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UNIVERSITY OF KWAZULU-NATAL  
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**#Democracy: A case study of social media use amongst members of the public sphere during the 2014 South African general election.**

By

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A dissertation submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of M-ART (Master of Arts) at the University of KwaZulu-Natal

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May 2016

## Declaration

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I ..... declare that:

(i) The research reported in this dissertation, except where otherwise indicated, is my original work.

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## Acknowledgments

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Many of the tweets and Facebook posts in this dissertation were posted and digested in seconds. But, this study took months of hard (but rewarding) effort to finish. I owe its completion to the support, guidance and patience of the following people:

- Prof. Jean-Philippe Wade, my supervisor, has been a constant source of academic wisdom, enthusiasm and moral support. Despite his professional and personal commitments, he has made every effort to ensure I received assistance – even after hours. I attribute the quality of this dissertation to his superior insight and attention to detail. One could not have been blessed with a better supervisor.
- My family who provided me with emotional and financial support during the time it has taken to complete this dissertation. I am inspired by my mother's (Ishara) conscientiousness, my brother's (Keshav) ambition and my sister's (Nitasha) resilience.
- I am sincerely grateful to Jon, who has provided me with a home close to campus, and lent a sympathetic ear during the more frustrating times of dissertation writing. I promise to buy you another one.
- Belinda Johnson, from the School of Politics, who affirmed the viability of my dissertation and provided me with excellent tips and material on the public sphere.
- The academic staff in the Media and Cultural Studies department at UKZN who provided me with advice and encouragement.

*This dissertation is dedicated to South Africa's social media population. Through my time spent with you I have realised the power and importance of a shared tweet, post, and like.*

## **Abstract**

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At present social media is used by 28% of the world's population. The use has naturally penetrated the political sphere where social media presence in election periods is a global growing phenomenon. However, limited research has been conducted examining political social media use in South Africa despite calls for social media research in developing contexts and the pervasiveness of social media use amongst the country's netizens.

In addressing this the dissertation defines the uses of social media during election periods and illustrates how social media was used during the 2014 South African general election. Finally, the study also determines whether social media contributed to the democracy of the country. The researcher used Jürgen Habermas's theory of the public sphere as the theoretical underpinning of the study.

An exploratory case study method was employed as the main research method with web archiving, a thematic analysis of Twitter trends and observation adopted as sub-methods. Research was limited to the most popular social media sites in the country: Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and Mxit.

The findings demonstrate that social media was used by the country's public, the traditional mass media, politicians and political parties, civil society actors and the IEC as part of their undertakings during the election period.

The study also found that during the election period an online public sphere was realised in the country and, as a result, facilitated the creation of public opinion by creating communication channels between the electorate and other electoral actors. The dialogues that took place online showed signs of deliberation and was given consideration by the relevant authorities. Finally, the online public sphere regulated the state by enlightening them on public concerns and holding them accountable for their actions.

## **Keywords**

social media; social networking; case study; public sphere; democracy, election; South Africa

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## List of Abbreviations

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ANC	–	African National Congress
ANCYL	–	African National Congress Youth League
COPE	–	Congress of the People
COSAS	–	Congress of South African Students
COSATU	–	Congress of South African Trade Unions
EFF	–	Economic Freedom Fighters
IEC	–	Independent Electoral Commission
IFP	–	Inkatha Freedom Party
NUMSA	–	National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa
SABC	–	South African Broadcasting Corporation
UDM	–	United Democratic Front
VF Plus	–	Vryheidsfront Plus

## Definition of Social Media Terminology

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@username – A username is how one is identified on Twitter, and is always preceded immediately by the '@' symbol. For example, Julius Malema is @Julius\_S\_Malema

Facebook Event – A feature on the site that allows members to publicise an event, invite guests and keep a record of interested/disinterested individuals.

Facebook Group – This is a place on Facebook where people can share their common interests or opinions.

Facebook Like – This is a feature that allows users to show their support for specific comments, pictures, wall posts, statuses, or fan pages.

Facebook Page – It is a public profile that allows public figures, businesses, organisations and other entities to create a presence on Facebook.

Follower – A follower is another user who has subscribed to a social media profile to receive the profile's content.

Hashtag – A hashtag is any word or phrase immediately preceded by the '#' symbol.

Retweet – This refers to the act of reposting or resending a message posted by another user on Twitter.

Selfie – A picture one takes of oneself and shares on social media.

Trend – A trend is a hashtag-driven topic that is immediately popular at a particular time

Tweet – A tweet (noun) refers to a post on Twitter that can consist of up to 140 characters of text, photos, videos and links. Tweet (verb) also refers to the act of making a post on Twitter.

Tweeter – The individual sending a Tweet on Twitter.

TwitLonger – This is a service that allows a Twitter user to post extended tweets that exceed the 140 character limit on the site.

Twitter Town Hall – This event occurs when a group or agency invites online users to a public gathering at a specified time.

Twittersphere – This refers to the postings made on Twitter, considered collectively.

Twitterview – This is an interview conducted on Twitter.

Viral – This occurs when a shared social media post receives significant attention on a social media platform.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction and Orientation

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### 1.1. Introduction

According to a 2014 GO-Globe report social media has penetrated 28% of the world's populace meaning that a staggering 2.03 billion people are active social media users (GO-Globe, 2014). Nearly 30% of time spent online is dedicated to social media participation (Mander, 2015). A "GlobalWebIndex Social Report" indicates that the average internet user spends an average of 1.72 hours engaging on social networking or media sites daily (Mander, 2015). While this section of the dissertation was being typed, three<sup>1</sup> of the top ten most popular websites in the world (in terms of online traffic) are social media sites (Alexa, 2016). This highlights the way social media has become an important (if not integral) aspect of a modern, technologically-driven society.

Social media or social networking sites refer to a "group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of User Generated Content" (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010:61). Social media was born in 1997 with the launch of the first site of its kind – SixDegrees.com (boyd & Ellison, 2008:214). The world has since seen the rise and fall of Friendster, Orkut (Morrill, 2015) and the growth of Facebook, YouTube and Twitter. The increased use of social media platforms can be attributed to their many advantages. They offer "timely and direct end-consumer contact at relatively low cost and higher levels of efficiency than can be achieved with more traditional communication tools" (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010:67). As such these sites have been embraced in many diverse fields such as commerce, education, activism and politics.

The latter field is the focus of this dissertation. In 2008 Barack Obama famously harnessed social media platforms during his campaign in the U.S. Presidential Elections (Copeland & Römmele, 2014:173). These sites helped Obama set record-breaking fundraising and grassroots mobilisation of campaigners helping him secure his bid for presidency (Tumasjan et al, 2010:178). His success has seen an adoption of social media politicking in other parts of the world and the rise in its presence as a common feature in the electoral process.

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<sup>1</sup> These sites are YouTube, Facebook and Twitter (Alexa, 2016).

With a developing prominence of social media in South Africa (Staff Writer, 2014a), there was a subsequent interest in how social media could impact South Africa's election processes as early as 2011 (Hogarth, 2011).

In 2014 South Africa held a general election to elect a new National Assembly<sup>2</sup> and new Provincial Legislatures<sup>3</sup> in each province. This was the fifth democratic election since the end of the Apartheid era. What was interesting about this particular election was the investment in social media by electoral actors - the country's electoral commission, the IEC, and several political parties began expanding their presence on social media in anticipation of the election (Tredger, 2014; Legg, 2014). With a rise in the significance of these sites as part of the country's political landscape, the media and PR professionals began dubbing the election as the "social media election" (Nevill, 2014) or the first "digital election" (Lourens, 2014a).

## 1.2. Objective of Study

This dissertation seeks to evaluate the above claims made by the media and PR professionals. In doing so, the dissertation will examine the uses of social media that took place during the 2014 South African general election and examine whether social media contributed to the country's democracy.

## 1.3. Nature of Study

In order to understand how social media is used during an election period, the dissertation first examines the uses that have taken place in other parts of the world during electoral periods. The guiding theory chosen for examining the election period is Jürgen Habermas' theory of the public sphere, a key theory in examining participation within a democratic system. Although developed from a study of eighteenth century bourgeois practices, a number of public sphere academics have examined the existence of online public spheres. As such the theoretical

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<sup>2</sup> The National Assembly is the lower house of the Parliament of South Africa and is voted in directly by the electorate. The National Assembly is "responsible for choosing the President, passing laws, ensuring that the members of the executive perform their work properly and providing a forum where the representatives of the people can publicly debate issues" (Parliament.gov, 2016).

<sup>3</sup> This is the legislative branch or arm of the government of a province. They "make provincial laws, and may adopt a Constitution for the province if two-thirds of its members agree" (SouthAfrica.info, 2016).

framework discusses the debate surrounding online public spheres and explores South Africa's potential for an online public sphere.

#### 1.4. Research Questions

In understanding the use of social media during the 2014 South African general election and whether it contributed to the democracy of the country the following critical questions will be examined in the undertaking of the study:

- What are the uses of social media during election periods?
- How was social media used during the 2014 South African general election?
- How did the social media use contribute to the democracy of South Africa?
  - Does South Africa have the potential for an online public sphere?
  - Was the online public sphere realised during the election period?

#### 1.5. Research Methods

In order to answer the main research questions, the study adopted an exploratory case study method. The case study acts as a main method and employs sub methods in order to create a rich data source of the phenomenon under investigation. For this study the researcher gathered a number of online secondary sources such as media reports, conducted a thematic analysis of election-themed trends on Twitter, and data was drawn from observing public sphere actors and screen-grabbing from the social media sites that were examined during the election period.

#### 1.6. Limitations of Study

Due to limited time and resources, the researcher concentrated on four of the most prominent social media sites during the election: Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and Mxit. These sites were chosen due to the level of political activity that took place on them as well as being the most popular sites in the country at the time (World Wide Worx, 2014:1-3). The researcher also focused on social media uses by actors of the public sphere. While others outside the public

sphere such as members of the commerce field may have used social media and engaged in the political discussions taking place, the researcher did not consider their participation. In terms of data collection the researcher did not use interviews as it would have presented challenges in collecting a representative sample and ethical concerns in terms of the manner in which respondents could be targeted. The scope of discussions that were taking place on social media sites was overwhelming. While the researcher made every attempt to track uses across all social media sites under investigation, it is possible that relevant uses may have been overlooked. Finally, it was not possible to make a comparative analysis of case studies. While the Democratic Alliance launched a social media strategy in the 2009 South African general election (Wu, 2013), the social media data is difficult to access and study out of context.

### 1.7. Importance of Study

The rise of social media and its ubiquitous nature amongst internet users naturally makes research surrounding these platforms of utmost importance. As social media research - particularly those dealing with the political landscape – is limited this study will fulfil an important gap in understanding how social media is used during elections, by which actors and the role it plays in the country's democracy. As research on the virtual public sphere is still developing, this study will test whether a developing country like South Africa has the potential for a public sphere and the implications this would have for the country's democracy.

### 1.8. Chapter Outline

Chapter two provides a literature review of the current state of social media research in South Africa and then focalises on the extent of local election-themed social media. As there is an expectation that local social media research is lacking, this chapter examines global social media use by various election stakeholders during election periods.

Chapter three provides all the necessary theoretical background surrounding the notion of the public sphere as developed by Habermas. The concept is defined, its actors are identified and the criteria for its creation are outlined. The importance and relevance of the theory for this study is explored. The theory is not without flaws and as such criticisms of the theory are discussed. Researchers have applied public sphere theory to the internet. The debate about the

potential is also explored, providing an understanding of the pessimistic/dystopian and optimistic/utopian views around the internet's democratic potential. As this dissertation focuses on social media, the research examining social media public spheres is discussed. Finally, this chapter provides a list of factors that support South Africa's potential to realise an online public sphere.

In chapter four the theory of the research approach, the case study method, is examined. This includes a definition of the case study method, its advantages and criticisms, types of case studies, its research design components and the ways the validity of case studies can be affirmed. The chapter then displays how the researcher has applied the research methodology with particular attention to the sub-methods used and the ethical considerations that had to be taken into consideration when conducting social media research.

Chapter five presents the main findings from the application of the case study method. This includes a discussion on how the public sphere actors – the public, the mass media, politicians and political parties, civil society and the IEC – used social media during the election period.

Chapter six uses Habermas' institutional criteria to prove that an online public sphere exists in South Africa. Next, the way in which the thriving public sphere contributed to South Africa's democracy during the election period will be examined.

Chapter seven concludes the dissertation by providing a summary of how the findings address the research questions. The limitations of the study are outlined and suggestions for future research are discussed.

Finally, appendices related to the case study methodology and research approval are found after the concluding chapter.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

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### 2.1. Introduction

Social media use has been identified as an important part of elections (Tumasjan et al, 2010:178). In order to evaluate the different uses of social media that took place during the election period it is important to understand the different types of uses that have been evidenced and the context that these uses have developed from.

First, this study will examine the type of social media research that has taken place in South Africa. As social media research from a local political perspective is limited, this research will outline the various parts of the world where social media use during elections is blossoming. Building upon this rising prominence of social media during election periods in these countries, this literature review examines the ways politicians, the electorate, the mass media and electoral commissions use social media during election periods.

### 2.2. Social Media Research in South Africa

Social media research in South Africa remains in its infancy. Of the research conducted within the field, one avenue has been social media use in education. These studies examined the use of Facebook by university students in both their personal and academic endeavours (Ogbonnaya & Mji, 2015); whether academic use of a group on Facebook by postgraduate distance learning students could support true learning (De Villiers, 2010); and how using social networking sites affects the occupational performance of high school students in the Western Cape (Mthembu et al, 2014). Other studies have also placed focus on the usage by educators and the benefits evidenced through their adoption of the platform (Visser, Evering & Barrett, 2014).

Some studies have examined the behaviours of social media users, primarily focusing on youth. One study examined the “perceptions and use of Mxit amongst the South African Youth” and their parents and “how they (both the users and the parents) reconcile the negative discourse, on the one hand, with the use of the system, on the other hand” (Chigona et al, 2009:2). Rachoene & Oyedemi examined online bullying of South African youth on Facebook (2015)

while Swanepoel & Thomas concentrated on the prevalence of Mxit addiction amongst adolescents (2012). Lastly, an academic paper examined “the behavioural attitudes of South African Millennials towards Facebook advertising, as well as several usage characteristics and demographic variables that have a favourable influence on intention-to-purchase and purchase perception” (Duffett, 2015:597).

The South African media have also been a source of social media research. Studies have examined the use of social media by community radio stations (Bosch, 2014) and the use of social media by journalists (Jordaan, 2013; Bosch, 2012; Verweij & Van Noort, 2013).

Research has also extended to social media’s presence in South African commerce. In this regard, studies have examined the adoption and usage of social media by South African banks in terms of their marketing efforts (Chikandiwa, Contogiannis & Jembere, 2013) and explored how local commercial organisations are using Twitter as a public relations tool (Moyo, 2015).

Surprisingly, there has been a dearth of research examining the use of social media in the country’s elections. Marika Louise Steenkamp remains one of the few researchers that have examined the local use of social media from a political perspective (2011). Using a qualitative methodological approach, her study examined the use of Facebook by political parties and members of the public. In terms of the breadth of social media use, the study fails to examine use by the media, members of the civil society and other critical members of the political public sphere. Another criticism is that the study concentrates solely on Facebook, ignoring important players in South Africa’s diverse social media landscape such as Twitter and Mxit. Napolitano does observe that Mxit used to remove content of a political nature posted by political parties from their site (2010:109) so using Facebook as the sole site of interrogation is partially understandable.

Despite these criticisms Steenkamp’s research does highlight the need for further examination of South Africa’s use of social media. This comes in at a time where other researchers are emphasising the need for local research. Amir Hatem Ali, for example, has also recognised this gap in local social media use; he questions the advantages of increased social media for citizens in developing nations and makes a call “to think critically and broadly about the role that social media can and should play in developing nations” (2011:187-188).

However, in order to accomplish this, it is necessary to examine the varying social media uses that are taking place in elections held across the world.

### 2.3. Growing Prominence around the World

The overwhelming majority of research understandably centres on various elections in the United States – the birthplace of the internet (Anstead & Chadwick, 2009:59). Researchers frequently attribute the beginning of social media campaigns to Howard Dean's use and encouragement of blogging during his bid for the Democratic nomination in the 2004 U.S. Presidential Election (Hellweg, 2011:22; Johnson & Perlmutter, 2010:555; Anstead & Chadwick, 2009:60; Newman, 2010:5; Drezner & Farrell, 2008:3). Although he failed in securing the nomination, his innovative strategy became the precursor to Barack Obama's successful harnessing of social media platforms during the 2008 U.S. Presidential Elections (Copeland & Römmele, 2014:173); an election which has been the source of much discussion amongst researchers (Hellweg, 2011:23). Other U.S. elections that have featured prominent use of social media include the 2008 primaries (see Vatrappu, Robertson & Dissanayake, 2008) and the 2012 general election (Hayward, 2012; Pathak, 2014). The successful use of social media in the U.S. (particularly by Barack Obama) has prompted usage by election campaigns in other parts of the world.

There has been evidence of use in Norway (see Johannessen, 2013), France (Auvinen, 2012:7), the UK (see Newman, 2010), Russia (see White & McAllister, 2014; Litvinenko, 2012), Ireland (see Lynch & Hogan, 2012), Finland (see Khaldarova, Laaksonen & Matikainen, 2012), Canada (see Reilly, 2011, Dumitrica 2014), Germany (see Tumasjan et al, 2010; Copeland & Römmele, 2014), Australia (see Macnamara, Sakinofsky & Beattie, 2012; Miragliotta 2012) and New Zealand (see Macnamara, Sakinofsky & Beattie, 2012: 31).

Asian countries that have seen usages of social media during election periods include Malaysia (see Raof et al, 2013), Singapore (see Black, Dafir & Behnke, 2013), India (see Pathak, 2014), Iran (see Carafano, 2009), Cambodia (see Soeung, 2013), Philippines (see Karan, Gimeno & Tandoc, 2008), South Korea (see Han-na & Min-sik, 2013), Japan, (see Abjorensen, 2013), Taiwan (Fong, 2013:66) and Sri Lanka (see Gunawardene & Wattedgama, 2013).

Although Africa features countries with lower internet penetration rates than some of the aforementioned countries (Editor, 2013), there has been significant election use in Kenya (see Odinga 2013; Wasswa 2011), Nigeria (see Okoro & Nwafor, 2013), Ghana (Wasswa, 2011:25), Botswana (Wasswa, 2011:25), Zambia (Chatora, 2012:5) and Liberia (Smyth, 2013:xi).

#### 2.4. The Role of Social Media During Elections

This section examines the role social media plays during elections with a focus on the countries that have been mentioned in the previous section. The uses evident include usage by politicians in their campaigning efforts, by the electorate, the traditional mass media<sup>4</sup> and electoral commissions<sup>5</sup>.

##### 2.4.1. Politicians and Campaigning

Social media holds a wealth of uses for politicians during election periods. This section explores the appeal of social media platforms for politicians, their uses as a communication platform in campaigning and the way in which social media plays a role in building a politician or political party's brand. Next, the potential for targeting youth and fringe markets that might be inaccessible through traditional means is examined, followed by their use of social media in fundraising and conducting smear campaigns.

##### 2.4.1.1. The Appeal of Social Media Platforms for Politicians

Social media has been identified as being fast, inexpensive (Hellweg, 2011:22) in contrast to traditional media costs and simple to use (Raouf et al, 2013:1144) as a means for political communication. These platforms can be useful when a politician or party (especially one that is new or smaller) lacks access to funds or is "marginalized" by mass media (Odinga, 2013:40; Raouf et al, 2013:1144) such as television, radio or newspapers for their campaigning. In the 2007 Philippine Elections the Gabriela Women's Party suffered from a limited amount of funds for mass media communication but successfully adopted social media such as YouTube and

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<sup>4</sup> The traditional mass media refers to communication entities that reach large numbers of people in a short time such as television, newspapers, magazines, and radio.

<sup>5</sup> Electoral commissions are entities delegated to supervise an election.

Friendster (Karan, Gimeno & Tandoc, 2008:2). This helped the party win two seats in congress (Karan, Gimeno & Tandoc, 2008:2). Through social media, campaigners are offered unmediated and uncensored communication that is free from the restraints associated with mass media (Raooof et al, 2013:1146). During the 2013 Kenyan general election and 2012 U.S. Presidential Election politicians benefited from direct contact with the electorate that was free from “filtering or modification” (Odinga, 2013:40; Raooof et al, 2013:1146).

#### 2.4.1.2. Communication

With such a variety of positive attributes it is unsurprising that social media has become an important part of a campaigner’s toolkit. The primary use of social media is to share information (Şen, 2012:491) and political messages (Ehrenberg, 2012:22) such as the “latest campaign schedules and developments” (Espina-Letargo, 2010:14). It provides a platform for politicians to communicate with party members, register voters (Cruz, 2012) and engage with voters and the opposition (Hellweg, 2011:23). Social media has been observed to allow politicians to encourage greater participation. This includes organising campaign volunteers locally (Hellweg, 2011:23) and on a massive scale (Şen, 2012:491) and enabling and encouraging “users to form online political coteries among themselves” (Robertson, Vatrappu & Medina, 2010:12).

Several researchers note the way social media creates a dialogue between politicians and the electorate (e.g. Stieglitz & Dang-Xuan, 2013:1277; Vonderschmitt, 2012:17) where each influences the other (Lilleker, 2006, as cited in Vonderschmitt, 2012). Obama was able to use social media to engage with the electorate in a personalised manner at grassroots level on a near day-to-day basis (Hellweg, 2011:23; Tumasjan et al, 2010:178). He successfully mobilised “an army of campaign volunteers as participants in his campaign” through his efforts (Van Dijk, 2013:12).

In addition to fostering dialogue during the elections, social media provides an avenue for politicians to monitor public opinion (Cruz, 2012) and thus gain a “more detailed and timely understanding of ...society’s concerns” (Naeli, 2013:5). Additionally, it has been noted that social media can potentially be used to get the attention of media and the opposition (Raooof et al, 2013:1144).

#### 2.4.1.3. Political Branding

The internet has been identified as a communication channel for political parties to develop their branding (Schweiger & Adami, 1999:350). Obama, for instance, used social media in his presidential campaign to become a candidate that a tech-savvy voting public could relate to (Zavattaro, 2010:123). However, his use would not be unique. In the 2010 municipal elections in Calgary, a relatively unknown candidate, Naheed Nenshi, drew attention from the media through his use of social media platforms (Dumitrica, 2014:59). It was observed that Nenshi created a persona through his prolific use of social media that was “relatable” and “less formal”; a persona which appealed to the electorate (Dumitrica, 2014:61). He became less of a politician and more of a “social media friend” (Dumitrica, 2014:61). This example illustrates that besides drawing attention from the media, social media can be used effectively to build a positive brand for a politician. By reducing the gap between citizen and politician, social media made it possible for Nenshi to address the needs and concerns of the citizens and help illustrate the level of his dedication to them (Dumitrica, 2014:61).

A similar branding success was apparent during the 2011 Colombo municipal council elections. A.J.M. Muzammil, an election candidate, posted campaign photos on social media platforms which depicted him engaging with varying members from different walks of life (Gunawardene & Wattegama, 2013:142). This helped portray him as more relatable – just like Nenshi.

#### 2.4.1.4. Targeting Fringe Markets and the Youth

It has been argued that politicians cannot rely on solely using traditional media as this has the possibility of isolating them from “a new population of voters who use social media as integral parts of their decision making process” (Hellweg, 2011:31). A group of voters viewed as marginalised includes young people (Han-na & Min-sik, 2013:49). Barack Obama is frequently recognised for his successful campaign to garner support from young voters (Hellweg, 2011:22; Smuts, 2010:9). He did this by engaging on platforms that are popular with them such as Facebook (Smuts, 2010:9). He also concentrated on issues that were important to them such as “hosting online Twitter town hall meetings on topics such as student loan interest rates” (Cruz, 2012). During the 2010 Australian federal election, the Australian Labor Party launched a spoof

viral video that appealed to a younger demographic in addition to garnering attention from the media (Mills, 2013:22).

#### 2.4.1.5. Fundraising

Social media can also be an avenue for politicians to raise campaign funds. Obama, in particular, has been widely “credited with his ability to raise record amounts of money from multiple smaller donors” (Robertson, Vatrappu & Medina, 2009:6; Robertson, Vatrappu & Medina, 2010:12; Hellweg, 2011:23; Copeland & Römmele, 2014:173).

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#### 2.4.1.6. Smear Campaigns

Another potential use of social media is to combat smear campaigns (Hellweg, 2011:23) or “online mudslinging” (Espina-Letargo, 2010:14). It can also be used to spread “lies, propaganda and spin” (Ehrenberg, 2012:22) which has the potential to do great damage to an opposition’s campaign.

#### 2.4.2. Electorate

The electorate also benefits from social media during the election. This section examines the access to information it affords, increased communication it facilitates, and the way it acts as a platform for political expression and monitoring. It also offers citizens a place to practise citizen journalism and an avenue for young people to engage in politics.

##### 2.4.2.1. Access to Information

Social media provides citizens with access to a vast amount of information. They are able to access information related to candidates in an election (Hellweg, 2011:24) and share this information with others (Robertson, Vatrappu & Medina, 2010:11). They can watch political videos (Hellweg, 2011:24) of “debates, speeches, announcements, political position papers and transcripts” (Hellweg, 2011:23-24) on sites such as YouTube or read blogs covering the elections (Kushin & Yamamoto, 2010:622). Additionally, the “diversity of voices” (Newman, 2010: 52) provides the electorate with information that may not be accessible from traditional media sources (Kushin & Yamamoto, 2010:614). Research even suggests that “the more they

look to mass media and social media for information, the more likely citizens are to vote” (Hellweg, 2011:24).

#### 2.4.2.2. Communication

Social media provides the electorate with the opportunity to “engage in political dialogue” (Robertson, Vatrapu & Medina, 2010:11) with other citizens (Kushin & Yamamoto, 2010:613), politicians (Pathak, 2014:354), electoral bodies, the media and other political stakeholders. This form of communication is very appealing for the electorate as it has the possibility of being less expensive and “impactful” (Hellweg, 2011:24). There is evidence that citizens are embracing social media for communicative purposes. The 2008 US Presidential Election saw citizens embrace the opportunity to “create their own political content, distribute it online and comment on the content created by others” (Hanson et al, 2010:585). During the 2013 Kenyan election, the electorate were able to communicate with politicians and question them on their positions (Odinga, 2013:22).

#### 2.4.2.3. Political Expression

Besides the communication methods above, social media offers the electorate a platform for various forms of political expression. The electorate are able to show support to a candidate through funding (Hellweg, 2011:24) which can be facilitated through social media and they can use social media to defend that candidate against false claims by traditional mass media (Vatrapu, Robertson & Dissanayake, 2008:36). They can use social media as a platform to critique existing governments or other opposition and mock them through satirical content (Reilly, 2011:507).

Social media can also aid in activism (Robertson, Vatrapu & Medina, 2010:11) and protest action during an election. Following the release of information detailing fraudulent activity during the 2011 Russian parliamentary elections, a protest movement “for fair elections” was launched in response (Litvinenko, 2012:31). Kenyans used social media to fight against unbalanced depictions of their 2013 election by international media by condemning the sensationally negative characterisations on social media – particularly Twitter (Odinga, 2013:37).

For parts of electorates who are unable to access traditional media, social media provides an alternative avenue for them to embrace their political identity. For example, it has been suggested that during the 2011 Presidential Election in Nigeria, citizens who were marginalised by traditional media were able to express themselves through social media (Iwokwagh & Okworo, 2012:386).

Social media has also been used as a tool for combatting censorship during election periods. According to Soeung:

One month before Cambodia's general election scheduled for July 28, the government announced a directive banning local radio stations from airing foreign programs during the campaign and election period. The directive temporarily banned programs from Western broadcasters including Voice of America and Radio Free Asia's Khmer language services. In response, the Cambodian public immediately turned to Facebook and other social media voicing their condemnation, followed by the US government and international media outlets, resulting in the government reversing the ban the next day (2013:1).

#### 2.4.2.4. Watchdog Role

Social media can be used by the electorate to monitor elections and ensure that transparent and fair elections take place. During the 2011 Presidential Election in Nigeria, citizens used social media platforms to "report electoral malpractices to [the] authorities" (Policy and Legal Advocacy Centre, 2011:3).

#### 2.4.2.5. Citizen Journalism

Citizen journalism helps ensure transparent elections, which social media facilitates through its use. There are several powerful examples of citizen journalism taking place through the use of social media. During the Kenyan elections, bloggers shedded light on malpractices that took place which resulted in some election results being cancelled (Odinga, 2013:12). During the 2011 Nigerian Presidential Election, citizens were used as online informants by mass media, political parties and civil society organisations (Policy and Legal Advocacy Centre, 2011:12). Following the release of controversial election results in 2009, protest erupted in Iran (Carafano, 2009:1). Iranian citizens took to social media to share events happening within the country with the rest of the world (Carafano, 2009:1). The foreign coverage of the election aftermath was informed by social media emanating from the country by ordinary people (Carafano, 2009:5).

#### 2.4.2.6. Youth Engagement

Social media offers a means for youth to get involved in elections. In the 2013 Presidential Election in Kenya, social media provided a means for a disengaged youth to embrace a political identity (Odinga, 2013:41). For example, they used social media to get more election news and learn more about those contesting the elections (Wasswa, 2011:vi).

It has been noted that social media has the potential for opening ways “for youth to help shape the flow of information and to be creative” (Kahne & Middaugh, 2012: 54). Instead of being dependent on the political narratives offered by traditional media, they can share them on social media with comments and “shape how their peers think about the information” (Kahne & Middaugh, 2012:53).

In addition to giving them the opportunity to provide a youthful perspective on political issues, social media also has the potential to highlight the issues of young people. During the 2011 Canadian election a series of “vote mob” videos were released, one of which is described as employing:

... a range of tactics to solicit interest from its viewership: election snippets from CBC commentators Rick Mercer and George Stroumboulopoulos, brightly coloured neon signs, Canadian flags, aerial shots of the city and campus, quick-cut editing, bilingual testimony, random dancing, and a lot of exuberant running around—all set to the music of Kanye West, Snap, and Bruno Mars (Reilly 2011:504-505).

These videos provided insight into the concerns and political stances of the youth and were a proud indication of their voting power (Reilly 2011:505). The impact of these videos was amplified through sharing on other social media platforms (Reilly, 2011:505). During the 2011 Seoul mayoral by-election a podcast called “Naggomsu” was circulated on social media and like the Canadian video mob videos, covered issues relevant to the youth that were not being covered by traditional media at the time (Han-na & Min-sik, 2013:49).

#### 2.4.3. Traditional Mass Media

Instead of being threatened by social media, traditional mass media has the potential to form strong partnerships with social media; this is best exemplified during election periods (Newman,

2010:20). During the 2008 U.S. General Election CNN joined with YouTube to hold a debate (Robertson, Vatrappu & Medina, 2009:6). It provided the electorate with an opportunity to ask candidates questions by posting them in the comments section of the site (Vatrappu, Robertson & Dissanayake, 2008:23). *The Guardian*, a British newspaper, would later work with YouTube to host debates during the 2010 UK election (Newman, 2010:21).

Social media can complement and enrich traditional forms of media (Newman, 2010:3). For example, traditional mass media is able to draw content from social media in the use of news making (Newman, 2010:3) such as the reporting of a politician's tweets (Pathak, 2014:354). They can then use social media to promote this content (Newman, 2010:11). During the debates of the 2011 UK elections, witty commentary on Twitter was often reported by mainstream media (Newman, 2010:33). During the 2013 Kenyan election *The Daily Nation*, a local newspaper, developed a social media sentiment tracker on their election website (Odinga, 2013:10). This example highlights the importance traditional mass media attributes to social media during election periods.

Social media can also strengthen journalism through its usage. During elections, journalists can act as "digital correspondents" (Newman, 2010:3), covering elections through social media. In Britain, Krishnan Guru-Murthy, a Channel 4 news presenter, tweets prolifically during leadership debates (Newman, 2010:19). They can also make use of "live blogs" (Newman, 2010:3). Live blogs incorporate "official sources and blogs and tweets into a new form of networked journalism" (Newman, 2010: 52). Audiences have appreciated these live blogs because they provide a "diversity of voices" and offer small bits of news in real time (Newman, 2010: 52). Using social media can also improve the quality and practices of journalism during election periods (Chatora, 2012:5). In Nigeria, "journalists from various media organisations engaged with citizens on Facebook and the citizens' contributions informed the journalists' questions during interviews with political players in institutions such as INEC<sup>6</sup>" (Chatora, 2012:5).

#### 2.4.4. Electoral Commissions

Social media can be used by electoral commissions to spread important information (Macnamara, Sakinofsky & Beattie, 2012:33) to the electorate such as "how to vote" type

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<sup>6</sup> INEC refers to Nigeria's Independent National Electoral Commission

content (Macnamara, Sakinofsky & Beattie, 2012:34). They can use the platform as a way to “give responses in real-time to users” (Macnamara, Sakinofsky & Beattie, 2012:35). During the 2011 Nigerian Presidential Elections the INEC “posted almost 4 000 tweets, many in response to voter queries” (Chatora, 2012:5). Research indicates that the most effective way to interact with the INEC was through Twitter (Chatora, 2012:5). The INEC also used social media to get “feedback from the public on the performance of election officials” (Okoro & Nwafor, 2013:10).

## 2.5. Conclusion

South African social media research remains in its infancy with prominent research emerging in the fields of education, youth behaviour, mass media and commerce. Studies examining social media use from a local political perspective remain few and limited in their research scope. However, this chapter has illustrated that a local perspective is important what with rising levels of research across the world interrogating social media use during election periods.

Through this research vibrant social media uses have been observed by relevant actors during election periods. Politicians and political parties have harnessed these platforms for their appeal, for communication purposes and in branding themselves. They have used social media as a means to target fringe markets and members of the youth, to fundraise, and conduct smear campaigns against their opponents. The electorate have used social media to access information, as a communication tool, and to express themselves politically. Social media has been a boon for members of the electorate taking on a watchdog role and practising citizen journalism. These platforms have also been particularly attractive to young members of the electorate. The traditional mass media have shown evidence of embracing social media as a tool to strengthen their role in disseminating news. Finally, electoral commissions have benefited from social media. This chapter has illustrated how they use these platforms to communicate with the electorate, to gain feedback and disperse important information about the election process.

