especially when tweets generated by politicians were empirically proven to lead to agenda-building.

2.15.1 How much news then is derived from Twitter

A February 2016 study of 3760 American adults by the Pew Research Centre confirmed that 91% of citizens learned about an impending election from a multitude of media sources (Gottfried, Barthel, Shearer and Mitchell 2016: 1 – 22). Of the 11 sources cited, cable news or satellite television scored the highest – at 24% - followed by social media (14%), local television (14%), news websites and related applications (13%); and radio (11%). Some 83% of younger Americans aged 18 – 29 received their election news predominantly from social media (35%); and then other sources. News websites were listed as the second most important source for this group at 18%. The primary election news source for Americans aged 30 to 49 remained cable/ satellite television news (21%), news websites and applications (19%); and then social media (15%). Americans in the older age groups (50 to 64 and 65+) chose cable/ satellite television news as their primary elections information hub (25% and 43% respectively). Social media remarkably for these two age demographics featured fairly low on the media source hierarchy, 5% for those aged 50 to 64; and 1% for those in the 65+ age band. These results illustrate again that social media and online news websites accessed using convenient mobile applications are the preferred election news source for younger age groups (18 to 49).

Another aspect of this survey by Gottfried *et al.* (2016:10) indicates that social networking site (SNS) users were more likely to receive election-related information from these portals; and would rather not be distributors in the information-sharing chain. Only 18% of surveyed users claimed to have shared election-related news on their SNS profiles by posting, commenting or replying. The survey further found that people in a higher socioeconomic bracket were “more likely” to use social networking sites. Facebook - and not Twitter - was the preferred SNS of choice for users to learn about an election; 37% of those surveyed confirmed this. Additionally, results proved that people (41%) who received election-related news did so from more than a single

SNS source. Table 2.2 below illustrates which social media site was accessed by Americans to learn about the 2016 elections:

Table 2.2: Percentage of US adults who learned about the 2016 American election	
SNS SOURCE	PERCENTAGE
Facebook	37%
You Tube	11%
Twitter	9%
Google Plus	6%
Reddit	3%
Instagram	3%
Snapchat	2%
LinkedIn	2%
Tumblr	1%
Vine	1%
SOURCE: See Gottfried <i>et al.</i> (2016: 11)	

It was confirmed in this section that there does indeed exist a close relationship between why politicians choose to communicate over Twitter; and how the prevailing news cycle impacts this transaction. The researcher in section 2.16 uses the US presidential elections – notably Mr Trump’s 2016 election – to further illustrate this.

2.16 TWITTER, POLITICAL COMMUNICATION AND THE NEWS CYCLE

While Mr Obama may be credited with infusing social media and social networking sites into the election campaigning maelstrom, the political relevance of Twitter can be attributed to his successor, Mr Trump. Twitter has become one of the most important political communication mediums of the present age. What is said here gets noticed (see Landers 2017). News organisations watch the tweets of prominent politicians for a fresh, sometimes ‘breaking’ story (see Dadoo 2018:91). When Mr

Trump tweets, the world takes notice. It becomes a story and is quoted across all local and global media outlets. The fact that these mini statements are tweeted using 140-characters from a verified (blue badge) Twitter Trump account, gives the news-grabbing statements more credibility. Additionally, Mr Trump, through his Twitter account, sought to control the news cycle coming out of his 2016 primary and presidential campaign. This shaping of the news cycle persisted even after Mr Trump took office in January 2017 (see Trump credits social media...2016; Manjoo 2016; McTernan 2016; Miller & Altman 2016; Omar 2016).

There has been the suggestion that the reason why US President Mr Donald Trump turned to Twitter and Facebook, in the first place, was because traditional media outlets such as the New York Times, CNN and the Washington Post lacked credibility (Stelter & Disis 2016). Owing to these social networking sites offering Mr Trump direct control over his messages, Facebook posts and random tweeting became the politician's strategy of by-passing traditional gatekeepers. Controlling what he said through his posts on these platforms ensured no so-called fake news diluted his political messages. The concept of *fake news* was one of Mr Trump's chief issues with contemporary traditional media avenues (Frizell, Miller, Rebala & Wilson 2017: 36-39). There were, however, rampant allegations of fake news contaminating the political communication space throughout the US election cycle, especially on Facebook (Allcott & Gentzkow 2017; Flaxman, Goel & Rao 2016). The fake news allegations were serious enough to warrant Facebook founder, Mr Mark Zuckerberg, to issue a statement denouncing reports of these modern-day propaganda-generating mediums (Ingram 2017). According to Bird (2017), fake news can be defined as a form of "deliberate propaganda" with a "deliberate political agenda". It was used during war and peace times; and is mostly used nowadays for commercial aims (see also Marwick & Lewis 2017: 46-49).

The 2016 US election demonstrated, also, how social media and social networking sites carried the agenda of mainstream media, showing a regression in terms of media agenda-setting. There has been a similar narrative emerging in South Africa, that media outlets such as the main television players like African News Agency (ANN7), ENCA and the public broadcaster, SABC come with their own ideological

biases (see African Media Barometer: South Africa 2018...2019:24). While channels like the SABC and ANN7 are widely regarded as pro-ANC mouthpieces, ENCA on the other hand is considered as too anti-transformation with its constant criticism of government (see Andersen 2018; TheMikeAppel 2018; Modjadji & Blignaut 2019). The three are, thus, said to suffer a credibility deficit (see DluDlu 2017; Harber 2018). This is perhaps one of the reasons political parties and their politicians are increasingly taking to social media and web-based technologies to structure their own narrative, devoid of third party editorial gate-keeping (see Guzman 2016). A disclaimer worth mentioning, though, is that while the US has a plurality of diverse media, the South African landscape is far from being that developed and ideologically-varied.

Following the Arab Spring revolution in Egypt in 2011, Riad, Metwaly, Negm and Gouda (2017:14-22) found that Egyptians now trusted social media platforms more for their daily informational consumption needs compared to mainstream traditional media channels whom they accuse of “bias”. In more recent times, the death of former liberation icon, Mrs Winnie Madikizela-Mandela, in April 2018 generated a wave of negative publicity from ‘traditional’ media outlets such as the New York Times and South African media. To counter the negative narrative that the former wife of Mr Nelson Mandela was a killer and a “tarnished leader of South Africa’s liberation”, an “amorphous” Black Twitter collective of Black Twitter subscribers used the micro-blogging application to neutralise this sentiment. Using creative hashtags like #MotheroftheNation, the ‘Black Twitter’ diaspora from countries afar as the US, UK and some African countries “reframed and re-positioned” Mrs Mandela’s legacy by sharing videos, fact sheets and historical first-hand stories of the late leader’s achievements (Rewriting history: Twitter’s reinvention of Winnie...2018). Soon enough, the initial negative narrative that first emerged in traditional media during the first few days of Mrs Mandela’s passing had dissipated almost completely by the time her official memorial and funeral had taken place (see Kirby 2018). Dadoo (2018:73-100) also recently showed how social media, especially Twitter, can be successfully used to counter decades-long pro-Israeli “flawed” mainstream media sentiment through the clever use of hashtags such as #GazaUnderAttack, #ShootingBack, #AhavaCrimes and #HungryForFreedom. In this respect, platforms

such as You Tube, Facebook and Twitter were “able to circumvent Israeli checkpoints and other restrictions” to give the modern world a window into the horrors of “occupation, siege, colonialism and apartheid” from Palestine, a facility that was previously unavailable (Dadoo 2018:73-100).

2.17 AN ACCEPTED WORKING DEFINITION OF TWITTER FOR THIS STUDY WITHIN THE CONTEXT OF DIGITAL POLITICAL COMMUNICATION

Based on the above discussion, the researcher is in concurrence that within the context of digital political communication, Twitter functions primarily as “a converged, multi-functional, multi-media broadcast platform for the synchronous and asynchronous communication of political ideas”. It facilitates the communication of political ideas digitally. Twitter for this study will, thus, be argued from a cultural phenomenon perspective in that one will be looking for elements such as the popularity of using such a medium; tweets are readily available using basic Google searches; data can be easily retrieved; the Twitter application interface (API) is more open and accessible; and the fact that it is a familiar platform (see Ahmed 2015a; Ahmed 2015b; Ahmed & Bath 2015). The researcher links the analysis of Twitter to ‘urban electioneering’ in chapter four.

2.18 SUMMARY

In this chapter, the idea of political communication and how the term has evolved over decades of scholarship - the four ages - was discussed. Today, it is impossible to dissociate political communication from rapid technological advances being made, especially when social media and social networking sites are being harnessed for campaigning purposes. The Internet has signaled the Fourth Age of political communication, with social media outlets such as Facebook, YouTube, Instagram and Twitter redefining this relationship between what, how and when politicians communicate to voting publics. Brought within the ambit of this chapter were the many branches of political communication, namely political advertising, political

marketing and political public relations. A distinction was furthermore made between rhetoric and propaganda. Within this chapter, it was indicated also how political communication fits into the digital and social media landscapes.

To help distinguish between the often confused terminologies, distinctions were made and definitions provided for both social media and social networking sites. It was argued and substantiated why Twitter – the focus of this study – will be classified as a social networking site. For this doctoral study, the researcher adopted the all-encompassing term digital political communication to illustrate a still-emerging intersection between political communication and technology. The researcher also sought to understand how Twitter functions, including why it is regarded as a multi-functional communication platform. It was, therefore, established that politicians and political parties leverage this multi-functionality coupled with its cost effectiveness and other notable characteristics to make it an integral element of their media mix. Additionally, it was deduced that Twitter can indeed be regarded as a medium for the communication of political ideas.

In chapter 3, the focus shifts to the theoretical framework of this study, namely seminal author, John Petrocik's (1996) classical issue ownership theory.

CHAPTER 3: CONCEPTUALISING ISSUE OWNERSHIP THEORY WITHIN THE CONTEXT OF THE STUDY

3.1 INTRODUCTION

Chapter 3 of this thesis aims to address RESEARCH QUESTION 1, namely: what are the theoretical criteria of party-political issue ownership within the context of digital political communication over micro-blogging site, Twitter?

In chapter three, the *digital political communication* concept is extended to issue ownership within the context of an urban electioneering platform (to be expanded upon in chapter four). As illustrated in chapter two, election campaigns are increasingly being fought in non-traditional media spaces found over the Internet. The dialogic and interactive nature of non-traditional spaces such as social media and social networking sites means a party's issues can now be discussed and debated in an open 'networked' manner. This chapter, therefore, aims to argue that during election campaigns political parties base their rhetoric on ownership of issues - for which ownership theory will form the foundation. Chapter three begins by looking at the concept of issue ownership; the many sources, dimensions and drivers of issue ownership theory; the media's overall role in generating issue ownership for political entities; the trespassing of owned and converged issues; and reflections on previous issue ownership studies and deficiencies observed. Issue ownership is then located within a South African context, reflecting briefly on voting patterns in this country; and how election campaigning has been promoted post-1994. The chapter ends by comparing issue ownership established through conventional means and its gradual gravitation towards digital.

3.2 ISSUE OWNERSHIP THEORY

It is important to locate the genesis of issue ownership, asking questions such as *where did issue ownership come from* and *was issue ownership always related to*

elections? In the first sub-section tracing Petrocik's (1996) classical issue ownership theory; a brief discussion is facilitated on how issue ownership has evolved from political concept to theory.

3.2.1 Issue ownership from concept to theory

Issue ownership is a party political concept first established outside of election campaigns. Although non-political actors can be considered competent or associated with an issue, issue ownership literature illustrates that the "ambiguous" concept has only been used for political parties (Budge 2015:761; Walgrave 2011). This is in agreement with the seminal work of Budge and Farlie (1983: 287) whose salience theory first implicitly asserted that issue ownership was always going to be associated with political parties and elections by extension. Their original research was primarily premised on voters acknowledging there would always be one party "much more dependable" than others when it came to "desired objectives" (Budge & Farlie 1983:287).

Endeavouring to trace the historical development of saliency and its concomitant relationship with issue ownership in political communication, Budge (2015) much later provides evidence that issue ownership did indeed have its origins in salience studies. Ideas around which issues received more attention than others surfaced far back as 1930 when US editors needed to quantify newspaper space devoted to American foreign policy. Similar content analyses-based studies followed in 1939 (Berelson 1971), including a subsequent study of the 1940 US presidential elections to gauge how much publicity was given to opposition candidates (Berelson, Lazarsfeld & Gaudet 1944). When coding exercises began to further develop and understanding whole sentences as quantifiable units regularised, there was a shift in thinking. One of the major breakthroughs in this regard came when, in 1976, a 22-category template was developed by Robertson (1976) using British election manifestoes over the period 1922 to 1974. Robertson's (1976:61-65) research was "highly influential" for another reason though: it led to saliency moving past coding to "selective emphases" and parties' ideological linkages coming into the issue

ownership discourse. Saliency, through Robertson's (1976) study, had now become a *bona fide* scholarly concept (Budge 2015: 767); and was widely attributed to have "refined" the term issue ownership as one knows it today. At the time of Budge and Farlie's (1983) study, issue ownership was increasingly being used in political research. Petrocik's (1996) eventual coining of issue ownership theory more than a decade later only sought to popularise the concept in subsequent election campaigning literature. Numerous empirical studies, thus, confirm this; that issue ownership is important for election campaigns (please see Ansolabehere & Iyengar 1994; Bellucci 2006; Benoit & Hansen 2004; Green-Pedersen & Mortensen 2007 and Therriault 2011 as further examples).

Studies spanning several decades show that election campaigns are impacted by a multitude of factors including party identification (Berelson, Lazarsfeld & McPhee 1954), ideological biases (Gelman & King 1993), economic appraisals (Vavreck 2009), policy assessments (Johnson, Blais, Brady & Crete 1992), ethnic and race matters (Mendelberg 2001), gender persuasions (Kahn & Goldenberg 1991), political candidate image constructions (Druckman, Jacobs & Ostermeier 2004) and wider electoral emotional appeals (Brader 2006). Rooted in agenda-setting and priming theories, issue ownership theory has its genesis in salience theory, voter identification studies, voting analyses and political issues research (Budge & Farlie 1983; Cha, Suh & Kim 2015: 309). Using his "Dominance" or "Dispersion" model, William Riker (1993) further asserted that political parties campaign on issues they have "dominance" over. Within the 'dominance' framework, parties who are authoritative on certain issues will seek to bring these "to the fore"; their rivals will subsequently abandon the issue (Aragones, Castanheira & Giani 2015: 71). The 'dispersion' framework, on the other hand, witnesses both dominant and less-dominant parties drop an issue completely if no outright ownership can be claimed. This is in agreement with Budge and Farlie's (1983) "salience theory" which first claimed that parties will campaign on issues they are strong on; and Stokes' (1963: 368-377) well-cited "valence model".

For this doctoral study, seminal author John Petrocik's (1996) definition of issue ownership is used as it is best suited to explain how political parties emphasise and downplay messages in election cycles. Petrocik (1996) uses the 1980 United States (US) presidential polls to illustrate that political parties "owned" a set of electoral issues; and are better at "handling" these issues than their political opponents. Issue 'handling' is about "intuitive appeal" (Hayes 2004: 1-2); and how this "handling" or associated historical dominance helps political parties establish themselves as brands. This "handling" subsequently acts as a "credibility" heuristic which assists voters when it comes to electoral choices (Holian 2004: 98; Petrocik 1996: 826). Campbell *et al* (1960: 170), however, reasoned that three preconditions needed to first exist before this happened, namely the voter needs to be aware of the issue; the issue should be important to this voter; and there should exist a natural expectation from the voter that only a particular candidate can handle the issue better than others. Maximum impact will be negated should any one of these factors be absent. In this respect, framing election issues was important.¹

In this introductory section on issue ownership theory, an appraisal was given on the genesis of the issue ownership concept; and how it has since been adapted for electoral contexts. As shown here, issue ownership was mostly being harnessed for political research purposes until seminal author John Petrocik theoretically developed issue ownership theory in 1996. The basic premise of issue ownership theory argues that political parties are brands charged with building reputations over time. During this bottom-up credibility-nurturing phase, issues become entrenched with certain political parties; and that party is considered more adept at 'handling' some issues over others. How the party handles or mishandles these issues over time determines that party's overall reputation. In order to understand just how issue ownership theory derives its name, it is integral to first look at how Petrocik (1996:828) focused on the various sources and dimensions underscoring issue ownership. Sub-sections 3.2.2 and 3.2.3 speak to these matters.

3.2.2 Sources of issue ownership

In his theory, Petrocik (1996:828) identifies two original sources of issue ownership, namely a party's previous electoral record; and its constituency. For any political party, winning political power is the ultimate aim. In order for this to be realised, it has to rely on its record of delivery while in government. If it has delivered successfully, that political party can then leverage such "handling" to campaign for extended political power. A party's core constituency is another important element of the issue ownership electoral transaction. In the case of South Africa's governing ANC, the "social basis" of a party becomes an important issue ownership (source) driver. When viewed on the left-right ideological political axis, the ANC will continue to be a pro-poor, mass-based party for the country's previously disenfranchised millions. It is this very constituency or "social basis" that will consistently mobilise to ensure the party is elected into office. For South Africa's mainly Black African population, identifying with the ANC as a liberator and then a political entity counts more as it is the party which reportedly gave Black people back their dignity post-1994, a key issue-driving force behind its support (see Ferree 2011). Maseti (2011: 58-59), therefore, labels this phenomenon a "captive constituency". Twenty-five years after democracy, the party is still strongly associated with the country's 1994 liberation project; and why its core base remains the marginalised Black African.

Expanding Petrocik's (1996) original but self-limiting conceptualisation of these issue ownership sources, Stubager and Slothuus (2013) later suggested more inclusions. Using the 2007 Danish elections as their canvas, Stubager and Slothuus (2013: 567-588) found partisanship, attitudes, perceived real-world developments and constituency-based ownership all exacted different effects on voter perceptions. For them, issue ownership was more than just narrow once-off "expressions of partisanship and attitudes". These supplementary issue ownership sources consider other factors which exert subtle pressures on a voter's mind.

In their quest to streamline Petrocik (1996) and Stubager and Slothuus's (2013) suggestions on the varying sources of issue ownership, De Bruycker and Walgrave (2014: 86) further proposed including "constituency issue ownership". Although similar in approach to Petrocik's (1996) seminal conceptualisation, De Bruycker and Walgrave (2014) preferred going deeper to understand why people supported a particular political party. Importantly for the authors, a party's own communication on issues would become automatic "owned issues" for it. Media coverage resulting from this would then organically create that party's track record. This is in agreement with what Klingemann, Hofferbert and Budge (1994) and Petrocik (1996) put forth much earlier. When a political party talks about its issues in the media, indirect associations are made between it and the voting public. De Bruycker and Walgrave (2014: 86-87) label this the "most oscillating" source of issue ownership, one that mirrors a "framing mechanism" for voters. Media is the linkage between party and voter; and voters "automatically" associate certain issues with particular parties. This is why when newer issues emerge in the public sphere; the media becomes the main conduit for expression.

As per the above discussion, while a political party's core constituency and electoral "handling" reputation - as suggested by Petrocik (1996) - are important sources of issue ownership, authors such as Stubager and Slothuus (2013) and De Bruycker and Walgrave (2014) reason more factors need to be brought within its purview. In fact, issue ownership emanates from factors such as partisanship, voter attitudes, global developments and constituency-propagated issue agitation. The media remains a significant source where multiple associations of issue ownership can be made. Issue ownership – then - was shown to originate from various sources, namely a party's previous record of "handling", how a political party's core constituency translates into issues to be pursued; and how the media is integral to this process. For this study, the following issue ownership sources are applicable: a party's history on issue handling; partisanship; a party's constituency or core voter base; and the media's complicity in underscoring those issues in the public domain.

Several authors insist the issue ownership process is not that straightforward. Issue ownership generation involves another layer - that of being bi-dimensional. This is what will be expanded upon in sub-section 3.2.3.

3.2.3 Dimensions of issue ownership

One of the defining extensions to Petrocik's issue ownership theory is Walgrave, Lefevere and Tresch's (2012: 3) conceptualisation that issue ownership can be demarcated into an associative dimension and a competence dimension. The authors' thinking has its roots in what Damore (2004) and Holian (2004) first pronounced: that there exists a perception of ability (competence) and related associative issues by mere implication. Some years later, Aalberg and Jenssen (2007: 118-120) labelled the associative dimension "issue hegemony" or how political parties become associated with issues and their "handling" of it over time. This "issue hegemony" has its roots in schema theory; and links form in voters' minds which would inevitably impact on "new observations". Associative issue ownership, then, triggers "accessibility" or easily-available information which acts as shortcuts to other judgments about an issue and/ or party. When parties talk "a lot" around certain issues and showing it cares, an inadvertent credibility "associative dimension" is injected into the equation. These "associative" issues are about "spontaneous" associations, "past attention" and how these issues are handled. It provides a "more nuanced understanding" of exactly how issues and parties are thought about in voters' minds (Walgrave *et al* 2012: 771-782).

Conversely, when a party is assumed best suited to deal with an issue, a competence dimension is added. In his study of British and Italian vote choices, for example, Bellucci (2006) deduces that when a voter considers a party fairly competent to deal with an issue, there can be no other vote choice for that voter. This party duly proves its competence and authority over the subject matter.

Building on Walgrave *et al*'s (2012) conceptualisations of the associative and competence dimensions, Lachat (2014: 727-740) later developed an individual-level model of the effects of issue ownership. Using the 2011 Swiss elections, Lachat

(2014: 739) found that while it was important to clearly demarcate the two dimensions, these were “far from always being congruent” and in sync with each other. Evidence gathered at the time suggests each dimension had its own influence on overall voting decision. This is in concurrence with what Walgrave *et al* (2012: 779) rationalised: that associative and competence ownership both affect voting but each dimension remains “distinct aspects” from each other.

To conclude, as much as issue ownership is sourced from a party’s own record, partisan constituency base and overall media attention, there exists twin dimensions of associative and competence related biases. In other words, parties need only prove themselves capable at handling certain electoral issues better than a political adversary to garner electoral favour. At other times, this handling over time creates automatic links to the party - the associative. This managed ‘handling’ over time would then filter through the competence dimension. Both the competence-based and associative dimensions of issue ownership are thus appropriate and applicable to this study. Next, it is argued that issue ownership is further augmented by a variety of other factors, chief of which include party election manifestos, group membership, leadership qualities; and party identification.

3.2.4 Additional issue ownership drivers

The idea that voters use “information shortcuts” or heuristics to make electoral choices is supported by McDermott and Panagopoulos (2014:293-305). There is widespread scholarly agreement that issue ownership is driven by multiple elements, including issues emanating from the election manifestoes of political parties; group identities; how political leaders are perceived by voters; how intensely partisans identify with a political party and its ideology; and other such motivations (see Converse 1960; Vandenbroek 2011; Graefe 2013; Pardos-Prado, Lancee & Sagarzazu 2014; Spoon & Kluver 2014; Kluver & Sagarzazu 2015).

Firstly, election manifestoes of political parties are said to be potent purveyors of issues each party would like to populate in the media space. In this sense, this makes the crafting of a party’s to-do-list of promises articulated in persuasive

election manifestoes important and relevant. Using an extensive transnational study of 104 political parties from 17 countries observed from 1986 to 2011, Spoon and Kluver (2014: 48-60) find parties are receptive to issues voters identify with in their respective manifestos. As much as the authors deduce that this is the case across all 84 national and European elections, electoral context was a defining element. However, before Spoon and Kluver's (2014) study, little was known how political parties respond to voters' concerns around issues; or if they respond at all. In a highly-contested political terrain though parties factor in what voters would like to see emphasised in their election manifestoes (Spoon & Kluver 2014: 57).

In a later study, Kluver and Sagarzazu (2015: 395) declared that election manifestoes are "more likely" to focus on long-term issues a political party perceives it enjoys relative strength on than the opposite. Using multi-wave panel data from the British and German elections between 1984 and 2009, Neundorf and Adams (2014:1-2), for example, find that voters issue priorities "influence and are influenced by party attachments"; and these demonstrate congruence with a party's long-term policy as outlined in their respective election manifestoes. Thus, German and British voters "reward" parties who mirror their concerns; and voters will "update their issue concerns in response to their party's priorities" (Neundorf & Adams 2014 35-39).

Using manifesto analyses of the 2002, 2006 and 2008 Austrian general elections, Dolezal, Ennser-Jedenastik, Muller and Winkler (2014: 57-76) confirm, also, that political parties seek to emphasise issues they own compared to those issues they display electoral disadvantage over. The authors also deduce that "direct confrontation" was more advantageous for parties than "selective-emphasis" on issues. In other words, focus on one's strengths and leave the peripheral issues to one's competitors (Dolezal *et al* 2014: 58). Using the 2007 and 2009 Belgian election campaigns, Walgrave *et al* (2014: 2) additionally show that when issue preferences are repeatedly re-enforced by political parties, voters are most likely to "update their beliefs about their party" – the authors labelled this "evolve over time" - and not move their vote elsewhere. That party's direct rivals will not benefit either as vote movement is fairly "limited" (Walgrave *et al* 2014: 2). Parties, in sum, will act on issues important to the voting electorate (Spoon & Kluver 2014: 50).

Party manifestoes, thus, transform into party-political to-do-lists during election time; and prove to be rich issue sources to be pursued if and when in government. Election manifestoes are increasingly proving to be important sources of issue ownership for any party contesting an election; and how these to-do-lists by parties can be transformed into competitive issue agendas to win political favour amongst the electorate.

Secondly, in addition to election manifestos considered as drivers of issue ownership, group membership – as in gender, race and sexual orientation – are likewise regarded as another issue ownership catalyst. Holman, Schneider and Pondel (2015: 816-829) in their research illustrate that election campaigns are sometimes segmented or “narrow-casted” to target specific audiences such as gender groups. Hillygus and Shields (2008) label this the “dog whistle” effect, or to refer to campaign messages that target only specific segments of voters. In their national sample of both male and female voters to test an identity-based voter appeal, Holman *et al.* (2015: 816-829) find that only women candidates are successful in highlighting issues relating to female voter identity. While male voters’ enjoy some success when it comes to accentuating their positive traits, they remain largely unaffected – proving also that tailor-made electoral appeals work.

A third issue ownership driver is how political leaders are viewed by ordinary voters, leading to the assumption that perceptions of candidates matter. There is empirical evidence to support this assumption; that a candidate’s personal and professional backgrounds have an impact on voter perceptions (Funk 1996; McDermott 2009). The most durable candidate traits voters consider before actual vote choice include “integrity, competence and reliability” (Miller, Wattenberg & Malanchuk 1986:521). Concomitantly, candidates stand to benefit if they score “higher” on these characteristics. The most successful candidate will be the one who embodies all three “in combination” (Miller *et al* 1986:535-536). For example, Dhawraj (2013) found that South Africa’s former opposition leader, Mrs Helen Zille from the DA, enjoyed high levels of all three traits, namely “integrity, competence and reliability” when she campaigned for her party in the 2009 general elections. Campaigning on a

mainly anti-corruption ticket, not only did the party under Mrs Zille's watch manage to increase its vote-share, the DA went on to secure outright electoral victories in the Western Cape (province) and the Cape Town metropolitan municipality – the only province and metro under opposition governance during that time. The former leader's Facebook page was also significantly much more popular and liked by more people than the party's official one (Dhawraj 2013).

Additionally, Graefe (2013) developed an issues and leader's model to predict that voters' perceptions are indeed shaped by a candidate's leadership traits and issue handling competence in a longitudinal study of the US presidential elections between 1972 and 2012. Vote choice was primarily determined by three factors, namely party identification, issues and the candidate. This is why candidates need to emphasise their issues, engage in "agenda setting", play to their strengths; and provide and communicate examples of these to their potential electorate. This model has huge implications for modern campaign strategists as it demarcates issue evaluations as the "most important factor for predicting elections" on election eve (Graefe 2013: 10). Lastly, the model also predicted that as party identification decreases throughout an election campaign, issues increase (Graefe 2013:11-12).

Seminal voter behaviour literature, fourthly, indicates that party identification has an influence over political perceptions (see Campbell *et al* 1960; Converse 1964). Graefe (2013: 11) defines party identification as that "psychological attachment" a voter feels towards a political party. Acting as a "filter" or "perpetual screen" through which voters assess parties on issue handling and overall performance (Bartels 2002), voter identification can also either "block or reinforce" political messages (Walgrave *et al* 2014: 15). For example, during his study of six US presidential polls between 1980 and 2000, Bartels (2002) found that candidate evaluations are strongly influenced by voter and party identification. Such candidates then tend to be favoured more. This is in concurrence with Asher (1992: 200) said earlier; that party identification, issues and candidates count in US elections. In his study of the 2008 US elections, Vandenbroek (2011:1045-1071) found that voter partisanship introduced an "affective bias" into the issue ownership transaction. Moreover, the author's bounded rationality model predicted that voters became motivated by both

“affective partisan attachments” and “rational issue considerations”; with party identification serving as a “crucial bound” on rationality. However, Walgrave, Lefevre and Nuytemans (2007) earlier argued that party identification was weakening, increasing the chances of voters now identifying with issues and issue ownership to assist in voting choices.

Related to the fourth issue ownership driver of political party identification as discussed above, electoral change literature suggests there are three possible sources of political de-alignment and realignment, namely conversion, mobilisation and activation (Pardos-Prado, Lancee & Sagarzazu 2014: 851). Conversion usually occurs when current political interests and ideologies no longer serve a particular constituency. Supporters would then move in the direction of their new policy concerns. Mobilisation is when a political party’s traditional voter base or “most natural electorate” activates into action for that party due to already-re-enforced party-voter bonds on “significant issues concerns” (Pardos-Prado *et al.* 2014: 851). There are always non-partisan voters - voters who claim no affinity to any single party. They can be an invaluable voting bloc for parties looking at attracting the so-called un-decided voter. Protest voting is one example of when this voting bloc can be unlocked; this group can be accessed if and when an issue is successfully and effectively primed.

Four key drivers of issue ownership – then - were explored here, namely election manifestos, group membership, leadership traits and the idea of how party identification is loosening its grip over voters; and its subsequent impact on issue ownership. The weakening of party identification, especially, has been on the increase in recent years. This has huge implications for politics, one of which points to electorates becoming more agile and engaged in the processing of electoral issues. For purposes of the study here, all four additional drivers of issue ownership will be considered. In the next sub-section, efforts are made to understand how the traditional media (radio, television, print) act as an integral element in the issue ownership project.

3.2.5 Role of traditional media agenda-setting in issue ownership

There is sufficient proof that traditional media coverage aids political party issue ownership (see Benoit & Hansen 2004; Aalberg & Jenssen 2007; Therriault 2011; Walgrave & De Swert 2007; De Bruycker & Walgrave 2014: 86; Kleinnijenhuis & Walter 2014). Consistent traditional media engagement in the form of talk shows, debates, sound bite driven news shows and other campaigning initiatives allow political parties and politicians to become associated with certain issues (Egan 2009: 8). Using the 2012 Sierra Leone parliamentary elections, Bidwell, Casey and Glennerster (2015: 1), for example, find candidate debates provide voters with rich information on contesting candidates; and that this impacts actual voter persuasion, with voters recalling the information for weeks. As a result of these positive effects, more money was invested in a candidate's campaign resulting in "substantial impacts" on voter behaviour and vote choice on Election Day (Bidwell *et al* 2015: 31). Studying the Belgian elections from 1991 to 2005, Walgrave and De Swert (2007: 37) found further support for this claim, that issue ownership is intricately linked to a political party's election communication strategy and general traditional media coverage during a poll. This ownership through the media is mostly entrenched when parties themselves talked about their issues; and when journalists covering the story talk about them. Parties will also issue press or media releases to communicate on its issues with the public and news media "independently", free of any third-party gate-keeping (Kluver & Sagarzazu 2015: 382). These "ideal" political communication instruments coupled with news stories and interviews would then activate automatic links in the mind of a listening or viewing public (De Bruycker & Walgrave 2014: 86).

The media's role, then, in promoting issue ownership is done by simply making certain issues more salient than others; it is this saliency that act as vote triggers on Election Day (see Ansolabhere & Iyengar 1994: 336; Bevern 2010; Green & Hobolt 2006; Song & Benoit 2003). Issue salience theory dictates that parties and candidates expend energy only on issues that matter to voters, resulting in "high convergence" (see Ansolabehere & Iyengar 1994; Minozzi 2014: 74; Sigelman &

Buell 2004). Due to the “stable” nature of pre-existing owned issues as compared to “new or free-floating” ones, Walgrave, Lefevere and Nuytemans (2009:155) warn that this makes these issues fair game to competing parties. Using a survey of 19 Western European nations between 1980 and 2010 to understand the saliency of the ‘green’ issue, Spoon *et al* (2014: 375) successfully prove that when the public renders certain issues more salient than others; and when the prevailing electoral system is more open, this benefits the issue in question, with smaller niche parties being the main beneficiaries. Green parties by virtue of being involved in so-called “green politics” become automatic “archetypical associative issue owners” as people perceive them to be “clear” green issue owners (Spoon *et al* 2014: 366). Therefore, it is only natural to expect “spontaneous identification” because green parties enjoy the “highest salience” when it comes to people linking them to the environment (Spoon *et al* 2014: 366).

Introducing the concept of “issue decision salience” through panel data sets from the 2006 Swedish general elections to understand how vote choices functioned, Kiouisis, Stromback and McDevitt (2015:3347-3368) further found that agenda-setting and priming notably by traditional news media had an effect on issue ownership. Earlier, Kiouisis and McDevitt (2008) in their model concluded that agenda-setting helped in the political socialisation process of young voting adults. Aside from conscientising young voters, it successfully predicted people will afford more importance to issues made salient in the news through reports, discussions, opinion-forming, the subsequent strengthening of political ideology; and eventually voter turnout. It fell short only on predicting actual voter preference.

Extant studies support the idea that issue ownership is also a dynamic process where parties gain the advantage even on issues they scored poorly on before (see Brasher 2009; Green & Jennings 2011; Stubager & Slothuus 2012). This means that issue ownership is not fixed; parties need to work harder with every election cycle to retain issue control (Tresch, Lefevere & Walgrave 2013). Showing through the use of longitudinal data on European immigration that centre-right political parties stand to benefit specifically on a contentious issue such as immigration through immense help from the media, Pardos-Prado *et al.* (2014: 847-875) illustrate the media’s

complicity in priming effects; and how that can “trigger electoral change” but will be less successful in changing a voter’s partisanship. The study also cements the notion that immigration as a contested issue is no longer the sole preserve of radical, right-leaning parties; more sober right parties can claim the issue through careful issue management (Pardos-Prado 2014: 868).

Earlier, Walgrave and De Swert (2003: 485) introduced the concept of a sophisticated voter to mean those voters who are educated; can cognitively focus on a number of electoral issues at one time; and then make their voting choice. A less sophisticated voter on the other hand is less educated and is a voter who can only focus on a few “easy” election issues because this group’s political understanding is “fragmented” (Maddens & Hajnal 2001). This makes them “especially susceptible” to the media’s agenda-setting capabilities. Therefore, Walgrave, Lefevere and Tresch (2014:1-15) argue that issue ownership is anything but static - it is a “variable party asset”; and it is the media’s priming of party messages which add to this issue ownership dynamism. Media engagement on issues is, thus, viewed as fuelling the “fluid” issue ownership process (Walgrave *et al* 2009: 20); and due to the media’s impact on voters’ perceptions this medium becomes a game-changer for politicians (Walgrave *et al* 2014: 3).

Not all political parties and candidates will be treated equally by the media though. Natural issue owners will command more of the media’s attention than their competitors (see Baum & Gussin 2005, Petrocik *et al* 2003, Walgrave & De Swert 2003). For example, South Africa’s governing ANC is the party long associated with the country’s liberation; and will thus naturally be linked with this narrative during any election cycle. The main opposition, the DA, has been challenging this recently. As early as 2013, the party has been creating campaigns showing it, too, and its leaders such as the late Mrs Helen Suzman and former DA leader Mrs Helen Zille had fought against apartheid. Suffice to say the ANC questioned the DA’s claims, using the media even more vigorously to stake full claim to the liberation narrative (see Dhawraj 2013).

The media space, then, is where publicity is sought by parties and individual politicians. The dynamism of issue interplay means that some issues will get due ventilation and others will not; consistency is key. The media's agenda-setting and saliency functions are inseparable from issue ownership. Both exist in a symbiotic relationship with the other. In sub-section 3.2.6, the argument shifts to how parties trespass on each other's issues; and how issue overlaps are handled within the traditional media space.

3.2.6 Issue convergence and issue trespassing in the traditional media space

In the previous section, it was established that election campaigns are never static. They are always in a state of fluidity; altering as the vote nears; and more issues surface. Issue convergence among different political parties becomes an expectation. Parties and candidates for this reason will "trespass" issues with the aim of winning favour with the electorate (Sigelman & Buell 2004: 650-652). Ample amounts of literature provide evidence for this phenomenon (see Damore 2004, Holian 2004, Sigelman & Buell 2004; Sides 2006, Green-Pedersen 2007, Green & Hobolt 2008). Parties and candidates are, therefore, incentivised to "trespass" on owned issues (Damore 2004) by either "competitively" re-framing it (Minozzi 2014: 75) or "jamming" the rival's messages (Minozzi 2011).

"Trespassing" issues not owned by any particular political party seeks only to benefit the trespassing party, especially when these issues are primed by the media – as Brazeal and Benoit (2008) argue. In his study of how "ideological depolarisation" impacts vote choices of Denmark voters between 1998 and 2007, Arndt (2014:149-170) finds political parties can confidently trespass other parties' owned issues. Juxtaposing a centre-right party against its social democrat rival on the "universal welfare" issue, Arndt (2014) shows electoral success can be assured if the former "credibly" converges on said issue; and if it is viewed in the mind of the voter as the rightful owner of that issue. Voter perception steered mostly through media priming, in this regard, becomes key.

A party's overall responsiveness to general public opinion shaped and communicated through traditional media spaces is another deciding factor (Tavits 2007). One method of ensuring issue ownership from the "natural issue owner" is through "deliberate communication" with/ to the voting electorate (Arndt 2014: 154). For example, Arndt (2014:167) further states while welfare issues traditionally belonged to leftist parties; it was left-leaning parties who enjoyed a natural "structural advantage" more than their centrist, right-leaning opponents in universally large welfare states. Through competence, astute responsiveness and the negation of "ideological staunchness", left-leaning parties could be beaten "on their own turf" (Arndt 2014: 153).

Furthermore, more and more political parties positioned on the left-right political spectrum are finding it increasingly difficult to 'own' their traditional issues. Jensen (2010: 282-299), for example, asserts that centre-right parties - to address their "structural disadvantages" - can compete with their social democrat rivals on some stereotypical leftist issues such as health and pensions to "limit their vigour" on these. Again, perception is significant. The centre-right needs to indicate that typical leftist-oriented policies such as welfare benefits will persist and be in "safe hands", in "bourgeois hands" too. (Jensen 2010: 282-299). Such parties have to demonstrate that they have "effectively stripped off its market-liberal" clothing; and show that its political overtures are not mere political manoeuvres but that "sufficient policy changes" will materialise once it assumes office (Arndt 2014: 154-167). In issue ownership literature, this "neutralisation" or the trespassing of others' issues is commonly referred to as "issue compensation". Using the example above, this mostly refers to how centre-right parties need to commit to spending more resources than their social democrat competitors on welfare issues in order to win or retain political power (Jensen 2010: 282-299). With any trespassing action, there is a caveat though: political parties cannot "trespass" on "too many issues" – as doing so may result in yielding in undesirable outcomes and the additional danger of ignoring one's core constituency in the process (Benoit & Hansen 2004: 116).

Issue trespassing and media studies literature also provides for a so-called *riding the wave theory* phenomenon. According to this theory, parties respond to an

electorate's issue priorities highlighted in instruments such as election manifestoes and media conversations (see Kluver & Spoon 2014; Spoon, Hobolt & De Vries 2014:374; Spoon & Kluver 2014). Using more than 40 000 press releases issued by German parties in elections spanning an entire decade (2000 – 2010) Kluver and Sagarzazu (2015: 380-396), for example, find support for this 'riding the wave' theory', in that parties attune themselves to the issue priorities of the electorate. Issue trespassing would then become an automatic reaction. These trespassed issues, however, need to be "timely" and "newsworthy" in order to facilitate a "bottom up" process of parties considering which issues are important to voters (Kluver & Sagarzazu 2015: 380-396).

In this sub-section, it was shown that elections - especially for political parties - are unique times where constant fluid issue-generation takes place. The prevailing electoral context was an important determinant of which party is being talked about by which media house. For example, in their analyses of the 2010 UK television prime ministerial debates, Allen, Bara and Bartle (2013: 155-176) illustrate that understanding the relevant political context was a non-negotiable factor in making sense of content generated. Parties have to respond to the external electoral environment they are operating in. If they do not, parties stand the chance of coming across as too "elitist" and indifferent to electoral conversations around them (Sides 2007). Trespassing becomes an almost knee-jerk response to this external environment. At times, a political party even needs to compromise its location on the traditional left-right political spectrum to ensure it is not out-of-step with what is going on around it.

Sub-sections 3.2.5 and 3.2.6, then, concentrated on traditional media, its agenda-setting role; and how parties needed to trespass on single and converged issues. It was confirmed that issue ownership is very much about competition; and outsmarting one's political rivals with a competitive edge. In sub-section 3.2.7, the focus moves to the gradual gravitation from conventional methods of issue ownership to digital issue ownership as is being witnessed over Internet platforms such as Twitter recently.

3.2.7 Gravitation from conventional media forms to digital issue ownership

Issue ownership literature is replete with examples of how politicians and political parties have long established issue ownership in the conventional sense. Before the arrival of Internet-based campaigning methods, the politician's only resource remained traditional media such as radio, television and print; home visits, party rallies, town hall meetings, community interaction sessions; and issue-supporting materials such as media releases, pamphlets, election manifestoes and billboards. As established earlier, issue ownership suggests the media takes its cue from political parties and their leaders (see chapter 3, section 3.2.5).

In this sub-section, the researcher shows the gradual gravitation of issue ownership through traditional media formats; and its transition to multimedia platforms such as social networking sites like Twitter. Apart from traditional media platforms such as radio, television and print, other issue-generation avenues available to political parties and politicians to promote issue ownership of their brands is through the simple media/ press release. The distinct disadvantage of this mechanism is that while parties retains editorial control once the release is issued, final editorial decision-making in the past was vested in media bosses (Kluver & Sagarzazu 2015: 382). Despite this, these instruments are valued for spurring automatic links in the minds of voters once issued and taken up the various traditional media houses (De Bruycker & Walgrave 2014: 86). When these media releases are reported as news stories, the issue ownership process begins all over again.

Election manifestos, additionally, prove important sources of issue ownership for parties contesting elections (see Kluver & Spoon 2014; Spoon & Kluver 2014; Wagner & Meyer 2014). In their expansive study of 17 countries, Spoon and Kluver (2014: 48-60), for example, posit parties react relative to how voters perceive issues in their election manifesto. The 2002, 2006 and 2008 Austrian polls analyses of Dolezal, Ennser-Jedenastik, Muller and Winkler (2014: 57-76) illustrate a similar strain of thought, that election manifestoes are significant signifiers which promotes issue ownership; and parties will react in an appropriate manner.

In the pre-digital media era, opposition parties and incumbent governing parties could never assume to fight the political battle on a levelled playing field. Unlike opposition parties who had the luxury of picking and choosing issues, incumbent parties needed to consistently talk about theirs to remain relevant. In this respect, governing parties could not afford to “shut up” if the objective was to be in the news to bolster party branding (Walgrave 2011). For example, Walgrave and De Swert’s (2007: 37) longitudinal study of the Belgian elections from 1991 – 2005 points to how media strategies were formulated to ensure an incumbent political party remained in the news by constantly being “talked about”, facilitating issue ownership in the process. Conventional methods of entrenching issue ownership in the past, then, include the leveraging of traditional media sources such as television, radio, print, pamphlets, election manifestos, media releases, mass rallies, home visits and community interactive meetings. Examples were provided to show how the media remains a significant player in the agenda-setting and priming phases of issue ownership creation.

Although there exists a voluminous amount of studies to understand the use of new or non-traditional media forms such as Facebook and Twitter in election campaigning; only few have sought to pursue a link with issue ownership. This growing body of work is exclusively focused on political studies, with a very few taking the political communication route. The few exceptions include Barbera (2015), DeSio, De Angelis and Emanuele (2016) and Feddersen and Lanz (2015) who all used Twitter-generated data sets for their issue ownership research. In the case of Barbera (2015), a Bayesian Spatial model was developed to decipher ideological leanings of Twitter users based on who they followed. De Sio *et al* (2016: 1) used Twitter data to propose an Issue Yield model to explain how political parties tailor messages based on a “risk-opportunity configuration”. Feddersen and Lanz (2015), on the other hand, deduced that issue ownership was more than simply identifying with a political party.

At the time of South Africa’s interaction with non-traditional media platforms for electioneering purposes - as will be shown within this thesis - social media and social

networking sites for political reasons were only beginning to permeate global politics, mostly inspired by former US President, Mr Obama's charismatic 2008 run for the White House. Since popularising such mediums for electioneering in both his 2008 and 2012 presidency campaigns, there has since been a viral uptake of these vote-reaching mechanisms. Social networking site, Twitter – the focus of this doctoral study - for example is enjoying more popularity with each passing year. Aside from parties using the platform to publicise their party-political communications, politicians and political parties regularly use the facility to respond to the prevailing media and citizen-steered agenda in a “bottom up” manner. These parties intentionally want to control what is being talked about them in the digital sphere; a platform such as Twitter affords them all these functions (Kluver & Sagarzazu 2015: 381-384).

Individual politicians, too, are doing the same, namely seeking to control the news editorial process with little or minimal interference from gatekeepers. US president, Mr Donald Trump is a good example. As leader of the proverbial free world, Mr Trump instinctively enjoys “global media attention”; and the media waits in anticipation for the leader's next tweet. Mr Trump knows that what he says over Twitter will make the news – sometimes even as breaking news on a news ticker tape running across television screens. The media, for their part, become even more emboldened when using Mr Trump's tweets because they know that the US president does all the tweeting himself. They accept it as *bona fide* news based solely on the fact that it originates from Mr Trump's personal Twitter account, as compared to the official President of the United States (@potus) Twitter handle (Collins 2017). This illustrates social media and social networking sites such as Twitter are now facilitating a shift from mass based communication (using traditional media forms such as television, radio and print) to direct communication with target audiences. Mir (2016) calls Mr Trump's controversial political communication style “futuristic”, the total opposite of the tried and tested method of traditional and more expensive media platforms. Instead, the leader has staked his name to a more “free, urgent and instinctive” avenue such as Twitter (Mir 2016).

This is probably one of the primary reasons why political parties and individual politicians like Mr Trump venture into social networking platforms in the first place:

they need to follow the online conversation and dialogic textures to possibly influence public opinion especially around election time. Seeking control over the content they disseminate without interference from media editors, gatekeepers synonymous with traditional media outlets are no longer a hindrance (Kapko 2016). Unfiltered media agendas can be set with a single tweet or post. Unsurprisingly, Mr Trump is now viewed as the master of Twitter for political communication purposes – using it extensively for his 2016 election. Labelling news output by networks such as CNN and the *New York Times* as mostly ‘fake news’, Twitter – according to him - gives him unfettered access to various constituencies at times convenient to him (Liu 2016). Citing reasons for personally tweeting and not handing over that duty to his close communication aides, Mr Trump regularly raises the issue of this gatekeeping by the bigger media networks (Liu 2016).

As much as Mr Trump’s random tweets are entertaining and at times spur feelings of brazen disgust, they are nonetheless different. This is what differentiates Mr Trump from other politicians on the micro-blogging site though. Whether it is the leader’s comments on women, immigrants, Muslims, climate change proponents, former prisoners of war, ordinary taxpayers or the US political establishment, Mr Trump commands authority on Twitter on the basis of him being an unorthodox and unconventional politician (Godwin 2016). It was this “unique style of language” as Brady, Jost, Tucker and Van Bavel (2017:4) and Godwin (2016) argue that has allowed America’s “tweeter-in-chief” to connect with American voters in the 2016 US polls. Mir (2016) even suggests that Mr Trump has altered how politics is communicated on Twitter by taking the idea of how to build “personality politics through 140 characters to a new level”. Furthermore, the site has afforded the former reality show host space to “launch his political ideology”, transforming him into an overnight global superstar “like no other political leader” (Dicey 2016). Mr Trump is, thus, reputed to have “redefined” political communication; and allowed media experts to scrutinise more how social media can be utilised as that strategic medium to “disrupt, attack and cultivate a strong following” (Liu 2016:2-10).

Importantly, Mr Trump is said to have eventually won the 2016 US elections because of his use of Twitter and his articulation of the *man-on-the-street* concerns - even if

only artificially. He himself repeatedly quoted phrases such as “we will drain the swamp” in reference to the American political establishment (Lie 2016:28). At one juncture during his campaign, he was labelled as the “king of the one-liner” (Liu 2016). Of course, most of what he said was without any substance but people responded to his simple, highly-repetitive rhetoric for reasons of it being catchy and easily remembered. Other catch phrases used by Mr Trump included “crooked Hillary”, “lying Ted”, “Low energy Jeb”, “the crooked media” and “the failing fake news media” (Godwin 2016). When targeted at his political opponents such as Mrs Hillary Clinton, these attacks were said to have inflicted more harm by exposing their weaknesses, often leaving Mrs Clinton on the backfoot when it came to an appropriate response. These simple and easily-remembered catch phrases were then carried over to Twitter and other social media and repeated “to deepen the memory” and negative association (Liu 2016:26).

To conclude then, prior to the 2008 US presidential elections, issue ownership in the conventional sense embodied an almost-exclusive traditional media route. Print, radio, television, political advertising, media releases, billboards, posters, pamphlets and election manifestoes served as the main channel of political communication messages. With the incremental shift to the Internet and avenues such as social media, social networking sites and individual party websites, it is yet to be confidently shown how each furthers issue ownership. Thus far, only a handful of studies have embarked on this scholarly journey; more rigorous academic enquiry is much-needed in this regard. It was, however, shown here how current US president, Mr Trump used a platform such as Twitter for reasons other than promoting a positive image of himself. Using the medium to primarily attack his opponents and critics, Mr Trump’s Twitter account is now classified as an alternative *bona fide* news source. What the president announces on the medium is considered news; and accepted as official speak for the US leader. The White House, itself, has recognised this fact: that Mr Trump’s personal Twitter account can be understood as official source of the 45th leader of the United States of America (Landers 2017).

In sub-section 3.2.8, issue ownership theory and its relevance to South African politics is explored to give more context to the study at hand.

3.2.8 Issue ownership theory in context: a South African perspective

There is an argument that South African politics has not matured to a point where race and racial identity has decoupled from electoral choice. Several authors such as Ferree (2011:1-5), Schulz-Herzenberg (2009b: 32) and Everatt (2014) assert that vote choices boast an “unmistakable racial imprint” with party identification, party images, ethnicity and race being dominant and “powerful predictors” during elections. Labelling the country’s election cycles as a *de facto* “racial census” where Black African voters vote for one set of political parties and White voters choose another set of parties, Everatt (2014:12-16) says South African elections are, thus, unique in this sense. Ferree (2011: 8) further describes South African elections as race-based with “racial identities” acting as “powerful, pervasive, divisive” heuristics embedded in decades of separate race-based policies under Apartheid. Parties like the ANC have subsequently been “rewarded” for abolishing that oppressive system; with voters supporting the governing party as an extension of their liberated identity and freedom. Within such a context, the electorate pays little or no attention to issues, policies or other “politics-as-usual” factors that have come to define other established democracies. It is this rigidity and inflexibility in vote choices, Ferree (2011:59-61) argues, that are said to represent approximately 90% of the South African enfranchised voter base.

In the past, South African political parties such as the ANC and DA traditionally entrenched their issues with constituencies through a number of issue ownership strategies, including traditional news media reports (radio, television and print), leaders’ speeches, question-and-answer sessions in different legislatures, mass political rallies, political advertising, political public relations, media conferences and face-to-face interactions such as home visits and walkabouts. From 2009 onward, television political advertising for election campaigning was introduced for the first time since 1994. Before that, no political advertisements or endorsements were permitted; radio and print functioned as the dominant mediums for everything related to election campaigns (Political parties tune into...2009; Teer-Tomaselli 2006: 432-437).

