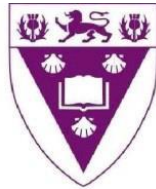


Youth responses to political party messages on Social Media: A case study of Rhodes University students during the 3 August 2016 local government elections



RHODES UNIVERSITY
Where leaders learn

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Humanities, Rhodes University, in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the degree of Master of Arts in Journalism and Media Studies.

By

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Abstract

Rhodes University was awash with political tension and activity in the 2015 and 2016 academic years. The University had been the scene of radical protests and demands for change by students. The #RhodesMustFall, #FeesMustFall and the #RURferenceList protests at Rhodes University started debates, conversations and public lectures amongst students and staff on and off social media on aspects of decoloniality, transformation, free education, issues of safety on campus and gender-based violence (*Grocott's Mail*, 2015b). However, very little of this was reflected in the election campaigns of political parties and seemingly, in student engagement with political processes, at least as reflected in this election. The three biggest political parties in South Africa, and the only ones that contested Ward 12 (Rhodes) ANC, EFF, and the DA, were active on social media aiming to directly engage with constituents and draw citizens to the polls. All the parties had former and current Rhodes University students as candidates for councillor. There was a substantial engagement by students on social media, on the Rhodes SRC Facebook page, and on Twitter. However, only 39% of registered students, turned out to cast their vote on election day (IEC, 2016b).

This study examines the interpretations and meaning-making amongst young people at Rhodes University, of the political party messages during the 3 August 2016 local government elections on social media. In addition, the study sought to understand whether youth at Rhodes (Rhodes University) actively sought out political party messages on social media (by following the ANC, DA, EFF Facebook and Twitter accounts), or were the messages incidental on their timelines (for example, following news organisations). Finally, the study sought to understand whether the media messages resonated with them and spoke to the issues faced by young people on the campus.

The research used qualitative thematic content analysis and focus group discussions to examine the relationship between the content provided by the political party messages and the audience's process of making sense and derived meaning from the content. Six focus group discussions were convened.

This study found that young people are social media enthusiasts, they actively sought election related content on social media by following the Twitter and Facebook accounts of the parties, and from news organisations. Furthermore, the study discovered that, although, young people engaged

with the political party messages on social media, they did not feel like the messages were targeted at them, and as such they felt the messages did not speak to them and the issues they face.

List of Acronyms and Abbreviations

ANC – African National Congress

BSM – Black Student Movement

DA – Democratic Alliance

EFF – Economic Freedom Fighters

FGD – Focus Group Discussion

FMF – Fees Must Fall

IEC – Independent Election Commission

LGE – Local Government Election

MIP – Minimum Initial Payment

PEC – Provincial Executive Committee

Rhodes – Rhodes University

RMF – Rhodes Must Fall

RUReferenceList – Rhodes University Reference List

SNS – Social Network Sites

UCKAR – University Currently Known As Rhodes

VONC – Vote of No Confidence

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

1.1 Introduction

This study examined the relationship between high and increasing social media engagement among young South Africans, yet low voting turnout, and the perceptions and meanings derived from political party messages among Rhodes University students. The study focused on whether political party messages related to the 3 August 2016 local government elections were targeted at and resonated with, Rhodes University students.

In the 2008 and 2012 US election campaigns, social media played a pivotal role for Barack Obama by facilitating early campaigning, mass mobilisation, campaign staff organisation and, particularly, in galvanising participation and activity among young people (Cogburn and Espinoza-Vasquez, 2011). This large-scale social media engagement saw 66% of the youth vote going to Obama in the 2008 elections.

In the recent elections in the United Kingdom, the Labour Party leader Jeremy Corbyn's social media campaign in particular, also resonated with the youth through direct messaging as they used Twitter, Facebook and YouTube (*The Guardian*, 2017). A survey by Curtis (2017) indicated that 66% of new voters (18 – 19 years old) voted for Labour, and a number of studies to look at why this was the case focused on social media use (Thorsen et al, 2017). Both elections showed an unprecedented high turnout among the youth in the elections, more than had ever before (Robillard, 2012; Thorsen et al, 2017).

This study was located in Ward 12¹ - the 'Rhodes University ward' - in Grahamstown, which was contested by the African National Congress (ANC), Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) and the Democratic Alliance (DA). All of these parties were active on social media aiming to directly engage with constituents and draw citizens to the polls. All the parties had former or current Rhodes University students as candidates for councillor. There was substantial engagement by

¹ Ward 12 demarcates the Rhodes University campus – it is bounded by Somerset Street, from Grey Street up to African Street, and includes the industrial area (Makana Municipality, 2010).

students on social media, on the Rhodes SRC Facebook page, and on Twitter. However, of the 4139 registered voters, only 1646 (or just 39%) actually cast a ballot (IEC, 2016b). The DA won by 1109 votes, with the ANC and EFF receiving only 369 and 150 votes respectively, with 18 spoilt votes (IEC, 2016b).

The year 2016 was also a year awash with political tension and activity on the campus. Considering the mood and atmosphere of politics on campus, political parties should have directed messages to issues that are relevant on campus and to students specifically. For more than a year, Rhodes University had been the scene of radical protest and demands for change by students. The #RhodesSoWhite, #RhodesMustFall, 2015 #FeesMustFall and the 2016 #RURreferenceList protests at Rhodes University started debates, conversations and public lectures amongst students and staff on and off social media on aspects of decoloniality and transformation (*Grocott's Mail*, 2015b). However, very little of this was reflected in the election campaigns and seemingly, in student engagement with political processes, at least as reflected in this election.

How did students understand political party messages in the 2016 local government elections (LGE)? How in particular did they engage with these messages, with the parties, and with each other on social media? Engagement with these elections was not only in the physical space on campus but was highly visible on the Rhodes SRC Facebook page, which featured some political party messages and numerous replies and comments from students.

A report by *We are Social* (2017) revealed that there are 15 million active social media users in South Africa, with Facebook being the most active platform, at 48% and Twitter fourth at 26%. Of the 15 million users, 63% constitute the youth bracket in South Africa. Social media² sites in this thesis refer to Facebook and Twitter, which are useful platforms to organise, and mobilise people around issues as they provide interactivity and immediacy among other affordances (Bode & Dalrymple, 2016).

² Social media refers to a collection of online platforms and tools that people use to share content, profiles, opinions, insights, experiences, perspectives and media itself, facilitating conversations and interactions online between groups of people (Moran, 2011). Cohen (2011) on the other hand defines social media as platforms that enable the interactive web by engaging users to participate in, comment on and create content as means of communicating with their social graph, other users and the public.

Social media have become a key means of communication between political parties and citizens and research by Hans & Nzama (2016) shows that most political party messages on social media are targeted at the youth. Although some of the election messages appear to have dealt with issues facing the youth, such as unemployment, from the data analysis, the key issues arising out of student protests were not raised in the political party messages. For example, safety on campus does not appear to have been prioritised by candidates standing in Ward 12.

1.2 Theoretical context

This research examined frameworks and perspectives in audience reception in order to tease out the complex issues between audience reception and the content of the political party messages during the August 2016 local government elections. This study drew on the encoding/decoding model devised by Stuart Hall (1980) as a framework to sample the political party messages and the meanings decoded by the students. The concept of encoding/decoding proposes that audiences actively read media texts and do not just accept them passively, but interpret them according to their own cultural background and experiences (Hall, 1980).

This study has attempted to understand the intended meanings of the messages (encoding), (Sønderskov and Thomsen, 2015: 52), using Hall's model as the basis for a framework of reception analysis. But as Hall's work has been critiqued for overly focusing on one specific dimension – meaning making – this study also applied Schroder's multi-dimensional model of media audience reception. Schroder argues that Hall's "set of three presupposes that the media text itself is a vehicle of dominant ideology and that it hegemonically strives to get readers to accept the existing social order, with all its inequalities and oppression of underprivileged social groups" (Schroder 2000, 236). He proposed a model which does not presume that the media text is a vehicle for hegemony and argues that "the multidimensional model proposes that we distinguish between readers' subjectively experienced agreement or disagreement with the media text on the one hand {the reader's 'position'}, and the researcher's 'evaluation' of the role played by the readers' positions in hegemonic struggles" (Schroder 2000: 236).

Schroder's model offers six dimensions that are closely related to the text and to one another and allows for the recipient's subjective experienced meanings to be produced in a specific situational context (Schroder, 2000). The six dimensions are *motivation*, *comprehension*, *discrimination*, *position*, *evaluation* and *implementation*. *Motivation* indicates the relevance or interest of the

media text to the audience; *comprehension* indicates audience members' shared understanding of text despite its distinct meanings; the *discrimination* dimension takes the form of a continuum from immersion to critical distance, which means that the reader may either simultaneously appreciate or ridicule a text or simply adopt one of them; *position* indicates the audiences' subjective attitude towards a text; *evaluation* indicates the audience's objective reading of the text, and *implementation* checks whether readings are used for political resources or not (that is the likely consequence from a social practice) (Schroder, 2000). This model was useful for this research because each of the dimensions focused strongly on the decoding aspect in the reception process. It allowed the researcher to explore how people received political party messages, and what interpretations they made of these messages.

1.3 The research question and objectives

Besides examining the manner in which Rhodes students decoded political party messaging on social media during the 2016 local government elections, this research interrogated whether those messages were specifically targeted and resonated with the youth, based on the meanings they drew from the messages.

The study also sought to answer the following questions:

- 1) Did the messages specifically resonate with them, and what meanings did they make from the election discourse which was present from political party messaging on social media?
- 2) Did youth at Rhodes University actively seek out political party messages on social media (by following the ANC, DA, EFF Facebook and Twitter accounts), or were the messages incidental on their timelines (for example, following news organisations)?
- 3) Did the social media messages conveyed by political parties relate to the issues faced by young people on this campus?

1.4 The research design

This study used a qualitative approach which attempts to study human action from the perspective of the social actors themselves (Babbie and Mouton, 2001). The study is a reception analysis; the rationale was to account for audience responses to political party messages on social media.

Audience reception assisted in understanding how different social groups used meanings circulated on social media sites in their attempts to make sense of their lives (Strelitz, 2000).

Social media plays a significant role in the lives of Rhodes University students (Chatora, 2010). Given that most Rhodes University students are in the youth bracket, and that they have almost unlimited access to the internet and thus social media sites, the campus was an appropriate site for this kind of study. Its students are predominantly suburban middle to upper class and went to suburban, former model C schools or private schools (Dalvit, 2010). The make-up of the student body is 71% black (62% African, 4% Coloured and 5% Indian/Asian students) and 29% White (Masiza, 2017).

The research used both a qualitative thematic content analysis and focus group discussions as means of data collection. Qualitative content analysis goes beyond merely counting words to examining language intensely for the purpose of classifying large amounts of text and to examine meanings, themes and patterns in a text (Weber in Hsieh and Shannon, 2005: 1278). The researcher did an initial thematic analysis of the messages produced by the three political parties in South Africa contesting the Ward 12 elections (ANC, DA and EFF), prior to the 2016 local government elections to tease out some of the themes in the messages. The selection of messages was limited to those posted from 4 July to 4 August 2016, which make specific reference to the elections, such as #ElectionDay, #LGE2016, #FinalRally. In addition to the content analysis of the messages, the sampled messages were used as prompts for the focus group discussions.

The study convened six focus group discussions. This method provided a framework for exploring the experiences and sense-making processes of the participants through conversations with one another and with the researcher about their reading of the 2016 local government election political party campaign messages on social media. Schroder's multidimensional model was used to classify the participant responses and to better understand their interpretations so that it can be grounded in reception theory.

Chapter Two (2) discusses the context of the study, such as the political atmosphere prior to the elections, and the #FeesMustFall, #RhodesMustFall and #RURreferenceList protests at Rhodes University. Chapter Three (3) introduces the theoretical framework which discusses Hall's Encoding/Decoding model, critiques of that model and Schroder's multi-dimensional model,

which underpins this research. Chapter Four (4) details the research methodology, Chapter Five (5) presents the data and the findings. Chapter Six (6) concludes the study carried out on this research.

1.5 Ethical considerations

Political affiliation, and political activity are sensitive issues and as such, the researcher obtained informed consent from proposed participants. Participants could withdraw from the study at any time, and all identifiable markers (including names, as well as information from interviews and focus groups), were handled with the strictest confidence to promote safety and comfort of the participants (Ali & Kelly in Seale, 2004). The researcher also used pseudonyms to hide the identities of the participants.

CHAPTER TWO

Contextualisation

2.1 Introduction

In this chapter, the researcher discusses the South African political landscape prior to, and during, the 2016 local government elections. It is important to note that the 2016 local government elections were the beginning of a turning point in terms of the history of South African politics, albeit at a municipal level, as a new political government came to rule in three of the country's metropolitan municipalities. This had not happened previously, as the African National Congress (ANC) had dominated all elections since 1994 and showed that there were cracks and challenges in the ANC's dominance. This chapter will highlight some of those challenges and illustrate the context in which the local government elections took place. Furthermore, the researcher discusses the atmosphere of higher education broadly, but also at Rhodes University in particular, in relation to the #FeesMustFall, #RhodesMustFall and #RURefenceList protests and their calls for change, transformation and decoloniality in this space. These protests took place less than a year before the elections. This is significant because it is important to note how student's issues were raised and covered in the discourse and campaigning prior to the elections. As in many communities in South Africa, students in higher education institutions made calls for government to deliver services in terms of its promises as set out in the Freedom Charter³. At the time, there was a growing impatience with government's inability (21 years after democracy) to ensure that the doors of learning be opened in higher education institutions particularly for the poor, to roll out free education, to abolish the colour bar in the education system, and to ensure security and equal human rights for all (Khumalo, 2015).

This chapter also looks at the impact that social media, had in terms of making these protests visible to South Africans and the international community. Social media played a pivotal role in making protests at institutions of higher learning more visible to sister campuses and other

³The Freedom Charter was the statement of core principles of the South African Congress Alliance, which consisted of the African National Congress (ANC) and its allies - the South African Indian Congress, the South African Congress of Democrats and the Coloured People's Congress. It is characterized by its opening demand; "The People Shall Govern!" It was adopted on 26 July 1955 at the Congress of the People in Kliptown, Soweto (African National Congress, 2018; Khumalo, 2015).

universities both in South Africa and abroad. Many students and activists found that social media was the greatest tool to mobilise resources in times of need (such as rallying and collecting funds to help pay bail for arrested students, securing food and other things that students needed) and acted as a catalyst to galvanise seemingly unrelated people behind a common cause.

2.2 SA local government elections

The South African local government system consists of municipalities of various types. South Africa's biggest cities are governed by metropolitan municipalities, and have more than 500 000 citizens (ETU, 2016). The eight metropolitan municipalities are in Tshwane (Pretoria), Mangaung (Bloemfontein), Johannesburg, Ekurhuleni (East Rand), Buffalo City (East London), Nelson Mandela Bay (Port Elizabeth), Cape Town, and Ethekewini (Durban). District municipalities are made up of a number of local municipalities that fall in the same district. There are 44 district municipalities, under which there are 205 local municipalities. Each municipality is broken into wards (IEC, 2016a; ETU, 2016), and the residents in each ward are represented by a ward councillor. Voters in the local municipalities also vote for district councils at the district municipality level.

Although there are three systems of electing a council, South Africa uses a system of mixed-member proportional representation, in which half of the seats in each municipality are elected on the first-past-the-post system in single-member wards and the other half of the seats are allocated according to the proportional representation (PR) system. The latter takes into account the number of ward seats won by a party and ensures that the final number of seats held by that party is proportional to their percentage of the total vote (ETU, 2016). In both metropolitan and local municipalities, voters elect a single ward candidate, as well as a proportional representative in their municipal council. Residents of municipalities that form part of district councils (excluding metropolitan municipalities) also cast a third vote to elect a proportional representative for their district council, in addition to the two votes they cast for their local council (ETU, 2016). On 3 August 2016, South Africa held its fourth local government elections since 1994. The local government elections are held in order to elect councils for all local, metropolitan and district municipalities in each of South Africa's nine provinces. Local government elections, just like national elections, are held every five years.

Local government is at the centre of the democratic system that has emerged in South Africa since the political transition in 1994 (Mufamadi, 2002). Democracy is best understood when it meets the challenges that ordinary South Africans come across (Mufamadi, 2002). This means that citizens must view local government as a legitimate vehicle of democratic expression, furthermore, local government must at all times include citizens in all its activities, and citizens must feel that local government belongs to them (Mufamadi, 2002). It is thus important to understand the context in which the 2016 LGE took place, because it is so central to the political climate in South Africa and is also a gauge of political feeling amongst citizens. The importance of local government elections goes beyond just local or community politics but is played out at a national level as political parties campaign at the national, provincial and local levels.

The African National Congress (ANC) has dominated electoral politics since it came into power in 1994 (Boyce, 2010). In recent years, however, there has been a gradual decrease in support of Africa's oldest liberation movement. The ANC has been the majority party in the local government elections across South Africa, with the exception of the Western Cape and its municipalities. At least since the 2006 local government elections, the overall share of the votes nationally for the ANC decreased slightly from 65.7% in 2006 to 62.93% in 2011 (IEC, 2016a). This was amid growing discontent regarding the state of the country's economy and the perceived corruption and patronage within the party, particularly as a result of former President Jacob Zuma (Booyesen, 2016). During the 2016 local government elections, the ANC amassed just 54% of the electoral vote (Gosam, 2016).

According to a service delivery protest study done by Alexander, in South Africa, some of the triggers of service delivery protests in the Mbeki-era included housing, land, and jobs, while protests in the Zuma-era were sparked by issues around housing, lack of infrastructure and maladministration in municipalities (2010: 29, 32). Alexander found that income inequality ranks highly among the structural protests. Furthermore, the study found that government statistics indicate that between the end of apartheid and 2007, South Africa's Gini coefficient dropped slightly, but also that the income of the poorest 20% of the population declined from 2.7% to 2.3% of total income (Presidency in Alexander, 2010). These problems were of course exacerbated by the global financial meltdown, which expanded inequality and intensified problems of survival. In another study, Pithouse (in Alexander, 2010) found that there is an inherent belief among South

African citizens that the ANC-led government disrespects them, only listens to them during election time, and ignores them some time. While many citizens of South Africa believed and supported the ANC in the hope that there would be an improvement in their living conditions, Alexander (2010) found that many citizens, between the Thabo Mbeki era and early Jacob Zuma era, supported the ANC because there was no strong opposition or alternative. He argued that the electorate regarded other parties, particularly at the time the Congress of the People (COPE⁴), and the then white-led Democratic Alliance (DA) as marginal or regarded as unsympathetic (Risenga, 2008; Alexander 2010). *Rand Daily Mail* journalist Lily Gosam's analysis of local government elections since 2006, revealed that opposition parties, had increased their support at the polls gradually from 34.3% in 2006 to 45.5% in 2016, (Gosam, 2016). Suggestions for the decline in ANC support include the emergence of more relatable breakaway parties such as the EFF (Economic Freedom Fighters), dissatisfaction over lack of service delivery, apathy and limited voter education (Gosam, 2016; Alexander 2010).

The official opposition party, the DA, increased its share of the vote from 16.6% in 2006 local government elections to 26.9% in the 2016 LGE (IEC, 2016a). The DA initially took control of the Cape Town metropolitan municipality through a coalition government in 2006, and now assuming control of the majority of councils in the Western Cape, including taking full control of the province from the ANC (IEC, 2016a; *News24*, 2013).

The third biggest party from the 2016 LGE outcomes was the newly formed EFF (formed in July 2013), which amassed 8.3% of the electorate (IEC, 2016a). The results of their first LGE saw the EFF gain 827 councillors, both at local and district level, with representation in almost 90% of the 257 municipalities in South Africa (Malema, 2017). Other smaller parties include the United Democratic Movement (UDM), which received 0.6% of the votes, Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP), which at 4.7% managed to retain some municipalities in its stronghold, KwaZulu-Natal. COPE was expected to decline in its support at the polls from the previous elections because of internal squabbles for leadership in the party and went from 2.22% in the 2011 LGE to 0.45% in the 2016 (IEC, 2011; IEC, 2016a). IFP breakaway party, the National Freedom Party (NFP), was barred

⁴ A pro-Mbeki political party that had broken away from the ANC after Mbeki lost ANC presidency at the 52nd ANC elective conference in Polokwane, after seeking a third term; and was recalled from state presidency (Alexander, 2010).

from participating in the elections after it failed to pay its election registration on time to the Independent Electoral Commission (IEC).