The second research question of the dissertation aims to understand how the social media uses investigated during the 2014 South African general election contributed to democracy. In order to accomplish this, the next chapter discusses Jürgen Habermas’ theory of the public sphere, the theoretical framework which will guide the direction of the dissertation.

## Chapter 3: Theoretical Framework - The Public Sphere

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### 3.1. Introduction

In the previous chapter the literature review examined the social media uses by relevant election actors during election periods. This chapter turns its attention to the theoretical framework which will guide the research being conducted on the 2014 South African general election.

The public sphere will be defined, its actors will be identified and the criteria for its creation will be outlined. The importance and relevance of the theory for this study will be explored. The theory is not without flaws and, as such, criticisms against the theory will be discussed. Researchers have applied public sphere theory to the internet. The debate about the potential will be explored, providing an understanding of the pessimistic/dystopian and optimistic/utopian views around the internet's democratic potential. As this dissertation focuses on social media, research conducted into social media public spheres will be examined. Finally, this study will provide a list of factors that support South Africa's potential to realise social media public spheres.

### 3.2. Defining the Public Sphere

The public sphere was conceived by sociologist, Jürgen Habermas, who studied eighteenth century bourgeois practices (Barlas & Çalışkan, 2006:3) that took place at coffeehouses, salons and table societies in Western Europe (Robertson, Vatrapu & Medina, 2010:13). Habermas described the public sphere as “a realm of our social life in which something approaching public opinion<sup>7</sup> can be formed” (1974:49). This occurs when private citizens converge to form a public body and discuss matters of “general interest” in a rational manner, which can then form public opinion (Habermas, 1974:49).

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<sup>7</sup> This refers to the “view that comes into being on a public issue after that issue has been debated and discussed in the public arena” (Odugbemi, 2008:17).

### 3.3. Actors of the Public Sphere

In addressing the nature of a politicised public sphere, Habermas has identified the following actors and their functions within the public sphere:

- *The Public*: These are active citizens who “give voice to society’s problems and who respond to the issues articulated in elite discourse” (Habermas, 2006:421) such as the electorate.
- *The Mass Media*: The mass media play a role in the construction of public opinion (Habermas, 2006:417). They provide “communication channels” and “introduce and shape topics of public discussion” (The World Bank, 2013:5). The mass media consists of “professionals of the media system — especially journalists who edit news, reports, and commentaries” (Habermas, 2006:416).
- *Politicians and political parties*: They act as “co-authors and addressees of public opinions” (Habermas, 2006:416).
- *Lobbyists who represent special interest groups*: They “translate the strain of pending social problems and conflicting demands for social justice into political issues” (Habermas, 2006:416-417).
- *Civil Society*: The members of civil society “articulate political interests and confront the state with demands arising from the life worlds of various groups” (Habermas, 2006:417). Examples of civil society include religious organisations, public interest groups and intellectuals (Habermas, 2006:417).

### 3.4. Criteria for the Creation of a Public Sphere

Habermas provides three institutional criteria that all public spheres have in common (1989:36).

The first criterion is that there should be a disregard of status (Habermas, 1989:36). Within the public sphere, individuals should engage as equals with this lack of social hierarchy encouraging a “better argument” (Habermas, 1989:36). This ensures that the “common humanity” of the participants is asserted (Habermas, 1989:36).

The second criterion is that issues of common concern should be exchanged and discussed (Habermas, 1989:36). Ayşe Fulya Şen summarises Habermas's historical perspective of common concern:

Before the development of the public sphere, authority of interpretation lay in the hands of the state and the church. These two institutions had a monopoly of interpretation in the fields of literature, philosophy and art. The monopoly persisted even at the time that specific spheres adhered to the rational thinking which flowed from the development of capitalism where more information was required. During this time philosophy and literature works as well as works of art became commercialised and were accessible to private citizens. These items no longer remained components of the churches' and courts' publicity of representation. Thus the private individuals, for whom these cultural products became available, determined meaning to it by the use of rational communication with others, verbalised it and stated the implicitness for so long they could assert its authority. Cultural products and information thus became the common concern of private citizens and this paved the way for other issues of common concern to be introduced as topics of deliberation (2012:491).

In essence, members of the public sphere should be able to deliberate topics that are introduced by members of the public sphere and that are pertinent to them.

The third precondition is that the public sphere must be inclusive (Habermas, 1989:37). Habermas emphasises that "however exclusive the public might be in any given instance" it should allow access to all that wish to participate and should not become a clique (Habermas, 1989:37).

Building on Habermas's work, Lincoln Dahlberg identified six specific requirements for the creation of a public sphere: Exchange and critique of reasoned moral-practical validity claims, reflexivity, ideal role taking, sincerity, discursive inclusion and equality, and autonomy from state and economic power (2001:623). Using these criteria, he displayed how Minnesota E-Democracy facilitated online deliberation through the communication practices of its participants on email based forums (Dahlberg, 2001:620). However, Dahlberg's research has been criticised by other researchers. Kasun Ubayasiri observed that his "analysis fails to address the fragmented nature of internet and continue[s] to theorise on one single overarching internet based public sphere – a futile pursuit in light of the internet being viewed as virtual world which mirrors the fragmented nature of contemporary society" (2006:8). As such his criteria would not be applicable to studies of social media platforms.

### 3.5. Importance of the Public Sphere

The theory remains “central” even in the face of criticism (Crossley & Roberts, 2004:1). It has been described as a “wonderful contribution to the theory of the human society” (Şen, 2012:493). Within academic fields that discuss society, communication (Moussa, 2013:49), democracy (Rabah, 2013:49) and the media’s role for democratic development (Prokhorov, 2012:17), the concept remains relevant. It is also widely used in research that explores the “relationship between citizen political participation and emerging information and communication technologies” (Häyhtiö, 2003:1).

The ideal public sphere serves an important role in “realising democracy” (Wang & Bates, 2008:11). It regulates the state by informing them of public concerns and holding them accountable (Häyhtiö, 2003:2). An ideal public sphere creates a dialogue between citizens with the expectation of uptake and consideration (Bohman, 2004:133). As such it helps citizens partake in political decision-making (The World Bank, 2013:1). An example of this is the way the public opinion formed through the public sphere impacts government in the form of “protests, demonstrations, petitions, even riots and rebellions” (Odugbemi, 2008:21). However, one of the most important ways the public opinion of the masses can make a difference is through elections (Negi, 2005:95). Elections provide individuals with an “accessible means of political participation in [a] democratic system” (Negi, 2005:97). As public opinion shapes electoral results, it provides the masses with the ability to hold their government accountable (Odugbemi, 2008:21).

### 3.6. Criticism of Habermas’s Public Sphere

Despite the importance of the theory, it has received a considerable amount of criticism (Prokhorov, 2012:19; Gerwin, 2011:7). Some argue that the public sphere ideal never existed (Şen, 2012:493; Goldberg, 2010:742) while others see the concept as romanticised (Papacharissi, 2009:7) or “utopian and unachievable” (Macnamara, Sakinofsky & Beattie, 2012:21). Some critics accuse Habermas of idealising the “the accessibility and the universality of a singular public sphere” (Gerwin, 2011:7). Guobin Yang also questions whether people went to coffee shops primarily to engage with others as detailed by Habermas (2003:7).

Habermas has mainly been accused of engaging in a “one-sided analysis” (Crossley & Roberts, 2004:10). The public sphere detailed in his works is regarded as exclusionary (Grbeša, 2003:112, Prokhorov, 2012:19) and elitist (Gerwin, 2011:7) with “large parts, if not the majority of populations” excluded (Deane, 2005:182). Habermas overlooks public spheres that are not bourgeoisie (Crossley & Roberts, 2004:11). As such, he limits his work to urban-based white men (Crossley & Roberts, 2004:12, Macnamara, Sakinofsky & Beattie, 2012:21) who were educated, wealthy, heterosexual (Deane, 2005:182; Grbeša, 2003:112) and property owners. This narrow perspective has been criticised for excluding women (Deane, 2005:182), homosexuals, the non-propertied, non-whites and members of the working class (Lunat, 2008:4; Fuchs, 2013:182; 119). Furthermore, even when these social groups have been included, their contributions were trivialised (Goldberg, 2010:742).

Habermas has revisited his theory and outlined further challenges to the public sphere such as “the lack of face-to-face interaction, high degrees of mediatisation, commercialisation and concentration of mass media, political intervention and ... the lack of feedback loops” (Gerwin, 2011:8). Additionally, he has recognized that alternate public spheres exist (Downey & Fenton, 2003: 187). As his research is “rooted in time and place” (Rabah, 2013:49), there has been a call to “revisit the concept to better adapt it to our changing reality” (Rabah, 2013:49).

### 3.7. The Virtual Public Sphere

One of these changing realities is the prominent rise of the internet in modern day society. Its expansion has led to scholarly interest in the implication it would have for democracy (Grbeša, 2003:118). Furthermore, there has been a rise in interest as to whether the internet can constitute a public sphere (Goldberg, 2010:739) – i.e. an ‘electronic’ or ‘virtual’ public sphere (Khan, Gilani & Nawaz, 2011:13). The internet’s potential is split between utopian and dystopian visions (Papacharissi, 2009:8). On one side, there are the optimists who believe that “the internet may either improve the existing form of democracy or revive the ancient form of direct democracy” (Şen, 2012:492). On the other side, are those who view the internet as being a bane to democracy and unable to constitute a public sphere (Fuchs, 2013:185,207).

The debate is complicated by the lack of research of the virtual public sphere particularly in developing countries (Lunat, 2008:10). Since social media is a relatively new development,

there is also a dearth of research into its use in democratic discourse and its effects on political action (Robertson, Vatrappu & Medina, 2010:13; Shirky, 2011:2). It is thus important to evaluate whether the internet (and social media) can form viable public spheres by examining the claims of both the pessimists and the optimists.

### 3.7.1. Dystopian Views of the Internet's Potential as a Public Sphere

Access and the digital divide are the main reasons critics argue against the virtual public sphere (Khan, Gilani & Nawaz, 2011:17; Iosifidis, 2011:620; Gerwin, 2011:9). Those without internet connectivity or digital literacy are excluded from the virtual public sphere and public forums - similar to Habermas's public sphere (Montemayor & Azagra, 2009:64; Robertson, Vatrappu & Medina, 2010:13). As such the voices of those who do not belong to a particular gender, age group, privileged race or class remain ignored (Deane, 2005:188; Iosifidis, 2011:624). This problem of representivity remains a problem in developing nations that suffer the worst of basic literacy and economic restrictions (Lunat, 2008:6; Hoskins, 2013:33). Even the critics that do acknowledge the existence of online public spheres believe that they remain exclusive because of the digital divide (Tierney, 2013:85).

The possibility of a public sphere can be disrupted by repressive governments (such as China) which practice sophisticated online censorship (Iosifidis, 2011:620. Goldberg, 2010:742). They are often able to suppress dissent and prevent the public from becoming aware of corrupt or exploitative activities (Shirky, 2011:8).

Beyond oppressive regimes, the online public sphere has been criticized for being vulnerable to commercial interests (Bohman, 2004:135; Tierney, 2013:83) which are contrary to the ideals of Habermas's public sphere. Social media platforms have also been scrutinised. One researcher argues that they are not just communication companies but advertising agencies with a profit-generating intent through advertising and the sale of their users' data (Fuchs, 2014:80).

The internet is capable of "accommodating contributions from people around the world" (Lunat, 2008:6). However, sceptics of the online public sphere believe that the political discourse created is often fragmented in a way that does not create a public sphere (Khan, Gilani & Nawaz, 2011:17; Khan, Gilani & Nawaz, 2012:45). Some critics feel that the internet creates

discussions that are “fragmented, nonsensical and enraged” (Rabah, 2013:56). In addition to fragmentation, characteristics of the internet make it chaotic. The open, free nature of the internet, the way it remains relatively unmoderated in comparison to traditional media (Wang & Bates, 2008:3) and the tremendous amounts of information available can lead to unstructured discussion, possible anarchy, polarisation and a decline in political community (Goldberg, 2010:742; Iosifidis, 2011:624).

Some critics feel that while the internet can facilitate public spaces, these do not necessarily translate into public spheres (Iosifidis, 2011:627). Instead, it just enables users to feel involved rather than actually advancing participation in civic life (Iosifidis, 2011:624). The interactive nature of the internet is believed to undermine instead of helping create a better civic participation (Goldberg, 2010:742). There is a lot of discussion that takes place online but it is believed that it is seldom critical or responsive in nature (Bohman, 2004:135; Iosifidis, 2011:620). Twitter’s concise word range is cited as preventing a lack of depth in discussions from occurring (Iosifidis, 2011:625).

Finally, it has been noted that some critics argue that the internet – particularly social media – create armchair activists with weak ties to each other and whose online activism cannot match real-world demonstrations (Abbott, MacDonald & Givens, 2013:106-107). They also see the internet as undermining the ability of the mass media to fulfil its role as a watchdog (Goldberg, 2010:742).

### 3.7.2. Utopian Views of the Internet’s Potential as a Public Sphere

A rising body of research has examined the potential of the internet and taken a more positive view which this section will motivate for. Scholars have postulated that the internet can act as a viable, effective public sphere (Şen, 2012:490; Ndunde, 2008:59; Wang & Bates, 2008:11). There is evidence of a virtual public sphere that has allowed interaction amongst the physically scattered citizenry in a developing nation like Zimbabwe (Moyo, 2009:68). Even researchers that have reacted cautiously, agree that while the internet cannot create a public sphere by itself, it is a useful tool for people to create the basis of one (Papacharissi, 2002:9; Iosifidis, 2011:626). Beyond this, studies indicate that social media fulfil the requirements to act as a public sphere (Robertson, Vatrapu, Medina, 2009:6; Robertson, Vatrapu, Medina, 2010:39;

Chowdhury, 2011:2). Although social media are not primarily political in nature, it is argued that political discourse can thrive on these sites (Edgerly et al, 2009:24). One study has illustrated how virtual public spheres have emerged in some Arab countries through the help of social media like Facebook and Twitter (Rabah, 2013:57). These public spheres have been noted to foster “democracy and empower citizens to transcend paternalism experienced” (Rabah, 2013:48). Here, social media offers a more inclusive space in contrast to the “traditional, hegemonic Arab elitist public sphere” (Rabah, 2013:48). Building on these studies, this part of the chapter will examine counterpoints to the more pessimistic views surrounding the virtual public sphere.

Utopians view the virtual public sphere as having more democratic potential than those formed by the traditional mass media. In fact Habermas, himself, identified that the traditional mass media is no longer able to provide a forum for the public sphere (Singh & Thakur, 2013:39). The primary reason, Utopians argue, is the commercialisation of the traditional mass media (Singh & Thakur, 2013:39; Şen, 2012:493). The commercialisation of the traditional mass media has led to “the neglect of communication roles between the public itself and the leaders, institutions and the organizations within mass media” (Şen, 2012:490). The second reason pointed out is that the traditional mass media is more difficult to access which prevents individual expression (Edgerly et al, 2009:5). The internet has been touted as being more accessible to the public in terms of cost (Bohman, 2004:134; Wang & Bates, 2008:4). The cost is so low that it is advantageous to undisciplined groups to coordinate themselves online (Shirky, 2011:6). In particular, social media platforms are free to use and easily available to most citizens in developed countries (Robertson, Vatrappu, Medina, 2010:15, Prokhorov, 2012:25). When digital access of broadband is widely available, social media can contribute to democracy (Unwin, 2013:45). In the U.S.A. they have been credited with transcending “socio-economic and racial barriers” (Ali, 2011:213). Social media has even managed to overcome the digital literacy barrier by being relatively simple to use and requiring very little technical expertise (Ali, 2011:213).

Utopians believe that the internet is able to overcome or prevent censorship and bias by governments and the media. Firstly, scholars agree that the internet is difficult to be manipulated by authoritarian control (Khan, Gilani & Nawaz, 2011:16; Gerwin, 2011:8). Secondly, governments are aware that censorship of the internet can harm the economy (Shirky, 2011:6). Thirdly, online censorship also risks “radicalizing otherwise pro-regime

citizens” who are affected by the restrictions (Shirky, 2011:6). This is more evident with social media sites (Singh & Thakur, 2013:40). According to the “Cute Cat Theory”, these sites are used primarily for recreational purposes such as the exchange of pictures of cute cats (Abbott, MacDonald & Givens, 2013:128-129). By shutting these sites for the political activity that may take place on them, the government risks alienating and angering the majority that use the sites for their enjoyment (Abbott, MacDonald & Givens, 2013:129). Finally, the internet can also help citizens hold their governments and journalists accountable for their actions (Hindman, 2008:3). Social media can “empower individuals to expose serious human rights abuses” (Ali, 2011:189). As the mass media is prone to manipulation, one study has highlighted the way a few “emerging democracies have migrated to social media to consume and debate information in a forum independent of a widely discredited and mistrusted traditional media” (Hoskins, 2013:32).

Some critics have come out against the notion of the public sphere as fragmented and ineffective. In response, a group of researchers suggest that the online public sphere acts as a global public sphere that can unite fragmented groups beyond national boundaries (Khan, Gilani & Nawaz, 2010:16). The internet facilitates spaces where people of different “political orientation and interests, gender, ethnicity, cultural capital, and geography” can find meaningful participation (Dahlgren, 2005:152). The internet also enables the creation of counter public spheres where individuals with “political currents oppositional to the dominant mainstream can find support and expression” (Dahlgren, 2005:152). In a similar vein, another scholar describes the virtual public sphere as segmented and linked (Yang, 2003:7). It has also been noted that the size of the virtual public sphere is not important. It is argued that while Habermas’s public sphere was limited to small groups of the privileged when it emerged in the 18<sup>th</sup> century they were still able to make a significant impact (Rabah, 2013:57).

Those with a more optimistic view of the internet see online communication as having greater potential to fulfil the ideal of the public sphere. The mass media have been criticized as being “limited, one-way, very slow” (Khan, Gilani & Nawaz, 2011:18) and providing “information flow [that is] predominantly vertical and asymmetrical” (Singh & Thakur, 2013:39; Şen, 2012:490). In comparison online users benefit from a many-to-many mode of communication (Bohman, 2004:134; Khan, Gilani & Nawaz, 2011:18) which “changes the flow of power in the media landscape, and therefore in society” (Beers, 2006:119). This interactivity provides citizens with more opportunities to engage with one another and increase their participation in the public

sphere (Wang & Bates, 2008:3-4). This two-way communication of the internet is particularly evident with social media (Abbott, MacDonald & Givens, 2013:106; Macnamara, Sakinofsky & Beattie, 2012:8). It enables a sustained dialogue or conversation (Singh & Thakur, 2013:38; Macnamara, Sakinofsky & Beattie, 2012:8) to take place between the members of the public sphere. The participants are also made active rather than passive consumers of information (Prokhorov, 2012:25; Ali, 2011:215).

The nature of this interactivity is less restricted online to the extent that the internet has been heralded by optimists as a place for personal expression (Khan, Gilani & Nawaz, 2011:16). One of the reasons is that the “underlying basic structure [of online communication] treats all content and users similarly” (Wang & Bates, 2008:3). The internet eliminates the need for face-to-face interaction (Tierney, 2013:85). As such participants can choose to express themselves anonymously. This can be quite useful “in an argument that may otherwise [have] been tempered through social mores or fear of retribution, thus enhancing the prospect of greater debate” (Ubayasiri, 2006:10). The anonymity can also help users divided by identity, allowing them to interact “freely and openly thus promoting a more enlightened exchange of ideas” (Papacharissi, 2002:16). It has also been noted that many people who do not express themselves offline are able to use online spaces such as blogs and Facebook to become opinion leaders (Şen, 2012:490). In addition to the anonymity of online interaction, there is less cultural and linguistic limitations online (Bohman, 2004:135). Social media, in particular, is able to help overcome the language barrier by supporting more languages and offering more diverse forms of communication (Ali, 2011:215). These diverse forms of political expression include text, visual, audio and graphic (Prokhorov, 2012:26). Critics of the concise range of tweets (Iosifidis, 2011:625) neglect that users can use long postings and link to blog postings for more extensive dialogue. Those who argue that a virtual thumbs-up-or-down does not account for deliberation on YouTube and Facebook ignore the comments sections on YouTube videos or Facebook walls (Gerwin, 2011:11).

The internet offers users access to practically limitless information including that of a political nature (Norris, 2000:2; Wang & Bates, 2008:4; Hindman, 2009:142). This allows participants to check their facts and reference in discussions (Montemayor & Azagra, 2009:63; Hindman, 2008:3). As such, this has the potential to allow dialogues to “progress beyond emotional, *ad hominem* exchanges and unsupported argument that are the hallmarks of popular television and radio talk shows” (Montemayor & Azagra, 2009:63).

In response to critics that see online discussions as chaotic, one optimist notes that even the “superficial and frivolous” diversionary conversation on social media is important as “communication in any sense and on any forum, demonstrates the possibility of democratic value” (Hoskins, 2013:32).

Optimists of the internet highlight its ability to overcome temporal and spacial restrictions (Khan, Gilani & Nawaz, 2011:18; Iosifidis, 2011:623; Robertson, Vatrappu & Medina, 2010:15; Gerwin, 2011:9). This has several benefits for citizens. Firstly, they do not need to be physically present in order to contribute to a discussion (Grbeša, 2003:118). This is particularly effective in developing nations or nations with dispersed populations like Zimbabwe (Moyo, 2009:68). Secondly, features like Facebook’s “asynchronous and non-temporally bounded wall-posting context” means that one user’s voice cannot dominate the conversation taking place (Robertson, Vatrappu & Medina, 2010:29). The internet offers a variety of channels and forums such as social media platforms (Khan, Gilani & Nawaz, 2011:16; Wang & Bates, 2008:5) where discussion can take place and public opinion can be formed. Research has found that Facebook, for example, facilitated public opinion during the 2008 U.S. Presidential Election. This was evidenced through Facebook postings that showed signs of deliberation (Smuts, 2010:68), the creation of communication channels between private individuals and the government (Smuts, 2010:69), the use of online petitions on the site, the aiding of individuals to fund candidates and the way Facebook fostered “communication with a civic group and/ or other individuals regarding relevant issues of common concern” (Smuts, 2010:70).

The internet has also been lauded for empowering marginalised groups (Khan, Gilani & Nawaz, 2011:16; Şen, 2012:492). The internet and particularly, social media, has been recognised for the way it has helped to bring people together “from diverse backgrounds” (Papacharissi, 2002:15) who share “indignation, anger, frustration”, feel victimised (Hoskins, 2013:31) or are isolated from mainstream politics (Norris, 2000:2). Through social media, they are able to collaborate (Khan, Gilani & Nawaz, 2011:16), express their opinions (Prokhorov, 2012:25), engage with one another (Wang & Bates, 2008:3), challenge authoritarian rule (Norris, 2000:4) and even organise protest actions – both offline and online (Hoskins, 2013:31). The latter use has been documented by researchers of the Arab Spring. Social media played a crucial role in organising dissent during the Arab Spring movement (Şen, 2012:490). Women in the Arab world are traditionally excluded by male-dominated politics (Şen, 2012:490). However, they were able

to use social media to voice their opinions within the online public sphere (Şen, 2012:490). Finally, in contrast to the ineffective armchair activist critique, proponents of the internet believe that the internet has the potential to complement and organise real-world activism instead of replacing it (Abbott, MacDonald & Givens, 2013:107; Shirky, 2011:7). They believe that the debates that take place online reflect the way offline interaction takes place (Rabah, 2013:50).

The internet also plays a role in complementing traditional media, especially in its role as a watchdog. The internet provides citizens with access to media content and “faster feedback mechanisms” between the media and public (Wang & Bates, 2008:3). Citizen journalism can give citizens the opportunity to shape news and report non-mainstream news stories that are overlooked by traditional media (Abbott, MacDonald & Givens, 2013:107). Citizen journalism helps make media harder to regulate and reduces media bias (Abbott, MacDonald & Givens, 2013:119). Through online platforms, citizens no longer have to rely on journalists to write the stories they are interested in or have to rely on the mass media to distribute them (Prokhorov, 2012:25). Citizen journalists also play a role in keeping both the government and the media accountable for their actions (Hindman, 2008:3).

In response to the criticism of new media being used for “commerce, social life or self-determination” instead of primarily for politically motivated reasons, one view argues that “this is common to all forms of media” (Shirky, 2011:3). Additionally, while social media platforms like Facebook have primarily corporate interests in the targeting of users through advertising, these sites suffer minimal censorship (Callahan, 2010:10). This minimal censorship allows users to “subvert [the] consumerism-oriented order” and enjoy “its ability to sustain a free space for discussion” (Callahan, 2010:10).

For the purpose of this study the researcher has opted for an optimistic view of the internet and its democratic potential. The utopian views are able to address all of the concerns the dystopian critics have of the internet. Where dystopian views point out issues of access and the digital divide, utopians view the internet as overcoming this through reduced costs, less literacy requirements and being open to people from different socio-economic and racial backgrounds. Where dystopian views fret about the internet being controlled or disrupted by oppressive regimes, optimists point out the difficulty in controlling the internet, the risk in censoring it and the way it can help the public in holding their representatives and the media accountable. Where

dystopian views criticise the commercial nature of the online public sphere, utopians argue that all forms of media are commercial in nature and that social media sites, in particular, suffer from minimal censorship. Where pessimists frown at the perceived fragmented nature of the internet, optimists argue that the online public sphere can act as a global, unified sphere that can provide spaces for people to engage from different walks of life. Optimists also point out the importance of having counter public spheres for people with dissenting views. Where pessimists sniff that the interactivity does not lead to civic participation or thoughtful debate, optimists highlight the way the limitless access to information and ability to fact-check online can lead to more factually-based exchanges. Where pessimists denounce the way the internet creates armchair activists, the optimists counter that the internet complements real-world activism. And, where pessimists insist that the internet hinders the mass media in their role as a watchdog, those with a utopian view laud the internet for its ability to complement the mass media and empower citizen journalists.

The virtual public sphere even has the potential to address some of the original criticisms levelled at Habermas' public sphere. Instead of being exclusive, utopians affirm the ability of the internet to provide a space for marginalised individuals.

Finally, a large body of research has progressed beyond exploring the internet's potential as public sphere and concentrated solely on the democratic qualities of social media sites. The next section examines this research.

### 3.8. The Social Media Public Sphere

Researchers have identified public sphere theory as a way to analyse communication in social media (Johannessen, 2013; Litvinenko, 2012; Smuts, 2010; Robertson, Vatrappu & Medina, 2009; Iosifidis, 2011; Robertson, Vatrappu & Medina, 2010; Steenkamp, 2011; Macnamara, Sakinofsky, Beattie, 2012; Edgerly et al, 2009). According to Iosifidis, the internet provides "communication spaces where debate can be conducted" (2011:5). Additionally, it creates "new public spheres for political intervention, thus expanding the realm for democratic participation" (Iosifidis, 2011:622).

Robertson, Vatrappu & Medina found that the dialog they observed “on the Facebook walls of the 2008 U.S. Presidential candidates showed evidence of several of the characteristics that scholars claim are central to the realization of a Habermasian public sphere” (2010:29). Ubayasiri found that YouTube also “offers an environment conducive for rational critical debate – thus a forum for a public sphere” (2006:12). Edgerly et al note that social networking sites like YouTube empower users to “share user-generated content” and communicate with each other (2009:24). They also state that:

Although these sites are not exclusively political, within specific enclaves, political speech can take hold and flourish. Scholars of the public sphere should continue to follow this trend and extend their work to areas of political social media (2009:24).

Building upon this precedence and the call by academics in this field for further examination, public sphere as a theory will be used for this study.

### 3.9. South African Online Public Sphere

While not as close to the ideal as more developed countries, South Africa does meet the requirements for an online public sphere in terms of the institutional criteria set out by Habermas for a functioning public sphere. In addressing these criteria the country’s internet access, diverse online spaces, internet freedom<sup>8</sup> and the digital literacy<sup>9</sup> (Şen, 2012:491-492) (which is necessary for online platforms such as social media to contribute to democracy) will be examined.

#### 3.9.1. Internet Access

South Africa’s online landscape is complex with Apartheid leaving a gap in terms of access between rural and urban areas (Molawa, 2009:6). Rural areas face barriers to internet usage by the expense associated with internet connectivity, “limited or no access to electricity/ power” and “low levels of literacy” posing difficulties when English remains the Internet’s predominantly used language (Molawa, 2009:6).

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<sup>8</sup> The Freedom of Expression Institute defines internet freedom as “the extent to which users can exchange ideas and share information given the restrictions permitted within the confines of the law” (Freedom of Expression Institute, 2014:12).

<sup>9</sup> Digital literacy is the ability to use digital technology.

Despite these challenges, South Africa ranks as one of the top three countries on the continent in terms of internet users (Internet World Stats, 2014). While only a third of locals (40,9%) have at least one member who uses the Internet (Statistics South Africa, 2014:13), evidence indicates that internet users “are becoming more representative of the country’s demographics” (Staff Writer, 2014b). There is an equal split between male and female users and the country’s predominantly black population are the most prolific race group online (Staff Writer, 2014b). There has been a rise in a phenonema known as “Black Twitter” where South African black people are using the platform to express their opinions and concerns – especially in their indigenous languages – without the need of mass media to amplify or define their assertions (Serino, 2013). As a youthful country (Maqutu, 2014), it is also appropriate that 53% of online users are below the age of 34 (Staff Writer, 2014b).

South Africa’s internet population continues to grow (Alfreds, 2013). The factors which are accelerating this include access to cheaper smartphones and mobile data (Alfreds, 2014a); the latter of which is aided in no small part by a price war between cellphone network providers since 2012 to the present (McLeod, 2012; Nicholas, 2013; Moneyweb, 2014). There are also a number of initiatives being established to make free WI-FI available in public areas (Alfreds, 2014a).

Another fact aiding internet access in the country is the proliferation of mobile phones. South Africa has a mobile penetration rate of around 128% (Thomas, 2014), meaning there are more cellphone sim cards in the country than taxis, television sets and radios combined (Imaginet, 2013). South African users of mobile internet consume a lot of data indicating a growing relevance of the technology in their lives. A recent study indicates that more than half of the mobile phone population consumes one gigabyte of data per month (Effective Measure, 2014a:6). In terms of mobile data usage, the country ranks 5<sup>th</sup> in the world (Imaginet, 2013).

### 3.9.2. Online Spaces

South Africans enjoy access to a number of internet sites and those with access to the internet show a strong predilection to social media sites. Research indicates that one of the top five reasons South Africans use the internet, is to access social networking sites (Staff Writer, 2014a). Additionally, one of the top three main uses of mobile data is to access social media

(Effective Measure, 2014a:10). The most popular social networking sites<sup>10</sup> used are Facebook, YouTube, Twitter and Mxit (World Wide Worx, 2014) - in that order.

### 3.9.2.1. Facebook

In 2013, this social network grew from 6.8 millions to 9, 4 million active users (World Wide Worx, 2013) to become the country's most popular social media network. It would retain its title with a 25% growth to 11, 8 million active users (World Wide Worx, 2014:2). With an equal user base of male and female and a high percentage of teenage users, Facebook has been credited with bridging South Africa's gender divide and being youth-friendly (World Wide Worx, 2014: 1-2). In 2014, the site was ranked as the 2<sup>nd</sup> most popular site in the country (Effective Measure, 2014b). In terms of Facebook users, the country ranks as 2<sup>nd</sup> on the continent and 32<sup>nd</sup> worldwide (Charlie Fripp, 2014).

### 3.9.2.2. YouTube

The second most popular social media site has an active user base of 7,2-million, growing by 53% from the previous year (World Wide Worx, 2014:3). South Africans are very active on YouTube with an estimated 48 hours of video being uploaded every minute onto the site in 2012 (Kruger, 2011). Overall, the site was ranked as the 3<sup>rd</sup> most popular site in the country, just after Google and Facebook (Effective Measure, 2014b).

### 3.9.2.3. Twitter

Twitter ranks as the third most popular social media network with 6,6-million active users (World Wide Worx, 2014:3). South African Twitter are very active on the site; evidence indicates South Africans rank as the tenth largest Twitter users worldwide (Lipman, 2014). Three of the country's cities – Johannesburg, Ekurhuleni and Durban – rank respectively as the 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup> and

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<sup>10</sup> Each of these sites is also held in high esteem by the youth of South Africa. The Sunday Times Generation Next Youth Brand Survey has polled youth (aged between 8 and 23) on their favourite social media platform. Between 2010 - 2014 these sites have charted within the top 7 of the most popular social media sites as determined by young people (Sunday Times, 2010; Sunday Times, 2011; Sunday Times, 2012; Sunday Times, 2013; Sunday Times, 2014).

4<sup>th</sup> most active cities on Twitter (Portland, 2014). South Africans generate an average of 80 tweets per minute, 3.4 million tweets per month and 115, 000 tweets per day (Meier 2013).

#### 3.9.2.4. Mxit

Mxit, the country's 4<sup>th</sup> most popular social media platform, has 6,5-million active users (World Wide Worx, 2014:3). Although it was one of the more popular sites, its numbers have waned due to stiff competition from other instant-messaging platforms like WhatsApp and 2Go (World Wide Worx, 2013:4). The company has also changed the way it measures active users; an active users is classified as having accessed the site in the last 30 days instead of the last 90 days (World Wide Worx, 2013:3). Mxit users remain loyal to the platform, accessing the site five times per day and using the site for 105 minutes per day (World Wide Worx, 2014:3). Additionally, Mxit still remains relevant as its users reflect the demographics of the country. According to one commentator, Mxit users are predominantly lower to middle class, black and young (Mzekandaba, 2014).

#### 3.9.3. South Africa's Internet Freedom

South Africa is the freest country on the African continent in terms of internet freedom (Freedom House, 2014:20). Additionally, research classifies the digital media environment of the country as "generally free and open" (Freedom House, 2014:697). There are a number of factors that affirm this. South African citizens have access to diverse viewpoints online and are able to engage in discussions without being censored by the government (Freedom of Expression Institute, 2014:15). Internet users and bloggers have not been prosecuted to stifle their freedom of expression (Staff Writer, 2014c). The country also benefits from an independent judiciary which has "issued a few rulings protecting freedom of expression online in recent years" (Freedom of Expression Institute, 2014:23).

