Exploring and analysing channels of communication used by the Greater Tzaneen Municipality to engage with residents regarding service delivery

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ABSTRACT

This study focuses on communication challenges regarding service delivery in the Greater Tzaneen Municipality. Service delivery is a contemporary issue that confronts citizens and the government of South Africa. In the Greater Tzaneen Municipality, residents most often protest for different reasons, some of which could possibly be because of what they perceive as poor service delivery or a breakdown of communication and feedback between the municipality and citizens. The study proposes that civil unrest can be minimised through amongst others, communication; therefore, it is important to analyse the channels of communication that the Greater Tzaneen Municipality uses to engage with residents regarding service delivery. The aim of this study was to analyse the channels currently used by the Greater Tzaneen Municipality to communicate with residents to determine the extent to which these channels facilitate two- way communication and how accessible they are to citizens. A mixed method exploratory and descriptive approach was adopted. Surveys were administered to 385 residents while semi structured interviews were conducted with four (4) municipal officers in the department of external communication of the Great Tzaneen Municipality. The sample included both males and females. Data collected through the interviews and survey questionnaires was thematically and descriptively analysed respectively. The results revealed that both traditional and modern channels of communication are used by the Greater Tzaneen Municipality; social media, radio and community meetings are utilised for immediate feedback. However, the issue of data and airtime for community members to engage on social media or with radio calls for immediate feedback is a challenge. The study further found that although the residents are aware of service delivery issues, their civil unrest behaviour does not change. Therefore, the study recommends that more channels that offer immediate feedback without data and airtime challenges be used, such as community meetings. The study also recommends that future research should investigate how awareness can be raised to change residents' behaviour regarding civil unrest.

Key words: Communication, Community, Greater Tzaneen Municipality, Participatory Democracy, Service Delivery, Two-Way Communication.

Contents

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

Service delivery is a topical issue that affects both citizens and the government of South Africa (Msibi & Penzhorn, 2010). Service delivery leads to development and social change and has far-reaching outcomes on the lives of citizens. Hence it is imperative for the government to ensure active involvement and participation in the affairs and activities of local government by citizens as an important approach to sustainable service delivery. One of the keys to citizen participation is accessible channels of communication that foster two-way symmetrical communication (Dahlen, Lange & Smith, 2010). This study argues that if citizens have no access to local government communication channels, they will not be able to participate in local governance conversations, neither will they understand the challenges and milestones of service delivery; one assumption driving the study is that since there could be many reasons why citizens are involved in violent service-delivery protests, it could also be the case that a lack of access to communication channels that promote a two-way communication process (the affordance of feedback facilitation) is contributing to the myriad of problems that lead to a breakdown of trust and rapport between citizens and municipalities. Dlamini (2014) outline that civil unrests emanate from public's demand for better service delivery; Motloutsi (2019) states that civil unrest is caused by citizen's response to inequality in the distribution of resources; Masombuka (2022) argues that social movements have become a communicative practice that the marginalised have used and still use to speak back to systems of oppression. From these scholars' perspective, civil unrests are a form of communication from citizens to government where citizens communicate their frustrations. Rasila and Mudau (2012) introduced a communication model relevant for effective public engagement which goes beyond just consultation and mobilisation of community members but sustainable members' participation. Netshitomboni (2007) proposed that 'imbizo' (which is a traditional gathering convened by traditional leaders when there is an issue to be discussed within the community) is an alternate solution for GCIS to achieve effective engagement with the public in another study, Conradie, Morris and Naidoo (2010) pinpointed Thusong Centres as resolutions to providing communities across South Africa with the necessary platform to engage with the government. However, the scholars have focused on mechanisms of government communication with citizens but not on channels employed by these mechanisms. The what to communicate with question is answered but the how to communicate question is not answered by the current body of knowledge.

Hence, the study aimed to analyse the channels of communication currently used by the Greater Tzaneen Municipality to communicate with its residents and to assess the extent to which the communication channels facilitate two-way communication and describe how residents can access the channels. Lastly, the study aimed to recommend appropriate channels of communication to the Greater Tzaneen Municipality based on the input of the participants. The Greater Tzaneen Municipality is in the Mopani District Municipality of Limpopo Province, South Africa.

The apartheid regime assumed control of all basic decisions that touched on development and service delivery, denying residents the opportunity to decide on their needs and the way these should be met (Tadesse et al,. 2016). The new democratic government sought to introduce a new governance model based on the 1996 South African Constitution which calls for accountable, responsive, and transparent processes to meet the information needs of the public and the right of the public to participate in their governance. In line with the model, local government entities are required to actively engage citizens in crafting their development policies, mechanisms, and strategies as the basis of participatory communication (Department of Provincial and Local Government, 2015).

In this era of participatory communication, the government needs to ensure that citizens have access to integrated channels of communication to ensure that they receive messages (Baker, 2013). Issues to do with service delivery have been gaining momentum throughout the twenty- first century (Bessette, 2016). Service delivery is seen as an intervention which is characterised by implicit as well as explicit effects on the public (Msibi & Penzhorn, 2010). Such effects require the active involvement of the public to ensure that all their expectations are fully realised. This puts communication at the heart of service delivery. Government entities and agencies should use communication as a mechanism to steer effective service delivery.

1.2 Problem statement

Local government entities such as the Greater Tzaneen Municipality whose mandate is service delivery require effective channels of communication through which to engage the public. Residents most often take to the streets to call for better service delivery because amongst other reasons, the milestones, and challenges regarding the delivery of services are not communicated to them (News 24, 2018).

Local governments are under pressure to enhance service delivery, but the situation is not improving, particularly in rural areas. The persistence of numerous difficulties in the local government system, as well as a rise in the number of service delivery demonstrations in South Africa, has prompted further questions about the role of local government in service delivery and development (Mdlongwa, 2014). Dahlen, Lange and Smith (2010) contend that civil unrest can be minimised through communication; therefore, it is important to analyse the channels of communication that the Greater Tzaneen Municipality uses to engage with residents regarding service delivery. Development agencies and governments admit that communication represents a key mechanism that results in effective service delivery (Bessette, 2016). Communication is essentially an expression of social relations between people (Angelopulo & Thomson, 2013). Service delivery is only possible through effective communication with beneficiaries. Collaboration, participatory decision-making, and genuine dialogue require communication channels that are defined by two-way communication (Bessette, 2016; Msibi & Penzhorn, 2010). The current body of knowledge focuses on the importance of involving citizens in service delivery issues. However, they do not focus on how this involvement should be implemented. Therefore, little research has been done on analysing communication channels employed by South Africa municipalities to engage with residents regarding service delivery. This is the gap this study intends to bridge. This study, therefore, examined how involving citizens can be achieved by exploring the channels used to communicate service delivery issues.

1.3 Research questions

- Which channels of communication are currently used by the Greater Tzaneen Municipality to communicate with its residents?

- How do the channels of communication used by the Greater Tzaneen Municipality facilitate two-way communication?

- What are the residents' preferred channels of communication for receiving information on service delivery?

- How knowledgeable are the residents about the Greater Tzaneen Municipality's programme of service delivery?

1.4 Research objectives

- To explore communication channels currently used by the Greater Tzaneen Municipality to communicate with its residents.

- To describe the extent to which the channels of communication used by Greater Tzaneen Municipality facilitate two-way communication.

- To explore residents' preferred channel of communication for receiving information on service delivery.

- To describe the extent of residents' knowledge regarding the Greater Tzaneen Municipality's programme of service delivery.

1.5 Theoretical framework

1.5.1 Theory of democratisation

The theory of democratisation has led to the "emergence of concepts such as empowerment, participation, and emancipation in the public service delivery and development process" (Msibi and Penzhorn, 2010:27). The theory posits that grassroots participation and involvement foster chances for the public to adopt appropriate activities. Public officials need to respond by employing the right channels of communication that will echo their approaches and goals to the community. This serves as an important way of encouraging participatory communication through public involvement in matters that affect them and to determine the course, solutions, and priorities they have pertaining to service delivery. South Africa has a history of oppression that dominated the apartheid era which was characterised by authoritarian governance. Under this style of governance, Black South Africans were excluded from basic rights such as participating in decisions pertaining to their own economic, political, and social interests (Tadesse et al,. 2016:17). The communities were mere recipients of service delivery and had no say in deciding how services were rendered. The 1994 democratic government sought to correct these injustices by introducing several principles of democratic governance. This resulted in the introduction of the 1996 Constitution, among a plethora of legislation and strategies to support public welfare improvement through participation and empowerment (Everett & Gwagwa, 2015).

In line with the new democratic government's goals, local government entities mandated with basic public service delivery are required to involve the public in their operations. The White Paper on Local Government (1998) required municipalities to work together with citizens, communities, and groups to create sustainable development. Under Chapter 2, Section 19 of the Local Government Municipal Structures Act (1998), municipalities are required to ensure that there are participatory systems that serve as the platform for meeting the community's needs. The 2003 Local Government Municipal Finance Management Act advocates for transparency and accountability so that communities are aware of municipal financial issues. There are also guidelines for setting up Municipal Ward Committees that promote democracy, structured communication, and participation between the community and local government (DPLG, 2015). Considering these legislative requirements, communication channels are the backbone to public participation as they serve as a means of engaging the public. This will ensure that the principles of "Batho Pele" are upheld regarding public service delivery.

1.5.2 Participatory communication theory

According to the participatory communication approach to development communication, change and development cannot come in a community unless "beneficiaries" partake in dialogic and communicative processes aimed at empowering them to actively participate in decision-making processes about important life-changing development projects. It is worth noting, however, that when studying the literature on "participation" in local government, it is rare for one to come across the concept of "participatory communication" being mentioned. This is despite the fact that communication (i.e. in the form of interpersonal, small group or dialogic engagement) is central, and key, to participation in the said context. Instead, common terms explored in the literature include "community participation", "citizen participation" or "citizen engagement", among others (cf. Ababio, 2004; Tshabalala & Lombard, 2009, Tau, 2013). This adds to the problem that the idea of participation (community engagement or community participation) is to be viewed in isolation, or in disconnect with, participatory communication. Notwithstanding, given that participatory communication can be criticised because is in an ideal and is utopian in nature (cf. Williams, 2004; Pieterse, 1998; Wald, 2014), it would be naïve to consider it as a "panacea" for addressing complex development challenges experienced by local citizens and their day-to-day struggle, alongside municipal authorities, towards change on service delivery.

Therefore, in this study, participatory communication is explored in the context of how participation, dialogue and empowerment are employed during communication of service delivery related issues in the Greater Tzaneen Municipality.

1.6 Literature review

1.6.1 Local government communication

The emergence of democratic governments across the world has laid a great communication burden on governments. Prior to this, a top-down approach was used whereby the elite made decisions for the people and passed them on without engaging them. According to Liu and Horsley (2007), government's traditional use of one-way models of communication (top to bottom), rather than two-way models, often limits dialogue with the citizens, thereby diminishing the role of public feedback. Mersham and Skinner (2015) state that for any democracy to operate effectively, governments should have two-way communication with their citizens. People have a right to know what their leaders are doing and why they are doing so. The government should also provide timely and adequate information to its citizens and reach as many people as possible. It is therefore important to determine whether the channels employed by the Greater Tzaneen Municipality foster two-way communication.

1.6.2 Local government channels of communication

Local government entities can employ different channels of communication to cover interactions between the entity and the community. As Nemec (2014) states, several channels can be employed in external communication. According to Steinberg (2017), the channels can be formal (recognised by the organisation) or informal (not recognised but result from community social life). These channels can be one-way or bidirectional. Andani and Naidu (2013) underscore that the government of South Africa employs different communication channels at both the local and national level. These channels are used for both convey information and to receive information from citizens or communities. The channels used include television, radio and newspapers, which are common formal channels (Andani & Naidu, 2013). In addition, the government entities also employ various other channels for communication such as public meetings, citizen forums that include ward committees, and community development workers. In most cases, these are downward channels although public meetings and citizen forums that include ward committees allow for two-way communication. This is beneficial to residents and the government in that two-way communication creates a shared understanding and eliminates conflicts and misunderstandings.

1.7 Previous Research and Research Gap

Past studies on public communication were undertaken as early as the 1950s following criticism of top-down approaches (Malan, 2015). There were reports and experiences of failed service delivery which resulted in the questioning of prescriptive public service delivery (Rahim, 2014). This led to a shift from prescription of development by government agencies to involving the public.

Malan (2015) highlights that the transition to democracy by several governments towards the end of the previous century brought about participation, emancipation, and empowerment in service delivery and development process. This brought about the grassroots concept of public participation in development activities.

Bessette (2016) revealed the need for transformation in municipalities to eliminate inequities inherited from the previous dispensation to ensure representativeness and democratisation. Bekink (2006) opined that municipalities need to be guided by different basic principles in the of process of service delivery such as fulfilling and promoting democratic values enshrined in the Constitution, for example, public involvement.

Moreover, Bekink stressed that there was a need for partnerships with community-based organisations, among others, which makes it important to explore communication channel used by local government in involving local communities to stimulate local development.

According to Ntliziywana (2017), public participation is only possible through effective communication. Local government entities are mandated to involve the public by various legislative instruments that include the 1998 White paper on local government and the Municipal Acts. The local government entities fulfil these requirements using various communication channels. According to Bessette (2016), use of diverse communication channels ensure that the public is engaged at all stages of community development and service delivery. This is particularly important in South Africa, where the previous apartheid dispensation denied citizens their right to be involved and to decide on matters of development (Tadesse et al,. 2015).

The studies presented above focus on the importance of involving citizens in service delivery issues. However, they do not focus on how this involvement should be implemented. This study, therefore, examined how involving citizens can be achieved by exploring the channels used to communicate service delivery issues.

The widespread service delivery demonstrations suggest that residents are not being engaged effectively, which can be attributed to the communication channels employed by local government entities. Lack of proper communication channels makes it difficult to communicate service delivery milestone and progress to residents (Rahim, 2014:118).

However, little research has been done on analysing communication channels employed by South Africa municipalities to engage with residents regarding service delivery. This is the gap this study intends to bridge.

1.8 RESEARCH DESIGN AND RESEARCH METHODS

1.8.1 Research design

A mixed methods approach was adopted in this study. In mixed methods research, the researcher gathers and analyses data, integrates the findings, and draws conclusions using both qualitative and quantitative methods (Creswell & Clark, 2011; Wallace, Clark, & White, 2012; Creswell, 2014; Wagner et al,. 2012). Priority can be given to either the qualitative or the quantitative method, or to both (Johnson & Christian, 2017). Mixed methods research involves the combination of data at one or more stages in the research process (Creswell, 2014; Castro, Kellison, Boyd, & Kopak, 2010; Johnson & Christian, 2017). In mixed methods research, data can be collected sequentially or concurrently (Creswell, 2014; Creswell & Clark, 2011). In this study, an exploratory sequential mixed methods design was adopted, which means that qualitative data was collected first, followed by quantitative data (Johnson & Christensen, 2017; Creswell & Plano, 2011). The researcher explored qualitatively first and then tested the exploration quantitatively with a large sample (Creswell & Clark, 2011; Wallace et al,. 2012; Castro et al,. 2010).

1.8.2 Research paradigm

Pulla and Carter (2018) consider a research paradigm to be the philosophy or worldview that frames the study. There are two main paradigms, positivism and interpretivism. Positivism is based on measurable observations whilst the interpretivism considers social constructs derived from humans in interpreting and understanding the natural world. The current study adopted both the interpretivist and positivist paradigm. According to Wagner and Kawulich (2012), the interpretivist paradigm explains multiple realities based on meaning given by the subject being investigated. (Wagner and Kawulich 2012:55).

This paradigm is relevant to this study considering the need to engage both transmitters and recipients of information to determine the appropriateness of communication channels.

The positivist approach will be used to investigate the phenomenon scientifically to discover a single objective truth and knowledge about the subject and to ensure that accurate inferences are drawn from the study's results.

1.8.3 Research methods

Scientific studies can assume several approaches which can be qualitative, quantitative, or mixed approach. According to Creswell (2013:97), qualitative approach involves use of non-numerical data to investigate the research problem from the real- life perspective. Quantitative data makes use of numerical data gathered from statistical measurements in connection with study variables. The combination of qualitative and quantitative approaches is mixed approach. The study adopted the mixed method which is known as the research in which the researcher gathers and analyses data, integrates the findings and draws conclusions using both qualitative and quantitative methods in one study (Creswell & Clark, 2011; Wallace, Clark & White, 2012; Creswell, 2014; Wagner et al., 2012).

1.8.4 Data collection techniques

This study used interviews and survey questionnaires to collect data. Survey questionnaires are frequently used to collect data from large groups of individuals in a short period of time (Wagner et al,. 2012). The survey questionnaires were administered to community members. A questionnaire was specifically designed for this study and administered in person to community members. A survey questionnaire was chosen because it enables an immediate high return rate (Aziz, Nawawi, & Ariff, 2018:2).

According to DeVellis (2016), a survey questionnaire is an appropriate data gathering method that results in high quality data that can lead to data accuracy and consistency. It automatically captures data which can be analysed immediately without the danger of errors. It is also more cost effective, saves time, and reduces bias (Sekaran & Bougie, 2013; Szolnoki & Hoffmann, 2013; Hair, Ringle & Sarstedt, 2016; Wagner et al,. 2012). Also, this method of data collection reduces the risk of missing data. Additionally, the in-person administration of questionnaires is more appropriate to this study now that COVID−19 restrictions have been lifted.

1.9 The population and sampling methods

1.9.1 Population

Population is defined as the entire group of subjects that is investigated by a researcher (Asiamah, Mensah, & Oteng-Abayie, 2017). Two different populations were used in this study, the community members, and the external communication officers of the Greater Tzaneen Municipality.