Although the ANC won the 2016 local government elections with 54% overall, support for the ANC fell to its lowest levels since it came into power. Political analysts declared these elections as ANC's toughest to date (Essop, 2016a). The ANC went into these elections on the back of a number of challenges – both internal and external. The internal challenges included factionalism, and dissent among some members (Olifant, 2017). The party faced factional battles as the road to the 54th national elective conference held in December 2016 intensified. There were figures within the ANC who were already aligning themselves to get positions within the top six (6) of the ANC. There were six people running for party presidency, with only two front runners who led the factions, namely #CR17 (Cyril Ramaphosa) and #NDZ17 (Dr Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma). These factions had the potential to blow up the ANC, as at every opportunity, members of the different factions would hurl insults, accusations, and behave in an uncomradely way (Mkhize and Makhaye, 2017). The #CR17 camp spoke of “corruption within the ANC and parasitic networks of patronage”, and “ANC needs renewal”; while the #NDZ17 camp spoke of “Radical economic transformation [RET] is a threat to white monopoly capital [WMC]”, and the “Need to change patterns of ownership to redistribute wealth, land, and have our own state-owned bank” (Matlala, 2017; *BusinessLive*, 2017; Abdulla, 2017). There was also a group of premiers⁵, namely, Ace Magashule (Free State), David Mabuza (Mpumalanga) and Supra Mahumapelo (North West) known as the “Premier League”, which was alleged to be the catalyst of many recent ANC elective conference outcomes to favour the Dlamini-Zuma faction (Letsoalo and Hunter, 2016). They were against and were attempting to stop Cyril Ramaphosa's ascendance to presidency, though Cyril Ramaphosa went on to succeed Zuma as ANC president (Cotterill and Pilling, 2017). As a result, there are ANC members who took the organisation to court to nullify the outcomes of many provincial and regional conferences, including the ANC KwaZulu-Natal, and the Free State provincial executive committee (PEC) conferences, because many were “irregular, unlawful, unconstitutional and/or in breach of the ANC constitution” (Du Plessis, 2017). All of this saw a

⁵ A premier is the head of government of one of South Africa's nine provinces. The premier of a province plays a similar role in a province as that played by a president for a country (Republic of South Africa, 1996)

weakened ANC, which was struggling with internal politics while trying to retain control at the local level amongst their supporters.

Another internal challenge of the ANC was dissent, which occurred from the Gauteng ANC seeking to divorce itself from Zuma. The Gauteng ANC and the national ANC have failed to find common ground regarding the e-toll saga⁶ (*City Press*, 2014; Munusamy, 2015). They had also been openly disparaging of Zuma during the run up to the LGE. In March 2016 the Constitutional Court found that he had failed to uphold, defend and respect the Constitution as the supreme law of the country. It found that Zuma flouted a directive from former Public Protector, Thuli Madonsela, that her remedial actions have legal effect and are binding. He had a duty to repay taxpayers money spent on luxuries, including a swimming pool, and an amphitheatre, added to his Nkandla homestead, specifically imposed on him through the Public Protector's constitutional power (*Mail & Guardian*, 2016; *News24*, 2016). The Gauteng ANC PEC asked him to do the honourable thing, which suggested he must step down from his duties (Letsoalo and Hunter, 2016). There were even allegations that the Gauteng ANC refused to use Zuma printed T-shirts as part of the 2016 LGE campaign, and the provincial structure did not give Zuma enough support when he canvassed voters in Gauteng, which many analysts saw as a move to distance themselves from Zuma (Hunter, 2016).

Another challenge for the ANC was the lack of consistency in communication and agreement on matters, which has led many analysts, including those in the ANC, to say that, "the centre does not hold" (Grootes, 2016). This resulted in mixed communication amongst the top six members of the organisation. For example, former ANC Western Cape chairperson Marius Fransman was suspended early in 2016 due to allegations of sexual harassment against him by his personal assistant. On 1 February 2016, then ANC Secretary General, Gwede Mantashe announced that Fransman had been suspended by the party, pending his appearance in front of a disciplinary committee (Makinana, 2016). However, while on a door-to-door campaign in the Western Cape ahead of the LGE, Zuma campaigned alongside Fransman. He alleged at the time that Fransman

⁶ E-tolls refer to a tolling system for the roads built as part of the Gauteng Freeway Improvement Plan. It consists of 49 gantries on Gauteng highways. The gantries charge people by electronically identifying the number plates of vehicles that drive under them. Each time a vehicle passes, a toll is charged. The cost is determined by the kilometre distance which the gantry represents. The system is controversial. Many citizens of Gauteng criticise it for being very costly (reportedly R14 billion over six years), and a threat to the province's economic wellbeing (Munusamy, 2015).

was back at work and had been cleared of all charges. Meanwhile, Mantashe came out to say that this was not true, maintaining that Fransman was still on suspension until his appearance at the DC (Makinana, 2016).

Furthermore, the run-up to the elections was also marked by a number of murders of ANC candidates, allegedly by rivals within the ANC, in an effort to secure lucrative positions in local government (Khoza, 2016). One finds that tenderpreneurs⁷ have incoming councillors killed so that favoured people could remain and continue to give them access to tenders (Cele, 2017). Most of these politically motivated killings took place in KwaZulu-Natal, with some occurring in the Eastern Cape. Another challenge faced by the ANC during the LGE occurred after the ANC leadership selected Thoko Didiza to be the mayoral candidate of City of Tshwane. She was seen as a neutral candidate who could help build bridges between the different factions in the Tshwane region between former Mayor Kgosientso Ramokgopa, and his deputy, Mapiti Matsena, but it had the opposite effect. Instead, it resulted in busses being torched, shops looted and streets barricaded with debris, as well as the deaths of five people during the unrest (Mokhema et al, 2016). All of these internal struggles were playing out very publically prior to the LGE and showed discord within the ANC that other political parties took advantage of, and which were made visible through mainstream and social media.

The external challenges of the ANC, included criticism from ANC veterans and attacks from other political parties. Former deputy president Kgalema Motlanthe, Ronnie Kasrils, Dennis Goldberg, the late Ahmed Kathrada and many others who are part of the 101 Stalwarts⁸ have all spoken out against the party and made calls for Zuma to step down as president (Marrian, 2016). These, and many more, have spoken out against the scandals that involved Zuma, which were tarnishing the image of the organisation, and meant the party was likely to see a drop in the electorate at the 2016 LGE. The veterans have been criticised, by Zuma, Mantashe and other leaders of the party for speaking out and not following party protocol to deal with issues through internal structures (Munusamy, 2017). As a means to restore unity, togetherness and comradeship, the 101 Stalwarts

⁷ A tenderpreneur is a person who is politically well-connected, who has got rich through the government tendering system. The word tenderpreneur is a portmanteau of "tendering" and "entrepreneur" (DestinyMan).

⁸ A group of ANC elders who played prominent roles in the fight for South Africa's liberation, it includes former Robben Island prisoners, leaders of the United Democratic Front, former Umkhonto we Sizwe (MK) combatants and those who served in ANC leadership structures during the exile years (Munusamy, 2017).

recommended that the party hold a special consultative conference, much like the 1969 Morogoro conference in Tanzania, which sought to iron out issues between disenchanted ANC military units and the party leadership. The military units were unhappy with the way the struggle was being pursued. They believed the leadership had become complacent and seemed to be accepting life in exile (Turok, 2016; Madia, 2017). However, while the consultative conference did take place, it was outside of the ANC, and senior ANC members did not attend, including former president Zuma, former National Chairperson Baleka Mbete and other ANC officials aligned to Zuma.

Major external challenges have also included attacks on the ANC by the DA and EFF. The DA, and its leader Mmusi Maimane, have called out the ANC as a party of corrupt officials who loot state coffers (Jordaan, 2016). They accused Zuma of being corrupt (citing for example Nkandlagate⁹, Guptagate¹⁰ and Nenegate¹¹), and accused him of being racially divisive by rallying black voters to support the ANC, claiming the DA was a white party (Mkentane, 2016).

The EFF have also attacked the ANC on many occasions in public and received a lot of media coverage leading up to the LGE. They accused the ANC and Zuma of corruption, kleptocracy, patronage and state capture by the Gupta family. All these allegations surfaced before the 2016 LGE and thus impacted on the political atmosphere at the time. The EFF tried to have Zuma removed from the presidency. They tried several unsuccessful vote of no confidence (VONC) motions, and also tried to have him impeached in Parliament after the Constitutional Court found that he had violated the Constitution (*News24*, 2016; Gaye, 2018). Zuma went on to resign as State president on 14 February 2018 under duress from the ANC, who threatened to support a VONC against him in Parliament (*City Press*, 2018). Political analyst Professor Tinyiko Maluleke goes on to further argue that:

⁹ Political scandal of 2009 regarding the state-funded upgrades to former President Jacob Zuma's private homestead. The upgrades cost the taxpayer R246 million (Essop, 2016b).

¹⁰ Started in April 2013 when a commercial plane landed at Waterkloof Air Force Base, a national key point. The plane was carrying about 200 guests who were going to the wedding of Vega Gupta and Aakash Jahajgarhia in Sun City. Days later, government announced a multi-department probe and several suspensions and arrests of officials. The scandal reached all the way to the top with former President Jacob Zuma, accused of having given permission for the landing (*News24*, 2015).

¹¹ It was in December 2015 when former President Jacob Zuma dispatched of then Finance Minister Nhlanhla Nene, replacing him with David/Des van Rooyen. Van Rooyen's appointment was the country's shortest; he was replaced by Pravin Gordhan as finance minister. The aftermath of the event resulted in South Africa losing R500 billion in equities and bonds (Hogg, 2016).

Besides being insensitive to the plight of the mostly poor South Africans who have religiously voted for it, the ANC has a plethora of weak points such as: ‘Years of factionalism, self-destructive behaviour, short-sighted haemorrhaging of skills and allied organisations, de-fanging of the leagues, rampant corruption, blatant promotion of the politics of the stomach, the facilitation of state capture, tolerance of buffoonery among the leadership, to name but a few ills, are starting to bear their bitter fruit for the ANC’ (in Mpfu, 2016: 5).

It was under this cloud of internal and external challenges that the ANC lost control of three metropolitan municipalities, namely the City of Tshwane (administrative capital), City of Johannesburg (economic hub) and Nelson Mandela Bay, thus subsequently losing R130 billion in city budgets to Democratic Alliance-led coalitions (Mbatha, 2016). The DA were the biggest winners of the elections as the party achieved its best local electoral performance so far, while first-time LGE contenders EFF, improved on its performance from the 2014 general election. Many analysts saw the LGE 2016 as a turning point in the political landscape of South Africa, as the dominance of the ANC at the polls was greatly reduced, while coalition governments became more widespread. Maluleke argues (in Mpfu, 2016), that the ANC would have lost by an even bigger margin had it not been for the party’s struggle credentials, including the presence of some of their high calibre stalwarts.

The above sets out the context of the ANC, DA and EFF ahead of and during the 2016 LGE. It is important to provide the context and backdrop of the election period, to set out the mood and the social, political atmosphere at the time. This also gives the reader an emic perspective of South African politics and the three political parties.

2.3 Political campaigns

In a democracy, election campaigns are supposed to be a peaceful and open discourse of persuasion of the electorate (Bratton, 2008: 621). Ideally, candidates compete for popular support by presenting reasoned arguments about why they are the most qualified and suitable for election into a public office, be it local or national government (Downs in Bratton, 2008). Election campaigns are different ways by which political parties and candidates present their ideas and positions on societal matters (for example on how to tackle unemployment, land, or lack of housing) to the electorate during the period before elections. Most often, apart from political rallies, political

parties use different platforms and mediums to reach their stakeholders and citizens, such as posters, Short Message Service (SMS), traditional media (television, radio, newspapers) and social network sites (Facebook and Twitter). Voters then choose and ultimately (are supposed to vote for) the contender whose policy positions most closely mirrors their own set of preferences (Bratton, 2008: 621).

The stakes at local government level are extremely high. This is where political parties are able to connect more closely with citizens, control large cities and tap into community-based support which they can leverage during national elections. In order to harness the power of the LGEs, the bigger political parties invested heavily in their campaigns for the 2016 LGE. The ANC spent R1 billion on its election campaign according to the former head of campaigns, Nomvula Mokonyane (Essop, 2016c). This is more than double the R429 million the party spent on its campaign for the general elections in 2014 (*BusinessTech*, 2016). She attributed the costs to printing of t-shirts, posters, billboards, hiring trucks, holding rallies, paying volunteers and preparing candidate lists (*BusinessTech*, 2016).

The DA was reported to have spent R350 million on its election campaign (Hunter et al, 2016). The DA has also used Nelson Mandela as part of their campaign strategy, saying that Mandela's vision of a non-racial SA lies in the DA (Manyathela, 2016). They had positioned themselves as a party that accommodates all citizens regardless of race, creed and class. They have also positioned themselves as a party that fights corruption, creates jobs and delivers better services where govern governs (Maimane, 2016; Toerien and Kubheka, 2016).

The EFF spent in the region of R10 million on their election campaign (Mokone, 2016). The party positioned themselves as a socialist party that has the interests of the poor at heart. They have made calls for the nationalisation of strategic sectors of the economy including, land, mines, and banks. Prior to the elections, they promised the electorate better services, cheaper municipal rates, free WI-FI, spacious houses for the poor, and free water and electricity in their election campaigns. The party became a kingmaker (in this instance, to bring another political party to power through the exercise of voting with them to constitute a council) in a lot of hung municipalities and the big metros including Johannesburg and Tshwane, that didn't get an outright winner (Jordaan, 2016).

It has since emerged after the 2016 LGE that the ANC ran a covert R50 million fake news and disinformation election campaign against the opposition (Comrie, 2017). The covert team, initially known as the War Room, intended to de-campaign the DA and EFF, and set a pro-ANC agenda using a range of media, including fake Twitter accounts paid to publish fake news and in doing so manipulate voter sentiment (Comrie, 2017). What the ANC were trying to do here was to influence voter sentiment, so that the electorate would reject the opposition and vote for them. No one in the focus groups mentioned the War Room and some of the disturbing material that emanated from there. However, it is worth mentioning that such a campaign existed as it shows the importance of the LGE and that the ANC felt it was necessary to conduct underhand campaigning at all costs in order to retain power at the local level.

2.4 #RhodesMustFall, #FeesMustFall, #RUReferenceList protests

This study was based at Rhodes University, an institution which experienced protests in 2015 and 2016, centering on a number of issues, including free education¹², decolonisation of the academic space, and rape culture. Since these protests happened during the election year, it was important to this research to witness how political parties responded to these issues in their election campaigning on social media.

A starting point of a wave that would engulf higher education institutions was when Chumani Maxwele smeared excrement on the statue of British imperialist Cecil John Rhodes¹³ at the University of Cape Town (UCT), on 9 March 2015, in protest against Rhodes' racism and his legacy at UCT. His act of defiance would be what scholar Suntosh (2016) called the tipping point of not only a national, but an international call for the decolonisation of higher education institutions, captured by the expression #RhodesMustFall (RMF). According to the movement's Facebook page (in Suntosh, 2016) "the eventual fall of "Rhodes" (after the UCT Council voted to have the statue removed on the campus following pressure from students and the public) is symbolic for the inevitable fall of white supremacy and privilege at our campus". Maxwele and

¹² In mid-December 2017, with relatively little consultation or planning, Zuma announced that in 2018 free higher education would be provided to all new first year students from families that earn less than R350 000 per year (Areff and Spies, 2016).

¹³ A colonialist mining magnate and politician, Rhodes was a zealous British imperialist who used his significant financial power as head of De Beers diamond group and his political influence as Prime Minister of the Cape Colony (1890–1896) to pursue an expansion of the British territory by founding Rhodesia (present-day Zimbabwe and Zambia) and by working toward the realization of his vision of a Cape to Cairo railway (Oxlund, 2016).

other protesters said that the statue had "great symbolic power" which glorified someone "who exploited black labour and stole land from indigenous people" (BBC, 2015).

The RMF movement, which initially started as a result of the statue, led to a wider student movement at various former white institutions. The movement's calls for the transformation of universities, included: "'decolonising' the curriculum, raising issues around the low number of senior black academic staff, and an awareness raising campaign around artworks on campus which are seen by the movement to promote institutional racism" (Bosch, 2017). Subsequent to the removal of Rhodes' statue, EFF leader Julius Malema made a plea for all colonial and apartheid symbols to be removed nationwide. At the University of KwaZulu-Natal's Howard College, the statue of King George V was similarly vandalised. Pictures circulating on social media, with the hashtag #GeorgeMustFall, depict the statue splashed with white paint and draped with a banner bearing the words "[End white privilege](#)". A number of the Anglo-Boer War statues were damaged in Uitenhage and Port Elizabeth; the statue of Paul Kruger in Pretoria was painted green; and the statue of Louis Botha outside Parliament in Cape Town was vandalised. Finally, in September 2015 the nose of the bronze bust of Cecil John Rhodes at the Rhodes Memorial was cut off, and derogatory graffiti was sprayed on the monument. At Stellenbosch University, there was a similar campaign, called #OpenStellenbosch which sought to address the institution's history of white exclusivity, language policy and dominance (Oxlund, 2016; Open Stellenbosch Collective, 2015).

The #RhodesMustFall message resonated with students as far away as in Edinburgh, California and Oxford in the United Kingdom (Oxlund, 2016). Black students, with experiences of racial discrimination, marginalisation and insensitivity at Oxford University found it easy to identify with the movement, and the need to do away with symbols of colonialism and white supremacy, and that there should be improvement in the representation of 'black voices'. The students voted in favour of the removal of Rhodes' statue at Oriel College where Rhodes studied, but were defeated by donors' threats to withdraw funding of £100 million to the institution (Oxlund, 2016). Small student protests in support of the removal of the statue and the #RhodesMustFall movement also occurred at the University of Edinburgh and the University of California, whose students felt that the demands of RMF were relevant to their own grievances of perceived black marginalisation.

The campaign's momentum reached the Rhodes University campus in Grahamstown. The establishment of the now defunct Black Student Movement (BSM) formed at Rhodes University

was as a result of the inspiration drawn from the #RhodesMustFall movement in Cape Town, with a small section of the student body demanding that the university be renamed (Oxlund, 2016). Furthermore, issues relating to underprivileged students' vacation accommodation, the 'Eurocentric curriculum', and the small cohort of black staff members as opposed to their white counterparts were raised. A study by HEMIS, an agency of the Department of Higher Education and Training, into the staff complement of universities in South Africa (2015) revealed that out of 318 academic staff at Rhodes University, 51 are African, 20 Coloured, 16 Indian and 231 are White. BSM held various protests on the Rhodes University campus, including disrupting a management meeting, disrupting the 2015 opening address by Vice Chancellor Dr Sizwe Mabizela at the Highway Africa conference, and occupying the council chambers for more than a month (*Grocott's Mail*, 2015a). BSM's persistence, drive and fight was not in vain, as it made Rhodes University confront some of the issues it had failed to address in the past 21 years post-apartheid at the time. Some of the victories include, getting the university to establish free accommodation for the spring vacation, the appointment of a task team to look into the feasibility of changing the Rhodes name, and began several initiatives to fund underprivileged students, such as the Isivivane Fund¹⁴ and Ubuntu Fund (Rhodes University, 2017).