#### 3.9.4. Digital Literacy

While there remains few studies on the levels of digital literacy in the country, a Digital Literacy Report conducted in 2009, found that 84% of South Africans are digitally literate (ECDL Foundation, 2009:43).

### 3.10. Conclusion

This chapter examined the over-arching theoretical framework that will guide the direction and scope of the dissertation. For this study, Jürgen Habermas' public sphere theory was used. First, the chapter provided a definition of the public sphere.

Next, the actors of a politicised public sphere were listed and their roles explored. These actors include the public, the mass media, politicians and political parties, lobbyists who represent special interest groups and members of the civil society.

In emphasising the relevance of the theory for this study, the importance of Habermas' public sphere was examined. This study affirms the public sphere as a key theory in discussions of democracy. However, the criticisms levelled against the theory have also been outlined.

The chapter then examined researcher's application of the public sphere to matters of the internet. The idea of the virtual or online public sphere has created conflict amongst researchers of the public sphere. As such the pessimistic/dystopian and optimistic/utopian views surrounding the debate on the internet's democratic potential have been examined. For the purposes of this dissertation, the researcher displayed the way optimists/utopians address the pessimistic/dystopian concerns and even explain the way the internet is able to overcome criticisms of Habermas' original conception of the public sphere.

Finally, this chapter concludes with an exploration of factors relevant for South Africa to meet the institutional criteria of Habermas' public. These factors include the country's growing rates of internet access, the country's diverse online spaces (especially in terms of social media platforms), the pervasiveness of internet freedom and the levels of digital literacy of the country's population.

The next chapter of the dissertation will examine the case study method used to gather data for the purposes of understanding how social media was used during the 2014 South African general election. This chapter will highlight the actors of the public sphere as the units of analysis in probing this use.

## Chapter 4: Methodology - Case Study Research Theory and Application

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### 4.1. Introduction

The previous chapter explored the theoretical underpinning of this dissertation. Now, the methodological approach of the research, the case study method, will be examined and the manner in which it was applied to understanding how social media was used during the 2014 South African general election will be explained.

First, this chapter will define the case study research method. Next, the advantages and disadvantages of the method will be outlined. The theory behind the approach will be examined. This includes the different types of case studies and the common criteria that all case studies are required to fulfil in order to produce reliable results. The study will then apply the case study research design with attention to mitigating the disadvantages of the method. As the research takes place on social media sites, the researcher will also demonstrate how data collection was conducted in an ethical manner.

### 4.2. Defining the Case Study Method

The case study research method is an “established research design” that is widely used in academia (Crowe et al, 2011:1). Robert K. Yin defines the method as “an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident” (2003:13). These phenomena can include nation-states, revolutions, political parties, people and notably for this study – elections (Gerring, 2004:342). In application, the case study acts as a main method that employs sub methods and draws from multiple sources of evidence to gain a clear understanding of the phenomenon under investigation (Gillham, 2000:13).

### 4.3. Advantages of the Case Study Approach for this Study

The case study approach was chosen for this study for several reasons. Case studies are useful for explaining a complex phenomenon (Kohn, 1997:3; Vissak, 2010:379) like an election. A successful case study is able to generate “rich” or “thick” descriptions (Vissak, 2010:371) by

drawing from multiple sources (Zainal, 2007:4; Vissak, 2010:379) and using different methods of enquiry. The diverse perspectives offered in this way (Woodside, 2010:3; Vissak, 2010:373) contribute to a deeper understanding of the phenomenon under investigation. The case study method is also useful for explaining “how” questions about an event which is in keeping with the research questions of this study (Schell, 1992:7; Vissak, 2010:379).

One of the research objectives of this study is to understand the extent of South Africa’s public sphere. Case study theorists agree that the method is appropriate for theory testing (Woodside, 2010:11; Vissak, 2010:371) as “it allows expanding and generalizing theories by combining the existing theoretical knowledge with new empirical insights” (Vissak, 2010:371).

The case study method is flexible in that it allows for the most suitable methods to be used. For example, if the necessary information can be gained through secondary sources instead of surveys, this prevents time wastage and possible costs of transport (Vissak, 2010:374).

The literature review has highlighted several reasons why case study research is appropriate. Previous studies have effectively used the case study research method to examine social media’s use in politics. These include social media’s role in the elections in West Africa (Smyth, 2013), Obama’s campaigning during the 2008 Presidential Campaign in the U.S. (Pillay, 2013a), the 2007 elections in the Philippines (Karan, Gimeno, & Tandoc, 2008), Facebook’s role as a tool for the establishment of democracy in Egypt (Prokhorov, 2012) and during the 2010 Iranian election protests (Callahan, 2010).

Despite this, there still remains a lack of research on the topic of social media use during elections conducted in developing nations. For this reason case study research will be effective as it is “tailor-made for exploring new processes or behaviours or ones that are little understood” (Meyer, 2001:330; Vissak, 2010:372).

Stieglitz & Dang-Xuan emphasise “that from the perspective of political institutions, there is an emerging need to continuously collect, monitor, analyze, summarize, and visualize politically relevant information from social media” (2013:1277). However, the nature of this endeavour is “difficult ... due to a large numbers of different social media platforms as well as the large amount and complexity of information and data” (Stieglitz & Dang-Xuan, 2013:1277). As such,

the adaptability of the case study method allows for flexibility in analysing social media for the purposes of this dissertation which draws upon multiple social media platforms to construct a perspective on the social media usage during the elections.

There is also the issue of how to measure such diverse usage of social media during the election. The case study is useful in this instance as it allows the researcher to “capture multiple realities that are not easily quantifiable” (Hancock & Algozzine, 2006:72) and “explore new areas where... measurement is unclear” (Kohn, 1997:3).

Finally, social media was used by several groupings during the elections in varying manners. The case study method is appropriate in this instance as it is “useful in situations where ... the researcher has no control over events as they unfold” (Macome, 2002:83).

#### 4.4. Criticisms of the Case Study Approach

Despite the many advantages of the case study method, there are criticisms of the method that need to be considered. This section outlines the concerns and counterpoints to the criticisms.

One of the key criticisms of studies that employ the case study research method is that the results cannot be generalised to other studies (Crowe et al, 2011:7; Woodside, 2010:9; Vissak, 2010:375; Zainal, 2007:5), they are difficult to verify and in particular, lack statistical generalization<sup>11</sup> (Vissak, 2010:383). However, it has been argued that “the objective of case study research is not to generalize findings to a population” (Woodside, 2010:9) but to probe, examine or generalize theories (Yin, 2003:10). This is accomplished by using analytic sampling<sup>12</sup> (Yin, 2003:10; Crowe et al, 2011:7). Analytic sampling offers the potential to study “multiple cases, or multiple behaviours and events within one case study [that] can be examined to deepen understanding of patterns and contingencies related to theory” (Woodside, 2010:10). A further defence is that “no one study can be replicated perfectly” (Woodside, 2010:10).

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<sup>11</sup> Statistical generalization is used when a researcher infers “the results from a sample and applies it to a population”. The sample used is drawn randomly and is “representative of the population” (Mills, Durepos & Wiebe, 2010:892)

<sup>12</sup> Yin defines analytical generalization as an attempt by the researcher to “generalize a particular set of results to some broader theory” (2003:37).

For the researcher, the case study method has the potential to be time consuming (Vissak, 2010:383) and labour intensive (Vissak, 2010:379; Schell, 1992:8). The researcher is left with copious amount of data to analyse (Baxter & Jack, 2008:554; Zainal, 2007:5; Schell, 1992:8) that may make him or her “lose sight of the most important dimensions, issues, relationships and aspects” of the study (Vissak, 2010:376). The time, labour and data analysis also have the potential to make case study research expensive (Vissak, 2010:383). For this study labour, time and expense have been reduced by limiting the objectives and scope of the study. For example, the study has chosen an election to highlight South Africa’s possible public sphere and chosen only the most popular social media platforms in the country to study. Additionally, proponents of the case study method offer techniques to mitigate these problems like suggesting the use of a computerised database “to organize and manage the voluminous amount of data” (Baxter & Jack, 2008:554).

In terms of execution, case studies have often been accused of “lacking scientific rigour” (Crowe et al, 2011:7; Neale, Thapa & Boyce, 2006:4; Yin, 2003:10) and producing poor results if not conducted correctly (Yin, 2003:10; Vissak, 2010:378). One of the contributing factors is that in contrast to other research methods, “a comprehensive ‘catalog’ of research designs for case study has yet to be developed” (Yin, 2003:19). This case study will make use of a multi-method approach (Vissak, 2010:380) and use “triangulation and multiple informants...to confirm and deepen information” (Woodside, 2010:9). The use of multiple sources has the potential to improve the quality of the research as it allows triangulation. Triangulation “reduces the respondent bias, provides additional information, increases support for the researcher’s conclusions, and may lead to new questions that can be answered in later research” (Vissak, 2010:380). The research also drew upon designs used by other research (see Macome 2002).

In addition to an execution pitfall, the research could be hindered by bias. For example, the researcher has to be careful when choosing their informants (Vissak, 2010:379) or interpreting data (Macome, 2002:87). The researcher may also be “tempted to ignore negative issues and leave out anything contradicting their developed propositions or theory” (Vissak, 2010:376). Besides using a multi-method approach to reduce bias, there are several ways a researcher can make their study more transparent during the methodology process. This includes giving a detailed account of “the steps involved in case selection, data collection, the reasons for the particular methods chosen, and the researcher’s background and level of involvement (i.e.

being explicit about how the researcher has influenced data collection and interpretation)” (Crowe et al, 2011:8). Additionally, the researcher should be clear on how “interpretations and conclusions were reached” (Crowe et al, 2011:8).

#### 4.5. Type and Scope of Case Studies

Yin distinguishes between three types of case studies used for research purposes which include explanatory or causal case studies, descriptive case studies and exploratory case studies (Macome, 2002:84). Explanatory case studies attempt to understand the phenomenon through cause-and-effect relationships and “search for explanatory theories of the phenomena” (Macome, 2002:84). Descriptive case studies are guided by theory to collect data. The theory used “should be openly stated in advance and be the subject of review and debate and later serve as the ‘design’ for the descriptive case study” (Macome, 2002:84). With exploratory case studies “the collection of data occurs before theories or specific research questions are formulated: it is followed up by analysis of data and leads to more systemic case studies” (Macome, 2002:84)

In terms of design, the type of case study can be either a single-case (holistic) design, single-case study (embedded) design, multiple-case study (holistic) design and multiple-case (embedded) design (Yin, 2003:39). Despite the differences in case study type, all will include a research design component, a case study protocol, data collection principles and quality criteria.

#### 4.6. Case Study Research Design Component

A case study research component consists of (1) a study’s questions, (2) its propositions, (3) its unit(s) of analysis, (4) the logic linking the data to the propositions, (5) and the criteria for interpreting the findings (Yin, 2003:24). In terms of study questions, “how” questions have been pointed out as appropriate for case study research (Yin, 2003:22). Study propositions “directs attention to something that should be examined within the scope of the study” (Yin, 2003:22). As propositions are informed by theory or previous literature, they are not used for exploratory studies (Yin, 2003:22). However, exploratory studies should still outline their purpose and criteria “by which they will be judged successful” (Yin, 2003:22). The unit(s) of analysis or case needs to be defined; i.e. a “pre-defined boundary which clarifies the nature and time period

covered by the case study” and a discussion of the “social group[s], organisation[s] or geographical area[s] that may form the sub-units” (Crowe et al, 2011:4). The latter two components (4-5) have been underdeveloped (Yin, 2003:26) and do not apply to research of an exploratory nature (Yin, 2003:34).

#### 4.7. Case Study Protocol

In preparation for data collection, Yin suggests using a case study protocol to increase the reliability of the study (Yin, 2003:67). The case study protocol acts as a guide during the data collection phase of a single-case study (Yin, 2003:67) and helps the researcher keep track of ‘the subject of the case study’ (Yin, 2003:69). The case study protocol is made up of a (1) case study overview of issues and objectives, (2) field procedures, (3) case study questions, (4) and a guide for the presentation of the case study report (Yin, 2003:69).

#### 4.8. Principals of Data Collection

Yin identifies three key principals of data collection in a case study: (1) triangulation, (2) adopting a case study database, (3) and maintaining a chain of evidence (Yin, 2003:97). Triangulation involves collecting evidence from multiple sources and has several benefits. It allows the researcher to “address a broader range of historical, attitudinal, and behavioural issues” (Yin, 2003:98). Triangulation also allows for the “development of converging lines<sup>13</sup> of inquiry” (Yin, 2003:98). A case study database is the presentation of a “well organised collection of the evidence base” and adds repeatability and a sense of transparency to the study (Rowley, 2002:23). Finally, maintaining a chain of evidence involves providing the reader of the study with a clear path to “follow the derivation of any evidence, ranging from initial research questions to ultimate case study conclusions” (Yin, 2003:105).

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<sup>13</sup> This occurs when the “data from these multiple sources are ... converged in the analysis process rather than handled individually”. Convergence strengthens a case study as the findings or conclusions are based on the “various strands of data ... braided together to promote a greater understanding of the case” (Baxter & Jack, 2008:554)

#### 4.9. Establishing the Validity of the Study

There are four tests that are used to ensure the quality of the study (Yin, 2003:33). This includes (1) construct validity, (2) internal validity, (3) external validity, (4) and reliability.

Construct validity deals with “establishing correct operational measure for the concepts being studied” (Yin, 2003:34). Here a researcher must ensure that measures being studied have been substantiated and that they correctly reflect and provide insight on the concept under investigation (Yin, 2003:35). In order to ensure construct validity, triangulation and establishing a chain of evidence can be used during the data collection phase (Yin, 2003:34).

Internal validity relies on verifying causal relationships by illustrating how one event leads to another event (Yin, 2003:36). They are used predominantly in explanatory case studies and do not apply to descriptive or exploratory case studies (Yin, 2003:36).

A case study’s external validity deals with whether the study’s findings can be applied or generalized beyond the study (Yin, 2003:37). For a single-case study, one tactic to ensure external validity is to use a guiding theory that can “help to identify the other cases to which the results are generalizable” (Yin, 2003:37).

A case study’s reliability is affirmed when a researcher does the same study and follows the steps entailed by the initial case study and both researchers draw similar conclusions or findings in their research (Yin, 2003:37). To ensure reliability, Yin suggests using a case study protocol and developing a case study database (Yin, 2003:38).

To reduce bias it has also been advised that the researcher should also discuss his or her relationship to the study as any bias could impact the findings (Hancock & Algozzine, 2006:66). This was done through researcher reflexivity. Researcher reflexivity essentially refers to an attempt by the researcher to turn a “critical gaze towards themselves” (Finlay, 2003:3) in an attempt to “make visible their individualities and its effects on the research process” (Gough, 2003:23). These “individualities” are factors like “motivations, interests and attitudes” (Gough, 2003:23) which may impact findings. Typically, the use of researcher reflexivity to reveal personal inclinations is common to qualitative research (Finlay, 2003:5).

Academics in the field of reflexive writing agree that a researcher is neither neutral (Clancy, 2013:15) nor detached and attempting to present oneself as such can hinder the research process (Jootun et al, 2009:46). Reflexivity helps a researcher acknowledge the personal biases (Clancy, 2013:15; Finlay, 2003:16) that influence his or her choices or experience and understand the ways it can affect the findings of a project (Nadin & Cassell, 2006:208). In this way, the researcher adds “integrity, credibility, and trustworthiness” to the research (Jootun et al, 2009:42; Walker, Read & Priest, 2013:38; Nadin & Cassell, 2006:209).

#### 4.10. Application of Case Study Methodology

The case study fits in with the theory in both design and application. This section will apply the theory mentioned in the previous sections.

A case study approach to investigate the use of social media during the 2014 South African general election<sup>14</sup> was chosen for several reasons. A ‘how’ type of question (see the research design components below) was being asked of a complex, contemporary event as it unfolded over which the researcher had little control. The case study approach enabled the researcher to draw on a number of sources of evidence of which access was easily available. The case study approach was also used in previous literature that examines the role of social media during elections.

This election was touted as the first election in South African history where social media could play a significant role (Tredger, 2014). As minimal research on social media’s role in South African politics has been conducted (see Chapter Two: Literature Review for more details), the case study for this dissertation is exploratory in nature.

In terms of design, a single case study with embedded units was chosen for the case study. A single case study design was chosen for several reasons. Due to a lack of prior research there

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<sup>14</sup> The sampling period took place during the election. The period as defined by ICASA takes place as soon as “the election day is proclaimed and ending on the day immediately following upon the day on which candidates of any of the political parties are declared elected” (2013:10). On the 7<sup>th</sup> February, President Jacob Zuma announced the election date (7<sup>th</sup> May) and the election ended on 21<sup>st</sup> May when members of parliament (from the political parties who had won seats in the election) were sworn in.

were no other cases the research could replicate, thus making a single case study design appropriate (Zainal, 2007:2). Secondly, the case study chosen represents a “critical case in testing a well-formulated theory” (Yin, 2003:40). When using theory to guide the study, the research is able to generalize from one case to another (Vissak, 2010:380). The theoretical framework has illustrated how public sphere theory is a key theory when dealing with democratic practices. An election was the perfect event to test how developed the country’s public sphere is. If the case study adheres to the expectations of the theory, the case study has the potential to confirm and “even extend the theory” (Yin, 2003:40). Another advantage was that the data of the study could be “analyzed *within* the subunits separately (within case analysis), *between* the different subunits (between case analysis), or *across* all of the subunits (cross-case analysis)” (Baxter & Jack, 2008:550). Single case studies are also appropriate where the case is “unique” (Yin, 2003:40) or “revelatory” (Yin, 2003:42). As this is the first known study to examine the use of social media during the South African general election and the first election to actually have enough social media users to make an impact, this type of case study is appropriate.

The five research design components discussed in the theory section will be addressed:

(1) In terms of research question, a ‘how’ type question guided the case study:

- How was social media used during the 2014 South African general election?

(2) In terms of propositions, the researcher did not develop any due to the exploratory nature of the case study. Instead, the following purpose statement was written:

- The purpose of this study is to examine the ways social media was used by relevant election stakeholders during the 2014 South African general election.

This purpose statement was informed by the literature review which illustrated potential uses of social media during the elections that took place in other countries. The purpose statement helped guide the data collection process.

(3) In terms of unit(s) of analysis, the relevant election stakeholders were included in the case study. These stakeholders were identified by the country’s Independent Electoral Commission

(Electoral Commission of South Africa, 2012:8) and conformed to the actors of the public sphere (see Theoretical Framework):

- The Public
- The Mass Media
- Politicians and political parties
- Lobbyists who represent special interest groups
- Civil Society

For the purposes of this study the IEC is also chosen for study despite electoral bodies not being explicitly mentioned by Habermas.

(4) In terms of the logic linking data and propositions, the researcher did not take any steps due to the exploratory nature of the case study (i.e. no hypothesis was formulated).

(5) In terms of interpretation criteria, the researcher did not take any steps due to the exploratory nature of the case study.

Following the direction of Yin (2003), a case study protocol was developed to implement the research design (see Appendix A: Case Study Protocol). The case study questions were based on the research questions and helped to focus on *what* was required by the researcher to know. The case study protocol helped ensure that the research was conducted in a trustworthy manner.

The researcher used the three principles of data collection to ensure methodological trustworthiness:

(1) The researcher drew evidence from multiple sources of data (see section 4.11.).

(2) A case study database was created (see Appendix B - Case Study Database).

(3) During the data analysis phase the researcher maintained a chain of evidence.

In order to ensure the quality of the study, three of the relevant tests defined by Yin (2003) were applied:

(1) In terms of construct validity, the constructs were aligned with the theory under examination i.e. the actors of the public sphere. The social media use by these actors was affirmed through the use of triangulation and the establishment of a chain of evidence during the data collection phase.

(2) Internal validity did not apply to this exploratory case study.

(3) A guiding theory (Habermas's public sphere) was used to ensure external validity.

(4) In order to ensure reliability, the researcher developed a case study protocol (see Appendix A: case Study Protocol) and developed a case study database that contained all of the data collected (see Table 2 in Appendix B – Case Study Database). A reflexive mini essay was also written (see Appendix C: Researcher Reflexivity) to reduce bias.

#### 4.11. Data Collection and Data Collected

This section explores the data collection process and the types of data collected. For the purposes of this dissertation the researcher conducted web archiving, a thematic analysis of election-themed Twitter trends and took on the role of an observer of the social media sites during the election period.

##### 4.11.1. Web Archiving

For the purposes of this study, a web archiving strategy was used. This is a “method that allows researchers to harvest texts and relevant metadata ... from the internet and compile them in data archives for various types of analysis” (Lomborg, 2012:221). Web archiving is particularly useful for gathering social media data to “explore and understand the user’s communicative practices and patterns on social media” (Lomborg, 2012:229). The strategy used in this instance to compile data was an event strategy. This entails “archiving the web (or a specific site or

group of sites on the web) in relation to a given event... thereby generating a thematically coherent archive” (Lomborg, 2012:222).

The following archival materials were collected:

- Cartoons
- Media Reports
- Campaign material distributed by parties online
- YouTube videos such as those released by the DA and EFF and *Nkandla Style* by ordinary citizens
- Opinion articles
- Mxit brand indexes which included the Mxit party applications and a summary of their monthly followers

#### 4.11.2. Thematic Analysis

Researchers have examined Twitter to understand the nature of the political communication on the site (see Godnov & Redek, 2014; Dang-Xuan et al, 2013). For this study a thematic analysis of election-themed Twitter trends was conducted during the election period (see Appendix D).

Thematic analysis is a method used for “identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data” (Braun & Clarke, 2006:6). Although it bears similarities to content analysis, thematic analysis “provides a purely qualitative, detailed, and nuanced account of data” (Vaismoradi, Turunen & Bondas, 2013:400) in a simple and descriptive way (Braun & Clarke, 2006:5). The theme or pattern “captures something important about the data in relation to the research question, and represents some level of patterned responses or meaning within the data set” (Braun & Clarke, 2006:11). The researcher is responsible for deciding what a theme within their data set is (Braun & Clarke, 2006:6).

Thematic analysis was used for several reasons. The method has been highlighted for its flexibility in that it can be used for both inductive and deductive theoretical approaches (Alhojailan, 2012:8, Braun & Clarke, 2006:5). Because it identifies and describes “both implicit and explicit ideas” within the data set, it provides the researcher with the opportunity to

understand the data more clearly (Alhojailan, 2012:10). The researcher is able to “move beyond calculating unambiguous words or statements or [simply] expressing the ideas” (Alhojailan, 2012:13). This was especially useful for this study which seeks to understand social media use rather than the extent of social media use during the elections.

Finally, the outcome of a thematic analysis is a detailed and complex picture (Braun & Clarke, 2006:5) which provides insight into the concerns of people during an event or the “reasons ... people have for using or not using a service or procedure” (Vaismoradi, Turunen & Bondas, 2013:400). This reason makes thematic analysis an excellent method for evaluating the use of Twitter during the elections.

For this study, provincial and national election-themed Twitter trends were recorded during the election period as they were tweeted by the Trendsmap SthAfrica<sup>15</sup> Twitter feed. The researcher chose to examine trends as they reveal the preoccupation of the majority of users on the site at a given time (Naaman, Becker and Gravano, 2011:905).

For this thematic analysis, the researcher followed the six steps or phases suggested by Braun & Clarke (2006). It must be noted that these phases are not linear so the researcher had the opportunity to skip where appropriate. First, the researcher became more familiar with the data by a process of “reading and re-reading the data” (Braun & Clarke, 2006:17).

Next, the researcher coded the data. This entails “generating pithy labels for important features of the data of relevance to the (broad) research questions guiding the analysis” (Clarke & Braun, 2013:4).

After the data was coded, the researcher examined the codes for themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006:19). The method of identifying themes within the data set was inductive or “bottom up” (Braun & Clarke, 2006:12). This is essentially a data-driven approach where the “themes identified are strongly linked to the data themselves” (Braun & Clarke, 2006:17). As the study is exploratory in nature the researcher felt an inductive analysis (which does not try to fit into theoretical preoccupations or “a pre-existing coding frame”) was appropriate for the study

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<sup>15</sup> This Twitter page provides South African Twitter trends in real-time. It can be accessed here: <https://twitter.com/trendssthafrica>

(Braun & Clarke, 2006:12). However, the researcher was mindful that the research cannot be divorced from “theoretical and epistemological commitments and data are not coded in an epistemological vacuum” (Braun & Clarke, 2006:12). The researcher was thus open to the possibility that the data from Twitter could reveal (or not reveal) a thriving public sphere during the elections. In terms of depth of identification of themes, the researcher examined trends at a semantic or explicit level (Braun & Clarke, 2006:13). This means that the researcher “did not look for anything beyond what ... has been written” (Braun & Clarke, 2006:13). This approach made sense in that the Twitter trending topics and phrases worked at an explicit level with very little interpretation needed to discern their meaning. It has been observed that software is “valuable in terms of improving the rigours of the analytical steps for validating that which does not reflect the researcher’s impressions of the data” (Alhojailan, 2012:9). The researcher thus used NVivo<sup>16</sup> to organise and group the data into similar themes.

Next, the themes were reviewed to ensure that they made sense “in relation to both the coded extracts and the full data set” (Clarke & Braun, 2013:4). Each of the themes were defined and named (Braun & Clarke, 2006:22).

Finally, Clarke & Braun advise writing up the findings by “weaving together the analytic narrative and (vivid) data extracts to tell the reader in a coherent and persuasive story about the data, and contextualising it in relation to existing literature” (2013:5).

In order to ensure the validity of results, coding was conducted independently and reviewed by the dissertation supervisor. Any issues with coding were addressed leading to a more accurate coding framework as seen in the similar steps of the research conducted by Shepherd et al (2015:4). The primary limitation of the thematic analysis was the data set. The Twitter trends were being released by Trendsmap SthAfrica at a staggering rate and there was no guarantee that the researcher identified and recorded all of the election-themed trends at the time. There is also the possibility the researcher misinterpreted certain trends as election-themed trends.

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<sup>16</sup> This is a software package provided by the university which allows for the analysis of qualitative data.

#### 4.11.3. Observation

Besides employing web archiving and a thematic analysis the researcher also took on the role of an observer in order to collect data and understand the processes that were occurring on social media. Observation is a type of research method where “on-going behaviour” is studied by a researcher (Oswald & Price, 2006). The type of observation method used for this study was a naturalistic or non-participant approach. This involves the researcher entering “a social system to observe events, activities, and interpretation with the aim of gaining a direct understanding of a phenomenon in its natural context” (Liu & Maitlis, 2013:610). He or she refrains from partaking in the activities under observation (Liu & Maitlis, 2013:610).

Non-participant observation had several advantages for this study of social media behaviour during the election. The researcher is able to get a feel for the behaviour of those being researched (Oswald & Price, 2006). In this way, the researcher gains a “nuanced and dynamic appreciation of group conflict that would have been difficult to identify through surveys or other more distant methods” (Liu & Maitlis, 2013:610). Besides group conflict, observation provides insight into a group’s interaction in context and illuminate the significance of “events and activities” for those observed (Liu & Maitlis, 2013:610).

This type of research does have weaknesses which the researcher attempted to mitigate. As the observation is at a distance, both the “cause of behaviour” and the representativeness of the behaviour are unknown (Oswald & Price, 2006). There is also a question of the objectivity of the observer: the analysis can be tainted by his or her “values and beliefs” (Liu & Maitlis, 2013:611). A researcher will also have to contend with a “problem of selectivity” as no “observation can [ever] be truly complete in the events, activities, people, or interpretations studied, or in the time period covered” (Liu & Maitlis, 2013:611). Finally, there are ethical concerns that the “researcher’s voice” can overshadow the “participants in describing and explaining what is going on in the setting” (Liu & Maitlis, 2013:611).

In order to ensure objectivity, the researcher ensured that observation took place at regular intervals during the elections across the most important social media sites and that all relevant social media users were observed. In order to mitigate the issue of selectivity, the researcher spent the entire duration of event observing and understanding behaviours on the social media

chosen for investigation. Although there was no similar election observed by the researcher, the researcher drew on the insight of other studies done on the use of social media during election periods in other countries (see Literature Review). In order to fully understand the behaviour of those observed and prevent the researcher's voice from overpowering the experiences of those observed, the study also draws upon archival data.

There is no one way to conduct an observation (Mulhall, 2003:311). For this study, screen-grabs of social media sites were recorded as close to the election as possible to ensure that poignant details were "not lost to memory" (Mulhall, 2003:311). Although data was separated immediately into a thematically coherent database according to social media uses, analysis of data was left until after the election period.

#### 4.12. Ethical Considerations

As evidenced from the objective of the study and the data collection approaches explored above, social media formed the crux of the study. The choice of research was desirable for several reasons. It has the potential to be cost effective, feasible and convenient as research requires little more than an internet connection (Moreno et al, 2013:708). For a researcher intent on capturing naturalistic behaviour, social media communities offer a view into "online behaviours and beliefs" that form part of the daily lives of the users (Moreno et al, 2013:708). These behaviours or beliefs can reveal "unique in-depth autobiographical accounts" (Murthy, 2008:856). In this regard a researcher must act ethically online when conducting research (Beninger et al, 2014:6).

However, the online landscape is forever changing and evolving; as such there is little guidance as to how one should conduct research online in an ethical fashion (Beninger et al, 2014:6). According to UKZN's 2014 "Exemption from Ethics Review Application", research conducted on open social media sources or fora are exempt from an ethics review (UKZN, 2014:1). Any archived material that exists within the public domain is also exempted from a review (UKZN, 2014:1). However, little was suggested in addressing some of the issues the researcher contended with. This included privacy concerns, the act of lurking on social media and harvesting data, the depiction of the data in the research, the traceability of the data and dealing

with questionable behaviour on the part of the user. This section examines each of these concerns and the way the researcher mitigated each issue.

Data was collected from open social media networks<sup>17</sup> which include Facebook, Twitter and YouTube. These networks are classified as open social media networks. Table 1 summarises the confidentiality expectations each user must read in the terms of service. Each clearly states that users should be aware their postings are public and should tread with care when using the site.

**Table 1: Social Media Terms of Service**

<b>Twitter</b>	In its privacy policy, Twitter acknowledges that “public user profile information and public Tweets” are available to a number of organisations. Universities are explicitly named as is their use of the site to “analyse the information for trends and insights”. Twitter goes on to warn users about the content they make publically available on the site (Twitter, 2015).
<b>Facebook</b>	Facebook’s privacy policy warns users that any “content or information “published on the site using the “Public setting” provides people that are on and off the site the allowance to “access and use that information” (Facebook, 2015).
<b>YouTube</b>	When a user posts any content to YouTube they give users the right to “use, reproduce, [and] distribute” the content “to the extent permitted by the functionality of the Service and under these Terms” (YouTube, 2015)

<sup>17</sup> Content was observed on Mxit but not captured as harvesting user data is not allowed according to the platform’s policy (Mxit, 2014).

Additionally, the researcher did not require a password to gain access to the postings published by users (Moreno, 2013:710; Stevens, O'Donnell & Williams, 2015:159).

As a non-participant observer of events during the election, the researcher acted as a “lurker” by harvesting data from the social media sites without participating (Berry, 2004:327). Some communities may be against this practice (Berry, 2004:327). In response, the researcher abided partly to the principle of non-alienation which entails “avoiding [to take] the content of online communication out of its context of original occurrence without the explicit permission of concerned parties” (Berry, 2004:327). While permission was not required by the researcher, effort was made to ensure the content was used and depicted properly in the analysis portion.

In terms of presenting the data, it has been recommended that paraphrasing and composite characters be used (Dawson, 2014:435). However, the researcher refrained from disguising the text in order to remain “faithful to the original intent of the postings” (Henderson, Johnson & Auld, 2013:552). In addition to ensuring that the posting is displayed correctly without errors (Zimmer, 2010:322), the use of direct quotes ensured that users were given credit for their postings and their presence online (Beninger et al, 2014:7, Beaulieu & Estalella, 2012:34). The researcher was not concerned by the postings being traced to the user as the data gathered was not of a sensitive nature. In any case, the postings were publically available and an effort to make the user anonymous would be rendered pointless by a search engine such as Google (Henderson, Johnson & Auld, 2013:552).

There is the possibility that the data could reveal activity that is “illegal, amoral, immoral, or otherwise illicit” (Henderson, Johnson & Auld, 2013:555). The researcher refrained from reporting such activity as it would harm the naturalistic aspect of the research. The researcher also felt that it was up to the community itself to report such acts to moderators of the social media sites.

#### 4.13. Conclusion

A case study method approach was used to examine the uses of social media during the 2014 South African general election. This chapter first defined the method and the reasons why this approach was advantageous for the study. This included being appropriate for explaining

complex phenomena like elections, being appropriate for theory testing (which is required for the second part of the research aims) and being flexible, time-saving and cost effective. The case study approach was also appropriate due to the benefits the approach had provided similar studies.

The criticisms of the case study method were explored with attention to the way the researcher would overcome these drawbacks of the approach. In response to criticism of the approach being unable to be generalised to other studies, the researcher affirmed the use of analytical sampling in rectifying this issue. In addressing criticisms of the method being time consuming and labour intensive the researcher highlighted the focused set of objectives and scope for the study and the use of technology to mitigate the criticisms. In response to concerns over case studies not being scientifically rigorous, the researcher adopted a multi-method approach and triangulation. In order to address possible bias the researcher harnessed a multi-method approach and made the steps of the methodology process explicit in order to ensure transparency.

The next part of the chapter covered the theory of the case study approach. This included a description of the types of case studies, the research design component, the case study protocol used to ensure the reliability of the study and the principals of data collection. The latter part of this theory section also highlighted four tests that should be used to ensure the validity of the study.

The theory of the case study approach was then applied with reasons why the method proved useful to the researcher for this specific study. An exploratory case study was used due to the nature of the research. In terms of design, a single case study with embedded units was adopted for the case study. The reasons for this approach were then outlined.

The researcher proceeded to discuss how the research design components were addressed in terms of the type of research question guiding the study, the propositions of the study and the units of analysis identified. As the study was exploratory in nature, the researcher did not take any steps in terms of the logic linking the data and the propositions and did not require the use of any interpretation criteria.