1.9.2 Sampling method

Purposive sampling and convenience sampling, which are both non-probability sampling methods, were used in this study. In purposive sampling, the researcher selects participants that are representative of the population and normally uses certain selection criteria to recruit the most suitable subjects (Etikan, Musa & Alkassim, 2016; Wagner et al,. 2012). The use of purposive sampling in this study was motivated by the need to include officials with an understanding of the topic who could provide meaningful and in- depth information. With convenience sampling, individuals who are readily available and are willing to participate are selected (Wagner et al,. 2012; Etikan, Musa & Alkassim, 2016). In this study, adult community members who were willing to participate in the study were included.

1.9.3 Ethical issues

The researcher solicited and was granted permission by the Greater Tzaneen Municipality in writing to use the Greater Tzaneen Municipality as the basis of this study. All the employees of the Greater Tzaneen Municipality who participated in the study did so knowingly and provided consent. The is for academic purposes. The ethical issues considered for the purpose of this study were informed consent, privacy, confidentiality, and anonymity. Before obtaining consent, participants were informed that participation was voluntary, and the aim, method, and the potential uses of the study were made known to them (Wagner et al,. 2012:64). Regarding privacy and confidentiality, the researcher ensured that the identity of the participants and any information disclosed by them that might harm or embarrass them was not revealed in any way (Richards & King, 2014:393). Regarding accuracy, factually. In terms of anonymity, the participants' identities have been omitted in the writing up of the findings (Bahri, 2018:265). In addition, ethical approval was obtained from a community representative and from UNISA and adhered to.

1.10 Summary

The issue of service delivery forms part of the government's agenda and is of concern to the public. For the Tzaneen municipality, an understanding of effective communication channels will ensure effective communication with residents regarding service delivery. This will result in improved engagement with the public as required by law and avoid public discontentment which can result in protests and violence. For the public, improved engagement will lead to enhanced service delivery. This study aimed to investigate the channels of communication used by the municipality and its community members. This chapter presented the background to and context of the study and clarified the objectives and importance of the study. This chapter introduced the study, The next chapter reviews past literature related to the study.

CHAPTER TWO: LOCAL GOVERNMENT CHANNELS OF COMMUNICATION

2.1 Introduction

The previous chapter outlined that communication is key in achieving citizen engagement. This chapter reviews past literature related to how and which communication channels foster citizen engagement. The focus of this chapter is on reviewing the importance of communication regarding service delivery between local government and the public, the purpose of communication in local government, and the role of channels of communication in the process. The chapter will also cover the theory that guides government communication with the public and identify any gaps that need to be filled to have a better communication process.

2.2 Defining organisational communication

Communication represents information transmission from the sender to the recipient (Argenti, 2017). In the view of Adler and Elmhorst (2018), communication represents a process of information exchange transpiring between two parties using a selected medium. It can also be considered a practice of information exchange done by sound, signs, symbols, text, and visuals (Barker and Angelopulo, 2016). In the professional context, communication refers to the exchange of information between people within and outside an organisation. It is therefore critical for organisations to identify the communication target to be able to mould the message to suit the recipient. Within an organisation, communication is vital as it ensures that messages are transmitted, relationships are built, and meaning is shared. Pauley (2010) underscores that organisational communication encompasses interaction with both internal and external stakeholders. Argenti (2017) emphasises that information exchange ought to be effective, that is, clear, using the right medium and ensuring feedback, to result in satisfaction. Mersham and Skinner (2015) outline that communication exchange ought to be free from obstructions to promote relationships of the organisation and stakeholder relationships in the entity. Therefore, communication between the municipality and its citizens must be clear, using accessible channels so that citizens can be properly engaged.

2.3 Local government communication

The emergence of democratic governments across the world has laid a great communication burden on governments. Prior to this, a top-down approach was used in which the elite made decisions for the people and passed them on without engaging them. According to Liu and Horsley (2007), government's traditional use of one-way models of communication (top to bottom), rather than two-way models, limits dialogue with its citizens, thereby diminishing the role of public feedback. Mersham and Skinner (2015) outlines that for any democracy to operate effectively governments should communicate with its citizens. People have a right to know what their leaders are doing and why they are doing so. The government should also provide timely and adequate information to its citizens and reach as many people as possible.

Local government communication can be defined as all the activities of local government institutions and organizations that are aimed at conveying and sharing information, primarily for the purpose of presenting and explaining local government decisions and actions, promoting the legitimacy of these interventions, defending recognized values, and helping to maintain social bonds (Mersham & Skinner, 2015). Local government communication concerns both local government institutions (e.g., governments, courts, auditor general's office, etc.) and local public sector organizations presenting a very broad range of forms (e.g., administrations, arm's length bodies, agencies, etc.). Viewed in terms of an organised process, government communication covers all formal activities, be they written or oral, regardless of the support used, and involving either a single individual (interpersonal communication), a specific group of people (group communication or mini communication) or an undefined body of recipients (mass communication).

Raadschelders (2003) argues that local government is part of the great country democracy being played out in local areas. Many citizens have the chance to be elected to executive and non- executive positions so they can occupy public offices. In these offices they must act in the public interest and think and speak in the same manner. They must constantly communicate with the public that elected them to office as a way of giving feedback on their promises.

Einstein (2019) claims that strong communication between local governments and citizens creates trust between them. The hope is that the created trust will get citizens to be more involved or engaged in developmental activities taking place in their communities.

Local governments communicate and publish a whole host of information which includes community development, health issues, education, recreation, crime, employment creation and interesting stories about its citizens. These issues have a direct impact on the lives of citizens and hence citizens have an interest in knowing how issues are being tackled. Rower and Frewer (2004) outline that local government needs to involve members of the public in the agenda-setting, decision-making, and policy-forming activities of organisations or institutions responsible for policy development. This creates a framework of working together and partnering in the complete process.

One of the main differences between local government and business communications lies in the purpose of the communication. Killingsworth (2010) argues that private sector organisations are established to make a profit and provide value to shareholders who fund them. On the other hand, the public sector is concerned with the public good and services that they offer and the social impact of their initiatives. Eller (2016) articulates that communication between local government and the people is not merely a managerial practicality or what should be done. It is political in nature, albeit moral, obligation that originates from the basic covenant that exists between the government and the people. Local government communications are often done for one or all the objectives below:

- Creating and maintaining an informed opinion about the subjects with which each local government department deals.
- Use all suitable methods of publicity, paid and unpaid, to help the local government achieve its purpose.
- Assist and advise on matters that concern the municipals and its public.
- Advise the local municipals of the public's reaction to the policies or actions of the department.

Local governments normally have a public relations department with communication officers to handle communication issues. Coombs (2012) defines public relations as the management function that is put by management be it civil or political to establish and maintain a mutually beneficial relationship between local government and the citizens on whom its success or failure depends. It is the use of communication to manage the relationship between any organisation and its stakeholders be it public or private. Flynn, (2014) outline that public relations is the strategic management of relationships between and organisation and its diverse public, using communication, to achieve mutual understanding, realise organisational goals, and serve the public interest. In local government communications, "public relations are the means by which an administrator interacts with the citizenry and is held accountable for all the actions of the public".

Howlett et al. (2010) stipulate that local government communications departments exist to carry out the following functions:

2.3.1 Communications research and analysis

Governments need to know what citizens are thinking (Mersham & Skinner, 2015). This process therefore includes a critical analysis of the prevailing public environment using public opinion research, media coverage, correspondence, or telephone calls to the department. This gives the government an opportunity to collect the views of the public before new policies and projects are introduced. Moola (2019) outlines that the government can achieve this through focus group discussions, surveys, public hearings, town hall meetings, or round table discussions. Ramotlhale (2020) argues that the use of parliamentary committees which review legislation and acts before they are passed into law, hold their own public hearings on government proposals and have been very beneficial in identifying public issues. Medupi (2009), Botha (2012), Meintjies (2015), and Oosthuizen (2020) conducted studies on how to eliminate civil unrest in South Africa and found that communication research is one of the factors that can help with eliminating civil unrest. They argue that communication research highlights the needs of citizens for the government to analyse them and respond to them. This study concurs with the argument made in these studies. However, the study argues that communication research and analysis should not only focus on the message element of the communication process, as per the focus of previous studies. Government should not only be concerned about what citizens think in terms of their needs, but communication research should be inclusive of analysing communication channels essential to reach citizens. This study is of the view that when the message is right but does not reach the audience then the purpose becomes null and void. The gap in the current body of knowledge is the necessity of analysing channels of communication used by local government to communicate with community members; this study intends to bridge that gap in the context of the Greater Tzaneen Municipality.

2.3.2 Communication plan

Unplanned communications have often resulted in disasters and unprecedented consequences in government departments (Mersham & Skinner, 2015). This has led to the creation of communications policies by governments that often determine who should speak, the media to be used and when. Having policies that guide communication will enable communication to be strategic towards service delivery issue. It will guide communicators to communicate to residents about service delivery issues and keep them abreast with challenges, progress, and milestones.

This engagement will create a good rapport between municipalities and communities, build trust and eliminate civil unrest as both parties will have mutual understanding on service delivery deliverables.

Currently, the South African government has the Government Communication Handbook (2014-2017) which outlines that the communication system should be grounded on the Constitution and Bill of Rights, which guarantee freedom of expression and the right of access to information – committed to openness. Also, government communication is guided by the Government communication Policy (2018) which outlines that Government communication is driven by democratic principles of openness and participation and is guided by the basic principles of transparency, and consultation. Chapter 10 of the constitution. section 195 (g) outlines that transparency must be fostered by providing the public with timely, accessible, and accurate information. The Com Task Report (2000:5) outlines that "the new government communication and information system needs to be better coordinated and more focussed in its messages. It should strengthen the capability of government to communicate its policies to the people, and be streamlined, credible, cost effective and highly professional. To do this it will need to engage better with civil society, creating a dialogue between government and the public".

The communication policies that are currently in place to guide local government communication with citizens emphasise what should happen in terms of communication, but the policies do not really stipulate how communication should occur. The municipality is guided on being transparent, credible, and creating dialogue, what is lacking is how do they implement this transparency, how do they create a dialogue with citizens, hence the study focuses on channels of communication to foster an understanding of how transparency and dialogue can be achieved.

2.3.3 Management of daily communications activities

In trying to communicate to the public in line with the strategy in place communicators normally choose an appropriate communication tool depending on the target audience. These can include news releases, media briefings, news conferences, advertising, speeches, publications, telephone enquiries, use of toll-free telephone lines, pamphlets, brochures, tours by ministers, special events (ceremonies, open house programmes), videos and, more recently, the use of Internet (which has opened the use of social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram to communicated. Most local government departments now run websites where information is readily available. It is however critical for the communications team to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of these activities.

They can analyse the news coverage, monitor phone calls, measure compliance or conducting surveys to evaluate how well a communications approach worked. Managing daily communication by the government helps in service delivery (Steinberg, 2017). When the government monitors and becomes aware of issues raised by the public at an early stage, they can respond to citizens on time and ensure that no critical service delivery issues are unnoticed to avoid dissatisfaction and in the end service delivery protests. Angelopulo and Barker (2013) argue that detecting a crisis at an early stage of warning signs such as complains can help manage crisis better, therefore, monitoring citizens feedback can help manage civil unrest.

2.4 Benefits of local government communication

Some of the key benefits of communication are illustrated in Figure 2.1 and explained in subsequent sub-sections:

Figure 2.1: Key benefits of communication
Source: Rahim (2014)

2.4.1 Result in public satisfaction

When government communicates with citizens on time, using channels they can access and a language they understand, citizens will better understand the milestones and challenges, progress gets to be communicated to citizens and they get to understand issues around them and develop a sense of satisfaction because they are involved through communication in government activities.

According to Nemec (2014), when citizens have open communication channels and mutual understanding with the government, they are likely not to take their issues on the streets through protests but consult with the officials utilizing that open communications system. In the wake of continued changes in public demands and the environment, there is a need to ensure effective communication. There is a need to shift from one-dimensional conventional means of communication to ensure public gratification (Daniel, 2013). The use of multi-dimensional communication ensures the satisfaction of all stakeholders and quick responses to changes such as population changes stemming from urbanisation and customer tastes or preferences (Malekane, 2014). Through effective communication, there is a shared vision which ensures public satisfaction.

2.4.2 Ensure quick response to demands and changes in environment

The new democracy in South Africa advocates for a responsive approach in matters of governance using various channels. Existent studies on government communication such as those by (Motha, 2019; Mudau, 2012; Botha, 2009) indicate that the major motivation by local government communication appears to be focused on interactive community mobilisation, rather than feedback to matters raised during such engagements. However, if local government communication is to be effective, then it is imperative that feedback is provided not only during a once-off interaction with citizens by government but also, and more importantly, as follow-up to grievances raised during engagements. The adoption of effective channels of communication necessitates a provision of quality feedback by government to service delivery concerns raised.

South African Government adopted the Imbizo and Thusong Service Centres as the main channels of communication to bridge the information gap and address service delivery backlogs in rural areas (Government Communicators' Handbook, 2014). Channels such as Imbizo are crucial to this study because it has become the most popular platform for engagement due to its direct, face-to-face interaction between citizens and government representatives. Imbizo is a traditional Zulu word, which means a 'calling', where traditional leaders summon people to solve societal issues of common interest (Mabelebele, 2006:104). Chaka (2014:358) notes that the practice of Imbizo is traditionally used to resolve community challenges by robustly and thoroughly engaging with traditional leaders. Participation through Imbizo would be an ideal way of involving affected community members with their own matters (Rasila & Mudau, 2013:14). These scholars conceptualise participation as relating to active community engagement in matters of development to ensure that communities identify their own development problems.

Inherent in this perspective is that the community is expected to be an active participant in monitoring and evaluating development processes. However, it may be argued that the Imbizo may not be the best forum to ensure effective participation, simply because it lacks feedback. As Kondlo (2010:390) observes, the Imbizo lacks a proper feedback mechanism and does not provide authentic community participation. In practice, the current situation of Imbizo in the Limpopo Province appears to be that feedback on issues of service delivery previously raised during gatherings is inadequate.

There seems to be no operational feedback mechanism to grievances raised during Imbizo by citizens. The Imbizo process is rendered incomplete and ineffective if there is no follow-up to issues raised during previous meetings, because the purpose of this gathering is to provide a platform for airing grievances. Therefore, it is not only logical but also incumbent upon the Limpopo Provincial Government to respond to development matters arising during Imbizo. The government ought to ensure that further feedback is provided as a follow-up to such gatherings to provide a cyclical communication process, an embodiment of effective communication. It is within this context that this study analyses the channels of communication that can foster feedback. Since feedback is a crucial benefit of communication, the study intends to explore other channels other than the ones used such as imbizo, to foster feedback.

2.4.3 Promotes warm relationships.

Misunderstandings and conflicts often result from a lack of effective communication. For organisations, effective communication is key to promoting enduring relationships (Steinberg, 2017). Green and Knippen (2014) accentuate that it is the responsibility of the management to design effective communication channels that promote transparency and clarity to stakeholders, thereby yielding improved relationships. The public is also willing to give their input if they perceive that there exist channels of open communication. The stakeholder theory guides organization to adopt a genuine engagements with their stakeholders so that relationships are built and business continuity is preserved. The study argues that when the Greater Tzaneen Municipality engages with all citizens, a relationship will develop, mutual understanding will occur and civil unrest will be unlikely to occur because citizens will feel part of the development process when genuinely involved.

2.4.4 Improved service delivery

According to Mersham and Skinner (2015), communication is key to the consensus of the public and the municipality touching goals and service delivery requirements. Free flow of information makes the municipality to be aware of public expectations. On the other hand, the public will also be made aware of the municipal capacities and requirements which all ensure delivery of services expected by the public. As such, communication channels that embolden bi-directional information flow ought to be employed for public satisfaction through improved service delivery.

2.4.5 Facilitates monitoring and evaluation.

There is a need to ensure that the activities of the municipality are as per set benchmarks and as agreed (Tadesse et al,. 2016). Municipal leadership can make use means of communication such as surveys and interviews to monitor and evaluate the activities connected to service delivery. Monitoring allows control of activities and correction of deviations as per set benchmarks (Argenti, 2017). Employees will also be able to execute tasks better in response to the evaluation outcomes, the study argues that responding to the evaluation outcome by the municipality will showcase the Batho Pele principle, increase responsiveness to service delivery issues, and build trust and legitimacy of the government.

2.4.6 Allows feedback.

Through communication, the local government will be able to give feedback to the public pertaining to service delivery issues. In the view of Nemec (2014), effective communication exist if there is feedback. When the public receive feedback, they will be able to be kept abreast and to hear progress pertaining to issues that affect them. More importantly, feedback allows the municipality to employ methods that foster effective problem solving and to minimise chances of conflicts that may end up in civil action. Steinberg (2017) supports that feedback is central in making well-informed decisions and is a key component to public participation.

2.5 Potential disadvantages of participatory communication

Despite the benefits that come along with participatory communication, there are several challenges that may be linked to participatory communication as highlighted in Figure 2.2 below:

Figure 2.2: Disadvantages of participatory communication

Source: Bessette (2016)

2.5.1 Power allocation

The use of participatory approach entails economic and political equitable power-sharing. This, however, results in decreased advantages to the authority. When power is shared, people in power might end up not wanting to take responsibility of their mandate because power is allocated to everyone. No one might want to account for work done or not done because all of them have the same power, time will be wasted in blaming each and fighting form decisions to be done which might delay the main purpose of government officials which is to deliver services to citizens.

2.5.2 Lack of skills by communication practitioners

Most public officials lack the required communication skills in participatory communication (Ayee, 2013). According to Everett and Gwagwa (2015), participatory communication requires the development of skills and approach by communicators. It is these skills that facilitate easy information exchange and consideration of public attitudes or feelings to ensure conscious manifestation of ideas. Lack of communication skills manifest negatively on service delivery or the realization of public engagement in the sense that issues of service delivery will not be addressed effectively or communicated to residents with respect to when and how they will be addressed. This creates dissatisfaction that might spark service delivery protests.