The #RhodesMustFall movement was the catalyst in the organisation of the #FeesMustFall (#FEMF) student protests against an increase in university tuition fees in October 2015 (Bosch, 2017). #RMF started at UCT, while #FeesMustFall, which started at the University of Witwatersrand (Wits), was more of a national student-led protest against the soaring fees of higher education institutions (Bosch, 2017). Scholars and political analysts have called the #FEMF movement the biggest student protest in post-apartheid South Africa since the 1976 Soweto Uprising¹⁵ (Oxlund, 2016; Maughan, 2015). In October 2015, Wits University announced a

¹⁴ The main goal of Isivivane Fund is to secure sufficient funding to ensure that no academically capable but financially needy student is refused entry to Rhodes University on the basis of lack of funds.

A 10-year campaign, Isivivane is the biggest fundraising initiative to be undertaken by Rhodes University in its 113-year history. It aims to raise R1 billion to achieve the following educational goals: to give academically deserving undergraduate students who are in financial need the opportunity to access Rhodes quality and transformative education, to increase postgraduate intake, to heighten student experience and to grow the endowment to ensure sustainability (Rhodes University, 2017).

¹⁵ The 1976 Soweto uprising was a series of demonstrations and protests led by black school children in Soweto and spread countrywide. The uprising profoundly changed the socio-political landscape in South Africa. Students from numerous schools began to protest in the streets of Soweto in response to the introduction of Afrikaans as the medium of instruction in local schools. It is estimated that 20,000 students took part in the protests. They were met with fierce

planned tuition hike. Some of the reasons cited included the souring rand–dollar exchange rate, together with increased salaries for academic staff and a general inflation rate of 6%. After a three-day lockdown of the campus, the #FeesMustFall movement spread nationally to other institutions when they also announced planned tuition increases for the 2016 academic year. Students in different campuses were united in the call for free higher education. After weeks of protests, government froze the fee increases for all students without an increment for middle-class students, while increasing university subsidies and contributions to the National Student Financial Aid Scheme (Konik and Konik, 2017).

Rhodes University then announced a reduction in the minimum initial payment (MIP) of 50% to 10% of fees for 2016. This meant that a student who would have previously paid R45 000 upfront was now only required to pay a R10 000 MIP (Rhodes University, 2018). The #FMF movement became a rallying cry against financial exclusion and debt traps for economically disadvantaged students. Rhodes University was shut down for three days whilst negotiations continued between management and student leaders (Mpulo and Pela, 2015; Parker, 2015). Although there was police presence, there were very few instances of violence or vandalism on the Rhodes University campus in 2015 (eNCA, 2015). The biggest victory at Rhodes was getting management to concede to reducing the MIP to 10% as an upfront payment, with an arrangement to pay fees over a 10 month period, and that all students that are academically deserving, but financially needy would not be excluded from the institution (Parker, 2015).

The #RUReferenceList was a protest that began at Rhodes University mid-April 2016. It was in response to a list of 11 Rhodes students accused on social media (posted initially on the RU Queer Confessions and Crushes Facebook page, and later posted on the UCKAR¹⁶ Student body [Facebook account](#)) of sexual assault. This sparked angry protest and demonstrations across the campus. The protest raised several issues, including: safety issues on campus, lack of visibility of campus protection, sexual assault (and cases that were not prosecuted as a result of University proctors talking students into dropping cases), rape culture, apathy towards survivors of sexual

apartheid police brutality. The number of protesters killed by police suspected to 176, but estimates of up to 700 have been made. In remembrance of these events, 16 June is now a public holiday in South Africa, named Youth Day (SAHO, 2017).

¹⁶ UCKAR = University Currently Known as Rhodes, a name students and staff came to use to refer to Rhodes University to indicate a desire to have the institutions name changed (Qambela, 2016).

assault by management and the University community, and a call for perpetrators to be expelled from Rhodes (*DispatchLive* 2016; Seddon, 2016). Just like other protests, the #RURefenceList spread to a few other universities with calls for an end to violence on women's bodies.

Suntosh (2016) makes a claim that Maxwele's actions and those subsequent to that indicate a growing mood of discontent among South Africans, in post-apartheid South Africa. He states that the renewed awareness of black consciousness, drew from earlier episodes in the country which questioned the state of society. He goes on to make an argument that it was former statesman Nelson Mandela's government of national unity that disabled radical activism by preaching peace, unity, reconciliation and love; and that South African youth and the public at large are critiquing those values in the wake of growing inequality, broken political promises, poverty and privilege. Suntosh points to three moments in South Africa's post-apartheid history that led to radicalism, particularly in institutions of higher learning:

The spine-chilling massacre of striking miners at Marikana triggered flashbacks of the police force's brutality in the 21 March 1960 massacre in Sharpeville, commemorated as Human Rights Day in the 'new' South Africa. In 2013, the formation and rise of the Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) offered us the urgency and stubborn audacity of a youthful political party. From 2014, their decorum-busting antics in Parliament, indifference to protocol, and interruption of a State of the Nation address in 2015, for the first time in a democratic South Africa, signalled an end to the politics of hope and patience. And then, the resilience of public protector, Thuli Madonsela in calling truth to power and insisting that the President pay back the money owed from his Nkandla home upgrades. There was a collective refusal to be silenced. These processes fed into a rumbling underlying energy – manifest in poverty, inequality, and exclusion – ready to erupt and disrupt. No longer entrapped in disorienting narratives of obedience, students finally actualised a politics of radical dissent (2016: 156).

This discussion was crucial in providing the context of the wave of protests at institutions of higher learning, but more importantly, to highlight the protests and the atmosphere, mood and issues faced by students on the Rhodes campus calling for decolonisation, transformation and the need for fees to fall in the election year. It was important to highlight this context, to understand whether, the

political party campaign social media messages were going to address and speak to the issues raised?

The advent and usage of social network sites (SNS) by different communities has many scholars debating the role and impact SNS can have as change drivers (Rauchfleisch and Schäfer in Mpfu, 2017). Scholars and commentators alike have conceptualised movements such as #RMF, #FMF and #RURReferenceList as internet-age networked student movements, because of the manner of communication between students and other interested parties on networks such as Twitter, Facebook and WhatsApp, which signalled a new way of mobilising and organising student political power (Luescher and Klemenčič 2017 in Luescher et al, 2017). Facebook and Twitter operate as a digital counter-public sphere that is a virtual hall where people gather around certain issues outside mediation by traditional media or the ruling class (Mpfu, 2017; Bosch, 2017). Content on these sites, especially on Twitter, is usually discussed through hashtags (#) that precede a word or phrase, so that interested parties and stakeholders alike can screen relevant issues. The hashtag becomes the imagined virtual hall where debates from local and national contributors come together through the online conversation. (Mpfu, 2017; Bosch, 2017). Twitter users can also retweet (RT) or like other users' tweets to indicate agreement, endorse a post, or to simply create an awareness of the tweet to other users, often referred to as tweeps, an amalgamation of the word Twitter and people (Mpfu, 2017). Bosch (2017: 224) argues that although the role of the internet in protests such as the Arab Spring are contested, one thing that is clear is how social media has facilitated protest participation by increasing opportunities for engagement in collective action in the student-led protests in South Africa.

2.5 South African youth

In April 2014, South Africa celebrated 20 years since the dawn of democracy. Many young people were able to participate in the election process for the first time. Democracy brought a lot of promises for the previously disadvantaged, especially the young people of being free from the shackles of the past, and having a democratically elected government that would listen to them (Malila and Garman, 2016: 64). A research study called *Listening to the 'Born Frees': Politics and disillusionment in South Africa* revealed that a lot of young people in South Africa, living in a democracy where there is freedom of movement, education and healthcare, still believe and have faith in the democratic processes and state institutions in this country (Boyce in Malila and

Garman, 2016). This is despite many of them still living in high levels of physical and material insecurity – “victimisation by corrupt bureaucrats, exposure to crime, shortages of food or cash income, or the loss of friends or family to AIDS” (Mattes, 2011: 7). Another study by Kamper and Badenhorst (in Malila and Garman, 2016), surveying 391 Black youth showed that a general level of optimism, hope, and independence exists amongst them around with a strong desire to escape the trappings of poverty and the inferiority of the past. The scholars found that Black youth continue to face many upheavals and challenges and are in a societal instability, evidenced through violent crime, poverty, and unemployment levels (Kamper and Badenhorst in Malila and Garman, 2016). Despite all of these challenges, Black youth have high expectations of a bright future. In recent times, there has been an emergence of young people, who are creating their own style and developing their own goals.

According to Malila et al (2013: 423) South African youth and the media have a relationship that is characterised by a linear traffic, from the media to the youth. Often young people are stereotyped in the media as a collective, an entity or even an object (Malila and Garman, 2016: 68). In a survey by Malila et al (2013), there are high levels of media consumption amongst young people: they are connected through traditional media platforms and on social media. However, the survey indicates young people also feel disconnected from the media, with many in the survey arguing that the media does not focus on issues in their communities and provides little information about their local context (Malila et al, 2013: 424). As such, young people feel that the media does not represent them, as it speaks to them, but it is not a platform that allows for engagement of public issues (Malila et al, 2013: 424).

2.6 Conclusion

In this chapter the researcher discussed the political landscape of South Africa prior to the 2016 local government elections, provided a view of the ruling African National Congress, the opposition the Democratic Alliance and the newly formed Economic Freedom Fighters. The researcher also outlined some of the parties’ election campaigns and main messages. This was followed by a discussion of the #.....MustFall movements, their origins and how they spread to campuses in South Africa, internationally and more specifically at Rhodes University. Finally, this chapter discussed the youth of South Africa and their relationship with the media. Since young people form the basis of this study, it was crucial to understand exactly how they consume the

media, and the sort of engagements they have, if any with the media. This chapter was an attempt to contextualise the local government elections and the political social landscape both in the country and locally, on the Rhodes campus. This was done to try and understand both the campaigns that were carried out by the political parties in light of this context, as well as the feelings of young people who were going to vote. This was the mood and atmosphere at the time in the run up to the 2016 LGE, but the question is whether was any of this was going to affect the campaigns?

CHAPTER THREE

Theoretical Framework

3.1 Introduction

This chapter examines important writing and developments within audience reception studies, in order to better understand the relationship between media, texts and the audience. In this study, media refers to social media. The first section will look at literature related to media and texts, and the different theoretical positions on the concept of media, text and audience. The second section deals with Hall's Encoding/decoding theoretical model, including any critiques stemming from it. This chapter concludes with Schroder's multidimensional audience reception model, and why the model is ideal for drawing out the many decoding elements in each dimension in this study.

3.2 Media audiences

The study of media audiences is not interesting or meaningful, unless it points to a broader critical understanding of the peculiarities of contemporary culture (Eng, 1991). There are two major dimensions in the theoretical reflections on audiences, the active-passive and the micro-macro dimensions. The first dimension is premised on the notion that the audience is passive versus the idea that the audience is active; while the second is premised on the idea that the audience is amass public versus the idea that the audience is a small community (Littlejohn, 1996).

Debates around the active-passive dimension seem to swing in the main between the idea that, "Voluntarism of a conception of the full human subject as an agent of meaning making and the determinism of a conception of the individual as the object of socialisation processes" (Allor, 1998). This notion influences audience theory, as there is a strict and clear indication that there is a preference for one of the binary oppositions (Carpentier, 2011). Scholars believe that the active-passive dimension emphasises the active role that audiences take in the signification process, and that often the participation-interaction dimension is hidden in the active dimension. Put differently, audience activity consists of two components, interaction and participation which are seen as very different components. The interactive component of audience activity refers to the traditional processes of signification and interpretation that are triggered by media consumption (Carpentier, 2011). The participatory component has two interrelated components. One is

participation 'in' the media and, the second is participation 'through' the media. Participation 'in' the media refers to citizens actively participating in the production of media content output. This form of media participation is seen to be encouraging audiences and citizens alike to adopt a more democratic and civic attitude (Carpentier, 2011). For example in the production of political party message, candidate councillors and their supporters may create media adverts and awareness of their campaigns on social media. Furthermore, it means that recipients of those campaigns can also, for example create memes¹⁷ from those posters on social media. Participation through the media deals with a different forms of participation, it deals with public debate and self-representation in the public sphere (Carpentier, 2011; Couldry, 2003). Participation essentially deals with ordinary people taking up space in public discussions in the discourse on media platforms. For example, citizens holding politicians accountable for both their actions and their promises on social media, can at most times see politicians responding positively, and it shapes the trajectory of the discussion.

The micro-macro dimension seeks to further define the audience. Carpentier (2011) defines the audience as an aggregate of individuals (micro) and a collective (macro). Radway defines (in Carpentier, 2011) the audience as a collective label for the consumers of electronic mediated messages. Furthermore, Moores defines (in Carpentier, 2011) audiences as groups divided by their reception of different media and genres or by social and cultural positioning.

Under the micro-macro dimension, there are various audience articulations. Livingstone and Lunt (1996) argue that television audiences are a combined group of alienated viewers, consumer-viewers, or citizen-viewers. In addition, Carpentier states that models such as the uses and gratification model are situated in the micro dimension. The uses and gratification theory will be discussed later in this section as a divergence away from media effects to the way in which people use the media. In the macro dimension, a strong emphasis is on the community aspect. Ang (1991) states that the macro dimension articulation is more complex and can be categorized in three different groups, namely class, gender, ethnicity; ordinary people; and taste cultures or subcultures. These three categories speak to the characters that people carry with them, the common popular

¹⁷ An image, video, piece of text, etc., typically humorous in nature, that is copied and spread rapidly by internet users, often with slight variations (Shifman, 2014).

cultures that ordinary people carry, and their preferences for certain media content (McQuail, 1994; Carpentier, 2011).

The active-passive and the micro-macro dimensions both attempt to define the audience within the realms of the mass media. Over and above that, the active-passive dimension helps to better understand the different types of media audiences, and how the active element in media audiences, through the participation-interaction dimension is important in the signification and interpretation of media messages. For example, in this study, participation in and through media allows audiences to also take part in the production of media messages through the creation of elements such as memes (that can also be used as a means of self-representation in the public sphere).

3.3 Uses and Gratification approach

The Uses and Gratification model is a popular audience-centred approach to understanding mass communication. The Uses and Gratification approach became prominent in the late 1950s and early 1960s. At that time there was widespread disappointment with attempts to measure the short term effect mass media campaigns had on audiences (Blumler, 1979: 10). The approach reflected a desire on the scholar's side to better understand the audience's involvement in mass communications in terms of being more focused on the individual user's own experience and perspective of the media and media text, rather than that which the effects tradition could possibly attain (Blumler, 1979: 10).

It is a communicative approach based in the socio-psychological communication tradition, that attempts to understand why and how people actively seek out specific media to satisfy specific needs (Cantril in Ruggiero, 2000: 3). The Uses and Gratification approach shifts the spectrum from the media effects on audiences, to understand the motivation of selecting and using particular media and asking "what do people do with media" (Blumler, 2000; Ruggiero, 2000; Katz et al, 1973). The major difference between the Uses and Gratification approach and the media effects approach is that in the Uses and Gratification approach, mass communication is taken from the point of view and perspective of the audience, rather than from the point of a communicator as in media effects (Ruggeiro, 2000). This approach assumes that audience members are not passive, but rather take an active role integrating and interpreting media into their lives. The approach also assumes that audience members are responsible for selecting the media that meets their needs, including various psychological needs.

Scholars suggest that there are many roles and goals of the media. The media attempts to keep audiences informed or educated (by imparting information, knowledge and understanding), and provide simple entertainment (escapism from the stresses of daily life). The media also enhances social interaction by sparking debates and conversations among audiences (Blumler, 2000; Katz et al, 1973).

Rubin said (in Ruggiero, 2000) that the concept of audience activity is not an absolute concept, but a variable one. For Windahl (in Ruggiero, 2000), the idea that audiences are active beings, leads to a depiction of the audience as selective and super rational, though that also invites criticism. Instead, he argued that audience activity covers a range of possible orientations to the communication process, a range that “varies across phases of the communication sequence”. Scholars Mark Levy and Sven Windahl provide a succinct explanation on what it means to be an active media consumer:

Different individuals tend to display different types and amounts of activity in different communication settings and at different times in the communication process (in Ruggiero, 2000: 8).

Although some of the empirical work done on the Uses and Gratification approach is not recent, it does account for the advent of technology and how the approach has evolved. In his essay *Uses and Gratifications Theory in the 21st Century*, Ruggiero (2000) pointed out that the active audience concept is gaining credibility with newer media researchers. He said that as emerging technologies provide users with a plurality of social media applications, media products, such as computers and cell phones; individuals are selecting a “media repertoire” in areas, audiences are choosing and using the media platforms they are most interested in (2000: 19). Reagan contends (in Ruggiero, 2000: 19) when he made a clarion call for scholars to desist from labelling media users as television or newspaper orientated people, but they should be called users of “cross-channel clusters of information sources” because of the media available for consumption.

Some scholars see the internet as a platform that supersedes traditional media because users can create relationships with many more people across the length and breadth of South Africa (Ruggiero, 2000). One thing that all scholars do agree on, is that the active audience concept will have to be revised when it comes to internet communication, because just like other media, user’s

needs and reasons for using the internet differ from individual to individual. Some users are goal directed and may want to complete a task through visiting specific web sites and networks, while others may be using the internet as means for entertainment and a way to escape from their daily lives (Ruggeiro, 2000: 20).

The Uses and Gratification approach relies a lot on the active audience member who acts with utilitarian considerations. Although the approach assumes that audience members are not passive, it is useful to this study to indicate that audience members have the power and agency over the kind of media they consume, in order to meet their desires and needs for them to achieve gratification.

3.4 Stuart Hall's Encoding/Decoding model

This segment is an overview of the approach to audience reception studies as developed by cultural studies theorists Stuart Hall and David Morley. This framework offers a theoretical approach of how media messages are produced, disseminated, and interpreted by audiences. The model is a theory of communication in which, in Hall's view, the media messages are open and polysemic (i.e. any text has multiple meanings rather than a single meaning). He suggests that audiences actively read media texts, rather than accepting them passively; they interpret the media text according to their own cultural background, economic standing and personal experiences (Hall, 1980).

Hall proposed that media messages pass through multiple phases of transformation during the reception process, from original production phase to interpretation phase. In the initial stage, the meaning discourse is framed or encoded according to the power structure relations, professional ideologies and dominant ideologies of producers who make assumptions about audiences. What Mcquail calls "preferred meanings" of audiences (2000). In the second stage, the rules of language and discourse are applied to the meanings and messages in the form of the meaningful discourse (Mcquail, 2000). At the concluding stage, the meaningful discourse is decoded as audience members decode or interpret the media text according to their own cultural background and experiences (Hall, 1980; Mcquail, 2000). Hall argues (in Ajibola, 2013) that the decoding moment demonstrated by audiences reading of the text, is just as important as the encoding moment. Thus Ajibola (2013) notes that elevating the manner in which audiences receive text in the

encoding/decoding theory, is of equal importance in terms of analysis, as understanding the creation of the text.

Hall suggests three hypothetical positions on which audiences decode and in which meaningful discourse maybe constructed (Hall, 1980: 136). He argued three different positions because "decodings do not follow inevitably from encodings, just because a media text is encoded in a particular way, does not mean it will be decoded or interpreted in the same intended format" (Hall, 1980). The first hypothetical position is that of the dominant-hegemonic position. The dominant code or position is one where the viewer or audience member connotes the actual meaning directly in the manner in which the media text was encoded; Hall calls it, "operating inside the dominant code" (Hall, 1980: 136). Inside the *dominant code* position, professional television broadcasters encode the media messages that have been signified in a dominant hegemonic format. Hall argues that these elites create the "hegemonic interpretations," because if these thoughts and ideas are hegemonic interpretations by the elites they become dominant (1980: 137). This notion is much like the philosophy of scholars Karl Marx and Frederick Engels "The Ruling Class and the Ruling Ideas" (1970). The scholars argued that the prevailing ideas of a particular society are formed by the ruling class to express and justify their position, the basic argument by Marx and Engels (1970) is that the ruling class also has some control over the dissemination of these ideas. Hall, therefore, stresses that if an audience member of a newscast decoded the message, believed it and that it resonated with his/her background and lived experiences, "in terms of the reference code in which it has been encoded" (1980). Then the audience would be "operating inside the dominant code" (Ajibola, 2013). This is what Hall (in Ajibola, 2013) refers to as "a typical example of a perfectly transparent communication where the text function as a framework ... of preferred structure of meanings which have been decoded".

