

Master of Arts Research Thesis

A multimodal analysis of the representation of voter disillusionment in social media memes distributed on Twitter in the lead up to the 2019 South African general election

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the Masters of Arts Degree in Journalism and media studies

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Declaration

I hereby declare that this dissertation is my own work. I have acknowledged all other authors' ideas and referenced direct quotations from their work. I have not allowed anyone else to borrow or copy my work.

Acknowledgement

I want to express my appreciation to those who have assisted me in this process.

Thank you to my supervisor, Brian Garman, for the support and advice and for allowing me to complete this thesis with a satisfactory attitude. I would also like to thank my uncle, Christopher Smith-Symms, for reviewing my thesis and providing constructive feedback.

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Abstract

This study is situated in the context of the 2019 South African general election, which saw the lowest voter turnout since its first democratic election in 1994. Many have questioned the capabilities of the African National Congress (ANC) since they came into power in 1994, due to allegations of corruption, maladministration and poor leadership. The concerns about the party's ability to manage the country's various social issues have led to a drop in voter turnout. There was much discussion in the media about the lack of voter turnout amongst young people in South Africa. This topic became a trending topic on social media under the #iwanttovotebut hashtag.

The sentiments expressed by South African Twitter users in the #iwanttovotebut memes are explored in this study. The analysis of the memes draws on the works of Kress and van Leeuwen's (1996; 2006) visual social semiotics, Fairclough's (1989) approach to Critical discourse analysis (CDA), and Thompson's operation of ideologies.

VSS allows for the description of the various semiotic resources that memers use to construct their meaning from multimodal texts. The tools provided by CDA go beyond the description of VSS and develop a more detailed analysis of how the memers construct their discourses of democracy/governance. Thompson's (1991) approach to understanding how ideology operates in language enables the deepening of the understanding of the dominant and naturalised notions of democracy/governance.

The findings indicate that memers have a limited understanding of democracy. They also have a limited understanding of how political parties operate and their responsibilities in the form of government and various agencies. In addition, it is not surprising that young people are not voting in the 2019 general election. This is a phenomenon that the media has characterized as "apathy." However, this research indicates that it would be more accurate to describe it as "disillusionment."

Fields of research: *cultural studies, media studies, social media, memes, visual social semiotics, textual analysis, CDA, multimodal analysis.*

List of abbreviation

ANC	African National Congress
API	Application Programming Interface
BEE	Black Economic Empowerment
DA	Democratic Alliance
EFF	Economic Freedom Fighters
ESKOM	Electricity Supply Commission (South Africa)
FB	Facebook
GEAR	Growth, Employment and Redistribution (Strategy)
GIF	Graphics Interchange Format
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
IEC	Independent Electoral Commission
IFP	Inkatha Freedom Party
NP	National Party
RDP	Reconstruction and Development Programme
SA	South Africa
SABC	South African Broadcasting Corporation
SNS	Social Networking Sites
TRC	Truth and Reconciliation Commission
U.S.	United States
VF+	Freedom Front Plus

Definitions

Memer: An online user who produces a meme and distributes it on the internet/social media.

Symbols

Hashtag

@ At sign. Used to tag a user's profile to a post

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

The research topic is situated in the context of the 2019 South African general election¹, as this event provided an opportunity to study the representation of the political attitudes of potential voters. The study focuses on the representation of disillusionment in memes distributed on Twitter under the hashtag #iwanttovotebut, which was a popular topic in the lead-up to the elections (Nkanjeni, 2019). The nature of the attitudes discussed and researched found that the low voter turnout among the youth is their apathetic attitude towards politics². Upon the observation of the #iwanttovotebut³ thread, there were signs of political apathy, however, this thesis argues that political disillusionment is more prevalent and is perhaps more appropriate in understanding the low voter turnout. Many people in South Africa's democracy have shown signs of dissatisfaction with the traditional forms of civic engagement, such as voting (Arvanitidis, 2017). In Addition, the exploration of voter and political disillusionment in the memes identifies the factors contributing to the low voter turnout in South Africa's young democracy.

In the 2019 general election, the ANC won with 57.50% of the total vote, followed by their official opposition Democratic Alliance (DA) with 20.77% and the Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) with 10.80% (Tobor, 2019; IEC, 2019). In the run-up to the election, 26.75 million out of the 35.9 million eligible voters registered (IEC, 2019), a percentage of 74.9% (Africa Check, 2019). What is of concern is that out of the voter population, there were 9.8 million people eligible to vote; 6 million of those eligible voters, under the age of 30 years old, did not register (IEC, 2019). Thus there is a decline in registration and votes among the youth. In the 2014 election, voter turnout declined from its height of 81% of registered voters in 1999 (Schulz-Herzenberg, 2014: 1) to 66.5% in 2019.

Research has shown that many citizens in South Africa express political or voter apathy due to the lack of socio-economic progress for citizens and the unfulfilled promises and

¹ The 2019 South African general election saw the lowest voter turnout since the country's first democratic election in 1994 (Roberts et al., 2019).

² Politics is a set of activities that involve making decisions in groups or among individuals; these include the distribution of power and resources (Axford & Browning, 2005: 2).

³ The #iwanttovotebut started on 6 May 2019 (three days before the general election), where people expressed reasons and sentiments as to why they would not vote in the 2019 South African general election.

responsibilities of political leaders (Tshuma & Zvaita, 2019). As a consequence, the discontent and dissatisfaction with democracy, particularly among the youth (18-25 years old), are increasing (Roberts, eNCA, 2019). Young people under the age of 30 represent more than half of the voter population, and there is a substantive decline in registration and voter turnout. A South African Journalist, Thembekile Mrototo (2019), from eNCA⁴ News, interviewed Dr Robert Benjamin from Human Science Research (HSR) about the decline in voter registration on 5 May 2019. Dr Benjamin argued that the decline in voter registration is not necessarily a result of apathy, but rather, it is the youth's way to convey to politicians that their lack of accountability remains unacceptable.

Voting has a significant function in elections as it is an effective way to hold politicians and political parties accountable (Rosema, 2007). Voting acts as a form of expression toward the government. If voters are satisfied with the government's activities, they would reward a party with a vote; if they are dissatisfied, they may either vote for the party's opposition (Rosema, 2007) or withdraw their vote entirely. This withdrawal of a vote functionally gives the ruling party, such as the ANC in South Africa, licence to continue with their misdeeds.

The state of a country's democracy is measured by voter turnout; a high level of voter turnout suggests the validity of democracy, whereas low voter turnout is typically associated with voter apathy and mistrust of the political process (Slaton & Becker, 2000: 199). The low turnout for the elections indicates that trust in political institutions has declined and reveals underlying issues within a democracy (Solijonov, 2016: 8). Low voter turnout suggests that fewer citizens consider elections the main instrument for legitimising political parties' control over political decision-making (Czeńnik, 2006: 449; Kirkland and Wood, 2017: 511). Lower citizen participation in elections does not necessarily mean that citizens are becoming less active in politics. On the contrary, there is often a rise in other forms of activism, such as mass protests, and an increase in the use of social media as a new platform for political engagement (Solijonov, 2016: 12). Social media provides an alternative means of political activism and participation (Ahmad, 2019).

In the age of digitalisation and information, social networking and microblogging sites play an instrumental role in providing people space and an alternative means to engage and

⁴ eNCA, eNews Channel Africa, is a 24-hour television news channel that is focused on providing news and information about Africa and South Africa.

participate in politics (Effing et al., 2011: 25-27). These spaces include social media platforms that provide a public space for users to generate, create and distribute their content to communicate, connect, and engage with other individuals and social and political groups or discussions online (Edosomwan et al., 2011: 79-83).

The development of social media platforms has enhanced the flow of information (van Dijck and Poell, 2013: 2-3) and the engagement of political discussions and debates to provoke societal and political change. Social media have made communication more interactive as it uses mobile technologies and web-based applications, built on the foundation of web 2.0, allowing for the creation and exchange of user-generated content (Bosch, 2017: 41-43). Web 2.0 refers to the technological development that has transformed the web into participatory platforms that allow people to consume, produce, and distribute content in real time and more' quickly than ever before (Darwish & Lakhtaria, 2011: 204). This allows the public to take up the media space and express their dissent, views, and experiences. The participatory, interactivity and user-centred nature of web 2.0 refer to the internet's potential to build and cultivate connections and communities and advance democracy (Van Dijck, 2013: 4; Bosch; Fourie, 2017: 48).

Social networking sites (SNS) and microblogging sites provide complete and uninterrupted information about events in real-time (Magade, 2020: 3). In South Africa, there has been a rapid increase in the use of social media platforms (Cilliers et al., 2017: 1-8). An estimated 37 million South Africans use the internet, of which 22 million are active on social media (Lama, 2020).

88.3% of social media users in South Africa are between the ages of 18 and 35 (Lama, 2020) – the same age category as the lowest voter turnout in the 2019 general elections (IEC, 2019). There is a correlation between the use of social media and political participation (Effing et al., 2011: 25; Kim & Chen, 2016: 320). In South Africa, media has played a fundamental social and political role and has contributed to the culture of democratic debate and has played a watchdog role in keeping those in authoritarian positions accountable and responsible for any misconduct, such as corruption and fraud (Wasserman, 2020: 451).

South Africa's democracy was hard-fought, and there was pride in its achievement that many lost their lives for. So why is South Africa experiencing a continuous decline in votes in the elections?

The decline in voter turnout in recent years comes after nearly 30 years of democracy, during which South Africa has experienced a slow rate of socio-economic development and progress for the majority of its poor citizens (Schulz-Herzenberg, 2020: 5-21). The ANC, South Africa's governing party since the first democratic election in 1994, has experienced feelings of betrayal expressed towards the party from citizens and supporters. The betrayals and unfulfilled promises of political parties in South Africa have contributed to its citizens' political attitudes and behaviour (Bhorat et al., 2017: 4-20). This attitude towards the ANC stems from the recent accusations of corruption⁵, financial mismanagement, and criticisms of incompetence (Beresford, 2015: 226-228).

In a democratic South Africa, many citizens live in the same, if not worse, conditions than under the Apartheid regime. The accusations of corruption have led to the argument that the financial kickbacks that politicians received could have gone towards developing housing and sanitation projects, alleviating poverty, and improving the unemployment rate (Terreblanche, 2002; 2018). All of which were promised during the transition to a democratic country and in the lead-up to election periods (Dawson, 2014).

Political disillusionment is frequently experienced when newly democratic countries come out of an authoritarian regime (Louw, 2020). When the new democratic government was elected in South Africa in 1994, black citizens, specifically, were confident in the government and were excited about the possibility of positive social, economic, and political structural change (Booyesen, 2013: 11). The ANC was highly respected and had faith that the party would provide a better life for its citizens, particularly the poor and marginalised population (Paller, 2013: 592). These promises that were once made fuelled political and socio-economic expectations of better standards of living, however for the past 27 years of South Africa's democracy, little change and progress have transpired (Dulani et al., 2013).

The increased level of poverty and inequality in South Africa has also resulted in scepticism and the distrust that citizens feel towards the democratic government and political parties (Masipa, 2018: 2). These issues contribute to the shift in political attitude in governance, a process identified in the stages of disillusionment, resulting in the low voter turnout in the 2019 general elections (Tshuma & Zvaita, 2019). Despite the low voter turnout in 2019, the

⁵ The arms deal, State capture, Bosasa

ANC still won the election, but for the first time since the 1994 democratic election, the ANC received below 60% of the voter population (IEC, 2019).

The media have played an instrumental role in achieving and maintaining democracy. The improved internet development and the functionality and flexibility of websites have enabled certain kinds of media production and participation (Serra, Camilo, and Gonçalves, 2014: 1). In traditional forms of media, such as broadcast television, radio, or print, politicians and journalists had much say and control of content and the production and consumption of news (Schwalbe, Silcock and Candello, 2015: 467). Contemporarily, however, ordinary citizens who have the technological means, such as digital devices, i.e., a smartphone, computer, and access to the internet, can operate social networking sites, such as social media platforms, and generate their content (Fenton & Barassi, 2011). This allows the public to bring attention to topics and discussions that interest them.

Social media platforms play a significant role in organising collective action on a local and global scale (Berthon et al., 2012: 262). One such example was the popular Twitter thread, under the #iwanttovotebut in the lead-up to the 2019 general election. Young South African Twitter users voiced their frustrations and challenges that ordinary citizens face, ultimately reasoning their logic as to why they would not cast their vote. Viewing these tweets as a collective suggests a form of activism that is not only partaking online but essentially offline as well (Earl & Kimport, 2011).

Memes have become a popular form of expression as their concise structure of the combination of text and image is a perfect medium for quick communication and consumption. Memes are user-generated content (Nissanbaum & Shifman, 2018: 306) and often comment on politics humorously (Burgess et al., 2017: 420). In his book *The Selfish Gene*, the term meme was first coined in 1976 by evolutionary biologist Richard Dawkins and explained the way ideas and behaviours are spread from person to person. Dawkins explains that memes are a “unit of culture” (Dawkins, 1976) that has become a form of social interaction and information. In digital culture, memes have become a widespread communication and expressive tool of opinions that can help to reveal societal and political ills. Memes have played a prominent role in global politics, have become part of political strategies during election campaigns, and have become particularly important in South Africa (Ross & Rivers, 2017: 286).

This study asks the question: what sentiments are represented in memes distributed by young South Africans on Twitter using the #iwanttovotebut hashtag in the lead-up to the 2019 general election? This is to understand how young people are using social media as a way of communicating their sense of disillusionment with the current political situation in South Africa and how memes contribute to these communications. The investigation of these representations within the social, political and economic context of the South African general election in 2019 can help to understand the nature of political participation and its relationship with democracy, among young people in South Africa at this time.

The following chapter begins with a review of the literature on representation, political disillusionment in democracy, social media and memes. The third chapter describes the research methodology and methods used in the analysis of the memes. The main methodological frameworks, thematic analysis, visual social semiotics, and critical discourse and analysis, are discussed. In the fourth chapter, a broad description and analysis of the memes studied are presented, with a profound description of the semiotic resources they use to create meaning. From this, a more detailed analysis of the messages represented in the memes is offered. In the concluding part of this thesis, the apathetic attitude present in memes is considered, but this research paper argues that disillusionment is prominent in memes.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter consists of 5 sections: The first section draws on Stuart Hall's (1997) *Work of Representation*⁶ to understand and explore the creation of meaning through signifying systems⁷. The second section consists of the literature on South Africa's democracy which broadly informs the investigation into how young South Africans relate to democratic institutions (Patel & Graham, 2019; Bawa, 2005). The history of South Africa, the transition to democracy, and its current political landscape is briefly mentioned (Gukelburger, 2020). In understanding the different waves of attitude in different periods, the third section of this review discusses the concept of disillusionment and how such political attitudes come about in democratic countries, particularly those that have undergone intense political struggles (Paller, 2013). The fourth section explores the role of media and how it has shaped the political landscape, how news and information are consumed and produced, and its role in political participation and activism online (Bosch, 2013). The Twitter platform and how it facilitates political discussions, participation, and activism, among other things, and the role social media plays in politics are also discussed in more detail (Bosch, 2017). Lastly, the fifth section refers to the literature on memes and how it has become a mechanism for political critique (Shifman, 2014).

⁶The book aims to provide a comprehensive overview of how language, images, and discourse work together as systems of representation (Hall, 1997). It also offers a variety of activities and readings that can be used by students and teachers in various cultural studies fields.

⁷ Signs that are made up of signifiers and signified are understood as a signifying system (Hall, 1997).

Section 1: The framework and significance of Representation

The theoretical framework of representation is used in this research paper to analyse media texts and to determine how ideas and issues are represented in #iwanttovotebut memes. The construction of representation, i.e., the visual codes⁸, the layout and design of the media texts, and the camera angles of images are explored.

In media texts, representation broadly shapes the audiences' or readers' knowledge and understanding of social or political issues. Media producers shape one's perception and view of the world through the transmission of information. Therefore, media producers are in a position of power to influence the way events, people, culture, and society are represented or portrayed in the media (Hall, 1997). Stuart Hall (1997) views culture with language and society. Hall (1997) argues that culture operates as a representational system, by which language works through the use of 'signs' and 'symbols' that stand for or represent ideas, feelings, and expressions (emotions). Language carries meaning and possesses codes that enable one to communicate ideas and interpretations about the world (Hutasuhut, 2009; Hall, 1997: 28).

Hall (1997: 15) proposes three theories to the concept of representation and how meaning and language are used to connect to a culture and represent the world. Firstly, the reflective approach to representation looks at how language reflects meaning that already exists in the world. Secondly, the intentional approach examines whether language expresses the speaker or writer's meaning intended to say or write. Lastly, the constructivist approach⁹ explores the way meanings are constructed through language¹⁰ (Hall, 1997:15). In the construction of meaning, language is a mechanism in the system of representation that is essential to exchange, share and construct concepts and meaning (Hall, 1997; Galbin, 2014).

Languages are defined by various signs, arranged in various ways to create meaning (Hall, 1997). To enable one to understand the signs meaningfully, codes are shared among people with the same conceptual map (Hall, 1997: 3-4). The constructionists consider these codes as part of social convention and as symbols that represent concepts in thought and language and help understand the world in which one lives (Hall, 1997: 29). Instead of focusing on

⁸ The visual images and symbols are present.

⁹ This study approaches representation from a constructivist perspective

¹⁰ Language correlates with words, sounds and visual images, facial expressions, and bodily gestures, all of which generate meaning (Hall, 1997).

the processes involved in the creation of a text, the constructivist approach looks at the structure and tends to lean towards textual determinism, which assumes that texts are read according to their intended conditions by the producer of text (Hall, 1997).

In contrast, Hall argues that readers have agency in the text's construction (Chandler, 2002: 185). The creators of texts and the readers of texts interpret and decode them. This includes the encoding of meaning into the text and the interpretation and evaluation of its meaning (Potter & Wetherell, 1987: 139). Therefore, meaning-making is complex and often involves multiple units of analysis that operate in the same area of knowledge. In this regard, the audiences can use their knowledge of a text to understand its context (Janks, 1998: 195).

Researchers have become more focused on representation to produce knowledge, and how this connects to social practices and power (Hall, 1997: 51). Michel Foucault's work largely influences this approach to representation, as his understanding of discourse includes various elements of social practice (Hall, 1997: 55). Foucault (1978) was interested in the production of knowledge through discourse and what he termed the 'relations of power' (Hall, 1997: 55). A discourse then consists of various processes designed to exclude certain individuals and ideas (Hall, 1997: 44; Macdonnell, 1986: 4). These ideas are then put into practice through various means, and these can be identified by the institutions that handle them. Discourse is more comprehensive than language, as it is not simply a collection of statements or a set of statements but rather an expression of social context (Mills, 2004: 11). Discourse do not exist in isolation, and thus the subject positions are not fixed (Jupp, 2006: 75).