2.5.3 Community literacy

There are usually problems such as lack of education, technology and digital divide which may bring challenges to participatory communication (Argenti, 2017). The use of participatory communication is more ideal for educated citizens who understand the motive behind it. In this light, illiteracy disempowers the community from being actively engaged by the local government. However, the government is committed to bridging the literacy gap as evidenced by community literacy programs to educate residents about their rights as well as ways to communicate their grievances (Argenti, 2017).

2.6 Service delivery

The white paper on transformation and service delivery (1997) emphasises that citizens be accounted to about service delivery issues such as: health care, education, water and sanitation, fair justice system, sustainable environment, housing, and safety. It further argues that users of public services are to be consulted about their needs and priorities. More accessible and responsive arrangements are to be developed to enable individual members of the public to get something done if standards are not met. Public servants are expected to treat all citizens with courtesy, respect, and dignity. However, this will not be sufficient by itself. Standards of service cannot be raised overnight. We must live within the resources the nation can afford. That is why a key part of Batho Pele is a relentless search for increased efficiency and the reduction of wastage within the Public Service. Every Rand wasted in cumbersome, inefficient processes, in delays and duplication, is money which could be invested in improving services. The aim is to progressively raise standards of service, especially for those whose access to public services have been limited in the past and whose needs are greatest.

The Green Paper on transforming service delivery (1996) presents that improving delivery of public services means redressing the imbalances of the past, while maintaining continuity of service to all levels of society, focusing on meeting the needs of the 40% of South Africans who are living below the poverty line and those who have previously been disadvantaged in terms of service delivery, such as black women living in rural areas. The objectives to be pursued therefore may include that of welfare, equity, and efficiency, etc. It also means a complete change in the way that services, attitudes, towards new ways of working which put the needs of the public first, is better, faster, and more responsive to meet those needs.

It further stipulates that a fresh approach is needed: an approach which puts pressure on systems, procedures, attitudes, and behaviour within the Public Service and reorients them in the customer's favour. This does not mean introducing more rules and centralised processes or micro-managing service delivery activities. Rather, it involves creating a framework for the delivery of public services which puts citizens first and enables them to hold public servants to account for the service they receive - a framework which frees up the energy and commitment of public servants to introduce more customer- focused ways of working. The framework consists of seven simple principles, derived from the policy goals set out in Chapter 11 of the WPTPS, which are aligned with Democracy and Accountability.

2.6.1 The benefits of service delivery

As a critical responsibility of the government and its institutions, the sectors of public service must deliver services required by the society to first maintain and to improve its welfare. This becomes achievable when government institutions develop organisational structures and employ qualified personalities who should be assisted to offer and to deliver the proper services (Malekane, 2014). Raadschelders (2003) argues that public services can be considered a key factor to determine the quality of life which cannot be measured in terms of per capita income. Raadschelders (2003) emphasised on the importance of service delivery on poverty alleviation. Mersham and Skinner (2015) concur that the services are crucial to poverty reduction, and they can determine the realisation of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) directly and indirectly. This implies that education is enhanced, becomes available and affordable. Better health facilities, communication and information technology services and energy; reducing poverty and women become empowered through employment and entrepreneurial creation opportunities in their respective services enterprises Mersham & Skinner (2015).

2.6.2 Importance of participatory communication in service delivery

Participatory communication entails public involvement in all communication process stages. It undermines the concept of project implementation without involvement of beneficiaries and criticizes the concept of beneficiaries being viewed as passive receivers of a product (Thomas, 2014). It adopts the theory of information sharing, commitment, and trust as well as engagement in developmental matters (Schoen, 2016).

There are several benefits that underline participatory communication as illustrated in Figure 2.3 below:

Figure 2.3: Participatory communication outcomes
Source: Thomas (2014)

2.6.2.1 Power & control

The concept of public participation is consistent to the notion of generative control and power (White, 2014). Under development concept, participation entail strengthening power of deprived masses (Ayee, 2013) through equitable power sharing. This control help citizens minimise public unrest as it gives them a sense of ownership and input in service delivery matters.

2.6.2.2 Liberation

This concept upholds that people should be free to influence the course of their lives, and participatory communication brings liberty. Genuine participation is deemed as freedom and emancipatory experience (Thomas, 2014). According to Mersham and Skinner (2015), participation can be thought of as a learning process. This is based on the idea that individuals are allowed the opportunity to formulate their own decisions and pursue their own goals thereby developing their full potential (Ayee, 2013). With liberty, citizens will be able to make inputs and bring ideas on the table that pertain to service delivery. Once those ideas are adopted, there is feeling of gratification which reduce incidence of service delivery unrest.

2.6.2.3 Self-confidence and reliance

Participatory communication ensures self-reliance and confidence in the view of White (2014). It explicitly addresses development of self-esteem and confidence, thereby providing platform for manifestation of people's abilities, and nurturing self-confidence.

2.6.2.4 Knowledge sharing

Unlike in the past when the educated were the only ones within the domain of knowledge creation, dialogue and participation has resulted in knowledge sharing, generation and acquisition (White, 2014). In other words, knowledge sharing has become a reciprocal process as indigenous knowledge is also shared.

2.6.2.5 Honesty, commitment, and trust

Through reciprocal collaboration there is creation of trust, promotion of commitment as well as honesty for both those in authority and the public (Servaes, 2013). This is because participation is based on listening, respect, and mutual trust.

2.6.3 Causes of poor service delivery

According to Adler and Elmhorst (2018), some causes of poor service delivery in town councils may include: interference of councillors in administration; inadequate public participation; improper alignment of the budget with central government requirements; lack of administrative skills and political leadership; and inadequate infrastructure. Western Australia's Department of Indigenous Affairs (DIA) back in 1999 cited numerous hindrances to service delivery as: land tenure, inadequate land, and non-rate ability of the land.

Daniel (2013) revealed other impediments such as: central government agencies which circumvent the local authorities' involvement and approvals, infrastructure that is substandard, local authorities with limited power to enforce education and health services management and control and the polarized perceptions of the parties. Most studies focus on the challenges of service delivery in local government. A study carried out by Aminuzzaman (2010) in Bangladesh showed that some of the institutional challenges faced when delivering services delivery at local authorities' level include limited resources and manpower. When the responsibilities and workload are considered, the local authorities usually are understaffed.

Aminuzzaman (2010) further claims that the local authorities lack logistic assistance like transport and computers. They have inadequate managerial capability, and they lack resources to design and to run service delivery that is innovative in employment generation, education, and health. Furthermore, Aminuzzaman (2010) discovered that there is a lack of coordination, and this problem exists between the local authorities and the government extension workers who are responsible for service delivery workers at field levels. The widespread service delivery demonstrations seem to suggest that residents are not being engaged effectively, which can be attributed to existing communication channels being employed by local government entities (White, 2014). Lack of proper communication channels makes it difficult to communicate milestone and progress to residents on service delivery (Rahim, 2014:118). However, little research has been done on analysing communication channels employed by South Africa municipalities to engage with residents regarding service delivery. This provides a gap for the current research.

2.7 Local government communication channels

Local government entities can employ different channels of communication to cover interactions between the entity and the community. Nemec (2014) concur that several channels can be employed in external communication. According to Steinberg (2017), the channels can be formal (recognised by the organisation) or informal (not recognised but result from community social life). These channels can be one way or bidirectional. Andani and Naidu (2013) underscore that the government of South Africa employs different communication platforms on both the local and national level. These channels are used for both conveying and receiving information from citizens who are also residents or communities. The several channels used include television, radio, newspapers, which are the commonly formal channels (Andani & Naidu, 2013). In addition, government entities also employ various other platforms for communication such as public meetings and citizen forums that include ward committees and community development workers. In most cases, these are downward channels although public meetings and citizen forums that include ward committees allow for two-way communication. This is beneficial to residents and the government in that two-way communication creates shared understanding and eliminates misunderstanding.

2.7.1 Interpersonal channels

Santucci (2017) views interpersonal communication channels as ideal as they foster participatory communication. Munyai (2014) validates that they promote horizontal information exchange which is consistent with the concept of participatory communication. These include community meetings, public events, Imbizos, door-to-door campaigns by members of the Ward committee and loudhailers. Most of these methods facilitate two-way communication, for instance, community meetings, public events, imbizos, and door-to-door campaigns. This can result in public satisfaction.

2.7.1.1 Citizen forums (Ward committees)

Cowell, Downe, Martin and Chen (2012) consider ward committees as participatory structures employed by the local government. Malabela and Ally (2011) argue that these forums can be used for conveying information to the public, although they have not proved effective and functional as was expected. Piper and Deacon (2008) found that the challenges of ward committees include lack of resources and skills by members as well as party politicisation. In addition, committee members are limited as they have decision-making power that is limited and they knowledge of functions or responsibilities is often limited (Ntliziywana, 2017). It is sufficient to note that direct engagement through citizen forums do not represent an effective channel for transmitting information and enhancing relationships between citizens and the government. They are important for gathering feedback from the public.

2.7.2 Mass media channels

In the view of Santucci (2015), mass media are methods that are traditional and are key to upholding values of the public in the process of communication. These include radio from local community station, community radio, national radio stations such as SABC radio sations, national and local newspapers. Below is Figure 3.1, presenting mass media channels that local government utilises.

Aminuzzaman (2010)

Source: Santucci (2015)

Below is a discussion of advantages and disadvantages of mass media channels

2.7.2.1 Telephone

According to Bekink (2016), telephone communication has been beneficial as it addresses business communication slack. The add that where face-to-face communication is not possible owing to distance or other factors, telephone communication can be used. Telephone communication also ensure immediate interaction of parties and expand individual or organisational communication ability (Thomas, 2014). However, lack of facial expressions and other non-verbal elements bring a challenge in using this channel (Schoen, 2016). This further inhibit individual ability to interpret emotion or context of the message by the sender.

2.7.2.2.   Television communication

The method is important as it shows reality and allow use of audio. According to Mersham and Skinner (2015), use of television ensures easy understanding and wide coverage which makes it preferable. In addition, it transmits messages quick and engages individuals across the world instantly.

Body language can also be used which foster understanding than using audio messages only. However, the use of television is costly (Bessette (2016). It also lacks durability as once the program is carried out it may not be available in future. Furthermore, although television is formal, it results in one way communication which leads to ineffective communication.

2.7.2.3. Radio communication

Radio has been the widely used channel over the years until recently when social media began to gain popularity (Adler and Elmhorst, 2018). The advantages of radio are that it can be targeted to certain audiences. For example, when wanting to communicate to a category of people a station can be used which is preferred by that targeted audience. Furthermore, radio is less expensive when compared to television among other traditional forms. It can be replayed and is appealing even to rural community. However, it lacks the visual component and need to be paid for. Audience may be available only in the morning and evening as during the day they may be occupied by work. Furthermore, although radio is formal, it results in one way communication which leads to ineffective communication.

2.7.2.4 Newspapers

The newspaper also happens to be one of the main channels that was used in the past. The advantages of newspaper are that it allows broad reach as well as targeting right audience using special sections (Pauley, 2010). It can be accessed in many parts and can be used for geographic selectivity, where news relevant for the local town is published in local press or magazine. However, the use of internet has decreased newspaper readership especially for the younger audience, it is short lived and can be ignored as some readers are not concerned with some newspaper advertisements. Furthermore, although newspapers are a formal channel, they result in one way communication which leads to ineffective communication.

2.7.2.5 Billboards

Billboards are usually placed at strategic points and are huge to attract attention of many people (Argenti, 2017). They are simple and convey straight forward message, the same way with notices. They can reach a diverse and large audience and act as a reminder to those who see them daily thereby increasing awareness. They can also deliver a low cost as they can be used for large number of people. However, they are static and only covey little information. They may be difficult to target certain group. Furthermore, billboards result in one way communication which leads to ineffective communication.

2.7.3 Information technology channels

Notwithstanding the use of mass media, the growth in technology has seen new channel of communication such as social media, and website platforms. These are desirable as they allow wider coverage, are quick and facilitate instant feedback.

2.7.3.1 Social media

The advent of new information technologies has seen the rise of new communication technologies. The new channels that can be employed include municipal websites, social media (Twitter and Facebook), as well as mobile applications such as to mobile applications (WhatsApp). Citizens and government have both increasingly started to use these tools to communicate and interact with one another. Kariuki (2019) underscore that both local government and citizens have begun to employ the information technology channels. Moreover, the government of South Africa has put effort in expanding ICT's and using it for selling government services even in the rural areas. There are also Digital Community Hubs (DCHs) used by the public for accessing information (Kariuki, 2019). The public can also make use of mobile applications such as WhatsApp to alert the municipality on range of issues that include road-related issues, calling emergency services such as ambulance, viewing their account balances and lodging complaints. The information technology channels are deemed effective as they can be used to engage citizens and keep them informed, for example, schedules of load shedding. They also enable a wide reach.

Despite the information technology tools' proliferation, mobile applications and the use of the website is limited to areas with internet and the ability of the public to buy data (Tadesse et al,. 2016).

This directly impact local government-citizen information exchange. More importantly, some cities still need to upgrade their IT infrastructure and e-governance services to facilitate easy interface of local government and citizens.

Previous studies on local government communication channels

(Bertot, Jaeger, & Grimes, 2010) outline that traditional channels of communication that the government uses such as imbizo's are not as effective to promote dialogue, immediate feedback and constructive conversations between the government and its citizens. However, Disoloane and Lekonyane (2011) argue that community engagement such as imbizo are important for the reach of elderly people in South Africa. However, they are presented as lacking direction, where community leaders do not know what to engage their community on and how to engage them.

New media such as social media has become an important part of government-public communication (Tursunbayeva, Franco, & Pagliari, 2017). A recent survey reveal that 148 countries' national governments use at least one social media platform, such as Facebook and Twitter, for everyday government communication (United Nations E-Government Survey, 2016). During crises like emerging health epidemics and natural disasters government stays connected via social media. With crisis-related information seeking and dissemination increasingly mediated by social media (Austin, Liu, & Jin, 2012), government and emergency management (EM) organisations harness these platforms to inform, mobilise, and coordinate action at various stages of a crisis (Houston et al,. 2015). South Africa has also been whatsapping as one of the social media channels to keep citizens abreast during the global Covid−19 pandemic in 2020. The Tshwane municipality also uses Facebook to keep stakeholders abreast about issues of load shedding, electric outbreaks, pipe bursts and other crisis issues. Other ways that are used are: hyperlinks, replying to public messages, retweeting message-to-facilitate speedy diffusion, and using hashtags to building online issue communities. Although social media is normally used by government agencies as a one-way form of communication channel to inform the public about information (Graham, Avery, & Park, 2015), the networked feature of these platforms enables the formation of an ad hoc, multistakeholder communication network (Yates & Paquette, 2011) that is, a communication network directed by government organisations to target and engage various stakeholders.

When embedded in such a multistakeholder communication network, government organisations are not only able to optimise resource mobilisation for disaster relief, but they are also expected to manage expectations (Palttala, Boano, Lund, & Vos, 2012).

Mabusela (2020) argues that social media is mostly used by the younger generation as opposed to elderly people in South Africa. 90% of the age group between 19-29 years uses social media while less than 40% of social media users are 69-89 of age (Budree, Fietkiewicz, & Lins, 2019). The elderly stakeholder group of 60-89 years is crucial to the survival of the ruling government since they constitute a major voting bloc with 80% voting loyalty while age group 19-29 years voting turnaround is less than 50% (Scott, Vawda, Swartz & Bhana, 2012). Therefore, the crucial stakeholder groups are missed in engagements within the South African context when social media is used.

Public participation caters for the literate; when citizens are asked to comment on gazetted content, only the literate and those not outside the digital divide can participate. Therefore, this channel of communication is not inclusive of all stakeholders as per the argument of the stakeholder theory.

It is therefore essential for local government to engage with community members using channels that have no limitations for that community. As Mabusela argues, the one size fits all communication approach between the government and citizens does not work in terms of reach and effect.

2.8 Elements of effective channels of government communication

In the view of Muthambi (2014), information sharing does not suffice unless accessible channels of communication form the foundation of effective information exchange. The National Department of Communications underscores that communication is the main force behind strengthening the relationship between local government and communities (Muthambi, 2014). The benefit of this is that citizens can express their voice through the exchange of information to ensure accountability by the government.

Svara and Denhardt (2010) accentuate that the South Africa local government is mandated to provide public infrastructure and services and to engage citizens in governance processes. This makes it domineering for the government to continuously communicate key matters to residents ranging from policy decisions to planning as well as ways of resolving service delivery issues.

As such, mechanisms that foster effective information exchange are crucial in strengthening deep government- community engagement. Muthambi (2014) found that effective interface between citizens and government can reinforce government reaction and develop engagement of citizens. There are many formats or platforms through which the government can ensure citizens engagement. There is need to use the right communication channels that facilitate stakeholder engagement. The benefits of communication channels lie in considering certain elements when choosing communication channels as illustrated and discussed below.
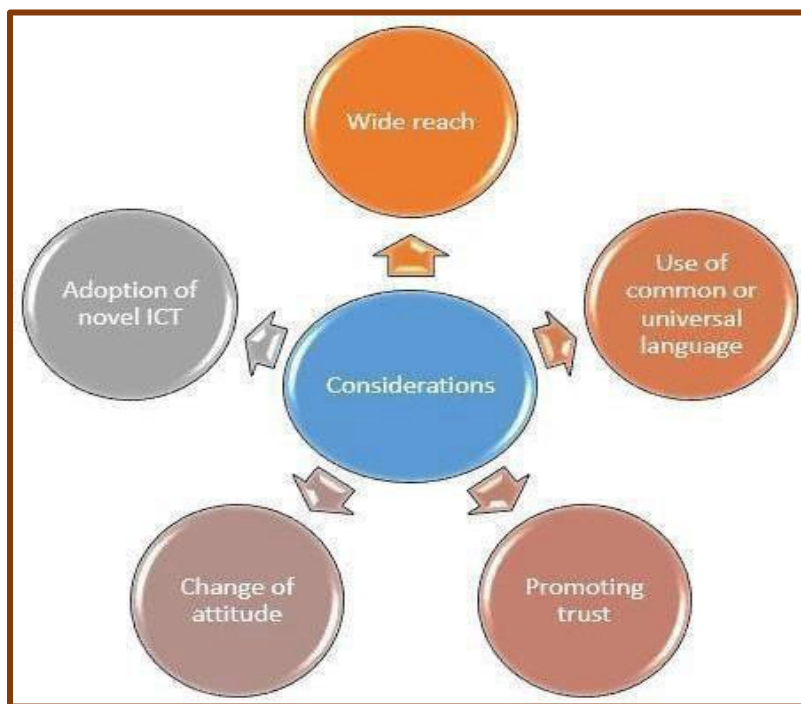
Figure 2.5 elements of communication channels
Source: Muthambi (2014)

2.8.1 Wide reach

The ideal communication channels should be those that can reach citizens in different areas. The channels that ought to be used need to ensure participation and inclusivity (Masiko-Kambala et al., 2012). If the channels used allow wide reach and access to information, there will be improved engagement. Wide reach has been a primary focus in marketing (Botha, 2019) where messages about products and services need to reach a wide range of customers. Little focus has been given in the context of government communication. The issue of government messages reaching a wide audience has not been widely populated in the literature.