In order to ensure the methodological trustworthiness of the study the researcher drew evidence from multiples sources of data, created a case study database and maintained a chain of evidence. The researcher also used three tests defined by Yin in order to ensure the quality of the study. This included construct validity and a guiding theory (Habermas's public sphere) to ensure external validity. In order to ensure the reliability of the case study, a case study protocol and case study database were used. Finally, a reflexive essay was written in order to identify any biases that might hinder the reliability of the study's findings.

The next part of the chapter detailed the data collection methods and the data collected using these methods. A web archiving strategy was used to gain a variety of archival material relevant to the study. A thematic analysis of election-themed Twitter trends was conducted in order to gain insight into the nature of political communication that was taking place on the site. The researcher also spent time during the election period as an observer and screen-grabbed appropriate examples that displayed the vibrant usage of social media taking place during the election period.

The chapter concludes with a discussion of the ethical concerns the researcher experienced while conducting research on the social media platforms. This included privacy concerns, the act of lurking on social media and harvesting data, the depiction of the data in the research, the traceability of the data and dealing with questionable behaviour on the part of the user. Mitigating factors related to these concerns were then detailed.

The next chapter provides the findings of the social media research following the application of the case study method and the web archiving, thematic analysis and observational sub-methods used.

## Chapter 5: Case Findings

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### 5.1. Introduction

In the previous chapter case study methodology was identified and used as a method of enquiry for the study. As the case study methodology relies on triangulation of archived online source material, a thematic analysis of Twitter trends and observation were used.

This chapter presents the main findings from the case study detailing how various actors of the public sphere used social media during the election period. The actors that will be examined include the public, the mass media, politicians and political parties, civil society and the IEC. Although lobbyists were also actors identified as members of the public sphere, the case study could not find evidence of their participation on social media and thus they will not be discussed.

### 5.2. The Public

First, the way the public used social media will be examined. This included using these platforms to gain access to information, for communication purposes and for political expression. Members of the public who took on roles as watchdogs and citizen journalists also benefited from their social media use. The final use of the public will be that by members of the youth – many of whom were voting for the first time.

#### 5.2.1. Access to Information

During the election period, the electorate turned to social media sites for information dealing with the process. Facebook and Twitter, in particular, became a source for tracking political rallies, debates, the electoral results and the Inauguration of Provincial Legislatures and National Assembly as these events were tweeted and posted about in real-time (see Figures 1-21 in Appendix D for examples of the topics that captured the electorate's attention). As political parties were active on these sites, social media sites offered a means for the electorate to learn about their positions and promises as part of their campaigning. The electorate were also able to view clips from political party events and their adverts when they were posted on YouTube.

Besides the observations of the researcher, there has been other research conducted that illustrates the public's use of social media to access information related to election matters. When it was announced that Agang SA's leader, Mamphela Ramphele, would be made the leader of the DA, the move became a significant talking point on social media platforms (Culverwell, 2014). An online monitoring and insights company, BrandsEye, "closely followed the story as it broke across the web, including social media" (Culverwell, 2014). It was discovered that after the announcement, there was a significant increase in the Facebook likes and Twitter followers of the social media accounts of both political parties (Culverwell, 2014). Through their research, the company CEO revealed that "the public wanted to keep up with the latest updates on this announcement" as evidenced by the use of social media (Culverwell, 2014).

### 5.2.2. Communication

Social media played a role in facilitating communications among the electorate and between the electorate and other actors relevant to the election process. Between members of the public, it was observed that social media sites (particularly Facebook and Twitter) became important places to create a dialogue on news items related to the elections and discuss their political party choices.

Through social media, the electorate were able to converse directly with political party members. The electorate used social media to question political parties on their positions. An example of this is seen in Figure 1 where Nomboniso Gasa probes Mamphela Ramphele's views on transparent party funding. The electorate were also able to question the actions of political party members during their campaign efforts. In Figure 2 EFF ya Rocka! queries Helen Zille about a picture that circulated of her giving the middle finger which she denied as a photoshopped effort in her response. The public were also able to use social media to engage political parties on the nature of their campaign. In another example, Sasha-Leigh Goncalves (see Figure 3 on p. 59) tweets her enjoyment of the DA's television advert which receives a response back from Zille. Figure 4 (p. 59) displays how one user asks Zille about a call she received from a DA representative and received an explanation from the party leader. The forum also provided a way to criticise political players and receive an unmediated response. Figure 5 (p. 60) displays an interaction between Gordon R. Ross and Helen Zille where he

displays his displeasure at the anti-ANC stance of the DA's campaigning. In another instance, workers criticised Zwelinzima Vavi, the General Secretary of COSATU at the time, following his support of the ANC<sup>18</sup> (Molathwa & Mabuza, 2014). Vavi used social media to respond back to their tweets (Molathwa & Mabuza, 2014).

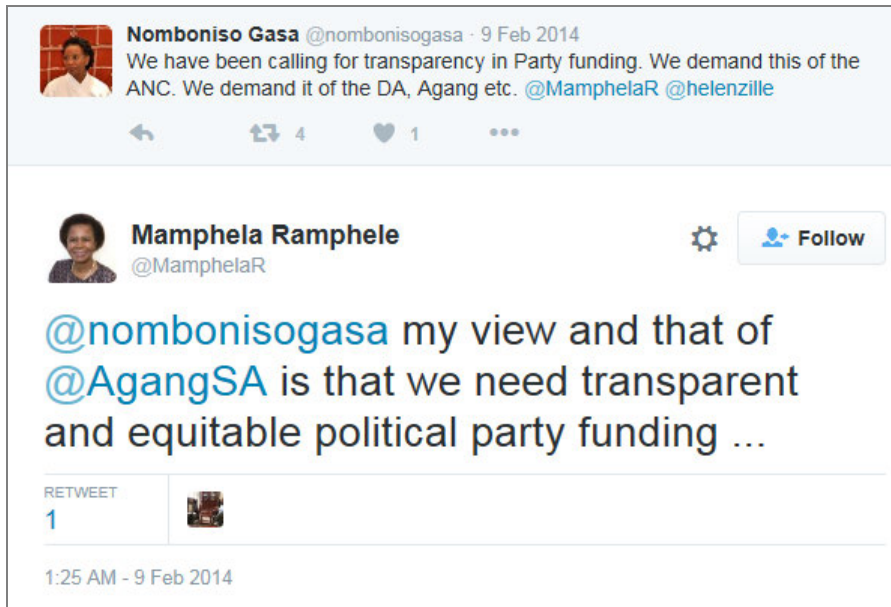


Figure 1: Nomboniso Gasa (2014) probes Mamphela Ramphela (2014) on her and her party's stance on transparent party funding



Figure 2: EFF ya Rocka! asks Helen Zille about a picture in which she is seen showing her middle finger to a crowd of people. Zille provides her account of the story (Zille, 2014a)

<sup>18</sup> Vavi had criticised the government and was supported by NUMSA, an organisation which refused to endorse the ANC during the election.



Figure 3: Sash-Leigh Goncalves (2014) commends Zille (2014b) on the DA's television advert

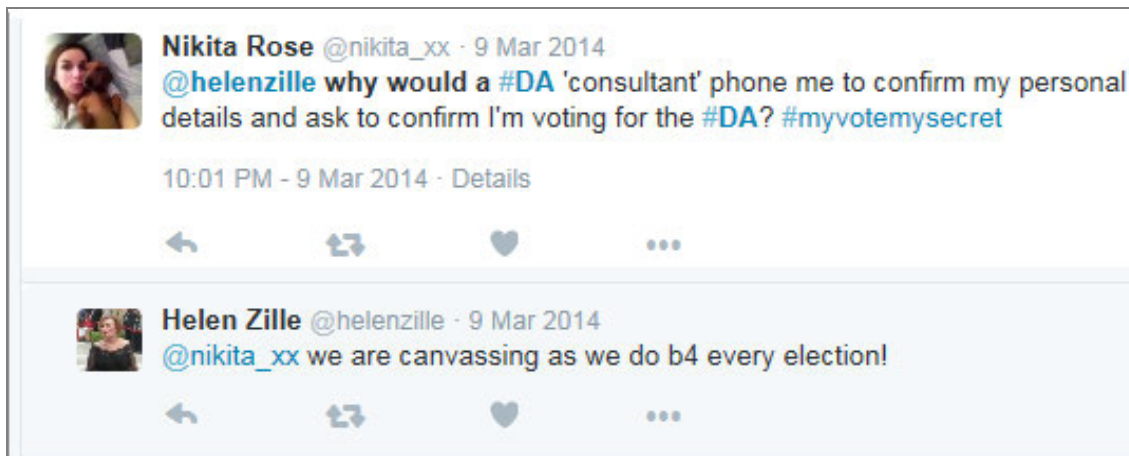
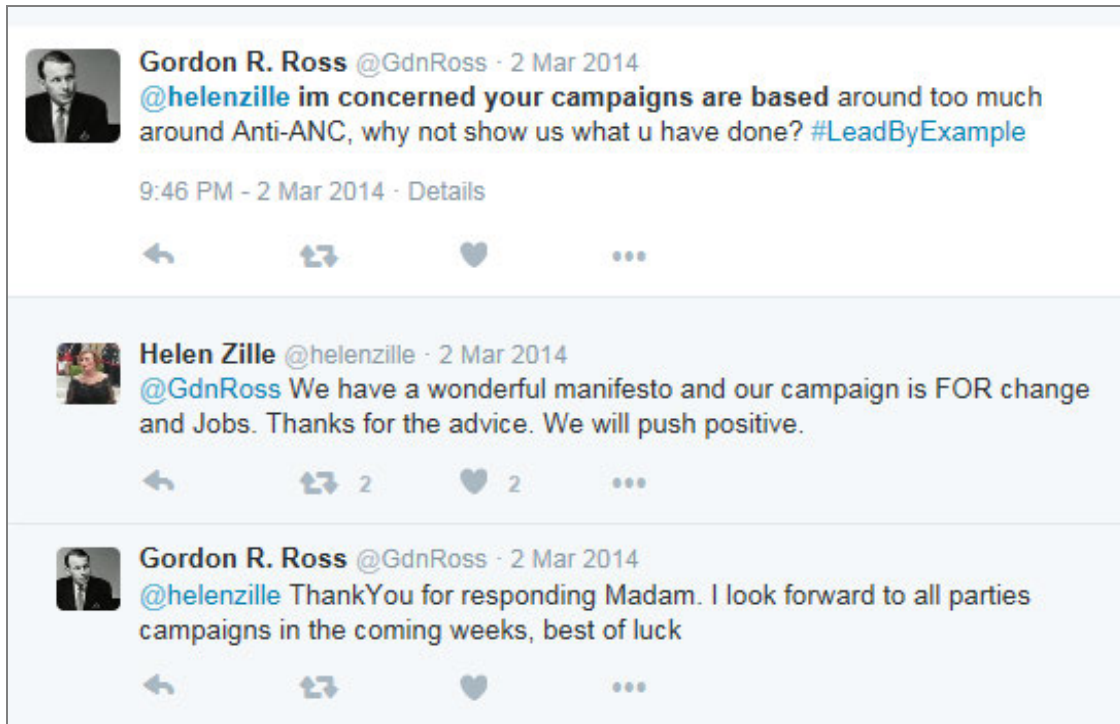


Figure 4: Nikita Rose (2014) asks Zille about a call that she received from the DA and Zille responds indicating that it is part of their campaigning (Zille, 2014c)



**Figure 5: Gordon R. Ross (2014a) advises Zille (2014d) to engage in a more positive campaign. Ross (2014b) responds with appreciation and wishes her well**

Several social media sessions or town halls were organized during the elections which afforded the public an opportunity to engage with politicians. Examples of this included Twitterinterviews with ANC members Paul Mashatile and David Makhura. A journalist would interview the politician and then open up the session for the public to ask questions. During his Twitterinterview, Makhura was questioned on diverse topics. These included questions on agricultural development and the use of land in Gauteng (see Figure 6), the popularity of the ANC in Gauteng and about accepting members from other parties (see Figure 7 on p. 62). He was also questioned on the ANC's efforts to aid the disabled community in business (see Figure 8 on p. 63) and about the ANC's campaigning efforts in Johannesburg South (see Figure 9 on p. 63). Each of these sessions proved very popular on Twitter and the hashtags associated with the sessions (#tweetmakhura and #tweetmashatile) trended on Twitter (see Figure 3 in Appendix D).

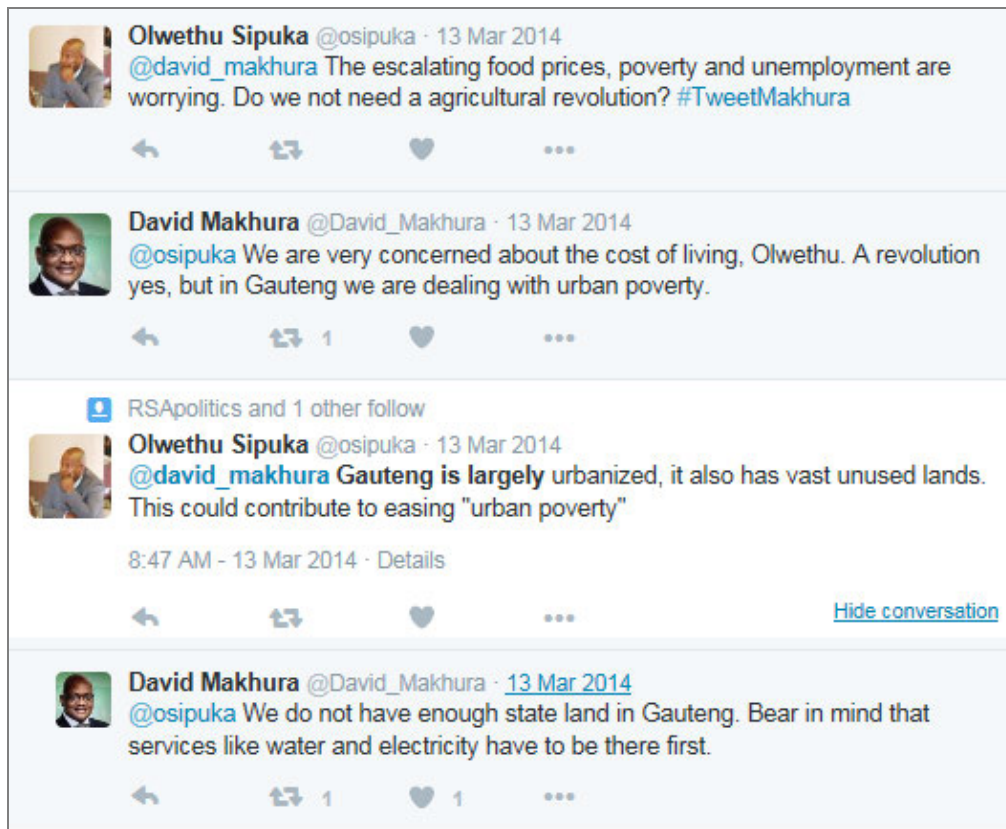
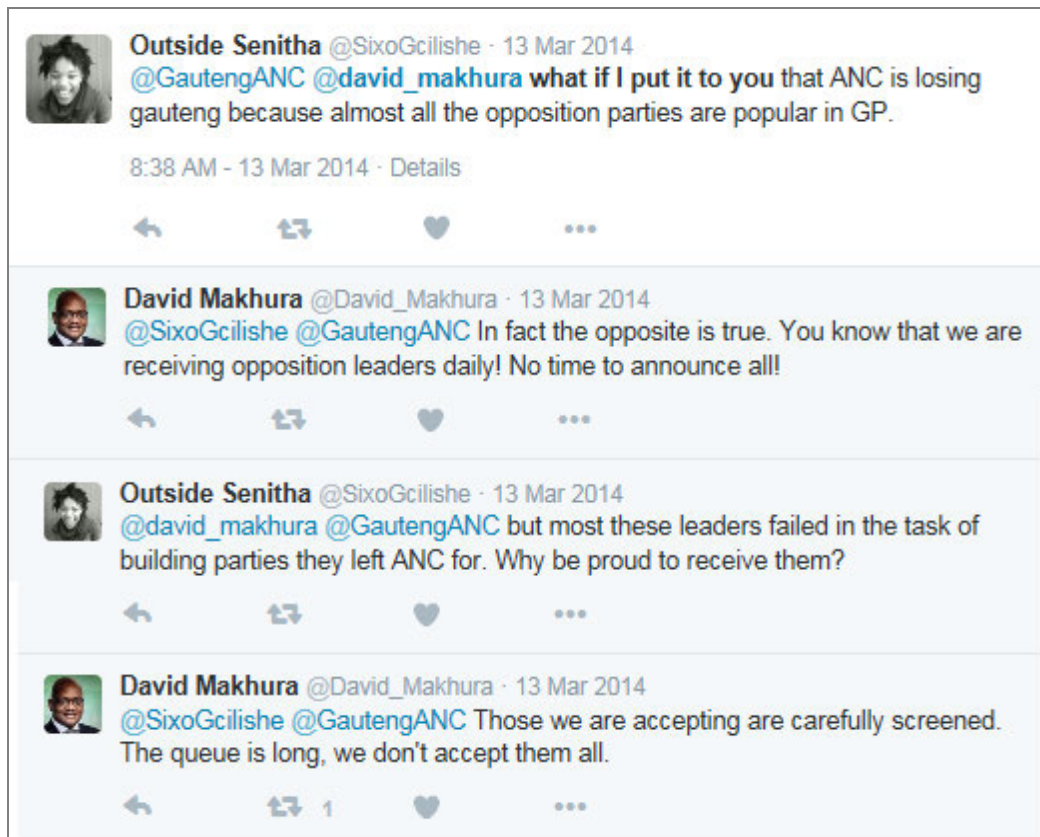


Figure 6: Olwethu Sipuka (2014a) asks Makhura about the need to channel efforts into agricultural development and about the use of land in Gauteng (2014b). Makhura responds with his concerns about the cost of living (2014a) and the challenges Gauteng faces in developing unused land (2014b)



**Figure 7: Outside Senitha questions Makhura on the popularity of the ANC in Gauteng (2014a) and about accepting members from other parties (2014b). Makhura denies the ANC is losing popularity (2014c) and comments on the process of accepting other political party members (2014d)**



Figure 8: StaffOnlly asks Makhura about the kind of support ANC has offered the disabled community (2014a) and asks for more engagement between the Deaf People SA GP organisation and Makhura (2014b). Makhura responds with the ANC’s track record on aiding people with disabilities (2014e) and makes plans to discuss the possible engagement further (2014f)



Figure 9: Akhona Mahanjana (2014) asks Makhura about the ANC’s campaign to win wards in Johannesburg South. Makhura responds highlighting the ANC’s strategy in place (2014g)

### 5.2.3. Political Expression

Social media provided an outlet for the electorate to express themselves politically during the election. One of the ways this occurred was in the manner they reacted to election events online. The most discussed election-themed event on Twitter was the release of the Nkandla

report. The Nkandla report constituted 21.2% of the election-themed trending topic on Twitter (see Table 3 in Appendix D). Figure 17 in Appendix D reveals how individuals that were posting tweets about the Nkandla report which resonated with the Twittersphere trended. An example of this includes Sizwe Ndlovu (see Figure 10) who trended following his tweets about the event. Certain hashtags such as “#NkandlaReport”, “#NkadlaReport” (see Figure 11) and “#comradesincorruption” (see Figure 12) trended as Twitter users reacted to the report. Following the release of the report, many articles were circulated and discussed on the site. Sisonke Msimang and phrases related to her opinion piece (“Requiem for a dream: On loving and leaving the ANC”<sup>19</sup>) trended after it was uploaded on the *Daily Maverick* website (see Figure 13 on p. 66). Many users also discussed some of the key players related to the report such as Riah Phiyega (see Figure 14 on p. 66), Gwede Mantashe (see Figure 15 on p. 66) and Thuli Madonsela. Each of these individuals trended (see Figure 17 in Appendix D). With regard to Madonsela, the Twitter users also commented on her appearance - particularly her dishevelled hair (see Figure 16 on p. 66). As a result “hairdresser” trended (see Figure 17 in Appendix D). The reaction to Jacob Zuma was split into two camps on Twitter: This included the DA-driven “#impeachzuma” (see Figure 17 on p. 66) which trended as well as the pro-Zuma “#handsoffpreszuma” (see Figure 18 on p. 67).

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<sup>19</sup> The article can be viewed here: <http://www.dailymaverick.co.za/opinionista/2014-03-20-requiem-for-a-dream-on-loving-and-leaving-the-anc/#.Vo1r829umbE>.

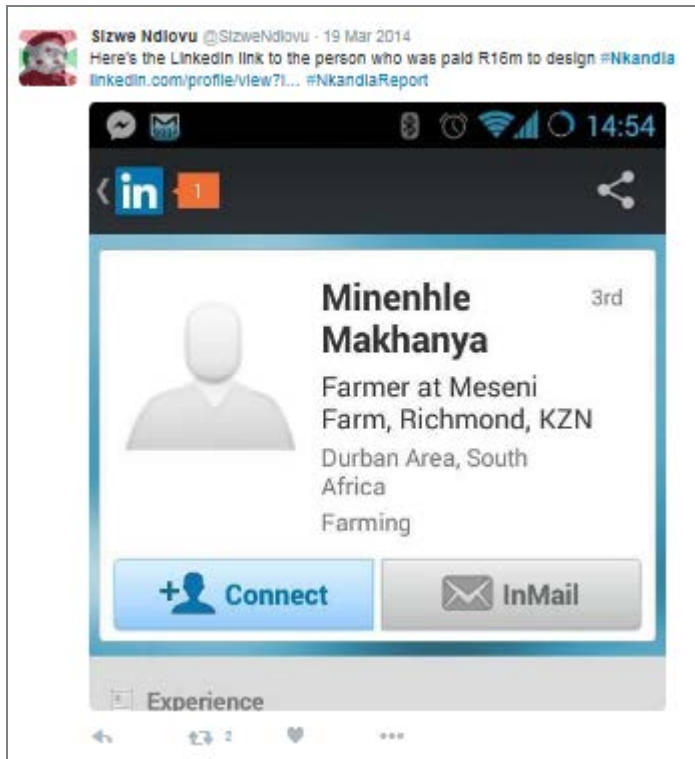


Figure 10: An example of Sizwe Ndlovu's (2014) tweets about the Nkandla report

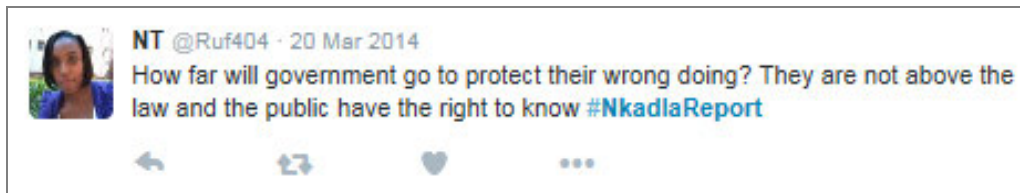


Figure 11: An example of an Nkandla report tweet with the “#NkadlaReport” hashtag (NT, 2014)

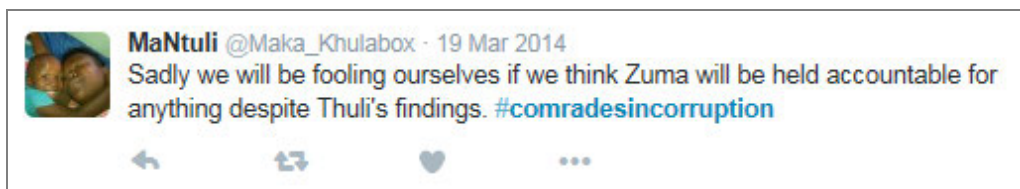


Figure 12: An example of an Nkandla report tweet with the “#comradesincorruption” hashtag (MaNtuli, 2014)

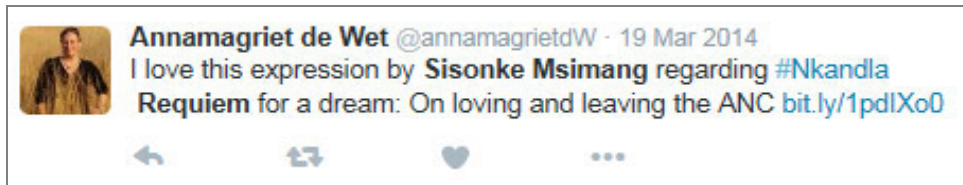


Figure 13: An example of a reaction to Sisonke Msimang’s opinion piece (De Wet, 2014)



Figure 14: An example of an Nkandla report tweet related to Riah Phiyega (Makholwa, 2014)

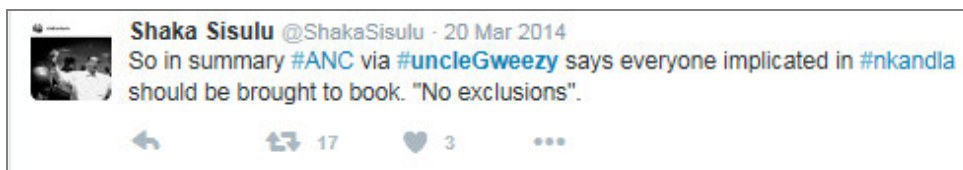


Figure 15: An example of an Nkandla report tweet related to Gwede Mantashe (Sisulu, 2014)

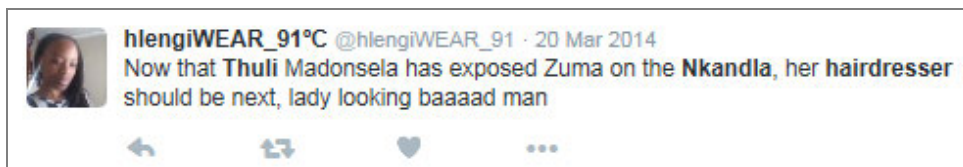


Figure 16: An example of an Nkandla report tweet related to Thuli Madonsela’s hair (HlengiWEAR\_91°C, 2014)



Figure 17: An example of an Nkandla report tweet with the “#impeachzuma” hashtag (Brueton, 2014)

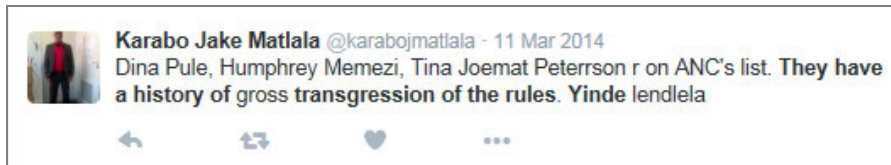


Figure 18: An example of an Nkandla report tweet with the “#handsoffpreszuma” hashtag (Thabethe, 2014)

Other election-themed events which created discussions on Twitter include Helen Zille challenging Jacob Zuma to a televised debate (see Figure 19), the release of the ANC’s National Assembly list which featured controversial members (see Figures 20-21) and the failed attempt to make Agang SA’s Ramphele the presidential candidate of the DA (Culverwell, 2014). In terms of the sentiment surrounding the latter event, BrandsEye’s report revealed that “many followers ... [felt] betrayed by Mamphela Ramphele’s actions while others [viewed] the move as a progressive step in the evolution of South Africa’s democracy” (Culverwell, 2014). Additionally, the report revealed that while “race featured as a heated topic”, the discussion online “also showed people’s willingness to thoughtfully address the issue of race and move beyond it as a bone of contention” (Culverwell, 2014).



Figure 19: South African Heroes (2014) reacts to Helen Zille challenging Jacob Zuma to a televised debate

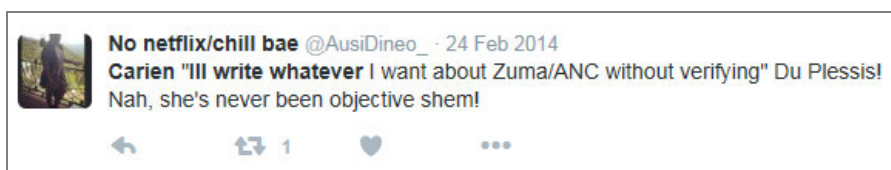


**Figure 20: Karabo Jake Matlala (2014) reacts to the release of the ANC's National Assembly list**



**Figure 21: Robert James Hickson (2014) reacts to the release of the ANC's National Assembly list**

Social media provided an outlet for its users to criticise and defend political candidates during the election. When Jacob Zuma questioned why he had to pay for the upgrades to his Nkandla residence, users took to social media in a “flurry of angry retorts” with “many observing that the South African public would therefore not pay for e-tolls because they did not ask for them” (Dayimani, 2014). Others also used these sites to defend his comments (Dayimani, 2014). In another instance, a Twitter war<sup>20</sup> (twar) took place between Zille and *City Press* journalist, Carien du Plessis. Users took to Twitter to defend and criticise (see Figures 22-23) each of the individuals involved. Zille was also the source of much discussion on Twitter following her use of a “doek” or headscarf and also cooking over a three-foot pot during her campaigning in the rural parts of the Eastern Cape. Her clothing choice and pose were described as being “reminiscent of black women cooking at a wedding or funeral” (Magolego, 2014). Many took to Twitter to criticise the lack of authenticity of her pose (see Figure 24) and calling her out on her cultural appropriation of black culture (see Figure 25).



**Figure 22: An example of a tweet criticising du Plessis during the twar between the journalist and Zille (No Netflix/chill bae, 2014)**

<sup>20</sup> Zille accused du Plessis of being unprofessional and biased in a series of racially charged tweets (Pillay, 2014a).

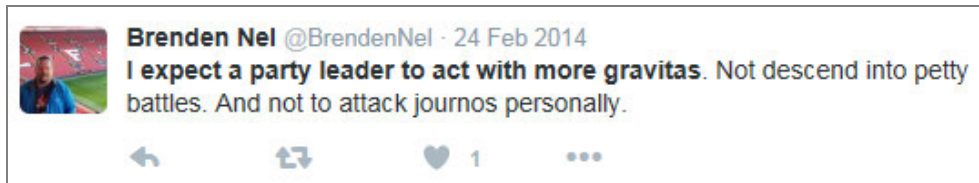


Figure 23: An example of a tweet criticising Zille during the twar between the politician and du Plessis (Nel, 2014)

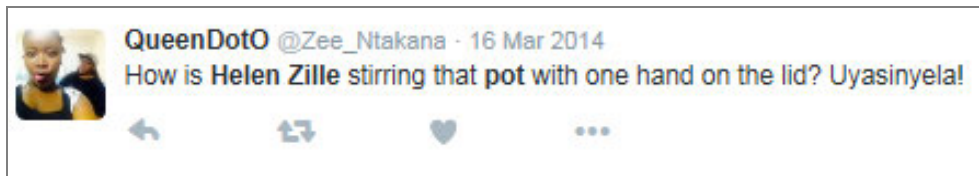


Figure 24: An example of a tweet questioning the authenticity of Zille's pose (QueenDotO, 2014)



Figure 25: An example of a tweet criticising Zille for cultural appropriation of black culture (Mbete, 2014)

This use of social media was not constrained to politicians. Warren Blakeman, a former Reebok employee, was widely criticised on social media following a tweet that “equated the ANC to monkeys and advised people to vote for the DA” (Mbangeni, 2014).

During the voting period a digital agency, Apurimac Media, recognised the posting of selfies and a rise in “citizen photography” (Phakathi, 2014a) to document the electorate’s voting experience. When the expats voted, one source described how these “elated voters posted selfies showing long queues to the voting stations or inked thumbs” (Evans & Pillay, 2014). A number of hashtags associated with their tweets trended such as “#voteabroad”, “#savotersabroad” and “#southafricansabroad” (see Figure 21 in Appendix D). A similar trend followed when the rest of the population voted. There were a number of pictures posted of inked thumbs, the queues at the voting stations and voters placing their marked ballot papers into the ballot boxes (SAPA, 2014a). A number of hashtags marking the event trended as a result such as “#myvote”, “#votinginsa” and “#yesivoted” (see Figure 21 in Appendix D). The posting of a selfie of one’s inked thumb was very popular on social media and several hashtags related to this act trended on Twitter such as “#thumbie” and “thumbfie” (see Figure 21 in Appendix D). The cultural relevance of this was highlighted in a cartoon entitled “Thumbs up for voting” by Gavin Thomson (see Figure 26).



**Figure 26: A cartoon by Gavin Thomson that highlights the cultural relevance of the voting thumbie (Thomson, 2014)**

In addition to the voters who were using social media platforms to celebrate their act of voting, some Twitter users also used the platform to explain why they would not be casting their vote (SAPA, 2014a).

The popularity of social media and selfies proved to be a challenge for the IEC. Despite the IEC declaring it illegal for a voter to take a photo of their marked ballot, a number of the electorate disobeyed this and posted pictures of their marked ballots and voting-booth selfies online (Gibbs, 2014). Several high profile South Africans revealed their vote online such as Sports Minister, Fikile Mbalula, celebrity, Sbusiso Leope (known by his stage name “DJ Sbu”) (SAPA Reporter, 2014) and an unnamed district mayor (News24, 2014a). Despite the IEC’s threats of fines and imprisonment, they later relaxed their position on the issue in light of the number of individuals posting online and only one voter was known to have been arrested (Shezi, 2014a).

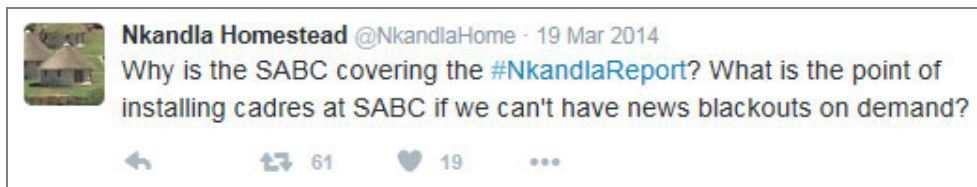
The election period saw many forms of parody, mainly used to critique political parties. The events surrounding the Nkandla report was the greatest source of parody. During the public protector’s press conference, many members on Twitter noted the lengthy nature of the proceedings. A hashtag (#thingsshorterthanthulisspeech) trended on Twitter (see Figure 17 in Appendix D) as users tweeted humorously about things that were shorter than Thuli Madonsela’s speech (see Figures 27-28). A parody account (Nkandla Homestead) trended (see Figure 17 in Appendix D) following a series of cheeky tweets dealing with the Nkandla report (see Figures 29-30). Several memes were also circulated on social media which summarised “the people’s response to ... Madonsela’s Nkandla report” (Sowetan Live, 2014). In April, Baleka Mbete, the ANC’s National Chairperson, defended Zuma by stating that “African tradition dictates that one does not interfere with a man’s kraal” (Davis, 2014a). She also described Nkandla as a “holy space” (Davis, 2014a). Her statement was met with ridicule on Twitter “with a spoof account [Nkandla Homestead , @NkandlaHome] suggesting it might now be possible to turn the water in the firepool into wine” (Davis, 2014a). In a similar way, Blade Nzimande’s branding of reports on Nkandla as “white people’s lies” also received a similar humorous treatment on Twitter (Ispas, 2014a).



