Factors Influencing the Potential Adoption of Social Media for Citizen-Based Monitoring in South Africa

Lesedi Senamele Matlala [a]

[a] School of Public Management Governance and Public Policy, University of Johannesburg, South Africa, lmatlala@uj.ac.za, https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6110-9902

Submitted: 31 January 2025, Revised: 26 March 2025, Accepted: 21 April 2025, Published: 30 June 2025

Abstract. Social media platforms have globally transformed governance, serving as vital tools for real-time communication, transparency, and public engagement. These platforms are widely used in South Africa for government-citizen communication and engagement. Still, their application in citizen-based monitoring (CBM)—a participatory governance mechanism that enables citizens to monitor public service delivery and hold governments accountable—remains unrealized. Despite South Africa's relatively high internet penetration rate of 68% and widespread social media adoption, systemic, institutional, and socio-economic barriers hinder its use for CBM. This study explores the factors influencing the potential adoption of social media for CBM in South Africa, offering insights into the opportunities and constraints shaping this emerging governance tool. Using a mixed-methods approach, the research incorporates qualitative data from interviews with government officials, media representatives, and civic organizations alongside quantitative findings from a citizen survey. The study identifies critical barriers, including unequal access to digital infrastructure, limited digital literacy among citizens and government officials, the absence of policy frameworks for social media governance, and socio-economic disparities perpetuating a digital divide. Moreover, trust deficits between citizens and government institutions present significant challenges to adopting social media for participatory monitoring. However, the research also highlights enabling factors, such as growing digital adoption, isolated cases of innovative practices, and an increasing recognition of social media's potential to enhance governance accountability. This study contributes to the discourse on digital governance by examining the factors influencing social media adoption for CBM in South Africa. It provides actionable recommendations, including investing in digital literacy programs, strengthening infrastructure, and fostering trust through participatory policy frameworks. By contextualizing South Africa's experience within the broader African governance landscape, the research lays a foundation for future strategies to harness social media's potential in bridging the gap between citizens and governments through monitoring and accountability initiatives.

Keywords. Social media, citizen-based monitoring, digital governance, public accountability
Research paper, DOI: https://doi.org/10.59490/dgo.2025.1063

1. Introduction

The global digital revolution has significantly reshaped governance, with social media platforms like Twitter, Facebook, and WhatsApp emerging as vital tools for enhancing transparency, accountability, and real-time citizen engagement in public administration [1; 2]. In countries such as the United Kingdom and Canada, governments have successfully integrated these platforms to improve responsiveness and facilitate participatory policymaking [3; 4]. These tools have redefined citizen-government interaction, enabling engagement in governance processes that were previously

inaccessible to many. However, in developing contexts like South Africa, the potential of social media remains largely untapped—particularly for citizen-based monitoring (CBM), a mechanism through which citizens monitor service delivery and hold government accountable. While global examples like SeeClickFix in the United States and social media engagement by Australia's Department of Human Services highlight how digital tools can enhance CBM and improve service responsiveness [6; 7], the same cannot yet be said for South Africa, where structural and socio-economic challenges limit effective adoption.

Despite a 68% national internet penetration rate and widespread social media use, particularly via WhatsApp and Facebook, South Africa's application of these platforms for CBM remains underdeveloped [8]. While digital platforms have proven effective for crisis communication—such as during the COVID-19 pandemic—inequities persist that hinder broader engagement. Urban areas report internet connectivity above 85%, while rural areas remain significantly underserved, with just 40% connectivity [10]. High data costs, compounded by low digital literacy—only 28% of South Africans report confidence in using online tools—further inhibit participation, especially among low-income and rural populations [8; 9]. These disparities restrict access to social media-based governance tools for those who most need to monitor public services. Moreover, trust deficits between citizens and the state—stemming from perceptions of inefficacy or political manipulation of digital platforms—create an additional barrier to adoption [10; 13]. Thus, while South Africa demonstrates strong potential for digital governance, it also faces distinct socio-political and infrastructural barriers that must be addressed for CBM to become a transformative tool.