It must be mentioned, however, that television was leveraged for mass rallies, media conferences, interviews and debates premised solely on editorial newsworthiness – mechanisms that could have aided the party profile building and issue ownership processes. A good example is the coverage given to the Congress of the People (Cope) just before the 2009 South African general elections. Editorial judgment was used to cover the party's media briefings and rallies based primarily on the fact that the party was a breakaway from the ANC soon after its leadership contest in Polokwane, Limpopo in December 2007. What endeared this new splinter group to the media more was that, unlike previous breakaways, this new formation was spearheaded by prominent ANC leaders such as Mr Mosioua Lekota (former government minister), Mr Mbhazima Shilowa (former Gauteng premier), Mr Smuts Ngonyama (former ANC national spokesperson) and Reverend Allan Boesak (former anti-apartheid activist) (see Africa 2014: 104-109; Booyesen 2009: 21-24; Booyesen and Masterson 2009: 387-388; Ndletyana 2010: 32-55; Southall and Daniel 2009: 113). News values judgments such as newsworthiness in this instance could not be questioned.

In sub-section 3.2.8, the researcher briefly touched on the South African political landscape; and how democratic political contestation was not permitted before 1994. This has led to an almost unique race-based politics in post-1994 South African society. Race, as a result, will persist to haunt the current South African political ecology for many years to come. Political parties can compete for votes using issues; race, however, is likely to dominate all other issues (see Ferree 2011; Everatt 2014). To conclude this discussion on issue ownership theory, it is important to reflect on the deficiencies of said theory to provide a more circumspect understanding of this study; and to illustrate possible academic gaps that may need filling either by this current thesis or future endeavours.

3.2.9 Relevant gaps identified within issue ownership theory

Critical engagement with Petrocik's (1996) issue ownership theory reveals a number of shortcomings, prompting a need to contribute to existing issue ownership

literature. These include the theory's biased creation for North American and European democracies, the theory's failure to accommodate differing non-presidential systems, the application of issue ownership to newer non-traditional media formats; and Petrocik's (1996) inability to elucidate on predictive voter behaviour using this theory.

The most glaring criticism of Petrocik's (1996) theory of issue ownership, firstly, is its observable formulation for North American and European democracies. Issue ownership theory is silent on post-colonial societies such as those found in Africa, Asia or Latin America. The issue of single party dominance has been entrenched over multiple decades in these societies. How, then, are matters of a party's historical reputation 'built over decades' addressed or to be addressed; and how can one juxtapose issue ownership theory to different contexts other than the ones found in the US and Europe? A thorough literature search reveals that only one researcher – Dhawraj (2013) - has thus far employed Petrocik's issue ownership theory (1996) to an African (and South African) context. Searches on numerous academic databases reveal that this present doctoral study is only the second study done on the African continent using Petrocik's (1996) issue ownership theory. No evidence could be found that any other study on political campaigns linked to Petrocik's (1996) issue ownership theory has been done in Africa and South Africa.

Secondly, Petrocik (1996) fails to consider the application of issue ownership theory to differing political systems such as those found in South Africa where no candidate competes openly for presidential office. The electorate here votes for a political party, who in turn choose their candidate as their figurehead. During the election trail, these leaders along with others are sent out to communicate the party's views in order to win it more support in a forthcoming poll. This criticism finds support from Therriault (2011) and Damore (2005) who both concur that Petrocik (1996) should have factored in different electoral contexts; and how campaign messages can be tailored to those settings. Therriault (2011: 6) labels this exclusion of factoring in different electoral contexts as "absurd".

This is why this study is important as it demonstrates the ‘flexibility’ of issue ownership theory to accommodate different political contexts. This study also points to new developments with regard to issue ownership theory when it comes to social media/ social networking sites where ‘issue ownership’ can manifest. As will be illustrated later in chapters 6 and 7, this age of social networking sites (Twitter notably) is actually making it easier for political parties to facilitate and allow entities to ‘own issues’ – especially at heightened times of a major election.

A third notable limitation in the literary progression of Petrocik’s (1996) issue ownership over the years has been the scant literature on how new media platforms are impacting the concept of issue ownership. To date, only few studies have taken on the challenge of researching the marriage between new media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter; and issue ownership. Dhawraj (2013), for example, illustrated through his observation of South Africa’s main opposition party, the DA in the 2009 general elections, that Facebook does indeed play a role in issue strengthening and image management. With this doctoral study, more research involving new media – specifically Twitter - and its significance for issue ownership theory will be explored. Moreover, this will also be the first study of its kind to investigate issue ownership in combination with digital political communication; and its intersection with urban communicative environments (see section 3.2.9).

Other significant criticisms levelled at Petrocik’s (1996) issue ownership theory include the theory’s inability to adequately explain and predict voter behaviour. For Green and Hobolt (2006: 3-5), Petrocik’s (1996) biggest flaw is that he offers no “sound theoretical foundation” nor sufficient “empirical support” for what issue ownership theory promises. Petrocik’s (1996) issue ownership theory has also been described as “conceptually vague” and “maverick” by Walgrave *et al* (2011:23) for reasons of the theory negating the existence of an “associative” dimension. At the time, Walgrave *et al* (2011: 23) suggested that Petrocik (1996) factor in a competency and associative dimension as genuine predictors of voting behaviour. This is why Lachat (2014: 727) argues that more understanding is needed as far as the “micro-level” dimensions of issue ownership are concerned. Future academic research into issue ownership has to devote much more attention to campaign

strategies to genuinely assess party engagement and disengagement with select issues. In addition, much more knowledge is needed to analyse the motivating factors of the so-called apathetic voting population as this was a group viewed by many political scientists driving electoral change nowadays. Issue ownership literature needs to investigate this political phenomenon (see Lachat 2014: 739; Pardos-Prado, Lancee & Sagarzazu 2014: 869). Similar proposals were advanced by Sides (2007: 468), who proposed that a minimal effects theory be added to consider issues of voter apathy and voters' non-engagement with politics.

From a methodological perspective, Therriault (2011: 1-2), too, takes issue with Petrocik's (1996) issue ownership theory, arguing that the author's original survey question is "problematic" and "vague". This is consistent with the persistent criticism that surveys are the dominant methodological instrument to gauge and explain issue ownership intensity. Another methodological criticism has been the lack of longitudinal research using Petrocik's (1996) theory. In fact, Pardos-Prado *et al* (2014:869) complain that such inquiry is "virtually absent", discounting any chance of comprehending the true role issues play over long-term issue ownership.

In summary, despite criticism levelled against issue ownership theory, it provides an appropriate theoretical framework for this study. Although issue ownership theory has been fairly well-cited in media and political studies internationally, the concept has not been adequately applied to non-North American and European contexts such as those found in Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Middle East. As mentioned earlier, the researcher could not find any evidence of any other study on political campaigns linked to Petrocik's (1996) issue ownership theory that has been done in Africa and South Africa. Moreover, this thesis will be the first academic undertaking to pursue understanding of how social networking site, Twitter, functioned as a party-political issue ownership digital political communication platform in South Africa's 2016 Local Government Elections. Moreover, the researcher in subsequent chapters will show how Twitter could have been used by the country's governing party, the ANC, and main opposition, the DA, as this party-political issue promotion and electioneering tool.

3.3 SUMMARY

This chapter sought to detail the many facets of issue ownership, when it first surfaced as a durable concept; and how author Petrocik (1996) made the eventual link with election campaigns in his seminal work on issue ownership theory. Deconstructing issue ownership theory, the researcher showed how issue ownership was a competitive and dynamic process that nourished the media agenda-setting transaction. The media's complicity in giving political parties and politicians much-needed publicity to begin the issue ownership political communication process was also confirmed. Issue ownership is, therefore, deemed irrelevant without the media: it needs the media in all its varied forms, traditional or non-traditional. Additionally, issue ownership was a daily battle for political parties to remain current, relevant and in sync with voters' priorities. For this reason, detail was given on the multiple dimensions and sources of owning issues in the public sphere; how parties were compelled to trespass on each other's issues; and how contemporary politics has had to keep apace.

The objective of this chapter was to present an argument that 21st century political communication is linked to issue ownership; and this is how political parties try to claim their political "space" and "brand" themselves. The argument is underscored by the gravitation of conventional ways of issue ownership using traditional media platforms such as radio, television and print (in the main) to establishing issue ownership using digital platforms such as Internet-based social networking sites like Twitter – ultimately leading to digital issue ownership. The example of current US president, Mr Trump, was given to illustrate how a social networking site such as Twitter could be leveraged as a potent digital political communication tool to set an altogether different media agenda from traditional news media.

The underlying argument of this thesis remains that political communication has undergone a number of changes since the mid-1900s. Its evolution from traditional media avenues to Internet-based technologies and applications has culminated in digital political communication or the online communication of political ideas. The

researcher will additionally, in chapter four, explicate on the concept 'urban electioneering platform' and how social networking site Twitter functions as this 'urban electioneering' portal for potential voters of both the ANC and DA in the 2016 local government elections.

CHAPTER FOUR: CONCEPTUALISING A DIGITAL URBAN ELECTIONEERING PLATFORM

4.1 INTRODUCTION

Chapter 4 aims to address RESEARCH QUESTION 2, namely: what are the theoretical criteria for urban electioneering promoted using micro-blogging site, Twitter?

Chapter four provides a theoretical underpinning for the term *digital urban electioneering platform*, explaining its relevance and application to the study at hand. Its introduction here is rooted in the argument that social networking site Twitter served as a *digital urban electioneering platform* for the ANC and DA in South Africa's 2016 Local Government Elections - the focus of the empirical part of this study. As will be argued throughout this thesis, both parties used a plethora of traditional and non-traditional vote-reaching media platforms to access voters, including social networking site Twitter to augment their electioneering campaign – notably in urban spaces. The concept of urban electioneering, thus, seeks to introduce a 'new' dimension to the *digital political communication* lexicon, with this study aiming to provide a comprehensive and sound discussion on 'urban electioneering' and its usefulness for contemporary political canvassing. The outcome is to provide a rationale for the context of this investigation; and to provide a unique approach to the topic which will facilitate a contribution to the existing understanding of political communication.

The researcher argues that a major tool for accommodating the dynamic processes of issue ownership during an election campaign is social media and social networking sites, looking specifically at the concept of a digital electioneering platform which will be conceptualised and defined. For purposes of the discussion on a digital urban electioneering platform, it is, therefore, important to embed this section within the broader context of urban spaces and digital technologies, urban communication, digital urban communication, urban politics; and the idea that social

networking sites function as urban electioneering platforms for political parties and individual candidates. The researcher is simultaneously mindful of the dynamism of a shifting South African local electoral landscape, one that is altering with each election cycle – as will be argued throughout the rest of this chapter.

The chapter concludes by connecting key concepts such as *digital political communication*, *digital issue ownership* and *urban electioneering platform* together to argue and substantiate that micro-blogging application, Twitter, could be an online electioneering platform for political parties to facilitate digital issue ownership. Additionally, Twitter will be shown to be an ‘urban’ electioneering platform for the agitation of party-political issues for political parties.

Importantly, not much literature is available on the inner workings of political parties; hence the interviews became part of the literature review – amplifying the significance of this chapter further.

First though, this chapter begins by situating the *digital urban electioneering platform* concept within urban communication, digital urban communication and urban politics to give the concept more context.

4.2 URBAN SPACES AND TECHNOLOGY

Increasing volumes of literature from disciplines as varied as political studies, communication science and urban and geographical studies perennially suggest digital technologies are an urban phenomenon. Several authors corroborate this; that information and communication technologies or ICTs are “connected” to the city (see Fong 2013; Black, Dafir & Behnke 2013; Suffrian 2013; Dutra, Rausch & Ebel 2014; Abdel-Aziz, Abdel-Salam & El-Sayed 2016). Although not visible physically, digital technologies are all around. Their importance, Krotz (2011) and Krotz and Hepp (2013) say, is emphasised more in urban environments, becoming ‘the life blood which courses through the arteries of urban-city routine’; and is achieved through a

number of instruments such as mobile phones, tablets, computers and other technology paraphernalia. These gadgets have been facilitating the smooth flow of communications for urban residents, ensuring day-to-day services continue uninterrupted. Whether it is media facades such as electronic billboards, giant-sized hoardings or informative, interactive touch screens, urban spaces are transformed into conduits of 'big data'. The urban space becomes the medium through which "big data" laden messages flow without end. It begins to give the city an identity of its own in the process. In other words, messages conveyed within the urban space become an "expression" of the city itself (see also Netto 2014; Gasparini 2012).

Moreover, this contemporary space is viewed as a "new social public space of this digital era" comprising of wireless (or wifi) networks, digital interactive media facades, interactive public displays and smartphone applications (see Abdel-Aziz, Abdel-Salam and El-Sayed 2016:487). These elements impact the public space in one of five ways, namely art and culture; education; planning and design; games and entertainment; and information and communication. This is in concurrence with what Ampatzidou and Molenda (2015: 111-115) assert when they classify the modern urban space as an "interactive smart city". Endowed with endless possibilities, this "virtual space" assumes an "informational" character. Digital media avenues, then, become those tools which enable "interaction" and "mixing" of boundless information within the city space. It responds to the needs of its urban inhabitants.

This inevitable fusion between digital technologies and urban space, however, can be attributed to what media studies label "mediatisation" (see Brighenti 2010:473). Hjarvard (2008:106) even suggests mediatisation be a "complementary" concept for all things urban. For Hjarvard (2008:106), new media, new media technologies and ICTs are – by default - "soaked in the urban experience of modernity"; they are mediated and classified as "urban" or "urbanised media" themselves. Gaye (2005) lends support to Brighenti's (2010:473) assertions, proposing that new media technologies are "locative" within the sheer largeness of the urban space. It is this nuanced physicality of the city space that is assimilated into multiple interfaces of interactive encounters amongst different technologies and urban residents.

Digital media, then, assume an urban identity, inseparable from the architecture defining a city or urban space (Hjarvard 2008:105). As life continues to be dictated to and dependent upon digital technologies in the urban space, a new layer of digital communication is subsequently added to this interface between urban space and urban citizen. Abdel-Aziz *et al* (2016:1-2) labels this phenomenon *human information interaction* or the construction of a “new social place”, supported in the main by how humans, spaces and digital technologies intersect. For Lughi (2013:1516), the contemporary urban space is indeed about a “convergence” between interactive digital media and physical urban spaces. This is precisely what the next section aims to illustrate: that the urban space is a vibrant arena of multi-faceted daily interactions of digitised urban communication.

4.3 URBAN COMMUNICATION AND DIGITAL URBAN COMMUNICATION

The modern-day 21st century city is a complex communicative urban space. Drucker and Gumpert (2016: 1383) affirm that “cities communicate” and are “environments of communication”. In her seminal paper, *Urban and Suburban Communication in a Digital Age*, Drucker (2005:10) 11 years earlier theorised that urban communication was really about urban spaces being fluid “products of communication” which provided an intersection for human interactions and observations – with the emphasis being on communication. Drucker and Gumpert (2016: 1366-1367) later argued that thriving contemporary cities have as their foundation a basic need to communicate, which further drive variables such as social and technological change. In their conceptualisation of this ideal urban space, the term “communicative city” was coined to describe the many attributes of this modern-day urban location. Not only is it “connected, inclusive, smart” and very much “global”, it boasts typical urban features such as “structures and services”; and more importantly people who give the city a sense of identity (Drucker & Gumpert 2016: 1366-1367). An alternative view is that of Georgiou (2010: 346) who argues that cities, as a result of their complex media and information and communication technology nodal networks, have developed “an aura of place-lessness” – something “virtual” to be “commodified” and marketed via the media’s multiplicity of avenues. This is in concurrence with what Castells (1996) proposed much earlier; that cities

automatically transform into “a process” rather than “a place” because of this networked texture of the urban space.

Today’s diverse urban media space is inhabited by a plethora of media outlets which may or not include local and regional media, language-specific platforms; and some of the bigger multinational media agencies. One tangible manner of measuring a city’s “mediascape” or plurality of media is what Georgiou (2010: 343) calls “the abundance of media looking outwards”. This is evident in general broadband penetration and the amount of satellite dishes visible on the roofs of urban homes. Conversely, inward-looking media has “some other kind of story” to tell. Here, community-based media such as community radio and television stations and knock-and-drop free community newspapers would come to mind. It is about news that literally “happens around the corner” (Georgiou 2010: 344). These centrifugal and centripetal communication intersections help shape the city or urban space.

Another feature of the urban space is the visibility of cell phone network towers and the phenomenon of free public wireless Internet rollout (as mentioned and discussed in chapter two), which have become staple features of upwardly-mobile, 21st-century cities. Additionally, because cities are dense spaces with large populations, media monitoring is extended to closed circuit television (CCTV) in the form of cameras and other devices. This is in agreement with what Jeffres and Lin (2006: 960-961) observed of the media’s four core functions of the urban space: coordination, socialisation, entertainment and surveillance (see also Guo 2016). On the latter, one example is the installation of webcams for effective crime patrol and traffic monitoring. In South Africa, these traffic monitoring agencies now have Twitter and Facebook accounts which tweet and post images of traffic bottlenecks, especially during rush hour traffic.

Although this study is not concerned with municipalities and their communicative relations with communities, it is important to mention that local entities will communicate with ratepayers for reasons of image and identity building, to publicise socio-economic development successes; and to foster social cohesion (Jeffres & Lin 2006: 959). Information technologies in the form of individual websites, for example,

are leveraged in this regard. Reasons for keeping pace with technology is twofold: municipalities want to come across “technologically trendy” and/ or for purposes of keeping communication channels open with local representatives. Municipal websites, also, by extension tend to portray local leadership positively; and may be viewed as a “civic mobiliser” in terms of credibility (Jeffres & Lin 2006: 957-961).

Moreover, in South Africa some major metropolises such as Cape Town, eThekweni, Johannesburg, Tshwane and Nelson Mandela Bay have their own Twitter and/ or Facebook accounts. Of South Africa’s eight metropolitan municipalities, only Buffalo City and Mangaung do not have Twitter accounts/ handles as at May 2017. The City of Johannesburg (@CityofJoburgZA), by far, has the most followers, with 518 000; Tshwane (@CityTshwane) 275 000 followers; Cape Town (@CityofCT) 227 000 followers; Ekurhuleni (@EMMInfo) 21 500 followers; eThekweni (@eThekweniM) 44 100 followers; and Nelson Mandela Bay (@NMBmunicipality) with just over 7095 followers. As a practical example, these Twitter accounts are generated to update residents on developments such as pipe bursts, electricity outages and billing queries.

Another example of how some South African municipalities are using social networking site Twitter to their advantage is the onset of removing the “spatial” from traditional town hall meetings to live question-and-answer tweeting sessions. These virtual “town hall debates” need only an Internet connection and a community leader to answer residents’ concerns in real time. These sessions are frequently done by mayoral leaders in the Cape Town, Johannesburg, Tshwane and Nelson Mandela Bay metropolitan areas, who all have individual Twitter accounts. As at 1 May 2017, the (former) mayor of Cape Town, Mrs Patricia De Lille’s Twitter account (@PatriciaDeLille) had 89 900 followers; (former) Tshwane mayor Mr Solly Msimanga (@SollyMsimanga) 131 000 followers; Johannesburg mayor Mr Herman Mashaba (@HermanMashaba) 44 000 followers; and (former) Nelson Mandela Bay mayor Mr Atholl Trollip (@AtholT) 14 700 followers (while Mrs De Lille and Mr Trollip have since been removed from office, Mr Solly Msimanga resigned as mayor and moved into the Gauteng provincial legislature as a normal member of that assembly). Incidentally, all four areas are administered politically by the main

opposition, the DA. The Ekurhuleni mayor, Mr Mzwandile Masina is the only ANC metro head who has a personal account on Twitter (@mzwandileMasina), with 13 800 followers. All the examples cited above points to a form of *digital political communication*, first introduced in chapter two of this doctoral thesis (and to be expanded upon later within this chapter).

Urban communication and digital urban communication, then, were shown within this section to be a tangible reality. While urban communication refers to the seamless communicative relationships that tend to occur in densely-populated urban spaces, digital urban communication was illustrated to be more about how that communication is facilitated through technological instruments. Next, the researcher extends the discussion to how social media and social networking sites are giving the urban space a different communicative texture. The argument is that social networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter are digital urban phenomena, primarily driven by high Internet concentration, population density; and the communicative realities of the contemporary urban space.

4.4 SOCIAL NETWORKING SITES ARE DIGITAL URBAN PHENOMENA

With wireless networks and mobile technology now very much part of daily urban life, fixed methods of integration such as the “wired” design of desktop computers is fast becoming a thing of the past (Abdel-Aziz 2016:489-490). Hand-held mobile technology in the guise of smartphone technologies (and its related applications) – for example - has made Internet availability ubiquitous. Information sharing, participation or even interaction over spatial and temporal contexts has never been this immediate. Today, it is generally accepted that citizens will have access to this online “information agora” at their homes, offices and through affordable mobile telephony; this affordability permits people to be more “socially connected” in virtual spaces than the physical (Abdel-Aziz *et al* 2016:488). One manner of making ‘social’ connections in the virtual space is through social media and social networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter.

There is evidence that both social media and social networking site usage is mostly urban based (see Lim 2013; 2014). Using Singapore's 2011 elections as her canvas to argue that higher concentrations of social media and social networking site usage exists in urban areas, Lim (2013; 2014) attributes this to Internet penetration being notably higher in urban areas. Adding to this is the fact that most Singaporeans (80%) were connected to the web at the time, coupled with high literacy rates; and extensive across-the-board social media use (Black, Dafir & Behnke 2013: 110). In her studies, Lim (2013; 2014), furthermore, finds that the very design of Internet-powered platforms like Facebook and Twitter are partially to credit for their urban tag. With the capacity to produce "vast" amounts of information and accelerate its dissemination at even faster speeds (Lim 2013:19), De Cindio, Krzatala-Jaworska and Sonnante (2011), therefore, collectively refer to Facebook and Twitter as "online spaces" and not mere "tools".

The software underpinning "online spaces" is more than just devices with which users interact; on the contrary becomes the "generator of a space in which the user lives" (see Winograd 1996). This software design, with its multiple algorithms, is the "architecture" of the digital urban or city space where online users are now referred more to as "inhabitants" who "live" in these created virtual spaces. Facebook and Twitter – as examples - are increasingly adding a digital sense of place-making to this urban architecture. These sites are simultaneously accessed on mobile phones for that 'quick bite experience' at any place and any time of day. In the case of Facebook, its design allows users to cluster themselves into homogenous groups without meeting face-to-face. This is in part concurrence with Marolt (2008:118) and Lim (2014:53) who reasoned that citizens would continue creating identities, based in combination on where they physically 'live, play, work and interact' – which would then find expression in virtual spaces. It is this type of new age socialising that is giving more currency to a virtual sense of place-making as Abdel-Aziz (2016:489) points out.

Thus far in this discussion, the urban/ city space was shown to be one mediated by multiple forms of technology. It, by design and nature, is re-configuring the urban space, with the objective of making urban life easier, more flexible and seamless.

Urban communication within these spaces was also confirmed, whether it was communicated through giant electronic billboards, interactive display screens, satellite and cellular phone network towers, or customised municipal social networking portals to keep urban residents updated and safe. Next, the concept of the middle class; and its relation to social networking sites is explained by the researcher in sub-section 4.5. The South African angle is brought in to justify the importance of this voting stratum and why this group was intensely courted during past election cycles, including the 2016 one.

4.5 THE MIDDLE CLASS AND ITS RELATION TO SOCIAL NETWORKING SITES

Supplementing the idea of social networking sites being urban phenomena is the conversation about the growing middle classes who are purported to populate urban spaces. The added argument is that the middle class is a political class: educated, politically-conscientised and technologically-savvy. As a result of this group being politically-aware; and reputed to vote according to specific material needs in combination with or without other voter behaviour heuristics (see Everatt 2014; Southall 2015), the middle class is considered important to any democracy. Globally, it has been shown it is the middle classes who take to the streets, organising themselves; and using technology to amplify their collective voices. Unlike the other classes (upper and lower), this is a voter cohort which insists on democratic accountability and is “more likely” to “press for the rule of law, property rights and better public services” (Endres 2014:2). Southall (2015: 1), furthermore, reminds one that it is the middle classes who are often viewed as “harbingers of democracy” and the “backbone of democratic society” as Jerven (2014:5) additionally puts it.

In the build-up to South Africa’s local elections, many advances were made by various parties towards winning the confidence of this middle class said to populate mainly urban spaces. The ANC, for example, cites the rise of this class mainly due to its transformative policies such as affirmative action and black economic empowerment (see Baker 2019; Zwane 2019 also). The party’s constituency no longer relies solely on poor “domestic and gardeners” but now includes suburban

voters – most of whom are middle class (Everatt 2014:14). Former ANC secretary-general Mr Gwede Mantashe even conceded his party was not keeping abreast of South Africa's changing voter profile. This diversifying new political class was proving a headache for the former liberation movement because it does not know how to connect with this demographic. In the past, voter outreach programmes were always defined by traditional face-to-face interactions through home visits and large stadium rallies. The middle class is one group that does not attend rallies and other such like-minded events (ANC eyes middle class...2013; Mantashe 2015; Everatt 2014:14; Mantashe 2017: 14). A new strategy was, thus, needed (Southall 2015).

The ANC's dissonance with the middle class, however, seems to originate from younger ANC partisans who adopted a more guarded approach towards the party – or at least this is what Southall (2015) argues. Demanding accountability, these young Black middle classes are “energetically” making a lot of noise on the ruling-party's failures using a number of platforms such as Facebook and Twitter to voice their opinions on the party's failures. This is why both the ANC and DA have recognised the importance of these portals in addition to their normal party outreach mechanisms to communicate with enlightened and disaffected partisans alike (Southall 2015:215). During the build-up to the 2014 South African general elections, for example, the question of the Black middle class and their “political alignment” shifting to opportunistic opposition parties like the DA came under question (Southall 2015: 208). Media attention was generated when Dr Mamphela Ramphele indicated she would be taking her party, Agang SA under the DA banner into the impending poll. The assumption was that Mrs Ramphele's apartheid struggle credentials coupled with public goodwill accumulated over decades would be enough to lure the valuable Black middle classes from the ANC into the DA fold. However, due to Mrs Ramphele's “spectacular inept politicking”, this dream collapsed even before it started (Southall 2015: 209).

Realising that the party was losing support especially within the middle class demographic, the ANC in the run-up to the 2014 general elections recruited former president Mr Thabo Mbeki together with Mr Kgalema Motlanthe and current deputy

president, Mr Cyril Ramaphosa to re-capture this group. Mr Ramaphosa's election, for example, at the ANC's 53rd National Conference at Mangaung, Free State in December 2012 was largely viewed as one that would "give credibility to the leadership team" elected there; and one that would appeal to business and middle classes (Mkokeli 2016). Citing former President Mr Jacob Zuma's unpopularity with the middle classes then - notably in Gauteng – ANC bosses instead chose to send Mr Zuma on a charm offensive among the working class and poor (ANC turns to Mbeki...2013; Southall 2015: 211). Despite the ANC's best efforts, the DA's improved showing in South Africa's eight metros in the 2014 general elections meant the party had made inroads into Black middle class households, possibly attracting support from a collapsing Cope and the failed political arrangement between itself and Agang SA (Southall 2015: 212).

Weekly newspaper, the *Mail & Guardian* carried a report in its 1 April 2016 issue where mention was made of how the ANC planned to win over Gauteng's middle classes "who feel alienated from the party or were undecided about voting for it" in the 2016 poll (Du Plessis 2016: 3). The ANC launched what it called a task team of approximately 2500 professionals and academics "who can spread the love" about the party (Du Plessis 2016: 3). Gauteng's three metropolitan cities – Johannesburg, Ekurhuleni and Tshwane - were of particular concern to it because the party had been slipping in vote-share tallies between elections. In Johannesburg for example, the party captured only 52.3% of the vote in the 2014 general elections compared to 58.5% in 2011 (local elections) and 62.4% in 2009 (national and provincial elections). The concern was even more accentuated in Tshwane: losing voter confidence of 60% in 2009 to 49.3% by 2014. The party identified the downward trend in vote-share, which opposition parties like the DA had been the main benefactor of. Southall (2015: 211) speculated losing Black middle class votes to the opposition in the metros would be more of a "major symbolic defeat" to the ANC than the actual loss of votes. In a survey of 17 000 Gauteng residents released in 2017, Everatt (2017) confirmed that former ANC president, Mr Jacob Zuma had indeed "cost" the party "dearly" amongst the province's urbanised middle classes; and this is why new ANC president, Mr Cyril Ramaphosa has been on a charm offensive since his December 2017 elections to win back these middle classes,

especially in Gauteng (see also Everatt 2019; Mailovich, Marrian & Quintal 2018: 22-27; Feketha 2018; Friedman 2019:7).

Opposition parties, especially the DA, were doing everything electorally possible to win over the Black middle class voter in the run-up to the 2016 local elections. Commenting on the DA's 2016 march for jobs in central Johannesburg, for example, Fabricus (2016) says the party's actions were consistent with global like-minded parties who were taking to the streets to voice dissatisfaction. It is these middle classes that were 'bringing down governments' by arranging popular mass protests like those seen during the Arab Spring in Tunisia, Egypt and Libya (in 2011) and those seen in Turkey, Brazil, Thailand and Ukraine. The common thread that connects all those protests was not that they were led by the poor but by more educated elements of society that had technological access; they used Facebook and Twitter for middle class political expression and organisation (Fabricus 2016). In his understanding of the issue, Fabricus (2016) at the time opined that the ANC itself may have been fully aware that its pro-poor policy trajectory was concurrently nourishing a growing middle class that would more likely be persuaded to vote for a middle class party such as the DA in future elections.

The researcher illustrated the importance of the so called middle classes in ever-increasing urbanised societies. Cognisance has been taken by South Africa's incumbent party, the ANC, and main opposition, the DA, acknowledging the importance of this voter demographic to likely drive electoral change in future elections – as was demonstrated in the August, 3, 2016 election. However, alarm bells began ringing for the governing ANC as early as the 2014 general elections. When its leadership met a year later at its mid-term stock-taking National General Council (NGC) in October 2015, the party resolved to “develop” a plan to tackle the reality of the urban Black middle class, most of whom were beneficiaries of ANC democratic material change. Mr Mantashe (2015: 23), in his organisational report to branch members, conceded that the voting electorate of 2016 did not boast the same characteristics of those who voted the ANC into power in 1994. The party needed to understand the changing demographic dynamics for it to fully comprehend

why voters found opposition parties “more appealing than the ANC”; for Mr Mantashe, something had to change – and fast (Mantashe 2015: 23).

Before dissecting the issue of social networking sites acting as collective arenas where digital political communication transpires, it is important to show how South Africa’s high Internet penetration rates aid the proliferation of sites such as Twitter in the urban space. Therefore, in the next sub-section, it is argued that South Africa is a comparatively highly-connected African nation; its urban spaces are digital environments with a high proportion of residents able to go online at any time through affordable mobile phone technology. Free government-provided wireless networks are also helping the country’s urban/ metropolitan residents join the online community. Lastly, the researcher shows, also, just what South Africans are accessing on the WWW to decipher whether or not social networking sites and social media form part of the South African online diet.

4.6 SOUTH AFRICA REMAINS A HIGHLY-CONNECTED AFRICAN NATION

South Africa’s population remains one of the most connected on the African continent. While only 2.4 million of the country’s population accessed the Internet in December 2000 (Ndebele 2015: 1), this figure rapidly increased to 26.8-million by 3 November 2015. Data from the International Telecommunications Union (ITU) corroborate these statistics: there was a marked increase in South African households owning a “computer” (18.3% in 2010 to 28.1% in 2014); and households with Internet access (10.1% in 2010 to 37.3% in 2014). These increases meant that more households accessed the Internet through various means (Switzerland. International Telecommunications Union 2015: sec 4: 224). Thomas (2015) attributes this rise to the fact that South Africans are now the owners of multiple technological assets such as Internet-accessible mobile phones, personal computers, laptops, tablets and other devices. By law, these devices are required by to be registered with the necessary authorities. This explains why there are now more sim registrations (77.7-million) in the country than the actual population (Ndebele 2015: 5).ⁱ

When it comes to access to the Internet in urban spaces, South Africa’s enumerating agency Statistics South Africa (or Stats SA) shows that a large proportion of so-called ‘urban’ residents are connected to the WWW in some form or the other. Numbers drawn from its 2016 General Household Survey approximate that 24% of households access the Internet at home, an Internet café or an educational institution. More remarkably, though, is the revelation that mobile devices are increasingly being used to go online. Approximately 120% of ‘urban’ residents are accessing the WWW from multiple devices, pointing to the popularity of such digital technologies; and again bolstering the idea that urban spaces are technology-filled ones. In addition, mobile handheld devices such as cellular phones and tablets are the choice of most urban dwellers. Although Internet access was fairly low in non-urban areas if and when logged on from home, work, an Internet café or a study institution, mobile devices were relatively popular when it came to joining the online community (South Africa: Statistics South Africa 2016: sec 13: 57-59).ⁱⁱ Figures from the Stats SA survey also confirm that urban residents are comparatively much more literate than their rural counterparts: 98.2% of all urban citizens aged 20 and above were functionally literate (South Africa: Statistics South Africa 2016: sec 4: 20). Please refer to Table 4.1:

Table 4.1: Percentage of South Africans accessing the Internet

INTERNET ACCESS	METRO & URBAN	RURAL
Home	23.5%	2.0%
Work	39.2%	3.9%
Mobile device	119.6%	38.3%
Net café/ educational facility	23.6%	3.2%
Source: South Africa: Statistics South Africa 2016: sec 13: 57-59		

Notwithstanding these promising numbers, universal access to the online world is primarily retarded by two factors in this country: high costs and slow broadband speed (Ndebele 2015:1). Despite the country enjoying Internet speed at one-fifth the level the US sees, the costs here are six times more (see Fourie 2019). Hence, the recent calls and agitation around a *Data Must Fall* hashtag (*#DataMustFall*) on social media platforms and news media reports. For example, a recent World Bank report suggests that South Africans paid US\$14.10 for just a single gigabyte of data; this

was fourth highest on the African continent (see Competition Commission to probe...2017:1; SA targets 80%...2016). This cost factor was hindering the country's "digital liberation" as Francis (2017) puts it. Connectivity to the digital world was key to "digital sovereignty" where digital literacy and access to newer and better opportunities for the general population remain the ultimate goals – the equivalent of gaining the "keys to new kingdoms" as Francis (2017) articulates it. Regardless of the cost impediment, there has been an 822% increase in mobile subscriptions between 2000 and 2013; confirming again that most South Africans are indeed desperate to come online, even if this means accessing the Internet through their phones or mobile network.

One possible solution has been the introduction of government-provided free wireless (or Wi-Fi) access in some of the country's major centres. While South Africa is on target to achieve 80% mobile broadband penetration by 2019 (SA targets 80%...2016), the rollout of free wireless networks is viewed as a possible panacea. The larger metropolitan areas, for example, signalled their intentions to make Wi-Fi freely available to residents. As part of *Project Isizwe*, the city of Tshwane alone had 650 000 residents accessing its free Wi-Fi network (Dardagan 2015). During his 2016 State of the City Address (SOCA), former Mayor Mr Kgosinetsi Ramokgopa waxed lyrical about how the city's free Wi-Fi service had narrowed the digital divide and inequality there. Officially called "TshWi-Fi", Mr Ramaokgopa said that the Wi-Fi service had seen more than 1.4 million web-enabled devices accessing the network, effectively making it the "largest WiFi network on the African continent" (TshWi-Fi to support...2016). Residents are offered 500 megabytes of data per day at a speed of 15-megabytes per second. These 776 "TshWi-Fi zones" are accessed at schools, colleges, campuses and other public places making it "one big Internet hotspot" (TshWi-Fi to support...2016). Plans are afoot by the city to outlay more than 1500 kilometres of broadband to expand its free Wi-Fi service (TshWi-Fi to support...2012). The Cape metro – in comparison - by April 2016 had 201 public Wi-Fi zones clustered across 78 locations in the city, with 84 000 residents accessing the free service in a week and some 460 000 since inception (De Lille 2016).

During his May 2016 Budget Speech, former Minister of Telecommunications and Postal Services, Dr Siyabonga Cwele, said that free Wi-Fi had been rolled out to other metros including 17 different areas within Nelson Mandela Bay in the Eastern Cape, 43 sites in Gauteng's Ekurhuleni and 47 hotspots in Johannesburg; and 35 identified areas in the Mangaung metro, Free State (Cwele 2016). Dr Cwele, additionally, suggested the country would need R67-billion to implement free Wi-Fi broadband-enabled sites countrywide (SA targets 80%...2016). As far back as 2015, Mochiko (2015) estimated that South Africa had approximately 10 000 commercial free Wi-Fi zones, a fraction of the nine-million globally.

This section showed that South Africa continues to be one of the most connected nations when it comes to Internet penetration. Coming online, however, has its drawbacks such as slow Internet speed and high data costs (see African Media Barometer: South Africa 2018...2019; Fourie 2019). Local governments, for example, are intervening by providing limited government-subsidised public Wi-Fi. The researcher also provided figures to illustrate that an urban bias exists when it comes to being online. Challenges notwithstanding, in section 4.7, a brief glimpse into what South Africans are accessing online in terms of social media and social networking sites is provided.

4.7 WHAT ARE SOUTH AFRICANS ACCESSING OVER THE INTERNET

As at 31 March 2019, South African Internet users numbered 31.1-million or 53.7% of the total population - a modest increase from 49% in 2016 (Internet world stats...2019). Of the population who enjoy a connection to the WWW, 16-million log onto social networking site Facebook (see Internet World stats...2019). This is in concurrence with Goldstuck (2017) who corroborates these figures, adding that 14-million Facebook users now accessed the site using their mobile phones. At the same time, Twitter had grown marginally "in line with international trends", increasing from 7.7-million to just above eight million (Goldstuck 2017). Key for Twitter's modest increase remained the micro-blogging site's value as "the social platform of choice" especially when it came to facilitating public discourse around news and debates (Van Dijk 2018). However, by April 2019, South Africa's Electoral Commission at the

launch of its 'digital disinformation' launch announced that Twitter was said to have increased to 8.3 million subscribers (Watch Electoral Commission...2019).

For purposes of this study, Guerrio (2015: 15) defines a Smartphone as "a mobile/cellular device that can access the Internet and its various applications (apps)". Its main advantage remains that it can function as a hand-held computer "capable of running general-purpose applications" such as accessing emails and responding to online networks whilst on the move. A 'feature phone' by comparison offered the user basic Internet access but was limited in its "advanced functionality of a Smartphone". The author draws attention to a third type of mobile device, the "basic phone" or "dumbphone" which boasts just two main functions – voice and the capability to send short messages (SMS) (see Dumbphones live on...2017: 21; Guerrio 2015: 14). Interestingly, 1.5 billion smartphones were sold globally in 2016 while the limited-functional "dumbphone" recorded sales of 400 million (Dumbphones live on...2017: 21).

Earlier, Poushter (2016:20-22), in his study of smartphone usage found that 73% of South African Smartphone users accessed both Facebook and Twitter from their devices. Also, in South Africa there is a marked difference in terms of the age demographic when it comes to owning a Smartphone. Forty-six percent of those aged 18-34 are expected to have such a phone as compared to only 30% for those aged 35 and above. The digital demographic divide deepens when income and education are brought into the matrix. More educated South Africans with a higher income are expected to be Smartphone users. Additionally, South Africans mirrored the global trend with 81% aged 18 to 34 leveraging their Smartphone for Facebook and Twitter access. Sixty-three percent (63%) of those aged 35-years and upward used their personal Smartphone for SNS browsing (Poushter 2016:20). By 2018, it was estimated that 60% of South Africans (or 16 million) now used a smartphone. Another report suggests the number could be higher, as much as 29 million. However, of this 29 million, only 22 million had Internet access (African Media Barometer: South Africa 2018...2019).

This section attempted to paint a picture that South Africans are voracious users of social networking sites such as Twitter, Facebook and Instagram. There have been progressive increases in the use of these platforms, as measured by technology companies World Wide Worx and Fuseware. Key to this increase is Smartphone technology which is proving to be the catalyst for online connectivity. With Smartphones getting cheaper and more affordable by the year, it is this technology with its multi-media functionality and portability that adds to its utility for general politics and election campaigning. This leads one to ask: is mobile phone technology, in the guise of Smartphones, just what politics needs? The next section attempts to answer this question.

4.8 MOBILE PHONE TECHNOLOGY AND ITS INTERSECTION WITH POLITICS

Several authors are optimistic about mobile phone technology and the promise it holds for politics (see Ackerman & Guizzo 2011; Arno 2012; Cumming 2012; Ginsberg 2012; Sweetser 2011). For example, Cumming (2012: 21) opines that mobile phones signal a “second Internet revolution”, with Chapman (2012: 16) labelling present developments as the “mobile Internet era”. A year earlier, Sweetser (2011: 309), too, predicted that mobile phones would be the “next horizon for development”. Owing to its portability, mobile phones are an “always on device” making it that much easier to access content and “network on the move” (Arno 2012). Ginsberg (2012: 22) calls this “dual screening” or multi-tasking while simultaneously doing many things at the same time.

With election campaigns likely to be fought over hand-held mobile devices in future, Smartphone ownership and usage thereof to access campaigns on the move will become integral. Guerrio (2015: 15) agrees, saying that mobile phone technology and their Internet capabilities will only aid how users on the (African) continent interact with information. Guerrio (2015:13) confidently contends also that users of social networking sites are likely to be “more active online”, meaning the chances of those users searching the Internet for political information will implicitly increase. Importantly, as a result of users’ having the option of customising their mobile phone

according to personal needs and tastes, every phone is likely to look different. Smartphones and feature phones will be equally responsible for keeping people informed, just behind traditional mediums such as television, radio and print (Guerrero 2015: 15).

In another survey by Smith (2015:1), it was confirmed that Facebook and Twitter accessed through mobile telephony are playing an “increasingly prominent role” on how voters learned about news and election-related updates. Coining the term “mobile election news consumers”, Smith (2015: 2) asserts that Smartphone ownership is aiding this reality. Using the 2014 US mid-term elections as his study base, the author additionally found that those citizens who were engaging with the political process using social networking platforms did so to be the first to hear about new developments. These connected citizens would also take an active interest in the overall election campaign of their preferred candidate through either volunteering their services, canvassing more support, making a financial contribution or by merely attending a campaign event (Smith 2015: 3).

A good example from a so-called developing world nation on the efficacy of how new media and mobile phone technologies are aiding election campaigning is how India’s current governing party, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) used these for the 2004 general elections. For those polls, the BJP ran an “aggressive” countrywide “India Shining” appeal, devoting as much as 5% of its campaign budget to its electronic online campaign (Arulchelvan 2014: 129-131). Not only was the party’s website re-energised, text messages were sent out *en masse*, pre-recorded audio files and emails mailed to the BJP’s 20-million strong subscriber database. Mobile ringtone downloads were also targeted at this database. For the 2009 Indian general elections, mobile technology again played a major part in BJP candidate LK Advani’s use of an “Obama style new media campaign” to get the attention of some 250-million mobile phone subscribers (Arulchelvan 2014: 131).

During the 2014 Indian general election cycle, new media technologies took center stage once more. In combination, television, the Internet and mobile all played a decisive role in getting out Mr LK Advani’s message, proving that a combined

sustained campaign using both traditional and non-traditional channels to disseminate political messages was “easy, fast and successful” (Arulchelvan 2014: 124-125). Arguing in favour of mobile phone technology, Arulchelvan (2014: 127) says the best part is that mobile phones are portable and affordable, with new entrants to a voting market likely to have immediate Internet access through their phones. One of the prime advantages of mobile campaigning is that election campaigns can also continue as late as 22h00 at night. Additionally, it is a cheaper alternative and possesses a “highly reachable” quality which no other media forms can share. Importantly, mobile technology does not discriminate (Arulchelvan 2014: 127). In other words, electoral messages stood an equal chance of reaching a wealthier voter as it did with a poorer registered voter. Mobile technology, thus, promised to cut across the class divide (Arulchelvan 2014: 140-141).

Closer to home, in South Africa’s 2014 general elections, evidence at the time suggests that mobile phones offered parties access to the youth on social networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter. There is speculation, also, that these sites will become even more important in future elections as Smartphone ownership increases, affording political parties access not only to younger voters but the so-called influential middle classes (Social media fires up...2014).

In summary, there is no question that the world is increasingly being powered by technology, permeating every space of one’s social, personal, civic and political life. Mobile smart phone technology - notably - is propelling this evolution. Global politics, too, is not immune to the all-encompassing powers of the multi-media enabled smartphone. Smartphones, together with its portability and multi-media functionalities, are proving an invaluable tool to political parties and individual politicians. The political persuasion process can be facilitated at any hour of the day as was the case in the world’s largest democracy, India. Ordinary voters can now be accessed on the move either through regular messaging using short message services (SMS) and/ or social networking sites such as Twitter and Facebook. Having provided statistical proof, then, that South Africa and its urban spaces are highly connected in terms of Internet penetration and social networking site access spurred mainly by the diffusion of affordable Smartphone technology, the discussion

shifts to the concept of urban politics; and its relation to the argument that urban spaces function as highly-charged digital political communication spaces.

4.9 UNDERSTANDING THE TERM 'URBAN' IN URBAN POLITICS

To recap on the 'design' element of the urban space, the term 'urban' literally means those 'built-up' areas housing concentrated populations within more compact spaces – as compared to rural spaces with sparse populations. While terms such as “urban” and “local” are used interchangeably, John (2009: 18-19) says there was a deliberate move away from the latter in 1970's European society due to interpretations of what “local” entailed. Classified as too narrow in its outlook with “local” translating into mere surveillance over local government and local political institutions, urban political researchers such as Young (1975) and Dunleavy (1980) opted using “urban” as more inclusive to describe general city processes, migratory population patterns, economic-generating activities of the city; and how these densely-populated areas had become cauldrons of ethnic and multi-cultural reconfigurations. Rapid urbanisation over the last few decades has contributed to this strain of thought too. Adopting a narrower view, Ward and Imbroscio (2015: 854-858) surmise that urban politics is literally the study of politics on an urban scale, of which elections form “the centrepiece”.

There is academic agreement that the field of urban politics is one that straddles a number of disciplines, including politics, economics, social policy, sociology, geography and anthropology (see Ward & Imbroscio 2011: 853-871; Seamster 2015: 1049-1050). When researching urban politics, scholars are mainly interested in three elements that comprise the urban space: the city, suburb and the more recent addition of a regional dimension (Young & Kiel 2014:1589). Several subsequent scholars have introduced their own neologisms or new terminology to describe this fast-shifting urban landscape. Cox (1995), for example, observed a “new urban politics” or NUP for short; Swyngedouw (2004:25) coined the word “glocalisation” to describe how the local was now being usurped by the global at city level; and Jessop and Sum (2000:2287) opted for “glurbanisation” to pin their take on developments.

Urban politics then, as the names suggests, is broadly about the politics of the city. It is about marrying the “spatial” with the “wider socio-political-economic” processes of the city or urban spaces (John 2009: 18). For the so-called “urbanist” researcher, cities have transformed into busy meeting places for work, study, diverse lifestyles and general consumption (food, arts, clothing and housing). John (2009: 18) labels this the more practical dimension of urban politics. The theoretical aspect conversely focuses more on how economic power and class issues go on to shape a city’s outlook.

John (2009: 21) says the urban political space is distinguishable by two main characteristics, namely its “propinquity” and “numerosity”. While “propinquity” refers to how urban politics has localised politics by bringing the administration, policy-making and implementation processes to the most basic level of delivery, “numerosity” had more to do with how easily researchable local governments were in comparison to the upper tiers of government. Urban or local councillors have become more accessible to communities (propinquity); and this “coalface” of urban politics provided future researchers with a wealth of possible research areas (John 2009: 21-22).

Furthermore, resulting from the increased globalised nature of contemporary politics, the national, provincial and international spheres of political authority are often inseparable from local city development. It was Cochrane (1999: 123) who predicted that 21st century urban politics would be a collaboration between local and global politics. In other words, “global is in the urban” and “the urban is in the global”. Put differently, cities rarely function independently as stand-alone entities. To function optimally, investment is needed for economic growth, job creation and improvement in general infrastructure such as road networks, hospitals, clinics and advanced modes of public transportation. Successful cities today are measured quantitatively in terms of how stable they are - economically, politically and socially. As engine rooms of development, cities are also charged with simultaneously maintaining their own favourable credit ratings from agencies like Moody’s, Standard & Poors and Fitch (to name a few), independent from provincial and national government (Dludla 2016b; Loko 2017). Local government in South Africa, as an example, receives less

than ten-percent (10%) of national fiscus allocations annually (Gordhan 2017). Municipalities have to fund any shortfalls for their own sustainability through rates, local taxes, fines and self-generated other revenue streams (see City of Cape Town...2017). Issues around the general environment, safety, transport and public facilities are included in the matrix too.

Of course, there are “more nuanced indices” such as how inclusive these urban spaces have become; and how this translates into the multicultural dynamic defining cities nowadays (Loko 2017). Mossberger (2009: 40-41) calls this interface between urban politics, business and local growth stimulation “urban regime analysis”. The grander objective is to nurture more productive working relationships among the main stakeholders with the end result being upward growth trajectories, long-term investment and overall job creation. This in turn would make urban spaces or cities wholly autonomous or less-reliant on the other tiers of government.

In the next section, the researcher shows how the urban political space is anything but a passive place. In fact, the urban political space has its own life, its own voice, its own energies; and this is where socio-economic-political discontents are given a voice. This is in agreement with Harvey (2012) who – in his analyses of the city space – reasoned that urban metropolises are “major sites of social and class struggles” (Harvey 2012:85); and places where “deeper currents of political struggles are expressed” (Harvey 2012:136).

4.10 URBAN SPACES AS SITES OF CONTESTED POLITICAL IDEAS

Literature on urban politics and general politics abound with examples of cities transforming into spaces of dialogue and collective community action (see Lopes de Souza & Lipietz 2011; Sassen 2011; Harvey 2012). Harvey (2012), for one, is firm that all major crises facing capitalist societies of today emanate from urban spaces. Others such as Rodgers, Barnett and Cochrane (2014) and Magnusson (2014) view the urban as a kind of “lens” or “prism” through which wider, national politics is localised. Put differently, cities have now become what Bellingradt (2012: 237) terms “a resonating box”, a place where localised issues warrant national appeal.

Historically, Harvey (2012:135) in his often-quoted book, *Rebel Cities*, shows that the era of protest politics generally involve urban spaces which then tend to “spread contagiously” to other densely-populated areas. This is mainly due to urban hubs functioning as integral arenas of ‘political action and revolt’ (Harvey 2012:116); and the fact that vast networks within these spaces are “replete with political possibilities” (Harvey 2012:135). Prominent examples include the US protests of 1960 which quickly caught on to other major cities; and the anti-war protests of 2003 which had more of a global contagion. Harvey (2012), again, cites a number of other such popular citizen action such as Tiananmen Square, London, Paris, Los Angeles, Chicago - all said to have sprung up from urban spaces or cities. Like the more recent, contemporary protests in Brazil, Thailand, Ukraine and Venezuela, their main aim was to disrupt the normal functioning of society; and cause economic imbalance (Runciman 2017). In Harvey’s (2012: 68-69) assessment, the urban protest had more to do with a feeling of uneasiness and that there existed “something in the city air struggling to be expressed”.

Additionally, the Arab Spring revolutions, for example, which swept across North African states in late 2010, early 2011, in fact emanated from cities and urban hubs. Although protesting citizens used technology to organise and draw attention to their cause using digital networks, the real potency of collective action manifested in physical places such as squares and city centres. Micro-blogging website, Twitter, in this regard, was leveraged extensively to send out images, text and video of these popular mass gatherings from these urban public spaces. For a brief moment, these once “weak” so-called urban arenas mutated into areas of political agency “in a strong sense” (Lopes de Souza & Lipietz 2011: 621-623). They were “re-invented” to illustrate a re-energised platform for “socio-political contestation” for a once disempowered population, silenced by decades-long of repressive democratic political expression (Lopes de Souza & Lipietz 2011: 621-623).

Moreover, expansive research on social movements attests that digital media and urban spaces are ‘inter-dependent’ and virtually inseparable (see Calhoun 2007; Marolt 2008; Castells 2012; Abdel-Aziz *et al.* 2016; Ray, Brown & Laybourn 2017).

Although protests such as the Arab Spring and Occupy Wall Street began in physical public spaces, social networks such as Facebook and Twitter afforded them new meaning through “cost-effective networking” and “diffusion”; their real power, however, emanated from urban spaces through the clever use of digital media and the vast networks each offered (Abdel-Aziz *et al.* 2016:490). This is in concurrence with what Castells (2012:61) had earlier said: that the Internet revolution would “not negate the territorial character of revolutions; it instead extends it from the space of places to the space of flows”. These intersected issue-driven spaces would also indirectly produce – what Lim (2014: 62) calls - “new narratives, new messages, new ideas” in its challenge to authorities.