The discourses of democracy is a critical examination of the concept of democracy (Fotiadou, 2016), which is often used by politicians and citizens to justify their actions, positions, and behaviour. This study draws on particular set of discourses on democracy/governance constructed by text producers of #iwanttovotebut. This enables their understanding and conceptualisation of democracy and how it ought to be practiced (Garcia-Blanco, 2009: 842). This study also employs methods of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA¹¹) to examine the representation of democracy in South Africa (Contiades & Fotiadou, 2016: 256). CDA is used to investigate how democracy is represented in texts produced by memers (meme producers) in #iwanttovotebut. This is also a comprehensive

¹¹ Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) aims to study how language can be used as a social practice. This will further be elaborated in Chapter 3.

and coordinated approach to addressing the various political and economic issues that concern society, such as uneven distribution of wealth, poverty and well-being of all citizens (Contiades & Fotiadou, 2016: 257). Citizens continue to face these issues in South Africa's democracy.

Section 2: The state of affairs in South Africa's democracy

The transition from the Apartheid regime to a democratic country was a euphoric achievement for many South Africans (Larson, 2019). With the new democratic government in power, citizens were confident in the government and were excited for the possibility of positive social, economic, and political change (Booyesen, 2013: 11). South Africa entered into a new dawn, and citizens anticipated a better life moving forward (Mashele & Qobo, 2017: 39).

The African National Congress (ANC¹²) was elected in South Africa's first democratic election in 1994 and has been the governing party ever since and the government of national unity (Mashele & Qobo, 2017: 24). The democratic election represented hope for a better future for the poorer population who were once denied rights and alienated from political participation during the Apartheid regime (Paller, 2013: 592). With an ANC-led government, the new democracy in South Africa was based on the vision "A better life for all" (Mashele & Qobo, 2017: 17). This implied that change would be achieved progressively and with ease (Mashele & Qobo, 2017: 68). South Africa achieved somewhat of a democratic success, as the political power is in the hands of the majority, and measures were taken to deal with poverty, such as social grants being given to those living in impoverished areas (Clarke & Bassett, 2016: 184). The new constitution entrenched human rights and access to education and health services for many South Africans.

The government implemented and introduced policies to improve the living and working conditions of the black working-class population. The reconstruction and development

¹² The African National Congress was founded in 1912 to ensure that all South Africans, regardless of their race, have the right to vote (Mules, 2018). In 1960, the ANC was banned until the government of F.W. de Klerk lifted the ban and many of its leaders, including Mandela, were released from prison (Mules, 2018). In 1994, Mandela became the country's first black president. After serving only five years in office, Mandela recommended Thabo Mbeki to succeed him - Mbeki eventually went on to serve as the president for almost a decade (Mules, 2018).

policy (RDP) aimed to establish a more just and equal democratic South Africa (Steyn et al., 2005). Due to the inequalities created by the Apartheid regime, the objective of the RDP was to alleviate poverty through housing, education, and job creation, ensuring socio-economic stability and growth.

The state of post-apartheid South Africa has augmented policies for the poor by implementing Black Economic Empowerment (BEE) programme policies and expanding essential service delivery such as water, housing, and electricity (Boshoff, 2012). The BEE policy has been somewhat successful in placing disadvantaged South Africans into employment. This is in conjunction with social grants to improve poverty and income statistics (Clark, 2014: 56). Consequently, employment creation became central to economic growth. The Growth, Employment and Redistribution Strategy (GEAR) was implemented in 1996 as the ANC believed that employment would reduce poverty levels (Steyn, 2005). The GEAR policy placed great emphasis on privatisation, reduction in state spending, and investment incentives (Mahedea, 1998).

Twenty-seven years into democracy, these changes have progressed at a snail's pace as many people live in the same circumstances, if not worse, than during Apartheid (Jones, 2019). There have been some strides in education and health, but essential services such as water, housing, and electricity remain a challenge (Mdlongwa, 2014: 39). Irrespective of the intention of policy changes, the stagnation of high poverty rates, unemployment, and inequality remains (Bhorat, Lilenstein, Oosthuizen, and Thornton, 2020: 1). In 2015, more than half of the South African population live in poverty, which is measured by three threshold points; upper-bound poverty line (R1183 per month), the lower-bound poverty line (R785 per month), and the food poverty line (R547 per month) (STATSSA, 2019).

Under the ANC leadership, there have been many shortcomings in improving socio-economic conditions for the poor and marginalised. Despite these efforts, financial mismanagement and corruption under ANC leadership have undermined economic progress and social rights that citizens are entitled to (Clarke & Bassett, 2016: 184). This has contributed to the decline of political and democratic optimism – particularly in the last decade, with the occurrence of economic mismanagement and lack of service delivery (Foa et al., 2020: 36). As a by-product, South Africa is experiencing a profound sense of democratic disillusionment, especially among the poor population (Paller, 2013: 592).

The current socio-economic and financial state is relatively poor (Pillay, 2001), irrespective of the resources, means, and opportunity to develop and progress economically (McMurry, Martin, Lieberman and de Kadt, 2016). The intense political strain that South Africa had undergone, coupled with poor governance and mismanagement of the country, is arguably most to blame for South Africa's current socio-economic and political situation (du Plessis & Plaut, 2019: 25-28; Mashele & Qobo, 2017: xi-xiv).

The repetitive nature of corruption within the African National Congress (ANC) that accumulated since the Arms Deal¹³ (under the leadership of Former President Thabo Mbeki) to, most recently, the infamous State Capture¹⁴ scandal (Gevisser, 2019), which involved South Africa's fourth President, Jacob Zuma¹⁵, has contributed to the steady decline in trust in politicians, political parties, and democratic institutions. As the scandals surrounding Zuma's personal life emerged, it was becoming more difficult for Zuma to maintain his popularity. These included lavish spending on his private home and alleged ties with the Gupta family (Mules, 2018). Subsequently, the party's approval ratings had also started to decline; this was most apparent in the 2016 local elections, where the ANC lost votes (IEC, 2016).

So should the recent actions of the party's leaders be blamed for the current state of affairs in South Africa? The ideals of equality and a just society that former President Nelson Mandela believed in have played a significant role in the country's political situation (Mules, 2018).

The politicians involved in the criminal acts benefit from this, while many citizens who live in impoverished areas continue to see their living conditions deteriorate (Paller, 2013: 591).

¹³ The Strategic Defence Package, also known as the Arms Deal, was a South African military program that was carried out to acquire new equipment and resupplies the country's post-apartheid military forces (Crawford-Browne, 2004: 329). The South African Defence Department embarked on a programme to upgrade its military equipment after decades of underinvestment, and to improve its military equipment and capabilities. In 1999, the government spent over R30 billion on upgrading South Africa's military equipment. The purchases included fighter planes, submarines, and helicopters (Crawford-Browne, 2004: 329). The Arms Deal was heavily linked to corruption allegations, and it was difficult to justify given that South Africa did not face any threats at the time. Several officials, including former President Jacob Zuma, were accused of profiteering from the sale (Feinstein, 2007).

¹⁴ State capture is a systemic corruption that occurs when private interests exert undue influence on a state's decision-making processes. The allegations of corruption caused controversy in South Africa in the beginning of 2016. In 2016, there were accusations of a potentially corrupt relationship between Jacob Zuma's family and the wealthy Gupta family (Wild, 2015).

¹⁵ In 2009, Jacob Zuma succeeded Thabo Mbeki as President and ANC leader. Despite the allegations of corruption against Zuma, he capitalised his support on the dissatisfaction with Mbeki (Mules, 2018). After Jacob Zuma's term officially ended, Cyril Ramaphosa was elected as South Africa's President in 2018.

The vast difference in the standard of living between politicians and citizens has contributed to dissatisfaction and discontent with political institutions. This is also a contributing factor to the growth and development of political disillusionment among citizens (Paller, 2013: 580).

Corruption, maladministration, and other financial challenges have hampered the efforts of improving service delivery. Due to corrupt practices and the slow pace of service delivery, the country has seen an escalation of protests among people who are frustrated with the government and local municipalities (Mdlongwa, 2014: 39). The socio-economic and political issues in South Africa have contributed to the discontent and dissatisfaction with the democratic government in general and the ANC in particular (Mosala, 2017; Masipa, 2018). The health of the country's democracy, as suggested in electoral turnout and economic growth (surpassing at an average of 4.5% per year at the time) in South Africa was relatively robust during the period following Nelson Mandela's election in 1994 until the end of Thabo Mbeki's presidency in the mid-2000s, (Foa et al., 2020: 36). The dissatisfaction within the party started to grow (Mules, 2018).

In recent years, there has been a decline in votes for all the elite political parties in South Africa. The support for the Democratic Alliance (DA), the ANC's oppositional party, had an upward trajectory reaching 22.23% in 2014; however, the 2019 votes for the DA declined by 1.46% (Tobor, 2019; IEC, 2019). With the decline of centralist parties such as the ANC and DA, there is an increase in support for parties such as the Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) and the Freedom Front Plus (VF+). In 2014, a new political party, the EFF, received 6.35% of the votes, becoming the third most popular party in the country within a year of its existence (IEC, 2019). In 2019 these votes increased to 10.8% (IEC, 2019). In the 2019 elections, the VF+ increased votes from 0.90% in 2014 to 2.38% (IEC, 2019). In 2014, out of 31.4 million eligible voter, 25.3 million registered to vote. In the 2019 general election, 9 million eligible voters were not registered, most under 30 years old. The turnout of registered voters, 26.7 million (out of 35.9 million eligible voter) on Election Day, 8 May 2019, illustrates a decline in the registration rate from 80.5% in 2014 to 74.5% in 2019. These figures are important as they illustrate the decline in political participation, which can be interpreted as apathy (Express News, 2021). However, examining the #iwanttovotebut meme in conjunction with these results may be caused by the disillusionment with the political system, especially among poor, young citizens (Lodge, 2020).

Indication of disillusionment in South Africa's democracy

The practice of voting in South Africa is to maintain and sustain democracy by holding political leaders accountable. As a representative democracy in South Africa, citizens vote for a respective party (Mhlongo, 2020; Graham, 2020). There has been a substantial decrease in electoral participation in the last decade. Citizens' participation is the cornerstone of a healthy democracy. Many factors within a democratic country contribute to low voter turnouts, such as lack of trust in politicians, negative media representation of politicians, and betrayal (Tshuma & Zvaita, 2019). The decline in votes can be based on two attitudinal trends; the decline in loyalty towards politicians and the decline in belief in political effectiveness (Solijonov, 2016).

The practice of voting as a human right has declined due to citizens' indecisiveness to vote, a consequence fuelled by politicians' lack of leadership. Carpini (2004: 396) explains that a citizen's commitment to a political party is typically based on their understanding of what the party stands for and its relation to pre-existing values, beliefs, and opinions. Carpini (2004: 396-397) argues that the expression of political opinions formulates the characters of the politicians and political issues, and expression of opinions is a crucial element in holding politicians accountable, especially in democratic regimes. Technological advancements have changed forms of expression and participation, allowing all participatory deliberation to be digitised (Carpini, 2004: 397).

The global decline in political participation may be attributed to the socio-economic circumstances and the failure of political parties and politicians to fulfil the needs of and promises made to all citizens' betrayal (Tshuma & Zvaita, 2019). This phenomenon of disillusionment has existed for quite some time in different historical and political periods, but the decrease and disregard in civic and political engagement or responsibility in democratic countries raise concern (Park, 2019). Citizens across the globe have expressed, through protest and otherwise, their discontent with political institutions. The dissatisfaction and scepticism of democracy have potentially increased the level of disillusionment in many countries (Caryl, 2016). In a survey conducted by Pew Research Centre in 2018, it was revealed that citizens from 27 countries, amongst them Brazil, Spain, Mexico, the US, and South Africa, are dissatisfied with democracy (Kent, 2019).

Oyedemi and Mahlatji's (2016) study has shown that youth apathy, in particular, is a common issue in participating in the electoral process where there is an interest in this group

in South Africa. The study explains why some “born-free” individuals did not vote in the 2014 General Election and explores the various factors that affect the participation of young people in the electoral process (Oyedemi & Mahlatji, 2016). It shows that political concerns and social-economic issues are some of the factors that influence youth turnout. In many countries, youth are not interested in politics and have an apathetic attitude toward the political process (Caryl, 2016; Kent, 2019). The idealisation of democracy and freedom has led to a narrative that suggests that born-free individuals should vote, but Oyedemi & Mahlatji (2016) argue that it does not mean they should be burdened with this expectation. Instead, they should be focused on addressing the issues of inequality, poverty, and unemployment.

Oyedemi & Mahlatji’s research (2016) found that there are reasons behind the non-voting behaviour of the youth. The themes were lack of service delivery and meeting basic needs of youth, unemployment, not knowing the importance and implications of voting, and disinterest in electoral politics and indecision about electoral choice (Oyedemi & Mahlatji, 2016: 6-9).

While many studies on political/voter disillusionment in South Africa have been conducted, very little analysis is on the most frequent and popular form of communication in the age of digital media, memes, has been done. This thesis hopes to contribute to this under-explored medium.

The youth are more susceptible to disillusionment or dissatisfaction with the South African government. In the South African Labour Market, the youth are vulnerable. The unemployment rate has been persistently high among the youth (18-34 years old). In the first quarter of 2020, over 63% of the youth’s population (20.4 million) were unemployed. Between 18 and 24 years old, the unemployment rate was 33.1% (STATSSA, 2020). The graduate level of unemployment is still lower than other educational levels (STATSSA, 2020). Therefore, education is an instrument to improve South Africa’s labour market and human capital development. The South African economy demands skill and experience, which lessens the chance of young people finding employment.

Section 3: Explanation and development of disillusionment in a democracy

With technological advances, globalisation, and access to abundant resources to contribute to development, one would expect change and progress for the better in newly democratic countries (Park, 2019). However, the majority of global citizens are poor, and the attitude of disillusionment occurs more predominantly. There is a shared sense of realisation that socio-economic change may never come to fruition (Niehuis & Bartell, 2006).

The process of disillusionment can be applied to several different environments, such as in the workplace (Edelwich & Brodsky, 1980), in the relationship between citizens and politicians, and marital relationships (Niehuis & Bartell; 2006). The concept of disillusionment in this environment can explain the development of political disillusionment within democratic countries that have undergone intense political struggles to achieve democratic freedom (Spierings, 2020; Paller, 2013).

Political disillusionment takes hold when the needs of ordinary citizens are unmet. This can be due to economic and income stagnation and economic inequality (Foa & Mounk, 2015), poor governance, financial mismanagement, corruption, lack of service delivery, political polarisation (Maher, Igou, and van Tilburg, 2018), income stagnation and inequality (Foa & Mounk, 2015) in South Africa. In democratic societies, the level of political disillusionment has increased and occurs around the world, as citizens across the globe express dissatisfaction and scepticism about democracy due to unfulfilled expectations and promises (Caryl, 2016). There is a global decline in the health of democracy as the democratic institutions lack principles and do not fulfil promises (Foa, Klassen, Slade, Rand and Collins, 2020: 1).

In democratic countries, disillusionment develops in stages that involve initial enthusiasm, stagnation, concern, and intervention (Bubolz & Simi, 2015: 343-345). Using the analogy of marital disillusionment (Niehuis & Bartell, 2006), newly democratic countries often start in the “honeymoon phase” (initial enthusiasm) – optimistic, committed, and passionate about growth and inclusivity of the country. The honeymoon phase is the period of the beginning of a relationship. The spouses are conscious of how they present themselves to their partner to convey a more impressionable appearance (Goffman, 1978). During this time, the pair obtain information about the person that is usually idealised and positive. The individuals who experience an idealised image of another within a relationship are the first stage in the process of disillusionment (Niehuis & Bartell, 2006). This concept can be

placed in a political context. A country transitioning from an authoritarian regime to democracy may express enthusiasm for the future. Once a country has obtained democracy, after undergoing intense political struggle, the citizens positively idealise democracy, possibly in an unrealistic manner.

Features relating to the concept of disillusionment are feelings such as discovery, disappointment, expectations, false/wrong feelings, loss, and reality (Maher et al., 2020: 951). The features of reality and truth are central in people's understanding of the world, and the feeling of betrayal and distrust are associated with the experience of being disappointed (Maher et al., 2020: 950). Similar features of disillusionment, as explored by Maher et al. (2019), Niehuis and Bartell (2006), measures disillusionment in the context of marriage. Niehuis and Bartell (2006) identify the features of marital disillusionment as disappointment, violation expectancy, and feelings of deceit, confusion, and hopelessness. Violation expectancy is at the crux of disillusionment that refers to one's understanding of the world rather than a specific event or occasion (Maher, Igou, and van Tilburg, 2020: 947).

When the honeymoon phase is over, an illusion of a functioning democracy and a utopian future dissipates when needs are constantly unmet. This usually occurs when there is a one-sided relationship where the other party is not benefiting. This creates a sense of disappointment. For instance, citizens may be disappointed when their expectations are unfulfilled, and they soon realise that the relationship between citizens and politicians is lacking (Tavits, 2008: 210). In South Africa, pre-1994, politicians promised citizens living in poorer and disadvantaged communities employment opportunities, housing, and free education (Louw, 2020: 1). However, poverty remains high and socio-economic inequalities continue to increase (Clarke & Bassett, 2016: 184; Booyesen, 2013: 2).

The decline in political participation, trust in politicians, and the growing sense of radicalism attribute to citizens' disillusionment. Using alternative labels such as 'honeymoon phase (Niehuis and Bartell, 2006), disenchantment, and burn-out (Brodsky and Edelwich, 1980), these terms all describe a similar process or development of citizen disillusionment in democratic countries, such as those in South Asia, Latin America and parts of Africa. Due to these countries' inexperience of a functioning democratic regime, their expectations are unrealistically high (Bernhagen and Marsh, 2007: 44). The transition

to democracy is typically associated with the support and enthusiasm for democratisation and is characterised by high expectations.

In South Africa, the public's devotion and admiration for the newly elected government have been marred due to the lack of government attentiveness to their needs for a decent education. This functioning economy leads to employment opportunities and service delivery. This brings us to the phase of concern. Citizens become concerned that due to the realisation that their expectations are unmet, citizens may express a feeling of concern. This can often be expressed through protest as they are dissatisfied and disappointed with the current circumstances. As a result, the people with high expectations of their government experience a dramatic sense of disillusionment. Therefore, disillusionment exists when there is a decline from positive opinion and outlook of democratic government to an increase in disappointment and discontent (Paller, 2013: 580).

Although South Africa's democracy is almost three decades old, contemporary political analysis shows that citizens are becoming increasingly disillusioned with the country's political system (Steyn-Kotze, 2017). The rise of political volatility in the country has led to increased service delivery protests (Steyn-Kotze, 2017); such protests signify dissatisfaction with politicians' activities and lack thereof (Norris and Walgrave, 2006; Lancaster, 2018). These protests are fuelled by various factors, such as political corruption and state capture. The main narrative that emerged from these protests was that the country's democracy has not delivered a better life for the majority of its citizens (Steyn-Kotze, 2017). The failure of the ANC to deliver its promise of a better life for the people has led to widespread democratic dissatisfaction. This discontentment is reflected in violent protests and the reduction of voter participation in the electoral process (Steyn-Kotze, 2017: 29).