Learning from global best practices in digital governance, such as Sweden's integration of open data platforms with social media and Denmark's policy frameworks enabling citizen oversight [2; 4], South Africa has a clear opportunity to improve its CBM systems. However, the fragmented nature of its e-governance policies and lack of institutional preparedness hinder this transition [11; 12]. A focused examination of the systemic, institutional, and socio-economic factors shaping the adoption of social media for CBM is therefore both urgent and necessary. This study responds to that need, offering an in-depth exploration of the barriers and enablers of digital CBM adoption in South Africa. By combining global comparisons with a localized analysis, it highlights not only the gaps but also the potential pathways for reform. In doing so, the study contributes to a broader understanding of how social media can be meaningfully integrated into participatory governance in resource-constrained environments and sets the foundation for more inclusive, accountable, and responsive service delivery in South Africa.

2. Preliminary Literature Review

The global expansion of social media for governance has led to the emergence of citizen-based monitoring (CBM) platforms designed to enable citizens to track public service delivery and provide real-time feedback. Examples include FixMyStreet in the UK, Adaa in Saudi Arabia, Ushahidi in Kenya, SeeClickFix in the US, and GovChat in South Africa, each showcasing different ways of integrating social media into participatory governance [14; 15; 16; 17; 18]. These platforms demonstrate how structured digital feedback mechanisms can enhance transparency and accountability. However, their success is often contingent upon strong institutional capacity, robust digital infrastructure, and well-defined policy frameworks. For example, while Ushahidi successfully aggregated reports during Kenya's 2013 elections using social media and SMS, the delayed government response and reliance on donor funding highlighted sustainability challenges within institutional governance contexts [16; 19].

Platforms like SeeClickFix and GovChat similarly show the promise of social media in enabling real-time citizen reporting and enhancing government responsiveness [17; 20]. Yet, challenges persist—particularly in developing countries—where governments are often hesitant to fully embrace these tools due to fears of criticism and lack of institutional readiness [21]. In South Africa, municipalities

frequently use social media for one-way communication rather than interactive engagement, reducing the potential for meaningful citizen participation [22]. The Nigerian #EndSARS movement provides another relevant example, where although social media was critical in exposing abuses, the lack of formal government mechanisms for digital feedback limited the long-term governance impact [23]. These cases underscore that while social media has democratizing potential, its effectiveness is shaped by political will, institutional culture, and governance structures.

In South Africa, barriers such as digital divides, low digital literacy, and the absence of cohesive e-governance policies further undermine the use of social media for CBM. With internet penetration at only 40% in rural areas compared to 85% in urban centres, and just 28% of South Africans expressing confidence in using digital platforms, accessibility and competency remain serious challenges [21; 22; 24; 25]. Additionally, without standardized frameworks for managing social media-driven monitoring, public officials struggle to process citizen feedback, eroding trust in digital initiatives [14; 15; 26; 27]. These limitations discourage citizen engagement and reinforce scepticism about the effectiveness of social media in holding the government accountable. Existing literature tends to emphasize technological and participatory dimensions of CBM but often neglects the structural and socio-political conditions required for scalability. This study addresses these gaps by examining the systemic, institutional, and socio-economic factors that shape social media adoption for CBM in South Africa. It situates the South African experience within global trends and offers targeted policy insights for improving digital participatory governance.

3. Analytical Framework

This study employs an integrated analytical framework combining the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), the Participatory Governance Framework, and Institutional Theory to unpack the systemic, institutional, and socioeconomic factors influencing the adoption of social media for CBM in South Africa. TAM, developed by Davis (1989), focuses on perceived usefulness and ease of use as key adoption drivers, which is especially relevant in South Africa's context of digital divides and affordability constraints, where marginalized groups often lack the digital literacy needed to navigate complex platforms [14; 15; 16]. Government officials, meanwhile, must balance the potential benefits of public engagement against risks such as misinformation, inadequate institutional capacity, and weak policy alignment [17]. Although case studies from Kenya and the Philippines show that social media can effectively enhance CBM, their success depends on institutional readiness—something South Africa currently lacks [18; 19]. The Participatory Governance Framework emphasizes trust and responsiveness as prerequisites for meaningful engagement, yet South African platforms like GovChat struggle with follow-through, reinforcing citizen distrust and limiting participation, particularly among disadvantaged communities [14; 22; 23; 24]. Institutional Theory further explains how fragmented municipal strategies, incoherent policies, and bureaucratic inertia inhibit the widespread adoption of digital tools. In contrast to countries like South Korea and Saudi Arabia—where platforms like Adaa are supported by structured governance policies—South Africa's inconsistent approach to digital governance continues to stall implementation [15; 17; 26; 27; 28]. Collectively, these frameworks provide a holistic view of the barriers and opportunities shaping social media's potential for inclusive, participatory governance in South Africa.