Having introduced the concept of urban politics and the idea that urban spaces are highly contested technological political spaces, the next section brings South African society within the purview of the urban political discussion. The researcher argues that information, technology and collective action are three essential elements defining contemporary South African urban spaces, which, when used in combination, “significantly” offer users simultaneous access to information, education and political and civic agency.

4.11 URBAN POLITICS AND ITS RELEVANCE TO SOUTH AFRICAN SOCIETY

As outlined earlier, urban spaces are proving highly-contested sites for political discontent and citizen activism; and South Africa is no exception. When there is unhappiness about particular issues in this country of 55-million people, residents take to the streets to give their concerns a voice. Prominent examples include the litany of so-called service delivery or community protests that have bedevilled South African society since October 2004 (see Booysen 2006; Dhawraj 2015; Runciman 2017). Unsurprisingly, these have been concentrated in the urban hubs, notably Gauteng’s Johannesburg, Ekurhuleni, Tshwane; KwaZulu-Natal’s eThekweni and surrounds; and the Western Cape’s Cape Town – to name a few (Dhawraj 2015; Runciman 2017). In the DA-administered Cape Town metro, for example, the politically-vanquished ANC became so frustrated with its electoral fortunes here that it took symbolic acts of faeces-throwing at the airport and on the Western Cape

legislature's steps to make its voice heard (Etheridge 2014; Evans 2016). Another illustrative example of the urban space proving to be highly-contested political space was when Mrs Thoko Didiza was reportedly imposed on Tshwane residents as their mayoral candidate before the 2016 elections. Violence broke out in the townships, with mainly rank-and-file ANC supporters refusing to passively be dictated to by national party leaders. The looting, unrest and violent scenes of unhappiness continued for weeks until ANC national leadership intervened (Dludla 2016a).

More prominently of late, the country bore witness to a number of issue-based, mass-based demonstrations such as the *Fees Must Fall*, *Rhodes Must Fall* and *Zuma Must Fall* campaigns since September 2015 (see Findlay 2015; Hunter & Mataboge 2015: 4-5; Habib 2019). The marches against former South African President, Mr Zuma, for example, germinated in the country's urban centres; and quickly moved to other areas (Anti-Zuma protests...2017). Technology, the co-ordinated dissemination of information and mass based civic organisation were hugely responsible for the media attention the protests received in news media, social media and social networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter. These issue-based protests also confirm the notion that social networking site usage - such as Facebook and Twitter which are primarily driven by hashtags – function as issue-promoting digital urban mediums.

Having confirmed that urban spaces are highly contested political spaces, the next section forwards the argument that urban and rural electoral contexts exist for political parties, with technology lubricating the urban dimension. An avenue available to political parties and politicians remains social networking sites. Former US president Mr Barack Obama popularised the Internet and these platforms for election campaigning purposes in both his 2008 and 2012 presidential bids. The researcher shows just how these avenues are capturing the imagination of the 21st century political world; and the attention of potential voters in the urban communication space.

4.12 SOCIAL MEDIA SITES IN URBAN-RURAL CONTEXTS

Prior to the Internet's arrival, physical spaces such as community halls, stadiums, lecture halls, public squares and peoples' homes served as the primary conduits for political communication interactions. Although physical meeting spaces are still highly relevant to the contemporary politician, the Internet's wide-reaching capabilities are accepted as a must-have in any election campaign toolbox. As illustrated in chapter two of this thesis, the importance of social media and social networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter – as an extension of the Internet's mass multi-media functionalities - can never be underestimated for political campaigning. Binaries of physical and virtual are no longer relevant nowadays because of these portals functioning as simultaneous “meeting places” where dialogue, interaction and citizen/ voter/ supporter participation thrive with political candidates and their parties. A feeling of closeness and reciprocity is, thus, created with politicians present on these mediums (see Perry 2018; Enli & Rosenberg 2018).

Energised by former US President, Mr Barack Obama's 2008 and 2012 election campaigns, there have since been many studies in various parts of the world hoping to replicate Mr Obama's successful social media political strategy in their countries (see Black, Dafir & Behnke 2013; Fong 2013; Suffian 2013). To use Singapore's 2011 election for illustration purposes, social media played an influential role there. Not only did social media drive campaign narratives of contesting politicians, it was instrumental in increasing voter turnout figures. Importantly, social media platforms acted as counter-balancing forums to neutralise mainstream media coverage of the ruling party, the People's Action Party (PAP). This is the main argument put forward by current US president, Mr Donald Trump, for his use of Twitter as his main political communication tool. Mr Trump reportedly does not trust the mainstream print and electronic media hence his persistent use of Twitter as a counter-balancing mechanism for important administrative policy announcements and other political messages (Liu 2016). Despite the relative success of social media in Singapore's 2011 election, mainstream media channels persist as primary information sources,

with social media portals continuing to fill “unmet information needs” (Black *et al* 2013:119).

In Malaysia’s intersection with social media, Suffian (2013: 89), additionally, shows how that country’s 2008 elections was lubricated by blogs; and further propelled by social media five years later. During Malaysia’s 2013 general election, social media was leveraged by parties in opposition to the ruling party, the National Front (NF), to overcome the in-built disadvantage of it commanding the attention of mainstream media channels, including the national public broadcaster. What the 2013 Malaysian general election, furthermore, showed was when it came to urban-rural voting trends, incumbent governing parties continued to be favoured by rural voters and trusted by the “older generation” of voters. Urban-based parties, who chose to harness the Internet and social media, concomitantly captured more of the urban vote (Suffian 2013:105).

A similar trend seems to be emerging in South Africa where there is a perception that the incumbent ANC is the *de facto* editorial chief of the powerful public broadcaster, the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC). Deliberately courted for its domination of the South African broadcast space in terms of quantity (20 radio stations and five television channels); language diversity (radio and television services available in a variety of languages, including vernacular), geographical outreach (rural versus urban coverage); and superior technical capabilities, the SABC is an integral media instrument for any serious political contender (Plaut 2019). The broadcaster’s radio stations alone account for approximately 40-million listeners daily. Its most watched television channel remains SABC 1 with 30-million weekly viewers (Lebone 2017:747-751, African Media Barometer: South Africa 2018...2019:6).

This is perhaps why the mainly urban-based DA may have been much more active in the social networking space as the party sought to overcome perceived ANC-influenced gatekeeping at the public broadcaster. It used mediums such as Twitter and Facebook to advance its digital political communication strategy with voters to

counteract the ANC's domination of the SABC media footprint (African Media Barometer: South Africa 2018...2019:6). Another argument is that the party may have used these platforms to draw attention to any media bias perpetrated against it from the side of the public broadcaster knowing that journalists are always eager for a story originating from a party's official account. Moreover, the (ANC-appointed) Minister of Communications is the public broadcaster's sole shareholder on behalf of government; she presides over the SABC board. This is the perceived bias the DA could have alluded to during the 2016 municipal elections (see Hlaudi and SABC board refuse to end their ban on airing violent protests...2016; Singh 2016).

Another illustration of the SABC's purported bias was the ban of violent service delivery protests before the 2016 elections by former SABC Chief Operations Officer (COO) and alleged ANC sympathiser, Mr Hlaudi Motsoeneng, in an effort to arrest the ANC's negative portrayal in the eyes of the electorate just before the crucial poll (Sibanda 2017). Arguably, this ban would have also given the opposition more reason to promote its negative advertising of the ANC – or so was the assumption (Sibanda 2017). There is the added speculation that the protest visuals ban was prompted more by the notion of the restless middle classesⁱⁱⁱ housed in the country's urban areas growing increasingly impatient with the governing-ANC. The electoral threat posed by the DA and EFF, especially, warranted the party engineering a protracted charm offensive just before the 2016 polls. The ANC feared ceding more 'urban' metropolitan municipalities to the DA; and opposition party coalition after August 3, 2016. The ban was eventually rescinded by the body governing electronic communications in the country, the Independent Communications Authority of South Africa or ICASA as it is popularly known (see Mkentane 2016c; Sibanda 2017).

Academic work, then, supports the idea of urban and rural electoral contexts. Suffian (2013), for one, demonstrates this in the 2013 Malaysian general election; that urban, rural and semi-rural contexts exist. Furthermore, Suffian (2013) argues that rural and semi-rural areas tend to favour incumbents with durable cognitive relationships with voters and not the opposition. As witnessed in that country's 2013 polls, these 'heartlands' of the National Front were, therefore, mostly unavailable to

opposition voices. This was the primary reason why social media and the Internet's expansive powers of agency were capitalised upon to equalise an otherwise uneven electoral terrain (Suffian 2013). A similar trend may be developing in South Africa, where ANC urban support is said to be in a state of perpetual decline, in line with increasing voter support for a more urban-biased political party such as the DA. This is why the ANC is, arguably, said to rely more on non-urban support to elevate its electoral standing. Next, the argument that an urban-rural divide exists when it comes to social networking site usage is probed more by focussing on Mr Donald Trump's electoral success in the 2016 US presidential elections.

4.13 THE URBAN-RURAL DIVIDE IN THE 2016 US ELECTIONS

Research from the 2016 US elections yields a somewhat different narrative from the discussion outlined in section 4.12. Although main rival Mrs Hillary Clinton won the popular vote, Mr Donald Trump secured the most number of Electoral College votes, enough to guarantee him the US presidency. Central to Mr Trump's win was the targeting of the rural voter; and his team's effective use of social media channels such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and You Tube. Mr Trump intentionally did not consider micro-targeting urban voters in that country's more than 300 metropolitan centres that constitute approximately 31% of the voting age population (Florida 2016). Instead, part of Mr Trump's strategy was to tap into disillusioned rural and semi-urban voter sentiment; areas which cumulatively accounted for 69% of the eligible voter population at the time (see Balz 2017; Halpern 2017; Hanrahan 2016).

The other Trump strategy was to deliberately keep Mrs Clinton's voters away from the ballot box on Election Day by using far-reaching social media platforms. Drawing heavy inspiration from former president, Mr Barack Obama's 2012 presidential campaign, Trump digital media strategists, in this regard, relied on three databases to micro-target specific demographics. Trump's team used a voter database called *Cambridge Analytica* with "profiles" of a staggering 220-million Americans; the Republican Party's "enhanced" *Voter Vault* listing details of 200-million voters; and a "custom-designed" database named *Project Alamo* comprising of donor information

and personal data from Trump campaign loyalists (Halpern 2017).^{iv} It was this innovative use of his social media arsenal which was viewed as “crucial” to Mr Trump’s eventual victory in November 2016. Facebook, for example, was used to take out political advertisements totalling US\$2-million during the primaries stage by Trump digital director, Mr Brad Parscale. Negative advertisements in the form of legal “dark posts” in combination with traditional Facebook posts were mounted to “dissuade” and suppress turnout in support of Mrs Clinton (Bratt 2018). One such advert was when Mrs Michelle Obama criticised Mrs Clinton during the 2008 presidential primaries (see also Robinson 2018; Hedley 2018).

Three other prominent “voter suppression operations” were employed to further stifle Mrs Clinton’s traditional voter turnout (Miller & Altman 2016:48). These included one directed specifically at White liberals and fellow Democrat, Mr Bernie Sanders’ supporters; a second aimed at young women who claim to have been sexually assaulted by former president Mr Bill Clinton and “harassed” by Mrs Clinton; and a third targeted at the African American voter in urban centres (see Miller & Altman 2016:48-51; Manjoo 2016). For this particular advert, the Trump campaign went as far back as her husband, Mr Bill Clinton’s 1996 election campaign, filtering his anti-crime drive where she reportedly equated young black men to “super predators” who had to be brought “to heel” (Halpern 2017). These negative adverts were, then, “modelled” into Mr Trump’s overall media strategy of suppressing Mrs Clinton’s traditional turnout so that the rural and semi-urban vote could determine the outcome of the 2016 presidential race.

Apart from Facebook, the Trump team’s digital weaponry included Mr Trump’s “unbridled” use of Twitter, breaking news stories through Wikileaks and alleged “fake news” generation from Breitbart, and an “army” of Twitter bots. Bots are automated accounts that can be produced fast and inexpensively using “software-controlled profiles”. These fake accounts - through the use of “software-controlled profiles” – are then empowered to produce content; and spur interaction with “legitimate” online users (see Shao, Ciampaglia, Varol, Yang, Flammini & Menczer 2018; Temming 2018). All were reportedly designed to populate the cyber information space with

more pro-Trump and anti-Clinton messages to ensure a pre-determined media narrative persisted. On Election Day itself, YouTube as an extension of Mr Trump's digital strategy, was optimally used when campaign bosses purchased "all" ad space on the platform. Using just five 30-second political advertisements spearheaded by different demographic representatives of Mr Trump's election campaign, the videos were reportedly viewed by "tens of millions" voting Americans (Halpern 2017).

From these discussions, one infers that Mr Trump's team did indeed have an urban strategy in place: that this multi-pronged initiative using social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter was his way of negative campaigning. This also points to the main assertion made by this researcher; that social networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter are very much urban platforms in their outlook. Additionally, keeping the turnout low in the so-called "battleground states" such as Pennsylvania, Michigan and Wisconsin was, thus, deliberate and key to Mr Trump's success. In Michigan, for example, Mrs Clinton lost to Mr Trump by just 12 000 votes; and in Wisconsin the former First Lady lost by 27 000 votes. These losses originated from mainly rural areas and speak directly to the success of Mr Trump and his team's voter-prediction model aptly named *Battleground Optimiser Path to Victory*. The complex instrument was created to rank and weight the 16 battleground states and the effect of each on the 270 Electoral College haul needed for a win. The plethora of varying voter permutations - using the model - more importantly identified that within these 16 states, there were some 13.5 million "persuadable voters" who could still be captured. This is where the focus on the rural and semi-urban voter and less attention to the urban factor first surfaced.

In the final analysis, Mr Trump is said to have won the rural vote by 62%-to-34% while Mrs Clinton secured the urban ballot by 59%-to-35% (Reality check...who voted 2016). It was this "demographic fault line" – according to Kurtzleben (2016) – which eventually won Mr Trump the much sought-after US presidential seat. This begs the question: if Mr Trump truly lost the country's approximately 350 metros by a "landslide", how then was the leader able to communicate and persuade the less densely-populated rural and semi-urban American populations to vote for him –

which cumulatively account for 69% of the country's voting age population (Balz 2017). While one can attribute part of this to a successful urban turnout-suppressing mechanism by the Trump strategists, how then does one explain the voting surge in rural and semi-urban regions of the country?

With a robust social media strategy in place, one can only infer that these populations were able to access, watch and be persuaded by the Trump campaign's various social media initiatives such as Facebook, Twitter and You Tube. This is where Internet penetration levels and mobile phone adoption need to be considered. Unlike most developing countries, the US enjoys high Internet penetration across its urban, suburban and rural geographies. Between 2000 and 2017, the US is said to have increased Internet connectivity by 200%. In 2000, while only 53% urban, 56% suburban and 42% rural residents were online, these figures increased to 85%, 85% and 78% respectively 17 years later. As at 30 April 2019, approximately 89% or 293-million of its citizens were connected to the information super highway. When it came to social networking site, Facebook, the US was one of the most active users with 240-million users online, a 73% penetration rate (Top 20 countries in Internet...2019). Twitter, on the other hand, was used by approximately 69-million Americans by January 2017 (Aslam 2018).

In addition to relying on his social media platforms to reach out to semi-urban and rural voters, Nass (2016) argues that Mr Trump used smaller, community-driven media networks in non-urban areas for voter segmentation purposes. One example is the use of the "less mainstream" Sinclair television group with whom deals were forged around the 2016 poll. The "deal" stipulated that the channel would get "exclusive" material from the Trump campaign without any commentary. It arguably boasted a "more conservative bent" compared to CNN (Nass 2016); and would – for example – be able reach 250 000 viewers in the all-important state of Ohio instead of CNN's 30 000. Various such deals were forged with other media.

Sections 4.12 and 4.13 then presented the argument that urban and rural electoral contexts exist. The 2016 US presidential elections provides evidence that social networking sites such as Twitter and Facebook *are* urban electioneering mediums, albeit used to negatively campaign against Mr Trump's rival, Mrs Clinton. Strategy on the part of the Trump campaign ensured Mrs Clinton's urban voter turnout was suppressed from the usual turnout in key Democratic constituencies such as the African American community, White liberals, the Hispanic population and women. Together with this factor and an increased turnout for the suburban and rural vote, Mr Trump's 2016 election team guaranteed their candidate a win.

Following the results of South Africa's 2016 LGE, a similar scenario is said to have transpired. Attributing its shock loss of three 'battleground' metropolitan cities – namely Johannesburg, Tshwane and Nelson Mandela Bay – to an opposition-led coalition, and a much lower overall vote percentage, the ANC repeatedly argued that its urban-based voters did not vote with the opposition but chose to stay away from the ballot box on the day (see Dlamini 2018; Mbetse 2018: 22-27). It was this deliberate suppressed voter turnout that gave opposition parties such as the DA the proverbial upper electoral hand. The urban-biased and mostly middle class DA, too, is said to have vigorously campaigned in these urban centres to get its partisans out on Election Day. What is not clear, however, is how much of the DA's negative campaigning against the ANC managed to keep the 107-year old party's traditional support base away from the polls that day – especially in South Africa's urban metros.

Earlier in (see section 4.13), it was authoritatively established that Mr Trump's election to the White House in November 2016 involved a pronounced use of social media platforms such as Twitter - mostly used to generate his own media narrative; and to challenge prevailing traditional media stories of his campaign trail at the time. Twitter – for the businessman – invariably changed the nature of how election campaigns needed to be fought. A typical conventional mix of traditional media outlets such as newspapers, radio and television were shown to be inadequate in an

age of hand-held, Internet-enabled smartphones. Twitter became Mr Trump's main mouthpiece. This begs the question: has Twitter now altered the traditional election campaigning toolkit and political communication as one knows it today? These are some of the issues the researcher probes in the next section.

4.14 HAS TWITTER ALTERED THE TRADITIONAL CAMPAIGN TOOLKIT?

While former US president Mr Obama championed the use of social media for election campaigning purposes, it is current US president Mr Trump who is credited with changing the nature of political communication through his personal Twitter account. Dubbed the micro-blogging site's "first presidential candidate", Mir (2016) argues that Mr Trump is responsible for changing the traditional election campaigning toolkit by "challenging the status quo" of established traditional media channels in the 2016 US presidential race. Aside from using Twitter as his "virtual megaphone" to announce policies, bully other users and demonstrate political brinkmanship, Mr Trump used the site's 140-character limit (now 280-characters since November 2017) to neutralise negative sentiment meted out to him by traditional or what he termed 'fake' media (Calfas 2017). During his 2016 campaign, Mr Trump showed that if there was something to be communicated, a simple tweet at a time and place determined by the user would suffice. There was no longer a need for ceremonial press conferences under the full glare of question-asking journalists and media cameras. Tweets, for Mr Trump, lubricated the news-making flow, allowing news organisations to report on the story in real time keeping in mind their own deadlines (Godwin 2016; Collins 2017).

Moreover, Mr Trump proved with his use of Twitter that the days of "cosying up to television and radio reporters" for favourable coverage are over (Kapko 2016). In the past, such gestures were viewed as "the most powerful weapon" political candidates could consistently yearn for (Buncombe 2018). Today, Mr Trump through his "tremendous" use of Twitter has demonstrated that candidates can tailor-make their own news agenda including, where, when and how they would like. This customisation means also that they do not have to speak to the most dominant media voices to obtain sufficient publicity for their campaigns (McTernan 2016). Mr

Trump, through example, showed that larger networks such as Cable News Network (CNN) and the New York Times could be by-passed in favour of smaller, regional and more community-driven media outlets to penetrate specific target audiences (Collins 2017). For the US president, his dominant narrative was unambiguous: the mainstream media just could not be trusted. Social media in the form of earned media, in this regard, had the potential to reconfigure the political landscape; and this is exactly what Mr Trump and his campaign team capitalised on.

Mr Trump's use of Twitter during the 2016 primaries and ultimately for his November 2016 election campaign was, however, by no means co-incidental – or at least this is what Nass (2016) argues. Mr Trump's overall race for the US presidency amounted to strategy, one that was engineered by Mr Jared Kushner, the leader's son-in-law. Together with the now US president, Mr Kushner recognised a growing disillusion with mainstream traditional media. The pair capitalised on this "waning faith" by "eschewing those sources" and going into direct attack mode. Throughout this duel with brands such as CNN, New York Times, the Washington Post and the Los Angeles Times, Mr Trump "played the game" on social media by disseminating "controlled content" direct to his various publics he sought an audience with. Whenever the leader felt traditional news outlets were unfair to him by propagating narratives that he could not win, Trump's first refuge was his various social media accounts including Facebook, Instagram and notably Twitter (Von Drehle 2016: 39-41). Using all three platforms with a cumulative follower base of 25-million at the time, Mr Trump effectively determined his own media agenda, minus any editorial filtering by the "distorting media middleman" (Miller & Altman 2016: 48-55).

Key for Mr Donald Trump was realising the importance of Twitter early on during his campaign. It – for him – was "a powerful venue for politicians" (Liu 2016:21), another means of by-passing traditional media gatekeepers who were bound by strict deadlines and ideological biases. Mr Trump's social media success – Liu (2016:5) argues - lay in the fact that the leader relied heavily on "strong rhetorical media" such as Twitter to disseminate his persuasive tweets. Mr Trump's communication style of tweeting was simple and efficient, able to capture "global media attention"; and the

imagination of ordinary American voters alike. So impactful was Twitter's use for the 2016 US presidential elections that the New York Times firmly asserted that the micro-blogging portal was indeed the premier source of breaking news on Election Day (Isaac & Ember 2016). To be specific, Mr Trump's election to the US presidency marked the beginning of the "Twitter era"; and one reputed to have truly changed the "nature of our public discourse" (Liu 2016:10).

Mr Trump's media success in the 2016 US elections, though, is also said to be partly attributable to the manner in which he portrayed himself to the voting electorate. To the apathetic voter, Mr Trump represented "a rogue knight" fixed on challenging the incumbent political establishment through his "unorthodox methods" of "making America great again", something Capitol Hill politicians were reportedly not getting right (Nass 2016). To communicate this message effectively, Mr Trump discarded the old rules of campaigning and brought in his own ideas that "direct communication is king" (Nass 2016). Mr Trump's use of social media channels as his "alternate soapboxes" proved campaigning trajectories had shifted. In this case, Mr Trump's earned media coverage (of some US\$4.96-billion of free media) showed that when confronted with an altered political landscape, it will out-manoeuvre the value of paid-for traditional media political advertising (Nass 2016; Von Drehle 2016:39-41).

Mr Trump's earned media (see chapter 2 section 2.11) also emanates from him being the host of the reality television show, *The Apprentice* and *Celebrity Apprentice*, shows syndicated in a number of countries outside the US (Gunn 2017:11). Selling himself as a brand in the political marketplace was less difficult when compared to main competitor, Mrs Clinton. This also meant that Mr Trump's campaign expenses would be significantly less as paid-for extra publicity was not needed. Furthermore, because Mr Trump was familiar with media and how television ratings work, he knew that his controversial and often upsetting rhetoric would compel people to watch and listen to him. The same could be said for websites: his rants - as uncomfortable as they were - gave him added exposure with every click (see also McTernan 2016; Miller & Altman 2016: 48-55; Von Drehle 2016: 39-41).

In terms of image management, Mr Trump's political image during the elections was mainly formed through his "widely-circulated tweets" which had a spill-over effect in mainstream media (Gunn 2017:11). It was this "aggressive and provocative discourse" that eventually allowed the 45th US president to dominate the news agenda across traditional and non-traditional media portals (Liu 2016:22). What Mr Trump demonstrated with his election, then, is that the integral communication link between a media house and the audience is where the real power of media influence lays. Mr Trump took control of this function by dictating what content he wanted his audience to hear and see using his media platforms - on his terms (please also see Manjoo 2016; Stelter & Disis 2016). With the proliferation of new media sites such as Twitter, Liu (2016:35) further argues that Mr Trump showed that the hand of traditional media can be "weakened".

As influential as it has been in the elections of Mr Obama in 2008 and 2012 and Mr Trump in 2016, social media still needs its traditional media counterpart to exert maximum influence over voters' minds before an actual poll. Gunn (2017:18), for example, cites how Mr Trump needed social media avenues like Twitter to embellish his political image because he lacked requisite political experience and widespread support from his own Republican party. Twitter for him, and his controversial tweets, became that "powerful arena" of agenda-setting (Gunn 2017:18). This is maybe why Karlsen and Enjolras (2016) suggest politicians use a "hybrid communicative structure" or "hybrid communication system", a mix of both traditional and non-traditional media forms to achieve influence and support. In this respect, successive US elections have shown that social media and social networking sites have indeed altered the traditional election campaigning toolkit.

4.15 TWITTER AS AN URBAN ELECTIONEERING PLATFORM TO ADVANCE ISSUES VIA DIGITAL POLITICAL COMMUNICATION

It was earlier established in section 4.4 of this chapter that digital technologies give the urban space its own identity. Urban spaces were shown to be highly politicised; and this is why political parties deliberately target these densely-populated areas (see Bernstein 2019:19). Coupled with higher literacy levels and pronounced

technology adoption (in terms of higher Internet connectivity and access through multiple devices), these factors make the urban political space ripe for the proverbial picking. One method of accessing these urban audiences is through social media and social networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter – both of which were shown to be “mostly urban” interactive platforms (Lim 2014). Adding to their widespread utility is Smartphone access and affordability (Goldstuck & Wronski 2016). Explicit examples from India, Singapore, Malaysia and the US were given to strengthen this argument (see Lim 2013; 2014; Mir 2016; Nass 2016).

The South African urban-city space, likewise, was shown to be highly connected. Internet access was leveraged at home, work, place of study or through the simple use of a personal hand-held mobile device. Local government polls were, additionally, shown to be the best time to establish conversations about urban spaces. These municipal elections act as triggers for interrogative discourse about the urban-city arena, affording politicians, the middle classes and other groups to populate digital spaces with concerns. Politicians, thus, realise the importance of the densified urban space (see De Cindio, Di Loreto & Peraboni 2008). This is why parties carefully consider election campaign strategies in urban centres. For them, population density translates into message concentration with concomitant minimal expending of scarce election resources. This becomes even more relevant when the campaign kicks into full election mode, resulting in “symbolic overheating” of key election messages (Gerstle 1993:69).

Growing evidence exists, also, that targeted political communication, especially in urban areas, yield better results for political parties. Ahmed (2014), for example - reporting back on a survey of India’s 16th Lok Sabha elections in 2014 - reveals that using “modern media techniques” coupled with more creative urban electioneering increases votes for parties. This targeted political canvassing yields higher turnouts and inevitably raises levels of “political consciousness”. US President, Mr Trump, too, used skilful urban political communication through social networking sites in the 2016 polls to deliberately suppress turnout figures for main rival, Mrs Clinton’s, traditional urban voter base (Balz 2017).

A wealth of literature across multiple disciplines, then, show there exist an intimate relationship between digital technologies and urban spaces (see Abdel-Aziz *et al* 2016; Dutra *et al.* 2014; Black *et al.* 2013; Suffian 2013). In their research, Brighenti (2010), Hjarvard (2008) and Gaye (2005) label this ‘mediatisation’ or the urban being mediated by new media technologies, with digital communications being a manifest reality of this collision between urban space and technology. Drucker and Gumpert (2016), for example, provides evidence that 21st century cities brim with communication interactions of all sorts, shapes and sizes. Urban spaces such as cities are, thus, now branded as “communicative cities” and “environments of communication” (Drucker & Gumpert 2016:1366). Part of this new urban identity is the notion that a new mediascape is defining the urban landscape, one that comprises of a plurality of media forms such as satellite dishes, television channels, radio stations, cellphone towers, community media, closed circuit television, public wifi, municipal social media and municipal websites.

The researcher showed that mobile phone technology such as Smartphones are gradually aiding the process of political message diffusion, especially in high population areas such as urban spaces. Smith (2015) confirms this: users are increasingly using hand-held mobile Smartphones to keep abreast of current affairs and news, layering the urban space as a highly political one. This politicised urban space is populated by a rising middle class whose demographics boast higher education levels, increasing numbers of users and owners of technology (gadgets); and a potential voting stratum very much aware of their political rights and civil liberties executed through protests, petitions or demonstrations like we see almost daily in South Africa. However, another manner of protest by this urbanised group is through the use of the Internet and applications such as social media outlets like Facebook and Twitter. It is this degree of political conscientisation which political parties are drawn to within the fast-changing urban ecology. Political parties are additionally aware of the numerous class and social struggles that urban centres are prone to. Protests around housing, sanitation, water supply and electrification as a result of rapid urbanisation, for example, will draw different political parties to the pleas of possible supporters.

Therefore, it is within this frame of thinking that this study finds itself: to argue that Twitter functions as a digital party-political issue-promoting urban electioneering platform leveraged by the ANC and DA as a vote-capturing portal in the 2016 LGE. This section showed how Twitter has increased its political communication currency in the South African and global political spaces. Oscillating in sync with global digital trends, political communication has evolved and continues to be in constant movement as more and more politicians consider the multiplying “network effects” of being on such a platform. As a medium that can best be described as ‘converged media’, Twitter to the political communicator is that intermediary to bypass the traditional media gatekeeper; and a medium through which multiple opportunities to set, influence and challenge the prevailing news agenda exists.

Lastly, the researcher demonstrated that social networking sites such as Twitter are also valued for another reason, electronic subject tags or hashtags. Although used on other social networking sites such as Facebook, Instagram and YouTube, its ‘trending’ potential is amplified on Twitter. A politician just needs to consistently focus on an issue for it to thematically snowball into a bigger one. Not only does this give politicians a much clearer indication of what a potential electorate may find relevant; this unofficial, *ad hoc* research data can also be used by the politician for future election messaging. Contemporary political parties confirm the financial reality that invaluable election research is costly and time-consuming. Trending Twitter hashtags give parties access to this informal polling to pre-read the electoral landscape: which issues are more important to the electorate at the time; and how conversations around topics are being structured. Parties then respond accordingly. As seen in the example of Mrs Zille’s colonialism tweets cited earlier, the DA was forced into adjusting its behaviour to limit further brand damage (De Vos 2018). A medium such as Twitter with powerful ‘interactive’ hashtags, thus, becomes self-correcting for parties (see Boshomane 2016:5).

In addition, Twitter’s short and punchy format allows for issues to be easily summarised or empirically coded in a few sentences/ and or a few words. In the case of Mr Trump, catch-phrases such as ‘drain the swamp’ and ‘crooked Hillary’ did

not need hashtags for it to soon trend; and increase the viral nature of those posted tweets. The 140 (and now 280) characters afforded to each Twitter user also makes tweets easily memorable; in most cases one tweet carries only a single subject. More significantly, what Mr Trump showed with his 'catchy' tweets was that entrenched, powerful media houses could be challenged successfully. This becomes especially important when one considers the level of economic monopolisation of present day media houses; and how difficult it becomes to alter the news agenda altogether.

Related to this, Twitter hashtags repeatedly demonstrate its ability to reconfigure prevailing traditional news media angles. Of late, there have been numerous examples of this. When Mrs Winnie Madikizela-Mandela passed away in April 2018, traditional media outlets immediately went on the offensive by unearthing the leader's so-called dark apartheid past and the murder of 14-year old Mr Stompie Seipei. An informal, amorphous group of mainly Black online users called *Black Twitter* intervened by providing an alternative narrative; that Mrs Mandela was anything but a murderer through the skilful use of hashtags such as #IAmWinnieMandela, #AllBlackWithADoek, #MotheroftheNation and #MamaWinnie. The tone of subsequent traditional and non-traditional media reports slowly began to change before Mrs Mandela could be buried (Danielle 2018). Other such examples include Afriforum's surprise pursuance of fraud and corruption charges against EFF leader, Mr Julius Malema, in mid-April 2018. Black Twitter users, again, stepped up to the proverbial plate and used hashtags such as #HandsoffMalema and #BlackLivesMatter to change the course of traditional media sentiment around Mr Malema (EFF calls AfriForum action...2018).

4.16 SUMMARY

The underlying argument of this doctoral thesis remains that political communication has undergone a number of rapid technological changes since its early use in the mid-1900s. Its evolution from traditional media avenues to Internet-based technologies has culminated in digital political communication. In this chapter, the researcher, therefore, sought to link issue ownership theory (as outlined in chapter

three) to the politically-charged urban communicative space and the broader concept of urban electioneering. Micro-blogging site Twitter was, then, shown to be this ideal vehicle to establish digital issue ownership in the urban political space.

Using the US, Singapore, Malaysia and India as examples, it was shown why social networking sites such as Twitter can be considered as 'urban' platforms. The example of the 2016 US presidential elections was notably brought within the ambit of the discussion to demonstrate that social networking sites such as Twitter was indeed used as urban electioneering platforms. Access and connectivity, however, were determining factors for these sites to be classified as urban electioneering portals. In this case, the sites were predominantly leveraged for negative campaigning purposes against Mr Trump's main rival, Mrs Clinton; and for altering traditional news media narratives. The researcher, through Mr Trump's 2016 election success, also showed how the leader changed the typical election campaigning toolkit, with social networking sites now very much integral elements of the contemporary election media campaign must-haves.

In the case of South Africa, the argument that Twitter formed part of the ANC and DA's 2016 local government elections media campaigning toolkit persists. Through this medium, the researcher argued why both political entities sought to promote, agitate and cement their issues in the minds of potential voters and the media. Furthermore, it was argued that all this was possible through the relative rapid technological leapfrogging that South Africa has been doing in recent times. In specific, mention was made of smartphone technology and its concomitant utility for politics. Digital issue ownership as a result of Twitter election campaigning and the snowballing of issues through hash-tagging on the medium by the ANC and DA had now become a manifest reality.

The chapter concluded by linking the concepts of digital political communication, digital issue ownership and urban electioneering platform to further the idea that Twitter functions as an online electioneering platform for political parties and political candidates. Digital issue ownership – facilitated mainly through tweet formats and subject categorisation using hashtags on the micro-blogging site - Twitter was shown

to be 'urban' in its structure through high levels of Internet penetration in urban areas; and the nuanced technological and politicised nature of the urban space. In chapter five, more detail will be provided on the ANC and DA; their issue ownership strategies using traditional and non-traditional media; each party's campaign objectives for the 2016 elections; and their increasing use of Twitter as a supplementary media communication platform.

ⁱ Statistics from the 2015 International Telecommunications Union (ITU) global connectivity survey reveal additionally that South Africa had dramatically increased its "mobile-cellular subscriptions per 100 inhabitants" from 97% in 2010 to 149.7% by 2014. This means that South Africans possessed more than one mobile/ cellular handset; and coverage of the general population was high. These statistics are in agreement with an earlier Institute of Race Relations (IRR) study that found the country had an estimated 77-million registered sim cards – this despite the population being approximately 55-million (see Cruickshanks 2016: 1; Switzerland. International Telecommunications Union 2015: sec 4: 220). By 2014, South Africa's five mobile network operators – namely Cell C, MTN, Vodacom, Telkom Mobile/ 8TA and Virgin Mobile – collectively accounted for 77.7-million subscriptions. Ndebele (2015: 10) points out that prepaid customers comprise 20.4% of all mobile subscribers in South Africa. These numbers become even more perplexing when one retrospectively assesses the numbers. In 2000, there were 8.3 mobile subscriptions or 18.6 cellular phones for every 100 people. By 2013, this number had increased to 77-million or 145.6 cellular devices for every 100 South Africans (+683%). While "fixed broadband subscriptions per 100 inhabitants" climbed marginally – from 1.4% in 2010 to 3.2% in 2014 – "active mobile broadband subscriptions per 100 inhabitants" rose threefold from 16.9% in 2010 to 46.7% in 2014 (Switzerland. International Telecommunication Union 2015: sec 4: 224). These trends were not unique to South Africa as other countries on the continent enjoyed similar bursts in technological uptakes. Algeria for example by 2013 had 100 mobile phones for every 100 citizens, Botswana 161, Libya 165, Mauritius 123 and Egypt 122 (Ndebele 2015: 9).

ⁱⁱ For the 2016 General Household Survey, Statistics South Africa categorised an "urban area" to include all South Africa's eight main metropolitan regions; and cities, towns, townships and suburbs. Entities such as towns, cities, suburbs and townships were classified according to their varying levels of economic activity and land use. Rural areas, on the other hand, were categorised as such based on their definitions as "commercial farm, tribal areas or informal settlements on land not classified as urban land".

ⁱⁱⁱ Ndletyana (2014:15) defines a middle class voter as a "fairly progressive" cohort of post-1994 South African society who supports democracy; and is thus "highly engaged in the electoral process". This middle class voter is educated, employed, earns a steady income, is upwardly mobile; and is *au fait* with technology. The middle class voter also possesses the means of technological engagement, be it through owning a personal or work computer, mobile phone, television set or radio receiver. It is for this reason the South African urban vote is valuable to competing political parties (Endres 2014: 2).

^{iv} Facebook, notably, has since come in for severe criticism with regards to the sharing of approximately 87-million American users' Facebook data with Cambridge Analytica. Consequently, in early May 2018, Cambridge Analytica announced it would shut down its operations in wake of the Facebook data controversy (Robertson 2018; Watkins & Sutton 2018). Mr Trump's 2016 election campaign was not spared too. The leader was, again, criticised for employing so-called underhanded tactics to secure him the White House in November 2016 (see Bratt 2018; Hedley 2018; Mzekandaba 2018; Robinson 2018).

CHAPTER 5: DELINEATING ISSUE OWNERSHIP STRATEGIES AND SOCIAL MEDIA WITHIN THE CONTEXT OF THIS STUDY

5.1 INTRODUCTION

Chapter 5 aims to address RESEARCH QUESTION 3, namely: What issues did the ANC and DA choose to focus on in their 2016 LGE manifestos?

This chapter provides an overview of South African politics at national, provincial and local level to contextualise the focus of this study. Brief profiles of South Africa's governing party since democracy, the ANC and main opposition, the DA are then provided. The researcher gives some background on each party's electoral dominance in South African politics, their ideological leaning; and narratives leading to the 2016 LGE. The researcher also details in brief some of the conversations and controversies which defined the pre-electoral political space in the run-up to the said poll with the view that some of these issues may have informed each party's party-political issue ownership discourse around the August, 3, 2016 election. Additionally, a critical reading of both parties' 2016 LGE manifesto was conducted to provide a list of party-political issues each party had focused on. The chapter ends by providing an overview of the way the ANC and DA used micro-blogging site, Twitter, in previous election cycles and its promise for future elections.

First, though, it is important to locate this chapter within the broader context of South African national, provincial and local government politics.

5.2 OVERVIEW OF SOUTH AFRICAN LOCAL GOVERNMENT POLITICS

South Africa has been a constitutional democracy since the end of White minority rule in 1994. Despite achieving multi-party democracy, the country is still classified as an "adolescent democracy" (Vecchiatto 2014), based on the single party dominance of the ANC who have consistently won every national, provincial and

local election (1994, 1995/ 1996, 1999, 2000, 2004, 2006, 2009, 2011, 2014, 2016) (see Butler 2014: 1-8; Herzenberg 2014a: 39; Maphai & Gottschalk 2003: 62). Like most other contemporary democracies, separate elections are held for national and provincial government and the local sphere. However, unlike national and provincial polls where seats are calculated according to the proportion of votes a party wins, local government uses a combination of both the first-past-the-post (FPTP) and proportional representation (PR) systems. In general elections, political parties submit national and provincial lists. At local government level, candidates win wards and political parties are allocated PR seats based on their cumulative vote tallies from both the FPTP and PR ballots. The fluidity of this system means that smaller players such as community organisations, ratepayer associations and civic bodies stand a greater chance of winning seats over some of the bigger, more established political players, mostly due to the electoral body's seat allocation formula. These organisations need only a small amount of votes to win representation onto a local council. Additionally, independents who do not represent any political party, stand to benefit should they win a contested ward (a single seat) (see Zybrands 2006: 137-138; Piper 2013: 34-35).

South African local government elections are thus different compared to general elections in that seat calculations made by the electoral body is a little more complicated. Smaller organisations are rewarded for putting up trusted candidates within the ward system. More established political parties are forced to share the political pie with these players, including influential independents. This malleable system of electing local councillors and councils is a little more fluid, leading to coalitions and co-governing arrangements – as was seen with the EFF in Tshwane and Johannesburg after the August, 3, 2016 polls. Such flexible permutations are mostly non-existent at national and provincial level in South Africa (see Zybrands 2006: 137-138; Besdziek 2006: 114-116; Piper 2013: 34-35).

For purposes of the broader objectives of this study, it was important to contextualise the differences between general elections and its local government counterpart. While a winner-takes-all approach is used for five-yearly national and provincial

polls, a mixture of first-past-the-post and proportional representation is applied at the local sphere. The competitiveness of the system translates into more robust contestation for all political players, simultaneously injecting a renewed excitement when it comes to local council control in all nine provinces. In the next section, brief profiles are provided on the ANC and DA for a better understanding on each party's ideological bias and constituency base. This profiling seeks to show how each related to urban spaces in their overall 2016 campaigning.

5.3 PROFILE OF THE AFRICAN NATIONAL CONGRESS (ANC)

Africa's oldest liberation movement, the African National Congress is and has been South Africa's governing party since the country's first democratic elections in 1994. This political party has won every election since that historic milestone in 1994.ⁱ Ideologically, the ANC is viewed as being leftist on the political spectrum. Its policies are predominantly pro-poor, with a pronounced focus on social on social grants, education, healthcare and infrastructure development (Ferree 2011: 218).

5.3.1 ANC electoral performance 1994 – 2016

In South Africa's first universal suffrage vote in 1994, the ANC won 62.65%, permitting the party to form a new democratic government. Nelson Mandela was inaugurated as the country's first Black president (see Boraine 2014: 41; *One year of Government...1995*; Taljaard & Venter 2006: 17).ⁱⁱ Subsequent elections proved easy for the incumbent ANC as it went on to secure even larger majorities, winning 66.35% in 1999 and 69.69% in 2004. The party's first real electoral decline (65.90%) came in 2009 and then further decline in 2014 (62.15%).ⁱⁱⁱ Following the 2016 local government elections, the party's majority was reduced to 54% nationally. It also ceded control of three additional metros to opposition coalitions, namely Johannesburg and Tshwane in Gauteng; and Nelson Mandela Bay in the Eastern Cape, meaning that the ANC is now in control of only four of the eight metros countrywide (Beardsworth 2018).

5.3.2 The ANC's voter support base

A 2013 national Ipsos survey found that the ANC's main support was rural (48%), down from 52% in 2010 (Harris 2011). In contrast, the party enjoys 37% support in the country's cities and/ or metropolitan municipalities – a marked decline from the 48% in 2010 (Harris 2011). The main language spoken by a typical ANC supporter is isiZulu (29%) and isiXhosa (20%). English only accounts for 4% and Afrikaans 2%. Other prominent languages spoken by ANC supporters include Sepedi (12%), Setswana (11%) and Sesotho (11%). In terms of age breakdown, the typical ANC supporters are 18 – 24 (26%), 25 – 34 (24%), 35 – 49 (23%) and 50 + (23%). These statistics dispel the myth the party is more popular among older South Africans; the 18 – 34 demographic accounts for 50% of its support (see also Friedman 2019: 7).

Another interesting inference from the 2013 survey indicates the ANC supporter only enjoys 22% of full time employment while the 'unemployed, looking, unemployed and not looking' comprises 41% of its support base. This figure might explain the 31% dependency on government social grants. Thirty-seven-percent (37%) of ANC supporters earn between zero and R5000 per month; and approximately 21% take home in the region of R5000 per month and upward. When it came to educational background, the majority (36%) of ANC supporters only boast 'some high school' or 'grade 12' (39%), with only 4% holding some form of tertiary education. Most ANC supporters are Black African (96%) with Indians and Coloureds making up the remaining 4%. These supporters are mostly concentrated in KwaZulu-Natal (22%), Gauteng (19%), the Eastern Cape (16%) and Limpopo (13%). Of note, only 4% of their support base calls the DA-led Western Cape home (Ipsos survey: profiles of the supporters...2013).

5.4 PROFILE OF THE DEMOCRATIC ALLIANCE (DA)

Formed on 24 June 2000 through the amalgamation of the former Democratic Party (DP), Federal Alliance (FA) and now defunct New National Party (NNP), South Africa's official opposition, the Democratic Alliance (DA), espouses liberal values and free market principles (Ferree 2011: 50; Jolobe 2009: 132). The party supports minimal intervention in the economy and privatisation of state assets. The DA is said to be "liberal-conservative" on the political continuum (Venter 2006: 10), with an emphasis on rule of law, family, right to quality education, freedom of choice and the independence of the judiciary. The party can, thus, be said to embody a "constitutionalist" outlook (Venter 2006: 10). The DA is still regarded as a party for English-speaking Whites (Ferree 2011: 50; Jolobe 2009: 132), a tag it still finds difficult to shake off despite numerous attempts to rebrand in 2001, 2008 and 2015 – seminal moments in the party's history.

5.4.1 The DA voter support base

When it comes to the DA's support base, the 2013 Ipsos survey found that the typical DA partisan either lives in a 'city' (9%) or one of the eight metropolitan municipalities (56%). Its rural constituency accounts for just 10%. Another study conducted by Afrobarometer – found that 88% of DA partisans is either resident in a city or major town, translating into the party being "fundamentally urban" (Graham 2012: 2-4). The DA supporter speaks mainly Afrikaans (50%) and English (32%), with Black African languages making up the remainder of its support (18%) – which is significant, considering how the party constantly publicises the fact that it is attracting more Black voters to its fold. These numbers are fairly consistent with its racial demographic profile: 50% White, 27% Coloured, 20% Black African and 3% Indian. In 2011, an almost-similar Ipsos/ Markinor survey found that a DA partisan speaks English (55%), Afrikaans (24%); and then a Black African language (21%). This tells one that DA support among the Black African group declined by a whole

two-percentage points between 2010 and 2013 (Harris 2011). The DA draws its core support from the 35 – 49 age group (34%), 18 to 34-year olds comprise 30% of its supporters and the remainder (35%) fall into the 50+ age group. A massive 43% of DA supporters were employed full time, while the 'unemployed and looking, and unemployed and not looking' numbers 24%. Only 19% of DA supporters confirmed they received a government social grant.

The Ipsos survey also affirms the notion that DA supporters are much wealthier than their ANC counterpart, with 39% earning a monthly income of R5000-and-above while 17% enjoy a monthly salary of between zero and R5000. Most DA supporters are educated: 42% have a grade 12 education and 19% have a tertiary qualification. Only a small percentage has some primary education (6%) and some secondary education (27%). A typical DA supporter can be found in just three provinces, namely Gauteng (35%), the Western Cape (25%) and KwaZulu-Natal (11%) (Ipsos survey: profiles of the supporters...2013). The DA is known for its in-house research, especially before a major election. Soon after the 2004 national and provincial poll, the party communicated that 74.9% of its support came from White South Africans, while 81.8% of Black Africans chose the ANC as their preferred political representative (Leon 2008: 620; Leon 2009c; Leon 2010: 20).

Mr Mmusi Maimane is the current leader of the DA, elected at the DA's Federal Congress in May 2015 (Van Damme 2015). Mr Maimane was re-elected in 2018. He is the party's first Black leader. Before Mr Maimane's historic win, former Western Cape premier, Mrs Helen Zille led the party since May 2007. Prior to Mrs Zille, the DA was led by Mr Tony Leon from 1996 until his resignation in 2007 (Jolobe 2014: 63; Selfe 2015: 20). Despite the party's continued electoral ascendance after each election cycle, the DA has not managed to successfully to shake off the image of it being a racially-exclusive party, led by Whites and reserved for White people and other minorities such as Indians and Coloureds (Mantashe 2010). This is why Mr Maimane's win and election as DA leader in May 2015 was viewed as historic for the party. Not only is Mr Maimane the first Black person to occupy the DA leader's position since formation, he also became a powerful transformation symbol for the

party's critics who repeatedly accuses it of using Black politicians as window dressing in its reconciliation project (Southall 2016: 213).

5.4.2 The DP/ DA's electoral performance 1994 – 2016

The DP contested South Africa's first democratic elections in 1994 with Mr Zach De Beer as its leader. In that poll, the party – the main representative of the English-speaking White population – won approximately 340 000 votes (1.73%) nationally and seven seats in the National Assembly. Despite the ANC's framing of the DP as anti-democratic and racist, the party increased its 1994 showing 351% from 1.73% to 9.56% in 1999 (see Besdziek 2006:130-132; Booysen 2005:131; Hahndiek 2006: 49-51; South Africa. Independent Electoral Commission 2004: sec13: 57-59). The party – now renamed the DA post-2001 - fared the best of all opposition parties in 2004, winning 12.37% of the national vote, an increase of 2.8% since its last electoral outing in 1999 (Besdziek 2006:130-132; Hahndiek 2006: 49-51; South Africa. Independent Electoral Commission 1999: sec 9: 75-78). By the time the DA went into the 2009 general election, it had a new leader in Mrs Helen Zille; and the ANC had split in September 2008. In that poll, the DA won 16.66% or 67 seats and the all-important political control of the Western Cape. This had now become the only province in the country not under an ANC-led administration. Following the 2014 general elections, the DA increased its support from 16.66% in 2009 to 22.23% (Boughey 2015: 15-16; Selfe 2015: 20).^{iv} The party's most notable success, however, came after the 2016 local elections where it managed to increase its vote-share to approximately 24%; and winning significant 'battleground' metro municipalities such as Johannesburg, Tshwane and Nelson Mandela Bay. In Cape Town, the DA managed to strengthen its electoral hold.

To fully comprehend the ANC and DA's 2016 election campaigning strategies, it was important to profile each party, including its support base, electoral histories; and possible weaknesses. When designing communication outreach programmes such as election campaigning material, it becomes vital for parties to understand the

prevailing election climate to comprehend what issues are in the media space at the time. These issues likely informed other campaign areas for these parties in the lead-up to the 2016 local election. In the forthcoming section, the 2016 local government elections pre-campaigning phase of the ANC and DA are looked at more closely to understand the issues that were at play for each.

5.5 THE 2016 ELECTIONS PRE-CAMPAIGNING PHASE

As with every election, the preceding electoral environment is always highly charged. For researchers, this can prove an ideal time to understand the many election and non-election issues at play, which go on to shape the actual tone of the poll. The researcher shows in the next sub-section how the South African 2016 electoral terrain was defined by multiple conversations around the ANC and DA. This is done with a view to augmenting the overall argument that each party campaigned on a set of pre-determined and newer issues during the 2016 polls.

5.5.1 The ANC brand comes under attack

In the lead-up to the 2016 LGE, the ANC and DA were not immune to typical political controversies preceding an election. The ANC's biggest headache came in the form of its weakest region, the Western Cape, where the party's top two leaders were suspended pending a disciplinary process. Provincial chairperson Mr Marius Fransman was accused of sexual harassment by his 20-year old personal assistant, with charges pressed against him a day before the party's 104th celebrations in Rustenburg, North West (Davids & Jurgens 2016: 1). Western Cape secretary Mr Faez Jacobs faced assault charges after allegedly attacking a researcher in his office. Both cases were serious enough to warrant the ANC's top leaders' intervention to manage the scandal (Dolly 2016). Mr Fransman had since been replaced with Western Cape ANC deputy chairperson Mr Khaya Magaxa as

provincial secretary and leader of the opposition in the Western Cape legislature (Davids & Jurgens 2016: 1; Theletsane 2016).

The ANC's other problems oscillated around its controversial former president, Mr Zuma, and the many attacks inflicted on his leadership style by opposition parties. Parties like the DA and EFF demanded Mr Zuma resign following his shock firing of former Finance Minister, Mr Nhlanhla Nene and the appointment of relative unknown Member of Parliament (MP) Mr David Van Rooyen in December 2015. During this time, the South African currency was battered on international markets, sending investors fleeing in the wake of Mr Zuma's (and the ANC's) policy uncertainty (Calland 2016: 13; Hunter 2016: 4; Named: Van Rooyen's two Guptas...2016).^y Soon after this development, a 'Zuma Must Fall' campaign germinated on social networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter (Election temperatures...2016: 4). National and provincial 'Zuma Must Fall' marches were also held in key urban centres like Johannesburg, Pretoria and Johannesburg (Over 6000 attend...2016; Satgar 2016). The initiative gained further traction when a giant 'Zuma Must Fall' billboard was erected in Cape Town (Election temperatures...2016: 4).