Over the past decade, protests have become an integral part of the political landscape in South Africa. Despite the high levels of protest, the ANC has maintained its dominant position (Runciman, 2017). This has led Susan Booyesen (2012), a political scientist, to argue that the protests in the country are part of a dual repertoire of political contests (Runciman, 2017; Booyesen, 2012). According to Booyesen (2012), the protests signal dissatisfaction with the results of the elections. However, Booyesen (2012) argues that the people are loyal to the party of liberation (Runciman, 2017). The findings of Booyesen's (2012) study suggest that the support for the ANC among the country's eligible voters is different from the protests in post-apartheid South Africa (Runciman, 2017).

Public activism, such as protest and refusal to vote, is due to the unmet expectations of the democratic dream, as the attitude of political discontent in newly democratic countries manifests as political scepticism and frustration. Some studies have illustrated that the trust in government dives into the general dissatisfaction in the political performance of new democratic countries (Hibbing and Theiss-Morse, 2001; Klingemann, 1999; Rose and Mishler, 2011). Distrust in government is a significant indicator of democratic and political disillusionment (Catterberg and Moreno, 2006).

There is a growing sense of political instability and mistrust in politicians and governing parties that project a sense of disillusionment. Research has shown the declining involvement of young people in political processes, particularly since the democratic elections in 1994 (Bosch, 2013: 119).

Rates of participation in elections relate to the feeling of disillusionment, indicating the health of democracy (Tavits, 2008: 209). The election and political campaigning in the lead-up to elections may generate unrealistic expectations due to the promises and hopes that politicians incite. It is simple; politicians say what the citizens want to hear to win them over. However, citizens may be disappointed when these expectations are unfulfilled, and they are left feeling betrayed, which causes an increase in disillusionment (Tavits, 2008: 210). In South Africa, the electoral statistics of the 2019 general elections illustrated the increase in votes for the far-left party, Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF), and the right party, Freedom Front Plus.

When the democratic government was elected in South Africa in 1994, citizens had confidence that the government would bring about social, economic, and political change (Booyesen, 2013: 11). The ANC has governed South Africa since the first democratic election in 1994 and is highly respected as people had faith that the party would provide a better life for its citizens, particularly the poorer population (Paller, 20013: 592). However, little change has happened in the past 27 years of democracy, as many citizens remain in poor and disadvantaged circumstances due to the lack of service delivery, employment opportunities, and the infamous state capture scandal in 2016.

The Arms Deal and, subsequently, the State Capture scandal was a pivotal moment that damaged the reputation of the ANC as politicians, such as Jacob Zuma, former President of South African was involved in corruption. The public who fought so hard to put the ANC

in power is disappointed in the individuals in the party who abused their power for their advantage and benefit (Paller, 2013: 590).

The lack of accountability and empty promises have contributed to the growth of discontent among young people. The notion of discontent translates into a decline in trust and confidence in politicians, democratic institutions, voter registration, and Election Day turnout – particularly among those younger than 30 years old. Benjamin Roberts (HRC) found that 62% of South Africans aged between 18 and 25 are dissatisfied with democracy, and only 12-17% trust South African politicians (Roberts, 2019).

The young population is socio-economically marginalised due to high unemployment rates and poor education among the youth (SATSSA, 2020). As a consequence of the neglect of these issues from political parties, young people have trouble deciphering which political party represents them and will fulfil their needs. Social media provides a platform to allow people to express political views and acts through new forms of participation in the public sphere (Burton, 2019: 3). Certain types of social media are used to correlate to democratic engagement, such as the development of interest, knowledge, and participation in politics, but can also foster cynicism, apathy, and ignorance (Carpini, 2004: 395-398). The media play a vital role in forming attitudes and expression and are at the centre of political debates and discussions (Bosch, 2017a). The media can influence public discourse and citizens' perception of reality as the media can frame political events and politicians in a certain way for ratings.

Section 4: Media and its role in the political landscape and public opinion

Media and its impact on public opinion play a central role in democracy and decision-making (Bosch, 2017a; Caldwell, 2017: 138 in Fourie, 2017). The media holds a symbolic power that influences people's thinking and behaviour as it guides people to understand, perceive and think about the world in specific ways (Fourie, 2013: 141). The power of traditional media platforms, such as television, print, and radio, provided a one-way flow of information, controlling content production, consumption, and distribution (Vukanovic, 2011: 53). This placed traditional media platforms in a position of power as they determined what was broadcast and the topic of discussion that the public may be interested in (Vukanovic, 2011: 53). This could obscure perception and influence what people are

exposed to. The content produced emphasises information deemed to be essential or informative that ultimately sets the tone and narrative for the audience.

Traditional and new forms of media, such as television, radio, print, digital and social media, have provided different ways of interpreting reality in which people find themselves (Vukanovic, 2011: 52). Media are typically positioned at the centre of political debates and play a role in deepening democracy while simultaneously holding power to frame political events, shape public discourse, and impact citizens' perception of reality (Bosch, 2017a: 3). The media plays a significant role in shaping and influencing the structure of society. With the development of information and communication technologies (ICTs), new media has played a fundamental role in shaping and maintaining politics in autocratic and democratic societies (Bosch, 2017d). The democratic constitution guarantees freedom of expression and contributes to the culture of democratic debate, and simultaneously, the South African media play a watchdog role to keep political power fair, honest, and just (Wasserman, 2020: 451).

The development of the internet and the creation of social networking sites and microblogging sites have disrupted a one-way flow of information and have changed the way people communicate, consume, and produce information (McGivern, 2016). Social media have become a primary source of information, politically and socially (Colman, 2013). In many instances, social media have become a popular platform for politics (Mare, 2014; Bosch, 2017e). Politicians worldwide use the platform for campaigning, connecting, and communicating with the public (Stier, Bleier, Lietz & Strohmaier, 2018). In many instances, social media platforms have been used for political persuasion. The tool of social media platforms as a political strategy has impacted voter participation both negatively and positively (Ahmad et al., 2019: 1).

Slaton and Becker (2000: 199) recognise the fundamental role of information and communication technologies (ICTs) as a critical component in the evolution of participation in democracy. The development of information and communication technologies (ICTs) and social networking sites have made it easier for the general public to participate and engage in public debate, a prerequisite for democratic participation, which is often characterised by criticism (Slaton and Becker, 2000). One of the critical features of social media is the interactivity that provides a space for users to express their opinions (Slaton and Becker, 2000). In the information and digital age, citizens can learn about the day's

pressing issues, follow the actions and development of elected and government officials, and communicate their political views (Carpini, 2004: 395). In democratic countries, social media can also foster cynicism, apathy, ignorance, disillusionment, and disengagement (Carpini, 2014: 395).

The impact of web 2.0 has been credited as a significant contributor to democracy and freedom of countries as it facilitated communication and conversations (Darwish & Lakhtaria, 2011: 213). Social media, to an extent, is deemed democratic as it provides the public with a voice and can be used to represent the political views of minority groups and those of the majority of the population (O'Shaughnessy & Stadler, 2004: 8). The media is used to publicise political issues and events, making it possible for pressure groups to unite around a common issue or cause. For the media to fulfil its democratic role, freedom of expression is crucial (O'Shaughnessy & Stadler, 2002: 8).

Social media provides a space for large scale communication where internet users create, consume and distribute information, usually in the form of image, text, or video (or a combination of those) to a wide range of audiences (Zeitsoff, 2017:1971; Kobierecki, 2014: 243; Kietzmann, Hermkens, McCarthy, & Silvestre, 2011: 241-251). One of the standard features of social media is that users generate and distribute their content, which, in a political context, can play a central role in a democracy (Fenton & Barassi, 2011). In South Africa, there has been a rapid increase in social media platforms (Cilliers, Chinyamurindi, & Viljoen, 2017: 1-8) for political purposes. Communication has drastically improved and has allowed people to create homogeneous groups that ultimately amplify pre-existing views, facilitated and shaped through echo chambers (Sunstein, 2007: 2). Social media platforms provide an alternative means of political participation as it brings a new practice of social inclusivity, group recognition, pluralised participation, and different forms of political conversation and engagement (Khosravinik & Unger, 2016: 212).

The participatory nature of social media helps strengthen and shift the political landscape in democracy, as citizens have a universal platform to play a watchdog role, hold politicians accountable, and voice opinions and concerns (Bosch, 2017b: 2). The use of social media as a participatory tool has provided a space for the public to engage politically with each other and with the government (Steenkamp & Hyde-Clarke, 2014: 92). In a healthy democratic system, political participation in the digital age involves access to information and the expression of personal views that construct and form a public opinion through the

internet (Steenkamp & Hyde-Clarke, 2014: 92). Social media is a communicative source where individuals share similar experiences, grievances, and sentiments (Zeitsoff, 2017).

Social media platforms can positively reinforce democratic engagement by encouraging and facilitating political interest, knowledge, and participation. Evidence suggests that media use can also foster cynicism, apathy, and disengagement (Carpini, 2004: 395-396). In the age of digital culture, social media platforms play a role in facilitating political discussions and participation, as information about politicians and elections has drastically increased due to the easy access to information, and endless feeds on the news (Steenkamp & Hyde-Clarke, 2014). Social networking sites provide a space for political campaigning, activism, mobilisation, and discussions. In democratic countries, social networking sites (SNS) play an instrumental role in fighting political oppression (Bosch, 2017e: 224-225). In the Arab Spring (Paller, 2013), social media enabled the democratisation of the authoritarian regime and provoked political and social change.

Twitter

Social media is viewed and understood as a participatory culture as users create content and culture within virtual communities (Fuchs, 2017: 36). The cultural participation of social media amplifies and contributes to the democratic circumstance and influences the state of protest (Fuchs, 2017: 54). Twitter is a popular microblogging site with about 7.7 million users in South Africa (StatCounter, 2020) that is commonly used as a political media tool. It enables people to stream their lives directly using short messages of 280 characters known as tweets (Zeitsoff, 2017: 1971; Kietzmann, Hermkens, McCarthy, & Silvestre, 2011: 241-251).

The use of symbols, such as @ and #, on social media, such as Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram, is fundamental in line with the analysis of the tweets/memes can be used to explore various aspects of social media communication (Pilar, Kvasničková Stanislavská, Kvasnička, Bouda and Pitrová, 2021). The hashtag (#) in social media culture essentially categorises a theme or topic so that when a social media user searches a particular hashtag (using the actual symbol '#'), tweets or posts related to that hashtag are made visible in one thread (Magade, 2020: 3; Hunt, 2015). In other words, all original posts and tweets are visible and can be viewed and engaged by any user. Twitter allows users a space to respond, discuss and react to real-life events in real-time (Murthy, 2013: 1). This allows the users,

researchers, journalists, and politicians to understand the general and social consensus among groups of people. Much political activism and mobilisation have started with discussions and sentiment expressed, shared and debated on Twitter, such as, #RhodesMustFall¹⁶ (Bosch, 2017e). In the age of democracy, this new form of communicative practice provides people with an alternative means to express their political opinions, views, and grievances (Amedie, 2015: 3). The collection of the data for analysis entailed the search for #iwanttovotebut on Twitter. Upon the search, numerous tweets about the hashtag were found.

Unlike the hashtag, which allows users to join conversations, the '@' symbol allows one to 'tag' other users (Hunt, 2015). Every social media user is identified and can be tagged with a username. This can be the person or institution's name to sign-up on the platform and create a profile. A user's tagging will notify the person or institution that someone has mentioned them in a post. Tagging a person is deliberate and direct to allow the user to engage or view the post. This is a fundamental mechanism in political engagement, particularly between citizen and politician.

As a convenient and effective tool, Twitter allows politicians to connect and communicate with voters (Kobierecki, 2014: 243). Twitter has recently played a central role in politics worldwide, including in the U.S, Canada, Brazil, the U.K, Kenya, and South Africa. In 2008, Barack Obama used Facebook extensively to communicate and engage with citizens during his presidential campaign (Burroughs, 2013: 258-259). This followed through to his second presidential run in 2012. In 2016, presidential candidate at the time, Donald Trump, used Twitter as a means for political expression and engagement, and more importantly as a means for political criticism against the oppositional candidate, Hillary Clinton (Maher et al., 2018: 207). Many tweets and false information were spread at the time to discredit the candidates. Many scholars have studied the use of Twitter by politicians and political parties and how they use it as a means of political strategy and persuasion. This study, however, is interested in how Twitter users utilise the platform for political criticism and expression (Valenzuela, 2013: 920-921).

¹⁶ The Rhodes Must Fall campaign was a protest movement that occurred at the University of Cape Town in South Africa. Rhodes Must Fall was initially formed as a way to protest against the removal of a statue of Cecil John Rhodes. Beyond this initial campaign, it continued to develop as a political movement against institutional racism and demands for Africanisation in the university curriculum (Bosch, 2017e: 221-222).

Section 5: Memes as a form of communication and political expression

The term meme is understood differently in the digital age but similar to Richard Dawkins'¹⁷ (1978) definition. Memes are defined as non-genetic mutations that are recognised as pieces of cultural information that are replicated and passed on to and from internet user(s) (Shifman, 2014: 4). They are cultural objects that carry meaning and content that uniquely bring cultural, social, and political issues to the surface. Within social networking and microblogging sites, memes are a widespread phenomenon in communication, entertainment, and politics (Shifman, 2014). In the contemporary digital age, the term meme refers to an image, video, or gif (Graphics Interchange Format), accompanied with text that is posted or tweeted on digital platforms that carry specific cultural meaning that rapidly spread and evolve online (Dobson & Knezevic, 2017: 778). The evolution, longevity, fidelity, and fecundity of memes rely on replication and imitation for their survival and transmission and are enhanced on the internet web 2.0 (Shifman, 2014: 17).

Social media are multimodal in nature, so it caters to the use of visual and verbal elements. This allows social media users to generate multimedia content to express their feelings, dissent, and experiences more elaborately and expressively (Kavitha, 2017: 219). Memes are typically constructed using a combination of text and image or emoji. Emojis are cartoon-like imagery of human facial expressions, which is a source of meaning that can be easily interpreted and recognisable (Davison, 2012: 124). One of the ways to express feelings is creating a customised image of a fictional or non-fictional character(s) and text that is usually rooted and based on personal experiences (Kavitha, 2017: 220). Inasmuch, memes are viewed as units of information created by ordinary users as a form of self-expression representing and reflecting a specific behaviour (Kobierecki, 2014: 245).

Memes in digital culture serve many functions; the first is entertainment, which derives from making people laugh at situations and individuals through humour, satire, irony, or parody (Shifman, 2014; Wagner et al., 2020: 313). The second function is that memes

¹⁷ Richard Dawkins, an evolutionary biologist, coined the term meme in 1976 in his book *The Selfish Gene*. Dawkins (1976: 194) defines the term meme as a “unit of cultural transmission” and a “unit of imitation,” which is similar to that of a gene, a mechanism of genetic transmission that replicates and mutates. Dawkins (1976) used the term meme, analogous to a gene, rooted from an ancient Greek word, *mimeme*, which translates to ‘imitated,’ referring to non-genetic behaviours, such as ideas, cultures, language, catch-phrases, and religion, that is replicable and spreadable (Grundlingh, 2018: 147). According to Dawkins (1976), memes ascribe to ideas and behaviours that spread from person to person within a culture. This has since been re-appropriated and transpired by the internet in the process of imitation (Solon, 2013).

provide a way and space for people to vent their frustrations against political figures and parties (McKelvey, et al., 2021; Chen, 2014; Dancygier & Vandelanotte, 2017). The third function of memes is that it distils an event in a concise frame that captures the essence of an issue. The most significant function of memes is their construction and framing of social and political reality (Denisova, 2019; Carter, 2016). Their representation constitutes ways of knowing, articulating, and interpreting different facets of our environment and experiences (Carter, 2016).

As discussed in the first section, language is a human communication system that allows for the exchange of information and expression of feelings (Rabiah, 2018). The user-generated memes allow social media users to express opinions, beliefs, and ideas using multiple modes to construct a message or convey a meaning that is often humorous or satirical (Shifman, 2014; Brubaker et al., 2018). Memes are structured using verbal and visual language to convey and construct meaning (Lincoln, 2019: 11-12). Humour is central to the construction of memes typically made up of text and image; often, the image is juxtaposed to the text, the incongruity (Shifman, 2014: 79) of the two elements, create humorous content (Drakett, Rickett, Day, and Milnes, 2018: 110).

Michele Knobel and Colin Lankshear (2007: 209) found that humour served as a significant component in the success of memes and that humorous texts are assigned for social commentary to address political issues. Memes are used as a form of communication, but it is also used as a strategic mechanism, particularly in politics. Humour is a strategic tool to persuade or criticise people, issues, or events (Knobel & Lankshear, 2007). Humour conveys a sense of criticism and recycles and reinforces dominant values and views, and serves as a powerful tool in political practices as it serves as a means of resistance or rebellion against social and political injustices and oppression (Tsakana & Poppa, 2011: 1). Political humour does not necessarily influence politics but conveys criticism against the political status quo and reinforces dominant values and views (Tsakana & Poppa, 2011: 1).

Political memes elicit different forms of humour, such as parody, satire, and sarcasm, to ridicule, mock or criticise representatives in political power (Shifman, 2014; Wagner et al., 2020: 313). Humour and satire often mask serious issues or criticise politicians or governance, and is used for engaging in political discussions or expressions in a meaningful way and sets the tone for political interaction (Davis, Love, and Killen, 2018: 3899-3900).

With that said, humour in memes are often used as a vessel to communicate opinions in a more acceptable form in digital culture (Grundlingh, 2017: 163).

The media plays a significant role in constructing stories on social and political issues (Owen, 2017). The way the story is framed affects the message's meaning and how it is received. Different modes of news solicit different kinds of attitudes or behaviours from audiences, which ultimately determines how they respond to it (Owen, 2017). Memes occupy a lot of the space in the social media culture, mainly with text accompanied by emoticons/emojis, gifs, photographs, and other imagery (Kostadinovska-Stojchevska & Shalevska, 2018). Memes can be seen as rhetorical devices, a persuasive tool for communication, and a form of expression (Huntington, 2016: 77-78; Seiffert-Brockmann, et al., 2018: 2862-2864).

Shifman (2013) argues that the creation and consumption of memes are political in themselves, and internet memes serve as vehicles of political participation (Drakett et al., 2018: 113). Commenting on political news by creating or sharing internet memes is one of the most popular ways to express views and opinions (Kobierecki, 2014: 243). Internet memes can be used as a form of expression of the political activity of citizens on the internet (Kobierecki, 2014: 243). Memes are also an essential medium for forming political opinions on salient social and political issues. User-generated memes reflect, create and represent public opinion. In a political context, particularly in the lead-up to elections and during electoral and political campaigns, memes depict political events, situations, and issues (Ross & Rivers, 2018: 1-3).