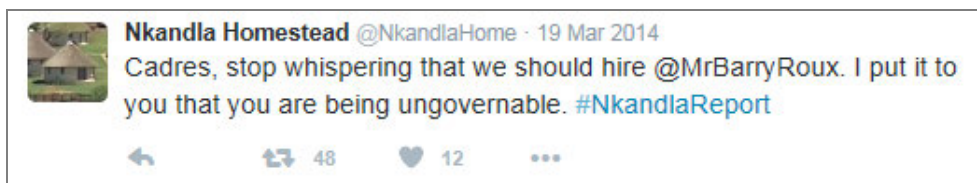
**Figure 27: Miss Wongie (2014) compares the short-lived attempted merger between Agang SA and the DA to Madonsela’s speech**



**Figure 28: Zamandela (2014) compares the notorious 72-day marriage between Kim Kardashian and Kris Humphries to Madonsela’s speech**



**Figure 29: A tweet by parody account “Nkandla Homestead” (2014a)**



**Figure 30: A tweet by parody account “Nkandla Homestead” (2014b)**

*Nkandla Style*<sup>21</sup> was another parody that focused on the Nkandla report (Powell, 2014). It was a music video that was released on YouTube and possessed lyrics that “poke[d] fun at the scandal around Zuma's homestead as well the perception of mass corruption in South African politics” (Alfreds, 2014b). The video was based on Korean singer, Psy’s international hit, *Gangnam Style* (Powell, 2014) and drew from the song’s tune, lyrical structure and its cutting critique of an extravagant lifestyle (Fisher, 2012). *Nkandla Style* received much attention following its release. By 8 April 2014 the song had gotten over 200, 000 views (Alfreds, 2014b). It received extensive press coverage and airplay from South African radio stations (Mitchley, 2014). According to Duncan Alfreds, the reaction from the public was mixed with some commending the production while others found it offensive and “racist” (2014b). Regardless, the creators followed up *Nkandla Style* with a sequel called *Sauce-a-loza*<sup>22</sup> – a parody that

<sup>21</sup> The video can be viewed here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cpOHTThrJfU>. However, it should be noted that this is not the original. The first posting of the video was taken down by YouTube over copyright issues (Ispas, 2014b).

<sup>22</sup> The video can be viewed here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MDEwXwu6Sn4>

references *Shosholoza*<sup>23</sup> in its title and lyrics (Mitchley, 2014). This parody highlighted the aftermath following the Nkandla report's release and continued the themes of its predecessor with an exploration of governmental corruption and excess. *Nkandla Style* was highlighted as a symbol of South Africa's press freedom (Alfreds, 2014c). In an interview with *News24*, "Afrosocialmedia" social media consultant, Samantha Fleming observed that:

The *Nkandla Style* video on YouTube is a great example of this - the identity of the creator of the video is kept anonymous. And yet it has gained traction because of what citizens perceive as the truth of the message - and because they are tired of stories of corruption (Alfreds, 2014c).

Other forms of parody that took place during the elections include the efforts of the Xcollektiv Facebook page<sup>24</sup>. On this page "funny posters [were uploaded] of politicians asking questions and drawing attention to current issues in the country" (Lourens, 2014b). In another instance memes were circulated on social media that mocked impoverished members of the electorate for voting for the notoriously ostentatious Julius Malema (Quintal, 2014a). However, these memes received criticism as patronising poor voters and characterising their choice as naive (Nepaul & Musker, 2014). In another instance a Phoenix resident, Ritesh Rampersad failed to receive help from his local MF councillor after he suffered a burst water pipe (Dawood, 2014). Together with his brother (who was a cartoonist), Rampersad created a cartoon of a boy urinating on the MF party logo (Dawood, 2014). The DA's logo was prominently displayed on cartoon (see Figure 31) and acted as a display of Rampersad's political affiliations (Dawood, 2014). He revealed that:

The cartoon depicts my opinion and that is how I feel. I am entitled to freedom of expression. I do not regret putting together the picture nor do I regret pledging my allegiance with the DA (Dawood, 2014).

The cartoon was circulated amongst DA members (SABC, 2014a) and was highly criticised by the MF who found it defamatory and a desecration of their logo (Dawood, 2014). The MF reacted by reporting the incident to the South African Human Rights Commission (SAHRC), the IEC and Facebook (Dawood, 2014).

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<sup>23</sup> This is an Ndebele folk song that is very popular in the country.

<sup>24</sup> The page can be viewed here: <https://www.facebook.com/xcollektiv>.



Figure 31: Rampersad and his brother’s cartoon that was circulated on social media (Dawood, 2014)

#### 5.2.4. Watchdog Role

Many members of the public (that were active on social media) used these platforms to report on irregularities during the election process. Figure 32 illustrates one example of a member of the public informing DA leader, Helen Zille of a video of a “mysterious bakkie removing DA signboards”.

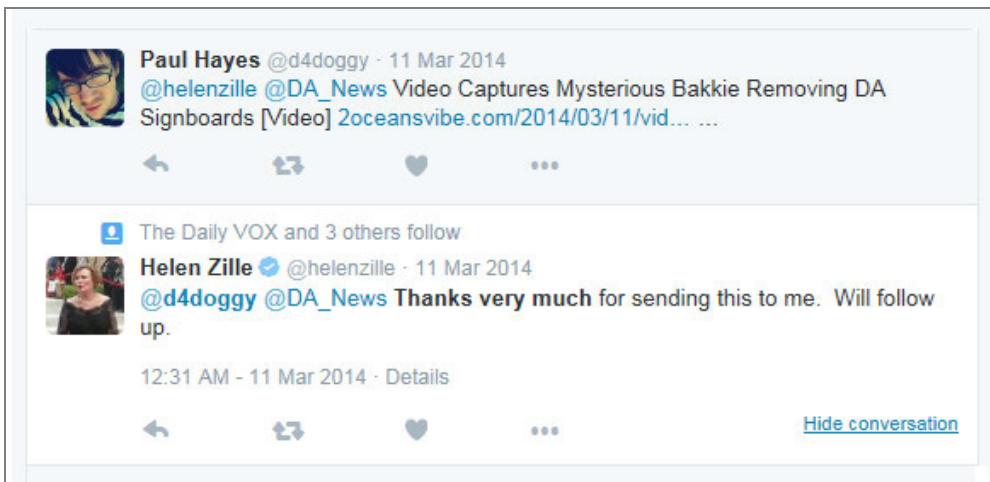


Figure 32: Conversation between Paul Hayes (2014) and Helen Zille (Zille, 2014e)

Citizens were active on social media and voiced their concerns on Election Day (Oneale, 2014). Donovan Dunn trended after he tweeted a photo of dumped ballot boxes in Pretoria (see Figure 33). Ashleigh Meyers trended after she tweeted about receiving a ballot paper with a vote already marked for the ANC (see Figure 34). Both Dunn and Meyers trended on Twitter following their tweets (See Figure 21 in Appendix D).



**Figure 33: Donovan Dunn's (2014) tweet of the dumped ballot boxes**



**Figure 34: Ashleigh Meyers (2014) reacts following her discovery of a mark on her ballot**

#### 5.2.5. Citizen Journalism

There were a few instances of citizen journalism during the election period. The public live-tweeted or posted to social media from rallies, debates and other election-related events they were participating in. However, the most significant example of citizen journalism was through “VIP:Voice”. This was a “citizen-based platform” that allowed users to become citizen reporters and report on election events (Maneta, 2014). The citizen reporters were able to use channels such as Twitter and an app on Mxit in order to relay their experiences within their communities (Maneta, 2014). According to the creators, “the campaign had 419,356 total visits, 222,481 total users, 114,300 total registrations and 121,974 VIP questions answered” (Vumi, 2015).

#### 5.2.6. Youth Engagement

Social media proved to be a valuable source of engagement for members of the youth. Many answered surveys conducted by Pondering Panda and the BBC on Mxit. These surveys provided insight into their political views, voting patterns (Rice, 2014; Lourens, 2014c), their attitudes to Jacob Zuma and the concerns that would shape their voting choice (SAPA, 2014b).

A 3D digital game app, (designed specifically for the South African youth market) was released by the IEC (see Figure 35). The gameplay features of “IXSA” (I vote South Africa) is described as follows:

The players create their own avatar and then lead their character through Election Day collecting points as they face challenges throughout the day. Players can post their scores on social media sites to challenge their friends to try [to] beat their scores (North Coast Courier, 2014).



**Figure 35: A screen grab from the IXSA game released by the IEC’s Twitter account (IEC South Africa, 2014a)**

The app proved popular with first time voters, providing a means to educate and entertain them at the same time.

Several youth debates had a strong social media presence. *Live Mag* magazine, for example, held their second “National #LiveVIPZA Youth Debate” on 29 April 2014 (Live Events, 2014). The debate hosted political party representatives such as Mmusi Maimane (DA), Fikile Mbalula (ANC) and Dali Mpofu (EFF) (Live Events, 2014). Members of the youth were encouraged to send in their questions to the panel using the @livemagsa Twitter handle and discuss the debate using the “#livevipza” hashtag (Live Events, 2014). The debate was also able to be live-streamed on YouTube (Live Events, 2014). The debate proved to be a hit as the “#livevipza” hashtag trended on the day of the debate (see Figure 10 in Appendix D).

Finally, many young voters (who were voting for the first time) used social media as a means to illustrate they had cast their vote. On Twitter, their excited tweets were accompanied with

hashtags such as “#1sttimevoter”, “#firsttimevoter” (see Figure 36) and “#bornfree” which trended on the social media site (see Figure 21 in Appendix D). Many were also able to turn to social media to ask questions related to the voting process.



**Figure 36: First time voter, Sian Ferguson (2014), tweets a picture of her thumbie with the “firsttimevoter” hashtag**

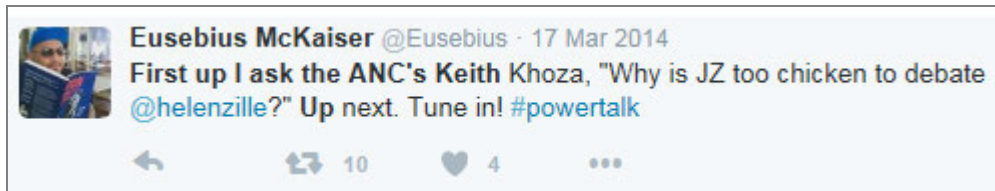
### 5.3. The Mass Media

In the previous section the uses of social media by the public were examined. Next, the mass media’s use of social media during the election will be explored. This included their use of the platforms for information dissemination, for commentators and journalists to communicate their personal views, live-tweeting or live-posting and to communicate with the electorate and other election actors. Members of the mass media also drew from social media in the creation of news pieces during the election period and to understand the public’s perception on election events. The final use that will be explored in this section is the mass media’s use of social media to

promote their content, field comments and to promote and supplement the events they organised during the election period.

### 5.3.1. Information Dissemination

One of the social media uses by the mass media was to keep the public abreast of election-themed events. There were several instances during the elections where journalists posted links to their articles for their audiences on these platforms. Columnist and radio show host, Eusebius McKaiser is seen in Figure 37 tweeting about an upcoming interview on his show that he would be having with ANC member, Keith Khoza.



**Figure 37: Eusebius McKaiser (2014) uses his Twitter profile to inform his radio listeners of his upcoming interview with Keith Khoza**

### 5.3.2. Communication of Personal Views

Social media was also useful for communicating the traditional media writers' personal views in relation to the election events. Justice Malala and Pierre de Vos are examples of political commentators linked to the mass media who harnessed Twitter's expositional qualities. Their commentary included thoughts on the opposition parties formed from the splintering of the ANC (see Figure 38) and Zille's use of a "doek" during her campaigning (see Figure 39). McKaiser was also popular for his commentary on the performances of the participants of the debates that took place during the election (Aboobaker, 2014).

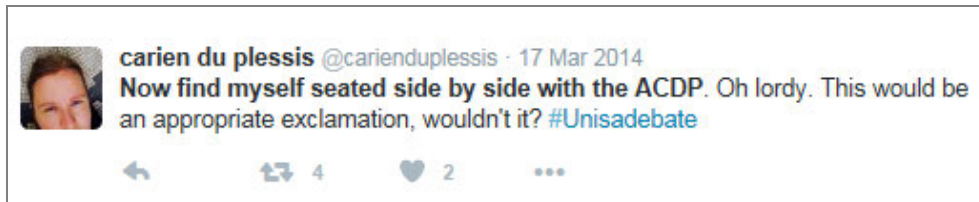


**Figure 38: Justice Malala (2014) comments on the number of splinter groups that have emerged from the ANC during Zuma's time as the ANC's leader**



**Figure 39: Pierre de Vos (2014) comments on Zille’s use of the doek during her campaigning efforts**

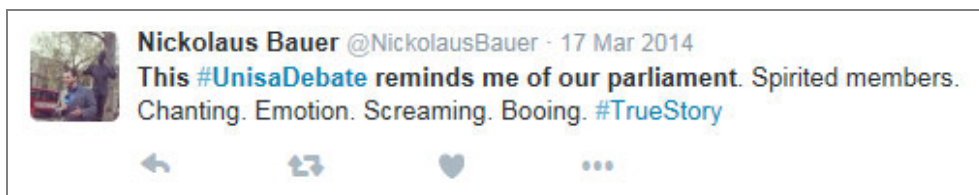
The postings of journalists often went beyond providing factual information about events. According to Hermida, journalists take part in personal brand-making when they engage on Twitter “through an individual rather than institutional account” and “go beyond just facts” in their social media utterances (2013:301). During the elections, journalists often narrated their personal experience at election events. An example of this can be seen by Carien du Plessis’s humorous tweet at the Unisa’s Great Debate (see Figure 40).



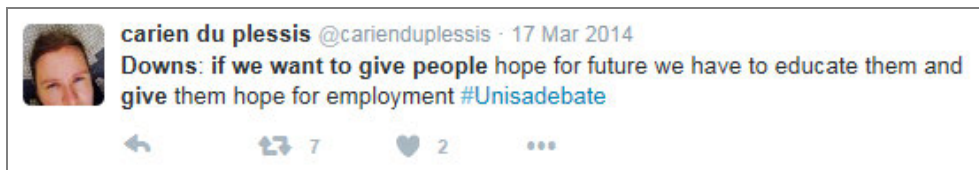
**Figure 40: Carien du Plessis (2014a) tweets humorously about being seated next to members of the ACDP. The ACDP is a South African political party known for their conservative, Christian views**

### 5.3.3. Live-tweeting

Amongst journalists, live-tweeting or live-posting from the election-themed events they attended was particularly popular and encouraged by some news stations such as the SABC (TMO Reporter, 2014a). Nickolaus Bauer and Carien du Plessis live-tweeted at UNISA's Great Debate (see Figure 41-42), and Khadija Patel covered the ABASA Election Debate<sup>25</sup> (see Figure 43). In Figure 44 Xolani Mbanjwa can be seen live-tweeting about Zuma's campaigning efforts in Tshwane. In Figure 45 (p. 83) Benita Levin tweets a picture of Thuli Madonsela taking questions during her session at Wits University. Similarly, Qaanitah Hunter tweeted a picture of Gwede Mantashe leaving the IEC office after submitting the ANC's National Assembly List (see Figure 46 on p. 83). These postings helped keep the electorate informed as events were taking place in real-time and helped supplement the news pieces these journalists produced.



**Figure 41: Nickolaus Bauer (2014) live-tweets at UNISA's Great Debate**



**Figure 42: Carien du Plessis (2014b) live-tweets at UNISA's Great Debate**

<sup>25</sup> This debate was organised by the Association for the Advancement of Black Accountants of Southern Africa (ABASA) as part of their ABASA Leadership Program (ALP).



Figure 43: Khadija Patel (2014) live-tweets at the ABASA Election Debate



Figure 44: Xolani Mbanjwa (2014a) live-tweets during his coverage of Zuma's campaigning efforts in Tshwane



Figure 45: Benita Levin (2014) tweets a picture of Thuli Madonsela answering questions about the Nkandla report at a public discussion she attended at Wits University



Figure 46: Qaanitah Hunter (2014) tweets a picture of Gwede Mantashe as he leaves the IEC office

#### 5.3.4. Communication

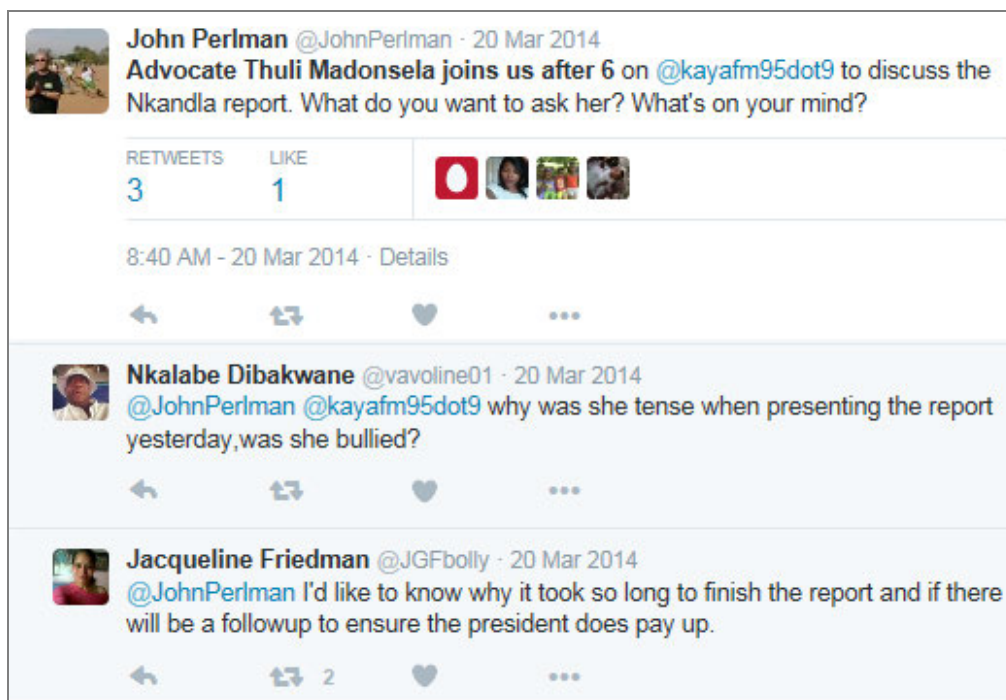
Members of the mass media also used social media to connect with members of the public, other members of the mass media and politicians. In Figure 47 Sisonke Msimang is seen interacting with a Twitter user about her opinion piece. The *Beeld* editor, Adriaan Basson, is seen engaging with a Twitter user in Figure 48 about his coverage of the Nkandla report. After John Perlman tweeted about his upcoming interview with Thuli Madonsela, he is shown in Figure 49 asking the public on Twitter what questions or comments they have for her. Columnists like Ivo Vegter and Pinky Khoabane have used social media to question the positions of political candidates on topics such as homelessness (Vegter, 2014) and the racial representivity within their parties (Khoabane, 2014). In some cases these interactions have caused tension between the mass media and politicians. There have been heated discussions between du Plessis and Zille (Pillay, 2014a) and *Business Day* journalist, Carol Paton, and Zille on Twitter during the election period (Politicsweb, 2014).



Figure 47: Sisonke Msimang (2014) engages with a Twitter user after he (Fickling, 2014) compliments her opinion piece



**Figure 48: Adriaan Basson (2014a; 2014b) engages with a Twitter user (Qhu, 2014) about his Nkandla report coverage**



**Figure 49: John Perlman (2014) informs his Twitter followers of his upcoming interview with Thuli Madonsela. He asks them to send him questions and comments for Madonsela. A few of their responses are illustrated (Dibakwane, 2014; Friedman, 2014)**

There were also Twiterviews that took place between journalists and politicians. The most notable examples include David Makhura being interviewed by Siki Mgabadeli and Paul Mashatile being interviewed by du Plessis (see Figures 50-51). Each of these Twitter interviews

proved to be very popular with the electorate and the hashtags associated with the interviews trended on Twitter (see Figure 3 in Appendix D).

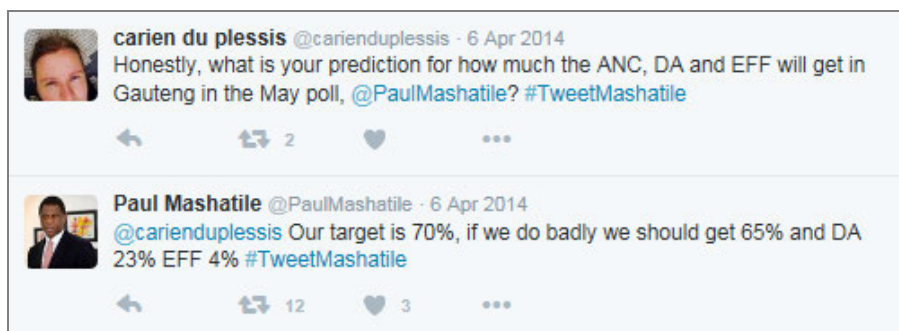


Figure 50: Carien du Plessis (2014c) asks Paul Mashatile for his election result predictions during their Twitterview. His response is depicted (Mashatile, 2014a)

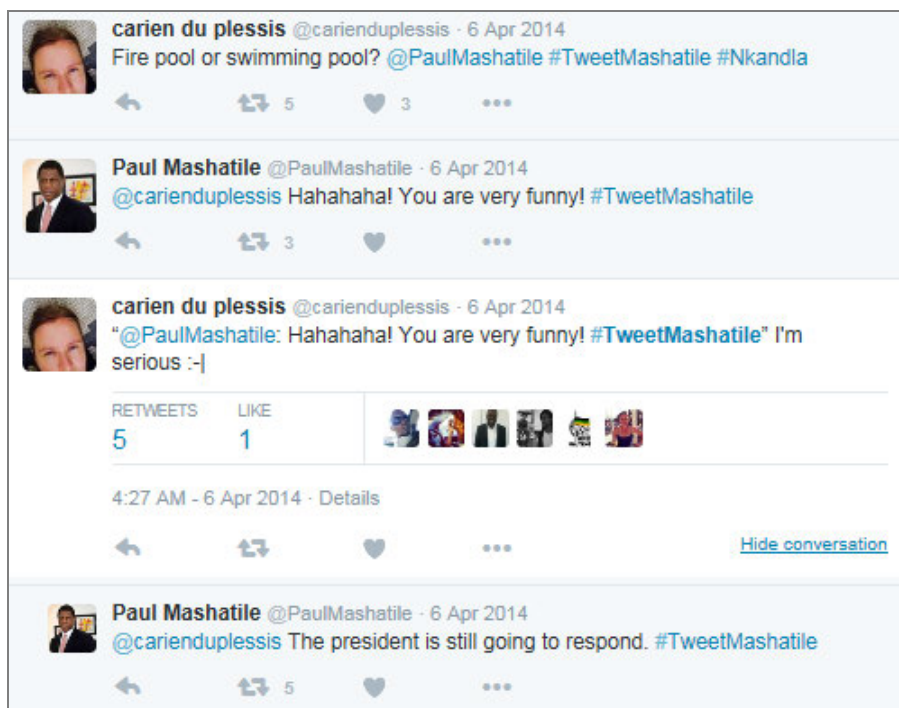


Figure 51: Carien du Plessis (2014d) asks Paul Mashatile a question about the Nkandla report during their Twitterview and encourages a response from him (2014e). His response to her is illustrated (Mashatile 2014b; Mashatile, 2014c)

### 5.3.5. Creation of News Pieces and Understanding Public Perception

In addition to engaging with Twitter users, members of the traditional media drew from social media sites in the creation of news pieces during the election period. Ndesanjo Macha used Twitter tweets to illustrate the varying opinions that South African netizens had towards the “Vote No” campaign in his *Global Voices Online* article (2014). He also quoted tweets from the ANC’s communications spokesperson to reveal the ANC’s antagonism towards the campaign (2014). When Abahlali baseMjondolo, a shack-dwellers’ movement, endorsed the DA during the election, the decision created a “storm of controversy” (Brown, 2014). Julian Brown referenced varying viewpoints on the decision in his article that he sourced from social media:

Over the past twenty-four hours, my social media feeds have been alight with an attempt to explain Abahlali’s actions. A disturbing number of them have focused on conspiratorial and racist explanations: either Abahlali were fooled into offering their support by one or another white interlocutor, or somehow money must have been involved. Others have questioned the decision to endorse the DA, even locally, when its actions in government in the Western Cape have resulted in evictions and the displacement of the urban poor. And yet others have bemoaned the decision to enter into the electoral arena at all - shocked and disappointed that Abahlali seem to have abandoned their principled stance against the elite domination of our electoral politics (2014).

This use of social media to enrich news content was common during the election period. Online news publication, *News24*, created a popular live election update feature on their site<sup>26</sup> (Strydom, 2014) that released a mixture of articles, tweets, YouTube videos of interviews, clips from conferences, photographs, polls, graphs, an interactive voting selfie photo uploader linked to province and election results as they were released. In another example a number of the electorate’s voting day pictures and selfies (that were tweeted at the SABC’s Twitter handle with the hashtag “#SABCelections”) were aired by the broadcaster and posted on its website (TMO Reporter, 2014a).

The mass media have also used Twitter to understand the public’s perception of various events during the election. A SABC News team conducted “an informal analysis of recent Twitter activity over the #Zuma and #ANC hashtags” (Demian, 2014). Through their research they were able to better understand the public’s sentiment towards the ANC and Jacob Zuma (Demian, 2014).

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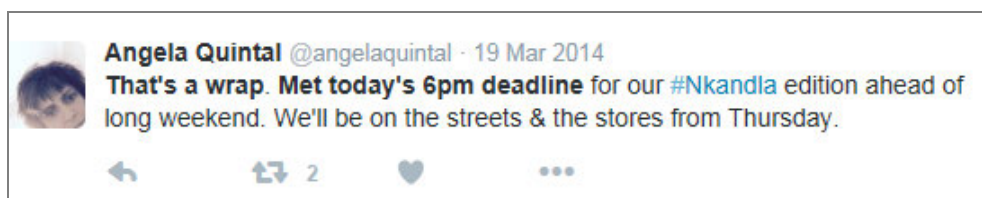
<sup>26</sup> The feature can be viewed here: <http://www.news24.com/elections/live/live-national-results-20140505>

### 5.3.6. Reporting of Events, Promotion of Content and Fielding Comments

For many media companies social media provided an alternative channel to report on events, promote their content and field comments. Figure 52 illustrates one such example - *Jacaranda News* is shown tweeting about the “20 Years of Democracy Debate”. In another example, Angela Quintal, editor of the *Mail and Guardian*, is shown using the platform to tweet about the newspaper’s Nkandla edition (see Figure 53). Many cartoons that were placed in newspapers were also circulated on social media such as Zapiro’s April Fool’s Day cartoon (Gifford, 2014). On Election Day, *Eyewitness News* tweeted a picture of dumped ballot boxes in Pretoria (Times Live, 2014) and trended as a result (see Figure 21 in Appendix D). *BBC World News* also released a Mxit channel which allowed voters to submit comments and receive “the best of the BBC’s coverage of the election via text updates, headlines, images, programme information and links to online coverage, all optimised for mobile” (TMO Reporter, 2014a).



**Figure 52: Jacaranda News (2014) tweets about the 20 Years of Democracy Debate**



**Figure 53: Angela Quintal (2014b) tweets about the Mail and Guardian’s upcoming Nkandla edition**

### 5.3.7. Event Promotion

The mass media also used social media to promote and enhance their events during the election period. When the *Daily Maverick* held their “The Gathering”<sup>27</sup> conference, it became a significant topic on social media (Brkic, 2014). According to the newspaper, the hashtag

<sup>27</sup> The conference had an election theme and hosted panel discussion with members from the political, media and business fields (Brkic, 2014).

associated with the event was “tweeted and retweeted well over 12,000 times and [the newspaper] trended globally” (Brkic, 2014).

*Live Magazine* held several youth debates during the election where social media played a significant role. During the debates members of the youth were able to ask questions through Twitter and Google Hangouts (Henderson & Mashego, 2014). *Live Magazine*’s “To Vote or Not to Vote” debate trended on Twitter (see Figure 10 in Appendix D) and was cited by the magazine as successful in reaching their targeted youth audience through the use of social media platforms (Shezi, 2014b).

The Talk Radio 702 Election Debate, held at the Johannesburg City Hall in April, also saw a strong social media presence (Lee, 2014). The debate was moderated by Talk Radio 702 radio show host, Redi Tlhabi, and her listeners were able to contribute by having their “tweets ... displayed in real time” (Lee, 2014). The *Mail and Guardian* held a live debate that was streamed on the newspaper’s YouTube channel and Google Plus page (Staff Reporter, 2014). The public were given the opportunity to send in their questions using the hashtag “#MGhangout” on Twitter, posting on the newspaper’s Facebook page and through Google Plus (Staff Reporter, 2014).

Another media-driven debate with prominent social media use was *The Oppidan Press*’s<sup>28</sup> Live Election Debate. This debate was able to be streamed live on *The Oppidan Press*’s YouTube channel and featured representatives from several political parties such as the ANC, DA, Agang SA and COPE (Online Editor, 2014). Members of the public were encouraged to tweet their “thoughts, opinions and questions to @oppidanpress using the #OppiDebate” (Online Editor, 2014). During the debate they were also able to ask the party members questions by tweeting using the “#OppiDebate” hashtag (Online Editor, 2014). *The Oppidan Press* encouraged the use of live-tweeting by awarding the best tweeters a free *The Oppidan Press* t-shirt following the commencement of the debate (Online Editor, 2014). The event was very successful on Twitter as “less than three hours after the debate started, #OppiDebate trended nationally on the site” (Adebola, 2014).

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<sup>28</sup> *The Oppidan Press* is a student-run newspaper at Rhodes University in Grahamstown.

#### 5.4. Politicians and Political Parties

In the previous sections the social media uses by members of the public and mass media were explored. This section turns its attention to the diverse ways social media was used by politicians and political parties during the election period. First, the the appeal of social media platforms for marginalised politicians and parties is highlighted. Politicians and their political parties used social media as a means to disseminate information and to target fringe markets and members of the youth. The election also saw the use of social media as a political fundraising tool. Politicians and political parties also used social media to enact smear campaigns and counter against smear attempts. The section then examines politicians and political parties in their capacity as a watchdog during the election. They used social media to create a dialogue with other relevant political actors – particularly members of the public that were active on social media. Politicians and political parties used social media to organise volunteers and encourage online coteries. This section also examines how they used social media as a way of monitoring public opinion. Finally, the latter part of this section will explore the ways in which the use of these platforms hindered the campaigning efforts of politicians and their political parties.

##### 5.4.1. The Appeal of Social Media Platforms for Marginalised Politicians and Parties

During the election social media proved useful for political parties that did not have the resources of the ruling party. Additionally, social media platforms proved useful for political parties that were marginalised by the mass media during the election. This is best exemplified by the experiences of the EFF and the DA.

In April 2014, the DA's campaign advert "Ayisafani" was banned by the SABC (Sanderson, 2014) and would not be broadcasted on the national broadcaster's television channels and radio stations (SAPA, 2014c). During an ICASA complaints and compliance committee meeting the SABC argued that it removed the advert because it incited violence against police officers and "attacked President Jacob Zuma without giving him the right of reply" (Ngobeni & Stephen Grootes, 2014). In response the DA argued that the actions of the SABC constituted censorship (Ngobeni & Grootes, 2014). They organised an "Ayisafani" march through Soweto in protest of

the SABC which attracted hundreds of supporters (SAPA, 2014d). The hashtag, “#darally”, which was associated with the protest march, trended on Twitter (see Figure 7 in Appendix D).

In what many commentators referred to as the “Streisand Effect”<sup>29</sup> (see Figure 54), the DA’s “Ayisafani” advert (which had been posted on YouTube<sup>30</sup>) went viral in light of the SABC’s actions (Walker, 2014). Social media users (that were sympathetic to the DA) began posting the advert on Facebook, Twitter (Bizcommunity, 2014a) and the party later made the advert accessible through Mxit (Walker, 2014). The “Ayisafani” advert on YouTube would receive over 660 000 hits by 5 May 2014 (Mackay, 2014). In response to the hits the advert received online, Mmusi Maimane revealed his belief that “people wanted to view the advert as a way of saying they don’t agree with the SABC’s decision” (Sesant, 2014). ICASA eventually ruled in favour of the DA and ordered that the advert be aired by the SABC with immediate effect (Spector, 2014).



**Figure 54: A cartoon that points out how the SABC’s decision to censor the DA’s election advert paradoxically aided the DA’s campaign (Jerm, 2014)**

<sup>29</sup> The “Streisand Effect” describes how attempts to censor or squash something controversial ends up creating more publicity around it – commonly “in the public sphere and the Internet” (Walker, 2014)

<sup>30</sup> The DA’s YouTube advert can be viewed here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g6jU2bZxGKI>

During the election period the DA's advert was also a source of attention on Twitter. The hashtag, "#ayisafani", trended on Twitter following the release of the advert on YouTube (see Figure 7 in Appendix D). When the DA followed up the advert with a sequel, "Ayisafani 2", the hashtag associated with the advert, "#ayisafani2", trended as a result (see Figure 7 in Appendix D).

The EFF, a newly-formed party who were contesting the elections for the first time, also benefited from social media in a similar manner. When the SABC declined to broadcast their campaign advert<sup>31</sup> as it "incited violence" (BBC, 2014), the advert received over 80 000 views on YouTube (News24, 2014b).

ICASA's complaints and compliance committee "ruled in the SABC's favour on Saturday by upholding the broadcaster's decision not to flight the EFF's advert" (Raborife, 2014). As such, their YouTube video became one of the few avenues their campaign message could be accessed. The EFF capitalised on the publicity they received from the banning of their advert and marched to the SABC's office in Auckland Park in protest. Several hashtags associated with the event trended on Twitter such as "#effad", "#effmarch" and "#effmarchsabc" (see Figure 11 in Appendix D).