Once the 'Zuma Must Fall' campaign began losing steam mid-January 2016, Mr Zuma was again thrust in the public domain when the EFF and its leader Julius Malema openly attacked him a few days before his annual State of the Nation Address (SONA). This time around, the ANC president had courted the anger of the EFF and the DA's Mr Maimane after he had capitulated on the Nkandla 'pay back the money' debacle. Replying to his Constitutional Court case around non-security upgrades implemented at his Nkandla private residence in KwaZulu-Natal, Mr Zuma conceded in court papers that he would pay back some of the money spent but that this should be determined by the Auditor-General and the Finance ministry (Feketha 2016: 4; Lund 2016; Mabuza 2016: 4; Ndaba and Thakali 2016: 4).

Mr Zuma's leadership was again questioned when news of former Finance Minister Mr Pravin Gordhan being instructed to answer 27 questions put to him by the Hawks – an elite crime-fighting unit – in relation to a “rogue unit” (Calland 2016:13) within the South African Revenue Services (SARS) during his tenure as Commissioner (see also Maphumulo 2016: 1; Marrian 2016b; Masombuka 2016: 2). The public spat is said to emanate from Mr Gordhan's fractious relations with fired SARS Commissioner, Mr Tom Moyane – a close Mr Zuma confidante (Hosken, Smillie & Capazorio 2016: 1; Maphumulo 2016: 1; Masombuka 2016: 2). News then broke on Wednesday, 2 March 2016 that ANC Chief Whip in the National Assembly and party veteran Mr Stone Sizani had tendered his resignation (Makinana 2016). The *Mail & Guardian* reported that Mr Sizani's shock removal was linked to the Nkandla issue (ANC always said Zuma...2016; Makinana 2016). On Friday, 4 March 2016, another prominent ANC leader Mr Keith Khoza announced his resignation from the post of ANC Communications Manager. Mr Khoza's decision was understood to be related to the growing dissatisfaction within party ranks around Mr Zuma (ANC spokesperson Keith...2016).

The negative publicity did not end there for the party. Another issue that caught the ANC unawares was when controversial local councillor, Mr Truman Prince, was exposed soliciting election funds using state resources. The Beaufort Mayor was eventually hauled before a party disciplinary committee and fined R100 000 for bringing the party into disrepute (ANC fines Truman...2016; Keegan 2016a: 44), The party garnered more bad publicity when the ANC Youth League's national president Mr Collen Maine was drawn into the racism narrative engulfing the South African media space since 2015. Mr Maine labelled EFF supporters “monkeys” at a party event (Ramothwala 2016: 5); the leader later withdrew his remarks. Earlier during that time, Gauteng Sports, Arts, Culture and Recreation Department official and ANC member, Mr Velaphi Khumalo brought attention to the party when he openly commented that Black people should do to White people what Hitler did to the Jews (Dlamini, Wagner, Narsee and Goba 2016: 1). Mr Khumalo was reprimanded for his comments, with the department saying that “public servants are meant to serve

everyone...if Khumalo believes that White people should be cleansed from South Africa, he should not be working as a public servant” (Mbangeni 2016: 1).

The ANC’s problems persisted when a few days before the IEC’s voter registration weekend on 5 and 6 March 2016, it was thrust into the public spotlight for all the wrong reasons. This time, the ANC’s national leadership was left red-faced when its Johannesburg region posted a picture on Twitter showing an ANC female supporter scantily dressed in an ANC-coloured swimming costume encouraging voters to register. The tweet carried the tag line “what do you make of this swimwear?” (Nare 2016); it went viral before the party could retract it and apologise to women. By 5 March (2016), it was discovered the lady in the “salacious image” was actually Jamaican designer Miss Errice Alicia who had chosen to share the selfie with her 32 000 Instagram followers (Serumula 2016). The swimwear colours were not that of the ANC but colours of her native Jamaica and the picture was reportedly “appropriated” by the ANC (in Johannesburg) and distributed to their followers on its Twitter handle (Serumula 2016).

Another issue for the party was the surfacing of a so-called R50-million ‘Black ops’ campaign before the 2016 local elections where the party was accused of waging a dirty, traditional and negative digital narrative against its main rivals, the EFF and DA. Part of the allegation was the creation of so-called fake Twitter accounts to generate negativity around the opposition. Additionally, it was alleged that the party had recruited some 200 ‘influencers’ to propagate a certain narrative on Facebook and Twitter. Electronic posters showing EFF leader Mr Julius Malema brandishing a gun calling for a ‘take up of arms’ to defend South Africa’s democracy were part of this ‘Black ops’ campaign too. The main aim of the ANC’s alleged ‘war Room’ was to “disempower the DA and EFF campaigns” to set a “pro-ANC agenda” with the party’s name not being implicated (Hunter 2017: 4). The ANC, however, successfully defended its name when the case was dismissed by the courts (see Comrie 2017; Mokone & Molatlhwa 2017: 4; Umraw 2017; Plaut 2019).

5.5.2 The DA endures brand damage too

The DA also suffered multiple dents to its image leading up to the 2016 local government elections. DA leader Mr Maimane was forced into defending the party's non-racial credentials on an almost weekly basis early into the 2016 New Year. The leader's headaches first started when DA MP Mrs Dianne Kohler-Barnard was exposed by the ANC reposting a Facebook comment on her wall calling for the return of notorious apartheid leader, Mr PW Botha. Mrs Kohler-Barnard was sanctioned by the party, leading to a R20 000 fine and an apology (Kodwa 2016b: 4). This was followed by the Mrs Penny Sparrow incident: when a DA member from the party's KwaZulu-Natal structures labelled Black African New Year's Day beachgoers 'monkeys' (see Khoabane 2016: 17; Selapisa 2016:2).

The party's erection of a giant billboard in the Johannesburg city centre in January 2016 also came in for heavy lambasting from the ANC, with the governing party spokesperson, Mr Zizi Kodwa, dismissing the DA as "racist" (Jadoo 2016a: 5). The billboard had Mr Zuma's smiling face with the text 'more people jobless under Zuma's ANC and counting' – a form of negative political advertising. On an adjacent wall, the DA had its banner with its logo and the text 'DA...vote for change that creates jobs' (see Jadoo 2016a: 5; Mabuza 2016: 4; Mkentane 2016: 4).

As the weeks progressed, more DA office-bearers were thrust into the news, from being involved in apartheid-era operations to matters of domestic violence. In the latter, the ANC made repeated calls for the DA to fire its mayor in the George municipality, Mr Charles Stander, who stood accused of brutally assaulting his wife (ANC calls for dismissal...2016; Keegan 2016a: 39). More image-damaging episodes followed, including accusations that party Cape Town councilor Mr Sam Pienaar failed to declare that he had been a colonel in the South African Defence Force; and had been directly involved in the Trojan Horse massacre in 1995. The massacre involved the killing of children and pedestrians in Athlone and Crossroads,

Cape Town (Naidoo 2016: 19). Nelson Mandela Bay Metro councilor Mr Chris Roberts was also found guilty of calling a United Democratic Movement (UDM) councilor a baboon; he was later dismissed by the party (De Kock 2016; Mkentane 2016b: 4). Another incident that made headlines in January 2016 was when DA MP Mrs Anchen Dreyer was photographed posing in front of a cardboard cutting of former Transvaal Republic colonial leader, Paul Kruger (ANC chief whip...2016: 4).

Beleaguered DA leader Mr Maimane capitulated and hurriedly called an urgent media briefing symbolically at the Apartheid Museum in Johannesburg, pledging his party's support towards non-racialism and affirmed there was no room for racists within the DA (Naidoo 2016: 19). At that briefing, DA representatives were made to sign the party's newly-drafted non-racial commitment policy in full view of the media. Mr Maimane himself faced allegations of taking leadership lessons and being 'mentored' and 'tutored' by apartheid-era State President, Mr FW De Klerk (Pillay 2016:27). Although Mr Maimane dismissed the story by weekly publication, the *Mail & Guardian*, the damage to his and the party's image had been swift. The publication, however, apologised to the DA and Mr De Klerk in mid-February 2016, citing a number of journalistic shortcomings in its reporting (Pillay 2016: 27).

Senior party leadership were not spared either. Prominent DA Member of Parliament (MP) Advocate Glynnis Breytenbach alleged a "political conspiracy" against her when she was again charged by the National Prosecuting Authority (NPA) in early 2016 (NPA dismisses claims of political interference...2016). Advocate Breytenbach stood accused by the NPA of not cooperating with the investigating body when misconduct allegations were levelled against her in 2012. She additionally stood accused of deleting key information from her laptop. NPA spokesperson Mr Luvuyo Mfaku, however, quickly dismissed Advocate Breytenbach's claims of a political motive for the charges (NPA dismisses claims of political interference...2016).

The other senior leader not spared was DA Federal Chairperson and mayoral candidate for the Nelson Mandela Bay metro, Mr Athol Trollip, who made headlines in the February Sunday papers for reported racism and ill treatment of workers on his family farm (Ngcukana 2016). Unfazed by the allegations of “human rights abuses” and the threat of these charges being elevated to the South African Human Rights Commission (SAHRC), Mr Trollip welcomed the move, saying only that this latest incident amounted to “a smear campaign by political opponents” (Ngcukana 2016). Mashego (2016) says the racism debate so close to the 2016 elections was opportune for the ANC as it gave the party “breathing room”; and the ideal opportunity to attack the DA because it knew the racism debate was the DA’s “weak point”. To gain full mileage from these ‘race’ debates, Mashego (2016) adds the ANC would only abandon race as an election issue after the 2016 vote.

Despite these setbacks, DA leader Mr Maimane used the findings of a local government report by Good Governance Africa (GGA) to buoy the party’s governing credentials (DA leader targets...2016). The GGA survey found that nine out of ten of South Africa’s best run municipalities were under a DA-led administration, with Swellendam in the Western Cape being the best run (Tschudin 2016: 63-65).^{vi} Not one to lose the opportunity to sing his party’s praises, Mr Maimane took to Twitter to communicate this to voters, with the binary reality being that South Africa’s ten ‘worst municipalities’ were governed by the ANC (Tschudin 2016: 63-65).

It was essential for this chapter to take cognisance of, and document, the prevailing election climate in the build-up to the 2016 polls. It indirectly framed how parties responded, reacted and replied to the electoral landscape at the time. Over the full election campaigning phase, these and other issues crystallised to either disappear altogether or become bigger owned issues for each contesting political party. Another noteworthy source of issues for the ANC and DA was each party’s election manifesto in the 2016 local government elections. Sub-sections 5.6 and 5.7 aim to capture the mood and sentiment before the ANC and DA’s election manifesto launches in April 2016; and what political issues each party emphasised.

5.6 THE ANC'S 2016 ELECTION MANIFESTO

A political party's election manifesto is a rich source of potential issues that parties intend focusing on to win over votes. The issue-setting agenda does not begin and end with the election manifesto though. The electioneering starts before the actual launch of a political party's election manifesto. What follows is an account of the ANC and DA's pre-election campaigning phase to make sense of the dominant and less-dominant issues infiltrating the media and voter space.

5.6.1 The mood before the 2016 elections manifesto launch

Fearing the possible loss of the Nelson Mandela Bay metropolitan municipality to the opposition in the 2016 election, the ANC elected to launch its 2016 LGE manifesto at the 110 000-seater Nelson Mandela Bay Stadium in the Eastern Cape on Saturday, 16 April 2016. The event, however, also drew attention for other reasons. The party was heavily lambasted for managing to attract only 42 000 partisans to the stadium on the day, about half the stadium's capacity. Letsoalo (2016) labelled the turnout a "psychological defeat" for the ANC. While some attributed the show-of-no-support to then ANC president Mr Zuma, party Head of Campaigns Mrs Nomvula Mokonyane was blamed for misreading the mood of the area beforehand. The ANC Eastern Cape leadership also shouldered some blame. Suffice to say, both the DA and EFF capitalised on the party's lacklustre event attendance, attributing it to the ANC's dwindling support, especially in the Nelson Mandela Bay Metro. The ANC hit back, dismissing the other parties' suggestions that something was amiss. In its defence, the ANC said that a number of busses had not arrived at the stadium on time due to logistical matters. Exactly two weeks later during its main 2016 manifesto launch, EFF leader Mr Malema mocked the ANC's poor turnout; and vowed that Mr Zuma would not be president of the country by the 2019 general elections (Letsoalo 2016).

The ANC supplemented its 2016 LGE launch by staging a number of manifesto breakfast briefings where the media could interact with top ANC people. These journalists would then report on what emanated from the briefings, ensuring the ANC's policies and promises to the South African electorate were communicated. The first of these sessions occurred on 9 May 2016 in Parktown, Johannesburg; and featured high-ranking ANC members, including current National Executive Committee (NEC) member and former Minister of Land Reform and Rural Development Mr Gugile Nkwinti and former Executive Mayor of eThekweni metro, Mr James Nxumalo. Additionally, the party held mini manifesto launches across all provinces, with Gauteng staging its massive manifesto rally at Johannesburg's First National Bank (FNB) Stadium on June 4, 2016.

In the section that follows, more information is provided on the issues the ANC concentrated on in its 2016 LGE manifesto; this formed part of the researcher's critical reading for this doctoral exercise.

5.6.2 A narrative summary of the ANC's 2016 election issue emphasis

The ANC's 2016 LGE manifesto is spelled out in 32-pages.^{vii} Using a combination of images and a mixture of big, bold and small text, the document begins with outlining the party's 2016 poll tagline, namely 'Together Advancing People's Power in Every Community – Local Government is in Your Hands'. The first few pages starts with a message from the then ANC president, Mr Jacob Zuma, who brings up historic anniversaries to be commemorated in 2016, the same year of the country's fifth local elections. The ANC actively attaches its brand to the liberation narrative by citing events such as the 60th anniversary of the Women's March to the Union Buildings in 1956, the formation of *Umkhonte we Sizwe*, the ANC's former armed wing during apartheid, 55 years prior, the 40th anniversary of the historic 1976 Soweto student uprisings and the 20th anniversary of the adoption of South Africa's final constitution. Mr Zuma clearly defines the ANC's pact with voters leading to the August 3 elections, focusing significant attention on accountable, community-chosen councillors who would now be compelled to sign performance agreements once elected. (South Africa. African National Congress 2016: sec 1:5).

The ANC reminds voters in the introduction to its 2016 LGE manifesto that the freedoms South Africans enjoy today did not come easily. Those liberties were hard-fought for and apartheid legislation at local government had – before 1994 – cut up the country into “over a thousand local authorities for White people, Africans in urban areas, African communities in homelands, and Indian and Coloured communities” (South Africa. African National Congress 2016: sec 1:1-5). The ANC went on to say the previous racist administration sought to “systematically divide the people” but that it was only the ANC (government) that had “fundamentally changed” the status quo for a “coherent, functional and stable structure...system of local governance” (South Africa. African National Congress 2016: sec 1: 1-5).

In subsequent pages, the ANC reminds South Africans of its many achievements since 1994, including the increased delivery of water, sanitation, electricity and refuse services. The party uses simple graphs to illustrate the delivery strides it had made between 2001 and 2014. It extends these illustrations the way the party has improved on deliverables such as ‘primary healthcare’, ‘human settlements’, the ‘expanded public works programme’, ‘municipal infrastructure’; and the way it had tackled issues such as ‘fraud and corruption’ (South Africa. African National Congress 2016: sec 2:18-25). Importantly, on page 16 of the 2016 LGE manifesto the ANC uses the image of Nelson Mandela to reflect on the local government achievements it has made between 2011 and 2016. These include the upgrading of 95 000 informal settlement households and the continued expansion of the Expanded Public Works Programme (EPWP) to 196 municipalities and 200 000 people by 2015 (South Africa. African National Congress 2016: sec 2: 18-25).

The ANC’s promise to the South African voter for the next five years begins on page 17 (South Africa. African National Congress 2016: sec 3: 17-32).

These include:

- Delivering basic services;
- Cleaning up local governance;

- Ensuring accountability of elected municipal officials;
- Improving municipal capacity for better delivery;
- Creation of jobs at local government level;
- Addressing crime;
- Providing more educational and health facilities;
- Introducing more mixed communities;
- Going greener in terms of 'cleaner' communities.

More qualitative analysis regarding the ANC's pronounced issues in its 2016 elections manifesto will be expanded upon in chapters six and seven.

5.7 THE DA'S 2016 ELECTION MANIFESTO

As argued herein, election manifestos prove important issue statements for political parties. They are the clearest indication of what parties intend doing once in official political office. Agitating on these issues, however, starts before any official election manifesto unveiling. The pre-campaigning phase is an important indicator of how some issues may be greater emphasised than others; and how these then become more salient during actual election campaigning.

5.7.1 The mood before the 2016 elections launch

The DA launched its 2016 elections manifesto on 23 April 2016 at the 20 000-seater Rand Stadium in Gauteng province.^{viii} Following the ANC's half-full stadium at its manifesto launch a week earlier, the DA also faced harsh criticism for failing to fill up the small venue albeit if the party used giant-sized branding banners to cover certain parts of the stadium. Both the ANC and EFF cried foul; arguing this was proof the DA could not muster enough support to populate such a small venue (Letsoalo 2016). During the DA's manifesto launch, party leader Mr Mmusi Maimane affirmed that the 2016 poll was a *de facto* referendum for the country's constitution – in reference to a Constitutional Court finding where a full bench of the apex court found that the ANC's top leader had violated the sovereign document (Mahlangu 2016). Two days

after the national manifesto unveiling, the party unfurled its campaigning posters on Monday 25 April 2016.

In section 5.7.2, more information is provided on the issues the DA concentrated on in its 2016 LGE manifesto – as part of the researcher’s critical reading.

5.7.2 A narrative summary of the DA’s issue emphasis in the 2016 election

The DA’s 2016 LGE manifesto is 61-pages long, albeit most in A5 page format.^{ix} The document opens with the party’s logo and name on the front page and the broad theme – *Change That Moves South Africa Forward Again*. In its promise to the South African electorate, it first reminds voters of the values that underpin the party, namely ‘Freedom, Fairness, Opportunity – One Nation with One Future Built on Freedom, Fairness and Opportunity for All’. Preceding this however, the party presents its “vision for local government from pages 1 – 6. Labelling the 2016 elections as the “most crucial since 1994” (South Africa. Democratic Alliance 2016: sec 1:1-11), the DA acknowledges the progress the ANC government has made since 1994. It, however, highlights the “crucial crossroads” the country finds itself in, making mild references to the recent Constitutional Court judgment against former President Mr Jacob Zuma, the ANC leader’s wastage of taxpayer monies on his Nkandla home, the state of South Africa’s rising unemployment levels, the imminence of a credit rating downgrading, corruption; and the fact that the governing-party’s “empty promises” were holding the country hostage. The DA’s manifesto, then, provides a small message from its leader, Mr Mmusi Maimane, after which it details its mantra ‘Vision 2029 – A Better Future’. The party affirms that DA administrations around the country “care...are lean, clean, responsive...citizen-oriented”; and if elected into national government by 2029, the country would be much safer, with lower corruption levels with a fair justice system that did not discriminate (South Africa. Democratic Alliance 2016: sec 1:1-11).

The rest of the DA's 61-page 2016 election manifesto delves into its many promises to South Africa's voters, using a combination of 27 'Where DA Governs' reminders; and 6 'Fact' testimonials to cement its appeal. Part of the DA's 27 appeals includes constant juxtaposing against the ANC and its delivery/ non-delivery record on a number of issues. For example, when focusing on how the metros facilitated job creation, the DA uses a graph labelled 'Rate of Unemployment' comparing the DA's delivery record in Cape Town – the only metro where it governs – against ANC-run metros such as Tshwane, Nelson Mandela Bay and Johannesburg (South Africa. Democratic Alliance 2016: sec 2:12-61). These binary couplings continue for most of the manifesto. Another example is 'Title Deeds Delivery' – in reference to the number of official home owners each party, both the ANC and DA has managed to create (South Africa. Democratic Alliance 2016: sec 2:12-61).

Again, the DA juxtaposes itself against the ANC, citing ANC-led metros like Buffalo City, Johannesburg, Tshwane and Nelson Mandela Bay and the way the DA has delivered in Cape Town. Perhaps one of the more controversial party-political juxtapositions the DA uses is its 'blocking' of the proposed tolling of the N1 and N2 highways in the Cape metro. The party deliberately cites this, comparing its proactive stance to the "e-tolling fiasco in Gauteng". Some of the other 'Where the DA Governs' reminders within the manifesto worth a mention include the creation of a "satellite mayor's office" in Swellendam - another municipality it governs, the erection of "substance abuse treatment sites" in its sole metro, how the party is tackling "early childhood development" in its only Gauteng municipality, Midvaal, "water management" facilities in DA-administered Drakenstein municipality, "waste water and landfill management" matters in the DA-run Swartland local municipality; and "Midvaal's Local Economic Development Success" (South Africa. Democratic Alliance 2016: sec 2: 12-61).

As part of its voter appeal based on tangible facts, the party lists six prominently in their 2016 LGE manifesto. Examples include "the City of Cape Town has repealed over 300 such policies and seen a significant increase in the value of new plans lodged with the City" – in direct reference to Cape Town's apartheid-era history of

racist laws and by-laws; “DA-run local governments provided 547 external bursaries in the 2014/2015 financial year”; and “in the 2014/ 2015 financial year, the City of Cape Town spent 67% of its budget in poor communities” (South Africa. Democratic Alliance 2016: sec 2:12-61).

The DA’s manifesto ends by making reference to the way *hashtags* have dominated the political discourse of late (strengthening the argument of this doctoral researcher of how online political communication was enabling the phenomenon of digital issue ownership as elucidated in chapter 3 of this thesis). Using an image of common South Africans gathering on the streets, the party’s 2016 elections manifesto ends with “#SouthAfricaComesFirst”, again another swipe at the ANC and its leader, Mr Zuma. The DA uses this end note to juxtapose itself against Mr Zuma, who told both ANC partisans and parliament that his party came first; and then the country. It is clear the DA is seeking to portray the ANC as a party that does not care about ordinary South Africans; and that the DA was voters’ best chance of a caring government that would use its service delivery record elsewhere in towns and cities where it governed to make the lives of South African more comfortable and safer (South Africa. Democratic Alliance 2016: sec 2: 12-61).

Issues identified – then - in the DA’s 2016 LGE manifesto include:

- Creating jobs through more private sector investment;
- Being more responsive to service delivery of basic services
- Tackling of local government corruption
- Addressing spatial apartheid planning issues
- Reducing crime

Sub-sections 5.6 and 5.7 touched on narrative summaries of the ANC and DA’s 2016 election manifestos; and what each promised the electorate. This was part of the critical reading the researcher embarked upon. (South Africa: African National

Congress 2016:1-32; South Africa. Democratic Alliance 2016:1-61). More qualitative analysis regarding the issues singled out in the ANC and DA's 2016 local government election manifestos will be provided in chapters six and seven through Grounded Theory documentary analyses.

In section 5.8, the focus shifts to the ANC and DA's use of social networking site, Twitter, in previous election campaigning to illustrate both parties' gradual progression to its adoption as part of their digital election campaigning and political communication arsenal. This is also done in anticipation of providing more context for the forthcoming chapters. For the 2016 polls, both the ANC and DA were not constrained in any way to just restrict themselves to traditional methods of engagement (radio, television, print, posters, community meetings, rallies, walkabouts). They also leveraged the Internet and sites such as Facebook and Twitter for digital political communication reasons. These forums only increased in use through successive elections. For purposes of this study, though, attention is paid only to micro-blogging application, Twitter.

5.8 ANC AND DA TWITTER USE IN THE 2016 ELECTIONS

Earlier, the researcher showed how political parties in South Africa like the ANC and DA factored Internet campaigning into their strategies only after the so-called (Barack) Obama effect in 2008. By this time, South African politics had not made the any big leap to using the Internet or social networking sites for political canvassing. Although these parties flirted with online campaigning in the 2009 general elections, actual use of online campaigning only began permeating the South African media landscape two years later. Dhawraj (2013), for example, showed how the DA extensively used Facebook to win over voters in the 2009 polls. The social networking site was shown to have emboldened the image of the then party leader, Mrs Helen Zille, in that election. Extensive qualitative analyses of online Facebook conversations illustrated how these conversations were modeled around a mainly anti-corruption stance; allowing the DA to attach itself to a so-called anti-Zuma ticket (Dhawraj 2013).

Twitter use by either the ANC or DA during the 2009 elections was virtually non-existent. The micro-blogging application was made popular by these political parties in a practical sense only before, during and after the 2014 provincial and national elections. By 2014, Twitter's efficacy in getting the politician's message out began to gain currency. At the time of the 2014 polls, the ANC boasted 120 000 followers, while the DA had approximately 77 300 followers. By the time the 2016 municipal elections arrived, the ANC steadily increased its Twitter followers to a massive 293 000. The DA's Twitter handle, on the other hand, numbered 209 000 followers. While the ANC's tweets numbered 29 100 in the heated lead-up to the 2016 elections, the DA had used the SNS extensively, tweeting 64 100 times by 13 May 2016. This represents a massive 35 000 (tweets) or 38% gap between the parties (My ANC Grow...2019; Democratic Alliance...2019).

At the time of the ANC's national 2016 LGE manifesto launch in the Eastern Cape on 16 April 2016, the party had approximately 270 000 Twitter followers.^x By 13 May 2016, the party's Twitter handle - @MyANC - had 293 000 followers while it followed 8457 other Twitter users. By 30 April 2016, the party had tweeted 27 600 times. Two weeks later, the party's total tweets amounted to 29 100, a modest increase of 1500. The DA's official Twitter handle, @Our_DA, states the party "joined in 2009" and boasted approximately 196 000 followers and was following 26 800 other Twitter users as at 30 April 2016. By 13 May 2016, its followers had increased to 209 000. An interesting observation was the marked surge in the party's tweets between mid-April – at the time of its national manifesto launch – and mid-May 2016. Exactly nine days after the DA's 2016 LGE manifesto launch at the Rand Stadium in Gauteng, the party had tweeted 59 700 times. By 13 May 2016, the DA's tweets totaled 64 100, an increase of 4400 (My ANC Grow...2019; Democratic Alliance...2019). Please refer to Table 5.1 on the next page for a clearer outline of the ANC and DA's Twitter presence between the 2011 and 2019 election cycles:

CHAPTER 5: DELINEATING ISSUE OWNERSHIP STRATEGIES AND SOCIAL MEDIA WITHIN THE CONTEXT OF THIS STUDY

Table 5.1: The ANC and DA's presence of Twitter 2011 – 2019			
AFRICAN NATIONAL CONGRESS (ANC)			
Year	Followers	Following	Tweets
2011	UNKNOWN		
2014	120 000	6570	11 100
2016	293 000	8457	29 100
*2017	394 000	8673	41 600
**2018	572 000	8622	48 300
***October 2018	601 000	8599	49 400
****January 2019	619 000	8585	51 700
*****May 2019	668 000	8587	56 800
DEMOCRATIC ALLIANCE			
Year	Followers	Following	Tweets
2011	1500	UNKNOWN	
2014	77 300	26 100	26 900
2016	209 000	26 800	64 100
*2017	351 000	26 500	81 500
**2018	511 000	26 900	87 800
***October 2018	526 000	26 800	89 400
****January 2019	535 000	26 800	91 600
May 2019	557 000	26 700	96 300
<p>*The researcher considered it necessary to depict changes in the ANC and DA's Twitter accounts exactly a year after the 3 August 2016 elections. These numbers were extracted on 3 August 2017 to illustrate the growing popularity of Twitter as the ANC and DA's chosen digital political communication medium.</p> <p>**Another reading of the ANC and DA's Twitter followers were taken on 3 August 2018 – exactly two</p>			

years after the 2016 elections - to again show the gradual increase of its follower base on the micro-blogging application (just before another all-important general election in 2019).

***In October 2018, the ANC surpassed the 600 000 Twitter follower mark

****At the time of the ANC's launch of its 2019 election manifesto, the party had accumulated 619 000 followers, compared to the DA's 535 000 follower base – again illustrating the importance of Twitter as a digital communication medium to political parties between major electoral cycles

*****These figures were recorded at the time of the 2019 general elections to show how both the ANC and DA had increased their support or follower base on Twitter

SOURCE: My ANC Grow...2019; Democratic Alliance...2019

The ANC has since acknowledged its past inertia in embracing social networking sites such as Twitter to communicate with its supporters (see Geleba 2018). Only recently, on Wednesday, 18 May 2016, the party held an information-sharing session using its Facebook and Twitter platforms. Using the hashtag #ANCLiveChat, supporters and non-supporters alike were encouraged to message or tweet the party's secretary-general, Mr Gwede Mantashe. At the time of the live chat, Mr Mantashe had 28 700 followers on Twitter. The leader's tweets were additionally retweeted by the ANC's main twitter handle, which boasted approximately 292 000 followers at the time (My ANC 2016 local government elections feed...2016).

At this juncture, one cannot say if either party used a social media strategy when communicating its political issues during the 2016 local government elections; or whether these Twitter handles were managed. Questions such as these will be explored further when semi-structured interviews are conducted with each party's social media managers to either confirm or reject the outcomes from the qualitative Grounded Theory analysis of the ANC and DA's 2016 LGE manifestos and the corpus of election-related tweets (in chapters 6, 7 and 8). Another question to be probed will be whether or not the ANC and DA adhered to a plan or schedule for all their political tweets (please refer to Annexures A and B).

5.9 SUMMARY

While chapters 3 and 4 introduced the key concepts underpinning this study such as issue ownership theory, urban communication, digital urban communication, urban politics and digital political communication, chapter 5 shifted the discussion to the protagonists of this thesis, namely the ANC and DA. Profiles of both parties were provided, coupled with what issues each sought to deliberately emphasise in the 2016 poll. To show how certain 'election' issues crystallised into bigger ones and possibly altered the ANC and DA's responses to them, the researcher recounted the energised electoral landscape before the August, 3 2016 election. The researcher, additionally, sought to single out key issues highlighted in each party's 2016 election manifesto (through a critical reading of the manifesto documents). The ANC, for example, listed the provision of basic services, clean local government, job creation, bringing down the crime level, the building of more educational and health facilities and the provision of more mixed and greener communities as part of its offer to the electorate. The DA, on the other hand, focused on local job creation, crime reduction, better delivery of services; and addressing corruption at the local government level with much more vigour.

The chapter ended by understanding the ANC and DA's past association with micro-blogging site, Twitter; and how each has used the platform since 2011. As South Africa's two biggest political parties, with the most number of representatives at all three spheres of national, provincial and local government, the ANC and DA could be said to have pioneered the adoption of non-traditional new media campaigning technologies. As shown here, such a stance was precipitated by twin motivations of reading the global trend of campaigning; and a need to come across as 'connected' to the fast-changing technological local electoral landscape. Political parties of the 21st century cannot afford not to be online when most of the political world is moving in that direction. Electorates demand two-way communication, interaction, accountability and responsiveness from elected politicians. Social media and social networking sites, in this respect, aid this process. This is possibly why the ANC and

DA have adopted aggressive social media strategies. The progressive increases in followers on each party's Twitter accounts prove there is a need and demand for such online communication. In chapter six, the methodology and operationalisation of key terms/ concepts of this study will be explained in detail.

ⁱ Although the governing-ANC has secured overwhelming electoral majorities in South Africa's post-apartheid elections, its share of the Voting Age Population (VAP) – or the number of eligible voters – has actually been in gradual decline. If one compares the numbers, the ANC won 54% of the country's VAP, this declined to 39% during the 2009 general elections. Opposition parties have been losing ground steadily in this picture too. The VAP's support of the opposition in 1994 was 32%; 25% in 1999; 17% in 2004; and 20% in the 2009 elections (Schulz-Herzenberg 2009a: 27-28).

ⁱⁱ Following the 1994 all-race vote, South Africa was governed by a Government of National Unity (GNU) from 27 April 1994 until 3 February 1997. Part of this arrangement, as stipulated in the country's interim constitution meant that any political party that attained 20 or more seats in the 1994 poll could lay claim to at least one cabinet seat; and be part of the government of the day (One year of Government...1995).

ⁱⁱⁱ Following the forced resignation of former party president Thabo Mbeki in September 2008ⁱⁱⁱ and the subsequent formation of breakaway party, the Congress of the People (Cope) a few months laterⁱⁱⁱ, the ANC won 65.90% in 2009 (Southall 2016: 210-211). By the 2014 general election, the party had experienced another splinter breakaway from within its ranks when former ANC Youth League (ANCYL) President Julius Malema formed the Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) in July 2013.ⁱⁱⁱ This arguably impacted the ANC's vote share; the party declined to 62.15% in that election but retained political control of eight provinces (Butler 2014: 42-56).ⁱⁱⁱ

^{iv} South Africans living overseas reportedly voted en-masse for the DA, which received an overwhelming majority of 84.44% of votes cast by expats in the May 7 elections. The ANC secured only 8.32% of the expat vote (South Africa. Independent Electoral Commission 2014: sec 4: 42-47).

^v More allegations of the Guptas' influence over President Jacob Zuma surfaced in the March 13 edition of weekly newspaper the *Sunday Times* when the publication lead with 'How Guptas shopped for new minister', in reference to Deputy Finance minister Mcebisi Jonas being offered the post of Finance Minister. The article alleged that Jonas was offered the job twice by the Gupta brothers before it went to Pravin Gordhan (Calland 2016: 13; Jika, Hunter & Skiti 2016: 1; Molathwa & Mabuza 2016: 1). Jonas called a media briefing on 16 March, confirming that he was indeed offered the finance portfolio by the Gupta family (Modjadji & Tau 2016: 2; Wildenboer 2016: 6). The Guptas hit back saying that Jonas' assertions were untrue and challenged him to provide evidence in a court of law (Cruywagen & Ramothwala 2016: 1; Hunter, Jika & Speckman 2016: 1; Oakbay, Guptas release...2016: 1). A few days later, more controversy followed when former ANC MP, Vytjie Mentor posted on her Facebook profile that she was once offered the Public Enterprises portfolio reportedly again by the Guptas, a claim which the Presidency and Zuma denied (Mpumlwana 2016: 16; Stone & Nhlabathi 2016: 1; Thamm 2016). Other prominent ANC leaders such as former Public Enterprises minister Barbara Hogan, Sports minister Fikile Mbalula and former Mineral Resources minister Ngoako Ramatlhodi also spoke out about the Guptas and other alleged offers (Dentlinger 2016: 1, 6; Magome & Thakali 2016: 6; Mkhwanazi 2016: 1; Stone 2016: 2; Zuma forces strike...2016: 1). By Sunday, March 20, 2016, former Government Communications and Information Systems (GCIS) chairperson, Themba Maseko also confirmed that he had received instructions from Zuma to "help" the Gupta brothers back in 2011 (Hunter & Shoba 2016: 1). Speaking to the *Sunday Times* newspaper, Maseko alleged that Zuma had instructed him to funnel part of government's R240-million advertising budget to the Gupta-owned newspaper. Maseko was removed as GCIS chairperson a year later (Hunter & Shoba 2016: 1).

^{vi} The Good Governance Africa (GGA) Government Performance Index (GPI) looked at South Africa's 234 local and metropolitan municipalities according to 15 indicators that were sub-divided on three clusters, namely administration, economic development and service delivery. District municipalities were excluded on the basis of "limited information" around them (Tschudin 2016: 97). The Markdata Omnibus Survey sample size was 2245 respondents; and conducted between 24 August and 30

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September 2015. The country's top three municipalities were found to be Swellendam, Heesequa and Bergrivier in the Western Cape, a DA-run province (Tschudin 2016: 97-103).

^{vii} The ANC's 2016 LGE manifesto can be accessed on:

<http://www.anc.org.za/docs/manifesto/2016/lge-manifestou.pdf>.

^{viii} The DA launched an ActivistApp a few days before the official launch of its 2016 election manifesto on 23 April 2016. The App – according to the party – would assist it to “have more boots on the ground unlike any other election before”; and would ultimately “revolutionises the way door-to-door campaigning, house meetings and other aspects of canvassing happen”.

^{ix} The DA's 2016 LGE manifesto can be accessed on: <https://www.da.org.za/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/DA-2016-LGE-Manifesto.pdf>.

^x Five days before its 2016 LGE manifesto unveiling, the ANC issued a media release on 11 April 2016 regarding a fake Twitter account. The party said that a parody @MyAnc_ account had been set up in its name; and sought to rectify that error by creating a new handle namely @MyANC (Kodwa 2016).

CHAPTER 6: METHODOLOGY AND OPERATIONALISATION

6.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter focuses on reviewing the methodology as well as operationalisation used for this study. A thorough motivation is provided for using the social constructionist worldview paradigm and its relevance to Grounded Theory, the methodological framework adopted for this study. Grounded Theory as the chosen methodology is assessed in terms of the main strains of thought around its application, with the researcher motivating why Kathy Charmaz's (2014) social constructivist version is apt over competing approaches.

In subsequent sections and sub-sections, detail is given on the various data collection, data analysis methods and techniques applicable to this study, namely qualitative analyses of the ANC and DA's 2016 election manifestos; and each party's 2016 election-related tweets. The chapter ends by detailing how the credibility of this study was safeguarded during the entire data collection and data analyses processes to further bolster academic validation.

Please refer to section 1.5 in chapter 1 for the formulation of the research goals, research objectives, research problem and research questions of the study.

6.2 METHODOLOGY

In this section, the methodology for the study is outlined. To clarify, there is a nuanced distinction between methodology and methods. While methodology refers to how the entire research process unfolds including the various sequential steps involved, methods traditionally point to the "techniques, procedures and tools" the researcher used to collect and dissect the data (Adu 2019; Chun Tie, Birks & Francis 2019). Firstly though, the term social constructionism is introduced and defined to show its broad relevance as the research paradigm. Secondly, the researcher, then, motivates why Grounded Theory is the research method of choice. This section will

also elucidate on the different data collection and data analyses methods to be followed through.

6.2.1 Defining social constructionism as the research paradigm

The worldview adopted for this study is social constructionism, which can be linked to the inductive qualitative theory-construction approach of Grounded Theory. Social constructionism, in the main, revolves around *what* people construct and *how* that process unravels, falling short only in answering the *why* question. Grounded Theory – on the other hand – has traditionally been known to tackle all three questions, namely the *what*, *how* and *why* of the research process. When viewed through a Grounded Theory lens, social constructionists attempt to answer the *why* aspect. In this respect, social constructionism is said to have been “instrumental” in the “remodelling” of Grounded Theory as one knows it today (Charmaz 2008: 397).

Social constructionism views the social world where knowledge is “constructed” and “not created”. Society – for the social constructionist – exists both objectively and subjectively. Meaning is, thus, shared. For Andrews (2012:1-5), the term social constructionism emerged to make sense of this “nature of reality”. Originating in sociology, social constructionism has long been closely associated with the post-modern era and qualitative research. Considering the “profound influence” of social constructionism on Grounded Theory as a chosen method, Andrews (2012:1-5) advises understanding the distinctions between “constructivism” and “social constructionism”. While the former boasts a more individualistic construct of the world mainly through cognitive processes, the latter relies more on the “social” aspect of how one views the world.

As an academic area of inquiry, social constructionism has its roots in the seminal works of Berger and Luckmann (1991) Burr (1995) and Schwandt (2003). For social constructionists Berger and Luckmann (1991) and Burr (1995), knowledge is the end product of societal human interactions, both objectively and subjectively. Rich interpersonal interactions seek to influence relationships in the ‘social world’ and vice

versa. This leads to what Andrews (2012:1-5) refers to as “routinisation” and “habitualisation” or habit-forming, routine-subscribing social realities. These patterns transform into “objective” knowledge bases and become further institutionalised, which individuals draw from. Subjectively – Berger and Luckmann (1991) further argue - one’s identity and how one socialises within society shape one’s knowledge world. These “primary” and “secondary” means of socialisation help “mediate” the objective world through the use of language. Social constructionists view language as the medium through which emotions can be relayed through the creation of concepts. In other words, language “structures” one’s social world, albeit subjectively (Burr 1995:7-12). Social conversations then - underpinned by language – remain the most significant way of “maintaining, modifying and reconstructing subjective reality” (Berger & Luckmann 1991:75-77).

For constructionist Schwandt (2003: 292-331), knowledge and scientific truths are created, as opposed to being established through sensory processes. In realist terms, concepts of the real world are constructed and not merely “discovered”. These concepts, then, “correspond” to something concrete in the scientific world (Andrews 2012:1-5). Schwandt (2003) further draws attention to what he terms radical and social constructionism or that objective knowledge represents anything of the real, observable world (radical constructionism). On the contrary, one can only make sense of the world through human experience.

To conclude, for the social constructionist, knowledge exists as an “objective reality” to be “constructed” and comprehended. It is about daily human interactions and how individuals using language function as different elements of society. Social constructionism has as its thrust the notion of how people engage with each other socially. Likewise, Grounded Theory has a similar outlook minus the accentuation on language. Society is viewed as both objective and subjective for the social constructionist. This finds resonance with constructivist Grounded Theory, as repeatedly proposed by Charmaz (2000; 2002; 2006; 2008; 2014). For this study, one anticipated “constructing” new knowledge around Twitter acting as a digital political communication tool for political parties where the promotion and entrenching of political issues took place. Additionally, knowledge was “constructed” around how

this digital political communication platform functioned as an urban electioneering platform for political parties.

6.2.2 Research design

A research design is the “total plan” researchers employ to answer a research question. This design must include the main research question, the type of evidence needed to answer that question; and how and where the proof will be sourced from. In addition, the research design should include how the data will be analysed and verified (Babbie & Mouton 2008:74). The researcher used a qualitative research design - consistent with the tenets of Grounded Theory - to suit the exploratory nature of the study. Creswell (2013) and Polit and Beck (2012) say qualitative inquiries are apt especially when not much is known about a certain phenomenon; this can then be used to develop theory inductively.

The qualitative research approach – as defined by Willis (2008:40) and Delpont and De Vos (2011:65) - is one which includes the exploration, description and explanation of human “behaviours, experiences, interactions and social contexts” where the main aim is to derive meaning without statistical quantification. Using the “naturalistic” approach, qualitative researchers aim to understand the “real world” using “context-specific settings”. These “deeper” meanings add to the understanding of human experiences where findings “unfold naturally” (Creswell 2013). Qualitative researchers, then, are interested in deriving “deeper” meaning—as opposed to merely looking at “surface features” - from how people “make sense of their lives” within the social “structures of the world” (Polit & Beck 2012).

Agreeing that qualitative research is best suited for exploratory objectives, Creswell (2007; 2013) asserts, further, that the primary data gathering instrument in such contexts is the researcher who embarks on some field work to explore and describe the phenomenon under investigation. Thus, four data collection techniques can be leveraged, namely field work, observations, interviews and documentary analysis. The main aim of such data collection and data analyses techniques is to identify all factors – preceding and otherwise – of the phenomenon under study (Creswell

2013). For the purposes of this study, two data collection techniques were applicable, namely the manual collection of corpus of tweets; and the manual retrieval of the ANC and DA's 2016 election manifestos – as explained in chapter 5. While the two election manifestos served as data sources for the Grounded Theory, it formed part of the researcher's critical reading to understand what issues the ANC and DA focused on in those documents.

6.2.3 The research method

Research methodology involves a hands-on approach using specific tools and procedures to resolve the main research problem (Leedy & Ormrod 2010:12; Babbie & Mouton 2008:74). The main research method used in this study was Grounded Theory that considered data from a corpus of tweets and manifestos (documents) of the ANC and DA. This research method was more appropriate because Grounded Theory permits theory to “emerge” from the data; invariably leading to “new ideas” inductively to build theory (Dey 1999: 63). Also, Grounded Theory was selected as the appropriate method because it fits the five research questions identified in section 6.3.2 of this chapter; and the researcher wanted to take a fresh look at the phenomenon. In addition to Grounded Theory, semi-structured interviews as a method involving the ANC and DA's social media managers were used to verify the overall findings of this study.

Grounded Theory is just one of four qualitative designs employed in the human and social sciences. Unlike ethnographic studies, case studies and phenomenological studies, Grounded Theory has as its main thrust the building of theory (Kolb 2012). Importantly, qualitative content analysis was not sufficient for this study to build theory, hence the adoption of Grounded Theory. Although similarities exist between the two methods, Grounded Theory's uniqueness is its ability to build theory which limited the use of a qualitative content analysis. In other words, sampling, data collection and data analysis are not considered as separate procedural steps in the research process but instead considered as one continuous process of data collection, analysis and sampling (Chun Tie, Berks & Francis 2019).

Like content analysis, Grounded Theory makes use of categories. The two, however, should never be confused to mean the same thing. Whereas content analysis rests on mutually-exclusive categories defined before data analyses procedures, Grounded Theory categories emerge inductively from the data. These categories are not mutually exclusive as they in a constant state of flux as the study progresses (Charmaz 2014). Moreover, Grounded Theory coding is not the same as a qualitative content analysis. Within a Grounded Theory approach, suppositions are developed inductively from a corpus of data through a process of constant comparisons (see Chun Tie, Birks & Francis 2019:1-8).

Grounded Theory was first conceptualised by sociologists Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss in their 1967 book *The Discovery of Grounded Theory*. Arguing in favour of a fresher method of understanding the social world, Glaser and Strauss (1967) proposed Grounded Theory as a context-specific method to challenge the domination of existing theories at the time. To be specific, Grounded Theory does not test existing theory but rather involves the inductive process of data collection and data analysis to generate new theory. Fresh new theory is, thus, said to be “grounded” in the data examined. This would, also, address the problem of the scientific discipline’s over-reliance on analytical constructs, variables and categories from already-existing theories (Glaser & Strauss 1967; Glaser 1978; Strauss 1987).

A typical Grounded Theory study involves multiple rounds of simultaneous data collection and data analysis through open coding, memo writing and theory-creation through the emergence of categories within the data set. Through the process of theoretical sampling, the researcher indulges in constant data comparisons using existing and newer data until such time theoretical saturation is achieved – or newer information around categories are exhausted. Once theoretical saturation is done, core categories or concepts should begin to emerge from the data; this in turn will inform the emergent substantive Grounded Theory (Glaser & Strauss 1967; Strauss & Corbin 1990; Charmaz 2006; 2014).

In summary then, a typical Grounded Theory comprises a few components, namely openness, immediate analysis, coding and constant comparisons, writing memos,

theoretical sampling; and the writing of a substantive theory. In this respect, Bringer, Johnston and Brackenridge (2004:251) advise that such a substantive theory should ideally be sufficient enough “to explain similar situations”. This is in concurrence with Strauss and Corbin (1998:267) who earlier reasoned that the merits of a sound substantive theory lay “in its ability to speak specifically for the population from which it was derived and to apply back to them”.

Sbaraini, Carter, Evans and Blinkhorn (2015:128) schematically outline the key components of Grounded Theory in Table 6.1 below:

Table 6.1: Components of a typical Grounded Theory study

Component	Stage	Description
Openness	Done throughout Grounded Theory study	Researcher uses inductive analysis to develop theory from multiple observations within the 'open' data
Immediate analysis	Conducted during simultaneous data collection and data analysis stage	Facilitates theoretical sampling
Coding and comparing	Coding is done during the data analysis stage to break down data into smaller parts; these are then constantly compared to each other to illustrate similarities, and differences	Data variations explained; and similar codes combined leading to more abstract categories or concepts
Memo writing	Done throughout analysis	Researcher records analytical thinking through memo writing
Theoretical sampling	Forms backbone of Grounded Theory analysis; done mainly during sampling and data collection stages	Informed by "coding, comparison and memo writing"
Theoretical saturation	Conducted during sampling, data collection and data analysis stages	Involves researcher exhausting data so no new information emerges from it
Substantive theory generation	Final stage of a Grounded Theory exercise with results from the study culminating in substantive theory/ theories	Concepts and categories are cohesively related to one another

Source: Schematic outline adopted from Sbaraini *et al.* (2015:128)

6.3 DISSECTING GROUNDED THEORY AS THE CHOSEN METHOD

Political campaigning using the Internet and social networking sites such as Twitter - especially in an African and South African context - is a fairly recent phenomenon. Due to the lack of theory with regard to digital political communication linked to digital issue ownership and a digital urban electioneering platform, Grounded Theory was ideal for this study because it permitted the researcher to move from data towards the propagation of new theory. The issue ownership concept within the context of digital political communication was studied (see chapters 3 and 4 of this thesis). Instead of relying on “analytical constructs, categories and variables” to surface from existing literature, a “contextualised” theory on how political parties communicate over Twitter using it as a digital issue ownership avenue and urban electioneering platform for digital political communication developed organically. The study, thus, began with proposed criteria (theories) and collected data to test those criteria (theories) to come up with a final conceptual framework. This is in agreement with the dynamic and fluid objectives of Grounded Theory. Juxtaposed against the social constructionist worldview, this study aimed to use Grounded Theory to “socially construct” this reality (Charmaz 2008:397-412). At present, three main approaches Grounded Theory inquiry exist. These are Glaserian Grounded Theory (1978), Straussian Grounded Theory (1998); and Charmaz’s Constructivist Grounded Theory (2006) – or as Chun Tie, Berks and Francis (2019:2) label these, traditional, evolved and constructivist Grounded Theory respectively.

6.3.1 Glaserian Grounded Theory

Named after Grounded Theory originator, Barney Glaser, one of the most distinguishable features of this version is the postponement of any kind of literature review until such time that data collection and data analyses are complete; and a new theory comes to fruition. For Glaser (1978:83), data can be anything and everything, from interviews, surveys and other secondary sources. With regard to interviews, Glaser (1978) dismisses the act of transcribing interviews, suggesting the notion of mere note-taking. Additionally, the researcher needs to keep a certain distance from the actual research process to avert any bias. What is important for

Glaser is that created categories of the eventual theory should fit the data and not the other way around.

This approach was not suitable for this study for two reasons. Firstly, Glaser speaks about postponing a literature review until all data collection and data analyses processes have been concluded. An extensive literature review was carried out for the current study in order to obtain theoretical measurement criteria (see chapters 3 and 4 of this study). Secondly, although the researcher does not disagree with the Glaser (1978) outright on maintaining a distance from the analyses to provide for impartiality, studies by Alemu, Stevens and Ross (2012) and Nagel, Burns, Tilley and Aubin (2015) lend support to the researcher's stance of being a co-creator of meaning through the rigorous Grounded Theory process.

6.3.2 Straussian Grounded Theory

Unlike Glaser's approach, Strauss and Corbin (1998) argue in favour of a more prescriptive research process using axial coding "in accordance with pragmatic situations". In other words, Grounded Theory should evolve according to prevailing research circumstances. In reply to Glaser's (1978) assertions that the researcher maintain a distance from all processes, Strauss and Corbin (1998) do not necessarily disagree but say the researcher should try to remain as objective as possible. This approach was not suitable for this study mainly because of the relatively rules-bound approach towards axial coding. Strauss and Corbin's (1998) model/ framework will not work with the present study because some flexibility is needed during the multi-pronged data analyses phases of the two different data sets (ANC and DA corpus of tweets and both parties' 2016 local government election manifestos). Additionally, axial coding as proposed by Strauss and Corbin's (1998) is more attune with the deductive approach of scientific inquiry; this study seeks to more inductive in the generation of new theory from the data.

6.3.3 Charmaz's Constructivist Grounded Theory

In contrast to Glaser (1978) and Strauss and Corbin (1998), researcher Kathy Charmaz (2006) proposed a third Constructivist Grounded Theory method, advocating for both researcher and participant as co-constructors of meaning. For Charmaz (2006), the research participant is an important element of the multi-stage theory-building process. Likewise, the researcher - for Charmaz (2014) - is as important, bringing their "paradigmatic orientation and experience" to the proverbial table. It is this "active engagement" between researcher and participant that inevitably leads to a better Grounded Theory. Furthermore, Charmaz (2006) supports the use of open and "actual" coding, with a more pronounced focus on context and complexity of the data. This flexibility in the research process will ultimately yield more descriptions and the possibility of multi-textured meanings from possible multiple theories. All three strains of thinking around the application of Grounded Theory do, however, share common strategies around theoretical sampling, constant comparison, coding, and memo writing (Glaser 1978; Corbin & Strauss 2008; Charmaz 2014).

Moreover, Charmaz (2008:403) points out that a 21st century constructionist Grounded Theory rests on a few important "principles". Firstly, the research process is assumed to be a social construction in "itself". In other words, using Grounded Theory is not merely a linear process of data collection and analysis. It involves active engagement from the researcher who in turn responds to "emergent" information from within the data. Secondly, using the principle of "reflexivity", the researcher interrogates the research process, constantly questioning what, how and why they are doing the Grounded Theory research. This "revision" and persistent "scrutiny" – thirdly - will lead to automatic improvisations in the methodology and analysis. Lastly, for one to fully comprehend how the "social" world under investigation is constructed, one needs to delve deep into the "rich data", which will elicit meaningful (social) constructions and "useful" Grounded Theories.