The study will fill in this paucity and emphasise the importance of messages reaching a wide audience, channels that can reach a wide audience remain a necessity.

2.8.2 Use of common or universal language

Channels used should be able to convey information in different languages and more importantly a common language. South Africa is a country characterised by diverse groups that speak different languages. The local governments should strategically think of channels that ensure inclusivity of all interest groups such as the youth (Vivier et al., 2014). In the literature Beukes (2009) argues that language policy and planning in South Africa have become trapped in a gap between 'intention' and 'performance'. His research focuses on the implementation of language equity for public participation in South Africa. The scholar claims that there is poor delivery when it comes to language policy and planning which ultimately affects execution. Auriacombe and Meyer (2020) state that "a democratic government should adhere-to-firm public administration principles, legal instruments, structure, and mechanism". Language policy is a political decision, and political decisions should always serve the best and highest interest of the community or nation (Glanz and Ouane, 2010). This assertion is like the South African situation in that in post-apartheid it was a political decision that gave rise to some of the languages being included resulting in the country having eleven official languages. Bakhtin (1981: 294) emphasised the importance of language by stating that "language is not a neutral medium that passes freely and easily into the private property of the speaker's intention, it is populated – overpopulated – with the intention of others".

This, therefore, means the implementation of language equity must be intentional and spread across the rest of the population so that the message that is communicated is understood. This was demonstrated in the matter which involved the Xolobeni community and the government. The community was able to challenge the government because it understood the issues that were going to affect their livelihoods. Vivier, Seabe, Wentezel, and Sanchez (2015) argue about the importance of interaction between the government and citizens in strengthen active engagement with citizens. In South Africa, there are few studies done on the lack of linguistic diversity post-apartheid. The studies that are available highlight the gaps when it comes to implementation without providing insights on the failures that are existing currently. Hence the study looks at channels that are accessible in terms of language as well.

2.8.3 Promoting trust

The main hindrance for effective public engagement is lack of trust (Bekink, 2016). The channels of communication used need to promote trust, transparency and ensure clarity as well as feedback. This will remove the common perception of communities that the local government have paternalistic attitudes touching their service delivery role (Vivier et al., 2014). As such, channels of communication to be used should ensure full cooperation and cultivate citizens' trust leading to more effective engagement. In addition, channels used ought to foster citizen input (Fieuw, 2013). Moreover, the local government need to ensure the fulfilment of its promises to prevent public frustrations which leads to lack of trust (Vivier et al., 2014). Trust emanates from transparency which means openness, communication, and accountability. Transparency in the public services means a public office holder is open everywhere and every time as possible when it comes to issues of decisions and actions they take. In furtherance to this, they should be able to give reasons for their actions and inactions (Chapman, 2000). When transparency is radical in management, it involves decision making being carried out publicly. Richard (2004), in his work, "What is Transparency?" sees transparency as an active disclosure. Similarly, various scholars have defined government transparency as the publicising of incumbent policy choices, and the availability and increased flow to the public of timely, comprehensive, relevant, high-quality, and reliable information concerning government activities. Transparency has been generally supposed to make institutions and their officeholders trusted and trustworthy (O'Neill, 2002).

Transparency International (2015) defines transparency as a way of shedding lights plans, rules, processes, and actions. Transparent governments govern better because the expansion of information provides the existence of a less corrupt political market and, in turn, more efficient. From being commonplace, it has become a sort of panacea for the delinquencies of the public man and institutional inefficiency. Faced with incidents of corruption, there is a cry for greater institutional transparency, the opening of public accounts, and the moralisation of politics. Transparency is, in fact, a central element in accountability in such a way that the idea of political responsibility is part of any democratic project. The study therefore argues that channels used by the Greater Tzaneen Municipality should encourage transparency.

2.9 Theoretical Framework for Local Government Communication

2.9.1 Theory of democratisation

The theory of democratisation has seen the emergence of concepts such as empowerment, participation and emancipation in public service delivery and development processes (Msibi & Penzhorn, 2010). The theory spells that grassroots participation and involvement foster chances of adopting appropriate activities for the public. Public officials need to respond by employing right channels of communication that echo their approaches and goals to the community. This serves as an important way of encouraging participatory communication through public involvement in matters that affect them and to determine the course, solutions, and priorities they have pertaining to service delivery. South Africa has a history of oppression that dominated the apartheid era which was characterised by authoritarian governance. The style excluded the better part of Black South Africans from basic rights such as taking part in deciding their economic, political, and social interests (Tadesse et al., 2016). The communities were mere recipients of service delivery and had no say in deciding the way services were rendered. The 1994 democratic government sought to correct these injustices through the introduction of several principles of democratic governance. This saw the introduction of 1996 Constitution, among a plethora of legislation and strategies to support the public welfare improvement through participation and empowerment (Everett and Gwagwa, 2015). In line with the new democratic government goals, the local government entities mandated with basic public service delivery, are required to involve the public in their operations. The legislative basis of public involvement is illustrated below:
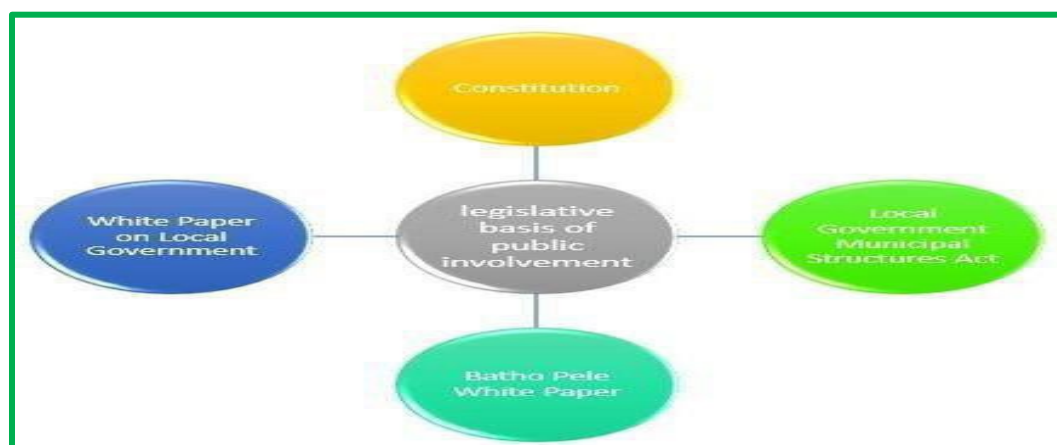

Figure 2.6 Legislative basis of public involvement
Source: Everett & Gwagwa (2015)

The White Paper on Local Government (1998) require municipalities to work together with citizens, communities, and groups to create sustainable development. The white paper is often considered as local government constitution. It visualises an inclusivity process where communities take part in matters of governance, planning, performance monitoring and program implementation by the municipality. As such the community does not become mere recipients of the process but become active participants in shaping their environment, health, and developmental issues. Under Chapter 2, Section 19 of Local Government Municipal Structures Act (1998), municipalities are required to ensure that there are participatory systems that serve as the platform of meeting the needs of communities. The guidelines also emphasise on the need to ensure attainment of objectives set in the Constitution.

However, SALAR (2006) noted with concern that whilst citizens want to come and be participants in the dialogue, some of them wants to have it on their own terms. This can derail progress due to such selfish behaviour. They further note that this dialogue must be meaningful and based on real interest from both the political players and the citizens themselves. In that light citizen dialogue should therefore be improved so that it becomes more systematic and organised so that it provides a better basis for decisions to be made. The Batho Pele principle advocates that people/citizens must come first. The eight principles to approaching service delivery by the government were designed to respond to the Batho Pele principles, the service delivery approach fosters participation and responsiveness. Considering the above legislative requirements, communication channels become the backbone of public participation as they serve as a means of engaging with the public. This can ensure that the 'Batho Pele' principles are upheld.

2.9.2 Dialogue theory

As prescribed in the White Paper on Local Government (1996) citizens' dialogue plays a very important process in creating policy and deciding developmental issues. SALAR (2010) says for a successful dialogue to occur the following should be considered:

2.9.2.1 Citizen dialogue as part of the government process

The issue of citizen dialogue should not be taken as a peripheral issue but as part of the process itself.

Questions as to what should be achieved and the importance of the process to development should be answered. Research such as that of Mabusela (2017) has shown that people are often sceptical as to whether their views will be taken into decision making. Therefore, genuine dialogue should have the potential to influence the decision that will be made. It should be an interactive tool that requires serious preparation before, during and after the process.

2.9.2.2 Distinguish between perspectives

There are three types of perspectives that must be taken into consideration. Firstly, is the organizational perspective which the local authorities would know very well? This can include internal issues such as knowledge about the financial situation of the local body, the work environment that employees are exposed to, the training needs, laws, and regulations that the authorities operate under. Such knowledge is necessary for the running of a functioning and efficient local authority that fulfils its employer's responsibilities. Secondly there is need to know the user's perspective. This means understanding the view of the user of the service delivery being rendered to them. This perspective is vital to enable the local government to determine the expected quality of service by the users. Thirdly is the citizens' view. Some citizens may not be necessarily users of the provided services. They still however have perspectives on whether the municipal is doing the right things, at the correct prices or costs and offering the correct quality. This is critical because they finance government directly or indirectly through payment of taxes, rates, levies, and fines.

2.9.2.3 The need to distinguish between decision time and dialogue time

Dialogue time means that before the decisions are taken, the citizens are given the opportunity to give their views on local government issues. The most essential factor in the dialogue time is that citizens still have the real potential to influence. The intention of the dialogue section is to create a range of options that decision-makers can choose from. During this time, different groups are afforded the opportunity to engage with each other and argue their respective views and values and support them with information where necessary. The politicians organise and participate in the dialogue process to listen to understand the various viewpoints from diversified individuals of different political affiliations.

They do not have to reply or explain anything since the decision time will come when they must make decisions. When the dialogue is completed, it is the responsibility of the politicians to make decisions. Decision time therefore means that the issues raised are then handed over to local government institutions set up to make local authority decisions, and citizens can hold the elected representatives accountable for the decisions that they make.

2.9.2.4 Clarification of the level of participation in dialogue

Local authorities should clearly articulate to the citizens the level and extent to which they can contribute to the dialogue. This is helps to remove issues of over expectation and encroachment to areas that people should not go to. SALAR (2018) says that there are five levels to the participation process:

2.9.2.4.1 Consultation

Means giving citizens the opportunity to say what options they think are preferable in a particular question. The starting point here is a set of options prepared by experts or officers and accepted by the elected representatives; citizens then choose their preference.

2.9.2.4.2 Dialogue

Giving people the opportunity to meet others to engage in dialogue on a topical issue. The starting point is that everyone should have the opportunity to make his or her voice heard and present arguments for his or her view in the matter.

2.9.2.4.3 Involvement

Means that people participate during a longer period and are involved in a development process, from a blank sheet of paper to a finalized proposal that will form the basis for political decisions.

2.9.2.5 Reaching the marginalised

Communities often have minority groups, the disadvantaged and the marginalised whose areas and places need more attention as compared to others. Interestingly such people do not also normally participate in these dialogues though they need more attention.

They do not participate according to Mabusela (2017) due to illiteracy, the digital divide and not having access to channels of participation. The local authorities should find means and ways to reach those communities by identification of prominent people within them like community leaders, doctors, and other recognisable people. Their participation in dialogues may change the whole perception of people and create new dimensions to the developmental thrust.

2.9.3 Importance of communication between local government and the public

Many studies on public communication were undertaken following criticism of top-down approaches (Malan, 2015; Rahim, 2014). There were reports and experiences of failed service delivery which saw questioning of prescriptive public service delivery (Rahim, 2014). This saw a shift from prescription of development by the government agencies to involving the public. A study by Malan (2015) highlights that the transition to democracy by several governments brought about participation, emancipation and empowerment in service delivery and development process. This brings the grassroots concept of public participation in process of development activities. A study of Bessette (2016) revealed the need for transformation in municipalities to eliminate inequities inherited from previous dispensation to ensure representativeness and democratization. The study by Bekink (2016) uncover that municipalities need to be guided by different basic principles in process of service delivery such as fulfilling and promoting democratic values enshrined in the Constitution, for example, public involvement. Moreover, the aforesaid stress that there is a need for partnerships with community-based organisations, among others, which makes it important to explore communication channel used by local government in involving local communities to stimulate local development. The study by Ntliziywana (2017) revealed that participation of the public is only possible through effective communication. Local government entities are mandated to involve the public by various legislative instruments that include 1998 White paper on local government and the Municipal Acts. The local government entities fulfil these requirements using various communication channels. According to Bessette (2016), use of diverse communication channels ensure that the public is engaged at all stages of community development and service delivery. This is particularly important in South Africa, where the previous apartheid dispensation denied citizens of their right to be involved and to decide on matters of development (Tadesse et al., 2015).

2.9.4 PARTICIPATORY COMMUNICATION

According to the participatory communication approach to development communication, change and development cannot come in a community unless "beneficiaries" partake in dialogic and communicative processes aimed at empowering them to actively participate in decision-making processes about important life-changing development projects. It views three themes, namely, participation, dialogue, and empowerment, as essential variables to consider when assessing the extent to which participatory communication is practised in a developmental process (Mefalopulos, 2008; Melkote & Steeves, 2015; Tufte, 2017).

In this way, dialogue, participation and empowerment are used to characterise participatory communication as a dialogic, communicative and mutually empowering process aimed at enabling stakeholders (i.e. beneficiaries, development planners, donors and municipal authorities) to collaboratively identify local problems and jointly make decisions concerning development projects needed to address the said challenges (cf. Mefalopulos, 2008; Tufte & Mefalopulos, 2009, Otto & Fourie, 2016) towards long-lasting and positive service delivery. It is also worth noting, however, that when studying the literature on "participation" in local government, it is rare for one to come across the concept of "participatory communication" being mentioned. This is despite the fact that communication (i.e. in the form of interpersonal, small group or dialogic engagement) is central, and key, to participation in the said context. Instead, common terms explored in the literature include "community participation", "citizen participation" or "citizen engagement", among others (cf. Ababio, 2004; Tshabalala & Lombard, 2009, Tau, 2013).

This adds to the problem that the idea of participation (community engagement or community participation) is to be viewed in isolation, or in disconnect with, participatory communication. Notwithstanding, given that participatory communication can be criticised because is in an ideal and is utopian in nature (cf. Williams, 2004; Pieterse, 1998; Wald, 2014), it would be naïve to consider it as a "panacea" for addressing complex development challenges experienced by local citizens and their day-to-day struggle, alongside municipal authorities, towards service delivery. Therefore, in this study, participatory communication is explored in the context of how participation, dialogue and empowerment are employed when service delivery issues are communicated with citizens at the Greater Tzaneen Municipality.

Participation

At its heart, participation involves creating platforms that do not constrict inputs from role players who can shape development agendas. The following typology of participation, as proposed by Mefalopulos (2008:11) describes four different levels of participation that characterise various forms of community/stakeholder (especially beneficiaries) involvement in development initiatives.

• Passive participation – stakeholders are informed about what is going to happen or what has already happened, and feedback is minimal.
• Participation by consultation – stakeholders provide feedback to questions posed by outside researchers or experts. However, this consultative process keeps all the decision-making power in the hands of external professionals.
• Functional participation – stakeholders take part in discussions and analysis of predetermined objectives set by the project. While this kind of participation does not normally result in dramatic changes regarding "what" objectives are to be achieved, it does provide valuable input into "how" to achieve them.
• Empowered participation – stakeholders are willing and able to be part of the process and to participate in joint analysis, which leads to joint decision making about what should be achieved and how.

This typology was adopted in the present study to assess the level of participation of citizens in the Greater Tzaneen Municipality when service delivery issues are communicated, a municipality needs to ensure that there is "empowered participation" to fulfil the legislative and theoretical requirements of citizen participation (Smith, 2003; Tshabalala & Lombard, 2009; Ababio, 2004). The participatory process should be characterised by extensive interpersonal communication and knowledge-sharing (Littlejohn & Foss, 2005) to reduce the possibility of self-serving agendas. Despite specific reference to "community participation" in the legislation, however, researchers have observed a dearth of informed deliberation and discussion on the quality and suitability of development projects conducted by South African local governments (Williams, 2006; Smith, 2003; Ababio, 2004; Horak, 2006; Mokone, 2007; Tshabalala & Lombard, 2009; Naidoo, 2010).

Essentially, participation focuses on allowing different voices to contribute diverse views regarding service delivery. An assumption guiding participation in participatory communication is that if stakeholders are granted the space for deliberation and decision-making on development projects, the process would be empowering and this will, in turn, enhance the quality of the relationship between municipalities and their communities, as well as create positive change towards civil unrests.