#### 5.4.2. Information Dissemination

Political parties and politicians used social media to disperse various types of information relevant to the election process and their campaigns. These included reminders about voting, notices about meetings, campaign launches, their appearances at television sessions and debates (see Figure 55), release of their national lists (see Figure 56), fundraising events (see Figure 57), relaying of campaign promises (see Figure 58 on p. 94) and to keep the public aware of their campaigning in different parts of the country (see Figure 59 on p. 94). Political parties also used these mediums to disperse campaign material such as manifesto material (see Figure 60 on p. 94), posters and petitions (see Figure 61 on p. 94). The ANC, in particular, appreciated the way social media sites provided access to interested individuals unable to participate in their events and the way these individuals could "obtain information about these

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<sup>31</sup> The EFF's campaign advert can be viewed here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gWfdU7xr-tA>

activities directly from the ANC, unrestricted by framing and bias that often pervade coverage of these events by the mainstream media” (Mthembu, 2014a).

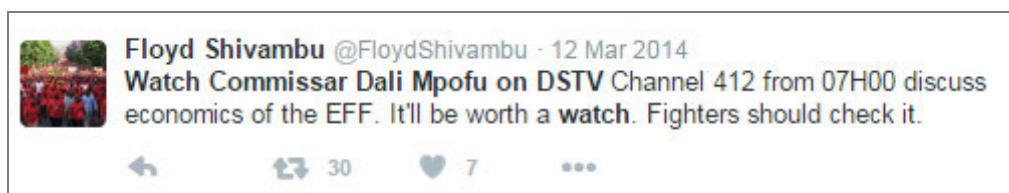


Figure 55: EFF member, Floyd Shivambu (2014), urges the party supporters to watch fellow EFF member, Dali Mpfu’s television appearance

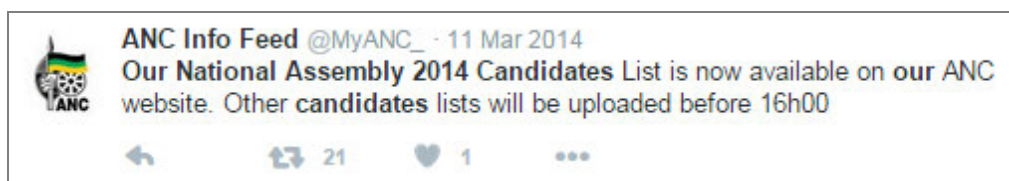


Figure 56: The ANC (ANC Info Feed, 2014) releases a notice about their National Assembly 2014 Candidates List being available on their website



Figure 57: A member of the DA tweets a poster advertising a fundraising concert involving the party (Benadie, 2014)



Figure 58: Mmusi Maimane (2014a) affirms his intention to fight etolls if he is elected Premier of Gauteng

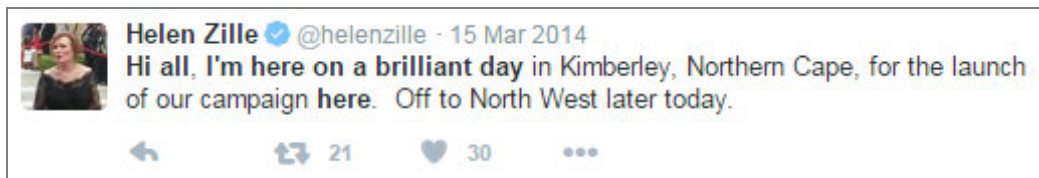


Figure 59: Helen Zille (2014f) communicates the agenda of her campaign trail

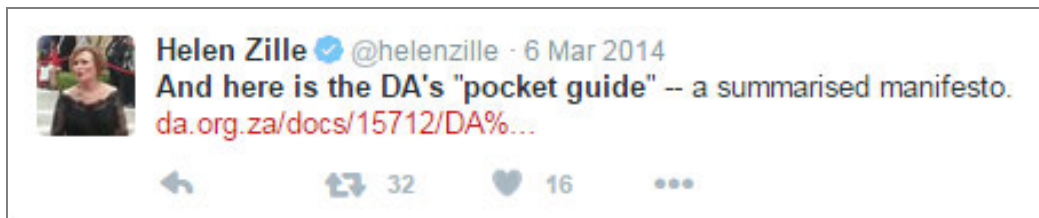


Figure 60: Helen Zille (2014g) tweets a link to a summarised version of their manifesto



Figure 61: The DA (Democratic Alliance, 2014a) distributes a link to their petition on Twitter

Political parties also ran several social media campaigns during the election. The FF+ began a campaign on Facebook and Twitter with the slogan "Protect the Public Protector" following the criticism Madonsela received after the release of the Nkandla report (SAPA, 2014e). The DA created a "#LookingForwardTo" advertising and social media campaign where they asked

“South Africans from all over the country what they [were] looking forward to under a DA government” (Moakes & Davis, 2014). As part of this campaign, adverts were aired on television stations and posted on the party’s YouTube channel (Moakes & Davis, 2014). The DA also created a website<sup>32</sup> that drew from the comments posted on Facebook, Twitter and Mxit using the “#LookingForwardTo” hashtag associated with the campaign (Moakes & Davis, 2014).

The ANC embraced a multi-media campaign when they launched their election adverts (Mthembu, 2014b). Besides being aired on television and radio stations, the adverts were also placed on the party’s YouTube channel (Mthembu, 2014b). The party also ran several successful social media campaigns. Their campaigning at grass roots level was relayed by members of the party using the “#ancinthestreets” hashtag. Figures 62 - 63 illustrate some of the postings that were made by politicians and canvassers engaging with the electorate. The social media campaigning was well received. Will Green named their “#MyANC” hashtag the “best social media hashtag” for the way it “gave their supporters a channel to latch onto and broadcast the opinions on the ground” (2014).



**Figure 62: Harold Maloka (2014) tweets a picture of the ANC’s campaigning efforts in Westbury**

<sup>32</sup> The website can be viewed here: [www.LookingForwardTo.co.za](http://www.LookingForwardTo.co.za)



**Figure 63: Jackson Mthembu (2014c) tweets a picture of the ANC's campaigning efforts in Msogwaba**

#### 5.4.3. Targeting Fringe Markets and the Youth

During the election period, political parties used social media to target members of the electorate that they could not reach through traditional media or local platforms. The most significant populations included members of the youth and members of the electorate that were abroad.

Many political parties targeted young people on youth-dominated social media platforms such as Mxit (Ndenze, 2014). The ANC launched a Mxit app that catered to ANC supporters of all nine provinces (Ndenze, 2014). Following its release it received over 400 000 subscribers mainly between the age bracket of 17 to 25 (Ndenze, 2014). According to the ANC national spokesman, Jackson Mthembu, the app could be used to engage with the party by gaining information on the party, its events and being able to answer polls (Ndenze, 2014). The ANC's

Western Cape App on Mxit was particularly popular during the election. It ranked within the top 29 brands on Mxit's Brand Index report during the election period (Bizcommunity, 2014b; Bizcommunity, 2014c; Bizcommunity, 2014d; Bizcommunity, 2014e). In April, the app subscriber base notably grew by 39% due to the "on-going Mxit Live Chat sessions held with various high-ranking ministers" (Bizcommunity, 2014d).

The DA also had a popular Mxit app during the election, ranking within the top 36 on Mxit's Brand Index report during the election period (Bizcommunity, 2014b; Bizcommunity, 2014c; Bizcommunity, 2014d; Bizcommunity, 2014e). In April the app had a 96% spike in its subscriber base which translated to 190, 598 new fans of their app (Bizcommunity 2014d). The reason for this growth was the launching of DemocraCity, "a Mxit-specific strategy game" that was described as a "hybrid between SimCity and Tamagotchi" (Ntuli, 2014). The gameplay prompts users to govern a city where they are responsible for making decisions that will "influence the happiness levels of [their] citizens" (Ntuli, 2014). According to Mbali Ntuli, the DA's youth leader, the app would allow members of the youth to "learn more about the DA in a fun way, as well as standing a chance to win a study bursary" (Ntuli, 2014). Cash prizes of airtime were also awarded to high-performing players each day (Ntuli, 2014).

Social media was also used by political parties to engage members of the electorate that were abroad. In one example, the DA released a YouTube video<sup>33</sup> featuring Zille. The video, "A Message from Helen Zille to South Africans Abroad", saw Zille encouraging this group to register to vote and cast their vote for her party.

#### 5.4.4. Fundraising

Political parties used social media for various types of fundraising during the election. There is evidence of the EFF using social media to promote their fundraising events. An example of this can be seen in the tweet issued by their party for their Manifesto Gala Dinner (see Figure 64). Additionally, a trust fund was started by the EFF to pay for the "R16 million in unpaid taxes, penalties and interests" that Malema owed the taxman (Motsai, 2014). In order to aid with the "marketing and fundraising" of the fund, social media accounts were created (Motsai, 2014). The DA also sourced donations through social media. In the "About" section of their Ayisafani

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<sup>33</sup> The YouTube video can be viewed here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=itzPaS7fyFE>

advert, a link was provided for their supporters to follow and contribute to their campaign<sup>34</sup>. The Ubuntu Party also used YouTube to solicit funds for their campaign. In an address posted on the party's YouTube account the party's leader, Michael Tellingier, encouraged people to contribute to their Indiegogo campaign so that the party could pay their election deposit and contest the election<sup>35</sup>.



**Figure 64: The EFF (EFF Official Account, 2014a) uses Twitter to promote their fundraising event**

#### 5.4.5. Smear Campaigns

There were many uses of social media by politicians and political parties to run smear campaigns and criticise their political opponents. A member of the Patriotic Alliance, Gayton McKenzie, crafted an open letter to Malema and posted it to TwitLonger in April 2014 (eNCA, 2014). The letter was highly dismissive of Malema, criticising his lavish lifestyle in contrast to his “everyman” political persona, his hypocritical stances and his education background (Dawjee, 2014). The letter went viral on social media platforms and the hashtag “#gaytonletter” trended on Twitter (see Figure 11 in Appendix D).

In March 2014 Agang SA surprised Twitter users with a Twitter campaign primarily directed at “President Jacob Zuma and Basic Education Minister Angie Motshekga, in a series of scathing tweets and lampooning pictures” (Van Onselen, 2014a). The audacious nature of the campaign caused many to wonder if the party's account had been hacked (Matroos, 2014) until Agang SA confirmed that the party was responsible for the tweets (Lourens, 2014d). The party trended on Twitter (see Figure 1 in Appendix D) and its campaign was praised by columnist, Gareth van

<sup>34</sup> The DA's YouTube video can be viewed here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g6jU2bZxGKI>

<sup>35</sup> The Ubuntu Party's YouTube video can be viewed here: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z\\_9dCn-VxE](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z_9dCn-VxE)

Onselen, for displaying “colour, variation, even humour” despite minor faults (Van Onselen, 2014a).

The criticism was not limited to election candidates. When former ANC ex-ministers, Ronnie Kasrils and Nozizwe Madlala-Routledge, encouraged the electorate to sustain from voting for the ANC, their “Vote No” campaign was met with criticism by ANCYL member, Mzwandile Masina (SAPA, 2014f). He posted a picture on Instagram of Kasrils and Madlala-Routledge harshly berating them for their actions (SAPA, 2014f). The ANCYL considered the comment disrespectful and distanced themselves from Masina’s post (SAPA, 2014f). Additionally, Masina apologised for his comment and removed it from Instagram (SAPA, 2014f).

It was also common for political parties to criticise the campaigning efforts of their opponents on social media. When Zuma refused to take up Zille’s challenge of a presidential debate, the DA branded his decision as cowardly on Twitter. DA member, Gavin Davis can be seen in Figure 65, questioning the confidence levels ANC supporters had in their leader when they rejected the idea of the debate. During the Nkandla scandal the DA also tweeted ways the money used for the upgrades could have benefited South African citizens (see Figure 66). In Figure 67 the EFF can be seen mocking members of the ACDP during the Unisa Debate.



**Figure 65: Gavin Davis (2014b) criticises Jacob Zuma and his supporters**



Figure 66: The DA (Democratic Alliance, 2014b) tweets how the Nkandla upgrades burdened South African citizens financially

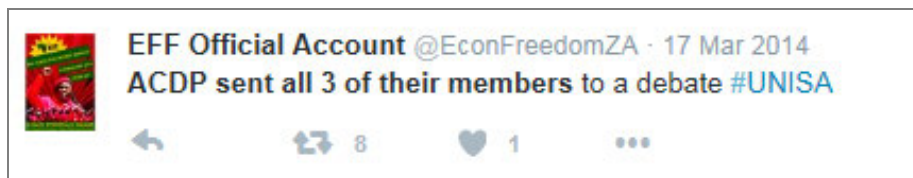


Figure 67: The EFF (EFF Official Account, 2014b) mocks the ACDP following their appearance at the Unisa Debate

Finally, social media also offered an avenue for politicians to defend themselves during the election period. When the media reported statements that Zille had made during a party meeting against fellow DA member, Lindiwe Mazibuko, she used Twitter as a means to refute the media reports and provide her version of events (Phakathi, 2014b). An example of Zille's engagement can be seen in Figure 68.



**Figure 68: Helen Zille (2014h) defends herself against reports of her attacking Lindiwe Mazibuko (J0HП, 2014)**

#### 5.4.6. Watchdog Role and Monitoring

Political parties also used social media to point out irregularities during the election period. The DA used social media to share pictures of their posters being removed and “replaced by ANC posters” (Green, 2014). The party posted on Twitter when “the SABC informed the party that it would be excluded from its live debates” (Mataboge, 2014). Zille also took to Twitter to warn her followers about a scam that was using her name to solicit funds (Jackman, 2014).

Political parties also used social media to keep the public updated of their monitoring of the voting process and the tallying of votes. Boitumelo Molelekeng, an EFF member, trended on Twitter (see Figure 11 in Appendix D) when she tweeted a picture of dumped ballot papers in Diepsloot.

#### 5.4.7. Creating a Dialogue

During the election period, social media provided a powerful platform for politicians and their parties to engage with members of the public sphere. Political parties were seen to use their social media profiles to deal with queries and respond to comments. An example of this can be seen in Figure 69 where Agang SA responds to a comment about the party. For politicians these platforms provided an opportunity for online “baby-kissing”. Many politicians embraced social media to respond to compliments (see Figure 70), deal with service delivery complaints (see Figure 71 on p. 103), answer questions about their campaign aims and create a dialogue about their campaign efforts (see Figure 72 on p. 103).

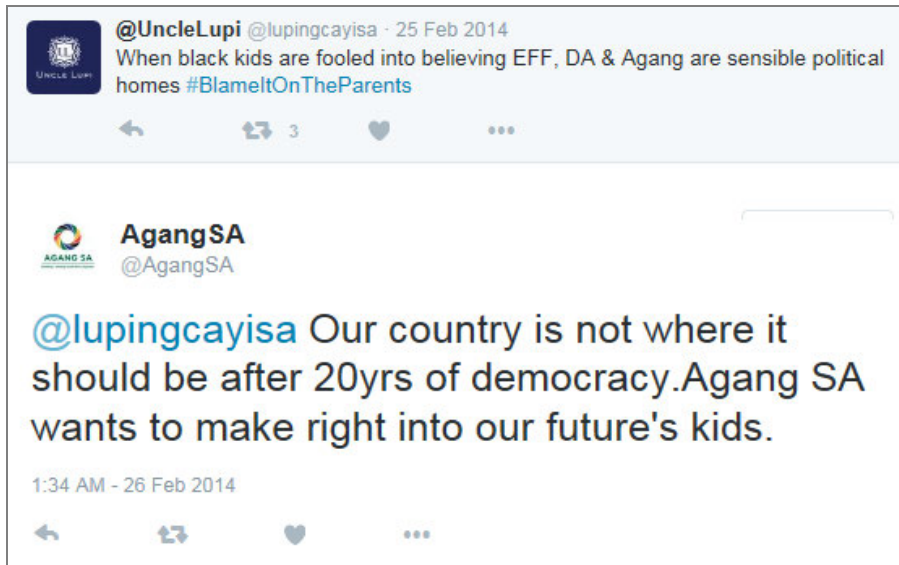


Figure 69: Agang SA (AgangSA, 2014a) responds to a comment about the party (@UncleLupi, 2014)



Figure 70: Helen Zille (2014i) accepts a compliment from a supporter (Prins, 2014)



**Figure 71: Mmusi Maimane (2014b) responds to a service delivery complaint involving fraud and corruption (Russell, 2014)**



**Figure 72: Helen Zille (2014j) asks for feedback on the headgear line released by the party as part of their marketing efforts after she receives criticism (Yeta, 2014)**

Many politicians capitalised on the qualities of social media by hosting a number of live-chats. Malema took to Facebook and Twitter to answer questions “ranging from EFF priorities ... education to e-tolls” in hour-long sessions that ran for two successive weeks (Mutnick, 2014). These live-chats proved to be very popular. During the first session the hashtag the public used in conjunction with their tweets (“#MalemaQandA”) trended on Twitter (see Figure 11 in Appendix D) while a thousand comments were posted on Facebook by ordinary members of the public, “journalists and lobby groups” (Mutnick, 2014). Will Green praised the session as the “best digital innovation” of the election (2014).

The ANC also conducted a number of live-chats during the election period, concentrating on Twitter and Mxit to host them. On Mxit their “MyANC” app saw young Mxit users engaging with high-ranking ANC members on various issues (Jongilanga, 2014). The members that took part in these hour-long sessions included Minister of Science and Technology, Derek Hanekom, Deputy Minister of Communications, Stella Ndabeni and Jackson Mthembu. The ANC promoted these sessions through posters on Mxit and Twitter (see Figure 73 for an example) and posted images of the ANC members on their other social media platforms as they partook in the online discussions (see Figure 74 for an example).



Figure 73: A promotional poster of Derek Hanekom’s Mxit chat (Jordaan, 2014a)



Figure 74: Derek Hanekom engaging with Mxit users during his Mxit chat (Jordaan, 2014b)

Besides Mxit, the ANC conducted live-chats or “Twitterviews” on Twitter (Mthembu, 2014a). During these sessions a journalist or other high-profile media personalities would interview a member of the party on Twitter. After the interview, the ANC politician would then answer questions from other members on Twitter. An example of a Twitterview that took place during the election can be seen in the poster in Figure 75 involving Chriselda Dudumashe (née Kananda) and ANC Provincial Secretary, David Makhura. In Figures 76 - 77, Makhura can be seen answering questions by the radio DJ on his predictions for the elections and reasons he would give her teenage daughter to vote for the ANC. Once the Twitterview concluded, he can be seen answering a question about the ANC’s creation of economic success in Figure 78 (p. 107).

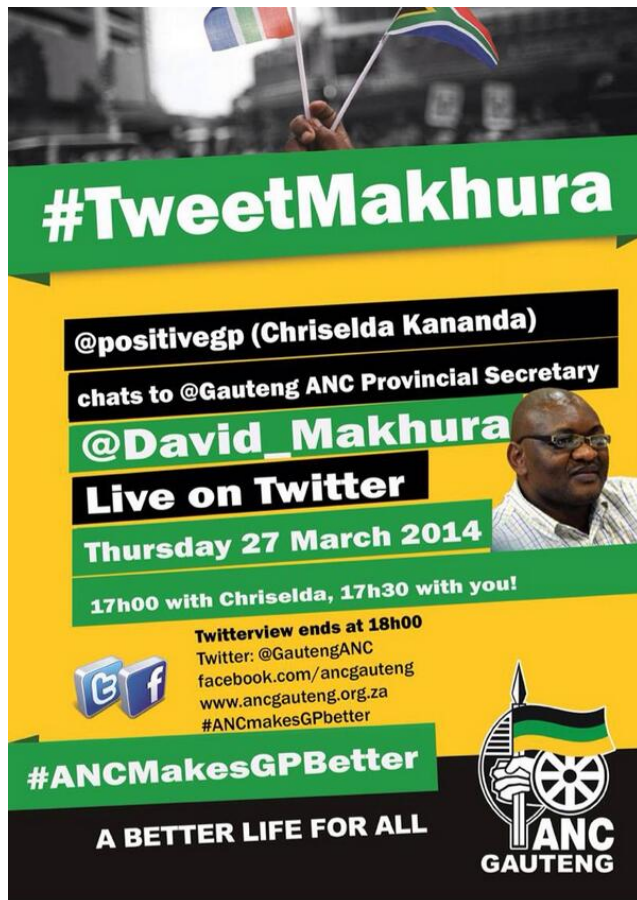


Figure 75: A promotional poster of David Makhura’s Twitterview chat (ANC Gauteng, 2014)



**Figure 76: David Makhura (2014h) answers Criselda Dudumashe’s question (2014a) about his prediction for the election**



**Figure 77: David Makhura (2014i) answers Criselda Dudumashe’s question (2014b) on how he would encourage a teenager to vote for the ANC**



**Figure 78: David Makhura (2014j) answers a question (IG: Matudumatji, 2014) on the ANC’s plan to create more wealth**

As the first party to embrace social media platforms, the DA had conducted interactive Town Hall sessions on Twitter as early as 2011 (Pillay, 2011). During the election period, one of their most notable sessions was the “Western Cape Story” Twitter Town Hall in which they answered questions surrounding their governance of the province. The participants of the Town Hall included Helen Zille, Phumzile van Damme, Gavin Davis and George Hill-Lewis (see Figure 79). The issues they addressed during the session included criticism of the province’s consultation fees (see Figure 80) and how the province had succeeded in promoting small business (see Figure 81 on p. 109). As part of their “#LookingForwardTo” campaign, the DA also hosted a Town Hall with their Shadow Minister of Finance, Tim Harris. The Town Hall provided Twitter users with the opportunity to ask Harris questions using the hashtag “#talktotim” (see Figure 82 on p. 109 for an example). The DA encouraged participation by offering the top five tweeters a chance to have coffee with Harris. The Town Hall was very popular and the hashtag associated with the session trended on Twitter (see Figure 7 in Appendix D).



Figure 79: Members of the DA preparing for their Twitter Town Hall (Mbhele, 2014)

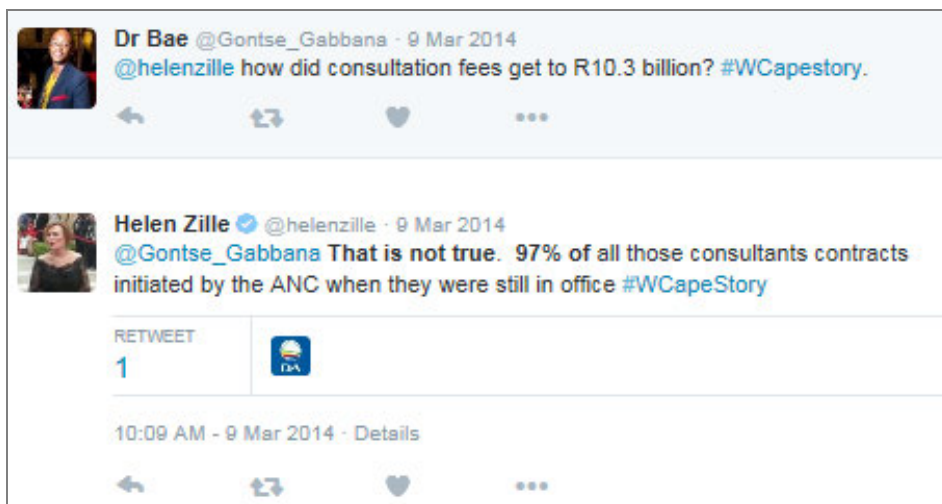
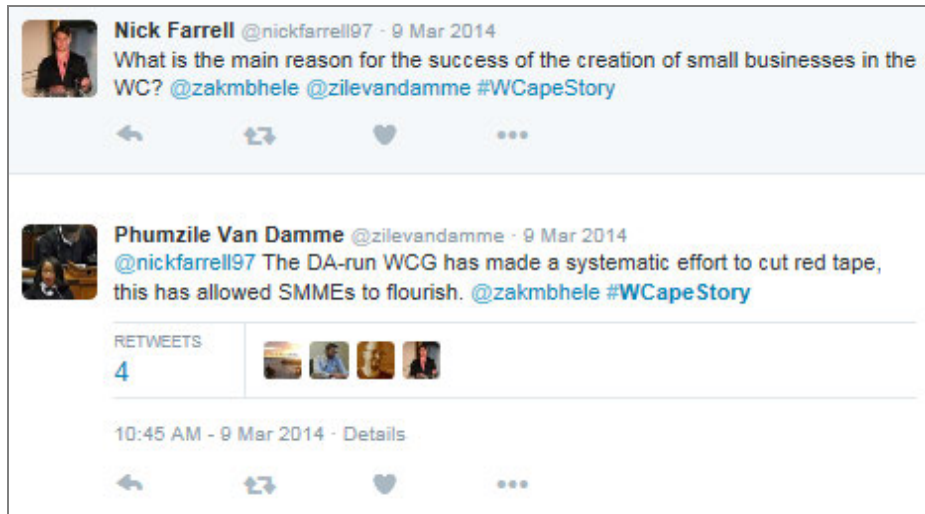
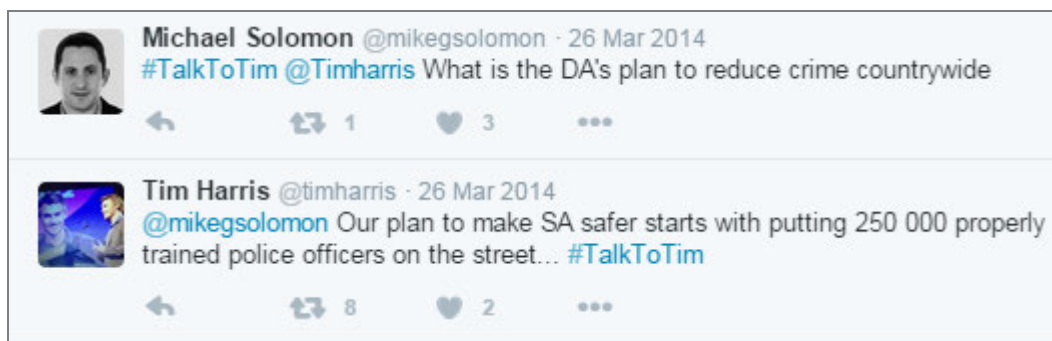


Figure 80: Helen Zille (2014k) answers a question on the Western Cape's use of consultants and the resulting high fee prices (Dr Bae, 2014)



**Figure 81: Phumzile van Damme (2014) answers a question on the successful creation of small businesses in the Western Cape (Farrell, 2014)**



**Figure 82: Tim Harris (2014) answers a question on the DA's plans to reduce crime in South Africa (Solomon, 2014)**

#### 5.4.8. Organising Volunteers and Encouraging Online Coteries

On their Mxit app, Agang SA allowed “users to create community groups by location or interest” (Jongilanga, 2014). The users who became part of the group would then be able to “create topics and post comments to a forum-style wall” (Jongilanga, 2014). Besides facilitating these discussions, the “group creators, or leaders, could also send announcements and updates to their group members” (Jongilanga, 2014). Agang SA also encouraged volunteers to sign others to their app and provided an airtime reward as an incentive for recruiters (Creamer Media Reporter, 2014). Agang SA encouraged their supporters to sign their petitions and encourage others to sign on their social media networks. The party also helped their members to recruit other members at grass roots level through their use of social media. Figure 83 illustrates one

such instance where the party commended the recruitment initiative of a member and referred the details of a party official who could assist him.

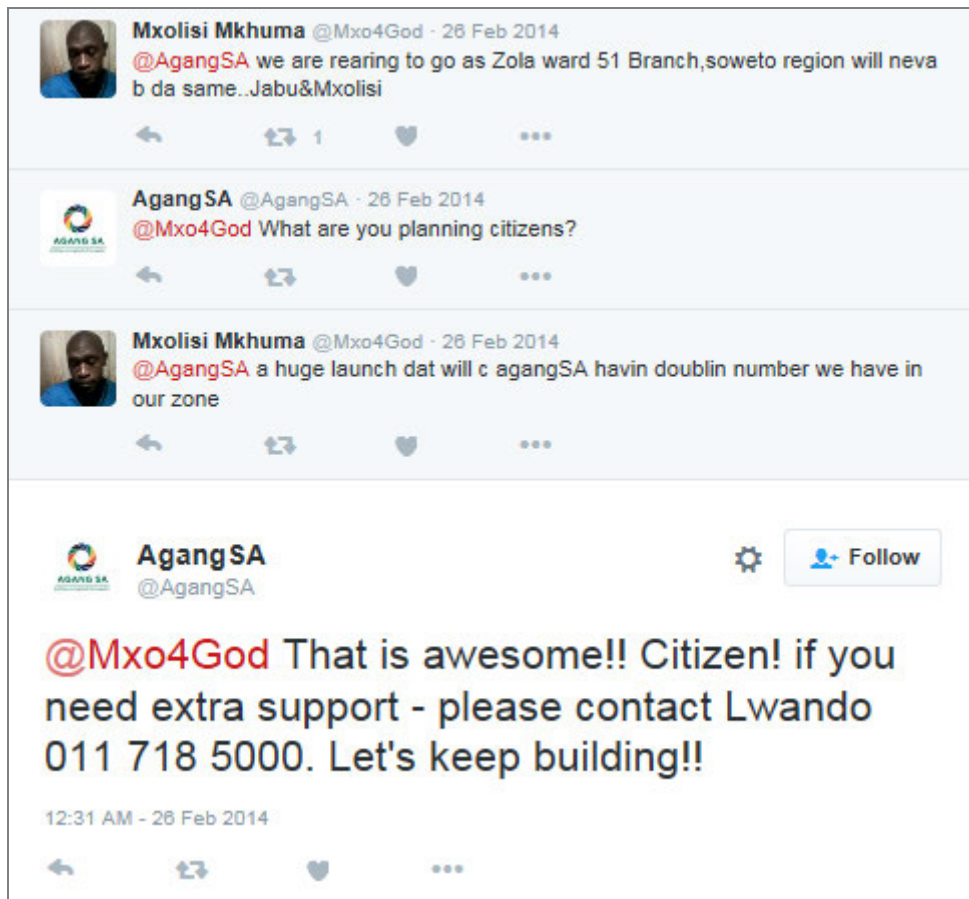


Figure 83: A tweet about a local campaign launch is directed at Agang SA’s Twitter account (Mkhuma, 2014a). The party enquires about the launch (AgangSA, 2014b; Mkhuma, 2014b) and then directs the tweeter to a member who can aid his efforts (AgangSA, 2014c)

The ANC used social media to encourage conversations around their campaigning. When Gwede Mantashe appeared at the University of the Witwatersrand to address students, they were encouraged to tweet about the event using the “Uncle Gweezy hashtag” (John, 2014). At their Siyanqoba rally, the party provided free Wi-Fi at the FNB stadium where it took place (Green, 2014). Besides growing the fanbase of their social media platforms considerably, the tactic ensured that “social media platforms were awash with images of a packed stadium and a sea of ANC t-shirts” (Green, 2014).

#### 5.4.9. Monitoring Public Opinion

Social media provided politicians and their parties with a way to monitor public sentiment towards their campaigns during the election (SAPA, 2014g). The DA, for example, tracked social media to help understand the main concerns of voters abroad (Katznellenbogen, 2014). In a posting on their website the ANC also affirmed that they use the feedback gained from social media platforms and would be continuing this practice after the election period (Mthembu, 2014a).

#### 5.4.10. Social Media Platforms as a Hindrance

While social media proved to be a useful communication tool for many politicians during the election, a number of politicians suffered from their use and lack of use of these platforms.

A Facebook account was created using the name and persona of ANC deputy secretary general Jessie Duarte (Udemans, 2014). The account made offers of money to Facebook users (Udemans, 2014). The ANC distanced themselves from the account and reported the matter to Facebook (Udemans, 2014). When Jacob Zuma announced the new members of his cabinet, fake Twitter accounts were created impersonating finance minister Nhlanhla Nene and communications minister Faith Muthambi (TMO Reporter, 2014b). The government distanced themselves from the accounts and beseeched members of the public to stop creating false profiles (TMO Reporter, 2014b). Despite this, the Nene Twitter account became very popular, quickly drawing in 3603 followers after a series of humorous tweets (SAPA, 2014h).

Besides the creation of false social media profiles, the official profiles of political parties were targeted. In one case the ANC's Western Cape Twitter account was hacked and began tweeting "insults about its own leadership" (Mzantsi, 2014). The ANC apologised for the tweets and removed them from the profile (Mzantsi, 2014). The incident drew attention on Twitter (Raubenheimer, 2014) and was mocked by the DA.

Several politicians also received criticism for their use of social media during the election period. One of the more notable incidences includes ANC member, Visvin Reddy. On a Facebook post aimed at the South African Indian community he stated that "whiners" who were critical of the

ANC's leadership of the country should leave and return to India (Mbanjwa, 2014b) (see Figure 84 for the Facebook post). The posting drew criticism from the Indian community (IANS, 2014), political commentators such as Iqbal Musa (2014), members of the ANC such as Logie Naidoo (Mbuyazi, 2014) and opposition parties such as the MF (Mbanjwa, 2014b). On Twitter his comments received considerable attention with the phrases "vivin" (sic), "reddy", "chatsworth" and "whining" trending in May (see Figure 3 in Appendix D). He was also mocked in a cartoon by Nathi Ngubane (see Figure 85).

Reddy was initially unrepentant (Mbanjwa, 2014b) but later apologised to the Indian community (Mbuyazi, 2014). Although he received the support of the Chatsworth branch that he led (Rondanger, 2014), Reddy was suspended by the party (SAPA, 2014i). The ANC would go on to receive poor results amongst the Indian community following the conclusion of the elections and some analysts pointed to this incident as one of the reasons Indian voters chose not to endorse the party (The Economic Times, 2014).



**Figure 84: A screengrab of Reddy's Facebook post (SABC, 2014b)**



**Figure 85: A cartoon by Nathi Ngubane mocking Reddy's actions (Ngubane, 2014)**

In a similar incident an ANCYL member, Themba Dlomo, posted anti-Indian comments on Facebook following an incident involving an unpaid ANCYL bill (Maqhina, 2014). The postings received media coverage and Dlomo deleted his comments following the recommendations of his Facebook friends (Maqhina, 2014).