A key element of Grounded Theory is clarifying what role the researcher plays in the research process. For this doctoral study, the researcher mostly identified with

Charmaz's (2014) social constructivist interpretation of Grounded Theory; and was thus purposefully selected, in line with the interpretivist paradigm, where meaning is "co-constructed" by the researcher (Alemu *et al* 2012). Additionally, seeing that such empirical data is new, one views the role of the researcher as an active agent who is "more than a witness" to a "phenomenon under investigation" (Nagel *et al* 2015:365-383; Charmaz 1990; 2006; 2008).

As a political researcher - and having worked within the South African political media landscape for a number of years - afforded the researcher intimate knowledge of the subject material. This first-hand information of the country's politics, thus, permitted the researcher to be a co-constructor of meaning as dictated by Charmaz (2008). The social constructivist framework additionally allowed the researcher to position himself firmly within the data, facilitating theoretical sensitivity for a deeper, more nuanced understanding of the different data sets. Coupled with this historical knowledge and the constant memo-writing, the researcher was able to consistently engage with the data through documenting and constant cross comparisons.

6.3.4 The debate around the utility of Grounded Theory

Since its first emergence in the late 1960s, Grounded Theory debate has wrestled with a number of criticisms, debates and deliberations on how best it should evolve. Chief among these are divergences in the application of theory-building inductively; the 'discovery' versus 'construction' debate; and the role of individual versus social processes in shaping Grounded Theory. There is, for example, widespread academic agreement that Grounded Theory was originally designed to elicit theory from inductive data collection and data analyses processes. However, as the method became more "prescriptive" over the years, questions began surfacing around the true inductive nature of such research. For example, Strauss and Corbin (1990; 1998) recommended using a coding paradigm that would naturally assume a more deductive nature than an inductive one. Coding paradigms by nature of their creation are subjective; they have pre-created dimensions which researchers use to look for observable patterns. Strauss and Corbin's (1998) axial coding is another element that injects a deductive quality into the research process. Thomas and James (2006)

are equally sceptical about the theory-introducing aspects of Grounded Theory. In their criticism, they question if theory can really be produced by simply looking at data; what happens to the researcher's own pre-conceived notions brought into the research process as Glaser and Strauss (1967) argue?

In Glaser and Strauss' (1967:1) original conceptualisation of Ground Theory, an assertion of "discovery from data" was made. This in itself is said to be problematic because an assumption is made that the 'discovery' element is already present in the data, waiting only for the researcher to bring it to the fore. Likewise, issue was taken with the phrase 'emergence of categories', impacting on the researcher's real role in the inductive data-to-theory process. In reply, constructivist Charmaz (2006) intervened and said categories and theory cannot 'emerge' from the data as this was to be 'constructed' by the researcher. This on-going process of discovery was about the researcher interacting with the data (Charmaz 1990:1169).

Lastly, one of the main aims of Grounded Theory is to create theories to explain and understand social processes and the ensuing consequences within the social sciences. Data collection and data analysis for Grounded Theorists culminated in a 'full cyclical interpretative' research inquiry. Worryingly, users of Grounded Theory lately have begun using the method only in half measure. In other words, Grounded Theory was now being used only for data analysis needs – a form of abbreviated Grounded Theory. Interviews, as an example, are now being understood from an individualistic angle, compared to a wider, social perspective (Alemu, Stevens, Ross & Chandler 2015:518).

6.3.5 Limitations of Grounded Theory

Of the many limitations cited in the use of Grounded Theory is the method's utility of induction as the prime avenue to draw conclusions from data. This induction automatically discounts the researcher's role in the overall scheme of things. The obverse argument, however, are researchers implicitly bringing their own "theoretically-informed" positions to a study? When researchers frame questions to be asked, these are informed from a "particular perspective" (Dey 1999:104). It is

this lack of attention paid to the issue of 'reflectivity' or continuous reflection that persists as a concern. Fortunately, constructivist thinking addresses this worry.

Authors such as Charmaz (1990, 2006) are firm that categories never fully capture what needs to be captured because data generation needs to have a source (Dey 1999:66). This is where the researcher comes in: it is the researcher who constructs the category. Thus, by implication, this category-creation is a reflexive (Grounded Theory) exercise. Clear documentation of the entire reflexive process is, hence, needed (Pidgeon & Henwood 1997). Another often cited criticism is the actual use of Grounded Theory by so-called novice researchers. Assuming the procedures are "easy" and straightforward, the majority view is that it is not. Grounded Theory involves tremendous skills in "crafting" a "seamless" Grounded Theory study, one that usually involves a certain level of thoroughness, "hard work" and creativity (see Suddaby 2006:639, Bryman & Bell 2007: 585).

In the next few sub-sections, the researcher expands on how each data set - namely the ANC and DA's 2016 election-related tweets; and each party's 2016 election manifestos - was sampled and collected.

6.4 SAMPLING, TARGET AND ACCESSIBLE POPULATIONS, POPULATION PARAMETERS AND UNITS OF ANALYSES USED

The ultimate goal of this study is theory generation. Grounded Theory research involves both purposive and theoretical sampling. While theoretical sampling entails the various coding processes in Grounded Theory, it still very much depends on a purposive sample to gather data to begin the initial coding process. With theoretical sampling, the researcher asks *where* and *what data to look for next* (Strauss & Corbin 1990; Charmaz 2014). In the next few sub-sections, the sampling, target and accessible populations, population parameters and units of analyses will be expanded upon.

6.4.1 Sampling of the ANC and DA's 2016 LGE corpus of tweets

Grounded Theory refers to the creation of new “contextualised” theories (Baker 2006:2) and typically includes a study corpus or data set of comprehensive language text stored in electronic format used for analysis later during the research process. For this study, the researcher began this process with a non-probability, purposive sample of the ANC and DA's 2016 election-related tweets as the aim was to use specified election measurement dates to track each party's issues digitally communicated using Twitter. Thus, a study corpus of purposively selected tweets by the @MyANC and @Our_DA handles - official Twitter accounts of the parties - was included in this non-probability, purposive sample. The corpus included only the Twitter handles of the ANC and DA and not of individual party politicians (a population parameter). A population parameter is another way of narrowing down a wider population for better research management. It focuses the sample according to strict criteria (see Asiamah, Mensah & Oteng-Abayie 2017).

The non-probability, purposive sample of the ANC and DA's tweets was retrieved using a specified date (1 May – 31 August 2016) in accordance with the proposed theoretical criteria - another population parameter. Each party's Twitter feed or timeline entries, then, served as the units of analyses (namely social artefacts). The units of analysis were thus a social artefact in the form of tweets. Neuman (2011:69) says that *units of analyses* – or those “cases under consideration” - are key in the data analysis process because they help in the development of final concepts. Additionally, the retrieved ANC and DA tweets served as both the accessible and target populations. In qualitative research, pre-determined population parameters refine the general population to a target and accessible population (Asiamah *et al* 2017:1613-1616). In the case of the two political parties, the sample size of the ANC's 2016 election tweets numbered 5400; while the DA's sample size numbered 7200 tweets. These were also ‘refined’ in terms of specified dates 1 May 2016 – 31 August 2016; and only the main Twitter handles of each party.

6.4.2 Theoretical sampling of the ANC and DA's 2016 LGE manifesto

As a result of theoretical sampling or theory-based sampling entailing what data to look for next to contribute to the evolving theory (see Charmaz 2014), the ANC and DA's 2016 LGE manifestos were, thus, theoretically sampled. Each manifesto was purposively sampled by the researcher, and served as the accessible and target populations. The only population parameter applicable to the election manifestos was that they had to be from the 2016 poll. Each manifesto – also a social artefact - served as the unit of analyses, with the researcher focused on every word, sentence and paragraph for analysis.

6.5 DATA COLLECTION: HOW WAS THE DATA COLLECTED

In this sub-section, the researcher provides more detail on how the different data sets were collected, namely the ANC and DA's 2016 LGE corpus of tweets; and each party's election manifesto. On the latter, both the ANC and DA's election manifesto formed part of the researcher's critical reading to decipher what issues each focused on (detailed in chapter 5). More detail is also provided on the NVivo Pro 12 software used in the analysis stage. Researchers are increasingly using qualitative computer software data analysis tools for efficiency reasons. Not only is the software adept at organising data, it also lubricates the smooth running of the coding and memo-writing processes. For the extensive data analyses part of the study then, the most recent version of a qualitative content analysis computer software programme – NVivo Pro 12 – was used. Such software, also, provides researchers with the necessary audit trail of the entire data analysis routine (Atherton & Elsmore 2007; Hutchison; Johnston & Breckon 2010:299), all pre-requisites for a sound, credible and trustworthy study. Not only does the software boast the necessary tools to do open coding, it also offered the researcher selective coding for theoretical sampling. A further motivation in selecting NVivo 12 for this study was the software's compatibility with a number of data types, including audio, video, plain text, images, word documents and pdf documents.

6.5.1 Data collection of the ANC and DA's corpus of 2016 LGE tweets

In the early stages of data collection, attention was paid to Ahmed and Bath (2015) and Gaffney and Puschmann (2014) who proposed using two Application Protocol Interfaces (API) when dealing with Twitter research, namely the Search API and Streaming API. While the former addresses historical tweets or tweets that have already been posted, the latter addresses tweets that occur in real time. There was the option of negotiating with the ANC and DA on possibly getting access to their Twitter accounts around the elections. This, however, was not feasible considering the amount of posting done by each party. Telephonic and electronic communications with representatives from both political parties confirmed this: that it would be practically impossible for each to mail the researcher on a daily basis at the time of the polls in light of other election-related pressures.

Another avenue explored was leveraging Twitonomy, a US-based social media company specialising in data set collection. Heeding the advice of the researcher's supervisors, a single month's subscription was taken and paid for in US dollars (US\$19) in order to understand the entity's capability and efficacy in the required data collection. While Twitonomy provided the researcher with vast amounts of data combinations that could be manipulated to extract deep patterns, its main handicap remained its inability to retroactively collect tweets older than three months. In effect, Twitonomy and its services could not be utilised for this study because the researcher sought historical tweets from the ANC and DA accounts dating back from 1 May 2016 until 31 August 2016.

Anticipating such challenges, the researcher proactively archived each party's tweets manually, starting from 1 May 2016 until 31 August 2016. These were captured weekly, converted into public distribution format (pdf) files; and stored on the researcher's laptop hard drive. Fearing possible virus infections, these files were additionally stored on removable USB drives later. Two main limitations of such archiving, however, still persisted. The files were extremely large; and many pages of printing were needed if and when physical comparisons were needed by the researcher. However, with the NVivo Pro 12 software, this cumbersome action was

mitigated by transferring all 36 pdf files (accommodating the ANC's 5400 tweets and the DA's 7200 tweets) to the software programme (see sub-section 6.8). Through this entire process, the researcher was cognisant of Wigston's (2010: 40-41) warning that Internet data could vanish without warning; retrieving this information quickly was, therefore, of utmost importance.

6.5.2 Data collection of the ANC and DA's 2016 LGE manifestos

Documents are integral to any Grounded Theory study. Its use, however, centres more on serving part of a broader qualitative multi-data collection method. This triangulation invariably leads to the study enjoying core credibility. At best, documents in scientific research are employed for five main reasons, namely to provide relevant context, to offer newer angles and issues that can be carried over to semi-structured interviews, to track material changes over time, to provide supplementary information to a situation; and to verify and corroborate research findings (Bowen 2009:28-30). For this study, the ANC and DA's 2016 LGE manifestos served as these documents. Access and retrieval to these manifestos was not difficult as each static document was freely available through a number of avenues including the parties' websites (in the public domain), through links accessible from their social media platforms; and via generic subscription-based email mailing lists. The researcher retrieved the ANC and DA's 2016 election manifestos from each party's website soon after their official manifesto launches in April 2016; and were immediately archived for later use and stored on the researcher's laptop.ⁱ

6.6 ISSUES RELATING TO DATA MANAGEMENT

The ANC and DA's 2016 LGE corpus of tweets was saved and archived on pdf documents; and later transferred to the software for easy referral. Likewise, the parties' 2016 election manifestos were saved and subsequently moved to the the NVivo Pro 12 software. Folders and sub-folders were used here for better organisation.

Various studies using Grounded Theory recommend using NVivo for data analysis (see Johnston 2006; Bringer, Johnston & Brackenridge 2004; Hutchison, Johnston & Brekcon 2010). In this respect, it cannot be emphasised just how convenient and useful the software programme was when it came to managing the data sets, coding the data during the first stages of open coding, making the required constant comparisons between the codes, isolating categories from the vast data; and notarising various relationships among the different codes during axial coding with the help of intense memo-writing. Importantly, NVivo Pro 12 allowed the researcher to move back and forth (constant comparisons) within the different data sets, examining the multi-layered properties of open and focused codes. Although the two semi-structured interviews did not form part of the Grounded Theory analysis, NVivo Pro 12 was also used to archive the interviews for later use.

6.7 ISSUES RELATING TO DATA CLEANING

Although the sample size for the corpus of tweets was moderately large (ANC 5400 tweets and DA 7200 tweets), not all tweets were relevant. Before actual analysis, the data was cleaned by the researcher. Data cleaning in the context of social media research includes issues around removing duplicate tweets, near-duplicate tweets and/ or taking random samples from the identified data set. Although not much has been written about data cleaning as it is still an emerging field, the phrase can sometimes refer to the researcher extracting 50 tweets every hour, for example, and analysing those. Similarly, samples can be taken from the larger data set. Data cleaning is also about organising the data into more user-friendly formats to facilitate more efficient analyses later (Baruffa 2018; Ryklief 2018). In this instance, the voluminous corpus of tweets was 'cleaned' to allow for better organisation. For example, the sampled tweets were rearranged in terms of monthly breakdowns (May, June, July, August). Owing to the researcher's full time employment as a political researcher with South Africa's public broadcaster, his expertise was leveraged in terms of 'cleaning' the data when it came to excluding non-election related tweets (theoretical sensitivity was important here). Some examples include when both the ANC and DA tweeted congratulatory messages to the country's Olympic heroes competing at the 2016 Rio games; and when (tweet) commentary

was made around the death of struggle stalwart Mr Mike Stofile. This 'cleaning' of the ANC and DA's corpus of tweets was minimal, though, and did not affect each party's final sample size in any large proportion.

6.8 DATA ANALYSIS PROCEDURES FOLLOWED DURING THE STUDY

Data analysis is about the systematic and strategic reduction of information from raw data into chunks of manageable and meaningful data sets to uncover patterns and trends in "recurrent behaviours, objects of a body of knowledge" so that "order, structure and interpretation" can take place (Neumann 2011). For the grounded theorist, this distillation process is paramount during data analysis (Bogdan & Biklen 2007). Grounded theory's coding processes of "selection, simplification, abstraction and transformation" is a continual one, emerging with linkable sets of raw data as descriptive or higher level analytical categories (Kolb 2012:83-86).

Grounded Theory studies would be incomplete without coding as it provides a direct link between a researcher's data collection, how that data is eventually interpreted; and how a thorough, rigorous and substantive Grounded Theory is generated. For constructivist grounded theorists, coding is divided into three separate stages, namely initial, focused and theoretical coding (Chun Tie, Birks & Francis 2019:4). During the initial coding stage, the data is 'broken open' to describe what is surfacing, exposing the various properties that define each code. In focused coding, open codes are collapsed into higher order, more abstract concepts based on similarities and differences. It is during the focused coding stage that the researcher questions which are the most relevant codes and concepts that can add depth to the analysis process. In the final theoretical coding stage, further refinement of these concepts lead to categories or central codes. An ideal central code is usually one which describes and represents everything within one's data set; and is one around which all other subordinate categories can find meaning through (Charmaz 2014). Central codes emerge once the researcher is fully satisfied that the extensive data has been saturated; and no new insights can be extracted with further analysis.

6.8.1 Initial coding of the ANC and DA's corpus of tweets

Although the researcher collected the ANC and DA's 2016 tweets between 1 May and 31 August 2016; and subsequently archived them for future reference, the data analysis process only began upon ethical approval from the university in July 2018. Reasons for this were provided in sub-section 6.7.1 of this chapter. As a first step in analysing the ANC and DA's 2016 LGE tweets, the researcher used two research questions, namely *'in what way does digital political communication by the ANC and DA during the 2016 LGE reflect certain issues to be associated with them'* and *'in what way was Twitter used by the ANC and DA as an urban electioneering platform during the 2016 LGE within the context of issues they wanted to be associated with'*. This was done in order to drive 'a process' to look for incidences in the data which corresponded or varied to the theory outlined in the various theoretical chapters (see chapters 2, 3 and 4). During the initial coding stage of the ANC and DA's corpus of 2016 LGE tweets, the researcher sought to explain what was emerging in the vast data set. Using the NVivo Pro 12 software programme, this stage of the data analysis process was made easier as thousands of tweets were put into two main folders. Two sub-folders were simultaneously created to house theoretical memos; and in-text references and properties were additionally archived using more sub-folders.

Tweets by nature are short, brief updates. Thousands of tweets from each party (individual units of analyses) were scrutinised to look for what each tweet was about. This helped the researcher when it came to understanding what each unit of analysis was about. The researcher analysed only written text and no videos, images and/ or click-throughs that led to external shared links formed part of the analysis process. Within the software programme, codes are referred to as nodes. As the researcher processed each tweet, they were assigned to nodes using *gerunds* or action words ending in the suffix 'ing' to denote "actions and processes" (Adu 2018). The researcher also heeded Charmaz's (2014) five-pronged guidelines to elicit the best kind of information from the data. These were: what processes are at play here; how can it be defined; how does this process organically develop; how does the researcher participate in this process; and how, when and why is the process

ultimately impacted? The programme also archived highlighted pieces of text for future reference. In most cases, the entire text within a tweet was highlighted, open coded using descriptive labels; and its text referenced to provide more context when constant comparisons were later carried out. This type of data archiving using NVivo Pro 12 proved extremely beneficial.

Analytical memos were also simultaneously written as more tweets were assigned to nodes. These case-by-case memos sought to capture the micro-analysis processes at work; and to preserve what the researcher was observing (see Corbin & Strauss 2008). For example, whenever the DA attacked the ANC's governance record, a memo was written pointing to a form of negative advertising to illustrate how Twitter was being used as a media broadcast platform. Doing such an exercise provided potent material for the focused coding and theoretical coding stages. Suffice to say, these memos also contributed to the analytical audit trail.

Please see Table 6.2 which shows how case-by-case memos were created as initial codes developed (these will be expanded on more in chapter 7).

Table 6.2: How memos were written during the initial coding stage

Raw data	Text reference	Initial code	Case memo
ANC			
The ANC has delivered according to Freedom Charter mandate	Vote for the ANC to realise ideals of Freedom Charter	Activating the ANC's liberation credentials	The ANC is still holding on to the liberation narrative to appeal to voters; it is leveraging this historical narrative to communicate to voters that South Africans owe the party for freeing the country
DA			
This new govt in Tshwane has stopped the spending of exorbitant amounts on food & parties for politicians" - @SollyMsimanga	"Transparency and honesty will become the trademarks of the Nelson Mandela Bay under this new multiparty government." - @AthoIT #NMBCouncil	Twitter publicising DA anti-corruption stance	The DA's focus on cleaning up the metros seems to be a clear election strategy to appeal to urban voters

For grounded theorists, the NVivo Pro 12 programme is a great resource because it helps the researcher think about the data more conceptually; and in a much nuanced micro-analytical manner (Adu 2016, 2019). As the initial coding process forged ahead, more and more nodes were created using the NVivo Pro 12 programme. In some instances, sub-coding occurred using NVivo's 'tree branch' facility to flesh out more properties and dimensions. This proved particularly useful for clustering similar initial codes. The 'tree branch' tab within NVivo Pro 12 assisted as far as preliminary constant comparisons were concerned. To avert any unintended forcing of initial codes into categories, the researcher acknowledged that these 'tree branch' nodes were used only for data organisation purposes. Thankfully, the 'tree node' structure was kept fairly simple and uncomplicated to mitigate against any unnecessary confusion.

Throughout the initial coding stage, the researcher was cognisant that this was still the initial phase of the analytical journey; and was 'open' to the idea that focused coding was inadvertently taking place simultaneously. This oscillation between processes is, however, encouraged by Charmaz (2014) to welcome fresher insights into the data. In this regard, the NVivo Pro 12 software facilitated this: whenever newer information was unearthed in the corpus of tweets, newer nodes were subsequently created. These, then, were addressed in the constant comparisons and focused coding stages.

Once the initial coding process of the ANC and DA's corpus of tweets had concluded, the researcher ended up with 43 initial codes for the ANC and 23 for the DA. Considering each party had a sample size of 5400 and 7200 tweets respectively, this open node list was extensive by Grounded Theory standards. Barring a few exclusions during the data cleaning phase, every party tweet was labelled and assigned a node. Please refer to Tables 6.3 and 6.4 for a detailed list of the ANC's 43 initial codes; and DA's 23 initial codes:

Table 6.3: List of ANC initial codes			
Initial codes emerging from the ANC's 2016 LGE corpus of tweets			
Abiding by electoral laws	ANC committing to youth matters	ANC committing to youth matters	ANC committing to gender equality
ANC is still an urban party	ANC is a liberation party	Accepting when the party has made mistakes	Accepting when the party has made mistakes
Acknowledging poor performance in the 2016 LGE	Acting against rogue elements in the ANC	Acting on corrupt deployees	Announcing the official results of the 2016 LGE
Accepting the 2016 LGE	Assessing what went wrong in the 2016 LGE	Consulting to ensure party mistakes rectified	ANC is still dominating the South African political landscape
Corruption eating into ANC support	Dealing with challenges identified in the 2016 LGE	Dealing with factionalism within the ANC	Dealing with list manipulation instances
Dealing with party problems	Ensuring local government deployees are accountable	Introspecting what went wrong in the 2016 LGE	Losing metros in the 2016 LGE
Monitoring service delivery	Preserving institutional memory in 2016 LGE candidate selection	Securing wins in non-urban municipalities	Selecting ANC candidates for 2016 LGE
Speeding up changes within party ranks	Stabilising state-owned enterprises	Thanking South Africans to vote	Keeping track of ANC's track record
ANC is a party for all including minorities	Training and skilling of local councilors	Twitter being used to negatively campaign against other parties	Twitter alerting public to ANC media campaigns
Twitter being used for public statements to the media	Twitter disseminating information on the metros	Twitter publicizing how the ANC has changes lives of communities	Twitter publicizing 'other' media interactions
Voting for the ANC in the 2016 LGE	Delivering on promises	ANC providing for the poor	Committed to the constitution
Total 43 initial codes			

Initial coding of the DA's corpus of 2016 LGE tweets revealed 23 initial codes.

These are listed in Table 6.4 (on the next page):

Table 6.4: List of DA open codes			
Initial codes emerging from the DA's 2016 LGE corpus of tweets			
Twitter being used to rally people to vote DA	Twitter publishing metro result outcomes	Twitter publicising DA anti-corruption stance	Twitter being used to issue mini statements on local government matters
Twitter disseminating voter education information	Twitter being used to show successes in metros	Twitter being used to rally voters in the metros	Twitter being used to publish election results
Twitter being used to publicise other media engagements	Twitter being used to publicise non-metro campaigning	Twitter being used to negatively campaign against other political parties	Twitter being used to publicise metro-related events
Twitter being used to issue party statements	The DA is committed to gender equality	DA using Twitter to trumpet its successes	DA using Twitter to promote social cohesion and patriotism
DA using Twitter to promote its core issues	DA using Twitter to promote a positive image of its representatives	DA using Twitter to claim attachment to liberation narrative	DA using Twitter to alert media to pressers
DA providing links over Twitter to other social media channels	DA is a party for the youth	DA committed racial equality	-
Total 23 open codes			

6.8.2 Initial coding of the ANC and DA's 2016 LGE manifestos

Following the initial coding of the ANC and DA's corpus of 2016 LGE tweets, the researcher utilised theoretical sampling to collect each party's 2016 election manifesto data. This purposive sample was guided by the research question '*what issues did each party chose to focus on in their 2016 LGE manifesto*'; and was chosen to diversify the overall data sample for the study. Election manifestos by nature are long, wordy documents containing a combination of text and images. While the ANC's manifesto comprised 32-pages, the DA outlined their plans for local government in 61-pages in A5 format. Unlike each party's tweets which could be easily examined because of their brief formats, here the researcher had to painstakingly analyse each word, sentence, paragraph, section and sub-section of the manifestos. Using the constant comparison technique, the researcher asked *what was going on here* and *what categories were being suggested* by the manifesto data. This iterative process continued until all text of each party's manifesto was completed. Using descriptive labelling, text items were named and assigned to nodes using the NVivo Pro 12 programme. To add some form of 'process' to these nodes, *gerunds* were used. Questions such as 'what is this data about' and 'what is being referenced here' were consistently asked of the data under analysis. Multiple readings of the data yielded abstract and concrete codes. This is in agreement with Charmaz (2007:45) who opined that initial codes are manifest as short descriptions in the form of concepts.

The initial coding stage of analysing the ANC and DA's 2016 LGE manifestos yielded ten (10) codes for the ANC and eight (8) for the DA. Please refer to Table 6.5:

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Table 6.5: List of ANC and DA initial codes from their 2016 LGE manifestos

ANC 2016 LGE manifesto	DA 2016 LGE manifesto
Promising multiple changes for the next five years	Governing towns and cities efficiently
Promising a set of key deliverables for the next five-year term of local government	Spreading a message of being pro-poor
Delivering on a constitutional mandate	Disseminating its message of its track record of good governance
Only the ANC is capable of moving South Africa forward	Pushing the party's bigger ten-year objectives
Only the ANC is capable of caring for South Africa's millions of poor people	The DA is a forward-thinking party
Targeting women as an important demographic for the party	Dealing with South Africa's urbanisation
Involving communities in all aspects of local government	Promising change over the next five years
Managing the party's local government employees	Emphasising the 2016 local elections are the most important since 1994
Consulting with communities and other key stakeholders is central to delivery	
Targeting the youth and young people as an important demographic for the party	
10 initial codes	8 initial codes

After this, the researcher went back to the ANC and DA's corpus of 2016 LGE tweets where constant comparisons were made to see if there was any congruence between the two data sets. It was also about comparing the manifesto data with election tweets coded earlier; and juxtaposing open category against open category for some form of theoretical clarity and elaboration to emerge. The properties of each open code across both data sets provided the relevant context for understanding any theoretical processes at work here. In order not to lose any theoretical linkages between each data set and between categories, intense memos were used (Gibbs 2010). The NVivo Pro 12 software eased this process as all analysed tweets, including the different nodes and in-text references, could be accessed with ease (Alemu, Stevens, Ross & Chandler 2015:518).

The researcher was fully cognisant that while each data set could have first been analysed separately during open coding to identify initial codes, it was also important to analyse them together through the triangulation of the data. During the process of initial coding, as many tools as possible deriving from this software was used to make sense of each data set and to explain the initial codes and data's properties through triangulation of the two data sets. Notably, the software was especially important for the open coding part of the study and to identify the properties of the data. For example, during initial coding of the ANC and DA's 2016 LGE manifestos, the researcher isolated these properties to show each node's multi-dimensionality.

Please see Table 6.6 as an example of this:

Table 6.6: Example of how properties were isolated during initial coding

Open code	Properties	Example from text
ANC 2016 LGE manifesto		
Promising multiple changes for the next five years	ANC insisting it will change the status quo; attending to unhappiness around local government delivery	Together with communities, the ANC will build on achievements made in delivering basic services to people
Promising a set of key deliverables for the next five-year term of local government	Measuring the party's performance; challenging voters to measure its councilors' competency	Local government is in your hands
DA 2016 LGE manifesto		
Governing towns and cities efficiently	Insisting that it can govern better than other parties; the DA is a party of good management and service delivery; the DA does not believe in cadre deployment but people appointed on merit; doing business with local government should be easier; local government is where thousands of jobs can be created	Cities and towns are change drivers; cities and towns are sites of multiple opportunities; cutting the regulatory burden; ensuring ratepayers are not overburdened; corruption needs to be stopped; a commitment to good governance to ensure that our towns and cities become the catalysts for change that moves South Africa forward again
Disseminating its message of its track record of good governance	Promoting good governance; publicises its good governance record of where the party governs	DA governments are open and honest; DA local governments are ready to lead by example; South Africa needs trustworthy leaders; party representatives aim to work hard and be accountable; DA local governments have delivered since 2011; a DA government is clean and people-driven

6.8.3 Focused coding of the ANC and DA's 2016 LGE corpus of tweets

Focused coding is a more abstract version of the properties identified during initial coding; and hence an expansion of the data for new insights. It is about relating codes through induction and deduction; and establishing causal relationships between each. Although this stage of the analysis process could have been done manually, the NVivo Pro 12 software helped examine the context of the data's properties first isolated during open coding. The researcher also used Borgatti's (1996) well-cited coding frame for this aspect of the analyses. Borgatti (1996) advises that instead of looking for "any and all kind of relations", the emphasis should be on causal relationships using what he calls a "basic frame of generic relationships". Please see an example of a focused coding frame in Table 6.7:

Table 6.7: Example using Borgatti's (1996) simplified coding frame for focused coding

Element	Description	Example
Phenomenon	Main concept that holds everything together	Managing the party's local government deployees
Causal conditions	What led to the phenomenon?	Distrust, corruption, breakdown in communications, social distance, community apathy
Context	Related to causal conditions above	-
Intervening conditions	Closely tied to context	-
Action strategies	Action needed in response to the phenomenon identified	Communities integral to local government decision-making, involvement, consultation, communication, interaction
Consequences	The intended and unintended consequences of the action strategy adopted above	Better delivery, more responsive, less grievances, less protests, more trust

Source: Coding frame sourced from Borgatti (1996)

During the focused coding stage of the ANC's 2016 LGE corpus of tweets, the initial 43 concrete and abstract open codes were reduced to 20. These 20 open codes were, then, grouped together based on similarities; and each code's properties on the NVivo Pro 12 software. Using the same method, the researcher narrowed these 20 open codes to a more manageable six (6).

This focused coding phase of the ANC 2016 LGE corpus of tweets continued in an iterative manner until a more abstract focused code surfaced from the data. The new focused code for the ANC's 2016 LGE corpus of tweets - arrived at through the amalgamation of focused codes from groups 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5 – is thus: *Twitter served as an additional broadcast platform for the ANC to publicise its countrywide 2016 LGE campaign in order to win back the confidence of its core support base for another five years through self-correction.* A sole focused code from group 6 – *attacking other parties* - fell away after more iterations during data analyses. This is how the clustering and preliminary generation of the six focused codes; and finalisation of the single focused code happened.

Please refer to Table 6.8:

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Table 6.8: Focused codes for the ANC’s 2016 LGE corpus of tweets

Initial code	Focused code	Final focused code	
Accepting when the party has made mistakes; Acknowledging poor performance in 2016 LGE; Dealing with party problems; Ensuring ANC local government deployees are accountable; Dealing with factionalism within the ANC; Dealing with list-manipulation instances; Corruption eating into ANC support; Consulting to ensure party mistakes rectified; Acting on corrupt deployees;	Promising to self-correct to win back the confidence of voters	Twitter served as an additional broadcast platform for the ANC to publicise its countrywide 2016 LGE campaign in order to win back the confidence of its core support base for another five years through self-correction	
	Group 1		
	Group 2		
	ANC is still an urban party; Securing wins in non-urban municipalities; Disseminating information on the metros;		The ANC remains the choice for both urban and rural voters
	Group 3		
	ANC is still dominating the political landscape; ANC providing for the poor; Twitter publicising how the ANC has changed lives of communities;		The ANC will continue dominating the South African political landscape as long as it delivers to the poor
Group 4			
Publicising 'other media' interactions; Issuing public statements to the media; Alerting public to ANC media campaigns;	Twitter was used as an amplifying tool for the ANC’s 2016 LGE campaign		
Group 5			
Activating the ANC’s liberation credentials;	South African voters owe the ANC another 5 years		
Group 6			
Negatively campaigning against other parties;	Attacking other parties	Falls away	

During the focused coding stage of the DA's 2016 LGE corpus of tweets, the initial 23 concrete and abstract open codes were reduced to 20 based on similarities and each code's properties. Using the same funnelling method as executed with the ANC's 2016 LGE corpus of tweets, the researcher further reduced the DA's 20 open codes to a more manageable six (6).

During this coding stage, similar codes were clustered into six groups using key words such as 'metro' for group 1, 'media' for the second group, 'values, heritage, history' for group 3; and 'record' for group four to render them more abstract. These six focused codes were then reduced to four by collapsing axial codes from groups 1, 2 and 5, with a new code emerging, namely *Leveraging Twitter as an additional communication platform to micro-target voters in the metros/ urban areas; to publicise the party's campaigning activities and to mount a co-ordinated negative political advertising campaigning against its rivals*. Draped around this main focused code was a sub-code, namely *Other political parties simply cannot offer what the DA offers voters, namely credible, accountable and incorruptible leaders; and proven governance delivery*. Through more intense and iterative analyses, it was decided to drop focused codes *The DA, too, is a party espousing the ideals and values of Nelson Mandela; and other liberation leaders*; and *Providing links over Twitter to other social media channels*. This is how the clustering of the six focused codes and generation of a final focused code for the DA's 2016 LGE corpus of tweets happened. Please refer to Table 6.9:

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Table 6.9: Focused codes for the DA's 2016 LGE corpus of tweets

Initial code	Focused code	Final focused code
	Group 1	
<p>Publishing metro result outcomes; Showing successes in metros; Rallying voters in the metros; Disseminating information on the metros; Publicising metro-related events; Publicising non-metro campaigning;</p>	<p>Targeting the metro voter through a co-ordinated communication strategy</p>	<p>Leveraging Twitter as an additional communication platform to micro-target voters in the metros/ urban areas; to publicise the party's campaigning activities and to mount a co-ordinated negative political advertising campaigning against its rivals</p>
	Group 2	
<p>Alerting media to pressers; Issuing mini statements on local government matters; Issuing party statements; Publicising 'other media' interactions; Publicising other media engagements; Rallying people to vote DA; Publicising how the DA has changed lives of communities; Publishing election results;</p>	<p>Twitter served as an additional amplifying tool for the DA's 2016 election campaigning activities</p>	<p>Sub-code: Other political parties simply cannot offer what the DA offers voters, namely credible, accountable and incorruptible leaders; and proven governance delivery</p>
	Group 3	
<p>Promoting social cohesion and patriotism; Claiming attachment to liberation narrative;</p>	<p>The DA, too, is a party espousing the ideals and values of Nelson Mandela; and other liberation leaders</p>	<p>Falls away</p>
	Group 4	
<p>Publicising DA anti-corruption stance; Disseminating voter education information; Trumpeting its successes; Promoting the party's core issues; Promoting a positive image of its representatives;</p>	<p>Other political parties simply cannot offer what the DA offers the voters: credible, accountable and incorruptible leaders; and proven governance delivery</p>	
	Group 5	
<p>Negatively campaigning against other parties;</p>	<p>Using Twitter to mount a negative campaign against other parties.</p>	
	Group 6	
<p>Providing links over Twitter to other social media channels;</p>	<p>Providing links over Twitter to other social media channels</p>	<p>Falls away</p>

6.8.4 Focused coding of the ANC and DA's 2016 LGE manifesto

During the initial focused coding phase of the ANC's 2016 LGE manifesto, the original ten open codes were distilled to five (5). Throughout this refinement process, the researcher repeatedly revisited the open coding texts to see if the reduced five codes was representative of the original data. After closer inspection, these were, firstly, narrowed down to just three (3); and ultimately to a single focused code (to be explained in detail below).

In the first of a four-stage focused coding exercise, focused codes *promising multiple changes for the next five years; promising a set of key deliverables for the next five-year term of local government; and delivering on a constitutional mandate* were collapsed into a single focused code, namely *Promising changes in its constitutional delivery mandate for the next 5-year term of local government*. This new focused code was the culmination of the researcher's reading of the various properties attached to the initial open codes which spoke more to the ANC's commitment to delivery according to a constitutional mandate. The researcher's theoretical sensitivity to the data set also came into play here. A second focused code – *The ANC alone remains capable of leading South Africa and caring for the poor* - was generated by distilling the open codes *only the ANC is capable of moving South Africa forward; and only the ANC is capable of caring for South Africa's millions of poor people*. A third focused code - *communities are integral to local government decision-making* - was conceptualised by rewording the open codes *consulting with communities and other key stakeholders is central to delivery; and involving communities in all aspects of local government*. Further refinement during the focused coding stage led to two more initial codes, namely *targeting women as an important demographic for the party; and targeting the youth and young people as an important demographic for the party* being generated as *women and the youth remain key constituencies for the ANC*. A fifth and final focused code was named as *managing the party's local government deployees*.

After more thorough and intense re-examination, these five codes were further narrowed to three focused codes. For the new, more refined focused code, the

researcher revisited the ANC's 2016 LGE manifesto, the initial codes unearthed in the first coding stage and the various properties identified; and came up with *voting for the ANC for the next five years is a vote for a caring, pro-poor party committed to women issues, the youth and local government delivery*. This new focused code was the outcome of merging three axial codes, namely *promising changes in its constitutional delivery mandate for the next 5-year term of local government, the ANC alone remains capable of leading South Africa and caring for the poor*, and *women and the youth remain key constituencies for the ANC*. The remaining two focused codes did not change, namely *communities are integral to local government decision-making*; and *managing the party's local government employees*. To test if the most relevant focused codes were extracted, the researcher used Borgatti's (1996) axial coding frame to verify. During this focused coding exercise, relations were inadvertently established among the remaining three more focused codes. Further analyses reduced this three-pronged focused code to *Voting ANC is a vote for a more community-driven, pro-poor, accountable local government*.

Please refer to Table 6.10 for an elaboration of this entire process:

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Table 6.10: The final focused code process for the ANC’s 2016 LGE manifesto

Initial codes	Coding stage 1	Coding stage 2	Final focused code
Promising multiple changes for the next five years;	Promising changes in its constitutional delivery mandate for the next 5-year term of local government;	Voting for the ANC for the next five years is a vote for a caring, pro-poor party committed to women issues, the youth and local government delivery;	Voting ANC is a vote for a more community-driven, pro-poor, accountable local government
Promising a set of key deliverables for the next five-year term of local government;	The ANC alone remains capable of leading South Africa and caring for the poor	Communities are integral to local government decision-making;	
Delivering on a constitutional mandate;	Communities are integral to local government decision-making	Managing the party’s local government deployees	
Only the ANC is capable of moving South Africa forward;	Women and the youth remain key constituencies for the ANC		
Only the ANC is capable of caring for South Africa’s millions of poor people;	Managing the party’s local government deployees		
Targeting women as an important demographic for the party;			
Involving communities in all aspects of local government;			
Managing the party’s local government deployees;			
Consulting with communities and other key stakeholders is central to delivery;			
Targeting the youth and young people as an important demographic for the party;			
10 initial codes	5 focused codes	3 focused codes	Single focused code

When it came to the DA's 2016 LGE manifesto, the initial eight initial codes underwent further distillation, with the researcher grouping similar codes together. For example, of the eight open codes, four depicted some form of 'time' or 'temporal' property. Thus, the following initial codes were clustered together, namely *emphasising the 2016 local elections are the most important since 1994, pushing the party's bigger ten-year objectives, the DA is a forward-thinking party and promising change over the next five years*. The new focused code was *the DA remains the most progressive party for tangible service delivery for the next five years*. When it came to the remaining four initial codes, namely *governing towns and cities efficiently; spreading a message of being pro-poor; disseminating its message of its track record of good governance; and dealing with South Africa's urbanisation*, here again, all four were clustered together to form an altogether new axial code, namely *a vote for the DA is a vote for clean governance of South Africa's towns and cities*. More intense analyses resulted in a single focused code for the DA's 2016 LGE manifesto, namely *Voting DA means choosing a contemporary party committed to clean; and accountable local government delivery in South Africa's towns and cities*.

Please refer to Table 6.11 for a detailed step-by-step elaboration of this process:

Table 6.11: The final focused code process for the DA’s 2016 LGE manifesto

Initial codes	Initial focused codes	Final focused code
Governing towns and cities efficiently	The DA remains the most progressive party for tangible service delivery for the next five years;	Voting DA means choosing a contemporary party committed to clean; and accountable local government delivery in South Africa’s towns and cities
Spreading a message of being pro-poor	A vote for the DA is a vote for clean governance of South Africa’s towns and cities	
Disseminating its message of its track record of good governance		
Pushing the party’s bigger ten-year objectives		
The DA is a forward-thinking party		
Dealing with South Africa’s urbanisation		
Promising change over the next five years		
Emphasising the 2016 local elections are the most important since 1994		
Governing towns and cities efficiently		
8 initial codes	2 focused codes	1 final focused code

6.8.5 Summary of final focused codes for the ANC and DA

As a final step in this focused coding process, the researcher cross-compared the focused codes generated from the ANC and DA's 2016 LGE corpus of tweets and each party's election manifesto. Initial assumptions from the outcomes of both data sets were constantly challenged with the researcher asking questions such as *does this fit here* or *does this fit there*. Furthermore, the properties of the new focused codes were looked at again numerous times to ensure these were indeed indicative and representative of the raw data. Using this constant comparison technique, codes were compared to codes; and data against data to understand the relationships between them; to ensure the relevant social processes were empirically being captured. Theoretical sensitivity, in this respect, became integral. Glaser and Strauss (1967:46) define theoretical sensitivity as the researcher's ability to have "theoretical insight into one's area of research combined with an ability to make something of one's insights". The researcher looked at the properties of each code to corroborate what was being seen. The researcher also inspected the detailed memos written during the whole open coding phase to capture what the researcher was thinking at the time (to be expanded upon in chapter 7). After various stages of intense focused coding, the following focused codes surfaced for the ANC and DA.

Please refer to Table 6.12:

Table 6.12: Final focused codes for the ANC and DA

Focused codes for the ANC	Focused codes for the DA
<i>ANC 2016 LGE corpus of tweets</i>	<i>DA 2016 LGE corpus of tweets</i>
Twitter served as an additional broadcast platform for the ANC to publicise its countrywide 2016 LGE campaign in order to win back the confidence of its core support base for another five years through self-correction;	Leveraging Twitter as an additional communication platform to micro-target voters in the metros/ urban areas; to publicise the party’s campaigning activities and to mount a co-ordinated negative political advertising campaigning against its rivals;
<i>ANC 2016 LGE manifesto</i>	<i>DA 2016 LGE manifesto</i>
Voting ANC is a vote for a more community-driven, pro-poor, accountable local government.	Voting DA means choosing a contemporary party committed to clean; and accountable local government delivery in South Africa’s towns and cities.

6.8.6 Theoretical coding of the ANC and DA's 2016 LGE corpus of tweets and election manifesto

To recap, Grounded Theory undergoes various coding processes in search for new theory. While initial coding is done to get initial codes and to get familiar with the data by looking at the data's properties, focused coding is more advanced and looks for relations among codes. Theoretical coding involves going back to the data in search for new theory and final codes (Charmaz 2008; 2014). During the theoretical coding stage, theory is identified using the insights gained from the abstract axial codes (see section 6.10.3 above). Here again, this could have been conducted manually. However, the NVivo Pro 12 software helped examine the context of the data for evidence.

Once the theoretical sampling process was completed for all data sets and analyses processes, the researcher began the selective coding phase. Here, each focused code identified in sections 6.10.3 and 6.10.4 was teased out in terms of their context, the evolution of each; and how each focused code related to another. Soon enough, theoretical saturation was attained; and a theory expressed through "a set of concepts that are related to one another in a cohesive way" emerged. It – for the researcher - was sufficient to be a tangible representation of all the data collected and analysed (Creswell 2013, 2015).

During this stage of the coding, the researcher felt a little overwhelmed. Although the focused coding stages had helped with narrowing the core category for each party, the researcher felt there was a need to re-look at all the raw data; and subsequent coding outcomes thus far. Theoretical sensitivity, in this respect became, paramount as a deeper understanding was needed for this layer of the coding (see Birks & Mills 2015; Adu 2019). The researcher waded through reams of data on NVivo Pro 12 in pursuit of theoretical saturation. In the end, two selective codes surfaced. However, the researcher was not content with these 'final' theoretical codes. Constant cross comparisons were again made, this time against the reviewed literature in chapters 2, 3, 4 and 5 to ensure the final saturated theoretical codes were consistent. Strong

repetitions in these iterative processes were searched for, resulting in more abstract, all-inclusive two final theoretical codes. These will be explained more in chapter 7.

For now, however, please refer to Table 6.13 for an illustration of how each theoretical code was arrived at, including theoretical memos written.

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Table 6.13: Final selective codes for the ANC and DA

Theoretical memos written	Focused codes	Theoretical codes
<p>Researcher consistently asked how Twitter was used by the ANC and DA during this stage;</p> <p>Need to look at open codes, axial codes for both the and DA to re-familiarise oneself with the data; and the different properties identified;</p>	<p>ANC 2016 LGE corpus of tweets and election manifesto</p>	<p>Digitally tweeting an election for implicit brand augmentation</p>
<p>In the initial open coding phase, (quantitatively) which were the most dominant codes? Which codes received more attention by both parties? Use these statistics to corroborate theoretical codes;</p>	<p>The African National Congress chose to leverage Twitter as a supplementary broadcast channel to publicise its full-scale, nationwide election campaign to drive home the message that voting for it was a vote for a more caring, community-driven and pro-poor local government committed to self-correction.</p>	
<p>Thus far, indications are that there will be two separate theories for the ANC and DA because the pair used Twitter very differently;</p>	<p>DA 2016 LGE corpus of tweets and election manifesto</p>	
<p>Careful not to force categories: check, reflect, relook at all open codes, axial codes and the properties of each;</p>	<p>Twitter for the Democratic Alliance served to micro-target voters in the metros, to publicise the party's campaign activities in South Africa's towns and cities, to project its leaders as incorruptible and accountable; and to campaign negatively against other political rivals that questioned its proven clean governance delivery record.</p>	<p>Audience-segmenting the urban for optimal brand embellishing</p>
<p>Thus far, one can see both parties used Twitter very differently from each other. This will be confirmed by the semi-structured interviews with the ANC and DA social media managers;</p>		
<p>Where does issue ownership feature in the data, open codes and axial codes? Use memos to expand why it was not evident in the data collection and data analyses stages.</p>		

The researcher is confident that the two core categories which surfaced from the extensive data collection and data analyses phases are wholly representative of the actual raw data reviewed. These will be discussed more in chapter 7, including how they contribute to the substantive grounded theory. Also absolutely integral to the process was the researcher's theoretical sensitivity or level of personal insight a researcher has within a particular field; and how that knowledge is leveraged that leads to a more nuanced, sophisticated; and data-reliant substantive theory (see Birks & Mills 2015:181). The researcher in this respect was fully immersed in the process from start to end. This ensured key elements from the data was extracted to build relevancy into the germinating theory. This also led to a more sophisticated Grounded Theory and/ or core categories as punted by Charmaz (2014).

6.9 TRUSTWORTHINESS OF THE GROUNDED THEORY PROCESS

For qualitative researchers, reliability and validity can be equated to the "trustworthiness, rigor and quality" of one's research (Creswell 2007:17-19). While internal validity speaks to the "accuracy" of data, external validity addresses matters of reliability and how research outputs can be generalised (Creswell 2007:18). On the latter point, Creswell (2007:17-19) points out that the aim of qualitative studies is not to generalise but to provide "unique impressions and understandings". This observation notwithstanding, Bickman and Rog (2008) suggest that a qualitative study would still be able to be generalised but this would depend on how the Grounded Theory was developed. Creswell (2007:17-19) agrees, noting that researchers need to account for matters such as biases, personal perspectives and other "recorded protocols" to ensure replication.

Grounded theory methodology and qualitative studies have perennially been criticised for being nothing more than "nice stories" (Urquhart 2012). Sceptics from mostly the quantitative discipline question the results of grounded theories; asking if readers are able to distinguish between *bona fide* theories; and mere assumptions based on a researcher's "self-delusion". Questions such as *how can one assume that such a theory outcome is reliable and valid* are normally asked (Carcary 2009).

Couched within that frame of thinking, authors Sikolia, Biros, Mason and Wiser (2013) make four suggestions to arrest such interrogatory questions being asked of one's grounded theory/ qualitative study. For them, such "nice stories" can be reliable and valid if the central concept of trustworthiness is achieved. Bowen (2009) equates trustworthiness to "conceptual soundness" against which the true value of qualitative studies can be benchmarked against. The researcher needs to check for four elements, namely credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability – as proposed by Brown, Stevens, Troiano and Schneider (2004) and Rolfe (2004). While not a perfect fit, credibility and transferability can be equated to the internal and external validity of a grounded theory study respectively; and dependability can be used as a synonym for reliability. Sikolia, Biros, Mason and Weiser (2013), therefore, suggest the following to "improve" the quality and trustworthiness of a grounded theory qualitative study. Please refer to Table 6.14:

Table 6.14: Different elements to a 'trustworthy' Grounded Theory study

Trustworthy dimension	Factors improving trustworthiness
Credibility (internal validity)	Renewed engagement with different data sets; triangulation of data through number of data collection sources; detailed descriptions data analyses to allow for theoretical coding and theoretical saturation; theoretical sampling aiding the data collection process; use of original (data) text in the substantive, developing theory; catering for negative cases.
Transferability (external validity)	Researcher's detailed account of the research, including interpretation of final results and resultant grounded theory.
Dependability (reliability)	Provision of a thorough audit trail
Confirmability	Audit trail to 'confirm' study's veracity

Source: Elements of a 'trustworthy' study as proposed by Sikolia *et al.* (2013)

The researcher, therefore, was motivated to increase the trustworthiness of this grounded theory study by focussing on credibility, transferability, dependability and the confirmability of this ground theory study:

6.9.1 Credibility

When applied to this study, establishing credibility was about the different data sets representing the phenomenon under question; and how correctly the various data collection instruments measured this. Credibility was safeguarded through the researcher's full immersion in the data collection and data analyses processes, through the grounded theory method; and from obtaining the requisite data from multiple sources (corpus of tweets and party election manifestos). Credibility was also secured through the researcher's demonstration of how and when consistent categories emerged during the different data coding stages. This electronic audit trail is captured on the NVivo Pro 12 software too. In this respect, the study could be said to be internally valid.

6.9.2 Transferability

When it came to the transferability or external validity element, the researcher sought to illustrate how the findings from this study were a perfect fit for the data studied. Grounded theory and qualitative studies are not about generalisability but about the researcher showing how similar results will be achieved if the same data was used. Transferability, this instance, was enhanced through detailed and clear descriptions of the entire research process. In chapters 6 and 7, for example, the researcher outlines how the sampling, data collection, analyses and interpretation of results took place.

Furthermore, because the role of the researcher is integral to emergent grounded theories, information here also in regard to his role as an 'instrument' and his interaction with the different data sets was given to elevate transferability. Audit trails, again, were provided throughout, including via the NVivo Pro 12 software the researcher used (Cooney 2010). In terms of what Charmaz (2008) and Strauss and Corbin (1998) label "reflexivity", the authors argue for the impossibility of divorcing oneself from what we already know. Before even entering the research space, the

researcher comes along with his/ her ideas of the world. In this respect, the researcher's background as a political researcher since 2006 (12-years) came into play, especially when it came to analysing the ANC and DA's tweets and 2016 election manifestos. For example, this knowledge became integral when hundreds of tweets from both parties were analysed. Before the actual analysis, the researcher needed to 'clean' the data. This would not have been possible had the researcher not been knowledgeable about the country's politics. It is within this frame of thinking that the researcher agrees with Charmaz's (2008) assertion that Grounded Theory construction is indeed relevant to the researcher's past experiences. For this study, it was an enviable resource on which the researcher was able to draw upon to better inform this study; and allow more sensitivity to the different data sets. This "reflexivity" (Strauss & Corbin 1998:47) was essential to demonstrate the researcher was not a novice; and the entire qualitative research process was acknowledged using intensive memos.

6.9.3 Dependability

When it came to dependability or the reliability of the study, the researcher is confident that should this grounded theory study be done by others to verify if the relevant procedures were followed through properly, the electronic audit trail will ensure the findings of this study are indeed dependable and/ or reliable. The data does represent what was studied. Through combinations of theoretical sampling, theoretical sensitivity, memo writing and constant comparisons across data sets, this dependability was cemented. In other words, the researcher accounted for any and all changes during the data collection and data analysis steps (please see Brown *et al* 2002; Morrow 2005; Rolfe 2004; Sikolia, Biros, Mason & Weiser 2013).

6.9.4 Confirmability

There is general acceptance that when one is conducting qualitative studies, the issue of transparency becomes important. Questions such as 'how did the

researcher go about his/ her research' and 'what were the different analytical processes and procedures employed' become integral to understand a researcher's logic in arriving at the conclusions he/ she proposed. Equally important is showing the step-by-step analytical process for readers to follow the logical theory-building process (Hutchison, Johnston & Breckon 2010:285). With regards to the confirmability, the researcher is confident that the "objectivity" of this study can be confirmed through the thorough electronic trail should another researcher choose to use the same data and data sets (Brown *et al* 2002).