Dialogue

Education philosopher Paulo Freire defines dialogue as "the encounter between men, mediated by the world, in order to name the world" (Freire, 2000:88). In this way, dialogue is about affording all stakeholders a platform to jointly express themselves in the process of naming the world, and it cannot occur "between those who deny others the right to speak their word and those who's right to speak has been denied them" (Freire, 2000:88). Dialogue, as a "dialectical process of moving from thesis to antithesis to synthesis" (Bartlet, 2005:346) is presented as one where people (in their interactions) teach one another, learn from each other and, in the process, discover things that had been unknown to them all and lead to praxis – a state of transformation of their world.

Since municipalities cannot, without dialogue, perform their legislatively required function of seeking community participation, it is the only platform through which community views and perspectives can be "qualitatively" collected. In the Greater Tzaneen Municipality context, dialogue is facilitated through public meetings initiated by a municipality. Dialogue, in the context of participatory communication, means that all parties should be afforded equal status as they discuss or express their opinions during all deliberation and decision-making stages. This means that no view or perspective should dominate over others, and no party should be perceived as having control over others (Mefalopulos, 2008). This places emphasis on the idea of empowerment, a theme which will now be discussed.

Empowerment

Since local government is mandated with improving the quality of life for its citizens, this cannot be achieved without their buy-in, contribution, commitment, and support (Ababio, 2004; Melkote & Steeves, 2015).

Put differently, community participation and dialogue serve the purpose of ensuring that citizens are empowered from the spaces created for them, individually, to improve their skills by negotiating their needs in forums that are often viewed as obstructive, discouraging and intimidating for them (Tshabalala & Lombard, 2009:397). In this sense, an empowerment process for community members cannot take place if people, themselves, are vulnerable to coercion or manipulation so that they should accept pre-designed development projects during municipal service delivery meetings. On the contrary, empowerment can only be achieved if they could participate in decision-making processes in these meetings and to take part actively in project rollouts. This view is also supported by Silvio Waisbord's (2005:78) succinct observation that power is central to the conception that community empowerment should be the main goal of development and eradicating civil unrests.

2.10 Conclusion

The study sought to explore channels used to ensure engagement between residents and the Greater Tzaneen Municipality. This chapter looked at local government communication and found that municipalities are made up of different stakeholders with diverse requirements. The continued service delivery problems in the wake of inequality and poverty makes it hard for local government to comprehend and address residents' expectations. This makes it crucial to use different techniques of information exchange as forms of public engagement. Moreover, it is evident that the conventional mechanisms of communication are losing value due to many factors such as technology, the need to fight marginalisation and ensure inclusivity (Masiko-Kambala, Gorgens & Van Donk, 2012). The need to ensure empowerment also makes it crucial to exploit widely used channels of communication that encourage public involvement (Malabela & Ally, 2011). The next chapter explores how this objective was achieved.

CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH DESIGN AND RESEARCH METHOD

3.1 Introduction

The preceding chapter reviewed past literature related to the study. The literature revealed that the emergence of democratic governments across the world lays a great communication burden on governments because prior to that a relatively top-down approach was used where the elite would make decisions for the people and pass them on without involving them. According to Liu and Horsley (2007) government's traditional use of one-way models of communication (top to bottom), rather than two- way models, often limits dialogue with the citizens, thereby diminishing the role of public feedback. Mersham & Skinner (2015) outline that that for any democracy to operate effectively governments should communicate with their citizens. People have a right to know what governments are doing and the reason why they are doing so. The government should ensure that they choose channels of communication that are accessible and provide timely and adequate information to its citizens. However, the literature documents few studies that contend on the issue of proper channels of communication for local government in Tzaneen. The study intends to bridge that gap. This chapter presents how the study empirically bridged the gap. The research methodology that the study adopted is discussed. This includes research design, approach and sampling instrument for the research, data analysis method, ethical considerations, and study limitations.

3.2 Research paradigm

Babbie (2007) defines a paradigm as 'a model or framework for observation or understanding.' Wagner, Kawulich and Garner (2012:52) also state that the paradigm guides the research methodology, which is how the research will proceed. According to Nayak Singh (2015) and Denzin & Lincoln (2008), the two dominant paradigms in social science research are positivism and interpretivism. The interpretivist paradigm is concerned with studying and understanding the world as it is experienced by others. The interpretivists stipulate that to understand social action social scientists must understand the common-sense constructs that individuals use to make sense of the world and that drives their actions (Yanow & Schwartz-Shea, 2011; Saks & Allsop, 2013).

Interpretivists use qualitative methods and are concerned with the subjective experiences of people, how individuals construct the social world by sharing meanings, interacting, and relating to each other (Yanow & Schwartz-Shea, 2011). The interpretivists try to establish an understanding of experiences and lives of people by capturing the subjective meaning of social actors (Morehouse, 2011). Saks and Allsop (2013) argue that interpretivists believe in the principle that all knowledge derives from peoples' perceptions and therefore research must consider how human subjects understand the world. The interpretivist believes that statements on what is real or false are bound by culture, context and are historically dependent, though some may be universal (Saks & Allsop, 2013; Wagner et al., 2012).

The interpretivist ontological assumption about "the nature of reality holds that there are multiple intangible realities constructed by people and that reality is socially constructed and depends on the mind of the individual (Morehouse, 2011; Wagner et al., 2012). Therefore, based on the interpretivist ontological stance, there were multiple realities that were discovered about the research topic based on social construct and on the individual mind or experiences of the participants and cannot be generalised into a single common reality. On the question of what counts as knowledge, the interpretivist epistemological assumption articulates that knowledge is subjective and is a social construct and depends on the mind of individual (Wagner et al., 2012; Arghode & Vishal, 2012:155). Therefore, the study discovered subjective knowledge constructed by the participants based on their personal construct and experiences. The study adopts the interpretivist approach to understand the participants' multiple perspectives or experiences of the phenomenon as well as the subjective meaning constructed by the participants as communication should serve to transmit meaning.

The positivists' paradigm on the other hand uses quantitative methods and believe that the only way to establish facts and objective reality is through a scientific approach. The positivist researchers aim to gather and interpret social realities scientifically and objectively to ascertain the laws that govern social life (Saks & Allsop, 2013; Yanow & Schwartz-Shea, 2011). The positivist aim is to discover objective realities on the natural world. The researchers are of the view that science is the only foundation for real knowledge (Yanow & Schwartz-Shea, 2011; Arghode & Vishal, 2012). The positivist is of the view that knowledge is acquired by discovering the scientific and social laws that govern the world by establishing the realities concerning the phenomenon being investigated and drawing conclusions (Saks & Allsop, 2013). Further, according to the positivists, the techniques, methods, and procedures utilised in natural sciences provide the best framework for studying the social world.

The positivist ontological assumption believes that there is one tangible reality that is constant across time and setting that should be discovered by a researcher (Morehouse, 2011; Wagner et al., 2012). The positivist epistemological assumption holds that knowledge is in-built in the natural science and is those statements of truths and beliefs that can be empirically tested, verified, confirmed, or disconfirmed and are constant and can be generalised (Wagner et al., 2012; Arghode & Vishal, 2012:157). The positivist assumption also holds that knowledge is objective and does not depend on the researcher's interest and feelings (Wagner et al., 2012). Based on the positivist ontological assumption, it can be argued that employing scientific methods helps in discovering an objective reality in which can be generalisable.

In terms of the positivist epistemological assumption on what counts as knowledge, one has to say that the use of scientific method through empirical testing of the research helps to achieve objective knowledge and reality of the phenomenon without the researcher's interest and feelings. The positivist approach was used to in this study to investigate the phenomenon scientifically and discover a single objective truth and knowledge about the research and to ensure that accurate inferences are drawn from the results of the research. There are many research paradigms, however, the two paradigms discussed above were the most appropriate to this research. This is because the paradigms are considered as the best way of investigating the topic under study. The paradigms are also most closely related to the way the researcher thinks about the study.

3.3 Research design

There are various research approaches used in social research which could be multi-method research or mixed methods research (Creswell, 2014; Wagner et al., 2012). This study employed mixed methods research. The mixed method is known as research in which the researcher gathers and analyses data, integrates the findings and draws conclusions using both qualitative and quantitative methods in one study (Creswell & Clark, 2011; Wallace, Clark & White, 2012; Creswell, 2014; Wagner et al., 2012). Priority can be given to either qualitative methods or quantitative methods or to both (Johnson & Christian, 2017). It involves the combination of data at one or more stages in the research process (Creswell, 2014; Castro, Kellison, Boyd & Kopak, 2010; Johnson & Christian, 2017). In mixed methods research, data can be collected sequentially or concurrently (Creswell, 2014; Creswell & Clark, 2011). In this study, an exploratory sequential mixed methods design was adopted. An exploratory sequential mixed methods design is referred to as an approach where qualitative and quantitative data are gathered one after the other (Johnson & Christensen, 2017; Creswell & Plano, 2011). This is when a researcher tries to explore qualitatively first and then test the exploration with a huge quantitative population' sample (Creswell & Clark, 2011; Wallace et al., 2012; Castro et al., 2010).

Qualitative data was gathered and analysed in the first phase and then the results were used to identify items for a questionnaire that was tested further quantitatively in the second phase (Castro et al., 2010; Given, 2012:527). This method was employed to follow up on the first exploratory findings (Creswell & Clark, 2011). Also, the findings of the qualitative data informed the quantitative data gathering in conjunction with literature (Creswell, 2014; Castro et al., 2010).

An exploration is required when variables are not known or when no guiding framework is available (Wallace et al., 2012). It is added that it is appropriate to identify variables to test quantitatively when the variables are not known (Saint & Fetters, 2011:310; Castro et al., 2010). As such, priority will be given to qualitative method as it helps to establish the variables that are unknown, and which will be tested through quantitative method (Johnson & Christensen, 2017).

Therefore, a sequential mixed-method design was chosen to develop better instruments to measure the phenomenon as the exploration of the study qualitatively first and further tested it quantitatively helped to confirm qualitative findings with that of quantitative findings. This research methods led to better validity of the research as the study collected data that was supposed to be collected and yielded the same results when retested in the same conditions. It also ensured the transferability of the study to another context by also testing it qualitatively with a different population.

3.4 The population and sampling methods

•   Population

Population is defined as an entire group about which some information is required to be ascertained (Asiamah, Mensah & Oteng-Abayie, 2017). Two different populations was used in this study which were deemed as the groups that information can be gathered from to ascertain the research problem. The population comprised of the community members and externals communication officers of the Greater Tzaneen Municipality. The interview population were officials of the Greater Tzaneen Municipality while the questionnaires population were the community member.

•   Target population

Target population is the group of individuals or objects to which the researcher intends to generalise the findings of the study (Asiamah, Mensah & Oteng-Abayie, 2017; Pernecky, 2016). The target population for the questionnaires were the community members that were conveniently accessible. The target population for the interview were the external communication officials of the Greater Tzaneen Municipality.

•   Accessible population

Accessible population is the portion of the target population to which the researcher has access to or a subset of the target population (Asiamah et al., 2017). The accessible population for the study survey was the 385 adult community members. The accessible population for the interview were 8−12 external communication officers of the Greater Tzaneen Municipality which depended on data saturation.

- Unit of analysis

A unit of analysis is the main subject that is being analysed in a study (Alsharari, 2016; Terre Blanche et al., 2006). The unit of analysis for the questionnaires were individuals selected from community members while the unit of analysis for the interview were individuals from the external communication officials of the Greater Tzaneen Municipality. This is because the study analysed communication channels use by the Greater Tzaneen Municipality based on individual's perspectives. Investigating individuals is suitable in this study as there is a need to understand different personal constructs, opinions and experiences and quantify different individual perspectives regarding the study. As such, it was necessary to identify and investigate appropriate individuals who can provide better understanding and accurate information based on the research goal.

- Population parameters/characteristics

A population parameter is a summary explanation of a certain population (Thompson, 2013). A population parameter can also be defined as "a characteristic of population by which the nature and features of a population can be estimated" (Panti-May, Hernández-Betancourt, Ruíz-Piña & Medina-Peralta, 2012; Chegg, 2020).

The population parameters for the study interview were those who work in the Greater Tzaneen Municipality department of external communication who have knowledge in external communication initiatives. The population parameters for the questionnaires were those who are permanent residents in Greater Tzaneen Municipality and are over the age of 18, available and agree to participate in the study and are able to read and speak English.

- Sampling method

Purposive sample and convenience sample which are non-probability samples were used in this study. The possibility of selecting participants due to the accessibility and availability is considered when thinking of the appropriate sampling method to be used in this study. In terms of purposive sample, the researcher selected participants in such a way that the participants are representative of the population and normally uses certain selection criteria to ascertain the most suitable people based on the researcher's experience or ingenuity (Etikan, Musa & Alkassim, 2016; Wagner et al., 2012).

The use of purposive sample in this study was motivated by the intension of including individuals with an understanding of the topic and can provide meaningful and in-depth information. The Greater Tzaneen Municipality external communication officials were purposively sampled because they were best able to inform the study according to the researcher's knowledge. The participants from the accessible population were sought in a purposeful manner. Out of 77 officials in the Municipality, participants in the external communication department were considered as the appropriate individuals with the knowledge of the study topic, their population size of four participating was determined by data saturation.

In terms of convenient sample, it is a sample where individuals who are available and willing to participate in a study are selected (Wagner et al., 2012; Etikan, Musa & Alkassim, 2016). Therefore, adult community members who were willing to participate in the study were selected. In determining the sample for the respondents, Statistics South Africa in its Community Survey 2016 estimated the population of Greater Tzaneen Municipality to be 455 228, and approximately 72% of the population comprises of adults (Statistics South Africa, 2016). The sample of this study population was selected from adult community members, which is 72% of the population in Greater Tzaneen Municipality. Therefore, (0.72 x 455 228 = 327 764). Since the adult population of the Greater Tzaneen Municipality is 327 764 (which is greater than 10 000), the desired minimum sample size (*n*) was obtained using the equation adopted from Gay, Mills and Airasian (2011) who outline that If the population size is around 500 (give or take 100), 50% should be sampled; if the population size is around 1 500, 20% should be sampled and when the sample is beyond a certain point (about $N = 5 000$), the population size is almost irrelevant and a sample size of 400 will be adequate.

$$Sample\ size\ n = \frac{Z^2 p(1-p)}{e^2}$$

Where

Z is critical value for the desired confidence level,

P is proportion in the target population estimated to have characteristics being measured, and

e = desired level of precision (margin error).

Assume p = 0.5 for maximum variability. Setting confidence level to 95% and margin error of 5%, then the sample is determined as:

$$Sample\ size\ n = \frac{Z^2 pq}{e^2} = \frac{1.96^2 \times 0.5 \times 0.5}{0.05^2} = 385$$

From the above calculation of the sample, the total population in Greater Tzaneen Municipality is 455 228 and the study will include people from 18-60 years old. The population of the age 18-60 was 327 764 which was 72% of the total population. Therefore, the anticipated sample size is 385 which is (0.72 x 455 228 =327 764). Participants who were willing and available to participate in the study were included. Regarding the sample size for the interview and sample size for the questionnaires, it is known that it is not compulsory for the sample size to have proportional relationship to the population size from which it is drawn (Pernecky, 2016; Blumberg et al., 2008). However, the sample size is a function of the variation in the population parameters being examined as well as the precision that the researcher needs. It is considered that the greater the variation within the population the larger the sample should be to provide estimation precision (Keyton, 2011; Pernecky, 2016). It is also known that "the larger the sample, the more representative it is of the population; this increases the generalisability of the results to the population" (Wagner et al., 2012).

3.5 Data collection techniques

This study used interviews and survey questionnaires as the data collection methods. Survey questionnaires are frequently used to collect data from large groups of individuals in a quite short period of time (Wagner et al., 2012; Eleftheriou, 2013). The survey questionnaires were administered to the community members. A personal questionnaire was designed and administered personally to community members. A survey questionnaire was chosen because it enabled an immediate high return rate (Aziz, Nawawi & Ariff, 2018:2). According to DeVellis (2016), a survey questionnaire is an appropriate data gathering method that results to high quality data that can lead to data accuracy and consistency. It automatically captures data which can be analysed immediately without the danger of errors. It is also more cost effective, saves time, and reduces bias (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016; Szolnoki & Hoffmann, 2013; Hair, Ringle &

Sarstedt, 2016; Wagner et al., 2012). Also, this method of data collection reduces the risk of missing data. Additionally, personal questionnaires were more appropriate to this study now due to Covid−19 restrictions being lifted.

The questionnaires had closed-ended questions with a 7-point Likert scale format ranging from strongly disagree, disagree, somewhat disagree, neither agree nor disagree, somewhat agree, agree, and strongly agree, which was administered to adult community members (Formplus Blo, 2020; Cummings, Kohn & Hulley, 2013; Zohrabi, 2013). Several studies have revealed a 7-point Likert scale to be more accurate and easier to use and a better reflection of true evaluation of respondents (Jacobsen, Snyder & Saultz, 2014; Tsai & McGill, 2011; Finstad, 2010). The questionnaires comprised of 14 questions linked to the research questions, literature, and problem statement.

Interviews were conducted with the external communication officials of the Greater Tzaneen Municipality. The reason interviews were only conducted with the external communication officials is because they know the channels of communication used to engage with community members on service delivery in the Greater Tzaneen Municipality. This allowed the study to explore deeply the channels used, why and how; interviews also allowed for in-depth understanding of the topic at hand as follow up questions were used. Also, the target population for interviews did not make up a large population and according to Creswell (2012) interviews are suitable for a smaller population size.

For the interviews, semi-structured face-to-face interviews were utilised in this study, and were conducted with the Municipal officials from the department of external communication. A semi-structured interview guide is formulated to enable the researcher to set a list of basic questions that describe the line of inquiry, but participants were allowed to respond in their own way (Wagner et al., 2012:102). Interview questions were formulated considering items that needed to be investigated and from the literature review. Interviews were chosen as they enabled the gathering of a large amount of data in a shorter period. This means that it took less time to discover a deeper insight within a short period (Priority Metrics Group, 2020; Wagner et al., 2012; Szolnoki & Hoffmann, 2013). It also allowed probing and the gathering of more responses and in-depth information from the participants' experience by treating the question just like a discussion (Priority Metrics Group, 2020; DeVellis, 2016).

Semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions were used, which enabled the participants to respond flexibly in their own words (Cummings, Kohn & Hulley, 2013; Newcomer, Hatry & Wholey, 2015). The questions made provision to elicit other responses. The researcher approached the manager of the Great Tzaneen Municipality for a permission letter and contact details of participants. When permission was granted, the researcher approached the external communication officials for an interview debriefing. The researcher then sent an information sheet and consent form to the manager's email who forwarded them to the participants. After that, the researcher went to the manager's office and collected the completed consent form and made arrangement with the manager for the day of interviews with those who agreed and completed the consent form to participate in the study. The researcher was then furnished with the phone numbers of the participants from the manager and phoned the participants for face-face interview dates and times.

Questions for the interview were developed in line with the research questions in conjunction with the literature. The interview participants were asked for permission to record the interview. The researcher transcribed responses and recorded the session for information that might be missed during transcription. The data was securely saved in the dropbox using a password. Also, after the collected data was fully transcribed, it was entered into an excel spread sheet and was saved using a password. The questions of the interviews and questionnaires started with demographic information and ended up with specific to general questions. Before the actual questionnaires administration and conducting of interviews, pre-testing of the questionnaire and the interview was conducted to ascertain if there will be any problem with the research questions. A pilot study was conducted with small group of the interview participants and survey respondents to identify the potential problem with the research instruments as discussed in the next section.

3.6. Pilot study

A pilot study is one of the most important stages in any research project (Hassan, Schattner & Mazza 2006:70; Hazzi & Maldaon, 2015:53). It is a study that precedes the main study. It is a small investigation to examine the feasibility of research instruments before the main study is conducted (Gumbo 2014; Ismail, Kinchin & Edwards, 2018).

It is important for researchers to first conduct a pilot study so that they know beforehand whether the study they intend embarking on is worth spending time and resources on, rather than wait to find out in the middle of the study. Through a pilot study, the researcher tries all research techniques and methods to see whether they are feasible or not; if they are, then the researcher will encounter no problems during the main study. However, if problems are discovered during the pilot study, then the researcher will be able to modify them accordingly, this will ensure that the main study encounters no problems. Pilot studies are useful in that they help improve the efficiency and the quality of the main study (Hazzi & Maldaon, 2015; Doody & Doody, 2015). Nonetheless, researchers should bear in mind that pilot studies do have some limitations and might not always be successful (Van Teijlingen & Hundley, 2001).

Even though researchers may complete a pilot study successfully, this is not a guarantee that the main study will also be completed successfully. Some problems may only surface during the larger study which did not surface during the pilot study. Apart from that, there might be a confusion when the same people who participated in the pilot study participate in the main study and yet new information is collected from them (Van Teijlingen & Hundley 2001:2). However, these limitations do not surpass the fact that pilot studies are useful and that researchers should always make use of them.

The researcher in this study conducted a pilot study on the citizens and officials of the Greater Tzaneen Municipality. The pilot study tested the feasibility of the research methods that were used in this study. According to Hazzi and Maldaon (2015:53), the pilot sample maybe derived from 10-20% of the main population; therefore, the researcher in this study conducted two interviews and administered 20 surveys for the pilot.

3.7 Data analysis and interpretation

To analyse quantitative data, the researcher used a statistical program which helped to determine the mean, median and mode. The researcher in this study used univariate analysis since qualities of one variable were analysed at a time (Walkman, 2011:117); moreover, descriptive statistics in the form of tables and graphics were also used. Descriptive statistics are a "mathematical summarisation of data" (Given, 2008:209).

The researcher took the large amount of data collected through questionnaires, then summarised and converted it mathematically into a few numbers that were easier to interpret and explain. These descriptive statistics were useful to this study as they enhanced legitimacy such as transferability, reliability, among others. This means that results of this study can be repeated or retested. The researcher in this study categorised descriptive statics in two ways; numerically using the three measures of central tendency and graphically through using tables and graphics. The central tendency was measured through the mean, medium and mode. To get the mean, the researcher summarised all scores and divided that by the number of test scores. To get the median, the researcher calculated the middle score of all achieved scores. Lastly to get the mode, the researcher looked at the most common achievement score (Given, 2008:210).

When analysing quantitative data, firstly the researcher took the raw data, which was filled questionnaires, and transformed them into an electronic format. Then the researcher continued to prepare data through coding, entering, and cleaning. During the coding process, the researcher transformed information from one form to another. Data from the questionnaire was changed to a numerical format that was understood by the analysing program (Terre Blanche et al., 2006:189). For instance, when using a Likert-type scale in a questionnaire, Strongly Agree was coded number '1' while Strongly Disagree was coded number '7'. Here, words were replaced by numbers. The researcher then entered the numerical codes into the computer. Rows were labelled according to cases while columns were labelled according to scores on specific variables.

The last step of preparing data was the cleaning stage, during coding and entering data, there might be errors which are dangerous as they render the results of the study invalid. Therefore, it was of utmost importance that the researcher checks and rechecks the data for errors, of which were corrected when found to produce valid and conclusive results (Terre Blanche et al., 2006:192).

To analyse qualitative data, interviews were transcribed. After transcribing, the researcher had to familiarise herself with the transcripts, this was achieved by reading them over and over. This enabled the researcher to know what kind of information is available and where it is found. When the researcher was fully familiar with the data, themes were induced by organising data into main themes and sub themes. Then the researcher continued by coding data, "coding is an important step of forming typologies as it facilitates the organisation of copious data" (Walliman & Baiche, 2001:262).

This is where the researcher identified interesting features and stages and distinguished them with labels. Labels enabled data to be easily identified as the researcher knew what type of data is found where. Then the researcher moved onto the elaboration stage where the researcher checked if data was categorised well. Also, the researcher was closely examining themes and elaborated on them until no new information surfaced. Lastly, the researcher assembled the interpretation and double checked if the information was objective and if there were no contradicting points.

The qualitative data collected for this study was analysed with a thematic analysis and with the support of the QDA miner software program.

Thematic analysis

The thematic analysis consists of a 6-step process that entails the following:

Step 1: Develop an understanding of the data: The data collected with the interviews was transcribed into MS Word documents and uploaded into the QDA software program.

Step 2: Generation of initial codes: The research objectives of the study were used to generate initial coding that from the base of the analysis.

Step 3: Searching for patterns of meaning: The documents were loaded into a software programme QDA miner. Patterns of meaning were identified and link to the code. New codes were created for new patterns of meaning that was identified.

Step 4: Reviewing themes: Similar patterns of meaning were grouped into themes.

Step 5: Define and naming themes: These themes were named, and a thematic map was created.

Step 6: Creation of findings report: The thematic map structure was used to write the findings report. Analysis findings were supported by quotes from the participants (Clarke & Braun, 2013).

3.8 Rigour

Research differs in many ways. In social science, intangible constructs are being measured, that is, the things that cannot be touched or physically seen such as behaviour, perceptions, attitudes, personality, and emotions (Heale & Twycros, 2015; Wagner, 2012).

Due to this, social scientists depend on interviews, drawings, questionnaires, and other abstract forms of data gathering to conduct research. Reliability and validity which are mainly linked with quantitative research as well as credibility and trustworthiness which are associated with qualitative research must be considered in research to ensure truthful, accurate and dependable measurement (Heale & Twycros, 2015:66; Middleton, 2019).

In quantitative research, data is collected through measuring scales and observations but depends on whether the methods of collecting data are gathering the data that is intended to be gathered and whether the data will yield the same results every time it is used under the same situations with the same respondents. This is about research reliability and validity in quantitative research (Wagner et al., 2012:80; Heale & Twycros, 2015; Drost, 2011:67). Reliability is concerned with consistency of measurement and/or the degree to which findings are repeatable. A measurement can be considered reliable if the same result can be consistently achieved by employing the same methods under the same situations (Middleton, 2019; Wagner et al., 2012:80; Walliman, 2011:179). This applies both to entire outcomes of the study and to scores on measures of individuals.

Reliability is a very valued criterion that shows the conclusiveness and accuracy of results in relation to the positivists who believe in studying a constant and unchanging truth (Drost, 2011:105). Validity focuses on measuring what is supposed to be measured and the extent to which research conclusions are sound (Heale & Twycros, 2015:67; Middleton, 2019; Wagner et al., 2012:80; Drost, 2011:105). It is concerned with accuracy of measure.

Middleton (2019) asserts that research that has high validity shows that it yields results that correspond to true characteristics, properties, and variations in the social or physical world. Experimentalists and quantitative researchers usually plan studies by recognising a set of certain validity threats in advance, and then adjusting for these. Such researchers usually employ experimental arrangements, tested, and tried measures and statistical methods to ensure that truthful inferences can be drawn from the findings of the research (Middleton, 2019; Drost, 2011).

Two different types of validity which are relevant to this study are discussed further: internal validity and external validity. Internal validity is the extent to which observed findings represent the fact in the population studied (Patino & Ferreira, 2018:183). It is also the degree to which causal inferences can be drawn (Terre Blanche et al., 200:90).

The study achieved internal validity through having no error on the research methodologies. The research included the appropriate selection of data collection techniques, data analysis methods and appropriate selection of sampling size. Also, internal validity of the questionnaire was ensured as the content of the items in the questionnaire were compared with the relevant content domain for the construct being measured and by the literature review that has been conducted on the related topic of this study. A relevant population was studied. External validity is the degree to which it is possible for research results to be generalised from the context of the study and from the data to the larger populations and settings (Pandey & Patnaik, 2014:5743; Terre Blanche et al., 200:90). This study ensured larger inclusion criteria of the sample that can represent the population to increase the generalisability of the findings to the population.

Regarding credibility and trustworthiness of the research, qualitative researchers focus on accurate measurement and use the terms credible and trustworthy rather than valid and reliable. In qualitative research, the main criteria that ensures credible and trustworthy are credibility, dependability, transferability, and confirmability (Noble & Smith, 2015:34; Wagner et al., 2012:137). Qualitative researchers argue that some studies are better than others, and the researchers propose that research can be assessed according to its credibility.

Credibility uses persistence observation, peer debriefing, and prolong engagement and triangulation (Wagner et al., 2012). Credible research yields result that are believable, convincing, dependable, and transferable to other context and people (Heale & Twycros, 2015:67; Middleton, 2019). To ensure the credibility of this research the researcher used triangulation where the same phenomenon was studied using different methods. Interviews and surveys were used to measure the same thing.

Dependability in qualitative research refers to different strategies used to ensure that what the study presents as the findings of research is credible and trustworthy. It considers the use of different sources of information, various data collection instruments and different researchers to measure the same thing to increase the trustworthiness and credibility of the research findings (Wagner et al., 2012; Anney, 2014:278). Therefore, to ensure the dependability of the research, the researcher sourced different sources of information; the literature, external communication officers of the Greater Tzaneen Municipality and the community members of the Greater Tzaneen Municipality.

Confirmability focuses on making sure that results are grounded in the data and assessing the degree of biases present to prove that the data and results were obtained from events and not from the construction of the researcher (Wagner et al., 2012). Confirmability can also be ensured through an audit trail. This enables a researcher to trace findings of the research step by step and record all the things that are done from the start to the end of the research (Shenton, 2004:72). Therefore, all the materials, raw data and records were kept very well as a confirmation that the findings are not the researcher's construction nor the researcher's judgement.

Transferability refers to the degree to which one set of results can be applied to another context (Saks & Allsop, 2013; Moon, Brewer, Januchowski-Hartley, Adams & Blackman, 2016:3). Qualitative research focuses on understanding certain phenomenon and then look at the potential transferability of these understandings to another context. It also focuses on providing a thick description and maintaining all versions of the data in their original forms (Wagner et al., 2012:243). The transferability of this study was maintained to its original forms and thick description of the data was presented.

The stance of this study concerning validity and reliability as well as the credibility and trustworthiness of the research are discussed below: The use of mixed method enhanced the validity and reliability as well as the credibility and trustworthiness of this study. In the first place, employing mixed methods helps to confirm qualitative results with those of quantitative results.

Therefore, results of the study can be retested, and the same result will be found. Moreover, the reliability and validity of quantitative instrument of this study was achieved through a pre-test of the questionnaire in form of a pilot study that were administered to a smaller group of respondents before the actual questionnaire administration. Since the interpretivists believe on subjectivity in discovering the social world, the qualitative instruments helped to provide in-depth information of the situation being studied depending on the experiences and subjective meaning of the participants, thereby increasing credibility and trustworthiness of the research findings. Also, questions were treated like a conversation during the interviews and participants were made-to-feel a more degree of anonymity online and probably responded to questions with honesty which will ensure the credibility, transferability, confirmability, and dependability of the research findings.

3.9 Ethical considerations

The researcher has solicited permission to use the Greater Tzaneen Municipality as a basis of the research study. All the employees of the municipality who participated in the study did so knowingly and with consent. The research was used for academic purposes. The ethical issues considered for the purpose of this study were the informed consent, privacy and confidentiality and anonymity. In terms of the informed consent, participants were informed of being involved in the study without force, and the aim, method and the potential uses of the study was made known to the participants (Wagner et al., 2012:64). Participants were made aware of the purpose of the research through the consent form and that it is for degree purposes. Regarding privacy and confidentiality, the researcher ensured that the identity of participants and any information disclosed by participants that may harm or embarrass participants were not revealed in any way (Richards & King, 2014:393). Regarding accuracy, this study ensured that data is reported factually. In terms of anonymity, this study ensured that personal identities of participants are omitted especially during the writing up of the findings (Bahri 2018:265). Another ethical concerned that was regarded in the study is voluntary participation, where participants were not forced to participate and could withdraw from the study at any time, the issue of voluntary participation was discussed during a debarring and was also available on the participant information sheet. Beneficence and non-maleficence is another ethical issue that was observed by the study through ensuring that no harm befell participants, the study was conducted at a community hall that is safe. Management of information was ensured by encouraging participant to use alphabets or numbers to label their survey sheets so that their personal information is protected; the responses were captured online and protected with a password and hard copies were stored in a safe that only the researcher has access to. Debriefing of participants also occurred where participants were informed of what the research is about, why their participation is important, what was expected of them, how they should participate, and were given an opportunity to ask questions.

Data was gathered online to ensure participants are protected from the Covid harm. Further, to ensure that these ethical issues were maintained, approval was obtained from the Municipality and community representative and UNISA. The study also adhered to UNISA's code of ethics and guidelines.

3.10 Conclusion

The chapter presented the research methodology used to analyse communication channels used by the Greater Tzaneen Municipality to communicate service delivery issues with community members. The chapter included a discussion of the research design. approach and sampling. instrument for the research. data analysis method. and ethical considerations. The chapter that follows highlights the main findings of the study.

CHAPTER 4: PRESENTATION AND INTERPRETATION OF FINDINGS

4.1 INTRODUCTION

In the previous chapter, the research methodology used in this study was presented. This chapter starts with the presentation of biographical and demographical data collected with the semi-structured interviews with external communication officials of the Greater Tzaneen Municipality followed by the biographical and demographical data collected through the questionnaire with the community members of the Greater Tzaneen Municipality. Secondly, the chapter presents the results of the qualitative data analysed thematically followed by the quantitative results descriptively analysed. This chapter is structured into four sections, following the introduction is a section on demographic and biographic results of participants and respondents. Section 4.2. presents the process of accumulating qualitative findings, section 4.3. describes qualitative results. This is followed by section 4.4. which focuses on the presentation of the process of accumulating quantitative findings, section 4.5 discusses quantitative results and lastly, in section 4.6. A summary of the chapter is outlined.

The semi-structured face-to-face interviews were conducted with four officials from the external communication department of the Greater Tzaneen Municipality. The notes that were taken during the interviews were further transcribed, coded, categorised, and analysed using Atlas.ti software. Personal questionnaires were administered to 385 Greater Tzaneen Municipality community members and 282 were returned, yielding a response rate of 73%. The questionnaire data which was captured using Moonstats. The captured data was coded, categorised, and presented using normal distribution parameters, mean, mode and standard deviation. Prior to conducting the interview and the administration of the questionnaires, a pilot study was conducted with 4 participants and 20 respondents. There was no problem found with the research items.

Table 4.1: Descriptive statistics of the biographical and demographical groupings of the interview participants

Qualification	Age Groups	Gender	Position		Total
			Manager	Assistant Manager	
Diploma	21-30				
B-Tech	31-40 years	Male	1	1	2
		Female	1	1	2

The age and position group findings as presented on Table 4.1 above show that the interview participants are between 31 and 40 years of age. All are in possession of a Diploma or a B-Tech qualification. The study was able to include equal population size of males and females.

Table 4.2: Descriptive statistics of the biographical and demographical groupings of the questionnaire respondents.

Gender	Frequency	%	Cumulative %
Male	62	21.9	21.9
Female	220	78.1	100.0
Total	282	100.0	
Race	Frequency	%	Cumulative %
Black	250	88.6	88.6
Whites	32	11.4	100.0
Age	Frequency	%	Cumulative %
18-28 Years	56	20.0	20.0
29-49 Years	133	47.1	67.1
50-60 Years	93	32.9	100.0
Total	282	100.0	
Occupation	Frequency	%	Cumulative %
Lecturer	46	16.3	16.3
Nurse / Doctor	46	16.3	32.6
Business Owner	98	34.7	67.3
Other	92	32.7	100.0
Total	282	100.0	

Education	Frequency	%	Cumulative %
Matric	72	25.5	25.5
Diploma	141	50.0	75.5
Masters	38	13.5	89.0
Doctorate	31	11	100.0
Total	282	100.0	

The biographical and demographical data of the survey respondents as reflected on table 4.2 reveals that 78.1% of the participants were female and 21.9% were male, 88.6% was made up of the black population while 11.4% comprised of the white population. Of these participants, 47.1% were middle age. This seemed to be a very young labour force. 74.5% of the study's respondents hold a tertiary qualification, putting them in a better position to understand the concepts of the study.