A more high-profile case involved two of the DA's highest ranking officials. After a *City Press* journalist wrote an article that presented the DA in a less-than-favourable light, Zille took to Twitter and accused du Plessis of "one-sided, inaccurate and unprofessional journalism in an hour-long Twitter-attack" (Beeld, 2014). Although some of Zille's Twitter followers supported her, her tweets were criticised by senior members of her party and members of the media (Beeld, 2014). Several cartoonists ridiculed her such as Zapiro and Brandan Reynolds (see Figures 86 - 87). Her actions were also one of the reasons Gareth van Onselen named her one of the "Biggest Twitter Liabilities" for the DA during the election period (Van Onselen, 2014b).



Figure 86: A cartoon by Brandon Reynolds highlighting Zille's undoing by her postings on Twitter (Reynolds, 2014)

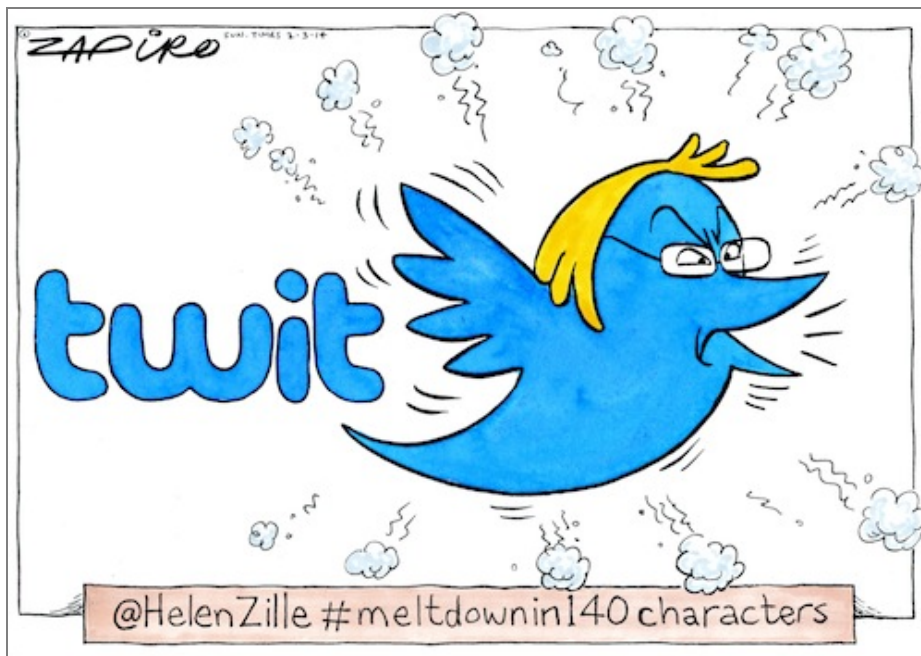


Figure 87: A cartoon by Zapiro mocking Zille following her twar with du Plessis (Zapiro, 2014)

The second incident involved DA MP, Michael Waters. During the election he tweeted a picture of a queue of dogs lined up, preparing to urinate on an election poster of Jacob Zuma (News24, 2014c). The picture included the phrase “Voting Day. Make your mark” (News24, 2014c). The picture was met with anger by Twitter users and was subsequently removed (Pillay, 2014b). The ANC released a press release condemning the tweeted picture for likening their voters to dogs (Kodwa, 2014). They also reaffirmed their belief that the DA was a “racist organisation” based on the nature of the picture (Kodwa, 2014). Following the reaction on Twitter, Waters apologised for the tweet and the DA reviewed its social media policy (Pillay, 2014b).

### 5.5. Civil Society

During the election period members of civil society made use of social media platforms. When Thuli Madonsela released the Nkandla report her actions were met with criticism from the ANCYL and Cosas (Destiny Reporter, 2014). In response the Justice Project SA<sup>36</sup> (JPSA) launched their “Hands Off our Public Protector” campaign in a display of support “against attacks on [the] Public Protector... and her office” (SAPA, 2014j). They successfully used Twitter to help publicise their campaign and were aided in the spreading of their message to the public in this way (SAPA, 2014j).

Africa Check<sup>37</sup> assessed the veracity of claims made by political parties during the election period. They drew upon tweets from the accounts of the DA (Joseph, 2014) and the ANC (Wilkinson, Brodie & Chiumia, 2014) as part of their undertaking.

The South African Zionist Federation<sup>38</sup> and South African Jewish Board of Deputies<sup>39</sup> (SAJBD) also made use of social media platforms during the election period. The Zionist Federation posted a “voter guide” on Facebook to ensure the South African Jewish community voted for a

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<sup>36</sup> The JPSA define themselves as a “non-profit company... [that] is primarily involved in the prevention and addressing of corruption and power abuse in law enforcement as well as in the education of the public in a wide range [of] road safety issues” (JPSA, 2014).

<sup>37</sup> Africa Check define themselves as a non-profit organisation aiming to “promote accuracy in public debate and the media in Africa” (Africa Check, 2014).

<sup>38</sup> This organisation defines its mission as acting “on behalf of the South African Jewish Community in all matters relating to Israel; and is the umbrella organisation responsible for all aspects of Zionist activity and for the range of the Jewish community’s multi-faceted relationship with Israel” (SAZF, 2014).

<sup>39</sup> The SAJBD works to foster positive relations between Jews and other South Africans and “to protect the civil liberties of South African Jews” (SAJBD, 2014).

political party that was supportive of Israel (JTA, 2014). As part of the SAJBD's "Make Us Count" election campaign, the organisation hosted "The Great Debate" (Henderson, 2014). This event "called on South Africans to join party leaders in political discussion" (Henderson, 2014). The questions that were answered by the panellists were fielded from "questions the public submitted using #TheGreatDebate on social media platforms" (Henderson, 2014).

## 5.6. The IEC

The IEC had recognised the value of social media platforms, running a social media campaign as early as 2011 (Pillay, 2013b). However, it was only in 2013 that the commission undertook to effectively harness these platforms (IEC, 2014: 77). They hired a young team to handle their social media platforms and engage with the public (IEC, 2014:77). This proved successful with a strong growth of likes, subscribers and engagement on their platforms (IEC, 2014:77). The IEC endeavoured to continue reaching people online during the election – particularly through Facebook, Twitter and Mxit (The Electoral Commission, 2013).

The IEC ran several initiatives with a strong social media presence. This included a "nationwide voter education campaign" that was facilitated by social media (Clotney, 2014). The commission joined forces with local celebrities to create a series of videos where the celebrity endorsed voting in an effort to encourage people to "participate in the electoral process" (IEC, 2014:79). These videos were posted on the commission's YouTube page and promoted through their other social media platforms (IEC, 2014:79). In an effort to generate interest in the electoral process and educate young people about voting, the IEC created a game called "IXSA" that could be downloaded free from "major app stores" (SAnews.gov.za, 2014). The game could also be accessed through Facebook and players were encouraged to share their scores with their friends on social media sites (SAnews.gov.za, 2014).

During the election period the commission used their social media platforms to engage with the public by answering their queries (see Figure 88). They also relayed information about the election process and kept the public informed about their activities (see Figure 89).



**Figure 88: The IEC (IEC South Africa, 2014b) answers a member of the public’s question (Attree, 2014) on how to register to vote in a new province**



**Figure 89: The IEC (IEC South Africa, 2014c) notifies the public that they are investigating alleged cases of electoral irregularities**

After the election the IEC emphasised how social media had helped make the electoral process more transparent and convenient – especially when the public were able to access results that were released on social media sites in addition to traditional media sources (Bailey, 2014). Social media sites also helped the IEC communicate with voters abroad whom the commission previously had difficulty reaching (Bailey, 2014).

## 5.7. Conclusion

In addressing the second main research question of this dissertation, the chapter used case study methodology to provide an understanding of the manner in which social media was used during the 2014 South African general election amongst members of the public sphere. The researcher used web archiving, a thematic analysis of election-themed Twitter Trends and

observation in an analysis that drew from Facebook, Twitter, Mxit and YouTube. The chapter's findings were presented using similar headings seen in the Literature Review as many of the social media uses by politicians and political parties, members of the electorate, the mass media and electoral commissions from other parts of the world were evident during this election.

First, the chapter examined how members of the public made use of social media during the election period. Through social media they gained access to varying forms of information related to the election. They also embraced these platforms for communicative purposes, engaging with members of the public and other relevant election actors. In particular the public were able to form a direct line of communication with politicians and political parties. As several online debates and Town Hall sessions took place during the election period, the public enjoyed further access to interrogate politicians and political parties on their political stances. In addition to communication, the public used social media as an outlet to express themselves politically. The release of the Nkandla report, for example, dominated Twitter and produced a number of (often witty) postings on the site. It was also common for the social media users to criticise and defend political candidates and other actors linked to the election process. The election voting period also saw a rise in varying forms of political expression with many social media users posting "selfies" and pictures of their thumbs to indicate they had cast their vote. Others also took to the platform to share their reasons as to why they had chosen to abstain from voting. The act of capturing a picture in the voting booth or of one's marked ballot and posting it on social media was so popular that it posed a significant challenge to the IEC. The public also made use of social media to promote forms of parody such as humorous commentary, cartoons and music videos. Many took on a watchdog role during the election period and reported irregularities on the site. While citizen journalism was not as apparent as in other elections overseas, there was evidence of the public using social media platforms to communicate their experiences during the election period. Finally, social media sites proved engaging for members of the youth who used these platforms to answer surveys, play election-themed games, partake in youth debates and display that they had cast their vote and participated in the voting process.

Next, the chapter examined the ways in which the traditional mass media used social media as part of their operations during the election. They used these platforms as a way of keeping the public abreast of election-themed topics. Members of the mass media such as columnists and journalists used social media to narrate aspects of events with a personal (often humorous)

touch. Journalists commonly used social media sites like Twitter to live-tweet about election events as they happened in real-time. The mass media also took advantage of the communicative nature of social media platforms. Journalists were often seen engaging with election actors such as the public and politicians. There were also a number of Twitterinterviews that were organised which provided journalists with an opportunity to interrogate politicians on their political positions – all under the scrutiny of the public eye on Twitter. Members of the mass media also used social media to enrich their news pieces, gain insight into public perception on events and infused traditional news reporting with content from social media to create more powerful forms of relaying news. The unity between mass media companies and social media sites was also heightened through the former's use of the latter as an alternative channel to report on events, promote content and field comments. Finally, the mass media held several election-themed events where social media was used prominently. These uses included social media as a means of promoting the event, helping the media reach young audiences and fielding comments and questions for panellists to discuss.

Social media was popular with political parties that did not have the resources of the ruling party or were marginalised by the mainstream media. When faced with censorship by the SABC, the DA and the EFF circulated their campaign videos on social media and received tremendous support and consideration on these sites. Politicians and political parties also used these platforms to disseminate various forms of information related to their politicking and ran campaigns with a strong social media presence. It also proved to be a valuable tool for politicians and political parties to engage with members of the electorate that they could not reach through traditional media or local platforms. These groupings included members of the youth who were more active on social media platforms than traditional mass media and members of the electorate that were abroad during the election period. Social media also provided an avenue for political parties to source monetary contributions for their campaigns. Politicians and political parties also used social media sites to run smear campaigns against their opponents and critics. Agang SA and the Patriotic Alliance member, Gayton McKenzie, received a lot of attention through their use of Twitter to ridicule the ANC and EFF respectively. While the smears took place on Twitter, their stories were reported by traditional mass media and brought further attention to their actions. Like the electorate, political parties also used social media to point out irregularities during the election. These irregularities included allegations of parties removing the political posters of other parties, scams using politicians'

names and possible dumped ballots. Politicians and their political parties also harnessed social media platforms to communicate with other election actors and create a dialogue. It was not unusual for political parties to host live-chats or interactive Town Halls on social media sites that provided mass media and the public an opportunity to engage with them and scrutinise their campaigning efforts. They also used social media to organise volunteers and encourage online coteries. Agang SA, for example, encouraged their Mxit app subscribers to recruit others to join the app. Parties like the ANC and DA used social media in order to monitor public opinion on their campaigning efforts.

While social media platforms proved useful to politicians and political parties, they did prove to be a hindrance in some respects during the election period. Politicians who were not active on social media like Jessie Duarte had accounts created in their name which were used deceptively. The ANC's Western Cape Twitter account was hacked and used to release controversial tweets. Finally, politicians like Visvin Reddy, Themba Dlomo, Helen Zille and Michael Waters also came under fire for inflammatory statements made on social media platforms during the election period.

The next part of the chapter examined instances of civil society actors using social media during the election period. Organisations such as the JPSA, Africa Check, and religious groups like the South African Zionist Federation and the SAJBD all harnessed social media in furthering their concerns and agendas.

The IEC, the country's electoral commission, also harnessed social media during the election period. They used social media as part of their efforts to educate the public on voting. They recruited local celebrities to endorse the act of voting on videos and posted this on their social media platforms. In an effort to entice younger voters they also created a game that rewarded a player's knowledge of the voting process. This game was tied to social media platforms like Facebook. The IEC also used social media as a platform to engage with South Africans. The platforms proved useful to the commission in creating a sense of transparency in the election process.

The next chapter will examine whether South Africa met the requirements for a fully functioned public sphere and how the social media uses (as displayed here) helped contribute to democracy in South Africa.

## **Chapter 6: The South African Public Sphere during the election and its contributions to Democracy**

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### **6.1. Introduction**

The previous chapter addressed the second research question by examining the uses of social media by members of the public sphere during the South African general election using a case study approach. This chapter will address the third and final research question in understanding the extent of South Africa's online public sphere and whether this played a role in contributing to democracy in South Africa.

First, this chapter will use Habermas' institutional criteria to prove that an online public sphere exists in South Africa. Next, the way in which the thriving public sphere contributed to South Africa's democracy during the election period will be examined.

### **6.2. The South African Online Public Sphere**

Thus far this study has displayed how South Africa has the potential for a functioning public sphere based on the country's internet access, diverse online spaces, internet freedom and digital literacy (see "South African Online Public Sphere" section in Chapter Three). However, it was only after studying the use of social media platforms during the election could the researcher understand the nature of South Africa's online public sphere. Habermas defined three institutional criteria that need to be fulfilled for a public sphere to exist (see "Criteria for the creation of a Public Sphere" section in Chapter Three).

The first criterion that Habermas identified is that there must be a disregard of status within the public sphere (1989:36). Those who registered on Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and Mxit were able to join the discussions that took place on these sites. In registering, members do provide basic personal information such as gender, date of birth and location - a feature common across all these platforms. However, this personal information does not hinder a participant from accessing discussion groups or conversations on these platforms. In her study on Facebook Smuts observed that the "status of a Facebook member is, however, only taken into account when those taking part in the deliberation access the Facebook member's profile" (2010:74).

However, members on Facebook can choose to set their profiles to private so their information is not accessible. Additionally, members on Facebook, Twitter and YouTube can choose to omit certain personal information from their profile such as a profile picture, their interests and profile biography.

Smuts found that “status can however play a role when the relationship between the administrator of the Page, Group or Event and the Facebook member(s) is taken into account” (2010:75) This was evident during the activity that took place during the elections. On platforms such as Facebook administrators of pages and groups were able to monitor and censor the comments of users partaking in a discussion. On YouTube the managers of a channel could also censor the comments of users that were commenting on the channel’s videos. However, this was not apparent on Twitter and on the discussions taking place on chatrooms on Mxit.

It can thus be argued that these social media platforms adhered to the criterion of disregard of status during the election period as long as participants during discussions ignored personal information during discussions and were not censored by the administrators found on some of these sites.

The second precondition outlined by Habermas is that members of the public sphere should be able to deliberate on issues of common concern (1989:36). It can be argued that issues deliberated across the social media platforms examined were of common concern. Access and participation on these platforms were free (excluding the costs associated with internet use) and only those that shared the concerns with others shared in the conversation. On Facebook participants were able to access groups and pages pertinent to their concerns. On Twitter participants could join in on conversations relevant to their concerns or partake in the trending election-themed topics that they were interested in. On YouTube participants could comment on political videos that matched their concerns or interests. A similar trend was evident on Mxit where participants joined chatrooms that were themed according to their interests.

The third precondition is that the public sphere must be inclusive (Habermas, 1989:37). In this regard critics of the virtual public sphere have argued against its effectiveness (see “Dystopian Views of the Internet’s Potential as a Public Sphere” section in Chapter Three) because of the digital divide and censorship by governments. Smuts has also observed that in societies with

poor and disadvantaged communities there is a lack of “resources, infrastructure and often ... the skills necessary to access the internet” (2010:75). While South Africa does suffer from these socio-economic issues, there is enough evidence to suggest that social media sites during the election period were frequented by diversity in terms of language, race, gender, economic background and age (see the “Internet Access” section in Chapter Three). There is also evidence that the rise in free WI-Fi, cheaper smartphones and mobile data (see the “Internet Access” section in Chapter Three) will continue making these social media public spheres more accessible to all South Africans and as such, foster greater online democratic participation.

Smuts found that there was exclusion in terms of “political identity” with the U.S. presidential campaigns on Facebook (2010:76). While Obama made his presence felt with aggressive campaigning on the platform, other candidates fell behind (Smuts, 2010:76). Smuts concludes that “it can be argued that an equal arena was not created for those who did not support Obama” (Smuts, 2010:76). A similar occurrence took place during the 2014 South African general election. While parties like the ANC and the DA enjoyed tremendous support in terms of their social media pages, profiles and apps, other parties were not as fortunate. However, the discussions that took place online were not limited only to these parties. Social media users often joined groups, pages and chatrooms without a specific political party affiliation and here the activities of these parties were discussed. Additionally, the trending topics on Twitter reveal that even parties without a strong social media presence such as the IFP and the UDM were the source of interest by Twitter users (see the “IFP” and “UDM” sections in Appendix D).

As such it can be argued that a fully functioning online public sphere was realised in South Africa during the election period.

### 6.3. Social Media Public Spheres Contribution to Democracy in South Africa

An ideal public sphere serves an important purpose in realising democracy (see “Importance of the Public Sphere” section in Chapter Three).

One of the ways this happens is through the creation of public opinion. During the election period social media facilitated communication between the electorate and other actors relevant to the election process. The conversations that took place showed signs of deliberation. One of

the best ways this was exemplified was during the Twitterviews that took place during the election period where politicians like Makhura and Mashatile engaged in an extended manner with the public on Twitter to answer their questions and address their concerns.

The other ways in which public opinion was created during the election included the creation of communication channels between private individuals and the government (Smuts, 2010:69), the use of online petitions on the site and providing an avenue where individuals could fund political candidates. Members of the electorate were able to converse directly with state apparatuses and political party members on social media during the election period. In terms of the latter the electorate were given several opportunities to engage with political party members in an open and transparent setting and inform them of their concerns. These events included several live-chats, Twitterviews and interactive Town Halls that took place on the social media platforms under observation during the election. Parties like the ANC and DA also created polls on Mxit and Twitter to understand the concerns of the electorate. In terms of fundraising the electorate were able to access links to donate to political parties such as the DA on social media sites.

In a fully realised public sphere a dialogue is created between citizens with the expectation of uptake and consideration (Bohman, 2004:133). On social media members of the electorate engaged with each other and discussed election-themed events. They circulated memes and shared satirical political YouTube videos. These instances were well-documented by the media and often became subject to reports and studies. While it cannot be stated with certainty that there was uptake of the public opinion created, several political parties and their members did show consideration of the discussions that took place on social media platforms.

A fully realised public sphere regulates the state by informing them of public concerns and holding them accountable (Häyhtiö, 2003:2). When this occurs citizens embrace their role in the political decision-making process (The World Bank, 2013:1). Participants in the social media public spheres were very active in this regard. Both members of the electorate and political parties used these sites to point out and voice their concerns over irregularities that took place during the election process. Members of the electorate also held political parties accountable, scrutinising their promises and past performances during the various live-chats, Twitterviews, Town Halls and debates that took place on social media. There are instances, such as in the

case of Michael Waters<sup>40</sup>, where public opinion directly influenced the actions of the politicians in terms of the campaigning.

#### 6.4. Conclusion

This chapter attempted to address the second research question of the study. First, it was proven that an online public sphere exists in South Africa using Habermas' institutional criteria. Next, the chapter illustrated how a thriving online public sphere contributed to South Africa's democracy during the election period.

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<sup>40</sup> Waters removed his offensive tweet and apologised for his actions. His actions prompted the DA to review its social media policy.

## Chapter 7: Conclusion

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### 7.1. Summation of Study

It is apparent that social media has had a tremendous impact on modern society with particular significance for politics. This study sought to examine how social media was used during the 2014 South African general election and whether this social media use contributed to the country's democracy. The general theoretical literature on this subject and specifically in the context of South Africa is inconclusive on several vital questions in terms of social media's use in politics – particularly during election periods. As a result the study also aims to add to the theoretical and practical development of social media research from a South African perspective.

The study commenced with a literature review identifying the extent of social media research in South Africa. Social media research in the country has focused primarily on its use in education, by members of the youth, by the mass media and in commerce. Because of the lack of local political social media research (despite calls for increased social media research in developing countries) the researcher examined social media use in the elections of other countries. Insight was gained in terms of the value social media has had for relevant electoral actors. Politicians and political parties, members of the electorate, the traditional mass media and electoral commissions have each benefited from their use of these platforms. These uses were important to explore as it was likely that similar uses would be exhibited in the South African election being studied.

What was apparent from the literature review was that the study's academic lens focused on issues of society, communication, democracy and the media's role for democratic development. As such Habermas' theory of the public sphere was used as the theoretical underpinning of the study. According to Habermas, the public sphere is a space where private citizens come together to discuss matters of general interest rationally, forming public opinion in the process. In a politicised public sphere he identified the following actors: The public, the mass media, politicians and political parties, lobbyists who represent special interest groups and civil society. Together with the electoral commission of the country, these actors formed the groupings whose social media uses were examined during the election period.

Despite criticisms of the public sphere such as being unachievable, and exclusionary, the theory serves an important role in realising democracy. In an ideal public sphere, the state is informed of public concerns and held accountable for their actions. The public concerns or opinion is particularly significant during election periods as electoral results are shaped by them. There has been a debate amongst public sphere academics as to whether the internet and online spaces like social media sites can facilitate a public sphere. Those more optimistic about the internet's democratic potential provide a more compelling argument; thus the researcher opted for an optimistic view. Additionally, research has been conducted that highlights social media sites like Facebook and YouTube as providing the necessary space for a public sphere to flourish. The latter part of the theoretical framework displays how South Africa has the potential for an online public sphere in terms of internet access, social media sites available for use, the country's internet freedom and digital literacy.

In order to determine the nature of social media usage, the study harnessed a case study methodological approach. The method, useful for explaining complex phenomena such as elections, proved to have many advantages and the criticisms were able to be mitigated by the researcher. For the study the researcher adopted an exploratory case study due to the minimal amount of research conducted on the topic. In terms of design, a single case study with embedded units was chosen for the case study. The units of analysis were the actors defined by Habermas's public sphere. Thus the researcher concentrated on observing the uses of these members during the election period which constituted the research period of the study. In order to ensure the quality of the study, the researcher applied three relevant tests as defined by Yin (2003). These tests ensured that the measures of the study were clearly substantiated (construct validity), that the study's findings could be generalized beyond the study (external validity) and ensuring the same results could be replicated or similar conclusions found if done by another researcher (reliability). In implementing the research design of the case study a case study protocol was used to ensure the research was conducted in a trustworthy manner. The researcher also included a short reflexive piece to reduce bias and affirm a sense of credibility in the study. Finally, the newness of the research provided ethical considerations that were not anticipated by the university's ethics committee. The researcher provided a list of the issues faced and the way each was handled.

The case study harnessed a multi-method approach. The sub-methods used during the research period included web archiving of relevant election material, and a thematic analysis of election-themed Twitter trends and observation. In terms of data collection, attention was also paid to ensuring methodological trustworthiness. The researcher drew evidence from multiple sources of data (triangulation), created a case study database and maintained a chain of evidence during the data analysis phase. Each of the research methods provided important insight into the uses of social media during the election period. Web archiving provided the researcher with a number of useful secondary sources such as cartoons, media reports, campaign material, YouTube videos, opinion articles and Mxit brand indexes. The outcomes of the thematic analysis revealed the preoccupation or the concerns of Twitter users in relation to the election. When it came to understanding how social media was used for matters such as political expression, the Twitter trends thematic analysis helped illustrate the forms in which this took place on the social media site. Observation proved invaluable in understanding the behaviours and processes that were taking place on the social media sites being researched. The researcher took on the role of a non-participant observer and screen-grabbed content from the social media sites that were pertinent to the aims of the study.

Following the conclusion of the election period on 21<sup>st</sup> May, the research concluded with data collection and the organisation and sorting of the data. An analysis of the data was then conducted in order to provide interpretative insights, while creating meaning and a holistic understanding of how the findings connected with the theoretical assertions (i.e. the actors of the political public sphere) set out in the theoretical framework of the study. The findings chapter addressed the second research question on the way social media was used by the members of the public sphere during the election period. The succeeding chapter answered the third research question (based on the findings chapter) in terms of how the social media use contributed to the country's democracy. The following section outlines how these chapters answered the research questions or objectives of the study.

## 7.2. Implications and Contributions of the Study

As case study research uses multiple methods of enquiry, the researcher was left with a large amount of data. It was a challenge sorting out the data, analysing and making sense of the data and finally drawing patterns of social media use to form categories to communicate what was

discovered. However, the researcher was able to gain a diverse perspective of the election to answer the research questions and fulfil the purpose of the study.

The first research question read: What are the uses of social media during election periods?

As political social media research in South Africa was limited, the social media research conducted during the election periods of other countries was examined. These uses were highlighted in the literature review chapter in anticipation of similar uses coming through during the 2014 South African general election.

Politicians and political parties have benefited from their use of social media in their campaigning efforts. They have provided them with an avenue of communication, building political brands and targeting fringe markets (such as the youth) that might not be able to be reached through traditional mass media. Additionally, it was found that politicians and political parties have used social media as part of their fundraising efforts and in their smear campaigns against their opponents. Politicians and political parties that were marginalised by the mass media or lacked significant funding were able to enjoy the relatively inexpensive and fast nature of social media as part of their campaigning arsenal.

The electorate of other countries also have used social media in a political capacity. They have used it to access various forms of election-themed information and used it to communicate with other election actors. The electorate have also used these platforms as part of their political identity: whether to fund political candidates, as part of protests, or to express their concerns when censored by the government. During the election period members of the electorate have also used social media to monitor the elections in a watchdog role capacity and to facilitate various forms of citizen journalism. Social media also provided members of the youth with an avenue to get involved in the election process. By using these platforms the youth can learn more about the elections, they can communicate their opinions about those contesting the elections and highlight their concerns that may not be reported on by the traditional mass media.

The literature review revealed that traditional mass media have harnessed social media during election periods in order to enhance their coverage of the event. These uses have included

drawing content from social media sites like the tweets of politicians, using social media to promote their electoral news pieces and combining traditional techniques with social media to report on the elections in the form of live blogs.

Finally, it was also found that some electoral commissions have used social media to facilitate their role during the electoral period. They have used social media to educate the electorate, answer queries and receive feedback from the public.

The second research question asked: How was social media used during the 2014 South African general election?

After understanding how social media was used during election periods, the researcher studied the 2014 South African general election. It was observed that many of the uses of social media that occurred in other elections surfaced during the country's election period by similar actors as those under observation.

In South Africa the public used social media to access information related to the election, to communicate with other members of the public spheres, to express their political stances in vibrant forms, ensure a transparent election as watchdogs and as an avenue for younger participants to partake in the electoral process.

South Africa's traditional mass media also embraced social media during the election period like the traditional mass media of other countries. The investigation revealed that traditional mass media used social media to keep the public abreast of election-themed topics. Journalists linked to the traditional mass media were active on the site, using it to report on election events in real-time often in a personalised manner. These journalists also used social media to live-tweet about events, to draw content from and use in their new pieces and to question relevant election actors such as in the form of Twitterviews. While there were no explicit live blogs during the election period, *News24* did create a feature on their site that combined traditional sources with new media sources in a way that made for informative, exciting and interactive election commentary. Journalists also infused their news pieces with (often just breaking) social media content related to the election. The traditional mass media also harnessed social media as a way of promoting their election-themed events and content.

The country's politicians and political parties also adopted social media in their campaigning in a way that reflected the social media politicking embraced in the rest of the world. The 2014 South African general election saw politicians use social media to disseminate various forms of information related to their campaigns, engage with members of the electorate and reach groupings that were inaccessible by traditional mass media such as the youth. Several politicians also used the platforms to source and facilitate funding for their campaigns and run smear campaigns against their opponents and critics. They also used them to monitor the election like many members of the public were doing during the election period. Perhaps the most important use embraced by politicians and their parties was as a communication tool to engage with other election actors and form a dialogue. Social media proved useful in organising volunteers and encouraging online coteries. It was also common for certain parties to monitor public opinion on social media as part of their campaigning. Social media also proved useful for parties to spread their campaign messages when marginalised by traditional mass media or lacking the resources of the ruling party. Finally, social media did present challenges to politicians and political parties. Fake social media accounts impersonating politicians were created and used deceptively. In one instance the ANC's Western Cape Twitter account was hacked and a series of controversial tweets released. Several politicians also received criticism following the release of controversial statements on these platforms.

Although this was the first election that the IEC decided to invest in social media, it used the sites effectively like many other electoral commissions from around the world. They used it to release content to educate the public on voting procedures and to entice those eligible to vote. The electoral commission also used the platforms to comment on the election process and establish a sense of transparency.

Members of South Africa's civil society also used social media during the election period, primarily as a way of communicating their concerns and agendas and as a means of engaging with other electoral actors.

The final electoral actors defined by Habermas are lobbyists. The researcher was unable to account for any lobbyists that were active on social media and if any participated during the election period. There was also little (if any) existing literature that highlighted social media uses by these actors during the election period.

The final research question sought to understand how the social media uses contributed to the democracy of South Africa. As the research on Habermas's public sphere and the virtual public sphere suggest a realised public sphere contributes to democracy in a country, the researcher asked the following sub-questions: a) Does South Africa have the potential for an online public sphere? and b) Was the online public sphere realised during the election period?

Interrogation of the first sub-question revealed that South Africa does have the potential for an online public sphere. Habermas set out three criteria for a functioning public sphere: Disregard of status, issues of common concern should be exchanged and discussed, and that the public sphere should be inclusive.

In addressing this it was found that South Africa's online space does fulfil these criteria. In terms of internet access the country ranks as one of the top three countries on the continent in terms of users. The demographics online are also beginning to match the demographics of the physical inhabitants of the country. In terms of gender and race, the internet demographics matches that of the country with an equal split between men and women and a strong use by the youth and by black South Africans who constitute the majority of the country. It was also pointed out that a growing phenomenon known as "Black Twitter" ensured a space where the historically marginalised race group could voice their concerns and opinions. Factors mobilising the adoption of the internet in the country include the proliferation of cheaper smartphones, data and the growing availability of free WI-Fi.

South Africans have access to several online spaces that facilitate dialogue. The more popular ones in the country include social media platforms like Facebook, YouTube, Twitter and Mxit.

South Africans also lack any restrictions in terms of internet freedom and digital literacy. The research found on these topics indicates that South Africans enjoy internet that is free from censorship<sup>41</sup> by the government and enjoy high levels of digital literacy.

After studying social media use during the election period the researcher was able to answer the second sub-question and establish that an online public sphere was realised during the

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<sup>41</sup> As of 2014 when the election period took place and the study topic was researched.

election period. Each of Habermas's institutional criteria for the establishment of a public sphere was addressed.

In terms of a disregard of status, it was found that anyone who registered on the social media sites could join in the conversations that took place on the sites during the election period. The personal information expected to be provided on sites like Facebook did not hinder a person's ability to join the conversations. However, a person is also able to set their profile to private (and in this way hide personal information) so that this information does not cause discrimination against them during the deliberation taking place as they discuss election events. Finally, on some social media sites users were able to omit personal details ensuring further disregard for status. While status can come into play when a page or group or event on Facebook or a channel on YouTube is monitored by an administrator, this censorship was not apparent on the conversations taking place on Twitter or Mxit.

It was found that members of the public spheres occurring on these social media sites were able to deliberate on issues of common concern. Access and participation on these platforms were free (excluding the costs associated with internet use) and only those that shared the concerns with others shared in the conversation.

The online public spheres on these social media sites fulfilled the third precondition of being inclusive. While South Africa does suffer from socio-economic issues that make it difficult for the poor and other disadvantaged communities to access the internet, there is enough evidence to suggest that social media sites during the election period were frequented by diversity in terms of language, race, gender, economic background and age. There is also evidence that the rise in free WI-Fi, cheaper smartphones and mobile data are making these social media public spheres more accessible to all South Africans and as such, foster greater online democratic participation.

It was found that political parties like the ANC and the DA enjoyed tremendous support on the social media sites under observation and dominated the discussions taking place on the site. However, the discussions did not completely alienate other political parties. In fact evidence based on the trending topics on Twitter during the election period reveal that smaller parties like the IFP and the UDM were the source of interest of Twitter users. It was also observed that

social media users joined groups, pages and chatrooms without a specific political party affiliation and here the activities of these parties were discussed

The researcher was then able to evaluate whether South Africa's online public sphere contributed to the democracy of the country. It was found that the social media use during the election helped produce the aspects that take place when a public sphere is realised.

One of the ways this happens is through the creation of public opinion. During the election period social media facilitated communication between the electorate and other actors relevant to the election process. The public was able to create a dialogue with other members of the public, politicians and their parties, the traditional mass media, civil society and the IEC in a transparent manner. These conversations also showed signs of deliberation. There were also other ways that public opinion was created on these social media sites such as the distribution of online petitions and links to places where the public could donate to the campaigns of political parties.

The dialogue created between citizens was given consideration and taken up by the relevant authorities. Much of the political social media content generated by users on social media was documented by the media and became subject to their reports and studies. While this study was unable to state with certainty that politicians and political parties took up the public opinion created, they did, however, show consideration to the discussions enacted.