4. Methodological framework

A mixed-methods approach was adopted to comprehensively investigate the systemic, institutional, and socio-economic factors influencing the adoption of social media for CBM in South Africa. This approach aligns with the study's aim to capture both quantitative and qualitative insights into stakeholders' perceptions and the contextual challenges of leveraging social media as a tool for participatory

monitoring. Combining quantitative surveys and in-depth interviews allowed for a holistic analysis of diverse stakeholder perspectives, ensuring a robust foundation for the study.

4.1 Survey Design

The research utilized a carefully constructed sampling strategy to ensure representativeness across South Africa's nine provinces, accounting for urban and rural distinctions. From an initial target of 6912 participants, with 384 allocated per province, the study surpassed expectations by securing 7282 responses. The sample reflected the country's diverse socio-economic and demographic contexts, capturing perspectives from both digitally connected urban areas and under-resourced rural communities. Approval from the University of Johannesburg's ethical review board confirmed adherence to rigorous ethical standards in research design and execution. Structured surveys incorporating closed-ended questions were employed to gather quantitative data on citizens' awareness of CBM, perceptions of social media use for CBM, preferences for CBM tools, and involvement in participatory monitoring efforts. The survey questions were designed to evaluate participants' familiarity with public service monitoring and their perspectives on using social media platforms for governance. Statistical methods were applied to analyze patterns and correlations, offering insights into regional and socio-economic disparities in social media adoption for CBM. These data formed the foundation for exploring systemic challenges such as the digital divide, trust deficits, and perceptions of institutional responsiveness.

4.2 Interview Design

To complement the quantitative data, 12 in-depth interviews were conducted with key stakeholders, including government officials (4), representatives of community-based organizations (CBOs) (4), and members of community media (4). The interviews provided rich qualitative insights into the nuances and complexities surrounding social media adoption for CBM. Open-ended questions allowed participants to share their experiences, challenges, and opportunities related to social media integration in participatory governance. The qualitative approach uncovered stakeholder-specific perspectives on institutional readiness, socio-economic barriers, and citizen engagement dynamics. The interviews addressed questions that could not be fully explored through quantitative surveys, including the institutional capacity to handle social media-driven feedback, trust issues between citizens and government entities, and specific regional or organizational barriers to CBM implementation. Secondary data sources, including academic literature and practical reports on CBM, citizen engagement, and social media governance practices, were consulted to contextualize and enrich the findings. This triangulated methodology ensured a comprehensive understanding of the systemic factors affecting the adoption of social media for CBM in South Africa.

Table 1: Sector specifications of the respondents

Organisation	Province	Sector	Respondent code	Experience (yrs)
A	Gauteng	Government	ARE1	5 years +
B	Gauteng	Government	BRE2	5 years +
C	Gauteng	Government	CRE3	5 years +
D	Gauteng	Government	DRE4	5 years +
E	Mpumalanga	Community media	ERE5	5 years +
F	Free State	Community media	FRE6	5 years +
G	Gauteng	Community media	GRE7	5 years +
H	Limpopo	Community media	HRE8	5 years +
I	Western Cape	CBO	IRE9	5 years +
J	Gauteng	CBO	JRE10	5 years +

K	Gauteng	CBO	KRE11	5 years +
L	KZN	CBO	LRE12	5 years +

Source: (Author's own construction 2023)

4.3 Contextual Relevance

The mixed-methods design offered a nuanced understanding of how systemic barriers—such as digital divides and socio-economic inequalities—intersect with institutional challenges to influence social media adoption for CBM. The quantitative survey provided broad patterns and generalizable insights, while the qualitative interviews added depth by capturing stakeholders' lived experiences navigating these challenges. Together, these methods enabled the study to identify specific institutional reforms, policy recommendations, and technological adaptations necessary for integrating social media into CBM frameworks within South Africa. By combining these diverse data sources, the study ensures a comprehensive analysis of the factors affecting social media's role in participatory monitoring, contributing to the discourse on digital governance and citizen engagement in developing contexts.

5. Findings and discussions

This section presents the study's results, which aim to explore the factors influencing the adoption of social media for CBM in South Africa.