Memes also act as pieces of visual rhetoric as it allows audiences to construct the meaning of the messages they send. Huntington (2013) found that memes use signs, language, and symbols to create messages and opinions to add to participatory media culture. The implications of understanding memes as visual rhetoric are identity building, public discourse, and commentary in participatory media (Akhther, 2018: 10). Memes shape identities, spread knowledge about social and political issues, allow audiences to create meanings from them, and provide a platform for public deliberation. Memes have been shown to disrupt the dominating narrative by turning the attention to ways of acknowledging that identity, relationships, and consumptive practices exist (Carter, 2016).

Memes have become a significant form of cultural practice and a vehicle for communicating ideas and conveying emotional states (Börzsei, 2013: 6) within the digital

sphere. Memes provide an expressive tool to address concerns and express opinions or ideas. The participatory culture and nature of memes are driven by hyperemesis logic, where every public event or moment is sprouted by a stream of memes on social media platforms that ultimately describe the condition or circumstance of public events (Shifman, 2014: 24). The hashtag (#) in conjunction with memes suggests an era of hyperemesis logic in which public events are marked. For instance, if a user were to search a particular hashtag, the user can understand the topic and the common sentiments or opinions associated with that topic (Pilar, Kvasničková Stanislavská, Kvasnička, Bouda and Pitrová, 2021).

In recent years, memes have become an integral part of digital culture, as it is a common form of communication and a source of information that is expressive and rhetorical. (Nissanbaum & Shifman, 2017: 483). Sharing content and spreading memes are a fundamental part of what internet users experience in the digital sphere (Shifman, 2014: 19). There has been countless research and analyses conducted on memes as a cultural logic of photo-based meme genre (Shifman, 2014), the language found in memes (Grundlingh, 2018, memes as speech acts (Grundlingh, 2018), and discourse and identity in participatory media through the use of memes (Milner, 2012). There is little research on the representation of user-generated (hashtagged) memes. This research is based on the analysis of such memes on Twitter, which will refer to as Twitter memes, which are constructed using both text and image (facial expression, gesture, etc.). These are often amateur memes that may not be thought out but are instantaneous and spontaneous responses to events, topics, etcetera, which typically stem from experience.

As mentioned, the construction of memes hold many characteristics; they use multimedia (images and text) to create meaning, and use humour as a mechanism to relate to intended audiences, and lastly they are political in nature and generate interest for viewers. The study and analysis of #iwanttovotebut memes will explore the all dimensions of the memes to explore the how disillusionment is represented in the memes.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

This chapter describes the qualitative research methodology and methods used to analyse #iwanttovotebut memes. The qualitative analysis of the memes begins with thematic analysis, allowing the data set to be collected and selected. Once the themes are established, memes are randomly selected, and a visual social semiotics (VSS) analysis (Harrison, 2003) and critical discourse analysis (CDA) (van Dijk, 2001) is conducted. Combining the two analytical approaches is appropriate as memes comprise multimodal texts that use written language and visual images to create meaning (Chandler, 2013: 34). A Multimodality is an interdisciplinary approach that understands communication and representation to be more about language and provides a framework for collecting and analysing visual elements (Machin & Mayr, 2012: 17).

The tools of VSS analysis (Harrison, 2003) and some elements of CDA (van Dijk, 2001: 359) are used to conduct a multimodal analysis of memes and to explore the meaning and messages created and communicated through the interplay of ‘signs¹⁸’. CDA is conducted to explore and reveal the use and organisation of language to construct and create meaning within the social context (van Dijk, 2001: 360; Janks, 1998). This approach dives into the ideology of the text in which an intertextual analysis is also conducted. The analysis of the #iwanttovotebut memes concludes with Thompson’s operation of ideology to legitimise the study and place such texts and discourses into context (Janks, 1998).

Thematic analysis

Thematic analysis is qualitative research used to identify, describe, report, and interpret patterns and themes found within a study (Braun & Clarke, 2006: 297). Thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) was chosen for its compatibility with large data sets and the study’s exploratory nature. In this study, a thematic analysis will serve as the foundation for

¹⁸ In semiotics, a sign is anything that can communicate meaning, such as gesture, image/icon, and sound

understanding the broader ideas of the texts and provide a focus for VSS and CDA (Harrison, 2003; van Dijk, 2001).

An inductive approach to thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2012) is conducted as the data determines the themes. A theme captures important data about the research question and represents some level of patterned responses or meaning within a data set (Braun & Clarke, 2006: 82). The displayed themes are described, identified by codes, and analysed to accurately represent the data set (Braun & Clarke, 2006: 82). In this study, texts and images of the memes are identified to link the common ideas or concepts to categorise texts into appropriate themes.

In the dataset, 10% of the #iwanttovotebut memes, posted on 6 May 2019, were randomly selected for analysis. The first 100 memes that came across were considered for analysis and grouped into themes. Once the themes are set, two memes from the first five (themes with more memes and rich in data and description) are analysed. Therefore out of the 100 memes selected for analysis, only ten are analysed in-depth.

Braun and Clarke (2006: 15) identify six stages of thematic analysis that were used to guide the process of identifying and describing themes for further analysis.

Step 1: Familiarisation with data

In this first stage, the researcher immerses themselves and actively engages with the data by reading and re-reading the data and taking note of initial analytical observations (Braun & Clarke, 2006: 88). Sifting through the thread and re-reading the tweets, the familiarisation of the data allows one to understand and consensus of the thread's contents.

In the #iwanttovotebut, the data was familiarised by scrolling through the thread and reading the first 100 tweets. The attention was mainly paid to those tweets which shared memes (a combination of text and image in the tweet). At the surface level, many people expressed that they would not vote due to 'corruption,' 'unemployment,' and poor 'service delivery. These texts or phrases are used to create codes and categories these ideas into themes.

Step 2: Coding

The coding process involves identifying the recurring words, phrases, or images that come across frequently to reveal meaning and categorise the patterns accordingly (Braun &

Clarke, 2006: 88). Once the researcher has familiarised themselves with the data, the coding process begins to identify phrases or written elements within a text and identify concepts or ideas (Braun & Clarke, 2006: 88). The data is organised and labelled during the coding process to describe the content in preparation for analysis.

100 memes were coded and established a pattern of keywords that frequently appeared in the memes, such as “long queues,” “load shedding,” “trust,” and “unemployment.” Once a pattern was identified, and the codes were established, 12 themes were categorised; five were chosen for analysis and selected based on the number of memes that frequently surfaced per the theme. For instance, the themes categorised were ‘voting inconvenience,’ this was based on the use of the language of each theme and identifying keywords that refer to electoral participation such as ‘online voting,’ ‘long queues,’ ‘ink on the thumbs.’

Step 3: generating themes

The use of visual representation in this phase arranges the codes into themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006: 88). Visual elements are central to this study as they are rich in meaning and governed by visual grammar structures utilised to decode the meaning of the images (Braun & Clarke, 2006: 88).

A pattern-based analysis allows a researcher to identify the salient features of a data set and to answer a particular research question (Braun and Clarke, 2006). In identifying the relevant patterns, the importance of the frequency in which each code appeared was considered. In this, many codes were combined into a single theme. For instance, “nails/ink” and “long queues” were grouped in the theme of ‘electoral inconvenience.’

Some of the codes were themed in their own right, with some incorporated codes, such as ‘employment,’ ‘trust,’ and ‘identity. The intent here was to explore and create themes that would be useful in understanding the purpose of the data and that would be meaningful in answering the research question.

Step 4: Reviewing themes

All data extracts of 100 memes that fit into each theme were re-read to ensure that all data forms a coherent pattern. Therefore, coherent themes were identified and considered; incoherent themes were discarded from the analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

The data set was relooked and compared to existing themes to represent the data accurately. In de-problematising, the themes and data sets that made the data sets accurate and valuable for analysis were combined or created. For instance, data regarding phases such as “this is the politicians after the election” or “we only hear from them during the election” and grouped them under the theme of voter manipulation.

Step 5: Define and Name themes

In this step, the labelling of the theme captures the essence of the themes and helps to understand the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006: 89). The use of language to name the theme is important here. The analysis of each theme capture whether the themes perhaps contain sub-themes; this helps identify the themes and what they are not (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Define and redefine themes to identify sub-themes that construct the bigger story (Braun & Clarke, 2006: 89). The themes were named concisely; for example, ‘voting inconvenience’ could be better named ‘electoral inconvenience,’ ‘distrust’ as ‘lack of trust.’ The themes such as education and healthcare were collapsed into the defined themes of ‘service delivery and ‘lack of identity, such as those who did not have an ID or connection with a political party, to ‘lack party identification.’ The initial theme of ‘unfulfilled/empty promises’ was collapsed into the finalised theme of ‘lack of trust.’ The themes such as corruption, lack of change/progress, unfulfilled promises, quality of education, and poor healthcare are all contributing factors to the theme of lack of trust, but because this was expressed in isolation, grouping it as one theme was not fitting, thus they were placed as their own theme.

Step 6: Writing up

Final analysis and report provide a logical account of data collected, gathered, and organised (Braun & Clarke, 2006: 20). During the conceptual analysis stage, memes were selected for analysis using thematic analysis to collect and identify data. Each theme was chosen by randomly selecting two memes for each theme for analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The modes and codes of each meme were analysed and explored to either argue for or against the hypothesis of disillusionment. In this study, the apathy represented and reflected in the memes is acknowledged and anticipated. However, disillusionment is prevalent, which alludes to the study in that direction.

Visual Social Semiotics

In media and cultural studies, the multimodal analysis offers a precise way of interpreting and constructing meaning and involves examining how various elements of communication (signs) are used to construct meaning (Machin & Mayr, 2012: 54). The representation of signs in memes helps understand how and why they are used to communicate. In semiotics, communication is done in various ways, with signs and codes¹⁹ being used to create and interpret the meaning of various expressions and actions (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996).

The emergence of multimodality as a mode of communication (Machin & Mayr, 2012) was initiated by the principles of social semiotics developed in the following volumes; Hodge and Kress in *Social Semiotics* (1988) and by Kress and van Leeuwen in “*Reading Images: The Grammar of Visual Design*” (1996, 2006). These works aim to examine texts that have meaning within a social context. Their work shows that texts can be socially created and focus on intersections of power and ideology (Janks, 1998; Thompson, 1990).

The social semiotics theory explores the modes of communication used to construct meaning within a social setting (Kress, 2010). Its goal is to understand how these modes of communication are utilised in order to achieve specific goals. Communication can be structured so that it can shape society and social relations. This is because semiotic systems can shape society itself. Social semiotics includes studying how people design and interpret meaning through the analysis of text and how ideologies and social interests shape semiotic systems²⁰ (Kress, 2009).

Visual social semiotics (VSS) is a framework for understanding how images convey meaning (Harrison, 2003: 47). The tools of visual social semiotics (Kress and van Leeuwen, 1996) and elements of critical discourse analysis are used to analyse selected memes (Fairclough, 1992). A visual social semiotics examination will determine what visual and textual strategies convey meaning (Harrison, 2003; Aiello, 2006: 90).

Many Twitter memes are constructed with visual and textual modes to make meaning. VSS is a valuable tool for analysing the image and its relationship to the text (Harrison, 2003). VSS assists communicators in analysing imagery and argues that images are a social

¹⁹ Shared understanding among people about the relation between signifier and signified.

²⁰ Semiotic systems are made up of signs, meaning, and code rules.

process as they can reflect one's political and social beliefs and attitudes (Harrison, 2003: 47).

English linguist and developer of the Systemic Functional Linguistic (SFL) model²¹ of language, Michael Halliday's (1978) book, *Language as Social Semiotic*²², was among the first to introduce the concept of meaning potential and the various features of a language. The social semiotic model as an approach works well for language because it is a source for thinking about all modes of representation (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006: 20). Michael Halliday (1978) argues that language has three functions, which he refers to as metafunctions; ideational metafunction, interpersonal metafunction, and textual metafunction. Halliday's (1978) metafunctions are important for understanding a social semiotic approach to language (Ledin & Machin, 2018: 18).

The textual function is a key concept in language theory. It helps to understand how language works and relates to our environment (Halliday, 1978). The concept of the interpersonal meta-function is related to the various ways in which language can interact with people (Halliday, 1978). An interpersonal function is a tool used in communication to reveal the relationships between the speakers and the receivers (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006). Interpersonal functions include the following: speech acts, requests, and implicatures, and play a vital role in the development and maintenance of social relationships among people (Halliday, 1978). It also realises the listeners' points of view and actions (Halliday, 1978).

Following Halliday's (1978) metafunction model, Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) create their metafunctions in their approach to visual social semiotics. Kress and van Leeuwen (1996) introduces three meta-semiotic tasks: representational metafunction, interactive metafunction, and compositional metafunction (Harrison, 2003: 50), to explore how visual elements convey meaning in the memes selected for analysis.

²¹ SFL is an approach to the functionality of language using a social semiotics system

²² Social semiotics is a conceptual field that draws on the analysis of language.

Representational metafunction (RMF)

This metafunction stems from Halliday's (1978) ideational metafunction that sought to represent relationships in the world and within us (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 1996; Harrison, 2013).

The RMF refers to how participants, objects, and circumstances are symbolised, characterised, or depicted in a story. This metafunction ultimately questions the image and refers to visual coding through narrative and conceptual structures (Janks, 1998). These structures refer to the ideas or activities performed or represented in the image. Narrative structures present unfolding actions and events, processes of change, and transitory spatial arrangements. They always include a depicted element that forms an oblique line and indicates directionality, called a vector (Kress & van Leeuwen 2006: 59). As for conceptual structures represent participants in terms of their class, structure, or meaning (Kress & van Leeuwen 2006: 59).

The presence of the represented participant (RP)²³ is fundamental in the analysis (Kress and van Leeuwen, 1996) as it explores the context, the facial expressions, attitude, and the intent of the meme. The memes analysed are expressive as the RP are the focal point of the meme and meaning-making potential. In all of the memes selected for analysis, at least one dominant RP is present in the meme and is stationed in the centre of the frame (Harrison, 2003: 54). At the beginning of the analysis, much attention is drawn to the RP in the image, as it allows to uncover the idea and attitudes expressed (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996). This is identified through the analysis of the facial expressions and gaze of the represented participant. The RP's lack of eye contact with the audience (Ly & Jung, 2015), for instance, can be interpreted as disinterest in engaging in the elections or discussions with other users regarding the elections.

Interactive metafunction

The interactive meaning is derived from Halliday's (1978) interpersonal metafunction. The interactions between participants and the participants and the viewer are represented in the interactive metafunction (Kress & van Leeuwen 2006: 114).

²³ RP refers to people, objects, or things represented in the image or text.

In images where the RP looks away from the viewer, Kress and van Leeuwen (1996, 2006: 148) refer to it as ‘offer’ images, in contrast to ‘demand’ images, whereby the RP gazes at the viewer. Without eye contact, the RP may somehow be viewed as detached or impersonal and maybe preoccupied in their world (Harrison, 2003). These meaning potentials stipulate the relationship between participants and viewers, and forming the power relation strengthens the communication and the meaning it intends to send (Kress and van Leeuwen, 1996; Janks, 1998).

The social relations that are described are determined by the different visual dimensions of the images, much of which presents a sense of intimacy, such as:

1. The intimate distance where only the face is shown
2. The close personal distance where the head and shoulders are visible
3. The far personal distance from the head to the waist is visible.

The horizontal angle refers to the distance between the image’s producer and the participant’s frontal plane (Harrison, 2003). The horizontal angle shows whether the viewer is involved or not. The concept of horizontal angle is the result of the system of offering and demand (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996; Janks, 1998). The implication is that the viewer is not involved with the world they see. The perspective of a viewer is different from that of the represented participants. In other words, the viewer does not seem to engage with them (Harrison, 2003).

Camera angles determine power relations. For instance, a low angle can make a subject look smaller and insignificant while simultaneously making another seem/look Great. The low angle of the RP would place the RP in a position of power (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996). The image can have a frontal or oblique point of view. It is not strictly a distinction, and there are degrees of obliqueness. The difference between the frontal and oblique angles is involvement and detachment (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996). If a viewer is positioned at a high angle, then the relationship between the viewer and the interactive participant is implied. This is because the participant has power over the viewer (Harrison, 2003). If the represented participant is at an angle, then the relationship between the two is depicted as one where the represented participant has the power to affect the interactive participant (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996). The angle at which a person appears to be involved in a particular project or activity is often used to convey power and involvement, but the exact nature of these connections is not given (Harrison, 2003).

Harrison (2003: 55) explains how basic features create strong viewer involvement. For instance, the social distance is determined by how close RPs in an image appear to the viewer, thereby resulting in feelings of intimacy or distance (Harrison, 2003: 55). The viewer can see an RP in six different ways. The intimate distance is the head and face only. The close personal distance is the head and shoulders (Harrison, 2003: 55). The far personal distance is from the waist up. The close social distance is the whole figure. The far social distance is the whole figure with space around it and the public distance which are the torsos of several people (Harrison, 2003: 55).

Compositional metafunction

The last metafunction is related to the idea of composition, which is the process of making sense of how representations and communicative acts are made (Kress & van Leeuwen 1996: 181). This metafunction is based on Halliday's (1978) textual metafunction, which combines the representational and interactive metafunction to explore how they relate to one another and how they are integrated to make meaning as a collective.

The analysis #iwanttovotebut memes are conducted from a visual rhetoric perspective, which encompasses semiotic techniques to examine the structure of images. The text is as important as the visual element in framing a message as it gives the subject(s) life and natural reality. Memes are visual modes of communication and derive their rhetorical power of construction and persuasion primarily from their visual nature (Shifman, 2014: 86).

Critical Discourse Analysis

The theoretical framework of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) enables understanding how language, image, and other modes of communication are combined to make meaning (Machin & Mayr, 2012: 1).

CDA requires identifying and understanding the semiotic resources and choices found in the image or text, which would explore how the use of semiotic choice influences and determines the construction of meaning (Machin & Mayr, 2012: 15). The choice of visual and verbal elements “suggests the kind of identities, values, and activities due to established

associations” (Machin & Mayr, 2012: 15). This is inadvertently associated with power relations, as CDA is traditionally concerned with revealing ideologies in text.

Language is a ‘communicative event’ (van Dijk, 2001: 98) that constitutes a particular way of talking and understanding the social world from both the producer and consumer of text. Discourse analysts adopt the principle that people construct perceptions of their social world through the construction and organisation of language (Adjei, 2013: 1). Hall (1996) and Janks (1998) look at the relationship between language, ideology, and power.