The second hypothetical position that Hall identifies is that of the *negotiated position*. This position is a combination of accepting and rejecting elements in the media text.

Decoding within the *negotiated position* requires mixing of both adaptive and oppositional elements (Hall, 1980). It acknowledges the legitimacy of the hegemonic definitions to make the grand significations (abstract), while, at a more restricted, situational (situated) level, it makes its own ground rules - it operates with exceptions to the rule (Hall, 1980: 137).

Hall states that in this position, audience members acknowledge the dominant position, they even believe it; however, they are not willing to fully accept it. They have the agency to make their own rules in order to coexist with the dominant position. Essentially the audiences share media's texts and accept the "preferred" meaning but are resisting and modifying it according to their own lived experiences and interests.

The last position is the *oppositional position*. Hall explains that a viewer can understand the literal (denotative) and connotative meanings of a message while decoding a message in a globally contrary way (1980: 137). Hall explains that this position is based very much on experiences and background. He argues that this is when audience members are in direct oppositional position to the dominant code because of their lived situation (Hall, 1980: 137). These audience members clearly understand the intended message of the media text; however, they reject it.

3.5 Critiques of Hall's model

Despite Stuart Hall's communication model being widely accepted in the area of audience reception, it has come under review and faced criticism from scholars for its inability to fully capture the audience's experiences and their responses to media texts. Some critics have gone as far as to note the conflation of the encoded meaning and ideological tendency. Scholar John Fiske in his 1987 chapter on "active audiences" considers the audience as people who have the freedom and autonomy to make a plurality of meanings of a given text (Fiske, 1987). According to Fiske's argument (in Hall, 1980), the meanings that audience members make are not determined by their social or class standing. He makes the point that subsequent studies to Hall's theory have indicated that there are a variety of social factors in meaning production processes, and one cannot simply focus on class determination as articulated by Hall (1980). Furthermore, Hall's theory argues that media texts allow for a variety of negotiated and oppositional meanings, and that at the end of it all their structure assumes a dominant ideology. Fiske disagrees with this notion, and instead chooses to look at in a more productive way, not as a singular meaning with a preferred meaning, but as "structures of preference in the text that seek to prefer some meanings and close off others [meanings]" (Fiske, 1987: 65). So, while Hall sees the media text as a "structured polysemy of unequal meanings" some preferred over others, others stronger and weaker than other meanings; Fiske leaves the agency in the hands of the audience members with various backgrounds and identities to receive the media text differently.

Scholar David Morley, like Hall, is from the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies at the University of Birmingham, England. He used a British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) programme; *Nationwide* to study the encoding/decoding reception model by Hall. The key question for Morley in that study was to explore how decodings are influenced and structured by social position, in an overdetermined manner, across a range of dimensions – class, race, ethnicity and gender – not class alone (Morley, 1980). Morley found that in the decoding stage, there should be a distinction from the comprehension of the media text and its evaluation. By comparison, Morley refers to the audience member's understanding and possible interpretations of the media texts in its basic sense, including the sender's intention at the time of encoding. Morley's study included participants from different occupational and educational backgrounds and experiences. Using Hall's three hypothetical positions, the *dominant*, *negotiated* and *oppositional*, he sampled the participant's interpretations and responses in order to see which hypothetical position they would construct from the media text (Morley, 1980). Morley's study revealed that management groups produced dominant readings; and teacher training students and university arts students produced negotiated readings of the text. Trade union groups most often produced oppositional or negotiated readings. However, he found that black college students, "fail to engage with the discourse of the programme enough to reconstruct or redefine it" (Morley, 1980; Kim, 2004). As a result of the inconclusiveness of the findings in terms of members of the same social class producing different hypothetical readings, Morley's initial conclusion was that decoding and interpretations cannot be traced solely to the socioeconomic position that an audience member occupies (1980).

At this point it is also worth highlighting Schroder's critique of Hall's model before moving to his preferred reception model, which will be used as the framework for this research. Schroder gives some of the shortcomings or what he refers to as "misrepresentation" of the Hall model using an anecdote from a reception study of charity advertising found in Roe (1996). Schroder argued that there should be a definition of the concept "preferred reading" for it to be useful. Schroder felt that the encoding/decoding model misses some of the readings or rather dimensions because of its sole focus on "polysemy" and "preferred reading". He makes the claim that the preferred meaning, as articulated in Hall (1980), cannot be regarded as a "property of text", raising questions about whose reading is the legitimate preferred reading: is it the one intended by the producer or the one decoded by the receiver? Also, he argued that polysemy cannot solely be the feature of the

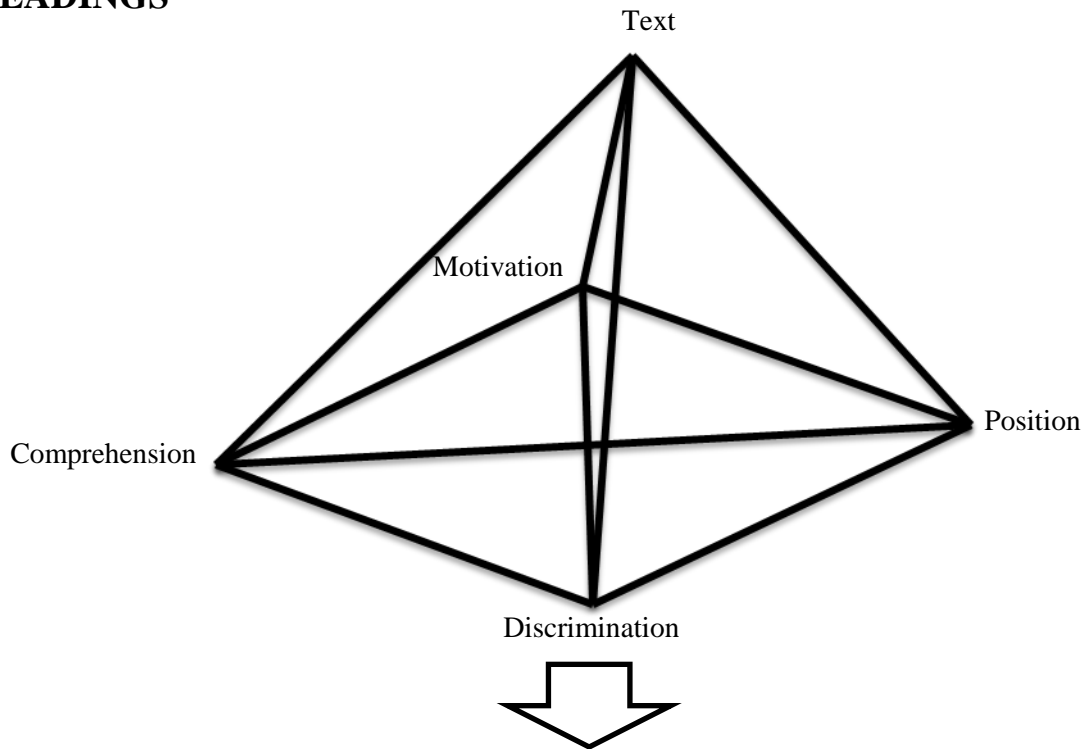
connotative level of meaning. Furthermore, Hall offered his encoding/decoding model as a hypothetical one that would require further development in order to become an adequate tool for empirical research; whereas Schroder's multidimensional model comes from empirical audience research and creates a framework that may assist reception analysts' attention to the various properties of audience discourses about media experiences (Schroder, 2000: 242). La Pastina argues (in Ajibola, 2013) that the engagement between texts and media audiences needs to be investigated in order, as a process that is positioned in a broader context, he offers four stages of the process, namely: reading, interpretation, appropriation and change.

3.6 Schroder's multi-dimensional model

This study used Kim Schroder's multi-dimensional model to make sense and understand audience reception. Schroder's model helped to better understand the various interpretations and experiences of audience members; suggesting that audience readings should be seen in terms of six sense-making dimensions (Schroder, 2000). The six dimensions are (Figure 1): *Motivation, Comprehension, Discrimination, Position, Evaluation* and *Implementation*. This model is, however, divided into two groups, one is the reading process, which Schroder calls the "interior reading process", which refers to how the first four dimensions are related to the text and to each other (Schroder, 2000: 243). These dimensions are primarily concerned with the way in which informants' subjectively - experienced meanings are produced in specific situational contexts. The second group (constituted by the *Evaluation* and *Implementation* dimensions) is the one in which subjective meanings may be rated by the analyst reader (audience member) in light of their social significance, as "they are situated in the socio-ideological formation and used as a resource for political action" (Schroder, 2000: 243).

Figure: 1

READINGS



IMPLICATIONS

Evaluation
Implementation

Schroder's multi-dimensional model: The model includes six dimensions of reception: *Motivation, Comprehension, Discrimination, Position, Evaluation and Implementation*. It tentatively divides these six dimensions into two groups: The four 'reading' dimensions are represented in the shape of a pyramid in order to show how all four are related to the text and to each other. They are all concerned with what we might call 'interior' reading processes, in which informants' subjectively experienced meanings are produced in specific situational contexts. The two dimensions called 'implications' are those in which the subjective meanings may be rated by the analyst in light of their social significance, as they are situated in the socio-ideological formation and used as a resource for political action (Schroder, 2000).

The starting point of Schroder's reception model, is the *motivation* dimension. This is a stage that draws both on audience member's cognitive and affective processes during the consumption of

media messages (Schroder, 2000). This dimension indicates the relevance of the media text to the audience, it includes any personal interest relevance, identification relevance (feeling attached to a character in the text), community (feeling a sense of belonging in the textual universe) etc. However, Schroder makes the argument that motivation is anything that sparks a reading, viewing, listening bug in the audience members, and any deviation from that by audience members is the arrest of the reception process (2000: 244). *Comprehension* is the second dimension, it refers to audience member's shared understanding of signs in spite of their polysemic nature. This stage draws on meanings of signs to be made from interpretive communities which are what makes communication possible. Furthermore, the semiotic resources available in society are determinants of one's level of experience, this is possible through discursive socialisation (Schroder, 2000). Ajibola (2013) gives an example for a better understanding of the *comprehension* dimension when he says "the encoder is concerned with having the audience actualise the intended message (i.e. convergence), whereas, the encoder of fictional message is rather interested in the plurality of audience responses (i.e. divergence)". Therefore, Schroder makes the point that this dimension should be understood as a decoding continuum from complete divergence to complete correspondence to either the encoders' intended meanings or the readings produced by other recipients (Schroder, 2000: 247).

For Schroder, *discrimination* is the third dimension. At this dimension, audience members may adopt an aesthetically critical stance towards a media text, as audiences comment and make remarks on the textual products' generic aspects (Schroder, 2000: 247). According to Schroder, this dimension is characterised by many questions as to how the media texts are to be received. He makes a point to indicate that all questions and readings of texts should be characterised by a bit of constructedness (a basic criterion involved in modality judgements about the reality status of texts). Awareness of a media text is quite an important aspect as it determines how close or distant one will engage/disengage with the text. Schroder, therefore, suggests that the multi-dimensional model of readings should include a dimension of aesthetic discrimination that takes the form of a continuum from immersion to critical distance (2000: 248).

The fourth dimension is *position*. This stage is about a continuum of attitudinal responses, from the acceptance of a textual position to the rejection of it, including the various textual elements perceived to make up that position. He drew the nexuses of this stage from the *Nationwide* study

conducted by Morley, who had conducted two focus groups between trainee managers and shop stewards. Both groups had to provide responses to their reading and the sort of meanings they made from the programme *Nationwide*. Both groups had contradicting responses to the programme, with the trainee managers saying the programme is a “socialist programme with a heavy pro-union bias”, while the shop stewards perceived it as “rabidly anti-union” (Morley 1980). In this dimension, acceptance of the media text does not necessarily mean the endorsement of the “preferred hegemonic position”, but rather it is what the reader agrees with or perceives to be the message of the text (Schroder, 2000: 248). Schroder argues that the above scenario gives a perfect need for the *position* dimension that comes in to resolve these shortcomings, as it applies only to “subjective” attitudes to the media text accompanying a reading. He goes further to say that those who accept the hegemonic meanings inscribed in a media text, do so unaware. While those who reject textual production, even if it is part of the media text, do so very much aware of the power structures that are encoded in messages (Schroder, 2000: 249). This is what Fiske (in Schroder, 2000: 249) calls the reader’s power in a semiotic democracy.

Evaluation is the fifth dimension in Schroder’s multi-dimension model. This dimension is somewhat different from the previous *position* dimension in that it focuses on the objective reading of media texts by audience members of the reception process. Schroder states researchers not only focus on the objectivity, but look at the impact of media messages in terms of the participant’s personal political analysis of the social subject-matter of the message (2000: 251). In this dimension, cultural analysts tend to locate the ideological positions that audiences assume from the ones identified by Hall (*dominant-hegemony*, *negotiated* and *oppositional*). Schroder made it a point to explain that the separation of the *evaluation* and *position* dimensions was important so as to reduce confusion that sometimes occurs in the one-to-one relationship found in Hall’s model, wherein “agreement and accepting” go hand-in-glove with the “dominant” reading, while “rejection” is assumed to be taking a “counter-hegemonic” reading (Schroder, 2000: 250). Schroder argues that this position should be used by the analyst “to evaluate audience readings not objectively but in terms of his or her personal political analysis of the social subject-matter of the message” (Schroder, 2000: 251). Schroder concludes by providing an example of *The Cosby Show* where it is possible for audience members to defy one ideological verdict and have many varied readings of a programme. In the sitcom the ideological portrayal of gender, race and class had

audience members reading the sitcom's portrayals as "respectively, progressive, hegemonic and contradictory" (Schroder, 2000: 250).

Implementation is the last dimension of Schroder's model. Schroder makes the claim that most empirical studies related to audience readings have never gone beyond the level of discursive readings. In this dimension, Schroder wants to test the extent to which readers would allow their readings to influence them, and what would be the likely outcome of that in terms of their social practice (2000: 252). He asserts that if counter-hegemonic readings do not cause an uproar and bring about change in social practice, such readings are as good as "politically impotent". Fiske in his earlier writings on polysemic readings and subordinate groups disagrees with the "politically impotent" statement. Instead, he argues that being different "is a resistive power and one that keeps alive the possibility of social change," because semiotic resistance is a force in itself that gives agency to the audience members (Fiske in Schroder, 2000: 252).

Schroder's multi-dimensional model took quite a lot from Hall's model, however, many scholars who have embarked on research on audience reception are aware that the meaning making processes is infinity more complex and can sometimes disregard the systematic analysis. Schroder's proposal or account for this model is to help with tools to analyse the dimensions of meaning that are involved in various encounters with the media. In addition, the model proposes a framework to analyse the sometimes tough process that audience members go through to engage, criticise, understand, and even respond to mass-mediated messages (Schroder, 2000: 254).

3.7 Conclusion

This chapter examined the concept of media audiences, from the concepts of active to passive audiences. There was a brief discussion of the concept of the Uses and Gratification approach and its usefulness to empowering audiences with the agency to make their own choices on their media consumption habits.

Stuart Hall's encoding/decoding reception model was examined quite closely, because the Hall model is the basis and framework from which Schroder's multi-dimensional reception model is drawn. Schroder's model has greater complexity, and it allows for a more intense focus on the decoding moment and analysis on the reception process through the six dimensions. This is essential in studying the sort of meanings that Rhodes University students made of the August

2016 local government elections' political party messages on social media. This chapter was important in broadly explaining audiences and audience behaviour, and how the Schroder model is beneficial to interpreting different elements or stages during the decoding process.

The next chapter discusses the methodology and the methods used to collect data for the study.

CHAPTER FOUR

Research Methodology

4.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses the research methodology, including the different methods that were used to collect data. This study's methodological framework is informed by the qualitative approach and as such informs the study's methodological framework, the chapter begins with a discussion on reception analysis, which is closely related with the qualitative approach. The qualitative approach is a research methodology that seeks to examine an active reality and instead of focusing on generalisations in the world, it focuses on understanding particular people and particular situations. Qualitative research essentially seeks to understand a research problem, primarily from the perspectives of the local population. Furthermore, qualitative research is effective in obtaining information regarding behaviours, attitudes, opinions and social context of the local population. As such, it was pertinent to this study, which is about gathering information about Rhodes University student's responses to political party messages on social media.

This study has been guided by the following questions:

- 1) Did the messages specifically resonate with them, and what meanings did they make from the election discourse which was present from political party messaging on social media?
- 2) Did youth at Rhodes University actively seek out political party messages on social media (by following the ANC, DA, EFF Facebook and Twitter accounts), or were the messages incidental on their timelines (for example, following news organisations)?
- 3) Did the social media messages conveyed by political parties relate to the issues faced by young people on this campus?

The data collection methods that were applied in this study are qualitative content analysis and focus group discussions. Qualitative content analysis goes beyond counting numbers and figures. Chihota-Charamba (2013) argues that it is useful in a study of this nature in finding out the patterns, ideas, thoughts, expressions and conceptions within the media in question. Focus group discussions offer an opportunity for intimate interaction and will be exceptional in this study to

draw understandings of how people socially construct meanings about public issues, for example, in this study, political party messages.

4.2 Reception studies

A reception study is a reader response literary theory that emphasises readers' or audience members' interpretation or reception in meaning making from a media text. The reception theory is generally referred to as audience reception. The objective of media reception analysis is to understand the lived experiences of media consumers (Moore, 1993). Jensen simply notes that media reception theory is "a meeting between a medium and its audience" (Jensen, 1988a). That said, the objective of this study is to understand how young people at Rhodes University made sense of or their interpretation of the August 2016 local government elections political party messages on social media.

The contribution that reception theory makes in media reception research is important to note according to a number of studies. First, reception studies are a relatively open activity of making sense of text, it allows audiences to reformulate, agree or even disagree with the dominant meaning of a media text (Jensen, 1988a: 4). It, therefore, allows audience members to combine their individual experiences, together with the media discourses and everyday discourses from culture, economy, religion and politics; to establish links which are rather unexpected and which move beyond the universes "immanent" in the text (Jensen, 1988a: 4). Secondly, reception can be characterised as an ongoing, complex process of reformulating, and reaffirming categories of understanding, in other words, it's a continual process (Jensen, 1988a: 4). According to Jensen, media and its contents are not just accounts of reality, but they are resources for everyday life and situating oneself in relation to a range of social and political issues, and possibly acting on them (1988: 5). Therefore, reception analysis seeks to clarify the audiences' experiences and practices through "getting those involved to verbalise them in a non-natural but open situation of the qualitative research interview, in which informants have considerable power to influence the agenda" (Schroder et al., 2003: 147). Furthermore, qualitative research collects evidence, produces findings that were not determined in advance, and produces findings that are applicable beyond the scope or boundaries of the study (Ncube, 2016). Therefore, qualitative research shares these characteristics, and it seeks to understand a given research problem or topic from the perspectives of the local population involved in the study (Ncube, 2016).

Audience reception was based on the medium of television, Schroder (2000) conceptualised a multi-dimensional model which would include studies of other media, including social media. This study has researched the way in which young people in a university setting made meaning of and interpreted political party messages on social media. The study made use of qualitative methods such as qualitative thematic content analysis and focus group discussions with a small number of Rhodes University students for the purpose of audience research by revealing the responses that Rhodes students made of political party messages on social media. These methods are seen to be the best at probing audience experiences of media (Jensen, 1988b: 4). The rationale of this chapter is to examine the philosophy underpinning the qualitative approach.