4.2 PROCESS OF QUALITATIVE FINDINGS

Interviews were conducted with four external communication officers of the Greater Tzaneen Municipality, which lasted for about 30-45 minutes each. Interviews were conducted on two consecutive days after permission was granted. An interview guide which comprised of 7 sectioned questions developed in line with the research questions was used to ensure that the interviewees were asked similar questions. Data was transcribed and thematically analysed. Transcripts were coded to find the recurrent patterns and themes in the responses. The qualitative instruments used in this study ensured that rich and in-depth information was gathered from the participants which enhanced the understanding of the phenomenon and the transferability of the qualitative findings.

4.3 PRESENTATION AND INTERPRETATION OF QUALITATIVE FINDINGS

Gaining an understanding about the communication channels currently used by the Greater Tzaneen Municipality to engage citizens on service delivery issues, the following research questions that are linked with the questions from the interview guide were defined:

- What channels of communication are currently used by the Greater Tzaneen to communicate with its residents?

- How does the Greater Tzaneen Municipality channels of communication on facilitate two-way communication?

- How accessible are channels of communication used by the municipality to citizens?

- What are the residents' preferred channel of communication for receiving information on service delivery?

- How knowledgeable are the residents about the Municipality's programme of service delivery?

The Thematic Map for the study

The data collected was analysed using a thematic analysis with the support of a QDA miner light software program. Based on similarities within the collected data the following thematic map, as presented in Figure 4.1 below:
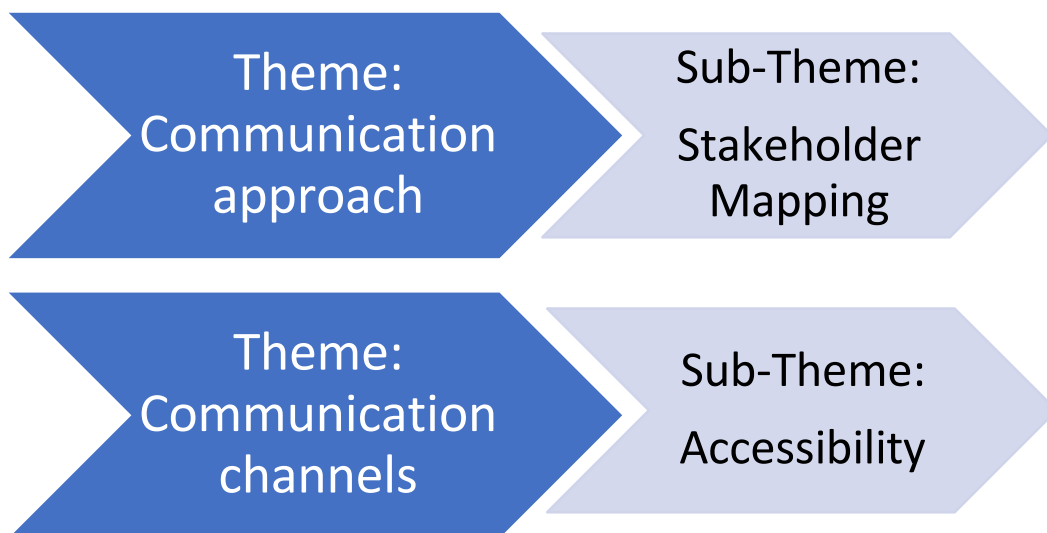

Figure 4.1: The study's thematic map

4.3.1 Theme: Communication approaches

The thematic analysis revealed communication approaches of the organisation as the theme emerges in Table 4.3 below.

Table 4.3: A representation of the communication approaches within the organisation themes per research Question 2

Codes	Category	Emerging theme
Language used	Stakeholder mapping	Communication approaches
Literacy level		
Communication methods		
Inclusivity	Stakeholder relations	
Accessibility		

The main theme communication approaches of the organisation are presented in two sub-themes that measure how the approaches used contribute to stakeholder management. It is important to explore how these approaches of communication nurture the relationship management of the municipality and citizens.

Sub-theme: Stakeholder mapping

It was found that stakeholder mapping is used prior to designing channels so that they align with the needs of the recipients and a good relationship is maintained.

"What is important with local government communication is to communicate with residents at the level they will understand, we map our residents. Tzaneen is made up of a population that uses 3 languages mainly, what we do then as a municipality is to use three languages for information dissemination of service delivery issues which are English, Sepedi, Xitsonga. This is to ensure that everybody understands the information being disseminated on service delivery. But majority of people in the Greater Tzaneen Municipality use Sepedi" – Participant 1.

"Communication between the municipality and residents transpires through simplified communication. Stakeholder analysis helps us to understand the literacy level in the municipality. We communicate with our residents based on their literacy level. We simplify our messages for all literacy levels of community members to be covered through the media platforms such as newspaper and radio and social media which can reach almost all residents" – Participant 4.

"We use channels of communication that are accessible to most members of the community. We employ both digital and traditional methods such as Imbizo, municipal website, radio, social media" – Participant 2.

The results reveal that the Municipality analyses their citizens before engaging in any communication activity with them, in terms of the preferred language, literacy level and present their messages using channels that are accessible and speak to the needs of the community members. Literature reveals that Governments need to know what the demographics of their citizens are (Mersham & Skinner, 2015). This process therefore includes a critical analysis of the citizens' background, culture, beliefs, and literacy levels. Also, governments need to know citizens information needs (Mersham & Skinner, 2015). This process therefore includes a critical analysis of the prevailing public environment using public opinion research, media coverage, correspondence, or telephone calls to the department.

Based on the results and literature, it can be argued that the Greater Tzaneen Municipality conducts a demographic analysis of their audience but that only informs the technicalities of communication and not the content. The study argues that the Municipality should include, as per the argument of Mresham and Skinner (2015), an information needs analysis, where they try to understand the information that citizens need. They might be informing them about policies, who is in office but miss telling them about service delivery issues because they lack an understanding of the information that citizens need. Slabbert (2020) refers to information needs analysis as environmental scanning which detects issues of concern to ensure that stakeholders' information needs are being met. Bruning (2002) argues that organisations must ensure that both the communication needs, and relational communication needs are being met.

Sub-theme: Stakeholder relations

It was reported by the participants, that the communication approach used by the Greater Tzaneen Municipality encourages a good relationship with residents. Inclusivity and accessibility of information are utilised to build and nurture relationships with residents.

"My understanding of two-way communication is that it is an effort of achieving inclusivity. The municipality does not just inform residents, it engages in a dialogue with them. The municipality allows them to be part of the conversations on municipality issues and not just to converse with them but to really consider their input on the decisions and implementations of municipal duties to them" – Participant 1.

"The municipality fosters two-way communication through public participation process to make community members part of our discussions, it is our strategy to maintain a relationship with them" – Participant 2.

''I think residents have access to our channels. Our approach is relationship focused. We try to show our community that we care about them through having face-to-face meetings to make our communication with them easily accessible" -Participant 3.

The results reveal that channels used by the municipality are accessible and foster two-way communication so that a relationship with communities is built. The literature reveals that prior to democracy a relatively top-down approach was being used where the elite would make decisions for the people and pass them on without engaging them. According to Liu and Horsley (2007), government's traditional use of one-way models of communication (top to bottom), rather than two- way models, often limits dialogue with the citizens, thereby diminishing the role of public feedback. However, Mersham & Skinner (2015) outline that for any democracy to operate effectively governments should communicate with their citizens. People have a right to know what they are doing and the reason why they are doing so. Rower and Frewer (2004) outline that local government needs to involve members of the public in the agenda-setting, decision-making, and policy-forming activities of organisations or institutions responsible for policy development. This creates that framework of working together and partnering in the complete process. The theory of democratisation spells that grassroots participation and involvement foster chances of adopting appropriate activities for the public.

Public officials need to respond by employing right channels of communication that echo their approaches and goals to the community. This serves as an important way of encouraging participatory communication through public involvement in matters that affect them and to determine the course, solutions, and priorities they have pertaining to service delivery.

From the above discussion, it is evident that the literature and results are in sync. The Greater Tzaneen Municipality fosters a relationship with their community through inclusivity, public engagement, and two-way accessible channels. The Municipality re-addresses the South African history of oppression that dominated the apartheid era which was characterised by authoritarian governance. The style excluded the better part of Black South Africans from basic rights such as taking part in deciding their economic, political, and social interests (Tadesse et al., 2016). The communities were mere recipients of service delivery and had no say in deciding the way services were rendered. The Greater Tzaneen Minimality strives to correct these injustices by making their community part of the government.

4.3.2 Theme: Communication channels

The thematic analysis revealed communication channels of the organisation as the theme emerges in Table 4.4 below.

Table 4.4: A representation of the communication channels within the organisation themes per research Questions 1 and 3

Codes	Category	Emerging theme
Face-to-face, meetings. newspapers. radio	Types of communication channels used	
WhatsApp. Facebook		Communication channels
Clarity	Channel effectiveness	
Feedback		
Resources to buy data	Accessibility	
Members do not read messages		
Information is readily available and on time		

The main theme communication channels are presented in three sub-themes, namely, communication channels used, channel effectiveness and channel accessibility.

Sub-theme: Types of communication channel

Participants reported that there are several communication channels used to engage with the community that includes traditional media and modern social media channels. Traditional communication channels used are face-to-face meetings, newspapers, and radio. The participants mentioned that in recent years the municipality started to use the modern social media channels such as WhatsApp, emails, and Facebook, that are more convenient and cheaper than some of the old communication channels.

"There are a number of channels that we as a municipality deem as appropriate to transfer messages, the most common one is Facebook and radio because they are either cheaper or accessible and instant by community members" – Participant 3.

"We facilitate access to channels through using media platforms such as newspaper and radio which can reach almost all residents" – Participant 2.

''We use both traditional and new technology channels to communicate with residents, WhatsApp, emails, newspapers, and others'' – Participant 1.

Both traditional and new technology channels are used in the Greater Tzaneen Municipality to converse with the community. Managers mentioned that through the social media, they can form groups and send messages instantly to all community members and most of them are cheaper than traditional media. Moreover, these channels have enabled communication between the municipality and the community to be satisfactory. Traditional channels are said to be used mostly for their credibility and accessibility to elderly people with have no access to the new technology channels. Literature reviewed that the use of communication channels that are most probably to effectively reach the audience is necessary for effective messaging (Botha, 2019). Andani and Naidu (2013) underscore that the government of South Africa employs different communication platforms on both the local and national level. These channels are used for both conveying and receiving information from citizens who are also residents or communities.

The several channels used include television, radio, and newspapers, which are the common formal channels (Andani & Naidu, 2013). In addition, government entities also employ various other platforms for communication such as public meetings, citizen forums that include ward committees and community development workers. In most cases, these are downward channels although public meetings, citizen forums that include ward committees allow for two-way communication. This is beneficial to residents and the government in that two- way communication creates shared understanding and eliminates confusion. Therefore, the Greater Tzaneen Municipality uses channels of communication that are also proposed by the literature.

Sub-theme: Channel effectiveness

It was found that the channels employed by the Greater Tzaneen Municipality are regarded as effective and even efficient because they are clear, and messages are received as intended. With meetings, members of the community can all gather and listen to the municipal officials, ask questions, get clarity, and respond accordingly.

"*Residents can easily access our channels as they use them to engage with us, if they aware not accessible, they would not be using them. Public participation meetings and Imbizo are some of the effective channels for receiving information by the residents as everyone gets to be fully engaged with the council on matters affecting the community and other priority programmes of the municipality*" – Participant 2.

"*Channels used are two-way, that makes our communication effective. On the radio, people can call in and get responded to, during community meetings, community members can participate in the conversation, on the social media platform, our social media team responds to issues*" – Participant 1.

"*We foster two-way communication through implementing the intercultural public relations principle of immediacy in our communication, we use channels that allow feedback to me immediate like meetings, radio interviews and social media*" – Participant 3.

It was found that communication channels used by the municipality foster two-way symmetrical communication as officials outline that immediate feedback is prioritised. Through these channels, messages are never lost or distorted, mutual understanding is achieved. The findings correlate with the literature of the study, that emphasises a dialogue between the local government and its community members. Effective communication allows the local government to give feedback to the public pertaining to service delivery issues (Nemec, 2014). Effective communication exists if there is feedback (Botha, 2019). When the public receive feedback, they will be able to be kept informed and to hear progress pertaining to issues that affect them. More importantly, feedback allows the municipality to employ methods that foster effective problem solving and to minimise chances of conflicts that may end up in civil action. Steinberg (2017) supports that feedback is central in making well-informed decisions and is a key component of public participation.

According to Nemec (2014), when citizens have open communication channels and mutual understanding with the government, they are likely not to take their issues onto the streets through protests but consult with the officials utilising that open communications system. In the wake of continued changes in public demands and the environment, there is a need to ensure effective communication. It is evident from the results that the Greater Tzaneen Municipality communicates effectively with citizens where there is a shared vision which ensures public satisfaction. Misunderstandings and conflicts often result from a lack of effective communication. For organisations, effective communication is key to promoting enduring relationships (Steinberg, 2017). Green and Knippen (2014) accentuate that it is the responsibility of the management to design effective communication channels that promote transparency and clarity to stakeholders, thereby yielding improved relationships. The public is also willing to give their input if they perceive that the existing channels are open and effective.

Sub-theme: Accessibility

It was found that sometimes community members cannot access messages sent to them on social media immediately. However, traditional channels used are accessible all the time.

"Members of the community sometimes have no data to access urgent messages about service delivery on social sites" – Participant 4.

"Ward councillors are always accessible as a channel of government communication with citizens" – Participant 3.

"Free weekly newspapers are available to inform citizens, the community radio is another accessible platform" – Participant 1.

The results reveal that some community members put their mobile data off, which means they do not get messages sent via communication channels that require the use of data. Other members complained that they do not have data and therefore cannot receive messages. When there is no accessibility to information, communication is not effective. This means that messages maybe delayed, which will cause communication to be ineffective.

This, therefore, means that lack of accessibility must be avoided for messages to be delivered correctly (Arins, 2013:14). The literature revealed that excellent media quality leads to excellent informal horizontal communication; inaccessibility therefore hinders excellent media quality between the municipality and its residents. Mersham & Skinner (2015) outline that for any democracy to operate effectively governments should communicate with their citizens. People have a right to know what governments are doing and the reason why they are doing so. The government should also provide timely and adequate information to its citizens and reach to as many people as possible. Therefore, accessibility is key.

4.3.3 Theme: Audience knowledge

The thematic analysis revealed audience knowledge within the organisation as the theme emerges in Table 4.5 below*.*

Table 4.5: A representation of the audience knowledge of the Municipality's programme of service delivery themes per research Question 5

Codes	Categories	Emerging themes
Transparency		
Participation	Content shared	Audience knowledge
Educational approach		

The main theme community knowledge shows that the residents are knowledgeable about the Municipality's programme of service delivery as indicated by all the participants. The main theme community knowledge is presented in one sub-theme, namely, content shared.

Sub-theme: Content shared

Participants reported that the residents of the Greater Tzaneen Municipality are knowledgeable about service delivery issues as the municipality takes an educational approach to teach them about these issues. The municipality is transparent with them in terms of what is service delivery, who must deliver, when will it be delivered, how and why services are delivered. Residents have knowledge about the milestones, challenges about shortfalls of service delivery in the municipality.

"My other contribution is that resident do understand and are knowledgeable about our program on service delivery as they share ideas and information in the meetings, we conduct with them to discuss service delivery issues" – Participant 1.

"What I can add on is that I believe that residents understand and are knowledgeable about the service delivery programs. It is communicated to them with different channels and strategies, and we usually involve them in meetings when service delivery issues are discussed" – Participant 2.

"I know, you did not ask this. I want to add that residents understand and are knowledgeable about the service delivery program that we conduct". Participant 4

"All information has been put through various communication platforms and is also readily available at the municipal offices. Communication is a strategic function of the municipality. It is our responsibility to ensure that our processes and activities are communicated to community members as it improves our transparency in all activities, actions and development projects" – Participant 3.

The results reveal that residents of the Greater Tzaneen Municipality are knowledgeable about service delivery. Unlike in the past when the educated were the only the ones within the domain of knowledge creation, dialogue and participation results in knowledge sharing, generation, and acquisition (White, 2014). In other words, knowledge sharing has become a reciprocal process as indigenous knowledge is also shared

Levy (2012) outlines that when citizens are well informed of issues that concern them, they build trust towards the government. This removes the common perception of communities that the local government have paternalistic attitudes touching their service delivery role (Vivier et al., 2014). As such, channels of communication to be used should ensure full cooperation and cultivate citizens' trust leading to more effective engagement.

The Greater Tzaneen Municipality's citizens are said to be knowledgeable about service delivery issues. The channels that the municipality employs are effective enough to allow them the ability to learn and have knowledge about issues in their municipality. The only challenge discovered here is when residents choose not to access channels or participate. Awareness about the importance of engaging is necessary.

4.4 PROCESS OF QUANTITATIVE FINDINGS

A personal questionnaire was administered to 385 adult community members with 282 responding yielded a response rate of 73%. The completion of the questionnaires took about 10 to 15 minutes. A broad inclusion criterion was used which enabled the study findings to be generalisable to the total population. That is to say that the results may be representative of the population. The statistical methods used ensured the reliability and validity of the research findings.

4.5 PRESENTATION AND INTERPRETATION OF QUANTITATIVE FINDINGS

In this section the findings of the quantitative analysis are presented. Findings present channels used for the communication of service delivery issue in the Greater Tzaneen Municipality. These questions addressed the 14 questions from the questionnaire. Respondents were asked to indicate their level of agreement with different items using a seven-point Likert scale (1 to 7) where 1 = Strongly Disagree, 6 = Agree and 7 = Strongly Agree. The normal distribution parameters, the mean, mode, and standard deviation were used to describe the data distribution of the selected questions.