The purpose of discourse analysis is to understand how people use language within a social context that will assist in uncovering deeply held attitudes and perceptions. Discourse provides different ways of theorising language as it is concerned with analysing text within a specific social context (Adjei, 2013: 1) and investigates the functionality and instrumentality of language. Discourses are the product of relations of power within a socio-historical context that can be related to the functional organisations of language (Wodak & Meyer, 2009; Janks, 1998). CDA would reveal the way knowledge and power are worked out in and through language (Wodak & Meyer, 2008: 2). For example, the assumption that democracy is the best form of governance calls on the discourse of democracy and suggests that voting is the responsibility and duty of citizens.

Through the study of language, CDA aims to understand what is meant by the language used to describe and explain what is often complex and nuanced (Wodak & Meyer, 2008). It aims to examine the various components and grammar of discourse, including the structure, content, and usage of language (Janks, 1998). An examination of a key feature of #iwanttovotebut memes – their intertextual nature – will help reveal the ideological underpinnings of the producers and the memes.

Norman Fairclough’s version of CDA views language as a form of social practice, and it attempts to engage critically with the discourses produced by dominant institutions, such as the government, to show how the texts they produce (re)create particular versions of the world (Griffin, 2005: 98). Fairclough’s CDA is concerned with the relationship between language, subject, social processes, and how the subject’s use of language influences the world’s perception.

The analysis in this study will be guided by Norman Fairclough’s (1992) three-dimensional model of conducting CDA:

1. Text

This dimension directs the researcher to describe and analyse the text to identify its genre as it determines its purpose. A good place to start the text analysis is with Thompson's idea of legitimation, as it will help establish the legitimated position. Legitimation occurs through storytelling or an argument from a particular position (Janks, 1998: 199). The text should be considered a mode of action as it presents an argument or story to convince the reader of its position. An appropriate tool to support an argument is visual semiotics. It allows the researcher to look at the signs, both image and words, regarding how people and events are classified and categorised.

2. Discourse practice

This dimension refers to the interpretation of the production and consumption of text and ultimately relies on the concept of intertextuality. The texts are shaped by discourse practice within which they are consumed. The 'media-maker decides how they wish to produce the text to fit the mould or space they represent (Janks, 1998). They require a particular expectation, which confirms or challenges the status quo. For instance, Twitter users chose to respond to #iwanttovotebut humorously. The use of humour is important here as it symbolises power and mockery or the critiques of the political system/institutions.

3. Socio-cultural practice

Socio-cultural practice refers to the broad context in which the text is produced and received – the wider society and societal practices circulated by the text (Tomaselli, 2018: 242). The political element of this study provides a situational context, which would require a discussion on the landscape of South African politics, its democracy, and the role young people play in a democratic country and how they are represented.

Memes are an emerging form of discourse currently prevalent in online discussions and communications (Shifman, 2013). Therefore it is appropriate for this research to critically analyse memes as it represents forms of communication, cultural and ideological content. This research aims to address how these Twitter memes reflect politics in South Africa that have potentially affected decisions to vote. The CDA will enable an in-depth understanding of how political discourse expresses knowledge and attitude shared.

Intertextuality

The concept of intertextuality was first introduced by Julia Kristeva (1986), who maintains that discourse and textual analysis are dependent on the network of prior texts and discourses (Adjei, 2013). The concept of intertextuality is the instrument behind interpreting the cultural meaning and discovering the meaning behind texts. Understanding the concept of intertextuality can invite new and rich interpretations of the content of #iwanttovotebut memes.

In creating a meme, the meaning of the original image or text is modified by other texts/images, thereby acquiring new connotations that may be marked by irony, sarcasm and blunt criticism (Adjei, 2013). Intertextuality occurs when humour, for instance, is used to strengthen underlying messages. Intertextual satire is present in memes as it refers to a form of expression where humour, irony, exaggeration, or ridicule is used to expose and criticise people (Shifman, 2013).

Culture and ideology are constructed through text (Nolte & Jordaan, 2011: 1). Within texts, meaning is co-created with the person who receives it; in other words, the recipient or audience finishes the sentences or meaning. It is up to the reader or audience to make the connection between texts. Intertextuality is a social construction whereby people understand texts with the same conceptual map (Bloom, 1993: 305). The social construction of intertextuality occurs within cultural ideology, which constrains what and how texts are juxtaposed (Bloom, 1993: 306). In the context of intertextuality, reading, analysing, understanding, and interpreting texts depends on being aware of other related texts (Laineste & Voolaid, 2016: 28).

Transitivity Analysis

The transitivity analysis introduces the reader to the concept of language representing the world. A language is a powerful tool that enables people to build a mental picture of the concept of 'reality,' which consists of the things that happen in the world that people can feel (Hopper & Thompson, 1980). Transitivity is defined by six different processes or kinds of expressions recognised in language structures; material processes, verbal processes, mental processes, relational processes, behavioural processes, and existential processes

(Janks, 1997). The majority of the processes expressed and identified in the texts were material, mental, and relational.

The material process refers to doing and happening that is identified using verbs (Janks, 1997). The concept of mental processes relates to the expressions of thoughts and feelings through verbs to describe people's thoughts and feelings (Alfiana, 2012: 55). The relational process is an abstract concept that refers to the relationship among entities or persons. It is often used to refer to the identification and attribution of persons or entities (Alfiana, 2012: 55).

Transitivity analysis involves identifying the process pattern of clauses, which can be used to identify the roles and responsibilities of the participants (Dryer, 2007). In the memes analysed, the main participants are the voter, the government, political parties/politicians, and IEC. The transitivity analysis can identify the expectations of democracy and government, which suggest that the people expect the government and the political parties to deliver on their promise of providing a safe and secure environment for all citizens.

Thompson's modes of ideological operation

The analysis of ideology is primarily concerned with how symbolic forms intersect with relations of power and how meaning is mobilised in the social world and bolsters individuals or groups who occupy positions of power. (Thompson, 1990:56). Thompson (1984; 1990) has identified five general modes of ideology that can operate seamlessly. These modes are legitimation, dissemination, unification, fragmentation, and reification (Janks, 1998).

Legitimation is a process that involves establishing a relationship of domination. This process is usually achieved through three strategies: rationalisation, universalisation, and narrativisation (Janks, 1998; Ferguson, 2009). Rationalisation is a strategy used to justify an argument and involves rationalising complex constructs or systems. Narrativisation is a strategy used to rationalise an argument. In narrativisation, stories are used to introduce ideas and constructs that are universal. Stories are also used to stimulate social constructs and guide communities (Janks, 1998; Ferguson, 2009). Universalisation is a strategy used to introduce new ideas. Dissimulation is a process of concealing or disguising unpleasant

actions or events (Janks, 1998; Ferguson, 2009). Usually, euphemism refers to the process of disguising unpleasant actions or events.

Unification and fragmentation are both processes that seek to unite people for ideological purposes (Janks, 1998; Ferguson, 2009). In the former, the goal is to create a collective identity, while in the latter, it is to divide people into factions and rule. Thompson (1990) offers the concept of language standardisation to unite various communities. This concept of unity can be used to create a collective identity and dissimulate inequality. Non-linguistic examples include uniforms, flags, and corporate logos.

Reification is the last of Thompson's (1990) modes of operation. The reification process is achieved through various symbolic forms such as naturalisation, passivation, and nominalisation (Janks, 1998; Ferguson, 2009). The former refers to the process of turning a word into a state, while the latter refers to the process of converting a verb into a noun. Naturalisation and externalisation seek to transform what is already known as thematised (Janks, 1998; Ferguson, 2009). The former aims to make the world more natural, while the latter aims to make it more complex.

The following chapter presents the analysis of the texts using the framework described above. It will begin with a thematic analysis in order to make some kind of thematic sense of the memes sampled. Furthermore, this will continue to describe the formal features of the images and their main participants, as well as the semiotic resources that are activated using Kress and van Leeuwen's (1996) visual grammar. Fairclough's (1989) approach to CDA and Thompson's (1990) modes of operation of ideology through language is also used to explore the construct of certain meanings.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESEARCH AND ANALYSIS

Introduction

This chapter analyses the #iwanttovotebut memes leading to the 2019 South African general election. The analysis will draw on the relevant literature summarised in Chapter two and the research methodology of the textual analysis presented in Chapter three. The analysis is presented in four parts:

Firstly, a thematic analysis is conducted, tabulated, and presented. From the analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2013), core themes in the memes are identified. Secondly, Kress and van Leeuwen's (1996) three metafunctions of visual communication are used to describe and analyse the tweets from each theme (as in Appendix 1). These enable the establishment of the semiotic resources used in the memes to create potential meanings. Thirdly, Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) (Thompson, 1993; Fairclough, 1998) is used to examine the construction of democracy in memes, which can uncover the sentiments expressed by young South Africans concerning the 2019 general election and democracy in general. Lastly, Thompson's modes of ideological operations in #iwanttovotebut explore how symbolic forms can create and reinforce relations of domination to understand the social interaction of the memes.

Most memes are constructed in the same way. At the top of the tweet is the avatar²⁴ or profile of the person who created the meme. Below the avatar or profile is the caption or text with the hashtag (#iwanttovotebut). The hashtag makes the opening phrase express a personal reason for not voting, followed by a still image or an animated gif. The caption of the image is in a San Serif Twitter font. There is text in the bottom part of some images, usually using a relatively large San Serif font with a drop shadow, presumably to make it more readable.

²⁴ An avatar is an image, icon or character that depicts or represents a particular person or organisation managing the social media page or profile.

Part One: Thematic analysis

The thematic analysis provides surface clues to the circumstances surrounding the #iwanttovotebut thread (Braun & Clarke, 2013). The beginning of this analysis entails familiarisation with the contents of the #iwanttovotebut tweets. The familiarisation of the memes helped identify potential patterns and the relationships between the memes selected for analysis.

The first 100 memes posted on Twitter on 6 May 2019 were selected and analysed, and ten themes were identified, created and codified. Five frequent themes listed in table 1 were selected for further analysis. Two memes from each of the first five themes listed in table 1 were randomly selected for analysis. Therefore, in total, ten memes are analysed, as can be seen in Appendix 1. For ease of identification, the memes selected for analysis are referred to as Figures 1-10, as shown in Table 1 below. All 100 memes are in appendix 2.

The selected content of the #iwanttovotebut memes dealt with the following themes:

Table 1: Categorise selected memes into themes:

	CODES	THEMES	Number of memes coded per the theme	Memes selected for analysis (As seen in Appendix 1)
1	“no/can’t vote online” “I wanna vote online” “I can’t do it on my phone” “I’m not using my petrol... unless they uber for me” “Hate standing on a long queue” “They don’t provide us with food at voting stations” “Ink on my thumb... no no” “I don’t want to spoil my manicure” “mark our nails” “no door to door voting stations”	VOTING INCONVENIENCE Description: Voting is too arduous, mainly when there are alternatives such as door-to-door voting or online voting.	18	Figure 1: “DO BETTER” gif Figure 2: Ruined manicure
2	“Aren’t convincing” “should be in jail” “supposed to protect us” “Failed”	LACK OF TRUST Description: The government’s corruption and financial mismanagement have led people to distrust governing parties.	17	Figure 3: Politicians are trash Figure 4: Poor progress

	<p>“Unfulfilled/empty promises” “not honest” “Can’t be trusted” “Don’t trust” “liars” “Steal money” “Corruption/corrupt” “Bribery” “...people...voting for live in mansions”</p>			
3	<p>“experience” “work/job experience” “unemployed” “job” “Apply/applied for job” “After/out of varsity”</p>	<p>UNEMPLOYMENT</p> <p>Description: The youth constitute a large portion of the unemployed population.</p>	16	<p>Figure 5: Youth unemployment</p> <p>Figure 6: Unemployment 2.0</p>
4	<p>“I don’t know which party to vote for” “No connection” “no party I identify with” “I’m confused”</p>	<p>NONPARTISANISM</p> <p>Description: Voters cannot identify with any political parties, as none of the parties responds to voters’ needs.</p>	13	<p>Figure 7: Judge Judy for Justice</p> <p>Figure 8: Indecisive, Baby</p>
5	<p>“Quality of public education” “RDP” “Homeless” “water” “load shedding” “potholes”</p>	<p>SERVICE DELIVERY</p> <p>Description: The failure of the government to provide basic needs to citizens.</p>	10	<p>Figure 9: Electricity won’t be back</p> <p>Figure 10: RDP denied</p>
6	<p>“They only remember us when they want us to vote” “Only when they need....” “Leaders will forget us” “After voting” “After the elections.” “manipulate” “they want votes to stay in power”</p>	<p>VOTER MANIPULATION</p> <p>Description: Politicians manipulate the public by giving promises to the public in the lead-up to the election. Soon after, the promises are not followed up, nor are they fulfilled.</p>	9	
7	<p>“I don’t (care)” “I don’t think it matters” “I’m busy minding my own business” “not inspired” “...(un)motivated” “I have no reason” “not registered” “didn’t register”</p>	<p>DISINTEREST IN VOTING</p> <p>Description: People are not interested in voting.</p>	6	

8	<p>“No change” “I don’t want to vote for change that never comes”</p>	<p>LACK OF SOCIO-ECONOMIC CHANGE</p> <p>Description: Economic stagnation. People live in the same circumstances that they did under the Apartheid regime.</p>	5	
9	<p>“The reality is this...” “making people rich”</p>	<p>INEQUALITY BETWEEN CITIZEN AND POLITICIAN</p> <p>Description: The standards of living between politicians and citizens are vastly different.</p>	3	
10	<p>“...taste of their own medicine” “not/won’t voting” “taste of empty promise”</p>	<p>VOTER DISOBEDIENCE</p> <p>Description: Citizens refuse to vote as a form of resistance.</p>	3	
TOTAL MEMES CODED			100	

Part 2: Visual Social Semiotics (VSS)

The visual social semiotics (VSS) approach to visual communication enables the description of the images by identifying the participants (people and objects) in visual elements, how the image relates to the audience, and how the participants intersect with one another to uncover various meaning potentials in the text (Kress and van Leeuwen, 1996). The three metafunctions of visual communication – the representational, interactive, and compositional – can be used to establish the semiotic resources that the producers of texts, such as the #iwanttovotebut memes, use to create meaning (Kress and van Leeuwen, 1996).

In multimodal texts such as the #iwanttovotebut memes, the images possess meaning potential, expressing feelings that the memers may have difficulty describing or explaining in the text. Visual and verbal elements not only hold meaning potential but also create social interaction with the viewer/audience. The social interactions between represented participants (RPs) and viewers are influenced by various factors, such as the gaze, distance, and angle relative to the viewers. In addition, images have a range of symbolic attributes or props that add to the meaning potential, such as the picture frames in Figure 1, hands in Figure 2, building walls shown in Figure 6, the cups in Figure 8, and the grass in the background of Figure 10 (Harrison, 2003: 50).

All images selected for analysis use specific common compositional semiotic resources like colour and salience and are photographic pictures. Two of the images are animated Gifs²⁵ (Figures 1 and 7), and these will act in similar ways to images with narrative processes – but it will accentuate those effects. In all 10 images, the human-represented participants (RPs) dominate the picture that is explored to describe the meaning potential in the images. (One exceptional image in Figure 2, in which the human RP is only partially represented by the overlapping fingers of her two hands.) The human RPs identified in these images are primarily adults, with two exceptions – a toddler in Figure 5 and a baby in Figure 8 – and most of them are people of colour (once again, there are two exceptions – the woman in Figure 7 and the man in Figure 9). All the human RPs in the analysed images are situated more or less in the centre or just off-centre of the image. For instance, a person’s body may be angled away from the viewer’s plane, while their head may be turned towards it (Figures 4, 5, 7, 8 and 9). There is only one human participant in all of the images, and so most of them exhibit minimal action, except for Figure 1.

Kress and van Leeuwen’s representational metafunction has two fundamental processes: the narrative and the conceptual processes (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996; Harrison, 2003: 50), which describe how images can be active even if there is only one human participant.

The narrative structure (those in which there is some event, action, or process) of images refers to vectors created by the eye line, a pointed limb, or objects that connect the human RPs within the frame and direct the gaze of the viewer (Harrison, 2003: 51). Figures 1, 4, and 9 show that the vectors and eye lines between human RPs create action. The vectors create a focal point or goal to tell the story in each image. The vectors direct the audience to the human RPs and some unfolding activities and events positioned in or outside the frame (the goal). This tends to help constrain the meaning of the image. Thus, in Figure 1, the human RP directs the viewer’s eye to another RP in the bottom right-hand corner. This, when read in conjunction with the text in the centre of the image/gif “DO BETTER,” and the other signs like the expression on her face and the text above the image, connotes a person scolding or reprimanding a child. In this case, based on the “@IECSouthAfrica,” one can assume that the ‘child’ is the IEC and that they are being told off for not organising

²⁵ In terms of moving images, the concept of modality is fully applicable to both moving and non-moving images.

an alternative option for online voting. The effect of the narrative process is accentuated by the movement of the arm in the animation of the GIF.

The intertextual and incongruent use of text and images in memes creates humorous situations that enhance meaning. In such instances, meaning is drawn from one place to another through the deliberate use of images and intertextuality. A strong intertextual reference is made in Figure 1 to complete the meaning intended. The main RP is Rainbow Johnson, portrayed by American actress Tracee Ellis Ross, in a comedy series, *Black-ish* (Model et al., 2020). This character is usually described as fun, friendly and witty, and is generally politically opinionated. The RPs face is recognisable and familiar, making the meme more approachable and accepting to the viewers or recipients.

In Figure 4, the vectors direct the audience to a man in the chair holding an enamel cup in the centre frame. In a South African context, the cup connotes poverty as that type of enamel cup is cheap and old and can imply slow progress in South Africa's socio-economic development (Jansen, 2019: 257). The hand touching the face (also seen in Figures 7 and 8) can symbolise a sense of deep thought, sadness, frustration, or disappointment. The RP's eye line is directed outside the frame, away from the viewer. The meaning created in Figure 4 expresses a sense of loneliness and sadness. In Figure 9, the colour saturation of the red shirt directs attention to the RP (the person-centred in the frame). The raised eyebrows and frowned mouth, coupled with his shrugged shoulders and hands gestured in the air, suggest a sense of confusion and elicitation.

The intertextual reference in Figure 4 refers to a high paid reality personality, Judge Judy Sheindlin. Judge Judy is a popular television program streamed internationally that has been active since 1996 and provides a unique opportunity to see the civil legal process in action (Kohm, 2006: 694). The show has been active for 25 seasons as Judge Judy is known for her quick, witty, intelligent, humorous and expressive response to parties in her courtroom. A familiar face in Figure 4 makes the meme relatable to the viewer.

The remaining 7 figures are conceptual in nature. This means that the participants are not linked through vectors and therefore are not represented as doing something. Instead, they are being or meaning something due to having specific characteristics or constituents (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996; Harrison, 2003: 50). In such cases, the meaning is less constrained and more open to interpretation; thus, viewers will need to rely more on the accompanying text to comprehend the meaning.