4.3 Research methodology

4.3.1 Qualitative research

Qualitative research is deemed by some scholars to be much more fluid and flexible than quantitative (emphasis on hypothesis and fixed measurements) research in that there is an emphasis of discovering novel or anticipated findings and the possibility of altering research plans in response to unanticipated and unforeseen occurrence (Bryman, 1984: 78).

In its broadest sense, qualitative research is research that produces data – people’s own spoken or written words or observable behaviour (Taylor et al, 2015: 7). It is a way of approaching the empirical world (Rist in Taylor et al, 2015: 7). Rather than trying to define qualitative research, Yin instead proposes five features that best describe and characterise qualitative research study. First, is that qualitative research studies the meanings of people’s lives under real world conditions. Second, it represents the views and perspectives of participants in a research study. Third, qualitative research covers the contextual conditions under which people live. Fourth, this methodology contributes insights into existing or emerging concepts that may help to explain human and social behaviour; and finally, it strives to use multiple sources of evidence rather than relying on a single source (Yin, 2011: 7-8). Jensen on the other hand highlights at least three common denominators in a number of theoretical and methodological aspirations in qualitative studies. At the core of all studies is the focus on concept of meaning, both as an object of study and as an explanatory concept (2012: 266). Jensen argues that people interpret their ordinary lives and the events that they encounter for a purpose, and from that they take up positions from which to exercise agency (which will inform their actions). Furthermore, qualitative research normally

assumes that communication should be examined as far as possible in natural settings, because it entails considering contexts in which particular communicative phenomena may be examined or encountered (Jensen, 2012: 266). Qualitative research regards all researchers as interpretive subjects, meaning it is carried out by human subjects (Jensen, 2012: 266).

Qualitative approach seeks to understand the way human beings think and make meaning and interpretations of their social contexts and how people communicate their understanding through communication. Considering all the qualitative research features by scholars Yin and the denominators by Jensen, qualitative research was preferred for this study because it is quite flexible in terms of pursuing different avenues of enquiry with research subjects. The researcher was given a wider space to follow various directions depending on the participant's response to a question. The researcher believed this flexibility to manoeuvre is required for exploring the various subjective interpretations and meanings of the political messages on social media by young people at Rhodes University.

The aim of this research was to understand the “insider perspectives” of a particular social group (Babbie and Mouton, 2001: 271). It is basically to make sense of, and interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings that people make and bring to them (Denzil and Lincoln, 1994). Scholars argue that the topic under investigation, or the nature of the object under study ultimately determines the type of research methods the researcher will undertake to complete the study.

4.3.2 Thematic qualitative content analysis

Thematic qualitative content analysis proposes that the researcher should know, or at least have a certain amount of knowledge, about the media product under investigation, so that they can conduct and have a meaningful conversation and interview with the participants (Schroder et al, 2003: 154). Unlike, quantitative content analysis that is a research technique for the objective, systematic, and quantitative description of the manifest content of communication (Berelson in Rourke and Anderson, 2004: 5). In addition to that, quantitative analysis is about numbers and figures, it requires formal properties such as word frequencies, space measurements, hashtags, time counts number of friends, or liked pages, number of tagged people in an image etc.

Qualitative content analysis is an approach that collects and analyses data from messages that are communicated by a variety of means (newspapers, books, physical media and increasingly by

digital forms of communication [social network sites, i.e. Facebook/Twitter]) (Curtis and Curtis, 2011: 195). The general intention of qualitative content analysis according to Chihota-Charamba (2013), is to find out the patterns, ideas, thoughts, expressions and conceptions within the media in question. With this section of the research, the researcher had to abstain from providing a detailed textual analysis of the media product, but to familiarise himself with sufficient knowledge of the media text in order to be able to carry the study.

The intention of using qualitative content analysis was to access and ascertain preliminary information so as to prepare adequately for the focus group discussions. Also, qualitative content analysis was used to understand the patterns and trends of the media messages on social network sites. The sample was small because the focus of the research is the audience, as such the centre of the research is the focus groups. The messages were used to enhance the FGD experience.

Qualitative content analysis helped in identifying some of the themes and even language used in the political party messages. The researcher conducted qualitative content analysis in order to probe and discover content, in a manner that is different to opening and reading a leisure magazine, book or watching a television programme (Neuman, 1997: 273).

For this study, the researcher adopted a random sampling form of technique in terms of selecting political party messaging content. All the messages selected, were between the period 4 July to 4 August 2016, as this was when the election season was in full swing, using the hashtags that were trending at the time, like #LGE2016, #Asinavalo etc. Since the analysis of text is concerned with forms and meanings, the political party messages on social media were analysed according to their particular representation (referring to the features and language used), the subjects used and the topical issues covered on the messages. Morley (1992) argued that in order to understand text, the underlying assumptions should be made visible and understood.

Furthermore, it was important to look into the mode of the address (looking at the ways these messages were used to address the target audience, whether they used emotive language, formal or even colloquial) of the political party messages to the audiences, and whether the mode of the address resonated with the audience. The knowledge that the researcher acquired through this exercise of qualitative content analysis provided the background for the focus group interviews,

by enabling the researcher to formulate and probe participants with relevant questions during focus groups.

4.3.3 Focus groups

One way of collecting data in qualitative research is through focus group discussions (Tonkiss, 2004). The focus group is a collectivist, rather than an individualist method that focuses on the multivocality of participants' experiences, beliefs and attitudes, usually with people of the same ethnic, socioeconomic and gender backgrounds (Morgan in Madriz, 2000). Stated simply, a focus group is a small group of people who get together and are focused on a particular topic which is facilitated by a moderator (Tonkiss, 2004: 194).

Focus group discussions have a number of useful advantages that place it head and shoulders above other types of data collecting methods, which Kitzinger (1995) and Tonkiss (2004) outline. Focus groups are excellent in helping the researcher to tap into communication that people use in their day to day interaction, including anecdotes, arguing, and jokes. Kitzinger argues that having and gaining access to such a variety of different forms of communication is useful because people's knowledge and attitudes are not entirely encapsulated in reasoned responses to direct questions.

Everyday forms of communication may tell us as much, if not more, about what people know or experience. In this sense, focus groups reach the parts the other data collection methods cannot reach, revealing dimensions of understanding that often remain untapped by more conventional data collection techniques (1995: 299).

Furthermore, this method is particularly useful for a study of this nature in that it helps to explore people's knowledge and experiences and can be used to examine not only what people think, but how they think and why they think that way.

A number of scholars (Tonkiss, 2000; Hansen, 1998; Curtis and Curtis, 2011) stated that focus group discussions have a positive element of encouraging participation from those who are reluctant to be interviewed on their own (such as those intimidated by the formality and isolation of a one to one interview). Moreover, they encourage contributions from people who feel they have nothing to say or who are deemed "unresponsive participants" (sometimes due to the dominance of others, however, they engage in the discussion generated by other group members).

In media and communication studies, focus group discussions are used to explore issues of audience reception, which are core to this study (Tonkiss, 2000: 194). This study used focus group discussions to understand how young people at Rhodes University made sense and meaning of political party messages of the August 2016 local government elections. The focus group discussions allowed the researcher to identify and to find out how the political party messages resonated with their needs as Rhodes University students, and students of higher education in general, which included revisiting some key thematic themes at different stages during the interviews (Hansen et al., 1998).

When collecting data using the focus group method, it is preferred that the researcher conduct a minimum of six focus group discussions, until such a time when the comments in the interviews begin to repeat themselves (Hansen et al., 1998). For this study, six focus group discussions were conducted. Participants signed up to any discussion that was convenient to them according to their schedule, and in this study, there were no rules in terms of arranging groups according to race, religion, class etc. The composition of the focus groups, were, what Curtis and Curtis (2011), termed “affinity groups”. Affinity groups were preferred in this study as it allowed the participants to be comfortable with each other (that enhances the interaction). Affinity groups are people who may know each other, and they spoke frankly about their interpretation of media content on the political party messages (Mabweazara, 2006; Curtis and Curtis, 2011: 109).

4.4 Sampling procedure of content analysis and focus groups

Given that this study is of a qualitative nature, the researcher chose purposive sampling of the focus group participants using the snowball sampling method to select both the data sample and participants. Purposive sampling represents a group of different non-probability sampling techniques. This technique is also known as judgmental, selective or subjective sampling. Purposive sampling relies on the judgement of the researcher when it comes to selecting the units (e.g. people, cases/organisations, events, pieces of data) that are to be studied. Usually, the sample being investigated is quite small, especially when compared with probability sampling techniques (Hansen et al, 1998).

Common to all qualitative sampling procedures is that selection of sample units is consciously shaped by the research agenda (Deacon et al, 1999). For this study the agenda is to understand and account for audience responses to political party messages on social media. It is for this reason

that participants were selected purposively using the snowball sampling method. The sample is primarily Rhodes University undergraduate and postgraduate students who are G15s and below (students who have been at Rhodes since the beginning of 2015 and years before) who would have experienced the wave of the #RhodesMustFall, #FeesMustFall and #RUPreferenceList protests on the Rhodes campus. Whether students voted or did not vote in the local government elections is not a sampling factor. Eligible students had to have access to a smartphone, tablet or a laptop that allowed for easy access to social network sites during the election period.

With regards to the content analysis sample, because the study is on youth responses to political party messaging, based on the 3 August 2016 local government elections, the sampling of political party messages was from 4 July to 4 August 2016, as political party messages featured quite prominently at that point online as a strategy by parties to sway especially the undecided voters. Research by scholars found that increased visibility on the eve of elections can increase issue knowledge, influence perception of voters about candidates and affected vote likelihood (turnout) (Benoit, 2014: 7).

The researcher chose seven political party messages to show the participants during the focus group discussions. They were chosen to spark and prompt the discussion on their consumption, engagement, and meaning making of these messages from the hashtags that were trending on social media in the run up to the election, such as #LGE2016, #Asinavalo. The researcher chose some which featured prominently on social media, which the researcher hoped would be able to jog the participant's memories of during the election period. These messages could be found on the Facebook and Twitter accounts of the @MyANC (African National Congress), @Our_DA (Democratic Alliance) and @EFFSouthAfrica (Economic Freedom Fighters); on news sites such as eNCA, EWN, and News24, or on timelines of people who would have shared the content. In the middle of the discussion, videos were also used as prompts to get more meaning and responses from participants. This method provided a framework for exploring the experiences and sense-making processes of the participants through conversations with one another and with the researcher about their reading of the 2016 local government election political party campaign messages on social media.

4.4.1 Snowball sampling

Snowball sampling was used to select the focus group participants. Initially, 48 focus group participants were proposed for all the FGDs combined, however, 43 turned up. Each group was expected to have eight (8) participants. Group one and six had eight participants; group two had only six (6); group three, group four, group five each had seven (7) participants.

The researcher tried to ensure that the participants are representative, at least of the racial make-up of students at Rhodes, because South Africa is a multiracial and diverse nation, so it is important to engage every racial profile as citizens and more importantly as students in this institution, especially on matters of politics. The make-up of the student body is 71% black (62% African, 4% Coloured and 5% Indian/Asian students) and 29% White (Masiza, 2017). The researcher had broken down the make-up of the 43 participants to: 73% African, 4% Coloured, 2% Indian/Asian, and 21% White participants.

4.5 Location of the study

The local government elections happen across South Africa, this study focuses on an audience membership of young people at Rhodes University. The decision to study this group came after a number of factors, the main being that after two years of political activity (strikes, marches) on campus, it was important to understand the interpretations and meanings that they made from political party message discourse and whether these messages in anyway shape or form spoke to the issues of Rhodes University students and students in higher education in general. Secondly, it was current and former Rhodes students who stood as candidate councillors for Ward 12, yet voter turnout stood at 39% of the student population (IEC, 2016b), furthermore there were a lot of posts on social media sites, Facebook and Twitter and conversations online by students, however, that did not translate in numbers at the polls. Third, the Rhodes campus was a convenient space to conduct the research as the researcher is a student there, and there was a relative easy access to the participants.

4.6 Moderator's role

According to a number of scholars, the ability to manage, handle and work with a dynamic group people is a key requirement for successful moderators (Curtis and Curtis, 2011). In order for the discussion to feel natural, the moderator should allow for an exchange of ideas and discussion amongst the participants with the least possible form of disturbance, the discussion should flow

through an unfettered exchange (Curtis, 2011: 108). There is a general agreement amongst scholars that the moderator should be flexible, empathetic, persuasive, objective and a good listener. Furthermore, the role of a moderator in a focus group is to put research topics and questions to the participants, it is them who should dominate the discussion (Fontana and Frey, 2000). In this study, the researcher made it a point that the thematic content topics are covered and that any similar issues of that nature are also covered and interrogated in the different focus groups for analysis. The researcher, as the moderator, was the one responsible for the facilitation of the focus group discussions. His role was to stimulate the discussion, ensure that the participants speak honestly about the topic and have their opinion validated (Curtis, 2011: 108).

In order to achieve this and to make sure that the focus group discussion does not go astray, the moderator had to be clear with the ground rules to the participants and ensure that they understand. This, Curtis and Curtis (2011) say, creates and develops a sense of camaraderie in the group. The moderator's job included ensuring that all the information and procedure as set out in the interview guide was followed, to ensure that none of the six focus group discussions degenerated into chaos. The intention and purpose of using the interview guide was to act as a board for questions and topics to be covered during the focus groups. The guide was properly set out to provide direction in relation to the sequence of questions, topics, and the prompting visual aids that the moderator used, including the time for them to be introduced during the discussion. The interview guide is Appendix 1. The moderator followed the interview guide quite rigidly as everything had been set on it, in terms of what the moderator wanted to find out from the participants, even with the follow up questions. However, the moderator always made it a point to go back to the guide, so as to allow for the discussion to flow at length and unhindered. The focus group discussions were conducted in English, as all the participants were quite comfortable with the language (however, the moderator had set it out at the beginning of each discussion that if a participant wished to express him/herself in another language, they were most welcome to do so). All discussions were recorded using a digital field voice recorder. The moderator sought written and verbal consent form from participants and verbally so as to record the discussion, and all participants obliged.

Before the FGDs began, the researcher conducted a thematic qualitative content analysis in order to ascertain preliminary information (like, language used, mode of address and topics covered) so as to prepare adequately for the focus group discussions. The moderator chose seven political

party messages to show the participants. This study used only one interview guide, which began with a “funnel approach” which were broad and general questions intended to find out which social network sites were used most by Rhodes University students to consume political party message before the 2016 local government elections. This was followed up by showing them political party messages which were online at the time, and probing participants with specific questions around the sort of engagements they had with those messages, the sort of meanings they attributed to the messages, and whether these messages spoke to their needs as students at Rhodes and in higher education in general. Lastly, the moderator wrapped up the discussions with responses from the participants on a few video messages from political parties. The videos were also on social media and they were an extension of the party picture messages. They covered more in-depth issues (ANC legacy, service delivery, fighting corruption, Mandela legacy) that the party messages could not.

4.7 Ethical considerations

Before the commencement of all six focus group discussions, the moderator/researcher read out all the rules, do’s and don’ts as well as what was expected by the moderator from the participants during the discussions, as stipulated in the consent form provided to all participants. All participants took part in the discussions out of their own free will. The moderator also explained to them that for transcription purposes, there was a need to record the interviews and they would be saved on a password-protected laptop in a digital audio format. Political affiliation, and political activity are sensitive issues, considering the nature of this particular study, the moderator had to ensure that all identifiable markers (including names as well as information from focus groups), will be handled with the strictest confidence to promote safety and comfort of the participants (Ali & Kelly in Seale, 2004). The researcher also used pseudonyms to hide the identities of the participants. The researcher received ethical clearance from the RU ethical standards committee before commencement of the research.

4.8 Conclusion

In this chapter, the researcher discusses the procedures employed in the data collection process. The chapter began with a discussion on reception studies, followed by an analysis on why the qualitative approach was suitable for this audience study. Furthermore, the researcher discussed the specific techniques employed for this study, which were thematic qualitative content analysis

and focus groups, from the data collected on social media. Moreover, the sampling method and the participant recruitment processes were briefly outlined; the researcher also discussed the FGD setting, and ethical considerations which detailed the rules, and how to conduct a good focus group discussion with minimal hassles. The next chapter presents and analyses the findings of the study.

CHAPTER FIVE

Presentation and Analysis of findings

5.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to present and discuss the findings of the study. The study used thematic qualitative content analysis and focus group discussions as methods to collect data. The chapter starts off with a discussion on the thematic qualitative content analysis on the political party messages from three political parties, the African National Congress (ANC), Democratic Alliance (DA) and the Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF), which the researcher used for the focus group discussions. The researcher had to ensure that he versed himself with the media messages and their content, so as to be well prepared for the focus group discussions, as the messages were used to spark and prompt the discussion amongst participants. In essence, this chapter explores the students' meaning-making and responses to the messages and whether these political party messages resonated with the issues of Rhodes University students.

The previous chapter set out the methodology underpinning the study, including the methods used to investigate the manner in which students decoded messages. The data was collected by FGDs comprising of 43 participants, in six focus groups.

5.2 Qualitative content analysis of political social media messages

A thematic qualitative content analysis was conducted on the political party message samples to draw out some of the themes and ideas encoded in the sample messages, in terms of understanding the topics covered, language used and mode of address used in the political party messages on social media. Also, only a small sample of media texts were analysed, which was done so as not to shift focus from the reception process, which remains the primary objective of the research study.

In the analysis of texts or programmes, it is important to look at the assumptions behind the content, and its audience, as Morley suggests that:

When analysing texts or programmes, we also have to look at the assumptions that lie behind the content. There will be assumptions made about the audience and these assumptions [about the audiences] need to be made visible if we are to understand the

implicit messages which a programme/text may transmit over and above what is explicitly said in it (1992: 84).

It is also important that the thematic qualitative content analysis focuses on the mode of address or how the stories speak to the readership, as this would help establish the kind of relationship political parties had with the recipients of these messages, and whether these political party messages resonate and appeal with the readers (young people). Morley (1992: 83) contends the need to be concerned with the modes in which the text addresses the audience members and how these modes of address construct reader's relations to the content of the text, therefore requiring the readers to take up different positions in relation to the texts.

Part of the reason the researcher undertook this study was because at the time of the 2016 local government elections, the discourse in the political arena was on values of late former statesman and liberation hero Nelson Mandela. The discourse also included the fight against corruption in all its manifestations, providing efficient public services, and the ANC's legacy in government. The researcher sought to understand the discourse from the perspective of other people who also received these messages.

Social media has, over the past few years, become integrated into election campaigning and other forms of political communication (Skogerbø in Enli and Skogerbø, 2013). The intention of political parties using social media networks in their campaigning is because of the increasing numbers of generation Y¹⁸ and generation Z¹⁹ are coming into the voting population. Social media has dramatically changed the way in which modern political campaigns are run, in terms of political parties being able to directly engage and communicate with the electorate. Recent scholarly work on political parties and social media indicates that microblogging services such as Facebook and Twitter have a huge potential for increasing political participation (Stieglitz and Dang-Xuan, 2012). The political parties in this study are adapting quickly to connect, engage and

¹⁸ The generation of people born during the 1980s and early 1990s. Members of Generation Y are often referred to as "echo boomers" because they are the children of parents born during the baby boom (the "baby boomers"). Children born during this time period have had constant access to technology (computers, cell phones) in their youth (Elmore, 2014).

¹⁹ Demographers and researchers typically use the mid-1990s to mid-2000s as starting birth years. At the present time, there is little consensus regarding ending birth years. Most of Generation Z have used the Internet since a young age, and they are generally comfortable with technology and with interacting on social media (Elmore, 2014).

influence citizens, especially young people, to vote for them in the local government elections (Tumasjan et al, 2010: 179). But the question is whether their messaging is resonating with young people and making them go out and vote?

The local election content on social media consisted of memes; photos of the candidates captioned with their names and the constituency they are from, and posters with aspects of the party's manifesto plus a clarion call for all South Africans to vote for the respective party.