6.9.5 Has trustworthiness been achieved in this study

In grounded theory studies, researchers have to aim for a trustworthiness standard, a measure that will ultimately determine if the said study boasts rigor. Such credibility can be boosted through extensive audit trails of the research process, data and analyses triangulation, negative case analysis when it comes to accommodating 'all data' in category-creation; and a researcher's engagement with his/ her data set (Kolb 2012; Birks & Mills 2015). The researcher substantiated in the sections above that this grounded theory study of the ANC and DA and how they used micro-blogging site, Twitter, to communicate their political issues in the 2016 local government elections fulfils these criteria.

6.10 SUMMARY

This chapter intended to show that the researcher has an understanding of the methodological implications of the choices made; and in particular that careful thought went into the links between the study's purpose and research questions and the overall research approach and research methods selected. To simplify the investigation, five research questions were formulated using the main research problem. The researcher in subsequent sections then outlined the methodological framework to be used, including a qualitative research design framed within the social constructionist world view and Constructivist Grounded Theory.

The uniqueness of using Grounded Theory is the method's simultaneous merging of the data collection and data analysis. Attention was paid to the three main approaches to conducting Grounded Theory, namely the classic Straussian version, Strauss and Corbin's (1998) interpretation; and Charmaz's constructivist Grounded Theory. Reasons were provided for choosing Charmaz's approach over the other two. A thorough account was provided on the entire data collection; and data analyses processes including the relevant outcomes from the multi-stage initial, focused and theoretical coding phases. The chapter concluded by referring to matters around the quality of this study to show how the researcher accounted for how the research was executed. In chapter seven, the findings, discussion and interpretation of this doctoral study are elaborated upon, with the final outcome being the proposal of a conceptual framework for Twitter serving as a party-political issue-driven digital political communication platform, with an inherent urban bias.

ⁱ The ANC's 2016 election manifesto can be accessed from the party's website www.anc.org.za, while the DA's 2016 election manifesto can be retrieved from www.da.org.za.

CHAPTER 7: FINDINGS AND INTERPRETATION

7.1 FROM CONCEPT DEVELOPMENT TO THEORETICAL CATEGORIES

Chapter 7 aims to address RESEARCH QUESTION 4, namely how did the ANC and DA leverage Twitter as a digital political communication tool to claim party-political issue ownership in the 2016 LGE?

The main thrust of the previous chapter was to provide conceptual clarity on the key inter-related concepts of this study, namely digital political communication, party-political issue ownership and urban electioneering. By way of an intense theoretical discussion of these concepts, it was shown the way in which they form the building blocks of this doctoral study. Related written memos (see Annexure C) prove this, with each detailed memo serving as the proverbial “mortar” that holds everything together (Stern 2007:119; Birks & Mills 2015: 118). Additionally, the literature in chapters 2, 3, 4 and 5 support the claim that digital political communication, party-political issue ownership and urban electioneering (as key concepts) form the foundation of this study. In the next analysis phase, the researcher uses the abstract versions of the focused codes and concept development to show which theoretical categories surfaced from the data. As part of the theoretical saturation exercise, the researcher went back to the raw data and codes generated through the iterative data analysis processes as part of this constant comparisons task to render the two focused codes even more abstract. The following four theoretical categories emerged as a result:

Category 1: Tweet-broadcasting the election campaign trail

This category encapsulates how each party leveraged Twitter as a supplementary broadcast tool. It is possible to label Twitter as such because the micro-blogging

site served to publicise each party's political communication messages in the 2016 LGE and to bolster each party's image and the images of their political candidates. Related to this major category are other sub-categories such as digital exposure, digital political communication extension, digital constituency outreach; and always-on digital campaigning.

Examples from the data show how the ANC and DA optimised the 'broadcast' capability of Twitter to ventilate their entire 2016 LGE campaign trail. In the case of the ANC, for example, whenever prominent leaders were dispatched to places like taxi ranks and old age homes – traditionally known as ANC electoral constituencies - these were broadcast over Twitter to stimulate hype for the party. In one tweet, 'Gauteng chair comrade @PaulMashatile and @ParksTauCOJ at Bara taxi rank #ANCEverywhere #ANCIInTheStreets', hashtags such as #ANCEverywhere and #ANCIInTheStreets were used to build momentum around the campaign (My ANC 2016 local government elections feed...2016). In another tweet, the ANC social media team tweets 'we have closed down Dumbe taxi rank , people want to see and touch President Zuma; Dumbe is at standstill. President Zuma on walkabout #ANCEverywhere...President Zuma at Bilanyoni mini rally #ANCEverywhere...children love our President #ANCEverywhere #ANCKZN' to illustrate the full extent of the 'grassroots' reach of the party's 2016 LGE campaign (My ANC 2016 local government elections feed...2016).

Similarly, with the DA, every minute aspect of the party's 2016 LGE electioneering offensive was broadcast over Twitter. For example, when the party sought to publicise the launch of its 'youth bus', the following tweet was sent out: '@Our_DA @MmusiMaimane & @AthoIT unveiling the DA Youth bus. #VoteForChange...@MmusiMaimane & @AthoIT will today launch a national youth campaign in Port Elizabeth's Wells Estate #VoteForChange'. Other campaigning events would also be tweeted in advance to create excitement and possible media

interest around these, for example: '@Our_DA Today, @MmusiMaimane is in Nelson Mandela Bay, campaigning with future NMB Mayor, @AtholT. #TrollipForMayor #VoteForChange'. Campaigning events such as marches were also heavily broadcast-tweeted to draw attention to the party. For example: 'TSHWANE JOBS MARCH - #DA_TshwaneVictory @DA_GautengNorth The failure of Sputla's government to empower the youth of Tshwane with jobs MUST be stopped. @SollyMsimanga @Our_DA' (Democratic Alliance 2016 local government elections feed...2016).

Category 2: Coordinating political messaging around the election

This category encapsulates the way both the ANC and DA used Twitter as a broadcast platform to document every minute detail of their 2016 LGE campaign. Twitter's effectiveness, however, lay in the way political communication messages were planned beforehand and ultimately coordinated by relevant social media managers. In the case of the ANC, this was not the case. The DA, however, demonstrated how a well-coordinated action plan works when it came to effective campaign messaging. Related to this major category are other sub-categories such as digital party brand embellishing, digital political marketing and digital political public relations. Examples from the DA's 2016 LGE corpus of tweets include its political messaging around its 'core issues'. For example, coordinated tweets focused on the party's 'core' electoral issues included 'Today, you can VOTE for CHANGE that: Stops Corruption Creates Jobs Delivers Better Services #ImVotingDA', '@MmusiMaimane: We have a manifesto that will be implemented so we can create jobs, stop corruption, deliver services' and 'Our Manifesto For Change. Change that creates jobs, stops corruption and delivers better services. #VoteForChange' (Democratic Alliance 2016 local government elections feed...2016).

Category 3: Advancing digital party-political issue ownership

This category encapsulates the way both the ANC and DA chose a medium such as Twitter to advance party-political issues within the online landscape in the 2016 LGE, a move executed to assist each party in the political persuasion process – especially in ‘battleground’ metros considered electorally vulnerable. Related to this major category are other sub-categories such as digital issue ownership, striving for agenda-setting, hashtagging party-political issues; and staying abreast of ‘party-political electoral issue’ movements through ‘listening’. More than the ANC, the DA demonstrated that ‘focused’ electoral messaging in the 2016 LGE has a latent power that leads to political persuasion. This issue-driven political persuasion process is aided more when creative and consistent hashtags are used to entrench issues a particular political party intends to convey. With the DA, there were innumerable examples from the corpus. When it came to negative ‘focused’ messaging, for example, the DA’s onslaught against the ANC continued even until a few hours before voting: ‘We are not demanding that you elect us “until Jesus returns”. We will prove ourselves in one five-year term - @MmusiMaimane #VoteForChange’; ‘Zuma’s R4bn jet will sabotage job creation and service delivery - @MmusiMaimane #JobsNotJets’; ‘The once proud liberation movement has degenerated into a corrupt and decaying patronage network for cronies. - @MmusiMaimane #Nkandla’; ‘Elections come and go. The yellow t-shirts come and go but nothing changes #VoteForChange’; ‘The ANC has changed, having to rely on insults to try and maintain support. It is not the party of Nelson Mandela. - @zilevandamme’; ‘When the ANC fight, it is the people that suffer! - @zilevandamme’; ‘Under Jacob Zuma, unemployment is on the rise, corruption is rampant, and service delivery is deteriorating - @zilevandamme’; ‘Thoko Didiza voted in support of the whitewash #Nkandla Report, which sought to replace the PP’s report, & undermine the Constitution - @jsteenhuisen’; and ‘@jsteenhuisen

Phuma, Zuma! Vote @Our_DA for real change #VoteForChange' (Democratic Alliance 2016 local government elections feed...2016).

Category 4: Segmenting the 'urban' for message targeting

This category encapsulated the way the DA – notably - used Twitter to micro-target the urban voter in South Africa's 'battleground' metros to help the party achieve message concentration and political persuasion to win it more votes in the 2016 LGE. While the ANC admitted to using Twitter to access urban audiences, this was not done as successfully as the DA (Geleba 2018). Hashtags, as an example, were not harnessed optimally to drive the 'urban' conversation in battleground metros during the 2016 LGE for the ANC. The DA, on the contrary, used hashtags centred on their metro mayoral candidates to ensure 'focused' and 'negative' electoral messaging hit their targets in terms of urban constituencies. Examples include '@Our_DA Under Jordaan over R320 million was lost to leaks & electricity theft in the last 9 months #ANCMayors'; 'Jordaan is a part-time Mayor of broken promises, faking the launch of a Metro Police & seeing unemployment rise by 21 000 #ANCMayors'; 'WASTED money in the last year: NMB = R3,4 BILLION Tshwane = R3,6 BILLION JHB = R4,2 BILLION Ekurhuleni = R975 MILLION'; 'DA metro mayoral candidates have campaigned for 988 days so far. And we still don't even know who the ANC's candidates are #MayorsForChange'; 'While Zuma's wives enjoy luxury German cars, #OlievenhoutboschPolice have to rely on 3 vehicles to service the whole Olievenhout&surrounding'; '@Our_DA Until Jordaan comes out of hiding & debates his record it's clear @MYANC has no good story to tell in NMB @AtoIT'; and '@MYANC mayors of JHB, NMB, Tshwane & Ekurhuleni had a hand in R12 billion unauthorised wasteful expenditure in their metros #VoteForChange' (Democratic Alliance 2016 local government elections feed...2016).

Another key aspect of the DA’s ‘urban’ electoral messaging notable in the battleground metros was the party’s use of emotional, personal appeals over Twitter for people to continue standing in line to cast their ballot. Some examples include ‘We once lost a municipality by just 3 votes. EVERY vote counts! #ImVotingDA #ElectionDay PLEASE vote if you haven't already!!!’; ‘Thank you for casting your vote. Please encourage your friends and family to head down to do the same. #ImVotingDA’; ‘#KhulaDA @AimFranklin #ImVotingDA to honour Madiba's legacy and return our nation to a focus on his values’; and ‘#ImVotingDA because Kgalema Motlanthe is absolutely right. The ANC is completely leaderless! Don't let the weather decide your future. Get out to vote’ (these were just some examples of tweets sent out on the party’s timeline coupled with pictures of metro mayoral candidates and metro-related information graphics) (Democratic Alliance 2016 local government elections feed...2016).

Related to this fourth major category are other sub-categories such as micro-targeting electoral constituencies, enabling technology, digital literacy, urbanised political spaces, multiple digital instruments; and online accessibility. Table 7.1 depicts the way these four theoretical categories emerged from the two focused codes, including how resultant sub-categories were realised.

Table 7.1: From focused coding-to-theoretical categorising
FOCUSED CODE 1
The ANC chose to leverage Twitter as a supplementary broadcast channel to publicise its full-scale, nationwide election campaign to drive home the message that voting for it was a vote for a more caring, community-driven and pro-poor local government committed to self-correction.
THEORETICAL CATEGORIES GENERATED
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tweet-broadcasting the election campaign trail • Coordinating political messaging around the election
RELATED SUB-CATEGORIES/ THEMES

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Digital political communication extension • Digital exposure • Digital constituency outreach • Always-on digital campaigning • Digital party brand embellishing • Digital political marketing • Digital political public relations
FOCUSED CODE 2
<p>Twitter for the DA served to micro-target voters in the metros, to publicise the party’s campaign activities in South Africa’s towns and cities, to project its leaders as incorruptible and accountable and to campaign negatively against other political rivals that questioned its proven clean governance delivery record.</p>
THEORETICAL CATEGORIES GENERATED
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advancing digital party-political issue ownership • Segmenting the ‘urban’ for message targeting
RELATED SUB-CATEGORIES/ THEMES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Digital issue ownership • Striving for agenda-setting • Hashtagging party-political issues • Staying abreast of ‘party-political electoral issue’ movements through ‘listening’ • Micro-targeting electoral constituencies • Enabling technology • Digital literacy • Urbanised political spaces • Multiple digital instruments • Online accessibility

In this section, the researcher used labelling to assign theoretical headings to the four categories. The four theoretical categories that emerged after much iteration and constant comparisons of data-with-data, categories-with-categories and themes-with-themes were ‘tweet-broadcasting the election campaign trail’, ‘coordinating political messaging around the election’, ‘advancing digital party-political issue ownership’ and ‘segmenting the *urban* for message targeting’.

Table 7.2 provides a quick reference on the way these four theoretical categories led to the unearthing of ‘new knowledge’ or ‘new discoveries’ on the subject matter.

CATEGORY	POSSIBLE NEW DISCOVERIES MADE
Tweet-broadcasting the election campaign trail	Twitter leveraged by political parties as an always-on broadcast media tool, capable of providing digital exposure; and one-to-many ‘mass communication’ at any part of the day or night in real time. Apart from giving election campaigns ‘visibility’, Twitter is viewed as an ‘accessible’ media platform for the ‘broadcast’ of most aspects of an extensive election campaign through hand-held smartphone technology. Additionally, Twitter combines text, images, audio, video and live-streaming to propose a ‘multi-functional’ broadcast capability which other media might not offer. In most instances, however, Twitter is used to ‘supplement’ traditional media (radio, television, print) coverage to implicitly show the extent, range and scale of the whole campaign trail and to additionally anchor a political party ideologically.
Advancing digital party-political issue ownership	Data from the study also illustrates how hashtagging greatly helps the party-political digital issue ownership process over Twitter. Consistency, focus-messaging and a ‘few’ rather than ‘too many’ hashtags within a heated election cycle has the potential to create momentum around select party-political issues. As shown with DA electioneering within highly-contested ‘battleground’ metros in the 2016 LGE, fewer rather than too many ‘focused’ hashtags worked, such as ‘#VoteFor Change’, ‘#KhulaDA’ and ‘#MayorsForChange’. Such focused hashtagging spurred a domino effect of message-amplification and deeper issue-entrenchment through mostly retweets and tweet interactions.

Next, the researcher shows how each of the four generated theoretical categories are further distilled by applying what Birks and Mills (2015:6) label a 'storyline technique' in the eventual pursuit of "theoretical integration".

7.2 'STORYLINING' THE PATH TO THEORY-GENERATION

In moving from the focused coding stage to the conceptualisation of key concepts and subsequent generation of theoretical categories, the researcher revisited the ANC and DA's 2016 LGE corpus of tweets and election manifestos in order to attain theoretical saturation. Memos written on the observations were looked at again to uncover deeper patterns within the data sets (please see Annexure C). The four theoretical categories and related sub-concepts and themes permitted the generation of two final theoretical codes fully representative of the data, namely 'digitally tweeting an election for implicit brand augmentation' and 'audience-segmenting the 'urban' for optimal electoral messaging and brand embellishing'.

Following the proposal of the four theoretical categories and two theoretical codes, the substantive grounded theory write-up process formed another sequential step of the Grounded Theory method. Glaser (2012) asserts that this writing-up of the theory should come naturally to researchers once memo-sorting is completed. By inference, memos are where substantive grounded theories first emerge, manifesting as theoretical codes. Sorted memos also indicate the way various concepts are related; and eventually integrated into the final write-up (please refer to Annexure C for a thorough brief on how memos contributed to the analyses). Glaser (2012:1-9) also adds that delaying this "readiness moment" of writing up the substantive grounded theory will only rob researchers of an energised theory.

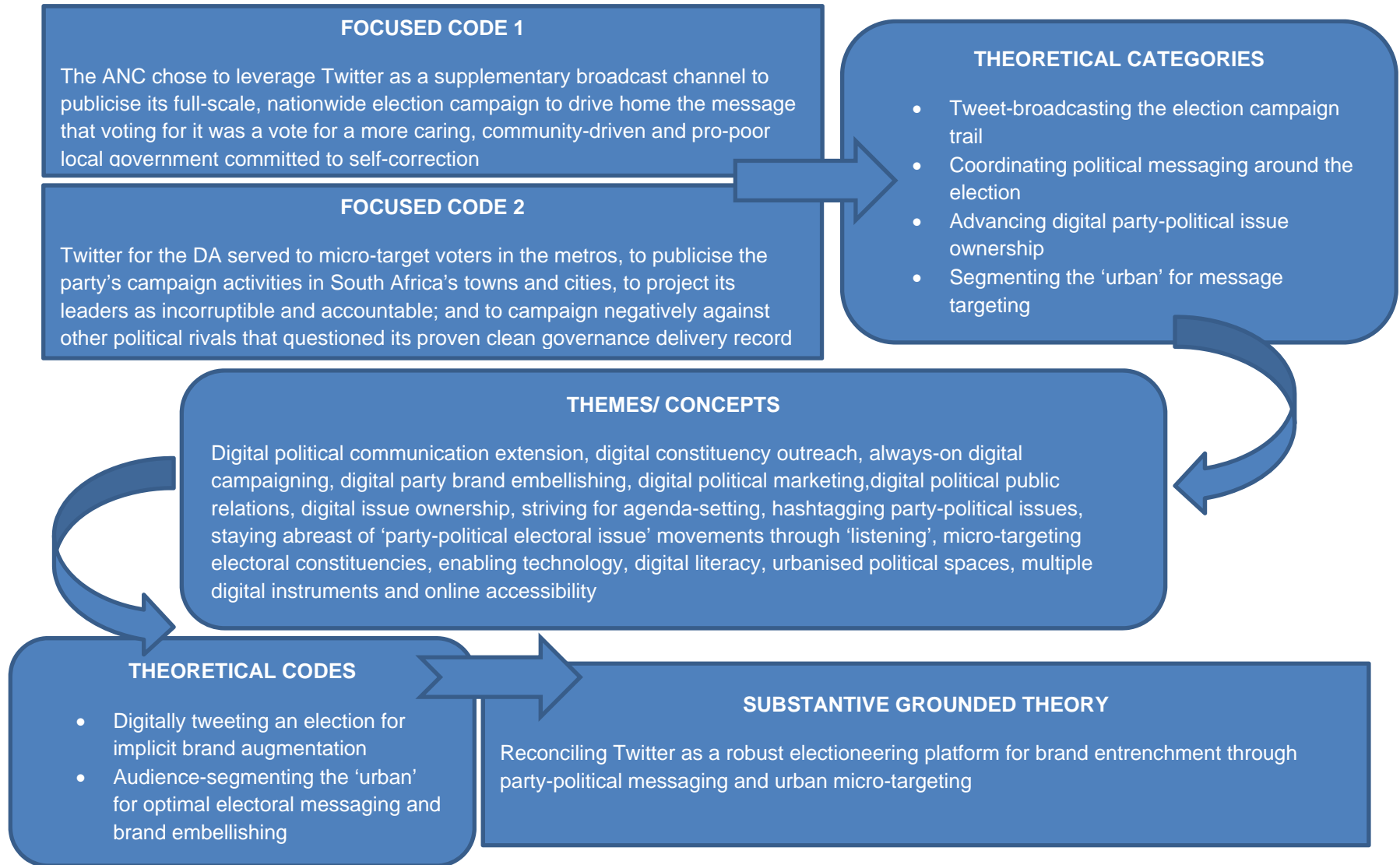
Ideally – Glaser (2012: 1-9) advises - sound substantive grounded theories comprise a single core category and between 4 and 6 “conceptual sub-categories”. This final substantive grounded theory should also be able to explain how the core category and related sub-categories resolve the main concern of the study. Thus, after reaching theoretical saturation, the researcher was comfortable that two ‘core’ theoretical codes fully representative of the data emerged – a key element of the Grounded Theory process.

Table 7.3 illustrates how these dual theoretical codes aided in the creation of the substantive grounded theory to explain Twitter’s use for party-political issue ownership claiming within a pronounced urban electioneering setting.

Table 7.3: Final theoretical codes and newly-generated substantive grounded theory	
PARTY	FINAL THEORETICAL CODES
ANC	Digitally tweeting an election for implicit brand augmentation
DA	Audience-segmenting the ‘urban’ for optimal electoral messaging and brand embellishing
NEW SUBSTANTIVE GROUNDED THEORY	
Reconciling Twitter as a robust electioneering platform for brand entrenchment through party-political messaging and urban micro-targeting	

For a clearer picture of the theory-generation process from the intensive focused coding stage, concept development, emergence of theoretical categorisation, concepts and themes, theoretical coding and yielding of substantive grounded theory phases, please refer to Figure 7.1 on the next page.

Figure 7.1: Detailing the process from focused coding to theory-generation



Next, the researcher accounts for the way theoretical saturation aided the credibility of this study – further ensuring the soundness of the generated substantive grounded theory.

7.3 THEORETICAL SATURATION AND GROUNDED THEORY EVALUATION

The ultimate goal of all grounded theorists is achieving theoretical saturation or breaching that point in the research process where no new data can add to the refinement of the developing theory. This is why constant comparisons are done until this saturation is achieved (Chun Tie *et al.* 2015:7). There are many suggestions to evaluate one's eventual substantive Grounded Theory. Charmaz (2014), for example, suggests four criteria, namely checking whether the new Grounded Theory aligns with the real world; is the fresh Grounded Theory easily understandable; is it abstract enough to move beyond the data it actually represents; and can this new Grounded Theory be used in a pragmatic sense to 'produce real-world results'? Katz (2016) additionally suggests asking four key questions to assess the soundness of a freshly-generated Grounded Theory. These are: are there clear connections between the raw data and categories; is the theory sufficiently useful to explain the process conceptually; is the theory explanatory enough of actual real-world problems; and can this theory be adjusted and amended if and when conditions alter?

The researcher is confident the substantive grounded theory generated for the ANC and DA can be used to solve real world problems. Social media and social networking sites are increasingly becoming non-negotiable aspects of a political party's electioneering arsenal. The results for both parties illuminates the way ahead for other political parties, locally and abroad, on ways to effectively use a site such as Twitter that offers unlimited free, uncontrolled, earned and converged

media. Secondly, because Grounded Theory involves multi-tiered stages of coding, the newly-generated core categories for the ANC and DA were made more understandable by providing a detailed audit trail of how all the raw data crystallised into the final two theoretical codes. Using a computer software programme such as NVivo Pro 12 also helped with this electronic audit trail. Thirdly, the researcher believes that both theoretical codes and substantive grounded theory for the ANC and DA are abstract enough to move beyond the data it actually represents. This is proven through the establishment of clear and unambiguous connections between the raw data, initial categories, focused codes, theoretical categories, theoretical codes and the way substantive grounded theory ultimately signaled a level of theoretical saturation.

Furthermore, a considerable audit trail using more than 50-pages of memos (captured and stored in the NVivo Pro 12 software programme) documents these intricate processes (see Annexure C). In this respect, the researcher believes that the entire data collection and data analysis stages are simple and conceptually clear enough to account for the entire Grounded Theory process. This confidence is bolstered by the fact that the two theoretical codes and/ or substantive grounded theory can be adjusted and possibly amended if more data is collected. For example, future researchers may decide to add another election to this cross-sectional study of the ANC and DA by supplementing election-related tweets from the 2019 South African general elections or the 2021 municipal polls to cross-compare data sets. Other social media and social networking sites such as YouTube, Facebook and Instagram could be added too. More and different political parties from the South African electoral landscape could also be used too.

Going back to the two theoretical codes generated for the ANC and DA, Creswell (2015:438) suggests the following criteria to evaluate the soundness of each, namely the theoretical codes need to be 'central', they must appear often in the

data, a logical explanation must account for how they came about, they should be abstract, each theoretical code's explanatory power should ideally increase as more refinement occurs; and check to see if each theoretical code is likely to 'hold' should external conditions alter. The researcher believes the two theoretical codes for the ANC and DA are indeed 'central' and fully representative of the data sampled and analysed. In other words, it is "grounded" in the data observed (Strauss & Corbin 1994). Furthermore, both theoretical codes are not only abstract in nature; they also appeared frequently in the data. Explanations were also given detailing the evolution of each theoretical code - from initial code to final theoretical code, adding to its 'explanatory' power in the process. The researcher is also confident that these theoretical codes are likely to remain constant should the research conditions alter (see also Calman 2014).

In the following section, the overall findings of this study are interpreted to lend more support to the substantive grounded theory and proposed conceptual framework (yet to be presented and outlined in chapter 8).

7.4 INTERPRETATION OF THE STUDY'S FINDINGS

In this study, the objective was to ascertain how the ANC and DA used micro-blogging site, Twitter, for the promotion of party-political issue ownership in the 2016 LGE and if the medium indeed functioned as an urban electioneering platform for the dissemination of campaign messages. Claims that Twitter served as a party-political issue ownership medium for the ANC and DA after the Grounded Theory analysis phase could only be verified by comparing this data to what each party initially claimed in their 2016 LGE manifesto. Only then, could a determination be made whether Twitter performed as predicted in chapters 2 through 5. Findings from the rigorous analyses, firstly, revealed that, while the ANC

used Twitter for mainly publicity-related reasons, the DA used the platform to promote its 2016 LGE issues, while simultaneously using it as an urban electioneering portal to target 'battleground' metros the party felt it stood a chance of winning. Secondly, intense data analyses of each party's corpus of tweets revealed that while Twitter's explicit use for campaigning in the 2016 LGE provided issue ownership functionalities for each party, some 'owned' issues were merely implicitly implied. Thirdly, is the confirmation that Twitter *can* be used as a voter mobilisation tool, in agreement with other studies on the subject (see Parmelee & Bichard 2012; Chang 2014; Diehl, Weeks & Zuniga 2015; Phillipose 2015; Bright, Hale, Ganesh, Bulovsky, Margetts & Howard 2017). However, for purposes of this study, voter mobilisation occurred under two very different contexts, namely when political parties sought to 'spread' publicity around their expansive campaign trail (as proven with the ANC); and when political parties needed to activate potential voters around certain self-generated and media-primed 'owned' party-political issues (as illustrated in the case of the DA).

On the first major finding, limited alignment was found when the ANC and DA's 2016 LGE corpus of tweets was compared against each party's election manifesto. Despite being a local government election, each party's 2016 LGE corpus of tweets mostly reflected 'national' issues as compared to 'local' issues. In the case of the ANC, issues such as 'delivering basic services', 'cleaning up local governance', 'ensuring accountability of elected municipal officials' and 'improving municipal capacity for better delivery' were the only 'manifesto' issues picked up within the party's corpus of tweets. Other manifesto issues such as 'creating jobs at local government level', 'addressing crime', 'providing more educational and health facilities', 'introducing more mixed communities' and 'going greener in terms of cleaner communities' were virtually non-existent in the party's tweets (see chapter 5, section 5.6.2). Like the ANC, the DA also promoted only some of its manifesto issues over Twitter during the 2016 LGE campaign. Tweeted issues included

'creating jobs through more private sector investment', 'being more responsive to service delivery and basic services' and 'tackling of local government corruption' (see chapter 5, section 5.7.2). An implied inference, however, is that this phenomenon probably occurred because of Twitter's technological 'immediacy' facilitating resonance with followers in real-time. Predictively, the deduction then is that while a party's election manifesto is a rich source of party-political issues as proposed by seminal author Petrocik (1996), this was executed with limited success for the ANC and DA in the 2016 LGE.

Please refer to Table 7.4 and Table 7.5 in the next two pages for a clearer outline of these major findings; and how they fit into the broader aims of this study:

CHAPTER 7: FINDINGS AND INTERPRETATION

Table 7.4: Summary of main results for the ANC

AFRICAN NATIONAL CONGRESS (ANC)		
2016 LGE MANIFESTO ISSUES		WERE MANIFESTO ISSUES DETECTED IN THE ANC'S 2016 LGE CORPUS OF TWEETS?
Delivering basic services		Yes
Cleaning up local governance		Yes
Ensuring accountability of elected municipal officials		Yes
Improving municipal capacity for better delivery		Yes
Creating of jobs at local government level		No
Addressing crime		No
Providing more educational and health facilities		No
Introducing more mixed communities		No
Going greener in terms of 'cleaner' communities		No
'OTHER' ISSUES INFERRED FROM THE ANC'S 2016 LGE CORPUS OF TWEETS AND WRITTEN MEMOS	IMPLICIT 'OTHER ISSUES' MEANING	DID 'OTHER' ISSUES CORRELATE WITH THE PARTY'S MANIFESTO ISSUES?
Nationwide campaign publicised over Twitter	The ANC is a well-organised party with immense electoral muscle to be 'omnipresent'	Yes
Extensive door-to-door campaigns and walkabouts with poorer communities (villages, townships, taxi ranks, hawker pavement stalls)	Shows the party is in touch with ordinary voters, it cares for the poor; and it goes out to where the poor live, commute and do their daily living from	Yes
Visits to churches, crèches, old age homes	ANC is a caring party for all	Yes
National leaders were the face of the 2016 LGE campaign (as opposed to local leaders)	To portray its leaders as caring and human (kissing babies, interacting with the elderly)	No
Limited focus on the eight metros, especially identified 'battleground metros'	Disconnect with urban constituencies	No
Celebrity and influencer endorsements	A party for all, regardless of standing in society, socio-economic status and influence	No
Using its liberation credentials to seek a renewed electoral mandate	ANC was the good guy who defeated the evil apartheid system; voters owe the ANC	Yes

CHAPTER 7: FINDINGS AND INTERPRETATION

Table 7.5: Summary of main results for the DA

DEMOCRATIC ALLIANCE (DA)		
2016 LGE MANIFESTO ISSUES		WERE MANIFESTO ISSUES DETECTED IN THE DA'S 2016 LGE CORPUS OF TWEETS?
Creating jobs through more private sector investment		Yes
Being more responsive to service delivery of basic services		Yes
Tackling of local government corruption		Yes
Addressing spatial apartheid planning issues		No
Reducing crime		Yes
'OTHER' ISSUES INFERRED FROM THE DA'S 2016 LGE CORPUS OF TWEETS AND WRITTEN MEMOS	IMPLICIT 'OTHER ISSUES' MEANING	DO THESE 'OTHER' ISSUES CORRELATE WITH THE PARTY'S MANIFESTO ISSUES?
Nationwide campaign publicised over Twitter	The DA is a well-organised party with immense electoral muscle to be 'omnipresent'	Yes
Although not as extensive as the ANC, door-to-door campaigns and walkabouts with poorer communities (villages, townships, taxi ranks, hawker pavement stalls) were conducted.	Party in touch with ordinary voters, it cares for the poor; and it goes out to where the poor live, commute and do their daily living from	Limited success
Emphasis on metro mayoral candidates	DA leaders are caring, in touch with voters, incorruptible and driven by delivering on the DA service delivery mandate	Yes
National leaders were the face of the 2016 LGE campaign (as opposed to local leaders)	Caring leaders who are human like ordinary voters (kissing babies, interacting with the elderly)	Yes
Extensive negative campaign against the ANC, notably against their national leaders and 'battleground metro' mayoral candidates	Part of the DA's 'focused' messaging campaign to discredit the ANC and its leaders	No
Promoting DA's core issues	DA commits to promises	Yes

Consistent with Petrocik's (1996) issue ownership theory, however, the DA followed through with the 'media's framing' of election issues and chose to concentrate its energies on 'focused negative messaging' against the ANC and simultaneous positive promotion of its 'core messages' and 'battleground' metro mayoral candidates (Dufour & Calland 2016; Davis 2016). These party-political issues translated into 'owned' issues for the DA. For example, one strain of 'focused negative issue messaging' involving former ANC president Mr Zuma and the reported R4-billion jet his party was purportedly buying him on 30 June 2016 received 644 retweets under the hashtag #JobsNotJets, proving the DA's strategy was 'energised' over Twitter. On the same day, the DA's Johannesburg (metro) mayoral candidate, Mr Herman Mashaba sent out a similar tweet of Mr Zuma's planned wastage of taxpayer monies. This 'focused' message received a further 111 retweets, 'energising' his party's negative campaign against the ANC and its campaign figurehead. Throughout the day, the DA tweeted more #JobsNotJets tweets, attracting approximately 500 more retweets and by inference added opportunities for its 'focused' electoral messaging to spread over Twitter.

Likewise, the DA's 'focused' messaging tweets around its battleground metro mayors like, Mr Herman Mashaba (Johannesburg), Mr Solly Msimanga (Tshwane) and Mr Athol Trollip (Nelson Mandela Bay) were able to 'energise' the campaign- helped in part by the consistent tweeting; and retweeting by other affiliated party-political Twitter accounts (Democratic Alliance 2016 local government elections feed...2016). The DA's promotion of its party-political issues in the 2016 LGE also extended to the way the party promoted a set of 'core issues' it had strategised and devised around the elections. Franklin (2018), for example, confirmed that "all campaigning" in the 2016 LGE was centred around the DA's set of core issues, namely to 'stop corruption, create jobs and deliver better services'. Influencers were also 'aggressively' used to drive these core issues 'in volume' over Twitter (see Franklin 2018), boosted in the main by catchy hashtags which were heavily promoted, such as "#VoteForChange" (please refer to Annexure C).

Another arm of the DA's 'focused' 2016 LGE campaign messaging was its communication around the Ipsos opinion polls which showed how close the race between the ANC and DA was in the 'battleground' metros (Berkowitz 2016; Brunette, Kotzen, Rampedi & Mukwedeya 2016). Using these in its favour, the DA continued tweeting the outcomes of the Ipsos opinion polls as part of its 'focused' messaging drive to ensure optimal voter mobilisation. For example, in a tweet sent out on 21 July 2016, the party's tweet *'Latest #IPSOS poll puts us ahead in NMB, JHB & Tshwane, but it is neck-&-neck. Many voters still undecided. Your vote can win it on Aug 3!'* was retweeted 35 times and 'liked' 27 times, adding to the message's amplification. Earlier, successive tweets from the Ipsos opinion polls had gained further traction with 93, 139 and 154 retweets. Other tweets such as *'Latest #IPSOS puts us 9% ahead of the ANC in Tshwane! We can win, but we need every supporter to vote on 03 August'* drew hundreds more retweets, again, ensuring the DA's 'focused' messaging around the Ipsos polling in 'battleground' metros received the necessary energy to possibly impact voters.

Message-sharing by other DA-affiliated accounts was also indicative of this particular voter mobilisation activation communication strategy adopted by the DA. More recent supporting literature within the political communication discipline exists attesting to Twitter's voter mobilisation characteristics. Bright, Hale, Ganesh, Bulovsky, Margetts and Howard (2017:12), for example in their study of the 2015 and 2017 UK elections, deduced that the micro-blogging site can achieve voter persuasion especially when the difference between rival political parties was a few percentage points. In the DA's case, by repeatedly and consistently 'focus tweeting' on how close the race was in the battleground metros, the DA could have tipped the electoral scales in its favour by ensuring voters were constantly appraised of how a single vote could mean either an ANC-led local government or one governed by the DA (South Africa 2016 election results...2016). Additionally, it was also earlier confirmed that interaction with party-political content over Twitter does find resonance in offline political expression (see Bermingham & Smeaton 2011; Franch 2013; de Zúñiga, Bachmann & Hsu 2014; Chang 2014; Riad, Metwaly, Negm & Gouda 2017: 18).

The other deduction is that because of the DA's consistent 'focused' negative messaging concentrating on the ANC, including discrediting its leaders such as Mr Zuma and ANC metro mayoral candidates, this could have succeeded in the suppression of ANC voter turnout on Election Day. While the DA's broad aim was to repeatedly 'focus' on ANC weaknesses, there was also a concerted effort by the DA to flood its own Twitter timeline (by implication the online Twitter online space) with so much negativity around the ANC that even ANC partisans would become more disillusioned with their party and choose to stay away on Election Day – pointing to the probability that the DA may have wanted to set the election agenda. ANC head of elections, Mr Fikile Mbalula, confirmed this in 2018, attributing his party's poor showing in a few of the metros (battleground metros such as Nelson Mandela Bay included) to the trend of ANC partisans boycotting the polls instead of voting for another party (Dlamini 2018). This deliberate suppression of the ANC's voter turnout, then, in 'battleground' metros meant that the DA's negative messaging had indeed affected the ANC's support base. This is in concurrence with what Ahmed (2014) and Nass (2016) had found in their understanding of this development in the 2014 Indian general election and 2016 US presidential elections respectively.

Conversely, the ANC's lack of 'focused' messaging over Twitter illustrates that a clear communication strategy is needed, mostly during a major election campaign. Also, there has to be buy-in from other affiliated party account holders such as prominent ANC politicians and party-political representatives to ensure message concentration is achieved around the party's key electoral messages. This was not the case in the 2016 municipal elections. Instead, the ANC's electoral messaging lacked 'focus', diluting any kind of 'issue ownership' over the micro-blogging portal. When retweeting of its messages did happen, these were done more to show some form of allegiance to the ANC brand that other supporters had been missing out by not being wherever ANC officials were campaigning. This 'electronic diary' element for the ANC was fixed on 'spreading the word' and not anchored on any particular electoral issue messaging highlighted in either its manifesto or other communication. This communication and planning disjuncture does point to the ANC's sporadic and

uncoordinated 2016 LGE Twitter campaign, a matter the party could attend to in future election campaigns.

What did work for the ANC, though, is how the 'visual' and 'real-time' aspects of Twitter permitted the party to further implicitly entrench its brand in the 2016 LGE. Using the social networking site as a simple publicity tool, Twitter was leveraged to show its leaders dressed in bright ANC regalia interacting with ordinary supporters at places like taxi ranks, train stations, church gatherings and hawker stalls. This is in alignment with the party's core constituency - poorer South Africans such as gardeners, domestic workers and street vendors (see chapter 5, section 5.3.2). This type of 'grass-root interaction' could not work with urban middle class residents; therefore the ANC used forums such as specially-convened meetings with professionals and other such stakeholders to communicate the party's 2016 LGE message across class (see My ANC 2016 local government elections feed...2016; KZN's growing black middle class...2019).

This implicit manner of using Twitter to publicise its vast electioneering campaign helped the party overtly 'own' the issue of being a caring, pro-poor, community-driven political party. Its leaders who were often shown over Twitter visiting old age homes, crèches and other such interactions during the campaign trail, sought to endear them to the ordinary citizen, portraying them as being more 'human' and less aloof than an out-of-touch politician. The sheer scale of the ANC's publicity of the 2016 LGE campaign over Twitter also implicitly sought to convey the 'issue' that here was a political party over 100-years old that was still relevant, professional, powerful and possessed the capacity to be in every part of the country.

Through its well-publicised 2016 LGE Twitter electioneering campaign, the DA was also able to demonstrate to South African voters, the media and other political rivals that it was a serious political contender with the necessary 'electoral muscle' to be everywhere. This implicit 'issue ownership' also allowed the party to further cement its brand. Like the ANC, DA leaders were shown kissing babies, interacting with poor

communities on walkabouts and home visits; and hugging old pensioners to illustrate the 'issue' of it being an attentive, empathetic political party that cared.

To conclude, the ANC and DA did not fully subscribe to issues highlighted in their election manifestos as there was no perfect alignment between issues promised to voters; and what each party eventually tweeted in the 2016 LGE. While the ANC's random use of Twitter amounted to creating hype around its election campaigning activities (voter mobilisation), the DA used the micro-blogging site to react to the external environment and to set an altogether different party-political issue agenda from its manifesto issues. Notably, in identified so-called 'battleground' metros it observed that the media had primed as possible areas which it could win from the ruling party. Using 'focused' messaging through a steady stream of negative tweets, the DA chose to tailor-make its own party-political issue agenda in these battleground metros to activate potential voters to choose it over other political offerings (voter mobilisation). Positive 'issue messaging' crafted around the leadership traits of these 'battleground' mayoral candidates in Ekurhuleni, Johannesburg, Tshwane and Nelson Mandela Bay ensured the party stayed on-message as envisaged in its broader communication objectives for said poll. This targeting of a few 'battleground' metros and the intentional suppression of turnout by political rivals was repeated some months later in the 2016 US presidential elections where, Mr Trump deliberately identified 13 'battleground' states, while simultaneously strategising to keep Mrs Clinton's turnout in key states among key constituencies at a minimum (see chapter 4, section 4.13). Additionally, both the ANC and DA tapped into the 'implicit' qualities of Twitter to show to voters that each could be everywhere, with the sheer scale, volume and ability to be 'omnipresent' on the rigorous four-month election drive. Besides communicating a message of being in touch and very much 'human' like poor voters they were interacting with on dusty roads, dirty taxi ranks and crumbling mud houses, the 'issue' the ANC and DA aimed to own was that of a caring and empathetic party they could identify with.

In the final assessment, however, there is a need to ask what both the ANC and DA did right in the 2016 LGE through their use of Twitter; what did they do wrong; did they meet their communication targets; were there any misses; and what could have triggered such digital political communication mis-steps over Twitter? Was this because they responded wildly and uncoordinated because of ‘emergency’ issues? In the case of the ANC, this study showed through deep analyses and written memos (see Annexure C) that the party did indeed use Twitter to publicise its 2016 LGE campaign. However, in doing this, the party missed several opportunities to effectively utilise hashtags for ‘party-political issue’ mobilisation and using the medium for urban electioneering micro-targeting. Instead, the ANC’s 2016 LGE campaign over Twitter came across as sporadic and uncoordinated – sometimes even disjointed. When it came to the DA, the party successfully used Twitter not only to publicise its nationwide 2016 LGE campaign, but to advance certain issues it sought to promote over the platform. Hashtags were just one part of this party-political ‘focus message’ mobilisation especially in identified battleground metros where the party reasoned it could win votes off the ANC. Explicit negative messaging ensured the party attacked the political opponent, enough to a point where it suppressed the ANC’s turnout in said election.

Thus, the basic line of argument for this thesis remains that micro-blogging site Twitter is an urban electioneering tool that allows political parties to own issues. The question to be answered in the proposed conceptual framework is how can Twitter be used as an urban electioneering tool that permits politicians and political parties to claim issues. As illustrated in chapter 7, the logical starting point for this proposition is for political parties and politicians – alike – not to exclusively focus on issues highlighted in their election manifestos but rather to claim issues as the election campaign organically develops. Central to this is not to allow a party’s issue agenda to be determined by reacting to everything in the electioneering build-up but to gauge how reactions and strategies (both offensive and defensive) can be linked to a few issues which develop during the course of the campaign. For example, in the case of both the ANC and DA, these ‘issues’ that each party sought to ‘own’ or

lay claim to were not always explicit by means of pronouncements but implicit in the manner in which each campaigned.

In the 2016 LGE, the ANC and DA were South Africa's biggest political players electorally, resource-wise; and in terms of incumbency. With state resources at each party's disposal (the ANC is present in virtually each tier of government while the DA controls one province and several local municipalities), the implicit inference from their corpus of tweets reveals that they both sought to come across as well-resourced political players by being everywhere; they both sought to be portrayed as caring and pro-poor by using extensive door-to-door campaigns and walkabouts; and they both sought to thrust their most prominent leaders in a positive light to illustrate they too were as human as the ordinary voter. These 'implicit' issues sourced from the ANC and DA's corpus of tweets, therefore, served as alternative sources of 'issues' to be owned during the 2016 LGE campaign trail. In conclusion, while findings from this study demonstrated alignment with Petrocik's (1996) issue ownership theory, in terms of issue-claiming through media framing, constituency-based associative issue ownership, issues highlighted in election manifestos and the images of leaders serving as issue-driving heuristics, Twitter's use by the ANC and DA in their 2016 LGE campaigns also endeavoured to implicitly convey party-political digital issue ownership over the medium, as illustrated in Tables 7.4 and 7.5.

7.5 SUMMARY

In this chapter, the researcher reflected on the rigorous memo-writing processes that underscored the data collection and data analyses steps of this doctoral study. Part of this process was development of the main concepts of this study, including more abstract focused coding that elicited four theoretical categories. An integral element of this rigorous process was the generation of two theoretical codes and a substantive grounded theory to capture the thrust of the overall study. Seeing that validation of the two theoretical codes and substantive grounded theory were needed, the criteria developed by Creswell (2013), Charmaz (2014) and Katz (2016)

were used to strengthen their validity. In the last part of the chapter, a critical discussion ensued to present, dissect and evaluate the main findings of this thesis.

In the next chapter, the researcher begins by focusing on the five research questions of this study. Detail will also be provided on the conceptual framework, including the three different but inter-related elements constituting it. The researcher also pursues discussion on the theoretical and practical application of this conceptual framework. Apart from singling out challenges encountered during this doctoral thesis journey, answers are provided as to how this study has added new knowledge to identified gaps within the communication science, political communication and social media fields. Chapter 8 ends with the researcher proposing suggestions for future scholastic work in these disciplines.

CHAPTER 8: CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

8.1 INTRODUCTION

The final chapter of this thesis aims to address research question 5, namely; How can the findings be used to propose elements for a conceptual framework that associates digital political communication, party-political issue ownership and digital urban electioneering through the use of micro-blogging site Twitter?

Apart from presenting the different elements of the conceptual framework and overall conclusions in this chapter, the journey travelled thus far is recounted, including milestones breached between the first chapter and this chapter; the significance of the findings to the overall body of knowledge in the communication science and political communication fields and the way other scholars in the discipline can expand on the research herein. First though, attempts are made to provide answers to the five research questions of this study.

8.2 RELATING THE RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND RESEARCH FINDINGS

In pursuit of the main objective of this study, namely to propose different elements of a conceptual framework to explore how micro-blogging site, Twitter, facilitated digital political communication and party-political issue ownership for the ANC and DA within a broader urban electioneering context for the 2016 LGE, the researcher attempts to answer the five research questions that navigated this study. Also, because scholarly work on the way Twitter can be used by political parties to promote their party-political issues within urban settings has not been explored, this study solves that problem by proposing a conceptual framework they can use for better digital political communication planning around major election cycles.

8.2.1 Answering research question 1

To resolve the main research problem, Research Question 1 was formulated as follows: *What are the theoretical criteria of party-political ownership within the context of digital political communication over micro-blogging site, Twitter?* To answer this research question, a thorough theoretical discussion was provided on political communication and issue ownership in chapters 2 and 3, for the purposes of identifying elements for the conceptual framework. In chapter 2, the researcher conceptualised political communication by providing a detailed historical development of the term, including the different stages of its evolution and related models that shaped it for present-day application. Following this, the researcher went into great detail locating Twitter as a digital political communication medium within the social media landscape to account for its applicability to the study at hand. The result was a nuanced conceptualisation of the term digital political communication at the end of chapter 2. For chapter 3, the researcher provided a detailed discussion on John Petrocik's (1996) issue ownership theory, its suitability for a South African electoral context and the way party-political 'issue ownership' had gravitated from traditional issue ownership to digital issue ownership – aided in part by the arrival of social media and social networking sites. An important element of the party-political issue ownership discussion was around the potency of hashtags facilitating the ownership of party-political issues in an election season.

8.2.2 Answering research question 2

To further investigate the main research problem, Research Question 2 was addressed in chapter 4, namely *What are the theoretical criteria for urban electioneering promoted using micro-blogging site, Twitter?*. For this part of the study where the researcher endeavoured to distil possible elements for the eventual conceptual framework, chapter 4 was devoted to firstly understanding the term 'urban communication', 'urban politics' and ultimately linking the two together. Discussion around 'mediatisation', technological nature of urbanised spaces; and

audience segmentation were then brought into the argument to augment the fact that social networking sites such as Twitter was indeed an urban platform. Examples from the US, Singapore and India were provided to further the argument that social networking site, Twitter, functioned as an urban electioneering platform.

8.2.3 Answering research question 3

For Research Question 3, the researcher attempted answering *What issues did the ANC and DA choose to focus on in their 2016 LGE manifestos?* To identify issues the ANC and DA focused on in the 2016 LGE campaign, each party's manifesto became part of the researcher's critical reading (in chapter 5). These manifestos - through theoretical sampling - were further analysed using the Grounded Theory method to find concurrence with what each party may have tweeted during the 2016 election campaign - as illustrated in chapter 7. While there may have been overlaps between the manifestos and tweets, these were minimal as each party moved away from issues in the manifesto. While the ANC and DA focussed on a number of varying issues in their manifestos, these issues were not necessarily aligned to each party's electioneering blitz over Twitter (as evidenced from the extensive data analyses coding outlined in chapter 7).

8.2.4 Answering research question 4

In answering Research Question 4 - *how did the ANC and DA leverage Twitter as a digital political communication tool to claim party-political issue ownership in the 2016 LGE?* – the researcher noted that while the ANC used Twitter as a digital political communication to supplement its 2016 LGE campaign, the platform was not used for the promotion of electoral issues in the strictest sense. Hashtags and the word frequency counter attest to this (see Annexure C). Instead, Twitter served as an electronic diary for the party to publicise the many events helmed by its vast network of political leaders across the country. Twitter, for the party, also endeavoured to extend the ANC's message that it sought a renewal of its electoral mandate with the South African voter for another five-year term.

In contrast, the DA used Twitter as a digital political communication platform for the promotion of certain issues the party wanted voters to associate it with. The party's huge urban focus provided proof of this where negative campaigning mainly against the ANC sought to distinguish itself as a corruption-fighting, good governance party of ethical and incorruptible leaders. The ANC, on the other hand, was framed by the party's tweets as the real villain in the 2016 LGE. The message conveyed was that, should voters choose it in the polls, nothing would change. Using examples that mainly involved then-ANC president Mr Zuma, the DA merely, further, embellished its image as a political party committed to clean governance. These 'negative' issues coupled with the 'positive' issues the party endeavoured to associate itself with for the 2016 LGE invariably defined both its and the ANC's image over Twitter (see chapter 7, sections 7.5 and 7.6). In sum, while both the ANC and DA used Twitter as a digital political communication medium in the 2016 municipal polls, unlike the ANC, the DA harnessed the full issue-generating (digital issue ownership) potential of the platform and used it to aggressively win over supporters, especially in the final days of the election. Mobile phones in the guise of Internet-enabled smartphones, in this respect, may have proved a huge asset for the DA.

8.2.5 Answering research question 5

In answering Research Question 5 - *How can the findings be used to propose elements for a conceptual framework that associates digital political communication, issue ownership and urban electioneering through the use of micro-blogging site, Twitter?* - the researcher showed in detail just how South Africa's two main political parties used the micro-blogging site to campaign for votes in the 2016 LGE, notably in identified 'battleground' metros such as Ekurhuleni, Johannesburg, Tshwane and Nelson Mandela Bay. Whereas the ANC predominantly used the portal as a *de facto* electronic diary to amplify its voice in the media space, the DA – it was confirmed here – used Twitter, firstly, as a digital political communication medium; secondly, as an avenue that could be leveraged as an issue-intensive one; and thirdly as an urban electioneering tool. Hashtags and co-ordinated 'on-message' strategies were shown to work for the party as an example of this phenomenon. The DA, in

particular, used Twitter as a political mobilisation tool – similarly seen in India’s 2014 elections (Phillipose 2015) and South Korea’s 2012 polls (Chang 2014) – to activate supporters.

After answering all five research questions of this study, the researcher is confident that the findings *can* be used to propose elements for a conceptual framework for digital political communication to promote issues political parties want to be associated with within an urban context (see section 8.3 to follow). Importantly, the researcher is also confident these three elements of the proposed conceptual framework, namely ‘coordinating and managing how an election is tweeted’, ‘focus’ messaging the election’ and ‘audience-segmenting as a message-tailoring strategy’ are grounded in the data.