The social interactions between the human RPs and the viewers are created through gaze, frame, distance, bodily gestures, and facial expressions. Four of the 10 images (Figures 3, 6, 9, and 10) portray a frontal-angle view of the human RP's face, creating attachment and involvement with the viewer. The stance, expressions, and postures of the RPs can "demand" or "offer" something from or to the viewer (Kress and van Leeuwen, 1996: 120). The demand is made when the RP looks directly at the viewer (as in Figures 3, 6, and 10). Seven images analysed are offers (Figure 1, 2, 4, 5, 7, 8, and 9). The offer is made when the RP looks past or away from the viewer, creating less intimacy between the RP and the viewer. An offer draws attention to the participant as objects of contemplation, as though they were specimens of their thoughts (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996: 120-127). An offer makes it more comfortable for the viewer to look at the RP.

The facial expressions and gestures of the RP add to the demand. For instance, In Figure 10, the smile or smirk expresses a sense of cheekiness and invites the viewer to enter the relationship of social affinity (Jung, 2015: 51). The cold stare of Figure 6 relates to the inferiority of whoever the cold stare is directed at. The direction of the gaze creates meaning potential in the images. The participant's gaze demands that the viewer enter a relationship with them.

In Figures 2, 3, 5, 6, 7, 8, and 10, there is very little interaction between elements/RPs in the image. The image lacks action due to the minimal vectors; thus, the meaning potentials are more open to interpretation than those in which we see narrative processes operating. The human RPs provide clues to the viewers that enable them to understand the image and the concept it stands for (Harrison, 2003: 50). Therefore, the focal point is the facial expressions and bodily gestures that possess the most meaning potential. The images are highly expressive and personal – as indicated in the close-up of the face. The facial expressions are reactional and dramatic. In Figures 1, 3, 4, 5, 7 and 9, the relationship is signified by facial expressions. The RPs face indicates intensity, as the eyes are either frowned and closed (Figure 8) or looking down in 'shyness' (Figure 5). The frontal view of the face creates tension in the image and holds viewers' interest. In Figures 1, 4, and 9, the viewer can interpret their meanings as sadness, frustration, disappointment, or anger, as expressed through bodily gestures and facial expressions. Most of the facial expressions and bodily gestures in the Figures create negative connotations, such as the frowning mouth in Figures 1, 3, 4, 6, 8, and 9.

Non-verbal languages such as bodily gestures and facial expressions add to meaning potential. For instance, the attention to the RP's bodily gestures and facial expressions creates much information that adds to the story's narrative. It can be a defensive gesture or a visual invitation to come closer to the viewer. A gesture can be made by a hand to the viewer. Finger-pointing (Figure 1) grabs the viewer's attention, and a defensive gesture would suggest staying away, for example, cold stare in Figure 8.

The placement, gaze, and attitude of the human RPs in an image create either horizontal or vertical angles that influence the power relations and intimacy between the RPs and the viewer (Harrison, 2003: 54). The horizontal angles of an image refer to the frontal projections and framing of the RP. A horizontal angle creates a sense of involvement between the RPs and the audience. In all 10 images, the RP is presented more or less frontally relative to the viewer. This frontal angle creates more involvement between the RP and the viewer. The vertical angle creates relations of power between the RP and the viewer. For instance, if the RP is looking up at the viewer (Figures 5, 8, and 9), the viewer is in a superior position.

The detachment between the viewer and subject contradicts the notion and feeling of intimacy created by the close-up shot. In Figures 4 and 9, the lack of eye contact positions the viewer on the side-lines – passively observing. This contrasts with the social intimacy of the frame and the angle of the image. The viewer feels close to the RP while also feeling uninvited – creating tension – and objectifies the RP. The point of view imposes power differentials and can position the subject as weak or powerful. The point of view creates interactive meaning and establishes viewer relationships.

Most of the images are structured to create an intimate and personal relationship with the viewer. The proximity and field of vision of the RP and the viewer determine the social relations, as the intimate distance (Figures 2 and 6) between the RP and viewer creates emotions of attachment or detachment. Moreover, most of the RPs are not interactive with the viewer. The eye contact created in Figures 6 and 10 allows the viewer to become immersed in the image. The nature of an offer enables viewers to become immersed in an image. The close personal distance (such as in Figures 3, 5, 7, 8, and 10) allows the viewer to become involved, and the image contributes to the storytelling process. In close shot or medium shot images, the viewer is presented with an imaginary relation to the participant.

The background of the images give the viewer contextual information; for instance, in Figure 1 – the background creates some sort of domestic scene, and in Figure 9, the background of the green field establishes that the participant is a referee. This is also contextualised through the text; “referee” on the shirt of the human RP (centre frame). Therefore the context helps tell the story. With the close-up frames, the size of the RP is enlarged and creates a way of salience. Many RPs take up the entire frame of the image, which enables the RP to capture the viewer’s attention (Harrison, 2003: 57), and the facial expressions and bodily gestures are emphasised. The close-up frame of the RP provides no additional context as the focal point is directed to the RPs facial expression and bodily gesture.

The purpose of the visual social semiotic analysis (VSS) in this study is to recognise the meaning potentials that the images contain. The semiotic resources activated in the images used in the memes express feelings of contempt, anger, disappointment, frustration, confusion and sadness. In choosing these images, the memers use a kind of visual shorthand to express these emotions related to the 2019 general election and their decision to withhold their votes. The use of VSS is largely descriptive, and in order to get a deeper understanding of what the memers are saying about their attitudes to, and relationships with, democracy, some aspects of critical discourse analysis (CDA) are used.

Part 3: Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA)

The multimodal analysis described above provides a systematic way of studying the #iwanttovotebut memes to reveal hidden meanings. Still, it does not allow one to understand the social interpretation of the memes adequately. Thus, to adequately answer the question posed in this study – “what sentiments towards the 2019 general election in South Africa are represented in the memes” – a critical discourse analysis is conducted, concentrating on an examination of the patterns of transitivity (Janks, 1997: 336) apparent in the memes. These are presented below in Table 2.

Table 2: Transitivity analysis of the #iwanttovotebut memes

FIGURE	ACTIVITY	TYPE OF PROCESSES	PARTICIPANTS	EXPECTATION	GOAL
1	Vote Want Vote online Make online voting available	Material Mental Material Material	Citizen Citizen Citizen IEC	To vote To vote Vote online	Goal 1: Vote Goal 2: IEC is responsible for taking voting online
2	Vote Risk Ruining	Material Mental Material	Citizen Citizen IEC	To vote To protect manicure	Goal 1: Vote Goal 2: Provide something that is worth risking 'my' manicure for
3	Vote Trust	Material Relational	Citizen Government	To vote The government needs to be trusted	Goal 1: Vote Goal 2: Government is responsible for building and maintaining trust
4	Vote Living	Material Relational	Citizen Politicians/citizens	To vote The expectation of a certain level of equality and empathy from politicians	Goal 1: Vote Goal 2: politicians to be concerned about voters at least as much as themselves
5	Vote Graduate employment	Material Relational	Citizen Government	To vote Expectation to provide employment or conditions for employment to be possible	Goal 1: Vote Goal 2: Employment. Tertiary education guarantees employment
6	Vote Graduate Employment	Material Relational	Citizen Government	To vote Expectation to provide employment or conditions for	Goal 1: Vote Goal 2: Employment

				employment to be possible	
7	Vote Identify	Material Mental	Citizen Political Party	To vote To have political parties who work to identify with their voters	Goal 1: Vote Goal 2: To have a relationship with a political party
8	Vote Know	Material Mental Relational	Citizen Political party	To vote To have political parties who I know have my interests at heart	Goal 1: Vote Goal 2: Have a relationship with a political party
9	Vote Sure/Certainty Lie	Material relational mental	Citizen Citizen Political party	To vote Parties lie to get you to vote for them	Goal 1: Vote Goal 2: Have political parties that can be trusted Goal 3: A regular supply of electricity
10	Vote Give	Material Material	Citizen Government	Government lives up to expectations.	Goal 1: Vote Goal 2: Government which provides for its citizens

Table 2 presents a transitivity analysis for the #iwanttovotebut memes and organises the data according to the participants identified in the table: citizen, IEC, government, and political parties/politicians.

Table 2 reveals that the three dominant processes in the texts are material, relational and mental – and these processes provide a mechanism for exploring how the memers use language to discursively construct how they understand democracy and governance and their role in this discourse. The memers understanding of democracy/governance stems from their social, economic, and political experience with government and political parties, expressed through the text. In these texts, the primary process that constructs the citizen is a material process – which is to vote; this is derived from the #iwanttovotebut hashtag. The material processes construct participants with particular agency and capacities to act or do certain things. Since the citizens are constructed primarily with a single material process,

the implication is that the only agency they perceive themselves as having in constructing a democracy/governance discourse is to vote.

The material processes are not only associated with the citizens. Some are also related to the other participants. For example, the IEC is also constructed with material processes associated with delivering a more convenient election process, i.e. online voting (Figure 1) and less frivolous, as Figure 2 suggests (the marking of fingernails as evidence of having voted could *ruin* the manicure). The difference between these material processes associated with the citizen and the IEC is constructing specific agency, responsibility and expectation. The texts suggest that the citizens expect the IEC to fulfil certain roles which are not under the citizens' control.

The texts construct the government and political parties with material processes and mental and relational processes. These processes help understand how the texts construct the responsibilities relating to governance, trust in government and political parties, employment, and service delivery, as the sole responsibility of these entities, and completely external to the role and responsibility of the citizen. The citizens perceive politicians and political parties as untrustworthy and lacking in care and empathy, but it also suggests that citizens want to have a relationship with a political party. The political parties are responsible for creating this relationship, who must prove that they have the citizens' best interests at heart and will fulfil their expectations. The expectation expressed in the memes is that people want to have a good relationship with their elected officials, but the lack of trust in this relationship undermines the credibility of democracy.

The texts of #iwanttovotebut have revealed that the memers are constructing democracy/governance with limited and delineated roles and responsibilities of the government, political parties, and themselves as citizens. The texts show that the memers see themselves as having one role in a democracy (which is to vote). Everything else related to that is the responsibility of the IEC, government, and political parties/politicians – as they are the only ones responsible for and are in a position to meet the citizens' needs and expectations within a democracy.

A transitivity analysis shows that the memers establish and delineate clear roles and responsibilities for themselves, politicians and governments. It helps identify how the memers construct their understanding of democracy/governance in South Africa. To further

develop this idea, Thompson's (1990) modes of operation of ideology provide a framework that supports such an argument.

Part 4: Thompson's modes of ideological operations

Thompson's (1990) work focuses on how symbolic forms operate to create and/or reinforce relations of domination and helps to understand the social interpretation of the memes. Table 3 summarises Thompson's modes of operation of ideology through the language in the #iwanttovotebut memes selected for analysis.

Table 3: Thompson's modes of operation of ideology in the #Iwanttovotebut memes.

MODE	STRATEGY	EXAMPLE FROM MEMES
LEGIMITATION	Rationalisation	There is a lack of service delivery, lack of jobs. It is the government's responsibility to make this happen. Therefore, the government is not worth voting for – (Examples Figures 3, 4, 5, 6, and 9)
	Universalisation	There is an alienation from political parties and a lack of trust in politicians – therefore, politicians are not worth voting for (Examples Figures 7 and 8)
		The electoral process is an inconvenience as people stand in long queues to vote when they could possibly vote online (Examples Figures 1 and 2)
	Narrativisation	Elections are supposed to be a mechanism for serving the interests of all, but in reality, they only serve the interests of a few politicians (Examples Figures 4)
DISSIMULATION	Displacement	N/A
	Euphemism	Voting is a democratic act, and high voter turnout projects a healthy democracy.
	Trope	N/A
UNIFICATION	Standardisation	Synecdoche – Zuma stands in for corruption and corrupt politicians; voting stands for democracy, etc. (Example Figure 3). Metaphor in Figure 3 (trash emoji).
	Symbolism of Unity	Democracy is offered as the norm, and therefore, voting is offered as the normal form of participation by citizens in this system (#Iwanttovotebut)
FRAGMENTATION	Differentiation	Participation in elections is something that ALL SA citizens do – hides the reality of a highly divided society. The rich and the poor stand in the same queue to vote.
	Expurgation of the other	Citizens vs. politicians.
REIFICATION	Naturalisation	Zuma – corruption and corrupt politicians. Zuma is constructed as the enemy in Figure 3
		Democracy, voting and resistance are normal and natural.

	Externalisation	<p>It is the political parties/politicians fault that the citizens do not identify with them. The ‘problems’ are external to the citizen or voter and therefore justify not voting. The blame lies with the government or political parties/politicians. Problems identified; not voting, corruption, incompetence, and unemployment.</p> <p>The externalisation of such practice blames the government and political parties for whatever reason they are given for not voting.</p>
	Nominalisation/Passivisation	N/A.

An analysis of Legitimation:

Through Legitimation, relations of domination may be established and maintained by being represented as legitimate (Thompson, 1990: 60-67; Janks, 1998: 202); this is done by representing certain symbolic forms through rationalisation, universalisation, and narrativisation.

The use of rationalisation in #iwanttovotebut

Rationalisation is a strategy that involves the creation of a chain of reasoning that aims to justify or defend a set of social or political institutions, rules, or decisions associated with them (Thompson, 1990: 60-67; Janks, 1998: 202). There are several examples of rationalisation in the #iwanttovotebut memes where memers construct chains of reasoning to justify their decisions not to vote.

Firstly, within Figures 3, 4, 5, 6 and 9, the memers’ construction of democracy/governance makes the government and politicians entirely responsible for providing citizens with socio-economic security, including service delivery and employment. Secondly, citizens do not “identify” (Figure 7) with any political party and are indecisive about choosing whom to vote for, as suggested in Figure 8. Thirdly, the electoral process is inconvenient for people as they stand in long queues to cast their votes. As shown in Figure 1, online voting is an alternative suggestion for creating and propelling more citizens to vote.

The use of universalisation in #iwanttovotebut

Universalisation is where institutional arrangements that serve some individuals' interests are typically represented as serving the interest of all (Thompson, 1990: 60-67; Janks, 1998: 202). As Figure 4 suggests, the elections – which are represented as serving the interests of all South Africans – do not serve the interests of the citizen, as there are few socio-economic benefits for the citizens who vote for their respective political parties. As Figure 8 may suggest, the elections serve the interest of the politician and political parties. The memers expressed the lack of opportunities for citizens, such as service delivery and employment. There has been slow progress in housing development (as suggested in Figure 8) and an increase in the unemployment rate (as indicated in Figures 5 and 6).

An analysis of Dissimulation:

In Thompson's (1990: 60-67) understanding, dissimulation is the process of obscuring, hiding or even denying relationships of domination. They can also be sustained by being represented in a way that distracts attention away from or downplays existing relationships. Ideological dissimulation is expressed in various symbolic forms using different strategies, namely, displacement and trope (Thompson, 1990: 60-67; Janks, 1998: 203).

The use of Displacement in #iwanttovotebut

Displacement is a term used to refer to how one individual or object refers to another individual in such a way that a positive connotation replaces a negative connotation of the term (Thompson, 1990: 60-67; Janks, 1998: 202). For instance, voting is a patriotic act that suggests that a higher voter turnout is a primary indicator of a healthy democracy; this effectively conceals all other issues that might threaten democracy. The vocabulary and language of the hashtag (#iwanttovotebut), in Figures 1-10, implies that the memers understand that it is their patriotic duty to vote and are aware that not voting may impact what they understand democracy to be.

The use of Trope in #iwanttovotebut

The use of language or symbolic forms is often figurative. One such form, synecdoche, is a figurative use of language that refers to a part of something standing in for a whole (Janks, 1998: 203). The use of synecdoche, seen in Figure 3, where the memer uses an image of the former president, Jacob Zuma, to stand in for all corrupt politicians. The use of metaphor (when a word or phrase that is ordinarily assigned to one meaning is assigned to another, thereby making an implicit comparison) (Foshaugen, 2004: 191) in one of the texts which represent politicians using the trash emoji – suggests that politicians are little different to common waste and are rejected or criticised as worthless.

An analysis of Unification:

The unification strategy refers to maintaining relations of domination by constructing a form of unity and collective identity that unites individuals despite their differences. There are two strategies in the modes of unification; standardisation and the symbolism of unity (Thompson, 1990: 60-67; Janks, 1998: 205-206).

The use of Standardisation in #iwanttovotebut

Standardisation constructs social processes – such as voting – as an inclusive process and uses it to create a collective South African identity (Janks, 1998: 205). Within this study, the wording of the hashtag #iwanttovotebut constructs voting as the normal mode of participation by citizens in a democratic system, in which every person's vote has equal weight and power and which creates equal access to the expression of political views and positions.

The use of Symbolism of Unity in #iwanttovotebut

This strategy refers to the symbols used to create a united group with a collective identity (Thompson, 1990: 60-67; Janks, 1998: 202). Participating in elections is constructed as being a vital part of being a South African, but it also hides the reality of a divided society. Thus, voting is a symbol of a collective South African identity where all citizens, regardless of their

socio-economic status and welfare, stand in the same queue to vote for leaders who represent them and their ideas.

An analysis of Fragmentation:

Fragmentation is a process that involves separating/dividing people from groups that can threaten dominant groups. The strategies of this mode include differentiation and expurgation of the other (Thompson, 1990: 60-67; Janks, 1998: 205).

The use of Differentiation in #iwanttovotebut

Differentiation emphasises the characteristics or differences that disunite (Thompson, 1990: 60-67; Janks, 1998: 204). Within the #iwanttovotebut memes, the participants, citizens, and politicians are differentiated and made distinct in terms of duties, responsibilities, and expectations of the respective participants within a democracy. The aspects that disunite citizens and politicians are lack of employment for citizens (Figures 5 and 6), identification with the politicians (Figures 7 and 8), and poor service delivery for citizens (Figures 9 and 10).

The use of Expurgation of the other in #iwanttovotebut

The strategy of expurgation of the other refers to the construction of an enemy as to why individuals are called to unite and resist (Thompson, 1990: 60-67; Janks, 1998: 205). Jacob Zuma, former South African President, is constructed as the enemy in Figure 3. Zuma represents a corrupt political system and creates another against whom we can unite. It also serves to establish a reasoned argument for not participating in such a system.

An analysis of Reification:

Reification describes a historical state of affairs that is neither permanent nor natural. It is done by suppressing or obliterating any event or process that has historical importance. The strategies explored include naturalisation and externalisation (Thompson, 1990: 60-67; Janks, 1998: 206).

The use of Naturalisation in #iwanttovotebut

This strategy refers to the representation of an event as if it is natural and normal (Janks, 1998: 206). Within a democracy, elections are represented as a natural event in which the citizens have the right to vote, and resist political parties and governance that does not meet their expectations nor represent their political views. The democratic system is not questioned; instead, socio-economic expectations are constructed, as suggested in #iwanttovotebut.