This section presents data from the thematic qualitative content analysis of sampled election material in order to see the kind of content found in this election material. The study abstained from detailed analysis, as the main point in this section was to familiarise the researcher with the media text in order to carry out the audience studies research that motivates this study. Familiarity with the language used, keywords/topics in content, followed by a description and interpretation of the underlying text provided the basis of the analysis. This content provided the background (in terms of jogging their memories of the messages, prompting the discussion, and raising some of the topical issues that were important during the 2016 LGE) for the participants during the focus group discussions, through the seven media texts chosen on social media in order to examine the participant's uses and responses to the 2016 LGE content.

According to scholars Enli and Skogerbø (2013: 758), in a party-centred system, such as Norway and South Africa, the political party plays the main role for originating and spelling out politics, and the need for candidates to build a personal image is less obvious. However, as we have seen a number of times, during local government elections, local party structures take charge of communication and campaigning by using the faces of their candidates more (for example, [Figure 1](#)), so that the local electorate can be familiar with whom to vote for when going to the polls. They are building what Enli and Skogerbø (2013: 758) call, "the candidate's political image". In the adverts on social media at Rhodes University, they used the faces of the candidate councillors competing for the Ward. Furthermore, these scholars argued, that since social network sites like Facebook and Twitter entered the political arena, they have levelled the playing field in terms of political communication, marketing and campaigning. They argued that social media has created a process of personalisation in politics (Enli and Skogerbø, 2013: 758), which allowed candidates to communicate directly with citizens, and to create intimate relations with citizens. Other adverts

included the national leaders of political parties, one advert was a meme of a baby, and the other advert was of ordinary EFF supporters.

Figure: 1



A poster of ANC Ward 12 candidate councillor Mthobisi Buthelezi

The picture of the ordinary people ([Figure 2](#)) captioned “Vote EFF for access for bursaries” indicates the social issues that ordinary people, go through to access higher education in South Africa. Access to higher education has been a major stumbling block for a lot of young people particularly because of exorbitant prices at public universities in South Africa, hence, the country experienced #FeesMustFall protests two years (2015 and 2016) in a row. That advert sought to speak to the issues of access to higher education.

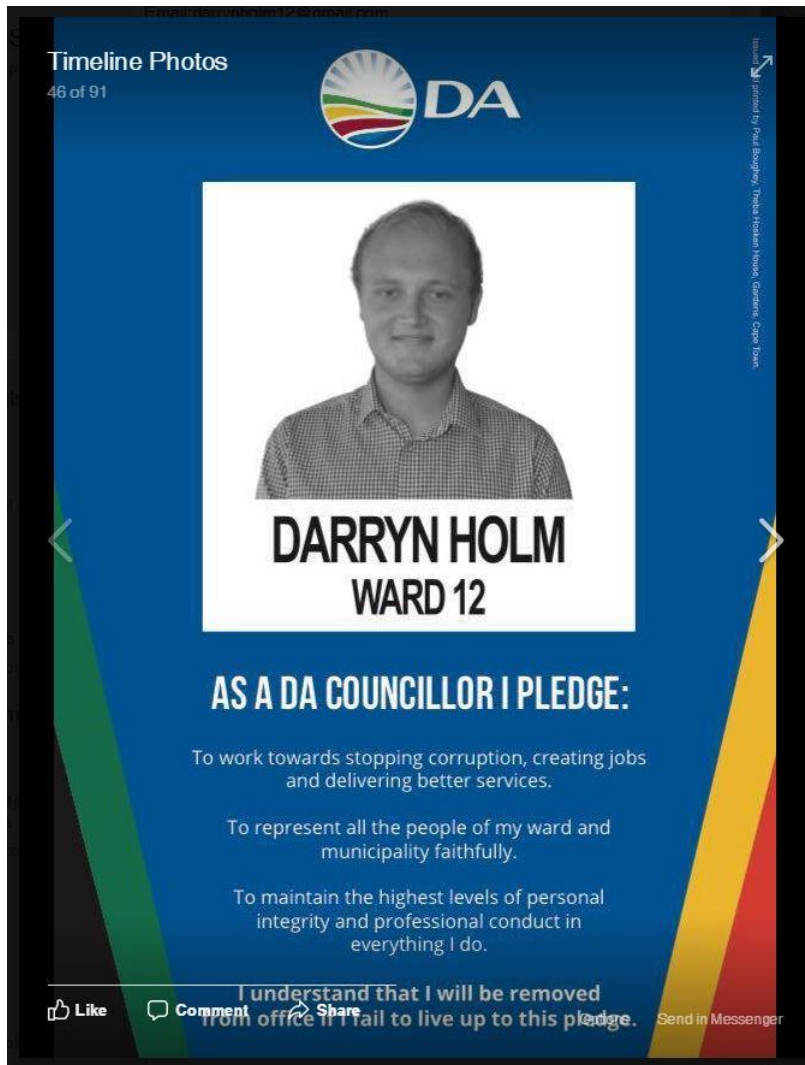
Figure: 2



A group of EFF supporters during a 2014 general elections march

In terms of language usage, five of the media messages were published in English, with one published in Sesotho and the other one published in both English and IsiZulu. The researcher noted that some of the tone in these political party messages plays a role to project their seriousness about the local government elections. For example, the DA have an entire manifesto pledge accompanied by the picture of their candidate councillor, as [Figure 3](#) shows. It states: “As a DA councillor I pledge – To work towards stopping corruption, creating jobs and delivering better services. To represent all the people of my ward and municipality faithfully. To maintain the highest levels of personal integrity and professionalism in everything I do. To understand that I will be removed from office if I fail to live up to this pledge”.

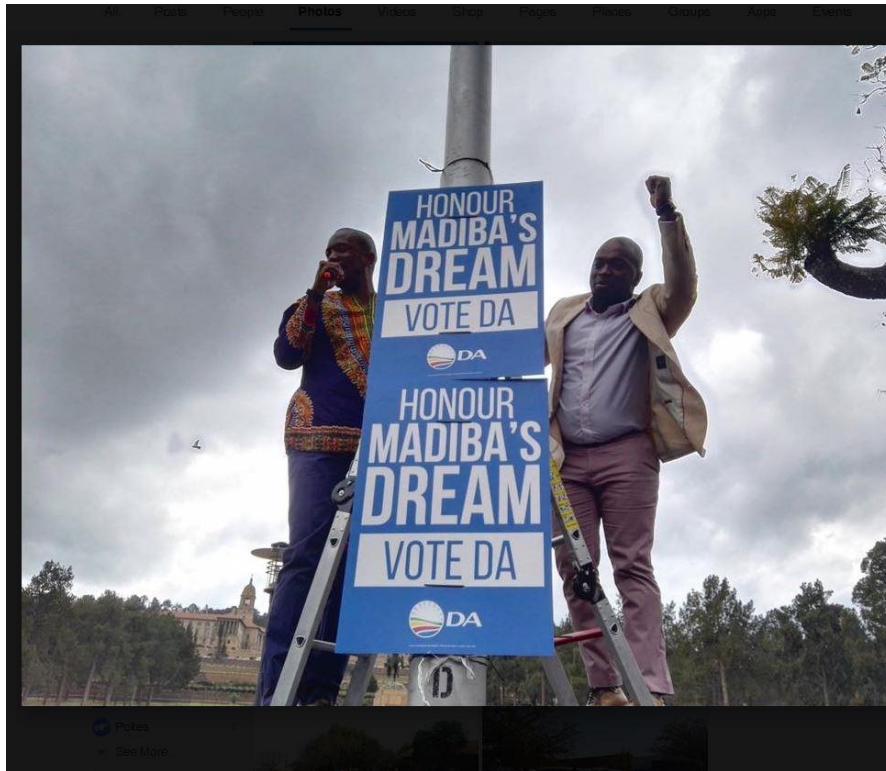
Figure: 3



A poster of Democratic Alliance Ward 12 candidate councillor Darren Holm

Another message from the DA reads, “Honour Madiba’s [Nelson Mandela] Dream, Vote DA”. As [Figure 4](#) clearly shows the message was published in easily understandable language, but also in a serious tone to appeal to the voter’s conscience when heading to the polls.

Figure 4



DA leader Mmusi Maimane and City of Tshwane mayor Solly Msimanga put up posters in and around Pretoria ahead of the 2016 LGE.

Through these messages the DA is trying to indicate to the electorate that they are the only political party that fights corruption, and even their councillors are willing to step down or resign should they fail to uphold their pledge. Also, the DA projects itself as a party that, unlike the ANC (Mandela was a member and president of the ANC, and head of state), still upholds Mandela's values of non-racialism and a corrupt-free South Africa, and that is an issue that resonates with a lot of South Africans (Ntsekhe, 2016). The EFF's adverts which reads, "Our last hope for jobs and service delivery," as [Figure 5](#) indicates, uses rather emotive language. It aims to use these issues as a draw-card for votes amongst the youth. The party is using the message of jobs in a country that has 26.7% unemployment, the unemployment rate for the youth below 25 years old, using the expanded definition, is a shockingly high 67.4%, which has become a crisis with social, economic and political implications (Stats SA, 2018; Peyper 2017).

Figure 5



A poster of the EFF bearing the face of leader Julius Malema

The ANC media message that was written in Sesotho bears the face of Mandela. It has a translation at the bottom, it states: “Ke tla batlana le African National Congress lefatsheng le la (lehodimong) mme ke tla ba setho sa yona.” This is translated to: “I will look for a branch of the African National Congress in the other world (heaven) and join it”. [Figure 6](#) indicates a rather flowery and humorous language that lowers the usual serious rhetoric covered in political party messaging.

Figure: 6



Former ANC President Nelson Mandela’s poster where he talks about opening a branch of the ANC in heaven

The language used on the meme ([Figure 7](#)): “Doeks for iingane zika Congolose!!! How will you wear yours?” literally means “Doeks for the children of the ANC” appears to indicate words and expressions which resonate with the speech familiar with a lot of young people which is conversational in nature and colloquial street talk.

Figure: 7



An ANC poster that called all Rhodes students to come collect doeks before the 2016 LGE

It emerged from the content analysis that the political party messages gave a part of their attention to issues around three topics: service delivery, Nelson Mandela's legacy and values, and the ANC's legacy.

From the sample, the EFF covered mainstream issues that are a challenge to South Africa, such as the issues of providing jobs, providing efficient services to the people, and the issue of access to higher education in the form of bursaries.

Who has the right to use Nelson Mandela and to talk about his legacy was an issue of contest between the ANC and the DA. The Democratic Alliance used Mandela as part of their electioneering campaign on social media. They made an appeal to South African voters, that if they wished to vote for a party that symbolises, and promotes clean, corrupt free governance, and non-racialism, then "Honour Nelson Mandela's Dream - Vote DA". They positioned themselves as the only party that has legitimacy to use Mandela, unlike his party, the ANC.

The ANC covered Mandela in their election message about him looking for an ANC branch in heaven and joining it, the implication being that one remains an ANC member even after life on earth. For the party, their main message of the LGE 2016 was the legacy that they, as a ruling party, have in government, of delivering to the people, and that they would still like to be given another chance to rule and deliver the services again.

5.3 Meanings and responses to political party message content from Rhodes University students in relation to how they received the messages.

This section explains how young people at Rhodes University made sense of, and interpreted political party messages, and whether these messages resonated with them as students at Rhodes, and higher education in general. Since audience reception is a complex field to study, the researcher used Schroder's multi-dimensional model to carry out the analysis for this study, using the six dimensions: *Motivation*, *Comprehension*, *Discrimination*, *Position*, *Evaluation* and *Implementation* as a framework to better evaluate meaning making and reception. The political party messages that were used for the focus group discussions were only a sample of those shared and used on social media in the run up to the elections (a month before 4 July – 4 August 2016).

5.3.1 Motivation

Schroder's multi-dimensional model insists that the process of audience reception starts with the *motivation* dimension, as a starting point that sparks an interest in the recipients to either engage or not engage with the media text (as Schroder puts it, arresting the audience reception process) (Schroder, 2000). From the statements made by the focus group participants about what motivates them to have an interest to engage with a text, one thing that is evident is that it is not easy to pin it to a single factor. Although there are a number of factors that serve to connect participants with the media text, the three that came out the most was "personal interest", "community" and "reminiscence" (something in the message reminding the reader of people or life experiences). What is evident is that many of the participants are social media enthusiasts and fanatics, which made the initial step of the study easier, meaning they did not need much to motivate them to be online. For the great majority of the participants, an interest on social media, in addition to their personal motivations, meant that they were coming across the latest media messages regarding local government elections on social media.

An analysis on youth electoral behaviour indicates that young people of all age groups are the most disengaged. This is the norm in both national elections and local government elections (Dermody et al, 2010: 422). It is at this point that one wonders, if the youth have little interest in South African politics, how do they come across these political party messages on social network sites, Facebook and Twitter? The consensus among the groups is that most of the participants spend so much time on social media that they came across and engaged with the media messages. One responded thus: *"I'm a social media guru. So I'm always switching between Twitter and Facebook. I find that Twitter is more current and Facebook lately, and then, was very depressing. Even the stuff that is generated on Facebook is nothing like what is generated on Twitter. So, I switch between both of them, now and then"*. The students went as far as to say that even when they are busy with academic work, they always ensure that they are logged into their social media networks: *"I'm on my phone, on Twitter, Facebook, even when I'm working. So it's most of the time, I'm switching between both of them most of the time. So, maybe I'll do a paragraph of an assignment and then switch back onto Twitter to see what's happening,"* said Tuelo. Amogelang concurred with both participants about her social media habits: *"I was reporting on those elections for a course, so I was on Twitter live tweeting a lot, ... almost every hour leading up to the actual*

elections and Facebook once a day.” While they may not have all been actively seeking out campaign messages, they came across anyway because they are on social media so much.

While research has indicated that young people are apathetic towards politics and elections (Harris et al, 2010: 10), focus group discussions revealed that the research participants are young people on social network sites, and actually are “motivated” and interested in South African politics. One thing became clear, most of the young people at Rhodes, were following the elections with a keen interest, with most feeling that social media messages are worth their while. Kgosi said: *“On Twitter I follow most political parties, not in the sense that I follow the accounts, but I go back and forth checking. I follow the predominant leaders (or the most visible leaders) and the news media accounts. On Facebook, I think my only interaction with the election messages was through people who are campaigning or people who shared their views on different political parties.”* Brutus concurred with Kgosi, saying: *“I follow EFF, DA and ANC. and I also follow the leaders of all these parties. I’ll get the news directly from them and I’ll supplement that with news from news websites like eNCA, SABC, EWN. I got my news by following these people all at once”.* So, although previous studies have said that young people are disengaged from politics (Harris et al, 2010: 11), the focus group discussions in this study have revealed that young people are actually online, and actively seek out political party messages, although they might not do anything beyond that.

An element of the accessibility of information argument is that the internet and social media can help convert or mobilise the politically disengaged to become politically engaged (Carlisle and Patton, 2013: 884). Participants Bakang and Kagiso found themselves also actively seeking election texts and material on the trends watch. *“I got my news because it was a trending thing, I researched on the trend for elections results. There was a hashtag, then I see everyone’s views and opinions, and I’ll go to particular news websites to get proper information, not just opinions and feedback, but I try to see what the political party says, what do the masses and what news websites say, so it was whole rounded thing,”* said Bakang. With Kagiso reiterating that in order to get the latest material, the trends watch was important to observe, *“Similar to others, I think my only extra thing is to check the trends list because when parties are trending or when something is happening, it will automatically be trending, and reading everyone’s opinion.”*

The *motivation* dimension is thus underpinned by the “link of relevance” between the reader’s personal universe and the universe perceived to be presented by the text (and the situation surrounding its consumption) (Schroder, 2000: 245). This means that for a reader to feel that a text is relevant or they relate to a text, it has to fulfil a few factors, namely having a personal interest in the subject matter of the media text, and the ‘community’ feeling (feeling of belonging in the textual universe). Since the focus group participants are Rhodes University students, the majority of them had a keen interest in the media messages from the Rhodes SRC (Student Representative Council) or UCKAR (University Currently Known as Rhodes) Facebook accounts, because they were familiar with the candidate councillors from the three political parties that were contesting Ward 12; and their friends shared a lot of the media texts on their timelines from news media organisations. Boitswarelo said: *“I follow all the political parties and what not, but I was not really interested in the whole nation’s worth of elections, that seemed dull. The majority of the information was the spice being thrown by my friends at some of the people who were running locally, a toddler was running for the DA, I think his name was Darren [Holm] and he actually won, so a lot of spice was being thrown about him on my Facebook. But then when they started counting votes, I used the hourly updates on eNCA, they were doing an hourly update province by province, it was cool and I was following that.”* Vuyiswa said: *“If anything was shared on social media, if it was funny, it would be shared to the UCKAR Facebook page. I seem to remember at the time DASO Rhodes sharing everything that the DA candidate was doing through the UCKAR page. So, I saw a lot of that, but I do not follow any political parties either on Facebook.”* Martha agreed much with Vuyiswa on the atmosphere of the Rhodes SRC Facebook page about the local government elections: *“I agree with her because there was a lot of political stuff on the Rhodes SRC and UCKAR page as well. It was most of the students who were also involved in the political parties. That is how I was also aware.”* Antoinette was on social media to root for her friends: *“I would say that I actively seek for information at the time, because obviously I was rooting for someone, so I had to be up to date with everything”.*

The focus groups showed that there were a range of different motivations amongst the young people for being online. Some came across these political party messages because they spent so much time on social media, they could not miss them. Others were simply deeply passionate about politics, following political leaders on social media, and the Facebook and Twitter accounts of the political parties. For other groups, apart from doing election related school work, they found it

important to keep themselves abreast of news related to the election, simply because they knew the people running, and it was in their Ward.

5.3.2 Comprehension

The second dimension of Schroder's multi-dimensional model is *comprehension*. *Comprehension* goes beyond understanding the content, but it means making sense of it (albeit making sense at a basic level) (Schroder, 2000). The focus group participants were shown political party messages (content) found on social media. From the onset as participants looked at the material, there were murmurs from participants around the media messages that they had come across during the election period on social media. At this point, the researcher wanted to see the first level of comprehension by participants of political party media texts.

The initial question was to find out whether the participants remember the media messages, what their initial understanding was, and did the messages spark any interactions, engagements with friends or colleagues. One of the media texts that many spoke about was a meme on the Rhodes SRC Facebook page of a baby wearing an ANC doek and scarf around the neck (Figure 7). It was captioned "Doeks for iingane zika Congolose [Doeks for children of the ANC]. How will you wear yours?" Cleo responded thus: *"In response to that, I think it became popular because in 2015 protests (especially at Wits) a lot of women were protesting in doeks and it became a symbol of the revolution, and a symbol for how hair is political and all those kinds of things. And I think that is why the ANC capitalised on it, which I thought was interesting and very clever of them. My engagements with the posters: I do not remember any of the ANC ones, and I don't remember the EFF one. I do remember the Darren Holm ones and I do remember laughing. I even laughed because of his face. I can see people laughing at this poster"*.

In terms of comprehension, Schumacher, Bakang and Goodness expressed mixed understanding or comprehension from their reading of the media text, particularly on the ANC advert. There was a gap between the intended message of the encoders, and the unintended meaning made by the recipients. Schumacher felt disrespected by the ANC's doek advert, saying almost angrily: *"I noticed the one about the doeks and the baby, which I found quite disgusting and offensive; out of all the things you could offer us you give us doeks that is offensive. I feel like it was disrespectful to the people, there are so many things that people need and you decide to give us doeks. The whole movement was about the doeks"*. Bakang took a while to respond to the question. He

provided a rather deeper and more holistic take of his comprehension of the media text, but in the end, he disagreed with Schumacher. He said: *“When I saw these adverts, I didn’t consider the EFF that striking, I don’t remember engaging with it, but I do remember engaging with the DA and ANC ones. The DA in terms of its campaigning were quite more visual and more active with the people, I saw this not on social media but on a personal level as the DA person was always around the library. With the ANC’s, the ANC was quite divided, they were dealing with Darren Holm [DA candidate councillor], he doesn’t engage with the students, his petty group [Daso – DA student society] were the ones engaging with the students. With him I saw this poster on Facebook, this was the time after the RU Reference List and the planning of FMF [FeesMustFall], and he was engaging with people on these issues and with the essentialist culture of last year you didn’t have a lot of people willing to engage on these issues, merely because people didn’t want to and due to the different factions in the FMF movement. With the doeks, I saw it on Facebook, it wasn’t striking to me but I recognised the impact it had, I remember seeing a picture of women in the library wearing their doeks, it was a very powerful picture. Although some people may think it’s disrespectful, I thought it was powerful especially for young women. The one with the baby and doek could have been better though”*.