Finally, a fully realised public sphere regulates the state by enlightening them on public concerns and holding them accountable. On social media the public was very active in highlighting irregularities and criticising poor behaviour of politicians during the election period. They were also able to engage directly with politicians through the many Twitterinterviews, Town Halls and debates that took place on social media.

### 7.3. Limitations of the Study

The study has provided insight into the uses of social media during the 2014 South African general election and illustrated how these uses contributed to the democracy of the country. However, the study does acknowledge certain limitations.

In terms of methodology, the researcher chose to concentrate on the four most significant social media sites in terms of usage. The researcher does concede that there may have been social media use that might have taken place on less predominantly used sites like Instagram; it was, however, beyond the time and resource capabilities of the researcher to observe all social media sites used in the country. The time constraints and need for ethical clearance also made it difficult for the researcher to consider interviews or questionnaires as part of the data collection process. This might have provided more insight into how the public sphere actors used social media - especially in the way politicians and their parties use it as part of their branding.

While the researcher had no issues with web archiving and observation, the thematic analysis of the election-themed trending topics on Twitter was problematic. The scope of Twitter trends that take place in the country and the difficulty in determining which were linked to the elections proved to be a challenge. While the researcher made every effort to ensure all election-themed Twitter topics were recorded and checked by the supervisor, it is possible some topics might have been missed.

The case study methodology was difficult to apply at certain times as the design remains underdeveloped. Despite this the work of Yin, in particular, has ensured this study has produced results that are valid, reliable and replicable.

In regards to the theoretical framework, there was very little applicable research that provided the institutional criteria for the creation of an online public sphere let alone a social media public sphere. The researcher was forced to apply Habermas' original institutional criteria in determining whether a public sphere existed online in South Africa.

Finally, the election period took place during the Oscar Pistorius trial<sup>42</sup>. Much of the content on the social media sites were dominated by tweets about events taking place during the proceedings. It is possible that if the study was replicated during a time where the election was the single focus, the results would be different.

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<sup>42</sup> Oscar Pistorius is a South African sportsman who gained fame after becoming a Paralympic champion. After shooting his girlfriend, Reeva Steenkamp, at their home in Pretoria, he was placed on trial with intense coverage and scrutiny by the media and public.

#### 7.4. Study Significance

This dissertation is an important step in the ever-changing and important field of social media research. It provides an account of social media uses during election periods. It displays how these social media uses emerged during the 2014 South African general election. It also illustrates how these social media platforms can contribute to a country's democracy as evidenced through the South African example. The study is also of significance in the field of online public sphere research. It proves that online public spheres are possible and can function in a similar manner to the original public spheres conceived by Habermas. For case study researchers this dissertation would provide a good template in applying the method developed by Yin. Finally, the research would be of interest to local politicians and political parties, mass media enterprises and civil society actors that are not currently harnessing social media and are interested in the ways it can benefit their operations.

#### 7.5. Recommendations for Future Research

A similar study could be conducted into the uses of social media use during the next South African general election and the results compared. As this dissertation was unable to account for any uses by lobbyists during the election period, it would be a good site for original research. Researchers from other developing countries – particularly in Africa - could examine whether similar social media uses are coming through in their elections, whether this is facilitating an online public sphere and whether it is contributing to the democracy of their countries. Public sphere researchers could also develop institutional criteria for the creation of online public spheres so research in the field has a way of defining the existence of online public spheres around the world. Finally, case study theory could be further developed as a research tool in terms of design.

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Zille, H. (2014j). "@missmalumo I modelled all the fashion headgear and sent out a tweet. Say which you like best.". [Twitter]. 01 Mar. Available at: <https://twitter.com/helenzille/status/439722848283021312> [Accessed 24 April 2016].

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## **Appendix A: Case Study Protocol**

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Summary of Case Study Protocol Following Yin (2003)

.....  
**A** Introduction to the case study and purpose of protocol

.....  
**A1** Case study questions, hypotheses, and propositions

Research question: How was social media used during the 2014 South African general election?

.....  
**A2** Theoretical framework for the case study

Jürgen Habermas's (1964) theory of the public sphere

.....  
**A3** Role of protocol in guiding the case study investigator

Standardized agenda for the researcher's line of inquiry and detailing data collection procedure.

.....  
**B** Data collection procedures

.....  
**B1** Names of sites to be visited

Facebook

Twitter

Mxit

YouTube

.....  
**B** Data collection procedures

.....  
**B2** Data collection plan

Collecting written material such as media reports about social media use during the election

Recording election-themed trends that trended during the election period in South Africa

Observing and screen-capturing relevant postings on social media sites

**B3** Expected preparation prior to site visits

Identifying specific documents such as media reports dealing with political social media use to be examined.

.....

**C** Outline of case study report

.....

**C1** A within-case analysis of the use of social media by the five defined actors of the public sphere

.....

**C2** A cross-case analysis of the way social media contributed to a more democratic election

.....

**D** Case study questions

.....

**D1** How was social media used by the public during the election?

How was social media used by the mass media during the election?

How was social media used by politicians and political parties during the election?

How was social media used by lobbyists who represent special interest groups during the election?

How was social media used by civil society during the election?

How was social media used by the IEC during the election?

.....

## Appendix B: Case Study Database

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For this study the researcher drew on multiple sources of data. A case study database was created in order to ensure the reliability and transparency of the case study. The data can be accessed on the accompanying CD included with the study. The data was also archived into a Google Drive account.

The following table summarises the contents of the case study database:

<b>FOLDER</b>	<b>DESCRIPTION</b>
Mxit Brand Indexes <sup>43</sup>	Mxit Brand Indexes were released on a monthly basis by Mxit and highlighted the top brands on the platform in terms of followers. The indexes archived constitute those released during the election period i.e. February to May.
NVivo Data <sup>44</sup>	This includes the NVivo file through which the Twitter Trends thematic analysis can be accessed and a Microsoft document with a list of all the election-themed trends.
Screengrabs <sup>45</sup>	This is a list of twitter screengrabs captured during the election period. These were screengrabs that were not used in the main body of the thesis. The screengrabs folder is made up of screengrabs related to Agang SA, the ANC, COPE, DA, debates that took place during the election, the EFF, IEC, IFP, the Nkandla report, UDM and voting and the

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<sup>43</sup> The Mxit Brand Indexes can be viewed here: <https://goo.gl/F4kWpK>

<sup>44</sup> The NVivo Data can be viewed here: <goo.gl/Lg7T7p>

<sup>45</sup> The Screengrabs can be viewed here: <goo.gl/Qiycz6>

	voting process.
Social Media Audit of Political Parties <sup>46</sup>	These are reports or studies conducted by ZASocial Media probing the nature of social media use by political parties. While these were not used in the main body of the thesis, they would be useful for anyone conducting research on social media use by South African political parties.
Twitter Analytics <sup>47</sup>	These were investigations conducted by the researcher into the way Twitter was used by politicians and political parties during the election period. Analytical sites that were used to generate these data sets include Twitonomy, Followerwonk, BrandTweet, twtrland, Twitalyzer and Socialbakers. While these were not used in the main body of the thesis, they would be useful for anyone conducting research on social media use by South African political parties.

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<sup>46</sup> The Social Media Audit of Political Parties can be viewed here: [goo.gl/YQ2U09](http://goo.gl/YQ2U09)

<sup>47</sup> The Twitter Analytics can be viewed here: [goo.gl/qzkjkl](http://goo.gl/qzkjkl)

## ***Appendix C: Researcher Reflexivity***

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My name is Rasvanth Chunylall. I am a South African male and classified as “Indian” racially. When I began writing this paper I was 23 years old. I grew up in a middle-class environment; perhaps, more on the lower spectrum due to losing my family’s primary breadwinner (my father) at a young age. Despite this challenge, I was able to complete my education with the help of several scholarships. I have a Bachelor of Arts Degree in English Studies and Media and Cultural Studies. Additionally, I achieved a Summa Cum Laude pass in my Media and Cultural Studies Honours degree.

I have supplemented my studies with positions as a research assistant on several projects. I contribute to the KZN Literary Tourism project<sup>48</sup> where (amongst other things) I run a monthly column called “On the Twitter Trail”. This column draws poignant tweets from the accounts of local writers. I have also run online surveys for the Safer Learning Environments project<sup>49</sup>. These projects have helped develop my abilities as a writer and sharpened by skills as a researcher. Primarily, they have helped me indulge my passion for online spaces; in the case of the KZN Literary Tourism project – social media.

I am introverted by nature and enjoy communicating online. As a youngster I used Mxit and continued onto Facebook and Twitter. Although, I used the more data-intensive YouTube merely to watch popular videos, I became a contributor to the site in my Honours year. In my Media Honours year production course my class was tasked with producing short films and uploading them onto YouTube<sup>50</sup>.

During my Masters year the elections took place and it was the first time I voted. It was exciting keeping track of the campaigning online and partaking in the event as a citizen. There was also a lot of hype surrounding the potential of social media to influence the elections. As someone comfortable with and knowledgeable of social media and interested in the elections, it was easy

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<sup>48</sup>See the project’s Wikipedia page for more details: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/KZN\\_Literary\\_Tourism](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/KZN_Literary_Tourism)

<sup>49</sup> The Safer Learning Environments project is researching the nature and extent of gender based violence on UKZN’s Edgewood campus.

<sup>50</sup> See Cinema Pariah’s YouTube channel for some of the productions I was involved in: <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCwWfhYfVG0QAR9yEBchPEzA>

choosing my topic. Throughout the research process, I did encounter several challenges and must address my biases which I have endeavoured to overcome.

In terms of political affiliations and belief systems, I have tried to remain objective in representing each political party, members of the media and civil society fairly in my dissertation. My research supervisor has been helpful in this instance, providing me with insight into language used that may be biased.

It was difficult choosing a theoretical framework but I settled on Habermas's theory of the Public Sphere as a key theory of democracy and one that has drawn attention by researchers in the social media field. In deciding what data to use and methods to apply to shed light on the topic, I decided to use a case study method. This method helped focus which platforms I would use, the participants I would interview and other aspects of data collection.

Finally, I believe my race, class and gender did not impact my findings. At the outset my age and optimism in the use of social media platforms did influence my beliefs. As someone who uses social media prolifically, I admit to believing that the use of social media during the elections was inevitable. I have done my best to remain mindful of evidence to the contrary.

## Appendix D: Thematic Analysis of Election-themed Twitter Trends

The Twitter Trendsmap SthAfrica timeline (which reveals the trending topics in the country in real-time) was observed between 7th February 2014 and 21<sup>st</sup> May 2014. Trending topics that were linked to the elections were recorded manually. The topics were then thematically analysed using NVivo. The trending topics were coded only for their matching themes and there is no overlap between thematic codes. In counting a trending topic towards the representation of a theme, the researcher identified the one thematic code that was most strongly identified with the trending topic. “Thematic codes” and “trending topics” are used interchangeably.

A list of summary themes and sub-themes are represented alphabetically in Table 3, together with counts of tweets within each theme and their overall percentage.

**Table 3: Emergent themes and sub-themes, their number and percentages based on analysis of election-themed Twitter trends.**

<b>THEMES</b>	<b>SUB-THEMES</b>	<b>NO. OF THEMES<sup>51</sup></b>	<b>PERCENTAGE<sup>52</sup></b>
Agang SA		<b>12</b>	1.6
	Agang SA Campaigning	10	
	Agang SA Post-Campaigning <sup>53</sup>	2	
ANC		<b>135</b>	18.4
	ANC Campaigning	101	
	ANC Post-Campaigning	34	
COPE		<b>3</b>	0.4
	COPE Campaigning	2	
	COPE SA Post-Campaigning	1	
DA		<b>84</b>	11.4
	DA Campaigning	66	
	DA Post-Campaigning	18	

<sup>51</sup> Figures in bold represent the total values of each theme.

<sup>52</sup> Rounded to one decimal place

<sup>53</sup> The post-campaigning period for each of the parties refers to the period following the election day to the period where the election results were released.

Dagga Party		1	0.1
Debates and Discussions		71	9.6
EFF		77	10.5
	EFF Campaigning	69	9.4
	EFF Post-Campaigning	8	
IEC		6	0.8
IFP		2	0.3
	IFP Campaigning	1	
	IFP Post-Campaigning	1	
Inauguration of Provincial Legislatures and National Assembly		26	3.5
Nkandla report		156	21.2
Other		5	0.7
UDM		5	0.7
VF Plus		1	0.1
Voting, Voting Process and Results		151	20.5
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>735</b>	

### *Analysis of Themes*

#### 1. Agang SA

Agang SA examines thematic codes linked to the political party during the election. The theme is divided into two sub-themes that examine thematic codes related to the party's campaign and post-campaign period that fell within the election period. Agang SA is made up of a total of 12

thematic codes which constitutes 1.6% of the election-themed topics that trended on Twitter during the election period.

### 1.1. Agang SA Campaigning



**Figure 1: A tag cloud of thematic codes or trends associated with Agang SA's election campaign**

As can be seen from Figure 1, Agang SA mainly trended following their manifesto launch (#agangmanifesto) and a media briefing by Agang SA member, Paul Sullivan, following a media briefing in Johannesburg dealing with corruption and fraud (#notonmywatch). When the party's Twitter account criticised the governing party on matters such as etolls with audacious tweets, the party also trended.

### 1.2. Agang SA Post-Campaigning



**Figure 2: A tag cloud of thematic codes or trends associated with Agang SA during their post-campaigning period within the election-period**

The party trended post-campaigning following internal struggles over parliamentary seats. Additionally, Figure 2 illustrates that SABC political editor, Denzil Taylor, trended after he tweeted about the party's leader, Mamphela Ramphela, relinquishing the parliamentary reins to the party's National Youth Forum and retiring from politics.





trended such as “magashule” in reference to the Free State premier, Ace Magashule, and “sylvia” in reference to Sylvia Lucas, the Northern Cape premier.

### 3. COPE

COPE examines thematic codes linked to the political party during the election. The theme is divided into two sub-themes that examine thematic codes related to the party’s campaign and post-campaign period that fell within the election period. COPE is made up of a total of 3 thematic codes which constitutes 0.4% of the election-themed topics that trended on Twitter during the election period.

#### 3.1. Cope Campaigning



**Figure 5: A tag cloud of thematic codes or trends associated with the COPE’s election campaign**

The COPE’s campaign received some attention during the election as displayed by Figure 5. In March their manifesto launch held in Bloemfontein trended (#copemanifesto) while a rally held in Queenstown caused their official Twitter account (COPE SA, @TeamCOPESA) to trend.

#### 3.2. COPE Post-Campaigning



**Figure 6: A tag cloud of thematic codes or trends associated with the COPE during their post-campaigning period within the election-period**

As evidenced from Figure 6, “#cope” trended during the post-campaign period following the release of the party’s results on 8 May 2014.



Officer, Hlaudi Motsoeneng – can be seen in Figure 7. When Abahlali Basemjondolo, the shack dweller’s movement, publicly endorsed the DA, parts of their name (“abahlali” and “basemjondolo”) trended. Other thematic codes related to the DA’s campaign include their manifesto launch (#DAMANIFESTO) and a town hall discussion with DA member, Tim Harris (#talktotim). Several DA members like Helen Zille, Ian Ollis and Makashule Gana trended following their tweets at the rallies they were a part of.

However, more critical aspects of their campaign also trended on Twitter. “Onselen” trended following a scathing article that was written by former DA member, Gareth van Onselen on *Business Day Live* about Mmusi Maimane. Sizwe Mchunu, the DA Leader in KwaZulu-Natal, trended when he was booed during his speech at Durban’s Moses Mabhida Stadium on Freedom Day.

#### 4.2. DA Post-Campaigning



**Figure 8: A tag cloud of thematic codes or trends associated with the DA during their post-campaigning period within the election-period**

The media revealed that Lindiwe Mazibuko, the parliamentary leader for the DA, would be resigning from her position and leaving to study at Harvard University in the United States. Several topics associated with this decision trended. This included “#lindiwegoestoharvard”, “#lindiwemazibuko” and “Harvard University, @Harvard”. Following reports that DA leader, Zille, claimed to have “made” Mazibuko, “#thingshellenmade”, “#helenzille” and “#thingshellenmade” trended associated with humorous tweets lampooning her comments. When Zille appeared on

“The Redi Tlhabi Show” to clarify her comments, the talk show host (Redi Tlhabi) trended on Twitter.

When the election results were being tabulated, the DA’s celebratory hashtag (#da4million) trended on Twitter. The hashtag, “#wccabinet”, also trended during peak Twitter discussion of the newly-elected premier’s (Zille) provincial cabinet.

## 5. Dagga Party

Dagga

**Figure 9: A tag cloud of thematic codes or trends associated with the Dagga Party during the election period**

Dagga Party examines thematic codes linked to the political party during the election. Dagga Party is made up of a total of 1 thematic code which constitutes 0.1% of the election-themed topics that trended on Twitter during the election period.

The Dagga Party trended (see Figure 9: “Dagga”) when they missed the election deposit deadline in order to be placed on the National Ballot.





The EFF's campaigning received significant attention on Twitter as evidenced by the number of trending topics linked to the party in Table 3 and the Figure 11 tag cloud. Several of their rallies trended such as their Kliptown rally (#effkliptownrally), Limpopo rally (#effrally) and their final Tshela Thupa Rally (#tshelathuparally) which took place in Pretoria. They also trended following campaigning in parts of the country such as Welkom (#effwelkom), Modimolle (#effmodimolle) and following an appearance at the Sondela Informal Settlement near Rustenburg (#sondela). Like the DA, the EFF's advert also trended (#efffad). When it was banned by the SABC, the party marched to the SABC office building in Auckland Park to protest the decision. The protest march trended on Twitter (#effmarch and #effmarchsabc).

Other thematic codes related to the EFF's campaign include their manifesto launch (#effmanifesto), a media conference held in Johannesburg (#effmedia), Malema's Q&A session held on social media (#malemaqanda) and a cocktail party (#effcocktailparty) held at the Fountains Valley Resort in Tshwane. When the EFF refused to pay the R600 000 deposit required of parties to contest the elections, their tension with the IEC trended on Twitter (#EFFVSIEC). When the Tshwane Municipality withdrew their permission for the EFF to use the Lucas Moripe Stadium after they had paid and signed a lease agreement, the phrases "Moripe", "Lease" & "initially" trended on Twitter. Additionally, several of Julius Malema's more sensational or controversial utterances captured the Twittersphere<sup>54</sup>. When he said that it had been a mistake to oust former president, Thabo Mbeki, for "domkop" Jacob Zuma<sup>55</sup>, the words "oust" and "domkop" trended on Twitter.

However, more critical aspects of their campaign also trended on Twitter. Gayton McKenzie, president of the Patriotic Alliance, wrote a critical open letter to Malema which trended on Twitter (#gaytonletter) together with phrases from the letter such as "Beret"<sup>56</sup> and "Woodwork"<sup>57</sup>. "Misspells" also trended on Twitter following the circulation of a photo of their campaign t-shirts which had the word "Economic" misspelt.

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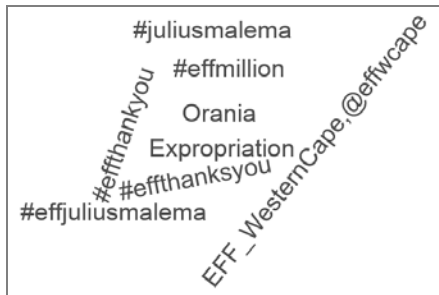
<sup>54</sup> A term referring to the users and postings made on the Twitter, considered collectively.

<sup>55</sup> Malema is referencing Mbeki's forced resignation as president by the ANC's National Executive Committee. Zuma would go on to take his place as leader of the ANC. Julius Malema was president of the ANCYL at the time and played a role in his removal.

<sup>56</sup> "Beret" is a reference to the EFF's uses of this headgear as part of their political branding.

<sup>57</sup> Malema failed the subject of Woodwork at Matric level and this has become a source of ridicule for the politician.

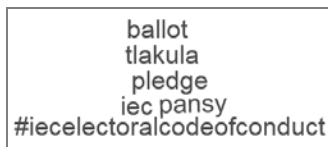
## 7.2. EFF Post-Campaigning



**Figure 12: A tag cloud of thematic codes or trends associated with the EFF during their post-campaigning period within the election-period**

When the election results were being tabulated, the EFF celebrated passing the one million mark and their #hashtag (#effmillion) trended on Twitter. The party also used tweets with the hashtag “#effthankyou” and “#effthanksyou” to thank their voters for supporting their party. “Orania”<sup>58</sup> also trended on Twitter when the EFF received 4 votes from the town. Malema held a press conference to discuss the results of his party and trended as a result (see “#effjuliusmalema” and “#juliusmalema” in Figure 12). Additionally, “Expropriation” trended following Malema’s promises to put motions into place in parliament to continue with the party’s aims to expropriate mines and land without compensation.

## 8. IEC



**Figure 13: A tag cloud of thematic codes or trends associated with the IEC during the election-period**

IEC examine thematic codes linked to the Independent Electoral Commission during the election. IEC is made up of a total of 6 thematic codes which constitutes 0.8% of the election-themed topics that trended on Twitter during the election period.

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<sup>58</sup> Orania is an Afrikaner-only South African town in the Northern Cape province.

On 19 March 2014, the political parties intending to contest the election signed the IEC's Electoral Code of Conduct pledge. Several topics trended on the day linked to this event including "pledge" and "#iecelectoralcodeofconduct". "[P]ansy" and "tlakula" also trended in reference to the IEC's chairwoman, Pansy Tlakula, who was present at the event. On 24 April "iec" trended when political parties accused their opponents of infringing upon the electoral act regulations they were required to adhere to.

## 9. IFP

IFP examines thematic codes linked to the political party during the election. The theme is divided into two sub-themes that examine thematic codes related to the party's campaign and post-campaign period that fell within the election period. IFP is made up of a total of 2 thematic codes which constitutes 0.3% of the election-themed topics that trended on Twitter during the election period.

### 9.1. IFP Campaigning



**Figure 14: A tag cloud of thematic codes or trends associated with the IFP's election campaign**

The IFP trended (see Figure 14: "#ifpmanifesto") when they launched their manifesto in Umlazi, Durban.

### 9.2. IFP Post-Campaigning



**Figure 15: A tag cloud of thematic codes or trends associated with the IFP during their post-campaigning period within the election-period**

The #ifp hashtag trended following the release of the parties preliminary election results on the 8 May.

## 10. Inauguration of Provincial Legislatures and National Assembly

Inauguration of Provincial Legislatures and National Assembly examines thematic codes linked to the inauguration of provincial legislatures and the national assembly that marked the end of the election period. Inauguration of Provincial Legislatures and National Assembly is made up of a total of 26 thematic codes which constitutes 3.5% of the election-themed topics that trended on Twitter during the election period.



**Figure 16: A tag cloud of thematic codes or trends associated with Inauguration of Provincial Legislatures and the National Assembly heralding the end of the election period**

In respect of the inauguration of the Provincial Legislatures, several trending topics related to the event trended such as “#premiers”, “#gautengpremier”, “#gplegislature” (Gauteng Province Legislature) and “#wcleislature” (Western Cape Legislature). “#swearingin”, “#parliament” and “#nationalassembly” trended as members of parliament took the oath of office during the ceremony. “Nosimo” and “Balindlela” trended in reference to Nosimo Balindlela who was nominated by the DA for the position of “Speaker”. When Jacob Gedleyihlekisa Zuma was nominated as president, “Objection” trended when the DA’s James Selfe objected to the nomination. However, he was elected to the position of president unopposed. The phrases “gedleyihlekisa” and “unopposed” trended in response. Journalists such as Paula Chowles and Carien du Plessis who tweeted about the event also trended.

## 11. Nkandla Report

Nkandla Report examines thematic codes linked to the report by the Public Protector on Jacob Zuma’s private residence in Nkandla and the costly security upgrades conducted to improve it with public funds. This report became an important topic during the election. Because the



report, there was a call on Twitter for the impeachment of Zuma (#impeachzuma) and a subsequent response by his supporters (#handsoffpreszuma) – the resulting hashtags trended.

Several topics related to the public protector also trended such as “#ppresser” (Public Protector press conference) and “madonesela” (sic). Some related to her unkempt hairstyle (“hairdresser”) while others made light of the extended nature of the Nkandla report press conference proceedings (#thingsshorterthanthulisspeech). A hashtag related to her also trended (#witsthuli) when she appeared at Wits University to have a public discussion about the report.

The EFF leader, Malema, trended (#malemazuma) following his appearance at Sunnyside police station in Pretoria to lay charges against Zuma based on the findings of the report. “#justicefactor” trended following a one hour Nkandla special on the *Justice Factor* television show which included Thuli Madonsela, Zweli Mkhize and Moshoeshoe Monare.

Several journalists, celebrities and ordinary Twitter users trended following their tweets about the report. Some of these included journalists like Nomsa Maseko and Xoli Mngambi, an eNCA journalist, who tweeted about his coverage of the ANC party press conference following the release of the report. Celebrities that tweeted about the Nkandla report and trended include actor, Tumisho Masha and comedian, Ndumiso Lindi. Some examples of others who trended following their tweets on Nkandla include Michael Nurick and John Perlman.

The Nkandla report’s findings became a source of several parodies that trended on Twitter. A parody account called “Nkandla Homestead” trended while a YouTube video called “Nkandla Style” also trended (#nkandlastyle).

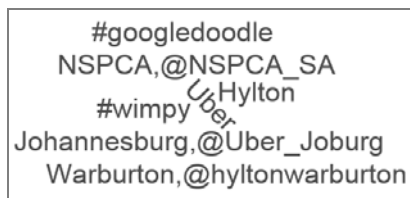
Members of the ANC who dealt with the fall-out following the report’s release also trended. One of these included Stone Sizani, the ANC chief whip (see “Sizani” in Figure 17), who trended following a statement where he accused Madonsela of political posturing. Blade Nzimande described news articles about Zuma and Nkandla as “white people’s lies” and “nzimande”, “blade” and “#whitepeopleslies” trended as a result. Comedian, Rob Van Vuuren, released several humorous tweets using the “#whitepeopleslies” hashtag and trended as a result. The ANC national chairwoman, Baleka Mbete, defended Zuma by stating that one should not

“interfere with a man’s kraal” in reference to the Nkandla homestead<sup>60</sup>. As a result “Kraal”, “Baleka”, “Mbetete” and “Chairwoman” trended following news reports of her utterance. As the central figure of the report, Zuma trended several times. The most notable followed his statements that he should not have to repay the cost of the upgrade and he believed he did not ask for the upgrades<sup>61</sup>. As a result the hashtags “#zumalogic” and “#preszuma” trended.

As part of their campaigning, the DA sent a bulk text message that Zuma had “stolen” taxpayers’ money as illustrated through the Nkandla report. This became a source of a protracted court battle between the ANC and the DA and resulted in trending topics on Twitter such as “#ancvsda” and “#nkandlasms”.

## 12. Other

Other examines thematic codes or trends associated with election-themed initiatives during the election period. These initiatives were conducted by private companies and organisations that played a role in the election. Other is made up of a total of 5 thematic codes which constitutes 0.7% of the election-themed topics that trended on Twitter during the election period.



**Figure 18: A tag cloud of thematic codes or trends associated with election-themed initiatives during the election period**

The National Council of SPCA’s (NSCPA)<sup>62</sup> ran a publicity campaign which caused them and the individual who tweeted about it (Hylton Warburton) to trend on Twitter. As part of the campaign a second poster had been placed underneath the posters of political parties that

<sup>60</sup> See this News24 article for more details surrounding her statement:  
<http://www.news24.com/Archives/City-Press/Baleka-Mbetete-You-dont-interfere-with-a-mans-kraal-20150429>

<sup>61</sup> See this Eyewitness News article for more details surrounding his statement:  
<http://ewn.co.za/2014/03/31/Nkandla-report-Zuma-says-he-wont-pay>

<sup>62</sup> The NSPCA is an animal welfare organisation.

made the party leaders on the uppermost poster appear as if they were holding animals<sup>63</sup>. According to a spokesperson from the organisation, the campaign was intended to encourage potential voters to keep the issue of animal welfare in mind when casting their vote. On Election Day, Google created a doodle<sup>64</sup> to celebrate the country's election and this trended (see "#googledoodle" in Figure 18). In the doodle the letter "g" in their titular logo was replaced with a ballot box emblazoned with the South African flag and accepting a marked ballot<sup>65</sup>. "#wimpy" trended following a campaign by the titular restaurant franchise that offered a free coffee to those who presented an inked thumb after voting. The online cab service company, Uber, also trended following their promotion that offered free rides on Election Day.

### 13. UDM

UDM examines thematic codes linked to the political party during the election. UDM is made up of a total of 4 thematic codes which constitutes 0.7% of the election-themed topics that trended on Twitter during the election period.



**Figure 19: A tag cloud of thematic codes or trends associated with the UDM during the election period**

"UDM" trended on the 24 February following an announcement by the party that it would be welcoming members from COPE. The political party also trended twice in March (see "udm" and "#udm" in Figure 19) following their campaigning efforts. When the UDM publicly disclosed their private donors in April, the party also trended. As the election results were being tabulated, "#udm" trended following the release of the political party's preliminary election results.

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<sup>63</sup> An example of the campaign poster can be viewed here: <http://citizen.co.za/171297/nspcas-election-posters-give-voters-paws-thought/>

<sup>64</sup> A Google doodle is an artistic and sometimes interactive change the company makes to the logo on their homepage. The doodle can be viewed here: <http://www.google.com/doodles/south-africa-elections-2014>

#### 14. VF Plus

VF Plus examines thematic codes linked to the political party during the election. VF Plus is made up of a total of 1 thematic code which constitutes 0.1% of the election-themed topics that trended on Twitter during the election period.

A rectangular box containing the text "#vfplus".

**Figure 20: A tag cloud of thematic codes or trends associated with the VF Plus during the election period**

As the election results were being tabulated, “#vfplus” trended following the release of the political party’s preliminary election results.

#### 15. Voting, Voting Process and Results

Voting, Voting Process and Results examines thematic codes or trends associated with voting, the voting process and the release of results during the election period. Voting, Voting Process and Results is made up of a total of 151 thematic codes which constitutes 20.5% of the election-themed topics that trended on Twitter during the election period.



voting in London and Sarah Kimani who was covering the South African expats voting in Nairobi.

On 30 April 2014, the rest of the country voted. Several hashtags related to Election Day trended such as “#southafricanelections2014”, “#southafricanelections” and “#2014election”. The voting public also used hashtags to indicate they had voted. Some were generalised such as “#ivoted”, “#yesivoted” and “#inked” – all of which trended. Others which also trended but were more specific included “#whyivoteanc” and “#ivotedda”. These hastags were used by voters to indicate their choice of vote. Some voters also chose to tweet pictures of their inked thumbs with the “#thumbie” and “#thumbfie” hashtags to indicate they had voted. Other trending topics were used to indicate one had voted for the first time and was typically used by the born free generation such as “#1sttimevoter”, “#firsttimevoter” and “#bornfree”.

There were also trending topics related to public figures who had voted. “#mbekivotes” trended when the former president, Thabo Mbeki, casted his vote. When Sibusiso Leope (also known as DJ Sbu) casted his vote, he tweeted a selfie with his marked ballot. This was explicitly against the rules of the IEC. A number of topics trended in response such as “#djsbuwhatanidiot”.

There were reports of irregularities during the elections and a number of individuals and topics trended that were linked to the incidences. “kwathema” trended after it was revealed that voting material and IEC documents were confiscated by the authorities at an agent’s home in KwaThema. Donovan Dunn trended after he tweeted a photo of dumped ballot boxes in Pretoria. Boitumelo Molelekeng, an EFF member, trended after she tweeted about alleged EFF votes found dumped in Diepsloot. Ashleigh Meyers trended after she tweeted about receiving a ballot paper with a vote already marked for the ANC. “ramphela”, “rigged” and “iecmustanswer” trended following an incident where Mamphela Ramphele allegedly caught an IEC official with unsealed ballots.

Another incident that captured the Twittersphere was when voting stations were burned down in Bekkersdal. “#bekkersdalelect” trended as a result.

Like the elections abroad, several journalists live-tweeted about the Election Day events and processes. Michelle Solomon, a journalist for the *Daily Dispatch*, trended as she live-tweeted

about the Eastern Cape's IEC Results Centre. Theresa Taylor, a journalist at *The Star* newspaper, trended as she tweeted about the preliminary results. Patrick Conroy, the head of news for eNCA and eNews Prime Time, also trended following his tweets.

As the election results were released, several hashtags that were used in the discussions around them trended. This included “#iecreresults”, “#electionsresults2014” and “#electionresults”. All nine provinces within the country trended (e.g. “#kzn” and “westerncape”) as the conversation on Twitter used their respective hastags to discuss their results as they were being released. When Mount Ayliff, a small town in the Eastern Cape, had its results released first “ayliff” and “mount” trended as result.

The *Isolezwe* newspaper's Twitter account trended following their live tweets about the election process in KZN. Additionally, television show, Morning Live trended (#morninglive) following their discussion of the election results. Several individuals that tweeted about the election results also trended such as Adam Habib, the Vice-Chancellor and Principal of the University of the Witwatersrand and Frank Chikane.

## Appendix E: Ethical Clearance

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4 December 2015

Mr Rasvanth Chunylall 209514079  
School of Arts  
Howard College Campus

Dear Mr Chunylall

Protocol reference number: HSS/1746/015M

Project title: #Democracy: A case study of social media use amongst members of the public sphere during the 2014 South African general election

**FULL APPROVAL-NO RISK**

In response to your application received 27 November 2015, the Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee has considered the abovementioned application and the protocol has been granted **FULL APPROVAL**.

Any alteration/s to the approved research protocol i.e. Questionnaire/Interview Schedule, Informed Consent Form, Title of the Project, Location of the Study, Research Approach and Methods must be reviewed and approved through the amendment /modification prior to its implementation. In case you have further queries, please quote the above reference number.

**PLEASE NOTE:** Research data should be securely stored in the discipline/department for a period of 5 years.

The ethical clearance certificate is only valid for a period of 3 years from the date of issue. Thereafter Recertification must be applied for on an annual basis.

I take this opportunity of wishing you everything of the best with your study.

Yours faithfully

  
.....  
Dr Shenuka Singh (Chair)  
Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee

/pm

Cc Supervisor: Professor JP Wade  
Cc Academic Leader Research: Dr Nicola Jones  
Cc School Administrator: Mr Sabelo Gumede

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