The use of Externalisation in #iwanttovotebut

The use of externalisation creates customs and traditions so that they are accepted as norms for all times and are unchanging despite their historical nature (Janks, 1998: 206).

The practice of governance places the blame on socio-economic issues on the governments and politicians. Therefore, the memers construct the problems as external to the citizens. Figures 5 and 6, for instance, place the blame for unemployment on government and political parties/politicians. The memes construct the idea that the government is entirely responsible for providing basic services and needs for the citizens.

The above analysis and observations contribute to the argument that text is a vital part of ideology, produced and consumed in various ways. Its role is to provide a vital link between political and cultural practices. For instance, the government and political parties are elected by citizens who vote for the parties that represent their ideas and concerns.

In the #iwanttovotebut memes, much of the expectations and fault for the current socio-economic conditions are placed on politicians, political parties, and governance. Since the memers construct the responsibility for the socio-economic issues that are external to the citizens, the act of not voting is then justified, as the government and political parties are to blame for corruption, incompetent leadership, unemployment; and as a consequence, the lack of voter participation is understandable and defensible.

Discussion

The study examined #iwanttovotebut memes shared on Twitter in the lead-up to the South African general election in 2019. In the media's reporting of this meme, young voters' reluctance to vote was characterised as "apathy" (Gasnolar, 2019). However, my findings indicate that this could more justifiably be understood as disillusionment where their expectations of government and political parties have not been met. Therefore, they feel justified in not participating in their understanding of democracy/governance.

The thematic analysis focused on the various topics and themes identified from the data. The themes are developed through a rigorous process that involves data familiarisation, coding, and identification. Five themes pertaining to the #iwanttovotebut memes were identified and described as follows:

1. Voter inconvenience: Voting is tedious, and alternative methods such as online or door-to-door voting are proposed.
2. Lack of trust: The government's mismanagement and corruption have led to the distrust of governing parties.
3. Unemployment: Youth constitute a large portion of those who are unemployed.
4. Nonpartisanship: Voters do not identify with any political party because none of the parties responds to their needs.
5. Service delivery: The failure of the government to deliver and meet the basic needs of citizens.

These themes served as a basis for further explorations of the sentiments shared by the public in the #iwanttovotebut memes, which suggest that the intention to withhold their vote does not necessarily imply that the people are not interested in politics, but it instead supports the argument that they are disillusioned.

The visual social semiotics analysis identified the meaning potential of the visual materials by focusing on the connection between the images their contents and the viewers. The findings of the VSS analysis suggest that the overall attitude in the images suggests feelings of contempt, anger, disappointment, frustration, despair and sadness – all of which form part of the phases of disillusionment (Niehuis & Bartell, 2006).

Disillusionment occurs when people realise that change may not happen, an optimistic attitude that was once prevalent turns to discouragement and dissatisfaction, and negative reactions begin to surface (Niehuis & Bartell, 2006; Paller, 2013). The feelings of disappointment due to the gap between citizen needs and government performance are expressed and triggered by events like the election period. In the age of digital media, political participation is no longer solely expressed at polling stations, and the public also uses social media platforms, such as Twitter, to express their political opinions and views (Paller, 2013).

In constructing the memes, the memers selected images that helped express their disappointment and dissatisfaction. Much of this was achieved through facial expressions and bodily gestures and the choice of the accompanying text. The image and text worked together to complete the intended meaning of the meme, which is to express their dissatisfaction or disappointment with the incompetence and poor leadership of political parties, politicians, and governance (Wike et al., 2016).

Using CDA enabled the examination of the memes to understand the discursive construction of discourse/governance. Memes are micro-level expressions that can be examined to analyse the macro-level discourses (Ding, 2015: 16). In this construction, the memers understand that in a democracy, there are delimited roles, responsibilities and expectations of each participant. In their view, there are three main participants; citizens, government (and in this case, the IEC as an organ of government), and political parties/politicians. This is consistent with the findings of a study of “*The Discursive Construction of Democracy in the Spanish Press*” (Garcia-Blanco, 2009: 850-851) – a country with a young and fragile democracy such as South Africa. The study conducted by Garcia-Blanco (2009) focused on the construction of democracy in Spanish newspapers and analysed how political practices were portrayed in the articles. Through this, it is believed that political parties and politicians should be the main actors in democratic politics (Garcia-Blanco, 2009: 850). Furthermore, the study suggests that the media's goal is not to create an environment where minorities can easily find acceptance or challenge one another. Instead, it aims to create a space where competing political positions can be debated (Garcia-Blanco, 2009: 851).

This study analysed media texts to understand the construction of democracy/governance, and the #iwanttovotebut texts show how politicians, political parties and the government

have betrayed the citizens and are not performing their responsibilities. Instead, they act to serve the interest of themselves and not the citizens; they do not provide services; and where they do provide them, the quality of service provision has been poor for quite some time since South Africa's democracy (World Bank, 2003: 78). The poor also rely on public services for their basic needs. Alleviating poverty is a basic human right and is the government's responsibility; the failure of the government and politicians to do so invariably causes a rift in the relationship between citizens and government.

The texts illustrate that the citizens desire to have a relationship with political parties - they expect to identify with a political party and build a strong and trusting relationship between citizens and politicians. The inability to do this insinuates that the parties and government are failing the citizens. The responsibility to achieve this identification and relationship is understood to be politicians and the government.

The memers construct the citizen as one who has a single responsibility in a democracy, and that is to vote. Along with that responsibility is the power to withhold their vote, and while the media constructed that as an indication of apathy (Gasnolar, 2019), it is believed that it is an expression of disillusionment and deliberate action to generate public protest.

The memers do not, in any of the texts, question democracy itself. While it is a social construct with alternatives, the memers view, understand and present it as natural, normal and ahistorical. Voting is also not questioned as a significant component and patriotic duty of democracy. Withholding the vote is justified by constructing the government and political parties as those responsible for the unmet goals and expectations. The memers express a desire to vote (in the hashtag #iwanttovotebut), which is key in distinguishing between apathy and disillusionment. The citizens are aware of the importance and significance of not voting. It is a conscious decision to withhold a vote: the decision and action to withhold a vote work against the desire to vote expected within a democracy. Socio-economic and political factors contribute to the decision not to vote expressed in the memes.

The memers understanding and expectations expressed within a democracy require that the government provides for its citizens and lives up to citizens' expectations. The memers create a discursive construction of the government through the texts and emanate their understanding of democracy. The concepts of politics held by citizens (Garcia-Blanco, 2009: 843) are evident in the #iwanttovotebut texts. The conceptions of democracy

constructed in the #iwanttovotebut texts refer to a pragmatic system of actors and a set of values and concepts that define what is desirable, good or correct. The actors (government, political parties/politicians, and the IEC) are expected to act on the demands of the public. The actor's role also shows how the voters' authority is represented. The inability to fulfil citizens' demands, the government, and political parties/politicians are believed to have the potential to improve voter outcomes and voters' attitudes.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION

Political participation is considered a cornerstone of democracy, and the South African democratic constitution encourages inclusivity and guarantees all citizens the right to vote (Davis, 1992: 476). However, within a democracy, citizens also have the right not to vote as there is no legal consequence if citizens choose such an option. With that said, it is out of the norm for citizens not to vote in a country that underwent political strain and oppression (Paller, 2013). Therefore, exploring, investigating, and understanding a drastic decline in voter turnout is fundamental.

This study sought to analyse the discursive construction of democracy/governance in the #iwanttovotebut memes, distributed by young South Africans via Twitter in the lead-up to the 2019 South African general elections, to determine whether the sentiments expressed in the tweets could be understood as voter disillusionment rather than apathy – as reported in several media at the time (Pillay, 2019). A multimodal discourse analysis was conducted to examine the visual and verbal cues in the memes and reveal the memers' understanding of democracy/governance (Spierings, 2020: 2).

The reasons given in the texts for not voting revealed a clear and quite constrained understanding of democracy/governance based on the participant's roles and responsibilities. In the memers' construction of democracy/governance, the citizens have one role, which is to vote. Thereafter all the governance responsibilities fall to the government and its various apparatuses. Furthermore, the responsibilities for relationships between political parties and members (citizens) are the parties, and not the memers'. In none of the texts used in this study, the memers did not criticise the idea of democracy itself nor called for any other form of political regime. Instead, they expressed frustration and dissatisfaction with the political parties and the government within an unquestioned democratic system.

The overall success of a democratic government in South Africa since 1994 is judged by citizens' opinions (freedom of expression) and their role and quality of elections (Kivilu et al., 2005: 1). Democracy is more than a set of rules, regulations, and government institutions. It rests on people's well-understood values and attitudes from various cultures

and backgrounds (Konrad, 2011: 3). The core characteristic of democracy is that governance is participatory, including fair and equal elections (Konrad, 2011: 3). In the texts analysed, the memers constructed democracy/governance based on their roles, responsibilities, and expectations. It showed that good governance and accountability are core principles expected by the memers to build democracy and develop a country. The memers are clear about what they understand by good governance – adequate and consistent service provision, provision of housing, and freedom from corruption.

The #iwanttovotebut texts also reveal that the citizens regard their only role in a democracy as voting; they are aware of the significance of their vote and place the responsibility and reason for going against that expectation on the government and political parties. This is because the government has not met the needs and expectations of the citizens, and therefore, they are justified in not fulfilling their end of the bargain. None of the memes analysed called for any encouragement for participation apart from voting. The fact that they only see a single role for themselves can be attributed to the ANC's systematic disempowerment of civil society since their election to power in 1994. During the 1990s, South African activists and intellectuals began to explore the idea of civil society. They saw it as a way to build a democracy that would be participatory and democratic.

Civil society refers to a space protected by a formal state and guarantees individual freedom and social order (Glaser, 1997: 6). An independent civil society is critical to the success of democracy in developing countries and is a way to counteract the democratic state's power (Glaser, 1997: 6). Civics started their life in the 1970s as groups campaigning for improved living conditions in black townships and to provide opportunities for all citizens. Overthrowing the country's white minority government would enable such opportunity (Glaser, 1997: 6). However, 27 years into its democracy, South Africa still faces many socio-economically challenges and poor government leadership.

There is a need for government to work together with civil society and political parties to develop a comprehensive policy that will address the increasing inequality in the society. This can be done through the establishment of a framework that is people-centric and involves the whole society (Nare & Mataire, 2020: 61). Without social and unity coercion, South Africa's economy will continue to decline. This will, in turn, affect the country's employment opportunities and social development (Nare & Mataire, 2020: 61).

The challenge of good governance conveyed in the #iwanttovotebut campaign includes corruption and a lack of empathy for its citizens. The effects of corruption in South Africa have severely constrained the country's economic development and the quality of governance (Mashele & Qobo, 2017). The incompetent leadership, financial mismanagement, and corruption have also damaged the foundations of democracy and have affected trust in the country. It has also affected the integrity of democracy and eroded the values of a democracy (Pillay, 2004: 586).

The results of the 2019 general elections and the subsequent 2021 local elections²⁶ (Friedman, 2021) in South Africa revealed a deep divide between the country's ruling party and its supporters. The ANC has been the governing party since 1994, but the support for the ANC in elections has steadily declined (IEC, 2014; 2019). Within a democracy, the function of political parties is to enhance the representation of the electorate and to articulate the interests of the citizens (Konrad, 2011: 9). Young voters' lack of participation and support implies that they do not identify with the party because they believe it does not speak for or represent them (Friedman, 2021). Some of the memes reveal that citizens do not identify with political parties, as they do not meet the needs and expectations of the public, and few benefits are granted to them.

Steven Friedman (2021: 1-3) cautions that placing the onus of voter apathy solely at the door of the ANC may be perceived as biased. Making the ANC the sole cause of South Africa's economic and political quagmire allows citizens to absolve themselves of any responsibility for the state's processes having become inefficient and non-representative. However, the primary focus on the ANC is understandable, as they have a long-standing history in South Africa's democracy, where they resembled and represented the interest of all regardless of race and have held the majority of votes for almost three decades (Joubert, 2019: 1-3). In addition, the persistent racial and class differences in South Africa have enabled politicians to avoid being held accountable as they preferentially relate to and

²⁶ South Africa's municipal elections were held on November 1, 2021. The elections will be held for all district, metropolitan, and local municipalities in South Africa's nine provinces (Africa News, 2021). The National results of part (the ward results 2021): ANC 45.06%, DA 21.53%, EFF 10.17% (IEC, 2021). It is worth mentioning here that there doesn't seem to have been an equivalent campaign to the #iwanttovotebut campaign, and this could mean that the disillusionment felt by the public has become apathy as the government has not paid attention to the issues raised in the #iwanttovotebut memes. The 2021 municipal elections may imply that there has been a shift from disillusionment to apathy.

identify with certain groups and individuals who enable them to indulge in their ideological and material needs at the state's expense (McMurry, Martin, Lieberman and de Kadt, 2016: 1-3). My research shows that many of the memes under #iwanttovotebut do lay the blame directly with the ANC as they express grievances about poor socio-economic development. They insist that the ANC is responsible and should be held accountable for this because they have been the ruling party since South Africa became a democratic state in 1994 (Steyn Kotze, 2015). Therefore it is justifiable to emphasise and place the responsibility on the ruling party for citizens' dissatisfactions.

However, voting is only one aspect of democracy that allows citizens a platform to participate and express their political views. Social media platforms provide an alternative means of political participation where citizens can express political sentiments (Bosch, 2017). One such platform – Twitter – allows users to engage with and participate in political discussions and online activism (Bosch, 2017). Young people in South Africa are increasingly using media, such as Twitter, to express their political views and opinions, explore their political identity, and connect with other like-minded individuals (Heiskanen, 2017: 4). In South Africa, online participation is prominent and can be understood as translating to a form of civic engagement.

The use of digital platforms and social media during the Arab Spring encouraged debate about the role of new media in society and their influence on democracy (Moreno-Almeida, 2019: 1126). Various studies have been conducted on the role of social media in the Arab Spring and how social media played a role in collective action (Wolfsfeld et al., 2013: 115). The potential impact of social media on collective action is widely acknowledged and is thus expected to provide various tools for activism, organisation, and mobilisation (Wolfsfeld et al., 2013: 115). Digital platforms have played a significant role and impact on democracy as they facilitate a place for the public to express sentiments to a broader audience. The role of new media in society can be explored through the way users and the public use digital platforms to create and sustain new networks of participation (Moreno-Almeida, 2019: 1126).

Social media can be a platform for protest as it allows people to communicate, organise and express sentiments and drum up support for them. The use of memes serves as a way for the public to connect and, among others, participate in discussions about public issues within a democracy, which can be challenging to achieve through traditional media outlets

(Camargo, 2018:71). The use of memes invites the audience to interact from afar as it invites them into a relationship of social affinity and invites the viewer to understand and view the world that the memer has constructed. The use of and the distribution of memes as a form of political participation in South Africa allows citizens to be more than mere spectators of political events and engage online.

The analysis of #iwanttovotebut memes was prompted by the media's concerns regarding the low voter turnout in 2019 (Pillay, 2019c). Many journalists and researchers characterised the decision of many young people not to vote as an increase in voter "apathy." Although previous studies indicate a growing sense of voter apathy is prominent in the age of social media, there are signs of voter disillusionment as distinct from the apathy that should not be ignored. In a political context, apathy is described as a lack of interest or concern, whereas disillusionment is a feeling of disappointment from the realisation that something is not as good as once believed. The #iwanttovotebut texts exhibited an interest and intent to vote; however, citizens are disappointed in the government for not meeting the expectations and needs that were once promised. The distinction between apathy and disillusionment is identified through desire and intent. The analysis shows that the memers desire to vote (as the #iwanttovotebut text implies), and expressing such desire through a meme suggests a plan to engage and participate in political discussion. Voter disillusionment is one of many reasons contributing to the decline in voter turnout.

There is a growing sense of political disillusionment worldwide (Maher et al., 2018; Fox, 2012), and recent national and local elections in South Africa reflect that (Louw, 2020). The 2019 South African general election marked the lowest voter turnout recorded in South Africa's democracy (Morais, 2019; IEC, 2019). When South Africa achieved democracy, the newly democratically elected party, the ANC, promised citizens a future of security, inclusivity, prosperity, and equality (Brook, 1997: 395); however, little socio-economic change has developed for all citizens, especially those living in impoverished conditions. The initial phase of optimism and enthusiasm in democracy and the political processes that enveloped the country after the 1994 elections has passed, and citizens are entering a phase of realisation where they have become aware that the promises of the ruling ANC are unlikely to be forthcoming (Niehuis & Bartell, 2006; Paller, 2013). The 2019 general election was held in this environment. The #iwanttovotebut memes show that the low voter turnout is a direct consequence of the government's failure to provide basic services to all

citizens, systemic corruption, and the lack of care and empathy expressed by politicians and political parties.

The #iwanttovotebut text indicates that the citizens/members desire to participate in the democratic process and vote, as the word “want” implies; however, the desire does not convert into action. Citizens are disillusioned due to the unfilled role and duty of the government and political parties. The common sentiments expressed that the government and political parties have failed to fulfil citizens’ expectations have led to voter disillusionment. The realisation of the government’s failure to meet citizens’ expectations and the likelihood that they may never do so is at the core of the development of disillusionment in South Africa’s democracy (Paller, 2013; Spierings, 2020; Slaton & Becker, 2000: 199).

Limitations of Study

Although this study offers a thorough analysis of 10 #iwanttovotebut memes selected from a sample of 100 tweets, the study is limited by the process of data collecting and selecting the memes to analyse. Twitter provides some search functionality through its API that allows an automated approach to data retrieval, but this gives access only to a relatively small sample of Twitter data. Researchers can conduct manual keyword searches using Twitter Search but can access only approximately 1 500 tweets or seven days’ worth of data through this method. This represents about 1% of all tweets, which does not allow for randomisation of the sample (Kim et al., 2016; Bosch, 2017: 69).