Another participant, Goodness, although having difficulties with her comprehension of the media text on the doeks, she remembered explicitly wanting to own one. She elaborated: *“I was a little bit confused, mostly with the ANC, because I was not sure why there was so much hype around their merchandise and getting celebrities to wear them. But, to be honest, I really wanted the doek and I got one, and there was even like a jacket. I called my aunt and told her that I know you can do the things for me. If I must say “Asinavalo” [We have no fear], I will be saying it too, but I was confused as to why their direction this time around because there is just too much hype around this merchandise this time around”*.

This idea of competing views was not as evident on the comprehension of Democratic Alliance texts. In one of their messages, they used former statesman Nelson Mandela’s name, to encourage people to vote for the party. The ANC were also running a campaign on social media, using Mandela’s image and name to encourage voting. Participants did not find the idea of using Mandela as humorous or appealing. Diamond criticised completely the concept, he said: *“Sometimes I thought it was such a joke because everyone used Mandela’s name to promote*

themselves – even the most corrupt people. Everyone just puts him there, either a picture or a statement about him, to get votes. I found it absolutely ridiculous, because they do not follow through on the principles that he set out in the first place. So that’s what I interacted with. And some of these things, like the ANC doek, I found hilarious. What on earth does that have to do with people voting for you to make this country a better place? It’s not a joke. I think some of them we absolutely hilarious.” Gracious agreed almost wholeheartedly with Diamond on the Mandela matter. She said: *“Every time I see another campaign going on Nelson Mandela’s memory I scroll past it and I get upset. I mean he’s dead how can you say your party is the one he would’ve backed, because your party is not the party he created, your party may not [be] the party he envisioned, so they instantly annoyed me”*. Martha tried to play devil’s advocate by disagreeing with the ANC but applauding the DA on Mandela. She said: *“I was agreeing in the sense that I also did not vote, I felt. The ANC with Nelson Mandela’s face, I feel like they were using that as a crutch, I feel like it’s different now, so it upsets me in that way. I feel I wouldn’t have voted for ANC, it’s like saying my mom has a law degree but that doesn’t mean I also have a law degree. It’s different now I think responsibility and control should take place. I saw the DA one about ‘honouring Madiba’s dream,’ I think it was smart. I see what they were doing. I think it’s still the same [as the ANC], when I look at political messages they lack the evidence, like I want to rely on this party because I know they will deliver for me, so a lot of the time when I look at political messages they lack that. That’s the only interaction, in my head I have interactions with myself, I didn’t engage much at all.”*

With the EFF, there was a general concern and agreement about lack of strength in terms of social media presence by participants. Kagiso said: *“The EFF was the weakest in terms of campaigning. You didn’t see much from them, even in terms of their social media presence. I think this also speaks to their support, the number of people who supported them but I don’t know I can’t be certain. There’s no campaign that they lead at Rhodes University, like nothing. I know the person who was running but I don’t know their campaign”*.

There were different readings and initial understandings of the media text by the participants. Fish argues (in Schroder, 2000) that this is not uncommon, in fact he calls it “a relative unity amidst diversity of meaning that manifests itself in reception analyses as socially patterned readings.” The *comprehension* model, according to Schroder (2000) does not prescribe that the specific

encoded media meanings ought to be similarly received or decoded by the recipients due to a number of factors, including both macro-social factors (class, etc.) and micro-social/situational relations. He argued:

Comprehension should therefore be understood as a decoding continuum from complete divergence from to complete correspondence to either the encoders' intended meanings or the readings produced by other recipients (Schroder, 2000: 246).

This is not to say that the recipients have adopted what Hall calls oppositional reading of the text. It means that it is a case of polysemy on the reader's part. Polysemy simply refers to the co-existence of many possible meanings for a word or phrase. This means that readers are aware of the intention of the encoders even before receiving the media text. Therefore, it means that even in interpretive communities, responses from participants can be of a polysemous nature. This is evident in the manner the participants responded to a question on the visibility of candidate councillors for Ward 12 on social media (Mthobisi Buthelezi of the ANC, Darren Holm of the DA, and Abongile James of the EFF). There were adverts of Buthelezi and Holm (Figures 1 & 3), taken from Facebook, which were used to jog the memories and try remind them of the election period. The participants responded like this:

"I remember, I was very confused. I think both their campaigns were very lazy. I am not even going to speak about the third candidate, because they were non-existent. Darren's was slightly more visible. Mthobisi had a late turnaround strategy. I do not know who his campaign advisors were but they did him dirty. I think his posters came out 5 days, if not the weekend before, people were supposed to go to ballot box. He was MIA – as in the physical person was not in the Eastern Cape. You are running for an election... It was just horrible. I think there was a debate between the candidates. People were not interested in going because they were not visible during the whole campaign season" (Roy).

"Mthobisi is a close friend of mine and he was part and parcel of the protests that took place here at school. He was also very active on social media. With the other ones there's nothing much to say, it's a wrap for them" (Thato).

"With the EFF, Abongile, was non-existent. With the ANC, Mthobisi, was very lazy. We did not even see him. He was okay. I think I saw him a lot of times, every time I was scrolling up. Even if

he was active, I do not think that Mthobisi would have won. I think this university is filled with liberal people. He would not have emerged anyway” (Kagiso).

Schroder argues that at times comprehension may not only be hard to understand because of situational factors, but they can be divergent (2000: 247). As illustrated above with the comprehension in terms of the visibility of candidate councillors on social media, he says it is not uncommon for audience members to fail to engage with the media messages. Comprehension according to Schroder should be understood in relation to a “decoding continuum, from a divergence from, to rather a correspondence to either the encoders’ intended meanings or the readings produced by other audience members” (2000: 247)

5.3.3 Discrimination

At the core of the *discrimination* dimension is whether the audience member readings are characterised by an awareness of “constructedness” (Agerholm-Andersen, 2012). The key question that Schroder poses here is whether the reader, as a decoder, adopts a critical stance towards a media text or is it an unquestionable representation of social reality? This dimension allows the reader to take a continuum of immersion with the text or a total distancing from the text, which means “the reader may either simultaneously appreciate or ridicule a text or simply adopt one of them” (Agerholm Andersen, 2012: 214). The question posed to FGD participants by the researcher is whether they think that the candidate councillors used social media effectively to engage directly with RU students?

“No, I don’t think so. For example, I didn’t even know that these people were running. I knew that Rhodes University was a ward but I didn’t know that these were the people who were running until I saw the posters on campus. Then there was a post, a couple of pages, a post on the Rhodes SRC page. Then only did I realise that okay, this is what’s happening. Like engaging I didn’t think it was that active. I’ve seen people engage on social media. They’ll pop up on your timeline every single time, you’ll just see that poster. They didn’t do much of a justice. I think it was just a matter of oh, okay, let’s just make sure we tick that box. Like we did that and that was it. Or, if it did pop up it was because someone else shared it” (Keabetswe).

Tebogo adopted a critical distance from the text (from immersion of the text), because he simply could not get the candidate councillors to respond to some of his questions personally. He said: “I

think what was lazy about them was that they had campaign teams answering questions on their behalf. So, you would see that someone would share a post and a question would be posed to the candidate representing the ward. You would have your Enkosis of the world, the cadres, the Linda Buthelezi of the DA answering and responding. You just ask yourself, “Wait, I am not here to hear from you”. Cool, you are part of the campaign team, but I want this particular individual to respond to me. And you can’t do something as simple as responding to a message that you literally tagged on social media just speaks to seriousness”.

Here there is a critique of the lack of constructed and conscious messaging and engagement. Mjekejeke even doubted the candidate councillors because of what he termed “their inability to communicate and engage with students”, he continued, *“They could have done it better. I remember a post that Darren Holm wrote to the Rhodes SRC page and that was it, but a lot of people don’t know how to engage with the students unless it’s something big like a protest. I don’t know how people can engage through social media here at Rhodes University, like engage and not just post something then carry on with life. So, it’s a no, but I don’t know how they could’ve improved on engaging with people”.*

Shaka also noted a lack of communication from candidates on social media, *“I don’t think they used it effectively because they didn’t create these kind of spaces where solutions could be spoken about. It’s a brilliant platform for elections to say these are my ideas what are your thoughts? That creates a space for students to engage with relevant issues to Rhodes. I don’t think they spent their time hearing our voices and really doing what a democratic government should be doing”.*

“I saw stuff on the UCKAR page, but I think when you have the capacity to make a compelling video and imagery and really cool stuff online, when you have this simple image that tells you nothing about the candidates I remember seeing Abongile and Darren’s pictures but they tell me nothing if you a person who is confused about where you lie and who to vote for like nah they didn’t use social media effectively at all. When I think about the potential and what it offers them, really not” (Bhekumuzi).

The focus group discussions showed that there are various reasons why readers take a critical distance against a text. For one group it was because of candidate councillors’ lack of seriousness in communicating and engaging with their constituents. Another group felt that the candidate

councillors were hiding behind their campaign teams or Rhodes societies. The responses of focus group participants indicate that the participants were able to “discriminate” and critique the shortfall and [lack of] effectiveness of their friends, colleagues and university mates who stood as candidate councillors for Ward 12 (Rhodes University), and their media texts on social media. Schroder states that such immersion and distancing from a text is a characteristic of “camp” or “ironic” reading found in campaign communication adverts, which the audience members can appreciate or completely ridicule, albeit in a “non-serious playful manner” (2000: 248).

5.3.4 Position

The fourth dimension is *position*. It applies only to “subjective” attitudes to the text accompanying a reading (Schroder, 2000). This dimension studies the reader’s “continuum of attitudinal responses, from acceptance to rejection of the perceived textual position and the various textual elements perceived to make up that position” (Schroder, 2000: 249). In this dimension, Schroder argues that the audience’s agreement is with what he/she perceives to be the message of the media text, and not the adoption of the so-called “preferred” hegemonic position that is usually inscribed in the text.

In looking at the political messages, the researcher asked the focus group participants the type of messages they anticipated receiving as students on the Rhodes University campus, as well as students in higher education in general. Although they recognise the work put together by the candidate councillors to appeal to students in higher education, some felt the messages were not directed at them specifically as higher education students at Rhodes University.

“I actually didn’t expect anything because, as people in higher education, we make up a very small percentage of the country. I don’t think we are the target audience for political movements when they do their campaigning. It is so evident just in Parliament during #FeesMustFall. We all heard the #StudentsMustFall. That in itself is a reflection of how seriously students are taken in the political space. We are not the target audience, so I didn’t expect anything” (Goodness).

Goodness did not want to take a position on the anticipated messages because she felt that due to the small number of students at Rhodes, and even in higher education generally, they do not matter to political parties. Zachariah also did not want to take a subjective position because he feels that at the end of the day, politicians are all about rhetoric, no substance, and never for the good of the

people. He said: *“I also didn’t expect much from them. I expect very little from the political parties regarding students. They don’t really have finances for much nowadays besides private jets and private cars to escort them. Everything requires money these days. So, when they say FeesMustFall, education is not necessarily going to be free within a year or like five years. We need to get that straight. We need funds. We need money and right now we do not have that. So when they make all these empty promises, it’s a joke. At the end of the day we need to face the reality of things. And the reality is we do not have money because they do their own thing and enjoy the money themselves. So, I do not really expect much from them because all of these ads are really not targeted to us. It is targeted to the country as a whole to vote for them”*.

While Goodness and Zachariah did not have expectations for the political campaign messages, others revealed what they did anticipate to see on Facebook and Twitter from political parties.

“I was expecting the DA and the ANC to have a stance, in their manifestos about what are the issues they will address in the ward experienced by students. I wanted them to have a stance on the name change, which is now a dead issue I also expected a stance when it comes to sexual abuse and safety on campus, I still think it was too much of an expectation” (Kgosi). Diamond and Sgaqagaqa had anticipated messages on student fees and decolonisation *“I expected messages on bursaries and funding considering the protests that have occurred in prior years. I think the EFF to some degree came through with regards to that. I also expected the EFF, since they are focused on the youth, I think they’ve realised that the youth is the economic driver, if you target the youth as they are the ones generating revenue. So, I anticipated them addressing free education and poverty”* (Diamond).

Sgaqagaqa agreed with the above comments on student fees and exclusion. In terms of his response (and the responses of the above participants), he has taken a negative attitude and position because the social media messages he expected, were not addressed. He said: *“I anticipated them to address decolonisation since it’s been an issue, and systematic exclusions on the basis of finances, withholding of results due to finances and safety issues around campus. Those are the things I thought they would focus on”*.

The stance adopted by readers towards a media text should in essence be conceptualised as a “process of commuting” according to Schroder (2000). It is at this point that Agerholm-Andersen

(2012: 217) states that readers have a “medium identification” with the media text in terms of their “position”. He says that audience members move or commute between a positive and a negative stance towards the value of the media text in terms of their attitudinal responses. It is at this point to gauge whether the social media messages conveyed by political parties relate to the issues faced by young people on the Rhodes University campus?

Harriet said, *“EFF tried but because their whole party is based on economic freedom and so they had to jump on that access to free education as a form of campaigning. I think it would be a stupid move of them not to. I think they tried but I think that’s the only thing they kind of addressed which is also then another issue why there’s a level of distrust. Because it’s very monolithic and not really intersectional in a sense, it’s always about one issue that EFF looks at, just one single issue that students face and that’s access. But the black child has various and multiple intersected experiences and they didn’t really address that. The other political parties, from my side, I don’t think they even tried to engage with a lot of or if they did it was at a very superficial level”*.

“Like the DA one. When he was like, ‘Priority is to save the interests of the youth of Ward 12 of Grahamstown’. Ward 12 is Rhodes University and a lot of the students here are students that were taking part in the protests that had happened from 2015, and it’s just too just disconnected for me. Like [Harriet] said, it tried, okay we heard they’re struggling about this, let’s just put it on our poster. I don’t think they could actually fully engage or connect to what the students were experiencing, especially in the times of the protests that were happening. It was just too disconnected. All these campaigns of different political parties were just too disconnected” (T-Gom).

Despite many of the messages being tailored to Rhodes students, many of the FGD participants felt negatively towards them in their reception. They felt the messages were done randomly, incidentally or “by the way” (in passing).

Other participants felt that the messages were not just directed at them but were actually country-specific tailored political party messages on social media.

“I don’t think so at all. Students really don’t seem to be the target market because they are addressing issues that are more country-based-politically. It is not talking about issues that students are facing. It is actually not really acknowledged that students are people who are in the

voting population, but there is nothing that people do to aim their campaign at that population” (Refilwe).

“To be quite honest, I think most of the messages spoke to national political agenda. I do not think that any of them really, in terms of the ones here at Rhodes, spoke to the issues here on campus. I think those were mostly just brought up in relation to the SRC and not the political parties. I do not remember issues of gender-based violence or #RURreference list ever coming up in these conversations...” (Goldfinger).

Voicing his displeasure and unhappiness at the messages tailored for a national audience, Capt. Sthembiso expressed disappointment at the political parties for their approach to the campaigning, and he lauded the EFF as the only political party to make an effort in their campaigning. He expressed his personal thoughts concerning the way in which issues covered in these political party messages were done in a shallow way. Furthermore, he believes that this was a missed opportunity by political parties using social media to speak directly and honestly to issues facing young people in South Africa. He argued that political parties can speak directly with young people and try to address some of their concerns in their campaign messaging, for example, at Rhodes University, issues relating to safety on campus, sexual abuse, high cost of higher education etc were some of the issues that led to a radical campus which experienced protests from students. He said, *“Looking at these posters, particularly the EFF is the only one that tried to go that way: Access to bursaries, last hope for jobs, service delivery and jobs after graduating. Otherwise, some people just put out what they know is going to be interesting. They don’t go into talking about the thing. It is like they are waving a sweet in front of you. You want cake, and they bring out a sweet then move it away just to distract you. Now you are like, I want a sweet. They didn’t go into deeper trenches about the issues. They are noticed or recognised, but they are not fully acknowledged. Because if they are fully acknowledged, they would say that this is what we actually want to do and how we are going to do it”.*

In one FGD, Antoinette raised just how patronising she felt these political party messages were, because many political parties started having an opinion on FMF. She said, *“It’s strange because when the elections came all the parties suddenly had a stance on Fees Must Fall and as soon as the elections were done they are gone. They’re all out here on Facebook and Twitter telling you what you want to hear and then after the elections they are gone”.* Thus, her response indicated

that she has a negative attitude toward the content of the text because of her expectations, and now the stances on FMF. The data from the FGDs in the *Position* dimension indicated that participant's subjective responses to the texts were indeed commuting from a slightly positive accepting of the text, to more of a rejection of the text (negative). One focus group indicated that they did not expect any sort of messages from political parties because of the negative character in which they describe the political parties and their messages as "only rhetoric" and "self-enriching". These descriptions are both not an acceptance nor a rejection of the media text. Instead they indicate the adoption of a rather stable stance (to be in the middle and not take a position) (Schroder, 2000). However, for other groups, there were negative responses towards the texts, as many of the issues they anticipated to be addressed were not addressed, including the pronouncement on the free education (or at least a decrease in fees), decolonisation and even a stance on the Rhodes name change.

5.3.5 Evaluation

This dimension is somewhat different from the previous *position* dimension in that it focuses on the objective reading of media texts by audience members of the reception process. Schroder states researchers not only focus on the objectivity, but look at the impact of media messages in terms of the participant's personal political analysis of the social subject-matter of the message (2000: 251).

Traditionally, the *evaluation* dimension looks at how the researcher understands audience reading of the media texts as "objective reading" on the continuum of ideological positions from 'hegemonic' to 'oppositional' (Schroder, 2000: 250). Within this dimension, the researcher sought to understand whether the messages specifically resonated with the participants, and what meanings they make from the election discourse which was present from political party messaging on social media? At this point, the researcher showed the participants three videos from the three parties, to get a deeper sense of the meanings that the participants made of these election messages. Bhekumuzi kicked off the discussion. He said, "*With the DA one, their campaign strategy is always to trash ANC, it's never their own thing. It's never using their own thoughts or whatever, or coming up with their own innovative plans. It's always just we're going to do better than ANC. So it's always dependent on ANC and ANC's failures. That entire thing, I found it really disrespectful. I think that it added to my distrust and with EFF it spoke to the particular people that they wanted to vote for them. It was very working class, which is okay but it also seemed very*

disingenuous because it was very calculated. With ANC, it's just very frustrating because they just rely on loyalty. They act as if all of these things are like great when this is what the government is supposed to be doing. They're going on like there's water, yeah, there's supposed to water. Why are we celebrating that there's water? Like running water. It's like Asinavalo. That's disrespectful. I feel like I'm thoroughly annoyed that they're like asinavalo. You should have uvalo [fear]. Why are you so comfortable with not producing work and just banking on the fact that you did work a while ago and now you're not doing anything? So, all of them were so frustrating for me”.

It is at this *evaluation* dimension point that the researcher wanted to hear objectively the sort of meanings, feelings, attitudes and responses that young people made of the contents of all the political party messages on social media. From the above response, it is evident that young people are producing counter-hegemonic readings of messages from all political parties. The reader, whose social situation places them in a directly oppositional relation to the dominant/hegemonic text, understands the preferred reading but does not share the text's code and rejects this reading, bringing to bear an alternative frame of reference, meaning participants do not read the messages of political parties passively. It therefore means they are empowered when reading messages in an objective manner.