8.3 TOWARDS A PROPOSED FRAMEWORK FOR DIGITAL POLITICAL COMMUNICATION TO PROMOTE PARTY-POLITICAL ISSUE OWNERSHIP VIA AN URBAN ELECTIONEERING PLATFORM

Conceptual frameworks provide coherence and understanding of overall research projects. Appearing at all levels of an academic document, namely the introduction, literature review, discussion and conclusion, conceptual frameworks have a multi-tiered structure of description, analysis and synthesis to allow researchers to make sense of the research journey (see Ravitch & Riggan 2012; Ravitch & Carl 2016; Badenhorst 2018). For this doctoral study, the proposed elements for a conceptual framework were developed from reviewing the literature in chapter 2 through to chapter 5. Concepts developed from multiple readings of the relevant literature included digital political communication, party-political issue ownership and urban electioneering (see chapter 7, section 7.2). Rich data yielded from the intense review of the literature and Grounded Theory data analyses processes also supplemented this conceptual framework. In the absence of a digital political communication framework that accounts for the promotion of party-political issue ownership within an urban setting, three inter-related elements of a conceptual framework are proposed. This proposed framework seeks to link the use of micro-blogging site,

Twitter, to digital political communication, party-political issue ownership and urban electioneering.

Ngulube *et al* (2015) asserts that conceptual frameworks are best illustrated diagrammatically using 'concept maps' for easy reference. When constructing a conceptual framework, the 'general' concept should be placed right at the top, more specific concepts relating to the 'general' concept further down; and links among the elements should be illustrated. For this study, the general element was 'coordinating and managing how the election is tweeted' (element 1) which was further subdivided into two sub-elements 'tweet-broadcasting the election with a communication plan in place' and 'mechanisms ensuring Twitter communication initiatives and responses are therefore deliberately coordinated as part of claiming party-political issues'. It must be stated upfront that all three elements of the proposed conceptual framework had their genesis in the entire data analyses process of this study.

The three elements for the proposed conceptual framework are illustrated in Figure 8 in the next page:

Figure 8.1: Elements of the proposed framework for digital political communication to promote party-political issue ownership via an urban electioneering platform



8.4 UNPACKING ELEMENTS OF THE CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Next, the three different elements constituting the new conceptual framework are unpacked. What the extensive data analyses of this doctoral study revealed was that if political parties include Twitter as part of their overall communication strategy as an urban electioneering tool to claim party-political issues for electioneering purposes, these three steps need to be followed to ensure optimal electoral messaging success.

8.4.1 Element 1 – Coordinating and managing how the election is tweeted

Element 1 refers to how political parties need to factor in micro-blogging site, Twitter, into their election campaigning arsenal for digital exposure reasons. Before leveraging the site, however, a number of precautions need to be taken to ensure Twitter's relevance as an additional digital broadcast (media) tool benefits the party's election messaging. Element 1 comprises two sub-elements, namely 'having a communication plan in place' and 'mechanisms ensuring Twitter communication initiatives and responses are deliberately coordinated as part of claiming party-political issues'.

Tweet-broadcasting the election with a communication plan in place

As shown in this study, political parties and individual politicians cannot ignore the Internet and the far-reaching capabilities of social media and social networking sites. Today, a number of elections globally are being contested using a combination of traditional and non-traditional media platforms (see prime examples of the 2008, 2012 and 2016 US elections in chapter 2 and 4). While choosing to be on the right platform is just part of an online strategy needed, being active over social media and social networking sites also requires a well-defined communication plan as these platforms thrive on fresh, well-coordinated content to attract views and clicks. With a

platform such as Twitter, political parties generally employ a social media team charged with producing content; and managing that content. Ideally, fresh, compelling content should be posted at least five times a day. Images and graphics should also be used, as research has shown that tweeted messages have a 62% chance of being shared should such messages include an image or graphic (see Twitter guide...2019). With limited budgets, some political parties employ just a single administrative person to take responsibility for this.

If political parties, however, are serious about winning political power, they will invest resources (financial and human capital) to ensure their social networking site accounts, for example on Twitter, are optimally handled in terms of management, curating fresh and relevant content; and ensuring some form of gate-keeping to maintain the party's timeline or Twitter feed clean at all times. The emphasis here is around trolls, bots, disinformation campaigns and fake news or any other negative sentiment that might influence others viewing the party's Twitter feed (Lubke 2019; Pillay 2019; Marrian 2019; Plaut 2019; SuperLinear2019). As seen with the 2016 US presidential polls, speculation is still rife that the Russians were complicit in installing Mr Trump to the presidency (see Russia used all social media...2018). However, in March 2019, the Mueller report found no evidence of Russian interference in Mr Trump's election (see Russia on Mueller report...2019; Sevastopulo & Shubber 2019). Vigilance is key and a party's original communication blueprint should make accommodation for the possibility of its timeline being infiltrated by disinformation campaigns and trouble-shooting mechanisms to counter this.

Mechanisms ensuring Twitter communication initiatives and responses are deliberately coordinated as part of claiming party-political issues

The political communication plan for political parties involves the entire electoral process of planning and having an electoral strategy in place and allocating resources to these (see Norris *et al* 1999). The broad aim is party image-building through careful political advertising, political marketing, political public relations; and exploiting the opportunities offered by earned and owned media. For this particular

study, although it was found that no significant connection exists between the way political parties propose issues in their election manifestos and what they eventually lay claim to by tweeting, party-political issue ownership was, however, shown to manifest in terms of a political party's longer term communication plan informed in part by that party's bigger election campaign objectives (see chapter 7, section 7.8). In the case of this thesis, the DA proved this phenomenon with their 2016 LGE campaign which targeted four 'battleground' 'urban' metros. There was even a tweet sent out by the Johannesburg metro mayoral candidate, Mr Herman Mashaba, on 31 May 2016 illustrating how his party's prospective metro mayoral candidates had spent a total of 988 days informally campaigning within the urban metro space. This reinforces what was proposed here, namely that the DA did indeed have a longer term, well-orchestrated communication strategy for South Africa's eight 'urban' metropolitan hubs; and with the emphasis very much on four 'battleground' metros, namely Ekurhuleni, Johannesburg, Tshwane and Nelson Mandela Bay (DA 2016 local government elections feed...2016) – even before the start of the 2016 LGE electoral race. This longer term electoral communication plan also included pre-emptive content-planning, anticipating threats to disinformation campaigns and creating content calendars to bolster party imaging and political messaging. DA social media manager Miss Aimee Franklin (2018) confirmed having such a strategy in place for the 2016 LGE (see Annexure B).

Having a social media presence also requires active interactive engagement through vanity metrics such as retweets, replies and mentions over Twitter (earned media and electronic-word-of-mouth or EWOM). Partisans who follow the party over Twitter can also be content-generators and due attention should rightfully be made towards this group. Feedback, interaction and allowing partisans to feel a sense of 'community' with it are integral for a successful online presence. Also, partisan loyalty will lead to even greater dissemination of its electoral messages during election cycles, either through online or offline voluntary campaigning, resulting in possible new votes for the party and/ or positive sentiment around it (more earned media and positive public relations).

Content from other stakeholders such as influencers, prominents and the party's own brand ambassadors must also be paid attention to. Influencers – for example - are important for political parties over Twitter as their following base can be exploited. Rowen (2019) furthermore argues that because influencers are “shapers of public opinion”, these individuals have immense power when it comes to giving “legitimacy” to political brands and campaigns with the possible potential of affecting “the decisions of others because of their authority, knowledge, position or relationship with their audiences”. Franklin (2018) also confirms that the DA did in fact use a number of influencers to disseminate the party's 2016 LGE political messages. There can be boundless EWOM and earned media that political party brands can harness by merely collaborating or even interacting with the stakeholder groups mentioned above.

In the case of the ANC (as was illustrated in chapters 6 and 7), the party, through a number of its public representatives fanned across the country, showed how it could rally its supporters to create an online buzz for it, retweeting and sharing content in the form of images, videos and sometimes live feeds. ANC social media manager Miss Athi Geleba (2018) confirmed this buy-in strategy from other “ANC structures”, including the party's “provinces, regions and branches”. The party gained more traction from the EWOM when prominent party representatives, such as former ministers Mr Malusi Gigaba and Mr Fikile Mbalula, retweeted some of the content from their personal Twitter accounts. Doing this additionally creates some form of party message uniformity which all members of the party are obliged – in principle – to follow and adhere to. There should be no messaging contradictions, especially over an instant medium such as Twitter.

8.4.2 Element 2 - 'Focus' messaging the election

Element 2 refers to how political parties need to closely monitor the entire election political communication messaging cycle over Twitter. Demanding a responsive attitude, Twitter election management teams need to consider a number of factors if

digital political persuasion is the ultimate objective. In this regard, Element 2 comprises four sub-elements, namely 'staying 'on-message' leads to party-political digital issue ownership', 'hashtagging augments the party-political digital issue ownership process', 'agenda-setting could be the ultimate aim' and 'listening to listen'. These four sub-elements are explained below:

Staying 'on-message' leads to party-political digital issue ownership

One of the biggest advantages for political parties to use social networking sites such as Twitter is the idea of concentrated messaging at minimal cost. While some argue this constitutes spam messaging, party-political issue messaging can overcome this perception by ensuring all party messaging boasts variety. In other words, the same content can be tweeted but the packaging requires repurposing and ensuring the latent message of the original idea is not diluted. For example, as was shown with the DA in chapter 7, section 7.5, the party used a multitude of negative political messaging tweets to attack the ANC brand in its attempt to persuade South Africans to vote for it (especially in 'battleground' metros). However, in order not to come across as blatant repeated spam messaging, the party used different permutations of negative campaign messaging. While some tweets included images of its metro mayoral candidates challenging the ANC's service delivery record in certain municipalities, other tweets used info-graphics with the ANC's logo and pictures of prominent ANC leaders. For the DA's 2016 LGE social media manager, however, such targeted messaging was all part of the party's "top line objectives" for the poll (Franklin 2018). This goal included retaining Cape Town "with an increased majority" and securing electoral victories in three 'battleground metros', namely Johannesburg, Tshwane and Nelson Mandela Bay. Hence, the DA's "message strategy" of focused and negative messaging became "heavily targeted" at residents in those "four key metros" (Franklin 2018). A noteworthy disclaimer, however, is there needs to be a focus on getting the mix and balance correct, which in turn will form part of a political party's broader communication plan.

Hashtagging augments the party-political digital issue ownership process

Social networking sites such as Twitter also offer political parties a unique facility which traditional media platforms do not offer, hashtags - or subject-related categorisation of issues which allow party-political messages to reach beyond a follower base (see Twitter guide...2019). Within a social media context, these can prove hugely useful when 'communities' within the social media landscape rally around certain hashtags - significantly during election season. At times, when political parties deliberately elect not to respond to 'trending' issues in the digital space, they might be viewed as out of touch and/ or too scared to tackle such matters (mostly when prompted by other political rivals to react). Vigilance and adhering to the party's main communication strategy (as discussed in sub-section 8.4.1) becomes vital (see Twitter guide...2019).

Related to the DA's focused and negative messaging in the 2016 LGE, hashtags became issue-drivers for the party in the four targeted battleground metros. For example, Franklin (2018) admits "key hashtags" such as '#VoteForChange', '#TrollipForMayor', '#MsimangaForMayor' and '#MashabaForMayor' were "repeated...in volume...over time" to entrench the DA's urban campaigning messages in the 2016 municipal polls. This aggression on the part of the party, coupled with a few core issues around 'stop corruption, create jobs and better services' was married with a number of DA-created hashtags "across all aspects of the campaign in volume" (Franklin 2018). Support for this argument is evident from the analyses of the DA's 2016 LGE corpus of tweets. Please refer to Table 8.1 for a brief illustration of how 'focused message' hashtags helped the DA in the 2016 LGE (Democratic Alliance 2016 local government elections feed...2016):

Table 8.1: DA 2016 LGE top 15 hashtags identified over Twitter

Hashtag	In-text mentions	Corpus percentage
#khulada	1963	1.01%
#voteforchange	1219	0.63%
#imvotingda	704	0.36%
#da	507	0.26%
#msimangaformayor	360	0.18%
#keepmakingprogress	310	0.16%
#mashabaformayor	301	0.15%
#trollipformayor	264	0.14%
#electiondebate	233	0.12%
#jobsnotjets	222	0.11%
#mayorsforchange	191	0.10%
#sabccensorship	185	0.09%
#dafinalrally	110	0.06%
#electionday	99	0.05%
#daforjobs	98	0.05%
#manifestoforchange	98	0.05%

Source: DA 2016 LGE corpus of tweets

Conversely, please refer to Table 8.2 on how the ANC's 2016 LGE corpus of tweets yielded only a few noteworthy hashtags to drive its issues:

Table 8.2: ANC 2016 LGE top 15 hashtags identified over Twitter

Hashtag	In-text mentions	Corpus percentage
#anchankssa	1697	1.33%
#voteanc	793	0.62%
#anctgmkhize	688	0.54%
#anceverywhere	659	0.52%
#asinavalo	534	0.42%
#siyanqoba	475	0.37%
#zuma	415	0.33%
#ancfriday	408	0.32%
#ancdpramaphosa	313	0.25%
#anc	238	0.19%
#mantashe	219	0.17%
#ancinthestreets	209	0.16%
#thisismyanc	169	0.13%
#ancsgmantashe	134	0.11%
#ancsg	100	0.08%

Source: ANC 2016 LGE corpus of tweets

A relevant current example of political parties and politicians, however, relating to prevailing hashtag-monitoring is the way New Zealand Prime Minister Miss Jacinda Ardern reacted to the racist killings of 51 Muslims at two New Zealand mosques on 15 March 2019. Miss Ardern knew very well that the eyes of the world were fixed on her country's response to the killings; and how the #ChristchurchMosque, #ChristchurchMosqueShooting, #NewZealandTerroristAttack and #WeAreOne hashtags organised people globally over social media. Besides electing to release an official statement on the killings over Twitter, Miss Ardern's also made a conscious decision to wear a hijab (Muslim scarf) during multiple media briefings. She also consciously chose to recite a part of a standard Muslim prayer during one such briefing (New Zealand PM Jacinda Ardern...2019). Viewed in hindsight, this was the best kind of imaging Miss Ardern could have asked for under such tragic circumstances. Aside from drawing global-wide praise for her government's actions, Miss Ardern and her government attracted large amounts of earned media and EWOM over platforms like Twitter, including a spill-over brand-imaging towards her political party (FaizaNAli 2019). This catastrophic incident demonstrated that sometimes it may be just the way political parties choose to respond to certain 'hashtagged' issues to come across as caring, responsive, attentive and listening (see Fifield 2019; Gonzales 2019; New Zealand PM Jacinda Ardern...2019).

Agenda-setting could be the ultimate aim

The absence of gate-keeping over a medium such as Twitter also benefits political parties greatly. Considered as part of their 'owned media', political parties have free reign to share whatever political messaging they desire – within Twitter's editorial guidelines of course. Unlike paid-for advertising, political parties can use their accounts to widely share any information that will benefit their political brand, including media releases, newspaper reports, links to leader interviews and external links to their other platforms such as their website and other social media accounts (more earned media). However, the point here is that political parties are incentivised to generate credible content which has the potential to influence the media agenda; and possibly the campaign agendas of its competitors. As Petrocik (1996) intimated,

when such actions are executed, other political parties may be forced to react through issue convergence and issue trespassing by assimilating your party's issues as their own. This becomes especially important during an election cycle where the battle is for the control of the media agenda, which may ultimately lead to more votes and associative issue ownership (leading a domino effect of party image embellishing) (see Twitter guide for...2019).

In the 2016 LGE, both the ANC and DA attempted to control the media agenda and possibly influence it through their use of Twitter. The DA, for example, admitted that one of the reasons for it being active on Twitter was to access "journalists and opinion formers" (Franklin 2018). This is why the party would simultaneously release media statements over the micro-blogging site for "amplification" and to ensure they were seen by journalists. Additionally, for the DA, traditional media were increasingly "getting their news" off Twitter, therefore the party found it "essential" to be present on the medium to possibly "influence the media discourse" (Franklin 2018).

For the ANC, the promise of Twitter's 'breaking news' characteristics were the draw card to maintain a presence on the site. Geleba (2018) adds that because Twitter had increasingly become the "primary news source" where people would go even before starting their day, the ANC needed to be proverbially 'plugged-in' to "check the conversations...what's happening...what's making news" to stay abreast of "trending" political and non-political stories. When it came to possibly having a say on what gets covered in the media, however, Geleba (2018) adds that the ANC in the 2016 LGE campaign did not attempt to attack other parties just for the sake of being in the media space. The ANC instead made a conscious decision to communicate its own issues over Twitter and to "stay on-message" by relaying the "messaging of the African National Congress" (see Annexure A).

'Listening' to listen

Part of a political party's comprehensive communication plan is deciding what type of content and formats should be used over Twitter. This must include linking the social

media strategy to the party's broader communication objectives. Importantly, communication strategies must and should always include a measurement feature to gauge engagement with the party's online content, related strengths and weaknesses of its electoral messaging and how these weak points can best be mitigated. Social media analytics, in this respect, can give more direction in terms of the main communication strategy and whether it has been a success or failure.

There is also a need to diversify content to ensure EWOM endures, leading to more earned media for the brand. This may also have an impact on the manner in which the party is perceived by its publics as one that is in touch and attuned with technology and the latest developments in that regard. The brand will seek not to come across as anachronistic. For example, in the case of this study within the 'issue ownership' argument, political parties need to monitor what conversations are taking place over the platform. What issues are other political parties talking about and why? An assessment needs to be made on whether or not the party responds; and why? How will it benefit or disadvantage the brand if silence on the matter is chosen or if a comment on the issue is communicated. Does the party have an opinion on the matter? How is the party perceived by its publics and other media if it chooses not to respond on a contentious issue? Twitter analytics, in this regard, is the best option as it gives parties the opportunity to monitor daily activity on their Twitter handle including when is the best time to tweet, who is interacting with content on the account; and which types of content are receiving the most attention (likes and retweets) (see Twitter guide...2019).

In the case of the ANC during the 2016 LGE, the party's social media manager conceded that more feedback mechanisms should have been put in place to monitor prevailing sentiment over Twitter. Due to a lack of human and other resources, this could not be implemented as the party had envisaged (Geleba 2018). The DA, however, used basic Twitter analytics on the micro-blogging site's dashboard to monitor online sentiment and to make the necessary adjustments to their political messaging in the 2016 LGE as required (Franklin 2018).

8.4.3 Element 3 – Audience-segmenting as a message-tailoring strategy

Element 3 refers to the way political parties need to speak to the right audiences at the right time. Part of successful electoral messaging over a digital platform such as Twitter is to gauge how targeted audiences can best be segmented; and for what electoral purpose. Therefore, Element 3 comprises a single sub-element, namely ‘micro-targeting audiences in a highly mediatised communication landscape; this sub-element is explained further below.

Micro-targeting audiences in a highly mediatised communication landscape

There is little doubt that the political communication discipline finds itself in a changed environment compared to some 70 years ago when television and radio were considered the main purveyors of news and political information (see Blumler 2013, 2015). Finding themselves ensconced between the third and fourth ages of political communication development, political parties today are challenged by a fragmented media landscape made up of multiple players accessible over a plethora of communication-enabled devices – or mediatisation as it is referred to (see Blumler & Kavanagh 1999; Graham 2008; Brants & Voltimer 2011; Blumler 2013). As shown here, the Internet and social networking sites offer political parties additional avenues in which to pursue these political communication objectives. Furthermore, because voter apathy and voter disillusionment with politicians has been on a steady increase – as per the third age of political communication (see Brants & Voltimer 2011; Blumler 2013, 2015) - political parties now have supplementary ways of appealing to that pessimistic voter demographic. The mediatised media landscape as a result offers political parties more avenues to aid the party-political persuasion process in the hope of turning this apathetic voter into an active one.

In chapter 4, sections 4.10 and 4.11 of this thesis, the researcher confirmed that the urban-city space was a highly-politicised technological space with its own communicative identity. Additionally, the urban-city space is populated by a

burgeoning middle class, a demographic that is said to demand more accountability from elected politicians (see chapter 4, section 4.5). Protests to agitate for those basic rights will not be uncommon in such spaces. The researcher also showed how approximately 41% of the South African eligible voting population could be found in the eight urban/ metropolitan spaces (Johannesburg, Tshwane, Ekurhuleni, eThekweni, Buffalo City, Nelson Mandela Bay, Mangaung and Cape Town), making it politically-attractive for politicians to campaign in (see Dhawraj 2016; Nkosi 2019). This is perhaps why politicians and political parties need to ensure Twitter inclusion is a critical element of their overall electioneering strategy, as it allows for tangible audience segmentation by virtue of being a wholly 'urban' communication platform (see chapter 4, section 4.4). Political message targeting can then be achieved and sent to the correct audience at the right time. Audience segmentation or micro-targeting voter audiences also ensure message concentration is achieved because of disproportionate population densities within the urban-city space.

Audience segmentation, however, within the urban-city space is further aided by the fact that there is a pronounced presence of mobile phone and smartphone technology in these areas (see chapter 4, section 4.8). South Africa, for example, was found to be a highly-connected African nation, with approximately 49% of its population having online access. This connectivity was accentuated in the urban areas with residents able to connect to the World Wide Web, notably through mobile phone technology in urban areas (see chapter 4, section 4.6 and 4.7). This fact affords political parties more creativity when designing campaigns – especially around a major election. Political messages can be customised and specifically targeted at identified audiences (audience segmentation). This intersection with the urban political space, mobile phone technology and a social networking site such as Twitter, is bound only to mature with each election cycle. Thus, for purposes of this part of the discussion, the researcher confirms that mediatisation and urban audience segmentation through the urban political space and mobile phone technology aid the urban electioneering process.

Further confirmation of the importance of this element within the conceptual framework is provided by both the ANC and DA. The ANC, for example conceded

that they needed to talk to the urban voter in the 2016 LGE. One way of kick-starting the conversation was through Twitter to access that electoral constituency because the micro-blogging site was “so dominated by urban audiences” (Geleba 2018). When it came to the DA, Twitter assumed the role of an instinctive urban audience segmentation tool. The fact that Twitter urban messaging was “cheaper” and could give the party unfettered access to a “much more targeted” electoral ‘urban’ market added to the site’s utility (Franklin 2018).

8.4.4 Summarising the three elements and sub-elements of the proposed conceptual framework

In section 8.3 of this chapter, the researcher presented the three proposed elements of the conceptual framework that all have their origin in the rigorous data collection and data analyses processes of this study. Underpinning the utility of this conceptual framework is the idea of, firstly, having a detailed communication plan for optimally and effectively including Twitter as part a political party’s communication arsenal. Secondly, staying ‘focused’ on the objectives of the party’s overall communication goals while not being shy to innovate at times with the prevailing ‘issue’ electoral landscape. Thirdly, knowing the audience, which can only be done with well-researched audience segmentation and ‘listening’ analytics. Central to this success during any election is speaking to the right audience at the right time.

With election campaigns increasingly involving a hybrid mix of both traditional and non-traditional media platforms, planning becomes an integral factor. Resources in terms of time, human resource capacity and harnessing technology become ultimate determinants of electoral success. To ensure mechanisms for Twitter communication initiatives are deliberately coordinated, there needs to be firm election goals in place. A lack of such coordination and a propensity to speak with multiple tongues over the medium will ultimately harm the brand rather than aiding it. Brand management should be of the uppermost concern to Twitter election managers. Partisans and influencers can be co-opted to embellish this branding.

Part of message coordination over Twitter is the compulsion to stay 'on-message'. Hashtagging electoral messages, then, becomes instinctive, leading to deeper party-political message entrenching. These orchestrated hashtags could in turn aid the agenda-setting advances of the political party, allowing it to be the agenda-setter instead of an agenda follower over Twitter. 'Listening' and monitoring the social media landscape in this respect becomes an important aspect of being online in an election season. Threats to the brand need to be proactively handled and political spin leveraged to ensure such damage is minimised. This is why knowing the audience is a non-negotiable factor when using Twitter for election campaigning purposes. Audience-segmenting and micro-targeting should never be an after-thought but more a requirement to gauge message efficacy. Successful offline political persuasion should, therefore, always be at the fore of every campaign manager's objectives when implementing audience segmentation.

8.5 CONTRIBUTIONS OF THE CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The researcher envisaged the primary contribution of this conceptual framework is towards the communication science discipline and the integration of a micro-blogging site such as Twitter into the digital political communication media mix for political parties. This will be used by them for the promotion of party-political digital issue ownership, especially around heightened electioneering cycles. Therefore, this study can be extended to the communication, social media and political communication disciplines with the four elements proposed here applicable from both a theoretical and practical perspective. The next two sub-sections elucidate on these theoretical and practical novelties of this conceptual framework.

8.5.1 Theoretical contributions

Perhaps one of the most important theoretical contributions of this conceptual framework is how the different elements – if used collectively – can be used by political parties to promote party-political digital issue ownership within an urban

electioneering context provided by Twitter. As election campaigning rapidly migrates to the technological space, there will be added pressure to determine how best to use that space. Empirical data in this study showed how when clear communication strategies are in place – coupled with the help of influencers – consistent messaging can drive home a particular electoral message. In the case of the DA, although this was part of the party's anti-ANC negative advertising campaign, the use of uniform hashtags, repeated messaging, negative 'infographics' and the fact that South Africans were accessing this information on their smartphones while standing in line to vote at polling stations, ensured the party stayed on-message for possible electoral success. It was also highly likely that voters made emotional vote choices after viewing the DA's negative party-political messaging on their mobile phones (political persuasion). Voters, then, can be influenced while standing in line to vote; and this accessibility is made possible through the very simple means of a hand-held mobile gadget.

This study also contributes theoretically to the notion of Twitter serving as an urban electioneering platform. Again, as illustrated empirically with the DA's 2016 LGE campaign, the party used Twitter to audience-segment the urban voter by having a clear urban political communication strategy in place. Franklin (2018) provided evidence of this during her semi-structured interview: that 'battleground' metropolitan municipalities such as Nelson Mandela Bay (in Eastern Cape), and Johannesburg and Tshwane (in Gauteng) were in the party's sights following a number of internal and external surveys showing it stood a good chance of emerging as the dominant party in those areas. Together with a pronounced focus on party-political digital issue ownership by focusing on its anti-ANC messages (negative advertising), this communication arsenal was effected more within the identified metros (Nelson Mandela Bay, Johannesburg and Tshwane). The mobile phone was the DA's instrument of choice for this 'urban audience segmentation'. The ANC in their semi-structured interview also acknowledged that their use of Twitter in the 2016 LGE was motivated by the 'urban' factor', an opportunity to appeal to the urban voter present on the micro-blogging site (Geleba 2018). Add to this the issue of rapid urbanisation; and the fact that urbanised voters seek more accountability from government leaders and one sees a massive pool of persuadable voters which can be accessed and

possibly convinced to vote for it. This is exactly what the DA did in the 2016 LGE. It used the factors of a fast-urbanising society coupled with a younger demographic being afforded universal suffrage in 2016 to possibly win it more electoral support in the urban areas.

Like the African continent, South Africa is also rapidly urbanising, with almost 64% of the nation's population now living in the eight metropolitan areas (Human settlement plans...2016). This figure is poised to increase to 71.3% by 2030 and as much as 80% by the year 2050 (see Tukwayo 2015: 19; Muggah & Kilcullen 2016: 16; Bernstein 2019: 19; Clarke 2019). Urbanisation, of course, brings with it an expanded and educated middle class – a key constituency boasting access to technology, who are technologically-literate, they won multiple Internet-enabled devices to access information and recognise that the urban space is a highly fluid and politicised one (Tukwayo 2015: 19; Muggah & Kilcullen 2016: 16). As seen in places like Malaysia, Singapore and more recently in the 2016 US presidential elections, the DA capitalised on Twitter's urban appeal, confidently using it as a digital urban electioneering platform to get its 2016 LGE political ideas across (see Suffian 2013; Chang 2014; Bratt 2018; Hedley 2018; Robinson 2018).

Related to the points above, the other theoretical contribution of this study remains Twitter's relevance to communication sub-disciplines such as political advertising, political marketing, political public relations, brand management and image management. The assumption that Twitter can aid or even further these elements of the digital political communication transaction was supported by rich empirical data involving both the ANC and DA. In the case of the ANC, although it had not leveraged Twitter as an urban electioneering platform, it made the most of ensuring Twitter communicated its brand to all corners of the South African electoral landscape (where other traditional and non-traditional media could not have been, either through human capital or financial considerations). The ANC needed just its members and prominent leaders dressed in party colours (green, black and gold) for the party's brand to enjoy traction in terms of recognition. When it came to the DA, Twitter ensured party representatives such as the metro mayoral candidates, were easily known, including their capabilities once elected to office (via information

graphics and consistent tweeting). These factors ensured Twitter was optimally used by the DA for its political advertising, political marketing, political public relations, brand management and image management efforts.

Another important theoretical contribution by this study is to contribute to the limited repository of South African and African literature on actual election campaigns. Furthermore, not many studies have endeavoured to explore a social media/ social networking site bias during an election campaign. Not only does this study address the South African and African literature deficiency, it also adds to the scant social media/ social networking site research involving actual election campaigns. However, more importantly is the fact that the study's findings here and the conceptual framework can be applied to non-African settings, beyond the terrestrial borders of Africa because social media and social networking sites are not restricted by any type of physical border. The research setting need just be similar.

8.5.2 Practical contributions

The framework contributes, firstly, to the political communication practices of how political parties and individual politicians and the way they communicate to electoral constituencies. Integrating social media/ social networking sites into the broader hybrid media mix is far from a recommendation but a necessity (see Alonso-Muñoz, Marcos-García & Casero-Ripollés 2016: 86). Secondly, this study also showed how planning and having a clear communication strategy in place was a must for political parties communicating over an immediate communication platform such as Twitter. Before executing a media strategy, political party communication experts – including consultants, spin doctors and media managers – need to be empowered to know exactly what brand of communication it is they seek; and what avenues (traditional and non-traditional) will be needed to achieve those objectives. Twitter, it was shown here, proved to be a strategic communication tool, notably for the DA, as a particular type of messaging over Twitter was needed. Franklin (2018) confirmed this during the semi-structured interview too.

For the ANC, Twitter was also that digital political communication tool but a clear communication strategy was not in place. Rather, the objective – gleaned from the empirical evidence – suggests it was a way for the party to create an ‘online buzz’ to show that it enjoyed support across the country. Lastly, the idea of political parties contracting political consultants before a major election is more the norm than the exception. Part of their mandate mostly involves carrying out pre-election surveys around voter sentiment and voter intention. This conceptual framework undoubtedly assists in this regard when it comes to consultants designing all-inclusive predictive communication strategies to maximise voter support in future elections.

Another practical implication of the conceptual framework involves the way contemporary election campaigning has evolved in terms of the political communication picture. The electioneering media toolkit has altered from the very first age of political communication evolution where voter choices were much more predictable to the age of television advertising and a third phase of a fragmented media landscape to the current still-developing technological phase (Blumler 2013, 2015, 2016). Political parties have had to use a combination of both traditional media and non-traditional media outlets to get out campaign messages. The three elements suggested in this thesis have practical implications for such a proposed hybrid election media toolkit, one that suggests it is about the visibility of a party’s representatives and its messages.

With respect to the 2016 US presidential elections, the researcher presented a thorough discussion on the way Mr Trump used social media and social networking sites such as Twitter to counter-balance general media coverage. Although a similar trend was not overtly visible in the 2016 municipal elections with the ANC and DA, Twitter’s importance is gaining traction as that counter-balancing tool in recent times. A good example is how the former South African president, Mr Zuma, signed onto the micro-blogging site to broadcast his own narrative since being forced to resign by the ANC in February 2018. Within two days, Mr Zuma managed to accumulate approximately 80 000 followers. By 7 January 2019, his follower base had doubled to 160 000; and by April 2019 the follower base had grown to 249 000 (PresJGZuma

2019). Since his sign-up to Twitter, Mr Zuma has used the medium to comment on a range of issues such as the contentious land-expropriation-without-compensation debate; the 'free education' dilemma the South African government finds itself committed to and thoughts on the controversial EFF leader, Mr Julius Malema (Coetzee 2019:8). One user even commented that Mr Zuma was "finishing his term over Twitter" – a mild reference to his February 2018 coerced resignation (see Maughan 2019). Thus, from a practical point of view, Twitter will increasingly be used to 'counter' traditional media narratives and will continue being the purveyor of 'breaking news' to allow it to be an agenda-setter for other media platforms.

8.6 GAPS IN RESEARCH AND CONTRIBUTIONS TO NEW KNOWLEDGE

As pointed out earlier, there has been a persistent shortage of studies on political communication within South Africa and the African continent. Added to this is the way election campaigns have fast gravitated to Internet-based portals such as social media and social networking sites. Scholarly work tracking these rapid developments on the African continent has, sadly, not kept pace. Also, the application of Petrocik's (1996) issue ownership has been applied only once to a South African and African context when Dhawraj (2013) studied the DA's political public relations campaign in the 2009 South African general elections. A quick database search confirms that this doctoral thesis is only the second study to use issue ownership theory juxtaposed against a major election. This theoretical contribution related to the applicability of party-political issue ownership theory is another addition to new knowledge created.

Another prominent advantage of this study is that not many South African scholars have probed the social media/ social networking site element in elections. This thesis is the first to use Twitter data sets to fully understand how the country's biggest two political parties campaigned for votes in the 2016 local elections. Results emanating from the Grounded Theory study point to new knowledge by exploring how Twitter was activated as a digital party-political issue ownership and digital urban electioneering platform, most notably for the DA. The party also used the platform aggressively to mount a negative political campaign against the ANC, pointing to

issue ownership of a different texture (see chapter 7, sections 7.5 and 7.6). This study also established that both the ANC and DA used Twitter as a digital political communication avenue for the 2016 polls; and in the case of the ANC, it was shown that the party also used Twitter as an electronic diary (see chapter 7, sections 7.3 and 7.4).

Lastly, this study is significant because it contributes to the expansion of the way social media and social networking sites are impacting the digital political communication and digital political persuasion process. Twitter, in the case of the DA, was shown to be a digital political mobilisation tool, most notably in the manner in which the party used negative advertisements and smartphone technology access to appeal to voters in the closing hours of voting (see chapter 7, sections 7.5 and 7.6). The researcher is confident that this study will make a fresh contribution to the discourse on social media, social networking sites, digital political communication, digital issue ownership and the phenomenon of urban electioneering.

8.7 STRENGTHS OF THE RESEARCH WITHIN THIS STUDY

This study is South Africa's first empirical study to use election-related data to understand how the country's two largest political players campaigned over a non-traditional platform such as Twitter. To the best of the researcher's knowledge, this is also the first study to dissect a local government election through a digital political communication lens, using a large qualitative sample of party-generated political tweets over a heightened, election-infused four month period. Considering that historical social media data is often difficult and costly to come by, the researcher regards the ANC and DA's 2016 local government elections data sets as invaluable from a research perspective. Had the researcher not elected to retrieve historical tweets for the ANC and DA at the time of the 2016 poll, this could have literally run into thousands as such data is sold in US dollars. This, however, was averted with the physical capturing of each party's election-related tweets on a weekly basis.

A further strength of this study remains its confirmation that Twitter was indeed used as a party-political digital issue ownership and urban electioneering campaigning platform for the DA to win over voter sentiment in a few of South Africa's urban 'battleground' metros. Semi-structured interviews with the DA's social media manager confirmed this (see Annexure B). An added strength of this study is the confirmation that Twitter facilitated party-political digital political communication for the ANC and DA in the 2016 LGE. In the case of the DA, this digital political communication extended to the aggressive promotion of party-political election-related issues. This study also showed how social media and social networking sites will continue to be used in traditional election campaigns. One of the findings from this study illustrated how the typical electioneering toolkit had altered, with social media/ social networking sites shown to be an absolute necessity to supplement traditional media avenues. The two, traditional media and non-traditional media, are needed for political communication campaigning purposes to ensure maximum coverage is realised.

8.8 STUDY LIMITATIONS

As with any ambitious study, there are a few limitations which must be noted. Firstly, a bigger sample size of each party's tweets and/ or perhaps over multiple elections in a longitudinal study might yield different results. Secondly, with politicians using a plethora of social media platforms to reach out to respective publics, platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, You Tube and Instagram should not be discounted. Thus, the use of only Twitter for this study was a potential limitation. The researcher also found that this study could have relied on more relevant studies from South Africa and the African continent, especially ones involving social media and political communication. However, because there still exists a dire shortage of such empirical scholarly work locally and within the African continent, this could be regarded as another tangible limitation. Likewise, as with any other single-country, cross-sectional study, limitations of generalisability will persist. Moreover, Twitter data is not representative of South Africa's national offline population, so the results cannot

be generalized to all voters. Importantly, because the study was exploratory in nature, the objective was neither to generalise the findings nor seek external validity.

8.9 FUTURE RESEARCH

In terms of future research, while this present study focused only on South Africa's two biggest parties, the ANC and DA, other political parties who use social media and social networking sites could be added to the research focus or form the basis of future research in this area. For example, as at 18 January 2019, the five-year old EFF had 679 000 Twitter followers, much more than older political players such as the ANC (619 000) and the DA (535 000). The party also tweets often: 42 400 posts (3500 more than the 38 900 tweets in January 2019 (Economic Freedom Fighters Twitter page...2019). However, by 25 March 2019, the EFF's account had increased its followers to 716 000, 37 000 more than in January. Comparatively, the ANC gained 20 000 followers and the DA 11 000 in the two-month period (My ANC Grow South Africa Twitter page...2019; Democratic Alliance Twitter page...2019; Economic Freedom Fighters Twitter page...2019).

While time and resources restricted this study to just analysis of written text in the entire corpus of tweets from the ANC and DA, future studies could include both textual and visual analysis for greater depth. A novel idea would be to conduct a multi-country African study to comprehend the way continental democracies embrace electronic-related campaigning and digital political communication. The research done herein can also be replicated and applied to other African nations; and perhaps other developing countries outside of this continent to deepen an understanding of how political communication is consistently altering with technology. Also, more scholarly work in the fields of political communication and social media political communication is needed with urgency. Furthermore, other social media platforms need to be probed more because elections are increasingly moving to the non-traditional digital media space. It is also highly recommended that this conceptual framework model be rigorously tested in future studies.

8.10 THESIS SUMMARY

The purpose of this study was to design a conceptual framework for digital political communication to enhance issues political parties wanted to be associated with. While political communication was the broad field of the communication science discipline investigated, issue ownership formed the theoretical framework within which this investigation was grounded. Urban electioneering was the specific topic which was probed in depth within the issue ownership theoretical framework. The researcher sought to argue that digital political communication using micro-blogging site, Twitter, was the specific platform that facilitated party-political issue ownership within an urban electioneering context.

This chapter provided a conclusion to the overall study by summarising the research questions, proposal of elements for a conceptual framework, contributions to knowledge, strengths, limitations, and by providing a number of potential recommendations for future research on the topic. The chapter emphasised the growing importance of Internet-fuelled applications such as social media and social networking sites for political parties committed to adopting a hybrid traditional media and non-traditional media outlay for elections. These platforms are now an integral element of the contemporary election toolkit. Discounting them from any electioneering drive has more negatives than positives. In arguing for the use of social networking sites for politics and digital political communication, Chang (2014: 35) could not have said it any better when he declared that the modern world could not go back to the “disconnected world” because these new platforms will persist to be “an indispensable factor in the political equation of the future”.

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ⁱ Please note not all sources were used in-text due to limitations on a PhD study. All sources mentioned here informed this study in terms of secondary and contextual reading and understanding of this topic.

ANNEXURE A: INTERVIEW SCHEDULE FOR AFRICAN NATIONAL CONGRESS (ANC): INTERVIEW CONDUCTED VIA TELEPHONE ON 7 OCTOBER 2018 WITH MISS ATHI GELEBA, ANC HEAD OF DIGITAL COMMUNICATIONS 2016 LGE

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TITLE OF STUDY: A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK FOR DIGITAL POLITICAL COMMUNICATION VIA AN URBAN ELECTIONEERING PLATFORM

The purpose of this study is to explore and describe how South Africa's governing African National Congress (ANC) and the official opposition, the Democratic Alliance (DA) leveraged micro-blogging website Twitter as an urban electioneering platform in that country's 2016 Local Government Elections, in order to generate a conceptual framework for digital political communication.

1 OPENING

Good morning/ afternoon, thank you for your time; and thanks for agreeing to being part of this study.

As per my earlier communications, my name is RONEESH DHAWRAJ, a student with the University of South Africa (UNISA), currently engaged with my PhD studies.

My topic broadly focuses on the ANC and DA and how each party used Twitter as an electioneering campaigning tool in the 2016 Local Government Elections.

It is for this reason that I elected to speak to both political parties, namely the ANC and DA, to understand each of their strategies, especially relating to social media and social networking sites.

We are not total strangers because my work at the public broadcaster, the SABC, permits me to receive your regular updates. I also regularly interact with some of your key people within the party when we need to set up interviews for the SABC. In that sense, we know each other. So please feel relaxed and speak to me during this interview like you would ordinarily do.

Please be cognisant that your responses are strictly confidential; and the interviews are scheduled to last for approximately 45-minutes.

To ensure there are no misunderstandings, I think it is necessary that I explain a few key concepts that might arise during the interview. These include:

Political communication: here I am merely referring to how your party communicates your political ideas to your various constituencies.

Social media/ social networking sites: for purposes of context, social media and social networking sites for this study refers specifically to platforms such as Twitter, You Tube, Facebook and Instagram. However, for this study, our main focus is on micro-blogging site, Twitter.

I think before we formally begin, let us attend to two things:

I have a form detailing 'informed consent' which essentially explains that you as a representative of the ANC/ DA are volunteering information willingly towards this PhD study; and the information can be used in the content of the final report. This form needs to be signed and dated.

Before we begin, I need to seek your permission and check if it is okay with me recording the full length of this interview. The rationale behind this is to capture the interview data for coding later. It is also for double-checking when official transcripts are later made of our interaction here.

2 BACKGROUND

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I think before we get into the actual specifics of the interview, let me ask a few background questions just to orient ourselves towards your party's 2016 local government elections campaign.

What were the key objectives of the ANC's 2016 local government elections campaign?

Well obviously it was to tell a story to the electorate of what the ANC-led government has been able to achieve; and communicate its successes particularly at local government level. We also would have wanted to demonstrate what an understanding of some of the key challenges and issues would have been amongst the electorate...you know...in terms of local issues; and what the ANC-led government has been able to address those challenges. But also we wanted to profile the candidates. Obviously, we had the mayoral candidates at the metros and the various municipalities that we would have wanted to profile so that the electorate can actually get to know their candidates.

Please can you tell me about the ANC's overall media strategy for the 2016 local government elections?

The value proposition would have been going into the elections and obviously popularise the manifesto and get people to not only vote on the day but also to register and make sure they've got the correct details at the Electoral Commission...and obviously to vote the ANC. But key was also to appeal to first-time voters who would not necessarily...you know...participated in that particular province.

If you are comfortable, please can you expand on the various costs associated with the ANC's overall media strategy? If you are willing, please can you give me a percentage allocation dedicated to the party's different activities?

I can't give you costs at this stage...I don't have a lot of the costs (data)...but also just to say that when it comes to social media, we didn't have a big a budget competitively speaking to other opposition parties...and a bigger budget as we would have liked to have because most of it would have gone to traditional media channels and platforms...yeah we did do some social media promotion but it was definitely not the amount of money we would have liked to have spent to have the kind of impact we would have liked to have had on that (social media) platform(s).

TRANSITION: I think let us move on to main aspect of this interview. Please feel free to stop me at any time if there is any clarification of any question.

3 BODY

3.1 Political communication within the digital and social media landscapes

As a caveat, perhaps let me just say when I mention traditional media, here we are referring to radio, television, print and other forms of media such as pamphlets and election posters. Non-traditional digital media refers to social media and social networking sites such as Twitter, Facebook, You Tube and Instagram.

Please tell me how both traditional media and non-traditional digital media channels were utilised for the 2016 local government elections?

We had an integrated strategy as far as the campaign is concerned. We had...the campaign comprised a mix of both traditional media and social media platforms...like I've already indicated...a lot more of the budget was spent across traditional media. For example, present on television with...like...tv adverts, radio adverts...translated into all of the different languages....above-the-line

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campaign in terms of billboards...but the focus of those was...what we did going into the campaign was to identify the foremost issues to a person who would be voting at the local government elections. For example, issues relating to how we have been able to provide electricity even to the areas that are most remote and make sure that communities have access to electricity, issues relating to water...and sanitation. So we would have had for example on our tv programmes...where we had representatives of different voices...both young and old...across different races...talking about the impact that provision of services and access of those basic services would have had to their livelihoods. So it was very much driven by people sharing and telling their own personal stories of how access to government services had changed their lives at a very basic level.

Please take us through the various traditional and non-traditional media channels that were used for the full duration of your 2016 local government elections campaign?

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How do you see the relationship between traditional media and non-traditional digital media for purposes of election campaigns?

I think that they are complimentary and they are both very necessary. One cannot go without the other. Whereas in previous campaigns we would have just focused on above-the-line...and tv...and all of that...particularly given the cost of traditional media...it has become very important that while we can have messaging that you are taking out on traditional media platforms, you then want that supported by digital media so that you can already have that engagement...and you can have the conversations. Also, an important aspect when it comes to social media is the fact that you get feedback. So on tv, on radio you are pushing your message. On social media, you are able to get active engagement and feedback in terms of the public sentiment, perceptions and all of that...it's not something very easy to get out of tv and radio presence.

So you can have a really great ad but the actual feedback and the actual perception...you know social media has become a very important tool to be able to gauge public sentiment at any particular time...in real time too...to see what the response is and what the general feeling is going into an election. So I think you want to have an integrated approach that combines traditional and non-traditional media where the one essentially supports the other.

And what social media has done for us as well is to take the message directly to the people and no longer just rely on these various (traditional) mediums. In that way, you are able to manage some of the costs because it is actually very expensive for us not able to run as much advertising on traditional platforms as we would like. But because of those budgetary constraints, nothing stops us from being able to push our message out there and support it with all of the other...like stakeholder engagement is pretty successful through the events we do...you then have that support on social media platforms.

What do you see as the difference between traditional media channels such as radio, television and print and non-traditional digital media (social media/ social networking sites) when it comes to election campaigning?

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Where does social media and specifically Twitter fit into the ANC's strategy?

Twitter...what we...social media you know at some stage was...when it first started...was ok get the intern to do social media...it's a youthful platform, young people understand it. But what we've found is that social media is actually increasing to be at the center of our communication strategy.

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Yes, all the social media platforms provide community engagement but with what we've increasingly found was that it has actually become the primary news source. So people literally...you know...they wake up...before they even brush their teeth, they go to Twitter...they check trending topics, they check the conversations...what's happening, what's making news...and you know...particularly from a political point of view...a lot of news break on Twitter.

I am sure you would have seen with all of these revolutions...these young people leading the revolution...being aware of political and social issues around the world...would have been...and Twitter has become a political mobilisation tool. So a presence on Twitter has become very key for us. So even in terms of any messaging that we communicate, we make sure we've got a presence on Twitter. We've got the main account of the ANC...but...political principals also have their own accounts...and we run a very active Twitter account.

One thing perhaps I can say is an area for improvement for the African National Congress is the 'listening' aspect...the listening and the feedback aspect. If you look at maybe the way we communicate on that platform, a lot of the messaging becomes one directional. So a lot of people will mention the ANC, will submit queries via Twitter, will raise issues via Twitter...we don't have a direct response mechanism at this stage because you want to have the right kind of capacity to be able to be consistent in that regard. So for example if someone raises a particular issue...I mean right now you have a lot of people mentioning the ANC at any given point in time...there are thousands upon thousands of mentions per week...you don't have the capacity to respond to all of the issues that are raised. But I think we can certainly do a better job in terms of being more responsive. You now some of it will be insults and bashing while some of it will be comments and all of that...but it is important for us from a professional management perspective to spend more time instead of just broadcasting but to listen.

What is the ANC's idea about the benefit of using Twitter as a communication platform?

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What were the main motivations behind including Twitter as part of your 2016 LGE campaign?

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What content was disseminated using your social media channels?

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How is the ANC likely to leverage the use of social media channels such as Twitter for future election campaigns?

We've recognised the need for us to be very much present on social media and drive the conversation as opposed to being on the receiving end. It could be either a media house or it could be an opposition party, they drive the narrative. So the ANC is trying to break into that space to disrupt and drive the agenda. So social media for us is no longer the optional extra, the peripheral type of thing you need to do but it is actually at the centre of our communication strategy. So it is important for us to maintain a strong presence and grow our audience on that platform and make sure that we engage.

You know the ANC refers to the 'battle of ideas'...but to influence the way people view the African National Congress and also be the source of information because often times a lot of people will go with the flow instead of speaking out and getting information. We see our role as being the primary source of information as it relates to the African National Congress, its ideology, its activities and its

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policy positions...so it's to provide information but also to drive the agenda and influence conversations on that platform.

Please clarify if the ANC followed or was inspired by other election campaigns locally or from abroad for your 2016 LGE campaign and how.

Obviously, when you work on any strategy particularly on such a new platform...ok not necessarily a new platform such as social media...you want to look at what has been best practice, what has worked and what is it that you can take and apply it to the local context. So we would have had engagements. For example, with Facebook they may have had a few products that may have worked in terms of promoting citizen participation in elections and so on. So we would have looked at what has worked. You know we obviously cannot forget...with the Obama campaign...it's one of the best...he was the first president to embrace with social media and put it at the centre of his political campaign and we were able to see the impact...and how that campaign was received by people all over the world when social media was not being taken seriously at the time by political parties. So I think that was obviously something to look at. But at a local point of view, the ANC I think was very innovative and very present in terms of adopting social media as a tool. We were very active going into the 2016 elections on social media.

3.2 Issue ownership by means of a digital urban electioneering platform

To what extent did the ANC campaign on set issues during the 2016 LGE?

Please explain if and how the ANC chose to emphasise issues for the 2016 LGE campaign?

The ANC normally engages. We've got a research unit that helps in terms of identifying what some of the key issues would have been. If we look at...tracing back from the democratic dispensation in 1994...we look and review the performance of the African National Congress at each election...whether we improved or our numbers decreased and what the various causes were. The research also covers the key issues to say...what are the key issues amongst the electorate...that then informs our messaging on the basis of those key issues that are identified. So if it is at local government level, the issue was to differentiate between your messaging at national level and local government level. So people at local government level will be worried about access to basic services, electricity, water and sanitation, refuse collection...and the ANC then needs to get back to that level and be able to articulate issues...what we've been able to do at a local government level...and also to show that all our public representatives are well aware of the issues in their localities that they can then expand on...given the central messaging that we then come up with.

What issues did the ANC select for amplification during the 2016 local elections?

-

Please take us through the process of how the ANC selected issues that needed to be tweeted using your Twitter account. How were these issues identified?

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How did these issues correlate with issues outlined in your 2016 LGE manifesto?

If you look at how the ANC goes about drafting a manifesto, it's not something that is outsourced...somewhere it is developed...it's a fully engaged process. So we literally through our

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structures on the ground across all levels...the branches, the zones, the regions, the provinces...there is a consultative process where we actually talk to voters directly in terms of what the issues are. And that then finds expression in the manifesto. So coupled with the research which will be aligned to what people on the ground are saying, we would then craft the manifesto on the basis of the feedback we will be getting directly from communities.

So there is very much an alignment between the issues at community level and what finds expression in the manifesto of the ANC.

In this respect, how did the party use these 'issues' to claim your space and brand yourself during the 2016 LGE?

-

How did the party address issues covered in the general news media?

-

Please can you explain how the ANC used Twitter as a response mechanism for issues that surfaced in the news media?

One of the tools we used...we do have a media monitoring service that will highlight what some of the key issues have been. Whilst we would not have had the capacity to listen to each and every issue, we are able to look at what is coming out of Twitter as an issue and then formulate a response...as and when these issues come in...so there might be issues for example that we may not have picked up via our strategy or our research...and these issues are coming up...we would then formulate a response to issues we do not necessarily foresee. The opposition, for example, will be on the attack...we don't necessarily have a direct response to those issues.

But we will formulate a response on the basis of the issues that are raised on that platform.

How were hashtags used to promote certain issues on your party's Twitter account for the 2016 LGE?

With all of our social media campaigns, we always identify a hashtag that sort of encapsulates what is expressed in the manifesto; and then we use that to communicate all of the campaign messaging. For example, going into 2016 the hashtag was Asinavalo. It's a hashtag that must resonate with different sectors of society and particularly young people who are mostly to be found on social media platforms. The hashtag was actually informed by a popular song that was talking to how the ANC was able to delivery services. Asinavalo loosely translated means that we are not afraid...sort of...we are confident. Now you are going back to the electorate...we go back...we do the door-to-door campaign, we do the rallies, we do the community meetings...so we are not afraid to go back to them because we've got a good story to tell. We've got a lot of progress that has been made and we can actually go back to them and communicate our successes...and what those achievements have been. The hashtag was informed by the fact that the ANC has been able to deliver from the previous manifesto...that these are the things we set out to do...and these are the achievements that we've been able to make. So we were able to support that with real facts...to say...when it comes to issues of housing, this is how we've been able to deliver, when it comes to electricity, this is how we've been able to deliver over the past five years. So Asinavalo sort of meant that...you know when you haven't done the right thing, you're afraid to go back to the same people that you went to in the previous election...to say guys please vote for us again...so we are not afraid to go back to ask to put their

ANNEXURE A: INTERVIEW SCHEDULE FOR AFRICAN NATIONAL CONGRESS (ANC): INTERVIEW CONDUCTED VIA TELEPHONE ON 7 OCTOBER 2018 WITH MISS ATHI GELEBA, ANC HEAD OF DIGITAL COMMUNICATIONS 2016 LGE

confidence in the African National Congress again because we've been able to deliver on mostly what we had set out to achieve.