4.5.1 Channels of communication used by the Municipality

The descriptive statistics of the channels used by the municipality to communicate service delivery issues is reflected in Table 4.6 below.

Table 4.6: Descriptive statistics of the channels used (*n* = 282)

	N	Mean (x̄)	Median	Mode (Mo)	SD	Skew	Kurt
The Greater Tzaneen Municipality uses community meetings to communicate to us about service delivery issues.	282	4.2	4.0	6	1.58	−0.15	−1.62
The Greater Tzaneen Municipality uses pamphlets to communicate to us about service delivery issues.	282	2.9	4.0	6	1.07	−1.83	1.97
The Greater Tzaneen Municipality uses Billboards to communicate to us about service delivery issues	282	3.0	4.0	6	1.13	−1.30	1.49
The Greater Tzaneen Municipality uses radio to us about service delivery issues.	282	4.2	4.0	6	1.56	−0.15	−1.62
The Greater Tzaneen Municipality uses newspaper to communicate to us about service delivery issues.	282	3.9	4.0	6	1.03	−1.73	2.97

	N	Mean ($\bar{x}$)	Median	Mode (Mo)	SD	Skew	Kurt
The Greater Tzaneen Municipality uses social media to communicate to us about service delivery issues.	282	3.8	4.0	6	1.13	−1.40	1.59
The Greater Tzaneen Municipality uses door to door campaign to communicate to us about service delivery issues.	282	3.8	4.0	6	1.06	−1.27	1.21
The Greater Tzaneen Municipality uses their website to communicate to us about service delivery issues.	282	3.7	4.0	6	1.11	−1.21	0.72

As reflected in Table 4.6 the mean score for the items of channels used to communicate service delivery issues range from neutral to agree (3–4). The two questions with the highest mean scores are the questions on the use of community meetings and radio ($\bar{x}$ = 4.2, Mo = 6) and on the use of newspaper and social media ($\bar{x}$ = 3.9, $\bar{x}$ = 3.8, Mo = 6).

The results reveal that the Greater Tzaneen Municipality uses both traditional and new media technology to communicate to community members about service delivery related issues. Channels of communication are elements that contribute to the success or failure of a communication episode (Karim & Noor, 2006). It is crucial to identify the channels that are most likely effective in reaching the audience (Keyton, 2011), and can precisely attract the attention of the target audience (Raab & Rocha, 2011).

The community of the Greater Tzaneen is aware of channels used to communicate about service delivery issues hence they were able to identify them on the questionnaire, this means that the channels are reachable. However, the use of diverse communication channels that have the maximum chance of generating the desired outcome of keeping community members abreast with service delivery issues should be considered. Raab and Rocha (2011) propose that a message has high chances of reaching the audience if people encounter the message in various platforms or channels.

Therefore, the Municipality is guided by the literature and uses various channels to communicate a message and increase the chances of high reach and repetition of a message which increases better comprehension. Karim and Noor (2006) outline that the more people are exposed to a message, the more likely they are to understand the content presented in that message.

The Greater Tzaneen Municipality community members outline that the Municipality uses radio, community meetings and social media as channels accessible to the community. This aligns with what the municipal officials shared.

4.2.1 Channels preferred by community members to receive service delivery messages

The descriptive statistics of the channels preferred by the community to receive service delivery messages is reflected in Table 4.7 below.

Table 4.7: Descriptive statistics of preferred channels (*n* = 282)

	N	Mean (x̄)	Median	Mode (Mo)	Std. (SD)	Skew	Kurt
I prefer to receive information on service delivery from the radio	282	4.0	4.0	7	1.55	−0.36	−1.09
I prefer to receive information on service delivery via social media	282	3.9	4.0	7	1.32	−0.53	−1.12
I prefer to receive information on service delivery via SMS	282	3.5	4.0	7	1.40	−0.37	−1.32
I prefer to receive information on service delivery via newspaper	282	3.0	4.0	7	1.50	−0.67	−1.10
I prefer to receive information on service delivery via community meeting	282	4.0	4.0	7	1.41	−0.45	−1.23
I prefer to receive information on service delivery via a call	282	3.5	4.0	7	1.39	−0.43	−1.21

As reflected in Table 4.7, the mean score for the items of the preferred channels in the range from neutral to agree (3.5–4.0). The two questions with the highest mean scores are questions on the use of radio and community meetings ($\bar{x}$ = 4.0, *Mo* = 7) and on the use of social media ($\bar{x}$ = 3.9, *Mo* = 7).

The success of the organisation among other elements lies on stakeholder inclusivity emphasised by the dialogue theory (Wolowska, 2014). Stakeholder inclusivity is when the views of stakeholders are included in the design and implementation of the organisation's strategy. Therefore, the study argues that the Greater Tzaneen Municipality should adhere to the community's preferred channels of receiving information from the municipality for the success of their communication efforts.

The community prefers radio, social media and meeting at most, literature outlines that meetings have an advantage to inform, educate and remind (Oku et al., 2016; Calder & Beckie, 2011). Radio provokes emotional and cognitive responses of the people (Klippen et al., 2017). it also conveys educational messages and provides a good opportunity for individuals to interact and express their views on a certain topic or issue (Benneheke et al., 2016). Social media has a large reach, and it allows a community to be formed and a conversation to occur around issues. It is therefore ideal for the transmission of prominent issues such as service delivery (de Wet, 2016).

4.2.2 Content shared on service delivery

The descriptive statistics of the content shared on service delivery messages is reflected in Table 4.8 below.

Table 4.8: Descriptive statistics of the content shared (n = 282)

	N	Mean $(\bar{X})$	Median	Mode (Mo)	Std. (SD)	Skew	Kurt
We are informed of what service delivery is.	282	3.8	3.0	6	1.48	−0.01	−1.52
We are informed of the milestones of service delivery.	282	4.0	3.0	6	1.47	0.02	−1.50
We are informed about the challenges of service delivery.	282	3.9	3.0	6	1.48	−0.06	−1.51
The information we have about service delivery makes us change the behaviour of protesting.	282	2.0	3..0	6	1.05	−0.02	−1.37

As reflected in Table 4.8, the question with a high mean score is the question on the milestones of service delivery ($\bar{X}$ = 4.0, Mo = 6).

The question on changed behaviour of protesting by community members after being exposed to service delivery messages is low in mean ($\bar{X}$ = 2.0, Mo = 6). Messages should answer all 5 w and h for mutual understanding to be achieved (Roots, 2006). The results reveal that the municipality informs residents on what and how service delivery is, which is a great quality in a messaging. Although the municipality informs residents, their feedback in behaviour is low. This is a concern and calls for a need to a further study of why the behaviour of protests is not changing although residents are communicated to and what could be done to encourage change in behaviour.

Factor analysis of strategies used

Suitability of the inter-correlation matrix for factor analysis was confirmed with Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO), which measured 7.1 i.e., above the recommended value of 6 (Hair, Black, Babin & Anderson 2010). Bartlett's Test of Sphericity Chi-square value was statistically significant (χ^2 (561) = 3907.25; $p \leq 0.001$), therefore indicating the appropriateness of the data for factor analysis.

Four factors that explained about 86.18% of the variance in the factor space were postulated according to Kaiser's (1970) criterion and extracted by means of Principal Axis Factoring. The factor matrix was rotated and sorted by means of a varimax rotation. Three factors (channels used, channels preferred, and content shared) were extracted.

The results obtained from the iterative reliability analysis of the extracted factors are as follows: Factor 1, channels used (measured by eight items), yielded a Cronbach's Alpha of 0.90, indicating an acceptable reliability. Factor 2, channels preferred (measured by six items), yielded an acceptable Cronbach's Alpha of 0.79. Factor 3, content shared (measured by four items). yielded a Cronbach's Alpha of 0.70, indicating an acceptable reliability. There were some cross-loadings between items of the sub-scale depersonalisation and emotional exhaustion.

Reliability analysis of the channels used

The measurement accuracy is a function of two things: (a) the extent to which the item measures what it sets out to measure (define as validity), and (b) the precision with which the variables are measured (define as reliability) (Malholtra, 2010; Blumberg et al., 2011:344). A summary of the factor analysis procedure and iterative reliability analysis results is presented in Table 4.9 below.

Table 4.9: Summary of the factor analysis and iterative reliability analysis procedure

Item per dimension	Cronbach's Alpha if item deleted	Dimension reliability
The Greater Tzaneen Municipality uses community meetings to communicate to us about service delivery issues.	0.936	**Channels used** Cronbach's Alpha 0.93
The Greater Tzaneen Municipality uses pamphlets to communicate to us about service delivery issues.	0.905	
The Greater Tzaneen Municipality uses Billboards to communicate to us about service delivery issues	0.905	
The Greater Tzaneen Municipality uses radio to us about service delivery issues.	0.912	
The Greater Tzaneen Municipality uses newspaper to us about service delivery issues.	0.912	
The Greater Tzaneen Municipality uses social media to us about service delivery issues.	0.936	
The Greater Tzaneen Municipality uses door to door campaign to us about service delivery issues.	0.905	
The Greater Tzaneen Municipality uses their website to us about service delivery issues.	0.905	
I prefer to receive information on service delivery radio	0.926	Preferred channels Cronbach's Alpha 0.92
I prefer to receive information on service delivery via social media	0.891	
I prefer to receive information on service delivery via SMS	0.936	
I prefer to receive information on service delivery via newspaper	0.881	
I prefer to receive information on service delivery via community meeting	0.876	

I prefer to receive information on service delivery via a call	0.927	
We are informed of what service delivery is.	0.989	Content shared Cronbach's Alpha 0.99
We are informed of the milestones of service delivery.	0.989	
We are informed about the challenges of service delivery.	0.989	
The information we have about service delivery makes us change the behaviour of protests.	0.990	

As reflected in Table 4.9 the results obtained from the iterative item reliability analysis of the four scales yielded the following Cronbach's Alphas: Channels used Cronbach's Alpha 0.93; Preferred channels Cronbach's Alpha 0.92; and Content shared Cronbach's Alpha 0.99, indicating acceptable internal consistency and reliability (Pallant, 2016).

4.3 CONCLUSION

This chapter presented the results of the qualitative and quantitative data collected. Qualitative data was collected by interviewing 4 out of the 4 external communication officers which was 100% of the target population. Quantitative data was collected through survey questionnaires. 385 members of the community members were given the questionnaire and only 282 were usable, making the response rate to be 73%. The main findings that were obtained from this study were presented.

Descriptive statistics of biographical and demographical data were presented. This was followed by a presentation on qualitative results using thematic analysis. Then followed the presentation on quantitative results, which were presented through the frequency distribution table. The results outlined that different age groups and different levels of expertise have been included in the study, giving various perspectives in the presented results. The study intended to explore and describe communication channels used by the Greater Tzaneen Municipality to communicate service delivery issues.

The results reveal that the municipality uses both traditional and online media to acquaint residents with information on service delivery. The primary communication channels used are social media (WhatsApp and Facebook), radio, newspapers, and meetings. The community members of the Greater Tzaneen Municipality indicated that they preferred radio, community meetings and social media as channels of communication on service delivery issues.

The results also revealed that the municipality informs residents about service delivery, its milestones, and challenges. It is unfortunate that the residents' behaviour on protests on service delivery does not change although they are being informed, as this is a concern the study wished to make recommendations on. The results allowed the achievement of all the objectives of the study making the study a success. The next chapter presents the conclusion which is the summary of the entire study, the research findings, and recommendations.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

5.1 INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this study was to analyse channels of communication that the Greater Tzaneen Municipality uses to engage with residents regarding service delivery. In the Greater Tzaneen Municipality, residents most often protest for different reasons, some of which could possibly be because of what they perceive as poor service delivery or a breakdown of communication and feedback between the municipality and citizens. The study proposes that civil unrest can be minimised through communication; therefore, it was important to analyse the channels of communication that the Greater Tzaneen Municipality uses to engage with residents regarding service delivery.

It was also important to analyse the current literature on the topic under study and what was discovered to drive the study was that the current body of knowledge focuses on mechanisms of government communication with citizens but not on channels employed by these mechanisms. The what to communicate with question is answered but the how to communicate question is not answered by the current body of knowledge. The gap in the literature aligned with the problem that the study wishes to address. Later in chapter 3, the methodology of how the study was carried out was presented followed by the results. This chapter presents the summary of the main conclusions derived from the research findings of the empirical study. It presents conclusions derived from interviews as well as survey findings. It also presents the recommendations of the study followed by the study limitations and possible directions for future research. The following is the summary of the conclusions from both qualitative and quantitative findings which focused on the main research questions.

5.1.2 Communication channels used

This research question required participants to indicate the communication channels used by the Greater Tzaneen Municipality to engage with residents regarding service delivery. The participants showed that there are many channels used as per research question 1. The participants listed many traditional and modern communication channels used which include radio, newspaper, face-to-face community meetings, the website, and social media (Facebook and WhatsApp). This study found that the common media used to engage with residents regarding service delivery was the radio, and social media as indicated by all the

interview participants. The interview finding was verified by the survey respondents who outlined that radio and social media are used to engage with residents regarding service delivery. The ability of respondents being able to indicate channels used to engage with them means that the community members are aware of the communication channels used to engage with them regarding service delivery, which means that the channels are reachable.

5.1.3 Communication channels preferred by community members

In this research question, participants were required to mention the communication channels preferred by the community for receiving information. As per question 3, several channels were mentioned as preferred by the residents, which are radio, newspaper, and face-to-face meetings and social media (WhatsApp). This study found that the interview participants had general agreement that the radio and community meetings were preferred by the residents for receiving information. The preference of radio and social media was confirmed by survey respondents although they also mentioned that they preferred community meetings as shown in Table 4.9 in the previous chapter. The questions with the highest mean score were questions on radio and community meetings ($\square$ = 4.0, *Mo* = 7) and social media ($\square$ = 3.9, *Mo* = 7). Based on the survey findings, this study argues that the Greater Tzaneen Municipality should adhere to the community's preferred channels of receiving information for the success of its communication efforts.

5.1.4 Community knowledge on municipality's programme of service delivery

The study found that the residents are knowledgeable about the Municipality's programme of service delivery as all the participants had common agreement on this. This finding was confirmed by survey respondents: the question with the highest mean score (*x* = 4.0, *Mo* = 6) is the question that showed that residents are informed of the milestones of service delivery. The findings show that the residents are knowledgeable about the program, its aims, achievements and challenges. The only concern that arises is that this knowledge does not change their behaviour.

5.1.5 Channels foster of two-way symmetrical communication

This research question focused on how the channels of communication used by the Greater Tzaneen Municipality foster two-way symmetrical communication. The results reveal that channels used strive for two-way symmetrical communication. Participants outlined that they implement inclusivity, they use radio and the social media for feedback opportunities offered by these channels.

5.2 Recommendations

This study made the following recommendations:

There was substantial evidence from the participants and the respondents that many traditional and modern communication channels are used to engage with residents regarding service delivery. Specific communication channels were preferred by the respondents for receiving service delivery messages; these were radio, social media, and community meetings. These channels should be used for conveying information by the Greater Tzaneen Municipality to engage with the community and ensure dialogue.

Furthermore, The Greater Tzaneen Municipality should consider the use of different communication channels including entertainment educational programs identified by the literature as being capable and effective in the transmission of information on service delivery. It is found that various informational needs require various communication channels to achieve efficient and effective communication (Elshout, 2014).

Additionally, adopting the strategy of increasing the frequency of news cycles on radio stations about service delivery by the municipality for instance is likely to increase the community's awareness of the destructive trends of civil unrest.

The study argues that the Municipality should include information needs analysis as per the argument of Mresham and Skinner (2015), where they try to understand the content that citizens need. They might be informing them about policies or who is in office, but miss telling them about service delivery issues because they lack an understanding of the information that citizens need.

The Greater Tzaneen Municipality's citizens are said to be knowledgeable about service delivery issues, and the channels that the municipality employs are effective enough to allow them the ability to learn and have knowledge about issues in their municipality. The only challenge discovered here is when residents choose not to access channels or participate. Awareness about the importance of engaging is necessary.

The study also recommends that the Municipality employs the social learning theory where residents should be made to observation, experience punishment for partaking in illegal civil unrests and a reward for not participating in.

5.3 Limitations of the study

The following limitations are presented regarding the study's qualitative and quantitative phases:

The researcher aimed to obtain huge data from both qualitative and quantitative data. But due to the inclusion of only experts of employees working in the external communication department of the municipality the interview results cannot be representative of the entire population and therefore are not generalisable. The survey results could be representative of the entire population and therefore is generalisable, although it was conducted in the context of Covid-19 which resulted in the survey's low response as only 73% of the 385 questionnaires sent to respondents were returned.

When the researcher embarked on interview and the distribution of questionnaire, it would have been a good idea to conduct document analysis of the interviews and questionnaires.

The researcher could not involve herself in the interview setting, neither had complete control over interviewees as the interviews were telephonic due to South African Covid- 19 regulations of social distancing and Unisa Covid-19 research ethics regulations.

Therefore, the study used a relatively small but statistically acceptable sample because of time and budget constraints.

5.4 Future research directions

The following are some directions for future research.

Evaluation of communication should focus on assessing the quality or success of communication interventions. Also, communication interventions should focus on examining the impact of communication on promoting sustainable change of behaviour from community members when it comes to civil unrest.

5.5 Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to analyse the communication channels use by the Greater Tzaneen Municipality to engage with community members about service delivery issues. Service delivery issues are crucial to citizens as they speak to their basic needs. This study has extensively reviewed the literature on the study topic indicating the role that communication channels can play in mitigating civil unrest as on service delivery issues. The main findings of the study were presented. Recommendations were made for the Greater Tzaneen Municipality and municipalities globally that might want to embark on a program of communicating to promote public awareness on service delivery issues. The study limitations and possible future research directions were also presented.

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