“I had issues with the ANC song and the whole #Asinavalo campaign; they seem to be selling this nice land where unicorns stay which is unrealistic. It's almost like blackmail, like they're saying we gave you freedom so vote for us. They're basically saying we gave you all this infrastructure so vote for us, as if they had an option of not doing them, meanwhile they had to do them as that's why we voted for them. It didn't show any current issues that need to be tackled like the EFF one which showed the people's living conditions, and the DA which showed the issue of sustainability. It was just too superficial for my liking” (Diamond).

“The EFF one was quite useful because it spoke to the harsh realities that are faced by our people. The DA one was useful to the middle class, when you look at the lady being concerned about the future and so on. The contrast is that the EFF was more focused on the working class for example the mention of the fact that people are being buried on top of each other. The ANC is all nice singing and dancing, but deep down we know that with regards to what is happening it's just putting mud on everything, it was useless. DA and EFF were useful” (Mogapi).

In light of the comments above, the researcher sought to get a better understanding of the meanings Rhodes University students made of the political party messages, by classifying each of the political parties on their own. This will help indicate the manner in which participants interpreted and grasped the media texts (Agerholm-Andersen, 2012). The researcher found that some participants would rather make comments on a single party advert, as opposed to discussing all three of them at once. What is evident though is that the participants have a comprehension and intellectual capacity for understanding the media texts, with their attitudinal responses commuting between a positive and a negative stance towards the texts (Agerholm-Andersen, 2012).

ANC

“We used to jam to this – it is such a joke. It reminds me of: ‘We have a good story to tell’. I can agree with Prince, it is riding on an old wave. It is something that the ANC uses all the time. ‘Remember Mandela’, ‘Apartheid’, ‘We have a good story to tell’. It is a whole lot of nothing” (Tebogo).

“I think that they are very biased, because they keep telling people that we are going to do this, we are going to do this... But it goes back to what I was saying earlier – they will tell you whatever it is you want to hear” (Keabetswe).

“With the ANC it’s like a slap on people’s faces because they keep saying the same thing but they never deliver. How can you say you’re building roads when we are driving over potholes; what feeding schemes? It’s an insult for me. They are very arrogant” (Amogelang).

What was evident in the FGDs is that a lot of the participants found the ANC’s whole campaign of #Asinavalo, which details their work since the dawn of democracy as a governing party, to be quite arrogant and big-headed (as though they would win by a landslide majority), biased and disrespectful. Very few participants actually thought it was about detailing the kind of work that the ANC has done since taking over government in 1994, or even the current state of affairs in terms of development in South Africa.

DA

“The DA advert is literally the most unrealistic thing. No one does that. We do not stand and say, ‘Neighbour, I am going to vote,’ then you walk past people shouting at you” (Thato).

“It feels slimy. It feels almost unethical” (Mmabatho).

“For the DA it’s actually pathetic. They make it seem like it’s about the party and they tend to forget it’s the people that vote them into power. After they get there, they are like “OK, we’re here,” and they keep fighting amongst themselves and actually forget about important stuff. For me it was just insulting” (Gift).

“I think unethical is the word because they are also using Mandela because he is a world icon. Not only for South Africa, the ANC, or even for DA. He is a world icon that stands for certain qualities and values. If we ask if DA stands for those values or do try to protect some of those values within South Africa... For instance, with regards to their manifesto, they did not talk about things that affect people which Mandela represented. Mandela would talk about them whether people want to hear or not. DA is falling short on that” (Schumacher).

“The DA didn’t say anything. There was literally nothing to be said like I am going to vote; I am going to do better. One of the critiques that the DA likes to throw at the ANC is that ‘You’ve just liberated the country. You’re just a liberation movement. You’re only capitalising. You’re only getting your voters because of the struggle icons’. But now they are using a struggle icon in their own campaign. It’s the exact same thing, but they weren’t liberators anyway” (Prince).

All the FGD participants had a similar response to the Democratic Alliance’s messages on social media. They all gave them the thumbs down, with the two biggest issues for the participants being how unrealistic their messages were, and how hypocritical they are for using Nelson Mandela in their campaigning and thus using the ANC as part of their campaigning. It is at this point when Fiske (in Schroder, 2000: 250) celebrated the power of media in allowing subordinate social groups (ordinary recipients of media text) to be able to maintain their self and sense of difference when exposed to hegemonic texts (meaning the reader fully shares the text's code and accepts and reproduces the preferred reading), and not to simply accept the media text passively.

EFF

With the EFF, the majority of participants felt that the EFF media texts detailed actual people's lived realities. They felt that the EFF media text felt more real and relatable, especially to the ordinary people. It seemed in the FGDs that most warmed towards the EFF messages, because of a number of things, namely the languages used and the issues covered.

“The EFF, I do think that their message was relatable to the ordinary person. Things like the land eviction, congested burial sites are realities for people. I think it was an efficient way of delivering a message. It was multilingual – there was Sepedi, isiZulu and isiXhosa. I thought the EFF message was very useful. What tends to happen when we think about political ideas and political parties, it's very ethereal things, but the message is something I really related with. It is something I connected to my own experiences and with my own realities” (Roy).

“I agree with them when they say the EFF one was a bit good. The EFF one was very realistic because it also touches on the issue of the land because if you listen to the song it talks about how it was taken. We know what the EFF is pushing for; it was very useful because I think at the centre of decolonisation is the return of the land” (Cleo).

“EFF – very useful, very thought-provoking, a very nice way of telling me of how I must change from the ANC” (Martha).

Many participants felt strongly about the EFF messages, and its impact, bar a few, including Zachariah who felt the political message simply had no solution for some of the issues raised. He said, *“The EFF video feels like more of a suspended dread, it depresses me. They don't say how they are going to fix all these things, they're just showing them.”*

Audience members' reading of media texts may represent any position on Schroder's continuum, either from the “negotiated” position under the Hall model, or it may commute between positions according to understanding in ideologically contradictory ways. What is evident from the meanings that participants make of the political discourse on social media in terms of their ideological positions in the social formation, is that audience members have their own agency when it comes to the reception process. Irrespective of the power encoded in the media message, audience members (participants) apply their minds and make their own meaning.

8.3.6 Implementation

This dimension deals with whether the audience member is able to either use or not use the media text as a point of departure for action in relation to other participants, individuals or groups (Agerholm-Andersen, 2012). Similarly, Schroder in an earlier study says that researchers have argued that in the case of counter-hegemonic media texts, that if readings do not translate into practice, then such reading should be regarded as “politically impotent” (2000: 251). Participants were asked, “what sort of meanings did you attribute to these messages? To vote/ not vote, why?” The great majority of FGD participants said they simply did not vote, others did not even bother to register to vote.

“I didn’t vote, simply because I feel like these messages were based on circumstances. At that time we had Fees Must Fall, ANC was all about sticking with Mandela and stuff. DA was all about corruption because the ANC is corrupt. So I felt like we need more than just that to vote. It shouldn’t be based on what’s happening. It’s good to notice that there a lot of things that are wrong but they should have put more into their messages other than just what’s happening” (Jerry).

Petronella felt that she could not bother to vote because she believed citizens of South Africa do not have equal rights. Plus, she said many of these political parties even use the race card to score cheap political points. She would rather keep her vote. *“These adverts to me were a joke. Like she said, it means our votes were very cheap. Why vote for any political party in our country that cannot even treat each other equally? All our political parties always bring up race and apartheid. We have not even moved past that. Now you want me to vote for all of these people up there, political parties, who can’t even get along or treat each other equally and set an example for the rest of the country. So, no, I chose not to vote” (Petronella).*

Methodologically, the best way to explore the uninterrupted process of “implementation” of media readings is not through discussions or interviews, but through an ethnographic approach of studying the media’s symbiosis with the processes of the everyday over time (Drotner in Schroder, 2000). Kgosi has been a political activist as a student, and he detailed a bit of insider knowledge about why he did not vote in the 2016 LGE. He believes the social media messages are not worth the data required to read them.

“I think a lot of the major political parties are just disingenuous. All of this is theatrics, all of these slogans, these catch-phrases. They do not speak to reality and they do not speak to any proven track record. I think the ANC is the only one with a track record – not necessarily a positive track record. Progress is inevitable so I do not think that it is a major notch that they can put on their belt – giving out free doeks. Wow, service delivery. Much in the same way, the EFF has no track record. They are speaking left, but a lot of the leaders in the political organisation itself come out of the ANC and have pretty much re-adapted the same old ANC tactics and projects to seem like they are more left, to seem like they are more socialist, Marxist. I think they speak of themselves like they are a more socialist, Marxist party – which does not necessarily translate. And then, the good old DA. Wow. I come out of this organisation, so I think I can speak with a bit of insider knowledge. Whoever writes their manifesto – great chap, spin doctor for Africa – really good at what he does. They actually do not have the support structures to implement any of these things. And I think it is evident in their leadership in Ward 12” (Kgosi).

Brutus even said that no amount of political messages on social media would convince him to vote, for as long as former President Jacob Zuma was still at the helm of both the party and the state. He said, *“In all honesty, I will not vote. The only reason I will not vote for the ANC is because of Zuma, but besides that I still love the ANC. And I believe in it”.*

“I would like something that does not make white people look like that because that doesn’t help me; I don’t want anyone representing me who looks like Darren Holm. Also something that has nothing to with Madiba. I would like something that represents me” (Prince).

Although he agrees with the above participants, for Gift, his meanings and understanding of elections went beyond the political party messages she came across on Facebook and Twitter. He said, *“I actually did vote, but not because of any of the posters. I voted because I went to one of the politics teachings. I always feel passionate about voting as much as I disagree with what’s happening with the entire system and the parties. One of the speakers, Angelo Fick, said when you cast your vote you must think of the most marginalised person in society because if you are privileged, in most ways the vote is not going to significantly affect your life. Yes, some things are going to change, but your life is going to stay the same. So, I did vote with that in mind. In reaction to these posters, I don’t think any of them speak to me. I think the one that speaks to me the most is the EFF one because I am a student. And the one that speaks to me the least is the ANC one.*

The second one, I can't understand the top part. I know that's my fault. I feel I'm the furthest from the target audience, which does not faze me."

5.4 Conclusion

This chapter highlighted some of the topics used, language used and mode of address in the sampled media texts of the 2016 LGE. It uncovered a number of factors in relation to the content. Firstly, the political party adverts make use of political heads. Secondly, some adverts use a serious tone to address matters, while others make use of playful (colloquial) language to appeal to ordinary people and to make the message understood to all citizens. Thirdly, the use of emotive language and serious issues as a means to drum up support from people and bring their message across.

This chapter also discovered that many Rhodes University students spend a significant amount of time on social media, beyond personal reasons, and that many of the participants came across the 2016 LGE political party messages on their Facebook timeline. Using Schroder's multi-dimensional model of reception, the chapter used the six sense-making dimensions to better understand the interpretations and experiences of audience members. The researcher discovered that all participants had a comprehension and understanding of the messages, and their intention as hegemonic texts. In some dimensions, albeit a few, other students accepted the messages, especially the EFF messages, with some describing the messages as "relatable to the ordinary person" and "very useful, very thought-provoking" (although rejecting the preferred meaning). On the other hand, many participants rejected the media messages in a counter hegemonic way (Schroder, 2000), such as the DA and the ANC media messages, describing them as "the most unrealistic thing," and "very biased; it was a joke". Ultimately, many of the students chose not to vote, citing many reasons, including political rhetoric in terms of promises and disingenuousness in the media messages (DA using Mandela, ANC on its legacy in government).

CHAPTER SIX

Conclusion

6.1 Introduction

The previous chapter presented and discussed the research findings. Using the theoretical framework discussed in Chapter three, it interpreted the research findings. This Chapter will conclude the research study.

6.2 Summary

This research study set out to examine how young people, particularly at Rhodes University, made sense and meaning of the political party messages that came out of the 3 August 2016 local government elections on social media. This study also sought to understand whether youth at Rhodes University actively sought these political party message on social media (by following the ANC, DA and EFF Facebook and Twitter accounts), or whether they came across these messages incidentally on their timelines (by following news organisations or seeing posts shared by friends). Finally, this study also aimed to find out whether these social media messages conveyed by political parties resonated and related to issues faced by young people on the Rhodes campus.

The study used qualitative research methodology. Included in that methodology was thematic qualitative content analysis and focus group discussions as methods to collect data. Thematic qualitative content analysis was important to find the sample and to ascertain preliminary information of the sample, so as to prepare adequately for the focus group discussions. In addition, the study included a small sample of local government election media texts that were published on social media between 4 July and 4 August 2016. This included an analysis of the language, subject and tone used by the political parties. The limiting of the sample was done so as not to shift focus away from the reception process, which remained the primary objective of the research study. An analysis of the sample shows that political parties used political party heads on their media messages, and that even the lower structures of the parties use the faces of the candidate councillors when campaigning in order to familiarise the community with them. In addition to that, some media messages addressed issues of importance, such as fighting corruption, or providing services and jobs. These used an emotive kind of language, but it was in a serious tone of address, considering the close to 27% unemployed people in South Africa (Stats SA, 2018). The study

revealed that issues raised by the #FMF, #RMF and #RURReferenceList movements, such as decolonisation on campus, free education (or at least a reduction in the fees), gender-based violence and general safety on campus, were not sufficiently foregrounded in the election media messages. Instead, there was a disconnect between issues affecting Rhodes University students and the political campaign messages which were about the ANC's legacy in government, with the DA honouring Mandela's legacy and fighting corruption

The study also used focus group discussions, which explored issues of audience reception. The FGDs were excellent in helping to explore people's knowledge, experiences and meaning-making senses, and to examine not only what Rhodes student think, but how and why they think that way about the political party messages of the 2016 local government elections. Through the focus group discussions, it was clear that the political party's concern of media messages not reaching young people on social media was not the concern of young people. Their concern was that media messages were disconnected from their issues, they do not resonate with them.

This study adopted Kim Schroder's multi-dimensional model of audience reception to better understand the various interpretations and experiences of audience members, using the six sense-making dimensions: *Motivation, Comprehension, Discrimination, Position, Evaluation* and *Implementation* (Schroder, 2000). This study sought to understand the meanings and interpretations that young people at Rhodes University made of political party messages during the August 2016 local government elections, and Schroder's model (rather than Stuart Hall's Encoding and Decoding model) became not only ideal to use, but better suited for the study. While Hall's model proposes that audience members decode the media text according to their experiences and background (Hall, 1980), this study required audience members to go beyond the mere discursive level of reading.

The interpretation and meaning-making process is both complex and nuanced, it requires a model with a number of tenets to explore. Schroder's model has attempted (as discussed in Chapter 5) to fill some of the gaps revealed in the Hall model. This was evident in the focus group discussions, where meanings did not either directly relate or disagree with Hall's "preferred meaning" of the media texts.

The audience data that came from the focus group discussions using the six sense-making dimensions from Schroder's reception model revealed a number of lessons or conclusions regarding audience reception.

The *motivation* dimension highlighted that participants, apart from being social media fanatics, were drawn to social media and more importantly to follow the political party messages on social media due to personal interest (knowing the people running for positions or having a genuine interest in politics). It also revealed that many of the participants actually follow news organisations, and the Facebook and Twitter accounts of the political parties to receive first hand media messages.

The *comprehension* dimension goes beyond understanding text, but making sense of text, even at a basic level (Schroder, 2000). This dimension revealed that participants attached different (polysemic) meanings to the text due to a number of factors, including class and experience. For example, with the ANC doek meme (Figure 7), some participants were confused about the intention of the message, others found that the advert symbolised a start of a revolution (even to start the topic on the politics of hair), while others found the advert very disrespectful because they felt there are bigger problems in this country than simply handing over doeks to people during an election period.

The *discrimination* dimension highlighted that a lot of the participants had taken a critical (di)stance when asked about the effective usage of social media by the councillors to speak directly with Rhodes students. The data revealed that many of the participants alienated themselves away from the media texts because of what they believed was the candidate councillor's inability to communicate and engage with students, other participants were of the view that the candidates put on a lacklustre performance in the run up to the elections, because they were not around, and had their Rhodes University societies (DASO and SASCO) and political formations communicating and responding on their behalf.

The *position* dimension referred to the subjective reading to the text, from acceptance to rejection of the perceived textual position (Schroder, 2000). Despite many of the messages being tailored to Rhodes students, many of the FGD participants felt negatively towards them in their reception. They felt the messages were random or incidental, and not targeted at them as students. The

participants expressed their own personal thoughts concerning the way in which issues covered in these political party messages were done in a shallow way. Furthermore, the participants believed that this was a missed opportunity by political parties using social media to speak directly and honestly to issues facing young people in South Africa. They argued in the FGD that political parties can speak directly with young people and try to address some of their concerns in their campaign messaging. For example, at Rhodes University, safety on campus, sexual abuse, and the high cost of higher education etc were some of the issues that led to a radical campus which experienced protests from students, but these issues were not prevalent in the campaign messages directed at students.

The *evaluation* dimension was very important in detailing objectively the kind of reading that the participants made during the reception process, the meaning-making of the LGE media messages on social media. Participants felt that the ANC messages were quite arrogant, big-headed (as though they would win by a landslide majority), biased and disrespectful; and not so much about the kind of work the ANC has done since 1994. Participants gave the DA media messages a thumbs down. They felt the DA media messages were unrealistic, and hypocritical for using Mandela in their campaigning. Participants stated that the EFF media messages were believable, realistic and they spoke to people's lived realities.

Finally, in the *implementation* dimension, which serves as a point of departure from the media text, the majority of participants did not cast their vote for the 2016 local government elections. Some argued that the political party messages did not speak to them; therefore, they saw no need to exercise the right to vote. Others did not go to vote because of the internal politics within the ANC. Some of the very few who voted did so as a result of encouragement from their politics lecturers.

6.3 Conclusion

This chapter has provided a summary of this research study. The study has achieved its aims, goals and objectives which set out to explore meaning-making of young people at Rhodes University of the 2016 local government elections on social media and whether these messages resonate with them as students. The researcher found that media messages and the meaning making process is complex, it is not binary. Meaning making is context driven, and draws on elements of a number of things, including people's experiences and background. The researcher

found that particularly on a Rhodes University campus that had been the scene of radical protests and demands for change by students through the #...MustFall movements, political parties contesting for Ward12 seem not to have engaged with the issues on the ground affecting students in their media messages for the 2016 local government elections. According to the data from the FGD, many of the student's issues raised in the protests were not captured and addressed in the media messages.

Appendix

Moderator Guide: 2016 Local Government Elections Focus Group Discussions

Welcome

Before the FGD begins, all participants should be briefed on their rights, informed of the purpose of this research and asked to sign consent forms (duplicate – researcher keeps one copy, participants keep their own copy).

1. Which social networking sites (Facebook + Twitter) do you use and how often were you online prior to the 2016 LGE?
2. How did you receive political party messages on Twitter/Facebook? Did you actively seek them? Or you came across them accidentally through people sharing @EFFSouthAfrica, @Our_DA, @MyANC content or the news sites (News24, EWN).
3. How did you engage with the content of these message? Share, retweet, like?

STOP QUESTIONS AND SHOW THEM POLITICAL PARTY MESSAGES/CAMPAIGNS

Having looked at these messages do you remember engaging with them, did they spark any particular interactions that you had?

4. What sort of meanings did you attribute to these messages? To vote/ not vote, why?
5. What would you attribute to be the single thing that influences your decision to vote or not from the political party messages?
6. In light of some of the issues raised in some protests, #RMF, #FMF, #RURreferenceList, do you believe the messages spoke to some of the challenges faced by students in this Ward and higher education in general?
7. What sort of messages did you anticipate receiving from the political parties, and the councilors, especially as students in higher education?

SHOW THE VIDEOS.....

8. Do you remember your response to the messages – did you think they were funny or useless etc??
9. How visible were the councillors campaigning on Social Media during the LGE?
10. Do you think they used social media effectively to engage directly with RU students? Can you give examples.
11. Do you think social media messages from political parties will change for the 2019 general elections, how do you expect them to be different? More savvy, more targeted?

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