5.1 Ownership and Accessibility of Social Media

5.1.1 Ownership of Social Media Accounts

The findings reveal a high prevalence of social media account ownership among respondents, with 83% reporting active accounts across various platforms (as illustrated in Figure 1). This high percentage underscores the potential for leveraging social media as a tool for CBM in South Africa. Among the platforms used, WhatsApp emerged as the most popular, followed by Facebook and Twitter, reflecting patterns consistent with global trends in platform adoption for communication and engagement purposes [28; 29]. Urban respondents reported higher ownership rates than their rural counterparts, with 92% of urban residents owning at least one social media account, compared to 68% in rural areas. This disparity is largely attributable to differences in access to internet infrastructure and affordability, as noted in the literature on digital divides in South Africa [30; 31]. Urban areas benefit from higher broadband penetration and more reliable network connectivity, while rural areas face challenges such as limited mobile network coverage and high data costs [32]. These findings align with the analytical framework, particularly Institutional Theory, which highlights how systemic inequalities in digital infrastructure can shape technology adoption for governance purposes [33].

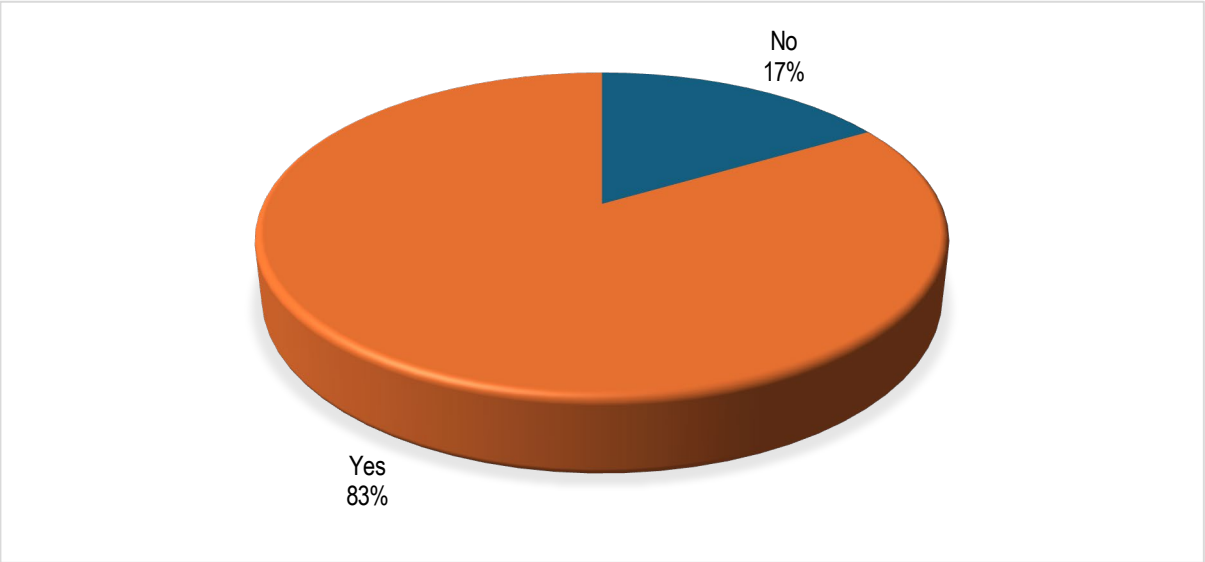

Figure 1: Percentage of respondents who have a social media account

Source: Author's own construction (2023)
N = 7282

Age and education levels further influenced ownership rates (see Figure 2). Respondents aged 18–35 exhibited the highest levels of social media account ownership (95%), while individuals over 55 reported significantly lower rates (48%). Similarly, respondents with tertiary education were likelier to own social media accounts than those with only primary or secondary education. These patterns suggest that digital literacy is critical in facilitating social media adoption, as younger and more educated individuals are generally more comfortable navigating digital platforms [29; 30]. This finding echoes the TAM, which posits that perceived ease of use and perceived usefulness are key determinants of technology adoption [34]. In this case, individuals with higher digital literacy are more likely to perceive social media as accessible and valuable for communication and monitoring.