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Appendix 1

Theme one: Voter Inconvenience

Figure 1: "Do Better" GIF



Figure 2: Ruined Manicure



Theme two: Lack of trust

Figure 3: Politicians are trash



Figure 4: Poor progress



Theme three: Unemployment

Figure 5: Youth Unemployment



Figure 6: Unemployment 2.0



Theme four: Nonpartisanship

Figure 7: Judge Judy for Justice



Figure 8: Indecisive, Baby



Theme five: Service Delivery

Figure 9: Electricity won't be back



Figure 10: RDP denied



















Appendix 2

100 memes categorised into 10 themes

Theme 1: Voter inconvenience

Total memes: 18

<p>1.</p> <p> Thabiso @Thabiso48636308 · May 6, 2019 #IWantToVoteBut I wanna vote online</p>  <p>27 158 911</p>	<p>2.</p> <p> Anele Booii @anele_booi · May 6, 2019 #IWantToVoteBut my voting station is in Pretoria and I'm in Joburg and hell no I'm using my petrol for that unless they uber for me</p>  <p>1 1 1 1</p>
<p>3.</p> <p> Long Lee @Leelikechinese · May 6, 2019 #IWantToVoteBut I hate standing on a long que just to make someone rich without me benefiting from it. 🙄🙄</p>  <p>1 12</p>	<p>4.</p> <p> Vusi @Vusi68489951 · May 6 #IWantToVoteBut the is no online voting 🙄🙄</p>  <p>1 6 21</p>
<p>5.</p> <p> Wakanda Smooches @WSmooches · May 6, 2019 I don't have the strength to stand those long queues. #IWantToVoteBut</p>  <p>3 10</p>	<p>6.</p> <p> Mfana Kajeko @TumisangPitso3 · May 6, 2019 #IWantToVoteBut they don't provide us with food at Voting stations</p>  <p>1 6</p>
<p>7.</p> <p> IG:Tsholofelo Sematie @Tsholo_Sematle · May 6, 2019 #IWantToVoteBut You can't vote online</p>  <p>1 1 1 1</p>	<p>8.</p> <p> Nthabile @DaReal_02 · May 6, 2019 #IWantToVoteBut I can't do it on my phone 🙄</p>  <p>2 1 1</p>

9.



10.



11.



12.



13.



14.



15.



16.



17.



Pam_News @Pam_News · May 6, 2019

#IWantToVoteBut we should really be able to vote online by now
@IECSouthAfrica



🗨️ 🔄 ❤️ 2 📤

18.



Mambosh @Foloti_T · May 6, 2019






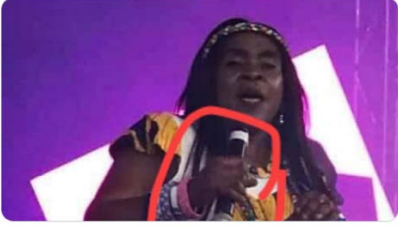










#IWantToVoteBut I can't stand such queues to make someone rich



🗨️ 10 🔄 66 ❤️ 176 📤

Theme 2: Lack of trust

Total memes: 17

<p>1.</p> <p> 1.ASTIN.5 @1Tshepo5 · May 6, 2019 #IWantToVoteBut None of the political parties are convincing. Half of the politicians should be in jail and the other half just make noise!</p>  <p>6 38 151</p>	<p>2.</p> <p> Siyabonga Vilakazi @CyhaVilakazi10 · May 6, 2019 #IWantToVoteBut #MamaSays That Marikana massacre under black leadership that was supposed to protect us, failed us dismally. We shouldn't have to protest to get basic needs. #SAElections2019</p>  <p>3 3</p>
<p>3.</p> <p> zubz_da_last_letter @zapiro_sa · May 6, 2019 #IWantToVoteBut they are not honest with US</p>  <p>1 7</p>	<p>4.</p> <p> Young Gatsby @snlanga · May 6, 2019 #IWantToVoteBut ALL (emphasis on ALL) these political parties can't be trusted.</p>  <p>3 3</p>
<p>5.</p> <p> Zandile Zulu @Zahkalindz · May 6, 2019 #IWantToVoteBut I don't trust any of these political parties, so I will just chill at home and sip my wine.</p>  <p>1 1 1</p>	<p>6.</p> <p> A-Sound @Alutaration · May 6, 2019 #IWantToVoteBut I know these politicians are all a bunch of liars.</p>  <p>1 1 1</p>
<p>7.</p> <p> Bayoze bavume @WayneUndisputed · May 6, 2019 #IWantToVoteBut I don't trust these politicians anymore!</p>  <p>1 1</p>	<p>8.</p> <p> Jeffrey Ntshwane @jeff_Ntshwane · May 6, 2019 #IWantToVoteBut our government doesn't keep their promises...</p>  <p>2 6</p>

9.

19Flow @MbusoLanga4 · May 6, 2019
 #IWantToVoteBut My parents been voting since 94 and still living in a shack, while the people they were voting for are in mansions.



59 423 1.5K

10.

Mfis'ongafi @Mngomz_sk · May 6, 2019
 #IWantToVoteBut now I know better SA's politicians and empty promises are same whatsapp group...andizi



1 2

11.

Magwabeni F @Faris_Unchained · May 6, 2019
 #IWantToVoteBut I think I'm just giving some people power to steal money while other people are suffering



1 1 6

12.

Ro_Meo @That_Phini_Poet · May 6, 2019
 #IWantToVoteBut The amount of corruption in South Africa is shocking me. Wow



2 3

13.

Christopher M. @VerbalVulture · May 6, 2019
 #IWantToVoteBut the only thing the government has given me is money problems with all their taxes and futile economic policies



4 7

14.

Euro Squire @Euro_siya · May 6, 2019
 #IWantToVoteBut Corruption has corrupted me into the level that I don't know who to trust between these snakes



1 1 1

15.

Sli @Ngesi_Sli · May 6, 2019
 #IWantToVoteBut I don't have money for a bribery



1 2

16.

Ntando's Dad @shusha_z · May 6, 2019
 #IWantToVoteBut I'm still waiting for the services they promised last time I voted



2 1

17.






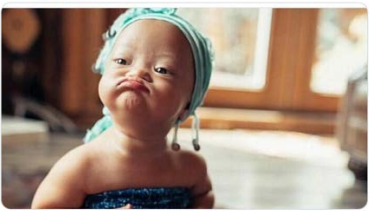




HonouRebel @UBONGA · May 6, 2019

#IWantToVoteBut all I hear from these political parties is " I promise to promise more promises on top of the promises we promised, and these promised promises we promise will materialize to more promise."



Theme 3: Unemployment

Total memes: 16

<p>1.</p> <p>Infinite +1 @musatraveler · May 6, 2019 #IWantToVoteBut I'm straight outta varsity I don't have that 4 years of voting experience...</p>  <p>2 8 38</p>	<p>2.</p> <p>Ma_Easy Does IT! @lempst_GP · May 6, 2019 #IWantToVoteBut I DONT HAVE A MINIMUM OF 3 YEARS VOTING EXPERIENCE</p>  <p>2 2 37</p>
<p>3.</p> <p>Riah Black @diks_nkoana · May 6, 2019 #IWantToVoteBut don't have 3 years experience!</p>  <p>2 27</p>	<p>4.</p> <p>MANDLA TOVEY JIVINDAVA @MandlaJivindava · May 6, 2019 #IWantToVoteBut i don't have 2 years experience mxm</p>  <p>84 167</p>
<p>5.</p> <p>Emily T @emily_tefftoM · May 6, 2019 #IWantToVoteBut Our qualifications are gathering dust at home, we are not getting employed and when we try entrepreneurship we also don't get government funding 😞</p>  <p>5 75 127</p>	<p>6.</p> <p>Tiisetso Pitso @tiisetsoPitso · May 6, 2019 #IWantToVoteBut I gotta keep my business running as usual because no political party is gonna hand me a job after voting</p>  <p>7 66 478</p>
<p>7.</p> <p>Tendani @Tendani_Lepali · May 6, 2019 #iWanttoVoteBut I don't have the "5 years experience"</p>  <p>9 53 274</p>	<p>8.</p> <p>Collen @Collen_KM · May 6, 2019 #IWantToVoteBut After Varsity, it's either you do Forex, Tupperware or Herbalife. You will choose.</p>  <p>17 90 448</p>

9.

Siya @Ms_Mensi · May 6, 2019
 #IWantToVoteBut I need the 12 years experience they ask for when we apply for jobs.



1

10.

Introverted Maniac @nhlanhla_tali · May 6, 2019
 #IWantToVoteBut we don't have assumed work experience like white people



1

11.


GWEMBESHE OMNYAMA @ThamiMyeni_MRE · May 6, 2019
 #IWantToVoteBut since i'm unemployed... i'll be too hungry to walk to the voting station



2

12.


Saint Sanele @sanelehlonza · May 6, 2019
 #IWantToVoteBut Im an Unemployed graduate!!!



2 2 3

13.

SipHo Lava's Ngwenya @Heel_Beast · May 6, 2019
 #IWantToVoteBut I don't have 3 to 4 years experience 🤔



3 10

14.

Corrypablo Soprano @Corrypablo · May 6, 2019
 #IWantToVoteBut I have no job experience only a Master's degree and home experience



6 34

15.


Zangoma Trap music @Deputy_Jesu · May 6, 2019
 #IWantToVoteBut People with work experience will Vote because They always say they need experience before they can employ us



1 29 141

16.

LANE & HERBS @Phum_Lane · May 6, 2019
 #IWantToVoteBut last year when I applied for a government job they told me I need 3 years experience. So nabo they need that to be my president



3 42 78

Theme 4: Nonpartisanism

Total memes: 13

<p>1.</p> <p> its_Gauta 🇿🇦 @Gauta93406403 · May 6</p> <p>#IWantToVoteBut I know we all love jokes but Maema can't be President. I like his concept and vision but noo...</p>  <p>🗨️ 4 🔄 10 ❤️ 122 📤</p>	<p>2.</p> <p> Nontsikelelo Mhlanga 🇿🇦 @ntsikie_05 · May 6</p> <p>#IWantToVoteBut I don't know which political party to vote for. 😞</p>  <p>🗨️ 1 🔄 1 ❤️ 12 📤</p>
<p>3.</p> <p> WawaGhost @WandleLinda04 · May 6, 2019</p> <p>#IWantToVoteBut I've got no connections</p>  <p>🗨️ 4 ❤️ 26 📤</p>	<p>4.</p> <p> Lovethelibra2 @lovethelibra · May 6, 2019</p> <p>#IWantToVoteBut I don't feel like there is a party I identify with</p>  <p>🗨️ 1 ❤️ 1 📤</p>
<p>5.</p> <p> Simtho Biyela @Simtho_Biyela · May 6, 2019</p> <p>#IWantToVoteBut the party that I use to vote for is corrupt (#ANC), I don't trust #DA I think they will even cancel child support grant and RDP houses, #EFF will chase away white people</p>  <p>🗨️ 2 ❤️ 6 📤</p>	<p>6.</p> <p> SEPTEMBER 18 @Cindy2Www · May 6, 2019</p> <p>#IWantToVoteBut I don't trust the @MYANC, @DA_NorthWest is always on about what the ANC is doing ... they're just sheep in wolf skin ... @EFFSouthAfrica is violent</p>  <p>🗨️ 1 ❤️ 1 📤</p>
<p>7.</p> <p> UnapologeticallyMe 🇿🇦 @Retshegofadicoe · May 6, 2019</p> <p>#IWantToVoteBut the ANC is full of lies the EFF is too dramatic And what the hell is DA?????</p>  <p>🗨️ 2 ❤️ 2 📤</p>	<p>8.</p> <p> #WelcomeTuchel @Starlarr_mdz · May 6, 2019</p> <p>#IWantToVoteBut I don't know which party to vote for</p>  <p>🗨️ 1 ❤️ 1 📤</p>

9.



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12.



















































13.



Theme 5: Service delivery

Total memes: 10

<p>1.</p> <p> Lesedi Molotsi @LesediMolotsi1 · May 6, 2019</p> <p>#IWantToVoteBut I'm from the Vaal, I can't reach the voting station because of potholes, so</p>  <p>  1  6 </p>	<p>2.</p> <p> Re Rotthe @ThabiSoul_Deep · May 6, 2019</p> <p>#IWantToVoteBut I'll probably get a puncture on my way to the station because of the potholes in my hood.</p>  <p>   </p>
<p>3.</p> <p> ndu mbonane @ndu_mbonane · May 6, 2019</p> <p>#IWantToVoteBut there'll be load shedding after the elections.</p>  <p> 1  2  8 </p>	<p>4.</p> <p> Mama wa Lu @Nyiko_bells · May 6, 2019</p> <p>#IWantToVoteBut I won't Coz loadshedding will Definitely come back after the Elections</p>  <p>   2 </p>
<p>5.</p> <p> Swati is @SiphoMashinini_ · May 6, 2019</p> <p>#IWantToVoteBut load shedding will come back</p>  <p>   </p>	<p>6.</p> <p> Marcus Fumbata @FumbataMarcus · May 6, 2019</p> <p>#IWantToVoteBut</p> <p>They won't give us RDP cars</p>  <p> 68  273  1.2K </p>
<p>7.</p> <p> Kedibone Mulaudzi @KediboneSA · May 6, 2019</p> <p>#IWantToVoteBut but I saw homeless people using elections posters for fire to keep themselves warm. Maybe I will because in this case the political parties delivered warmth to the homeless</p>  <p>   </p>	<p>8.</p> <p> Sandile Mabaso @SandilehMabaso · May 6, 2019</p> <p>#IWantToVoteBut high school mathematics made me hate the letter X so I can't imagine myself standing in the long queue just to mark the letter that I hate</p>  <p> 2  48  107 </p>

9.

 **Black Diamond**  @AmyFrFr · May 6, 2019

#IWantToVoteBut ANC downgraded the quality of public education whereas their children are going to private schools...



10.









 **S.T Masina**  @Sihle202520 · May 6, 2019

#IWantToVoteBut I'm 100% sure load shedding will be back after the elections ... so they are just lying about changing South Africa



Theme 6: Voter manipulation

Total memes: 9





































<p>1.</p> <p>Eclicia @Eclicia1 · May 6, 2019 #IWantToVoteBut They only remember us when they want us to vote</p>  <p>2 4 13</p>	<p>2.</p> <p>Relebogile Legodi @RELEH_LEGODI · May 6, 2019 #IWantToVoteBut ANC will pass our problems like this straight after voting</p>  <p>48 648 1.7K</p>
<p>3.</p> <p>NOMNDAYI OMKHULU @mserah32i · May 6, 2019 #IWantToVoteBut I know politician are trained to manipulate people,so i don't wanna be a victim of that..</p>  <p>1</p>	<p>4.</p> <p>Sistaz @sistazzy · May 6, 2019 #IWantToVoteBut Im afraid of the petrol increase after the elections..</p>  <p>3</p>
<p>5.</p> <p>Phumeza Ndamase @phushee · May 6, 2019 #IWantToVoteBut all these political parties remind me of that one family member who remembers you only when they need money</p>  <p>3</p>	<p>6.</p> <p>Bazil the Bulldog @BaziltheBulldog · May 6, 2019 #IWantToVoteBut this is a picture of Politicians in our streets after Wednesday.</p>  <p>2</p>
<p>7.</p> <p>Lessy Lesego @Lessylantjie · May 6, 2019 #IWantToVoteBut I feel like after elections they will stop calling me and taking me to dates, giving me attention nje.. I can't take that chance, sorry!</p>  <p>1 3</p>	<p>8.</p> <p>Ro, Mco @That_Phiri_Poet · May 6, 2019 #IWantToVoteBut I'm too sceptical and not trusting people who only want to talk to me when they want votes to stay in power. No way.</p>  <p>2 5</p>

9.













Theme 7: Disinterest in voting

Total memes: 6

<p>1.</p> <p> Amogelang Mayvee @AmogelangMayvee · May 6, 2019 #IWantToVoteBut I don't give a F about all of this 🤔 so I'll be sleeping the whole day</p>  <p>  2  6 </p>	<p>2.</p> <p> TSOTSO @KHUTSO_MPANENG · May 6, 2019 #IWantToVoteBut I'm too busy minding my own business</p>  <p>   1 </p>
<p>3.</p> <p> Lee-Roy PRO-KTM Mankayi @RoyTheLeeKage · May 6, 2019 #IWantToVoteBut I am not inspired, nor am I motivate so I don't wana get involved!</p>  <p>  17  39 </p>	<p>4.</p> <p> Ralf-Dust Mjozi @Cream_Lukhanyo · May 6, 2019 #IWantToVoteBut I have no reason to</p>  <p>  2  7 </p>
<p>5.</p> <p> vhugala@96 @vhugala961 · May 6, 2019 #IWantToVoteBut a not registered 😞</p>  <p> 1  2  5 </p>	<p>6.</p> <p> NdoTondwaNgaYehova @sharon_tee123 · May 6, 2019 #IWantToVoteBut I didn't register. I regret it 🙄🙄</p>  <p> 2  7  18 </p>

Theme 8: Lack of socio-economic change

Total memes: 5

<p>1.</p> <p> Marokolo26 @Marokolo26 · May 6</p> <p>#IWantToVoteBut we have been voting and no change so why must I vote, I rather go drink on the 8 of May</p>  <p>2 1 6</p>	<p>2.</p> <p> KIING OF THE JVNGL 🦁👑 @mycousinphayo · May 6, 2019</p> <p>#IWantToVoteBut I don't want to vote for change that never comes 🙄</p>  <p>1</p>
<p>3.</p> <p> Bandisa @TheeBandisa · May 6, 2019</p> <p>#IWantToVoteBut it has been 25 years, some countries developed rapidly during this period but here we are, with different political parties that are only active during voting periods, Mandela day, 16DOA and FREEDOM DAY.</p>  <p>1</p>	<p>4.</p> <p> Andile D @andilechyna28 · May 6, 2019</p> <p>#IWantToVoteBut I don't think it would make any difference</p>  <p>24 views</p>
<p>5.</p> <p> Trust 'Sisyphus' Simelane @Tru_stEE · May 6, 2019</p> <p>#IWantToVoteBut I know that it really doesn't change anything, especially in our clearly immature democracy. It is populism and another set of empty promises for the next few years. Every party is similar to the next.</p>  <p>4 14</p>	


Theme 9: Inequality between politician and citizens

Total memes: 3

<p>1.</p> <p>You Promised To Marry Me @PromisedToMarry · May 6, 2019 #IWantToVoteBut the reality is this 🙄🙄🙄🙄🙄🙄</p>  <p>1 11 23</p>	<p>2.</p> <p>Them! @HerdsThem! · May 6, 2019 #IWantToVoteBut I'm tired of making people rich while I remain poor everyday</p>  <p>1 6</p>
<p>3.</p> <p>Ras_Victor @LekokoVictor · May 8, 2019 #IWantToVoteBut the ANC is like this guy they only care for themselves.</p>  <p>1</p>	

Theme 10: Voter disobedience

Total memes: 3

<p>1.</p> <p> Kamohelo Mosia @KamoheloMosia10 · May 6, 2019 #IWantToVoteBut I'm making them taste their own medicine</p> <p>People if you have registered, do not VOTE 🙄 let's just give them a taste Of empty promises ...!!</p> <p>Follow us on IG @mphandle_t</p> 	<p>2.</p> <p> #Deep_N_Musique @NeoNthite · May 6, 2019 I'm registered, but I'm not going to vote, e reng empty promise mo ngwaneng. 🙄🙄 #IWantToVoteBut</p> 
<p>3.</p> <p> Ndiondo Enhle Msibi @BusiMsibi21 · May 6, 2019 #IWantToVoteBut</p> <p>I registered to vote but I won't vote. I want them to know what empty promises feels like</p> 	

END