But obviously our performance in the local government elections was not to our expectations but there was a big issue in terms of how national issues affected the local government voting patterns. That is the area where we could have definitely improved. Our focus was mainly on local issues like I am saying. We focused on the issues we identified because people are looking for basic services...but the issues that were actually happening at a national level that resulted in low voter turnout actually impacted negatively on the messaging of the ANC at local level. So the voting patterns...you would think...that because...for example if you look at the metros, this was the best performing metro, it did well in terms of providing these services and dealing with peoples issues...but somehow the votes for the ANC...there was not a direct correlation between what we've been able to deliver and what the results were for the election...which in fact when we look back at the research, there is an issue that there isn't a causative relationship between the delivery of services and voter turnout and people voting for the African National Congress which I think is something we want to look at going into this (2019) election.

In what way was Twitter's interactive features used by your party during the 2016 LGE campaign? Please explain why and what was the motivation for this.

The issue of retweeting and amplifying messaging was mainly focused on the structures of the ANC. For example, we've got the national account that was then supported by the provinces, the accounts at local level, the branches, the regions and so on...so it would be to amplify all the messages coming from the African National Congress and also the public representatives. So we would retweet people who are...for example we had that campaign that was pushing for people to go out...we would retweet pictures of people going out to vote...helping their neighbours and this normally creates that...that thing of goodwill so that everybody comes out in their numbers. We would also had a twibbon campaign...do you know what a twibbon is...it's basically that ribbon that people put on their profile pictures...so we had a very big successful campaign where people would download to say that they would vote the ANC...they would provide reasons why they would vote for the ANC. So we had different campaigns aimed at amplifying messaging...and one of the most successful campaigns was that twibbon messaging where people would basically download the twibbon onto their profiles and then they tweet a message in support of our campaign...and then we would retweet a lot of those as well.

How were 2016 LGE conversations between your party and other political parties – if any - handled on your party's Twitter account?

Given the fact that the ANC is the largest political party, what was important for us was to stay on-message. For example, a lot of the other political parties would try and create issues. With the opposition parties, they don't so much have their own proposition that they are going out with...except that their campaigns are driven with chipping away at the mass base support of the African National Congress. It's like if they don't talk about the African National Congress, they literally have nothing to talk about. So we were of the fact that a lot of the times the opposition parties would try and promote negative messaging around the African National Congress and all of that to chip away at our support. So what was important for us as the African National Congress was to stay on-message...particularly given the fact that we had a lot to communicate in terms of what the achievements of the African National Congress were. So we stayed very much on message we were not so much destructive in terms of what other political parties were doing. For example, they would try to get us to respond in a negative way. While we monitored what was happening, we made sure we were responsive to issues

ANNEXURE A: INTERVIEW SCHEDULE FOR AFRICAN NATIONAL CONGRESS (ANC): INTERVIEW CONDUCTED VIA TELEPHONE ON 7 OCTOBER 2018 WITH MISS ATHI GELEBA, ANC HEAD OF DIGITAL COMMUNICATIONS 2016 LGE

of the electorate and we made sure we stayed on-message and communicated the messaging of the African National Congress.

How were 2016 LGE conversations between your party and Twitter users – if any - handled on your party’s Twitter account?

-

What issues did your party retweet to your followers during the 2016 LGE campaign?

-

Please can you specify how often and why this was done?

-

What different multimedia formats did your party use when communicating on Twitter during the 2016 LGE? Which were most used and why?

We used everything...we did interviews, we used video, we packaged video content, we had audio, we ran polls on Twitter, we had the twibbons, we ran images...we pretty much ran...we had messaging coming from voters themselves...yeah we pretty much did everything. Also, live coverage has become a very important part of our social media strategy because people demand the message as it gets delivered. But what is also important for us with live feeds is that...around cynicism people just want to distort the messaging. So we would also want to go back to our platforms and make reference...no this is where what was said...because it helps us as well to keep a record of what was said. For example, you go to a rally and somebody will report on it inaccurately or somebody will take it out of context and all of that. You are able to go back to the same recording of that rally and say this is what was said. And it gives us that ability to communicate directly to the voter and allow the voter to make a choice and take that decision of what they will believe or not believe about the ANC. So live...across all our social media platforms...Facebook, Twitter, Instagram...live coverage is very important....both live tweeting and using periscope and having live video coverage.

How effective would you say was the party’s main Twitter account in attaining its communication objectives?

I think we were quite effective in terms of getting our messaging out there. There was a lot of participation. I think if you look at it in terms of the share of voice and all of that, the ANC is there. It was always present. There was a lot of participation and engagement on issues. I think if you look at the share of voice, the ANC has quite a significant share of voice and was able to achieve our communication objectives. Where we would not have done well is ‘emphasise messaging’ relating to national issues that were taking place at the time. I think we could have been more responsive but our focus was at local issues as opposed to dealing with/ talking to those national issues which ended up affecting our results at the poll.

3.3 Conceptualising a digital urban electioneering platform

From the view of your party, how was the issue of urban areas being statistically more technologically-connected than non-urban areas?

I think in terms of urban voters, the ANC is very much aware that we need to be talking to the urban voter. Obviously, when we are talking on the social media platforms, the bulk of the people present on those platforms because they’ve got access to technology, they’ve got access to data; and they will

ANNEXURE A: INTERVIEW SCHEDULE FOR AFRICAN NATIONAL CONGRESS (ANC): INTERVIEW CONDUCTED VIA TELEPHONE ON 7 OCTOBER 2018 WITH MISS ATHI GELEBA, ANC HEAD OF DIGITAL COMMUNICATIONS 2016 LGE

more likely be based in urban areas. With the urban voter, the issue is more...you know...I pay taxes, I demand accountability, I'm close to media...and...increasingly you don't have that romantic connection to the ideological outlook and history of the African National Congress. So people are not going to listen to your messaging on the basis of you know 'I love the ANC', 'I love the history of the biggest freedom movement' and all of that. They're demanding accountability in terms of public representatives and how public funds are being used today. So it was very important for us to be alive to the fact that we can no longer talk about...you know...people must vote because the ANC did all of these amazing things in the past but respond to day-to-day issues...like what are we doing today, how are we going to be able to respond to the issues of the day. From our research, as the ANC delivers services, as the ANC improves peoples' lives, as we urbanise, that does not give an automatic link that therefore says...as Ronesh's life has improved, as we've been given you access to services, as you've been able to urbanise and all of that...it does not automatically mean that you are going to vote for the ANC. Even though the ability of the ANC to improve your life and simplify things and all of that...it's there, it is demonstrable. For example, if you look at Gauteng, a lot of the improvement is happening around Gauteng but that does not necessarily equate to votes for the African National Congress.

Can you clarify if your party deliberately addressed an urban audience in the use of digital media such as Twitter in your 2016 LGE campaign? If not, why not?

Yes, very much so because you know Twitter is very much so dominated by urban audiences. It definitely was...through the way that we packaged our campaign, to the way that we got engagement...like various structures of the African National Congress would have had different engagements with different sectors...so we would tailor make our messaging. If we are talking to this particular audience, this is the type of messaging you would need to put to them. We definitely did have that consciousness and that awareness of the fact that we needed to address urban audiences with our campaign.

Why was this position taken?

-

And how was the specific targeting of urban audiences through Twitter relevant to your planning in the 2016 LGE campaign strategy?

-

Please can you explain if the idea of mobile phone (smartphone) technology was factored into your 2016 LGE campaign and why?

Definitely! A lot of our content we made sure it was digitally mobile friendly. Whether I was our website, whether it's the campaign pages...all of the campaign you could literally access everything and have a user friendly experience off your device. I mean a lot of people consume social media via their mobile devices. So that was a very important part of our campaign to ensure that people were able to interact with the African National Congress via their smartphones. So again...like the video content we used, we used audio content, the daily activities we had as part of the campaign were very much driven by smartphone technology.

4 CLOSING

At this point, please feel free to add anything you think I may have left out.

ANNEXURE A: INTERVIEW SCHEDULE FOR AFRICAN NATIONAL CONGRESS (ANC): INTERVIEW CONDUCTED VIA TELEPHONE ON 7 OCTOBER 2018 WITH MISS ATHI GELEBA, ANC HEAD OF DIGITAL COMMUNICATIONS 2016 LGE

Again, I must thank you for availing yourself for this interview. I believe it was a very interactive session with some very good information-sharing.

Are there any questions you would like to ask me? Is there anything unclear that you think needs more explanation or clarity?

When will this study be published? And will we have access to it?

Can I ask if I may contact you should there be more questions?

Thanks again for agreeing to be part of this study. I appreciate your time.

Yours sincerely

RONESH DHAWRAJ – UNISA PhD student

*ANNEXURE B: INTERVIEW SCHEDULE FOR DEMOCRATIC ALLIANCE (DA):
INTERVIEW CONDUCTED VIA EMAIL IN SEPTEMBER 2018 WITH MISS AIMEE
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**ANNEXURE B: INTERVIEW SCHEDULE FOR DEMOCRATIC ALLIANCE (DA): INTERVIEW
CONDUCTED VIA EMAIL IN SEPTEMBER 2018 WITH MISS AIMEE FRANKLIN, DA HEAD OF
DIGITAL COMMUNICATIONS 2016 LGE**

**TITLE OF STUDY: A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK FOR DIGITAL POLITICAL COMMUNICATION
VIA AN URBAN ELECTIONEERING PLATFORM**

The purpose of this study is to explore and describe how South Africa's governing African National Congress (ANC) and the official opposition, the Democratic Alliance (DA) leveraged micro-blogging website Twitter as an urban electioneering platform in that country's 2016 Local Government Elections, in order to generate a conceptual framework for digital political communication.

1 OPENING

Good morning/ afternoon, thank you for your time; and thanks for agreeing to being part of this study.

As per my earlier communications, my name is RONESH DHAWRAJ, a student with the University of South Africa (UNISA), currently engaged with my PhD studies.

My topic broadly focuses on the ANC and DA and how each party used Twitter as an electioneering campaigning tool in the 2016 Local Government Elections.

It is for this reason that I elected to speak to both political parties, namely the ANC and DA, to understand each of their strategies, especially relating to social media and social networking sites.

We are not total strangers because my work at the public broadcaster, the SABC, permits me to receive your regular updates. I also regularly interact with some of your key people within the party when we need to set up interviews for the SABC. In that sense, we know each other. So please feel relaxed and speak to me during this interview like you would ordinarily do.

Please be cognisant that your responses are strictly confidential; and the interviews are scheduled to last for approximately 45-minutes.

To ensure there are no misunderstandings, I think it is necessary that I explain a few key concepts that might arise during the interview. These include:

Political communication: here I am merely referring to how your party communicates your political ideas to your various constituencies.

Social media/ social networking sites: for purposes of context, social media and social networking sites for this study refers specifically to platforms such as Twitter, You Tube, Facebook and Instagram. However, for this study, our main focus is on micro-blogging site, Twitter.

I think before we formally begin, let us attend to two things:

I have a form detailing 'informed consent' which essentially explains that you as a representative of the ANC/ DA are volunteering information willingly towards this PhD study; and the information can be used in the content of the final report. This form needs to be signed and dated.

Before we begin, I need to seek your permission and check if it is okay with me recording the full length of this interview. The rationale behind this is to capture the interview data for coding later. It is also for double-checking when official transcripts are later made of our interaction here.

2 BACKGROUND

*ANNEXURE B: INTERVIEW SCHEDULE FOR DEMOCRATIC ALLIANCE (DA):
INTERVIEW CONDUCTED VIA EMAIL IN SEPTEMBER 2018 WITH MISS AIMEE
FRANKLIN, DA HEAD OF DIGITAL COMMUNICATIONS 2016 LGE*

I think before we get into the actual specifics of the interview, let me ask a few background questions just to orient ourselves towards your party's 2016 local government elections campaign.

What were the key objectives of your 2016 local government elections campaign?

Top line objectives: Retain Cape Town with an increased majority, win Nelson Mandela Bay, Tshwane and Johannesburg.

Please can you tell me about your party's overall media strategy for the 2016 local government elections?

The media strategy was heavily geared towards targeting people living in these 4 key metros.

If you are comfortable, please can you expand on the various costs associated with your party's overall media strategy? If you are willing, please can you give me a percentage allocation dedicated to your party's different activities?

Confidential information. The likes of ICASA has attempted to quantify the spend per party for TV and radio. You could look to that for a rough steer.

TRANSITION: I think let us move on to main aspect of this interview. Please feel free to stop me at any time if there is any clarification of any question.

3 BODY

3.1 Political communication within the digital and social media landscapes

As a caveat, perhaps let me just say when I mention traditional media, here we are referring to radio, television, print and other forms of media such as pamphlets and election posters. Non-traditional digital media refers to social media and social networking sites such as Twitter, Facebook, You Tube and Instagram.

Please tell me how both traditional media and non-traditional digital media channels were utilised for the 2016 local government elections?

Both were utilised, with a heavier focus on traditional media than non-traditional.

Please take us through the various traditional and non-traditional media channels that were used for the full duration of your 2016 local government elections campaign?

Top line – print ads, radio ads, TV ads, leaflets, posters, Twitter, Facebook, You Tube and Instagram.

How do you see the relationship between traditional media and non-traditional digital media for purposes of election campaigns?

Increasingly the two are linked and non-traditional media will continue to grow as a platform. The two should be linked and both echo and reinforce similar messages.

What do you see as the difference between traditional media channels such as radio, television and print and non-traditional digital media (social media/ social networking sites) when it comes to election campaigning?

**ANNEXURE B: INTERVIEW SCHEDULE FOR DEMOCRATIC ALLIANCE (DA):
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Non-traditional media is generally cheaper to use and much more targeted – you can reach more of your target market for cheaper than through many traditional media. It is good value for money.

Where does social media and specifically Twitter fit into your party's strategy?

It is an important part of the strategy. Whilst the majority of voters do not use Twitter, it is a platform used by many journalists and opinion formers. So it is important from the point of view of being able to use it to influence the traditional media.

What is your party's idea about the benefit of using Twitter as a communication platform?

See above – increasingly the traditional media are getting their news from Twitter, so it is essential we are on the platform and therefore able to influence the media discourse.

What were the main motivations behind including Twitter as part of your 2016 LGE campaign?

See above.

What content was disseminated using your social media channels?

Almost all campaign content – TV ads, summaries of leaflets, infographics etc.

How is your party likely to leverage the use of social media channels such as Twitter for future election campaigns?

Very likely.

Please clarify if your party followed or was inspired by other election campaigns locally or from abroad for your 2016 LGE campaign and how.

We are constantly seeking inspiration from campaigns around the world. There was nothing in the 2016 that was specifically copied from other campaigns, but we are always inspired in all the work we do year-round by other innovative campaigns. In terms of local campaigns, the DA tends to be at the cutting edge of campaigning and setting the standard.

3.2 Issue ownership by means of a digital urban electioneering platform

To what extent did your party campaign on set issues during the 2016 LGE?

Fully.

Please explain if and how your party chose to emphasise issues for the 2016 LGE campaign?

Our key pledges/issues in 2016 were – stop corruption, create jobs and better services. All campaigning revolved around this.

What issues did your party select for amplification during the 2016 local elections?

See above.

Please take us through the process of how your party selected issues that needed to be tweeted using your Twitter account. How were these issues identified?

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The campaign as a whole drove the same key issues above based on comprehensive research and listening to voter needs.

How did these issues correlate with issues outlined in your 2016 LGE manifesto?

They were the same issues.

In this respect, how did your party use these 'issues' to claim your space and brand yourself during the 2016 LGE?

We aggressively drove the three issues across all aspects of the campaign in volume.

How did your party address issues covered in the general news media?

We regularly assess what issues come up in the general news media and decide if we need to act/respond based on our own messaging priorities.

Please can you explain how your party used Twitter as a response mechanism for issues that surfaced in the news media?

Twitter was used to share all media statements from the party – we used it to amplify these messages and make sure they are seen by journalists.

How were hashtags used to promote certain issues on your party's Twitter account for the 2016 LGE?

Key hashtags were repeated in volume over time e.g. #VoteForChange, #MashabaForMayor.

In what way was Twitter's interactive features used by your party during the 2016 LGE campaign? Please explain why and what was the motivation for this.

Yes, we definitely use these features. The power of social media lies in the 'social' part – community management (engaging with our followers) is a central part of our strategy. We mobilise many 'influencers' to share our messaging. Anthony and I are close to the coal face and invested deeply in the campaign, so our sharing of content is a by-product of our jobs and intense involvement with the campaign. But yes, there is always a general drive to get as many diverse voices sharing our messaging as possible.

How were 2016 LGE conversations between your party and other political parties – if any - handled on your party's Twitter account?

There were not many conversations with other parties.

How were 2016 LGE conversations between your party and Twitter users – if any - handled on your party's Twitter account?

Every day we engage with our users on Twitter – responding to their questions and comments.

What issues did your party retweet to your followers during the 2016 LGE campaign?

The three main campaign issues referenced above.

Please can you specify how often and why this was done?

Daily.

What different multimedia formats did your party use when communicating on Twitter during the 2016 LGE? Which were most used and why?

Mainly video and infographics. Video tends to be the most effective if produced appropriately.

How effective would you say was the party's main Twitter account in attaining its communication objectives?

Very effective, we were able to trend number 1 in South Africa on many important occasions, including on voting day.

3.3 Conceptualising a digital urban electioneering platform

From the view of your party, how was the issue of urban areas being statistically more technologically-connected than non-urban areas?

Yes, generally urban areas are more connected. Given in 2016 we were targeting big metro areas, this trend was in our favour and made social media an effective tool for reaching our target markets.

Can you clarify if your party deliberately addressed an urban audience in the use of digital media such as Twitter in your 2016 LGE campaign? If not, why not?

Yes, our key targets were to win votes in the 4 metros identified earlier.

Why was this position taken?

Our election strategy dictated it.

And how was the specific targeting of urban audiences through Twitter relevant to your planning in the 2016 LGE campaign strategy?

Our strategy focused on winning urban areas.

Please can you explain if the idea of mobile phone (smartphone) technology was factored into your 2016 LGE campaign and why?

Yes it was, most South Africans are connected via mobile phone and it remains one of the best ways to reach people.

4 CLOSING

At this point, please feel free to add anything you think I may have left out.

Again, I must thank you for availing yourself for this interview. I believe it was a very interactive session with some very good information-sharing.

Are there any questions you would like to ask me? Is there anything unclear that you think needs more explanation or clarity?

No

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Can I ask if I may contact you should there be more questions?

Yes

Thanks again for agreeing to be part of this study. I appreciate your time.

Yours sincerely

RONESH DHAWRAJ – UNISA PhD student

ANNEXURE C: MEMOS WRITTEN ON THE ANC AND DA'S 2016 LGE CORPUS OF TWEETS AND MANIFESTO

Grounded Theory is an active, systematic and intensive back-and-forth process. The researcher writes memos to capture reflections, perceptions of the data; and new info that may arise at the time. Memos record a researcher's process of thinking; and are done almost sub-consciously from start to end. Although memo-writing is largely from a researcher's perspective, it is an essential element to a well-thought out Grounded Theory. Memos lubricate the latent theory yet to surface from the data. If there are no memos, a researcher will struggle to produce a Grounded Theory rich in "explanatory power" (see Adu 2016, 2018, 2019). For some (see Calman 2014; Katz 2016), memos are actually where Grounded Theory occurs; it is a recording (and an audit trail) of what researchers do operationally. Intensive memo-writing ultimately keeps the momentum of a Grounded Theory in check; and navigates the analytical sophistication of the final substantive theory (Creswell 2013, 2015). In this respect, the researcher wrote large amounts of memos during the entire data collection and data analysis stages including case-based memos during the open coding phase; conceptual memos to capture the logic behind the axial coding stage; and theoretical memos to understand the final stage of theoretical coding. More than 50-pages of memos were, thus, written to document the researcher's observations. To ensure manageability, a conscious decision was taken to sort through these by labelling similar chunks of information to decipher main strains of thought. The grand objective was the search for a single golden thread to string together the researcher's intuitive observations about what was seen in the data (Adu 2016, 2018, 2019).

In the next few sub-sections, each memo-writing exercise of the ANC and DA's 2016 LGE corpus of tweets and election manifesto are detailed to supplement the substantive nature of the findings.

MEMOS WRITTEN ON THE ANC'S 2016 LGE CORPUS OF TWEETS

Most of the memos written on the ANC's 2016 LGE corpus of tweets were clustered into sub-categories, namely how national issues and not local issues dominated its campaign; how Twitter publicised its countrywide electioneering drive including how other media amplified these messages; and how simple branding through posters, t-shirts and other party regalia ensured the ANC was visible. For its 2016 local government election campaign, the ANC chose to employ a number of tried-and-tested forms of electioneering methods to connect with constituencies. This blitz was defined by walk-about, door-to-door campaigns, town hall meetings, church services and ad hoc interactions with commuters and hawkers at taxi ranks (My ANC 2016 local government elections feed...2016).

National issues versus municipal issues

A key aspect of the ANC's 2016 LGE campaign was how the party consistently used national issues instead of local government matters to appeal to voters. This was further exacerbated with national

ANNEXURE C: MEMOS WRITTEN ON THE ANC AND DA'S 2016 LGE CORPUS OF TWEETS AND MANIFESTO

and provincial leaders doing most of the campaigning; and local ANC representatives seldom getting a platform to articulate the party's offer to voters. When it came to the highly-contested metros, here, too, national leaders in the form of the ANC's top six officials and other NEC members did most of the campaigning including door-to-door visits, mini rallies, community hall meetings; and town hall debates. It was rare to see metro mayoral candidates campaigning within a metro to speak to issues concerning voters. When these interactions did happen, they were paired with another national leader. At other times, that local leader would comment on the party's delivery through a national radio/ television debate. Of course, this could have been a result of the ANC facing a number of negative credibility deficiencies at the time due to its scandal-prone president, Mr Jacob Zuma. The best way to tackle such negative publicity was to field other national and provincial leaders to bolster the party's image – or at least this is what the researcher inferred from the data (My ANC 2016 local government elections feed...2016).

Twitter was an electronic diary for the ANC

One of the most note-worthy observations was how the ANC used Twitter as an electronic diary to document most election-related activity on the campaign trail. From door-to-door campaigning, provincial manifesto launches and keynote addresses at churches, mini rallies and community meetings, Twitter was there to record it; and present service delivery successes to the party's audiences. At most times, simple text coupled with images were used to ensure the ANC's 2016 LGE campaign was visible. Periodically, ANC officials would activate the live streaming feature on their smartphones to illustrate the huge turnout at party events. However, at most other times, images were used to drive home the message that the ANC was still a relevant mass-based peoples' movement (My ANC 2016 local government elections feed...2016).

The researcher reasoned that the ANC could have adopted this stance of leveraging Twitter as this electronic diary because it was not logistically possible for traditional media to be everywhere as party leaders criss-crossed the nine provinces. Traditional media coverage also demands resources such as manpower, television cameras and radio recording equipment. Bigger events with the party's more prominent leaders would naturally get live television or radio coverage by virtue of incumbency (see Mthembu 2019). Other peripheral campaigning events with less prominent personalities of the party would then be tracked on platforms such as Twitter. The micro-blogging site, in this sense, became an omnipresent, boundless media tool that could be activated using a simple smartphone in the pursuit of maximum media coverage (My ANC 2016 local government elections feed...2016).

Twitter publicised other media interactions

Part of Twitter's amplifying qualities was how the micro-blogging site was used to multiply its voice in the media space. With live coverage comes the phenomenon of live tweeting or posting pieces of a story as it happens – in real time. As traditional and non-traditional media journalists followed ANC

ANNEXURE C: MEMOS WRITTEN ON THE ANC AND DA'S 2016 LGE CORPUS OF TWEETS AND MANIFESTO

leaders on the extensive campaign trail, these mini stories would break first over Twitter. Text, images, short videos and sometimes live streaming, the ANC's message was amplified through 'other' media houses using either 'live' (synchronous) online posts or through delayed (asynchronous) media pieces published a few hours after the event. The ANC in turn would retweet these stories to embolden its overall election campaign.

A stand-out element of this 'other media' interaction was how ANC leaders leveraged community media as and when visits to local communities were conducted. While these leaders would grant big traditional media players access to its leaders, the party nearly-always went all out to accommodate smaller community media organisations. This suggests the party recognised the potent power of such localised media (community radio, community television and community newspapers) in helping communicate the party's political ideas to communities leaders campaigned in. Again, these 'stories' itself would become the news through live tweeting. In other words, whatever was said during live interviews, including actual images of the leader appearing on that community media channel; and sometimes simultaneous live coverage, would be tweeted. This audience segmentation, no doubt, amplified the party's communication efforts around its 2016 LGE campaign (My ANC 2016 local government elections feed...2016).

How the ANC branded itself during the campaign

The ANC media campaign for the 2016 municipal elections was extensive. Its leaders, mostly national and provincial, traversed the length and breadth of the country's nine provinces to interact with people, spreading the ANC's message of delivery; and to propose the party's promises for the next five-year local government term. Despite the ANC's relative size in terms of political support, the party did not mount a massive technological campaign that sought to alienate its core support base who still identified it with the country's post-1994 liberation. Rather, the party chose to use a combination of different tried-and-tested community outreach mechanisms mostly involving door-to-door campaigns, mini rallies and community meetings (My ANC 2016 local government elections feed...2016).

During these multi-fold interactions, the ANC used simple but effective branding in the form of its widely-known yellow black and green t-shirts. From its president, Mr Zuma, to the deputy president, Mr Ramaphosa, these t-shirts were worn by all ANC deployees on the campaign trail including provincial and local government leaders. If one were to stand in a crowd of a thousand people listening to an ANC deployee citing how the party had changed the lives of the poorest, one would see that the ANC's branding needed just the yellow t-shirt to identify its presence. What helped also was the fact that these 'bright' symbols of the party's name and image were freely given to communities as they made their way to these gatherings. At times, some leaders would even wear ANC-emblazoned jackets, head scarves and ANC caps to stand out in a sea of yellow to know the ANC had arrived to reach out to them in the lead-up to the 2016 elections (My ANC 2016 local government elections feed...2016).

ANNEXURE C: MEMOS WRITTEN ON THE ANC AND DA'S 2016 LGE CORPUS OF TWEETS AND MANIFESTO

The 'yellow' ANC t-shirt also functioned to mock political rivals, notably when members of other political parties crossed over to the ANC. These new recruits would then be publicly paraded at a media briefing or impromptu rally in full view of a watching public and media to profess their dissatisfaction with their old political home; and their joy at joining the ANC. The 'yellow' ANC t-shirt would serve as powerful transition tools, elevating the ANC's brand in the process. In some instances, these new recruits would still wear their old party t-shirts; and would only change into the new yellow ones when the spectacle of the event demanded so (My ANC 2016 local government elections feed...2016).

Hashtags were not used optimally

Despite the ANC's best efforts to mobilise supporters through a nationwide electioneering blitz, hashtags did not form part of this. Instead, the ANC's use of these subject-driven identifiers was mostly uncoordinated, sporadic and very event-driven, context-driven; and related to individual places and politicians. They were seldom used to identify issues the party chose to communicate on. A cursory glance at the ANC's top 15 hashtags within its entire corpus of 2016 LGE tweets confirm this. These hashtags were isolated using the NVivo Pro 12 software. Please refer to Table 7.1 for a list of the ANC's top 15 hashtags (My ANC 2016 local government elections feed...2016):

ANC 2016 LGE top 15 hashtags identified over Twitter

Hashtag	In-text mentions	Corpus percentage
#ancthankssa	1697	1.33%
#voteanc	793	0.62%
#anctgmkhize	688	0.54%
#anceverywhere	659	0.52%
#asinavalo	534	0.42%
#siyanqoba	475	0.37%
#zuma	415	0.33%
#ancfriday	408	0.32%
#ancdpramaphosa	313	0.25%
#anc	238	0.19%
#mantashe	219	0.17%
#ancinthestreets	209	0.16%
#thisismyanc	169	0.13%
#ancsgmantashe	134	0.11%
#ancsg	100	0.08%

Source: ANC 2016 LGE corpus of tweets

Message retweeting and celebrity endorsements

During the ANC's 2016 LGE campaign over Twitter, the party shared the tweets of other ANC handles; and other ANC politicians. The very active ANC handle mostly retweeted the posts and updates of other ANC prominents regardless of Twitter followings. Mr Fikile Mbalula, for example was retweeted many times along with Mr Malusi Gigaba, Mr Yonela Diko and Mr Harold Maloka. When it came to celebrity endorsements, the ANC went to great lengths to retweet these to show the party was still the choice of leading members of society including television presenters, Miss Kuli Roberts and Miss Mandlakazi Sigcawu, hip-hop singer AKA, television stars from *Isibaya* Miss Zinhle Mabena, Mr Bheki Mkhwane and Mr Menzi Ngubane; and popular actor Mr Thato Molamu from the television show, *Greed and Desire* (My ANC 2016 local government elections feed...2016).

Was there an urban connection

The ANC, interestingly, made no clear distinction when it came to isolating urban areas from non-urban areas as far their 2016 LGE corpus of tweets were concerned. It equally publicised wins and losses from wherever the party contested – both urban and rural. When the ANC did talk about urban issues, these were mostly as a result of its representatives being interviewed as part of panel debates on other traditional media channels. The information would then be amplified using Twitter and simple hashtags such as #ElectionDebates or #TauForMayor. In some cases, urban-based campaigns involving individual mayors, especially in Gauteng and Nelson Mandela Bay in the Eastern Cape would involve these mayoral candidates on the campaign trail – with other national leaders from the party. On the rare occasion, the party would use Twitter for live question-and-answer sessions to introduce its metro mayors under hashtags such as #PeoplesMayors. This, though, was not done often. Miss Thoko Didiza – for example – joined the micro-blogging site on the actual day of her campaign trail in Tshwane. A clear observation was that there existed a real chasm between ANC's politicians and technology, notably in the urban areas. Technology was not embraced (My ANC 2016 local government elections feed...2016).

The ANC focused on its own issues

While other political parties continued attacking the ANC's perceived failures, the ANC chose to focus on its own issues with minimal attacks aimed at opposition parties. When the party did elect to campaign negatively against its adversaries, these were done in one of two ways: by welcoming new members from other political parties or by referring to the opposition in vague verbal swipes. For example, the DA's purported racism in Cape Town and the Western Cape was used to generate hashtags such as #LiberateWesternCape and #ANCTakesCapeTown when the party's political elite campaigned there. As an illustration, on that same campaign drive in Cape Town on 2 July 2016, former ANC president, Mr Zuma said "you can't continue to be governed by a child of the National Party...the DA is a child of those who oppressed us". The leader then took aim at the ill-disciplined

ANNEXURE C: MEMOS WRITTEN ON THE ANC AND DA'S 2016 LGE CORPUS OF TWEETS AND MANIFESTO

EFF by suggesting “others have no respect...would you vote for people who are disrespectful?” (in mild reference to the EFF’s parliamentary disruptions against Mr Zuma when he was still South African president) (Evans 2017) (see My ANC 2016 local government elections feed...2016).

Using its liberation credentials to appeal to voters

Of course, the ANC continued to have the so-called liberation dividend to rely on during the campaign. The ANC’s role in South Africa’s emancipation from apartheid is well documented. While the country is well into its 25th year of democratic governance, the ANC stubbornly holds onto this ‘issue’, using it as a campaigning tool to mobilise its key constituency, namely the poor and marginalised (please see section 5.3.2 within this thesis for a brief profile of an ANC supporter). The party used its liberation credentials vastly on the 2016 LGE campaign trail, reminding voters using nostalgia that it and no other party was responsible for bringing democracy to the country. The name of the late Mr Nelson Mandela – in this respect – was used as this vote-catching tool. There were innumerable instances where Madiba’s name was cited when leaders campaigned under the party banner to remind voters they owed the party of Mr Nelson Mandela another five years. This was reinforced during the annual Youth Day celebrations and 61st anniversary observance of the Freedom Charter. Struggle stalwarts such as Rivonia trialist, Mr Andrew Mlangeni, Mrs Winnie Madikizela-Mandela, Mr Ahmed Kathrada and Mr Tokyo Sexwale were also used to remind voters of the ANC’s deep connection with South Africa’s liberation politics (My ANC 2016 local government elections feed...2016).

MEMOS WRITTEN ON THE ANC’S 2016 LGE MANIFESTO

During the open coding stage of the ANC’s 2016 election manifesto, the researcher found that the party focused on a narrow number of issues; and relied on repetition to reinforce these issues. For the researcher, the key points from the ANC’s 32-page manifesto included an all-inclusive urban-rural focus; the party’s emphasis on its liberation credentials; the issue of dealing with fraud and corruption within party ranks; and the juxtaposition of national issues assuming a local angle for election campaigning. With regard to the first point, the ANC demonstrated in its 2016 election manifesto that the party did not have an urban-specific strategy. Using its delivery record since 1994, the party through multiple examples show how the party provided for both urban and rural resident. There is no bias of any sort. Using its status as South Africa’s governing party since democracy in 1994; the ANC leverages its liberation history prominently in the manifesto. On the third point, the ANC is honest with itself when it comes to matters of alleged fraud and corruption involving its employees in government. Perhaps most importantly, the ANC uses national issues throughout its 2016 election manifesto to appeal to local government voters. For example, although issues relating to housing, crime, health and education are national competencies; these remained viable election issues for the ANC to campaign on. This blurring between national, provincial and local government matters then became somewhat entangled.

MEMOS WRITTEN ON THE DA's 2016 LGE CORPUS OF TWEETS

For the researcher to make sense of the DA's exhaustive 30-page memos written during the data collection and data analysis stages of the party's 2016 LGE corpus of tweets, dominant topics were sifted and sorted. Other than promoting core issues highlighted in its election manifesto, memos noted how the party had used Twitter to energetically mount an urban campaign in several key metros it sought victories in. Written memos also noted how the DA used Twitter to promote the images of its metro mayoral candidates; how negative advertising defined most of the DA campaign; how national issues were agitated more than local government issues; and how together with effective branding the party used emotional appeals, influencers, endorsements and strong repetition in its messaging (Democratic Alliance 2016 local government elections feed...2016).

Promoting the DA's core issues

Of the many observations, the researcher firstly noted how the DA in most of its 2016 LGE corpus of tweets remained fairly consistent when it came to promoting the party's core issues, namely speaking around 'voting for change' and 'voting for change that stops corruption, creates jobs and delivers basic services'. This message was also carried by its public representatives including its leader, Mr Maimane and mayoral candidates at rallies, voter meet-and-greets; and on the general campaign trail. The party also spoke with one voice around these 'core issues' with no DA representative contradicting the other on these in public. Hashtags, too, ensured these core issues reflected message consistency for the party in the public media space (to be discussed later) (Democratic Alliance 2016 local government elections feed...2016).

Twitter and the DA's urban drive

Twitter was used extensively to promote the party's urban campaigning strategy and to agitate positive sentiment around its metro mayoral candidates in the 2016 municipal election. In 'battleground metros' such as Ekurhuleni, Johannesburg, Tshwane, and Nelson Mandela Bay, for example, hashtags such as #KnowYourDAMayors #MayorsForChange #HermanMashabaForMayor #SollyMsimangaForMayor and #AtholTrollipForMayor were heavily promoted. In the case of a secure Cape Town metro which the party had won comfortably in 2011, the hashtag #KeepMakingProgress was instead used. Coupled with this pronounced promotion of the metro mayors was a regular Did You Know (DYK) feature the party chose to send out at regular intervals. Images of former Cape Town mayor Mrs Patricia De Lille, for example, was tweeted showing the DA's success in delivery juxtaposed against the ANC's non-delivery in metros like Johannesburg, Tshwane, Ekurhuleni and

ANNEXURE C: MEMOS WRITTEN ON THE ANC AND DA'S 2016 LGE CORPUS OF TWEETS AND MANIFESTO

Nelson Mandela Bay. Numbers were given in infographic slides to illustrate ANC wastage in metros the party governed; and how the DA would correct this should it take over these cities. Using the #MayorsForChange hashtag as a further illustration, DA influencer @KristoffDJ on 31 May 2016, for example, tweeted 'While ANC wasted R20bn in last fin year in Tshwane, NMB, JHB & Ekurhuleni, access to sanitation & water in CT rose to 96%++ #MayorsForChange'. In another example, the same influencer tweeted 'Just like Jacob Zuma, ANC mayors seemingly have a blank cheque to misspend public money to the tune of millions #MayorsForChange' (Democratic Alliance 2016 local government elections feed...2016).

From the researcher's observations captured through memos, there seemed to be unity, cohesion and on-point messaging among the party's metro mayoral candidates over Twitter including Nelson Mandela Bay's Mr Athol Trollip, Tshwane's Mr Solly Msimanga, Johannesburg's Mr Herman Mashaba, Ekurhuleni's Mr Ghaleb Cachalia and Cape Town's Mrs Patricia De Lille. The DA, for their part, ensured people knew who their local metro mayoral candidates were through images, text, live-streaming; and information-laden infographics. Twitter was instrumental in positively framing the images of these metro mayoral candidates. Coupled with text and images, infographics were repeatedly used to highlight each leader's traits to make them more personal and less politician-like. The emphasis was on volume to ensure these slides, infographics and mini fact sheets were seen multiple times at different times of the day by possible different audiences. The metros, notably Johannesburg, Tshwane and Nelson Mandela Bay, were 'battleground' election hotspots for the party. Johannesburg mayoral candidate, Mr Herman Mashaba, confirmed this when on 31 May 2016 he tweeted 'DA Candidates in battleground Metros have spent combined 988 days so far on campaign trail, in communities with the people #MayorsForChange'. Using its main handle, the DA, too, latched onto this wording and frequently tweeted posts such as 'In the battleground Metros all indicators show the election is a 2-horse race & only the DA can beat the ANC on 03 August #MayorsForChange' (Democratic Alliance 2016 local government elections feed...2016).

Another tactic used by the DA in the metros was to consistently discredit the ANC's mayoral nominees. Dr Danny Jordaan, for example, was the party's choice for Nelson Mandela Bay in the Eastern Cape. Besides repeatedly calling for Dr Jordaan to openly debate his DA counterpart, Mr Athol Trollip, the party used Twitter to mock the soccer boss. In one tweet, the DA said 'We demand that the ANC name its candidates so that we can debate issues that have led to tragic mismanagement under ANC #MayorsForChange'. In another tweet, DA influencer @KristoffDJ posted '#MayorsForChange want ANC to come out of hiding and announce mayoral candidates. Why so scared to announce @MYANC?' (the researcher elucidates more on this negative campaigning later within this chapter) (Democratic Alliance 2016 local government elections feed...2016).

When the DA was not attacking or discrediting the ANC, it relied on a large number of emotional

ANNEXURE C: MEMOS WRITTEN ON THE ANC AND DA'S 2016 LGE CORPUS OF TWEETS AND MANIFESTO

appeals to get voters in the metros to vote for it using Twitter. The party's 2016 LGE corpus of tweets brim with examples. Knowing the metro vote was likely to be a closely-fought one, it kept communication lines open over Twitter; and used text such as 'long lines must not deter you; don't you want to live in a place where is delivery like other DA-run councils?' and '#ImVotingDA because Kgalema Motlanthe is absolutely right...the ANC is completely leaderless...don't let the weather decide your future, get out and vote'. Another example from the DA's corpus includes 'Give us 5 years! We are not asking that you elect us until JESUS RETURNS #ImVotingDA". These appeals involved a number of personal addresses, as if the party had chosen to speak directly to each voter. In another instance, the DA used the results of a Markinor survey on the metros to show just how close the ANC and DA were in several 'battleground' places. The party – over Twitter – pleaded with voters to stay in line to vote because a single vote could determine if the DA won that metro or not. This the party did with renewed vigour using multiple tweets and retweets from other DA-affiliated accounts (Democratic Alliance 2016 local government elections feed...2016).

The DA goes on the attack with negative advertising

As outlined earlier, a large part of the DA's 2016 LGE corpus of tweets revolved around 'attack-campaigning' or negative advertising. The ANC – in this regard – provided the ideal 'attack-advertising' material for the party to launch a litany of open, well-publicised assaults in the public domain. The media lapped it all up; and constantly gave the DA the necessary oxygen to ventilate these said issues. The ANC, too, was complicit in handing the DA many opportunities for it to go on the prowl with the many scandals around its then president, Mr Jacob Zuma. For the DA, Mr Zuma became the *de facto* name and face of its negative attacks against the ANC throughout the 2016 LGE campaign. For example, on Twitter, a combination of text, images and infographics were used to imprint certain facts in the minds of the media and potential voters. If the DA was not singling out Mr Zuma for "dividing us", the party brought up the leader's perceived interference in a number of key state bodies which were now worse off before his tenure. Some examples include Mr Zuma's purported deployment of Mr Hlaudi Motsoeneng to the nation's public broadcaster and the devastating effects thereafter (under the hashtag #SABCCensorship); and Mr Zuma's alleged interference in the appointment processes of state-owned enterprises (SOEs) such as Eskom, South African Airways (SAA), Transnet and the Passenger Rail Agency of South Africa (PRASA) (Democratic Alliance 2016 local government elections feed...2016).

Mr Zuma's association with the infamous Gupta family was also repeatedly brought up to remind voters that the country's number one citizen had gambled with the future of younger South Africans; and a party such as the ANC could not be trusted. Other issues the party leveraged to discredit the ANC was Mr Zuma's #SpyTapes case, his #CorruptionTrial, how the leader was lambasted by the Constitutional Court in 2016; and how the abuse of taxpayer monies has paid for Mr Zuma's ongoing

ANNEXURE C: MEMOS WRITTEN ON THE ANC AND DA'S 2016 LGE CORPUS OF TWEETS AND MANIFESTO

court cases. Hashtags such as #JobsNotJets and #SayNoToNkandlaAir were used to drum up support against government wastage, with the DA persistently reminding voters the ANC government was set on buying Mr Zuma a R4-billion jet. The R4-billion, the party argued, could have been used to tackle poverty and address the issues of South Africa's most vulnerable. More emboldened, the DA used another hashtag called #ZumasWives to hit out at the ANC and the unnecessary taxpayer monies Mr Zuma used to buy top-of-the-range vehicles for the South African president's many wives. The relentless attacks by the DA continued with no end over Twitter (Democratic Alliance 2016 local government elections feed...2016).

Mr Zuma, however, was not the only prominent ANC leader that caught the eye of the DA in full attack mode. The ANC's metro mayoral candidates became the subject of hundreds of negative DA tweets. For example, because the 2016 election battle was perceived to be more about the metros, the DA constantly attacked Dr Danny Jordaan who was the ANC's mayoral candidate in Nelson Mandela Bay in the Eastern Cape. When the party was not commenting about Dr Jordaan's lack of political experience, it highlighted how he had avoided direct debates with the DA on public platforms. In Johannesburg and Tshwane, ANC mayoral candidates Mr Parks Tau and Mrs Thoko Didiza faced equally severe criticism when the subject of delivery arose. In the wake of Mrs Didiza's candidacy as ANC mayoral candidate for Tshwane, the DA used the #TshwaneUnrest hashtag to campaign against the party, promising voters that under a DA-led government, such party politics would not threaten their safety. This negative assault against the ANC was only amplified when the DA pushed the images of its mayoral candidates as caring politicians for the people; and portrayed itself as the only party capable of governing the country's major cities. Using its governance record in the City of Cape Town, coupled with its delivery successes in other places, the DA generated the narrative that it alone could solve South Africa's many service delivery problems in the nation's metropolitan hubs (Democratic Alliance 2016 local government elections feed...2016).

Another element of the DA's negative campaign against the ANC was how it used ANC-created situations to bolster its credentials as an all-inclusive, democracy-loving political party. For example, when the DA's Muslim youth leader, Mr Yusuf Cassim was labelled a 'terrorist' and from 'Boko Haram' by ANC members because of his long beard, the DA called out the ANC for its prejudicial rants. At the time, the DA threatened to report the ANC to the South African Human Rights Commission (SAHRC). The party also sought public sympathy by repeatedly tweeting about possible election-rigging by the ANC – a mild reference that the ANC could play dirty by refusing to pass on political power should it lose certain municipalities. At one point in the campaign DA leader, Mr Maimane even remarked 'we have the ANC who for years has supported (Robert) Mugabe and helped him stay in power...Zimbabwe is a godo reminder of the choice facing voters in our election here #KeepMakingProgress' (Democratic Alliance 2016 local government elections feed...2016).

National issues versus local government issues

Like the ANC, the DA, too, focused more on national issues than local government ones. The only difference, however, was that the DA consistently talked around its core issues, namely ‘voting for change’ and ‘voting for change that stops corruption, creates jobs and delivers basic services’. The party proverbially went off-script whenever it attacked the ANC for its many perceived governance failures. This is where national issues would surface in the rhetoric. Some examples pointed out earlier was controversy around then ANC president, Mr Zuma’s spending on his Nkandla home, the ANC government’s impending purchase of a R4-billion jet; and the spending of approximately R8-million on cars for the president’s wives. When local issues did surface – as was seen with the Tshwane violence – here too the DA would proverbially frame it to advantage itself (Democratic Alliance 2016 local government elections feed...2016).

Hashtags were part of message mobilisation

When it came to hashtags, the DA’s messaging was coherent, consistent and well-co-ordinated. The party had a very clear plan in mind before every event involving its many public representatives. If the hashtags were not modelled around the core issues of the party, they nearly-always were about what was happening in the metros. Furthermore, what the researcher observed was that when the party ‘talked’ around a certain issue, fresh hashtags would be created; and all other DA-associated accounts including its influencer army would tweet using this. As was done with the ANC’s 2016 LGE corpus of tweets, the researcher used NVivo Pro 12 to sift out the DA’s top 15 hashtags communicated over the campaigning period. Table 7.2 provides support for the researcher’s noted observations (Democratic Alliance 2016 local government elections feed...2016):

DA 2016 LGE top 15 hashtags identified over Twitter

Hashtag	In-text mentions	Corpus percentage
#khulada	1963	1.01%
#voteforchange	1219	0.63%
#imvotingda	704	0.36%
#da	507	0.26%
#msimangaformayor	360	0.18%
#keepmakingprogress	310	0.16%
#mashabaformayor	301	0.15%
#trollipformayor	264	0.14%
#electiondebate	233	0.12%

ANNEXURE C: MEMOS WRITTEN ON THE ANC AND DA'S 2016 LGE CORPUS OF TWEETS AND MANIFESTO

#jobsnotjets	222	0.11%
#mayorsforchange	191	0.10%
#sabccensorship	185	0.09%
#dafinalrally	110	0.06%
#electionday	99	0.05%
#daforjobs	98	0.05%
#manifestoforchange	98	0.05%

Source: DA 2016 LGE corpus of tweets

DA branding, other media interactions and message diffusion

While the ANC and DA seemed to use Twitter for very different reasons around their 2016 LGE campaigns, there were a few similarities. Besides each using the site to publicise news pieces written about them, each party also ensured that whatever was communicated by its public representatives on election-related debate shows were simultaneously tweeted. The DA, too, like the ANC, used its main Twitter handle to retweet a number of affiliated party accounts including tweets from its leader, Mr Maimane and other prominent DA politicians. This type of message diffusion was aided more with the use of party influencers charged with handling the main DA account. Influencers such as @Kwena_94, @KristoffDJ and @AimFranklin kept the momentum going, retweeting as many positive messages about the party as they could. Another area of commonality between both parties was in the branding over Twitter. As witnessed with the ANC, t-shirts proved powerful symbols for the DA's branding too. While on the campaign trail, DA leaders ensured they were clothed in the party's signature blue, white and yellow regalia. Free t-shirts would be distributed to people attending rallies, community meet-and-greets and townhall meetings. These pictures showing a full so-called 'blue wave' would then be tweeted by the party's social media managers to illustrate the party's support. Like the ANC, these recognisable blue, white and yellow t-shirts would also be handed out to former members of other parties when they publicly joined the DA. The DA – in turn – made a huge ceremonial fuss about these switch-overs on Twitter (Democratic Alliance 2016 local government elections feed...2016).

MEMOS WRITTEN ON THE DA's 2016 LGE MANIFESTO

When it came to memo-writing involving the DA's 2016 election manifesto, this proved fairly easy as the party – like the ANC – tended to focus on a few issues. Repetition, however, had a particular function: to emphasise certain issues more. While the ANC chose not to focus on other parties in its election manifesto, the DA deliberately chose this strategy in most of its 61-page 2016 manifesto. Unsurprisingly, the governing-ANC was talked about and/ or implied in most of what the party chose to promise the electorate. Juxtaposing its delivery successes in places like Cape Town, Midvaal and

ANNEXURE C: MEMOS WRITTEN ON THE ANC AND DA'S 2016 LGE CORPUS OF TWEETS AND MANIFESTO

the Western Cape, the DA used these to negatively frame the ANC's non-delivery. Heaping blame on the ANC, the DA cited matters such as the expanded public works programme (EPWP) and how these jobs were given only to card-carrying members (by implication the ANC); how ANC-driven broad based black economic empowerment (BBBEE) had made only a few well-connected people rich at the expense of the poor; and the ANC's policy of cadre deployment damaging governance in this country. The DA's negative political advertising against the ANC endures for most of the party's 2016 manifesto with more and more pages devoted to how the DA could do better than the ANC. The other stand-out feature of the DA's 2016 election manifesto was the deliberate messaging to the urban voter resident in 'towns and cities'. The word 'rural' is barely mentioned. Providing numerous examples of how it could do better than the ANC, the party committed to tackling crime, improving transport, providing more free wifi hotspots, rectifying billing anomalies; and addressing the urbanisation crisis around housing in the metros.

COLLEGE OF HUMAN SCIENCES RESEARCH ETHICS REVIEW COMMITTEE

3 July 2018

Dear Ronesh Dhawraj

**Decision: Ethics Approval from 03
July 2018 to 02 July 2019**

**NHREC Registration # : Rec-
240816-052**

**CREC Reference # : 2018-
CHS-0030**

Name : Ronesh Dhawraj

Student #: 33841578

Researcher(s): Ronesh Dhawraj
Department of Communication Science
University of South Africa

Supervisor(s): Prof DF du Plessis and Prof TC du Plessis
Department of Communication Science
University of South Africa

A conceptual framework for digital political communication via an urban electioneering platform.

Qualification: D Litt et Phil (Communication)

Thank you for the application for research ethics clearance by the Unisa College of Human Sciences Research Ethics Committee for the above mentioned research. Ethics approval is granted for one year.

The low risk application was reviewed and expedited by the Chair of College of Human Sciences Research Ethics Committee on 3 July 2018 in compliance with the Unisa Policy on Research Ethics and the Standard Operating Procedure on Research Ethics Risk Assessment. The proposed research may now commence with the provisions that:

1. The researcher(s) will ensure that the research project adheres to the values and principles expressed in the UNISA Policy on Research Ethics.



2. Any adverse circumstance arising in the undertaking of the research project that is relevant to the ethicality of the study should be communicated in writing to the Department of Psychology Ethics Review Committee.
3. The researcher(s) will conduct the study according to the methods and procedures set out in the approved application.
4. Any changes that can affect the study-related risks for the research participants, particularly in terms of assurances made with regards to the protection of participants' privacy and the confidentiality of the data, should be reported to the Committee in writing, accompanied by a progress report.
5. The researcher will ensure that the research project adheres to any applicable national legislation, professional codes of conduct, institutional guidelines and scientific standards relevant to the specific field of study. Adherence to the following South African legislation is important, if applicable: Protection of Personal Information Act, no 4 of 2013; Children's act no 38 of 2005 and the National Health Act, no 61 of 2003.
6. Only de-identified research data may be used for secondary research purposes in future on condition that the research objectives are similar to those of the original research. Secondary use of identifiable human research data require additional ethics clearance.
7. No field work activities may continue after the expiry date (**2 July 2019**). Submission of a completed research ethics progress report will constitute an application for renewal of Ethics Research Committee approval.

Note:

*The reference number **2018-CHS-0030** should be clearly indicated on all forms of communication with the intended research participants, as well as with the Committee.*

Yours sincerely,

Signature : 

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