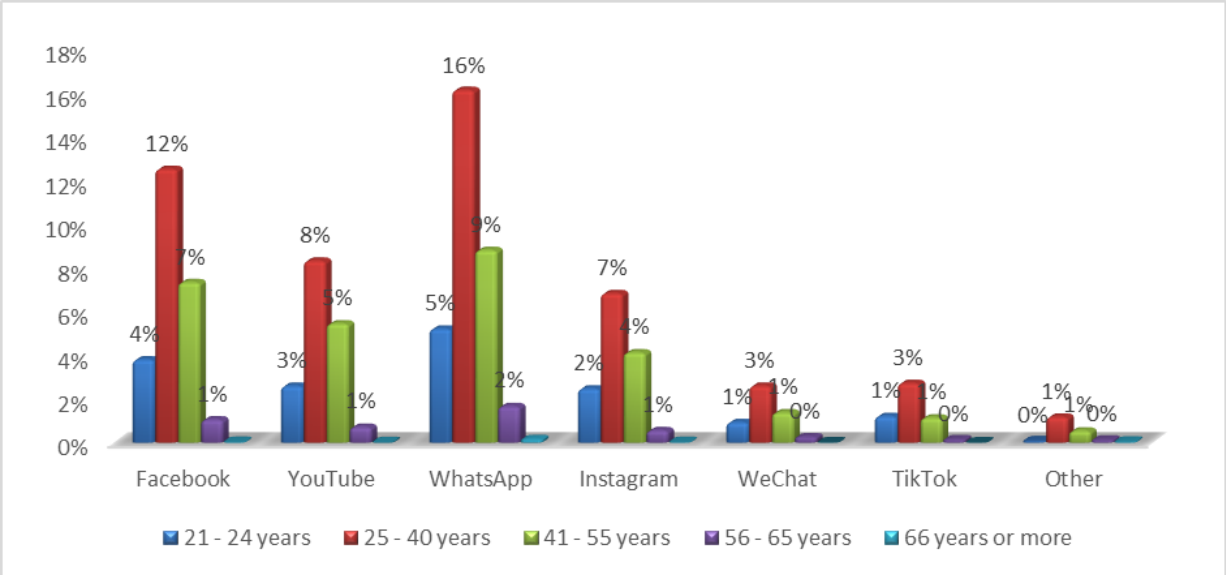

Figure 2: Ownership of social media platform by age

Source: (Author's own construction, 2023)
N = 7282

The data reveal notable regional variations in social media platform preferences across South Africa, with respondents in Gauteng and the Western Cape—areas with better internet access—favouring platforms like Twitter and LinkedIn for professional engagement, while those in Limpopo and the Eastern Cape predominantly use WhatsApp due to its low data requirements and accessibility on basic smartphones [28; 32; 35]. This pattern reflects global trends indicating that platform adoption is shaped by local context and resource availability. High social media ownership among urban, young, and educated users offers a promising base for CBM initiatives; however, the persistent digital divide, driven by urban-rural disparities and socio-economic inequalities, remains a critical barrier [36; 37]. To ensure equitable adoption, targeted strategies must focus on expanding digital infrastructure, lowering data costs, and implementing robust digital literacy programs in underserved areas. These findings underscore a key tension outlined in the analytical framework: while social media holds significant potential for participatory monitoring, its effectiveness is limited by systemic inequalities and institutional readiness. As emphasized in the Participatory Governance Framework, trust, inclusivity, and institutional support are essential for transforming social media into a legitimate CBM tool [20; 29]. Thus, ownership alone is not enough—real impact requires addressing issues of access, trust, and policy coherence through comprehensive governance reforms [30, 31, 38].

5.1.2 Accessibility to Digital Infrastructure

Access to digital infrastructure is a foundational requirement for adopting social media in CBM, yet the study reveals persistent disparities across demographic and geographic lines. As illustrated in Figure 3, only 35% of respondents reported having internet access in their dwellings, while 8% explicitly lacked access, and an additional 57 respondents did not provide a response—likely indicative of connectivity challenges. This data underscores ongoing structural barriers to digital inclusion in South Africa's governance landscape [39; 40]. Younger respondents (aged 25–40) showed the highest levels of connectivity (17%), reflecting their relative digital fluency and alignment with the TAM, which posits that perceived ease of use and usefulness drive adoption [42]. In contrast, respondents above the age of 55 exhibited significantly lower levels of access, consistent with findings from Mawela (2017) and Loader & Mercea (2011), which highlight generational gaps in digital engagement [41]. However, access alone does not guarantee participation in CBM; other factors—such as distrust in institutions and doubts about the efficacy of digital reporting—remain critical barriers. These findings point to the need for targeted, age- and education-sensitive interventions to promote both digital literacy and civic engagement across all age groups [43].

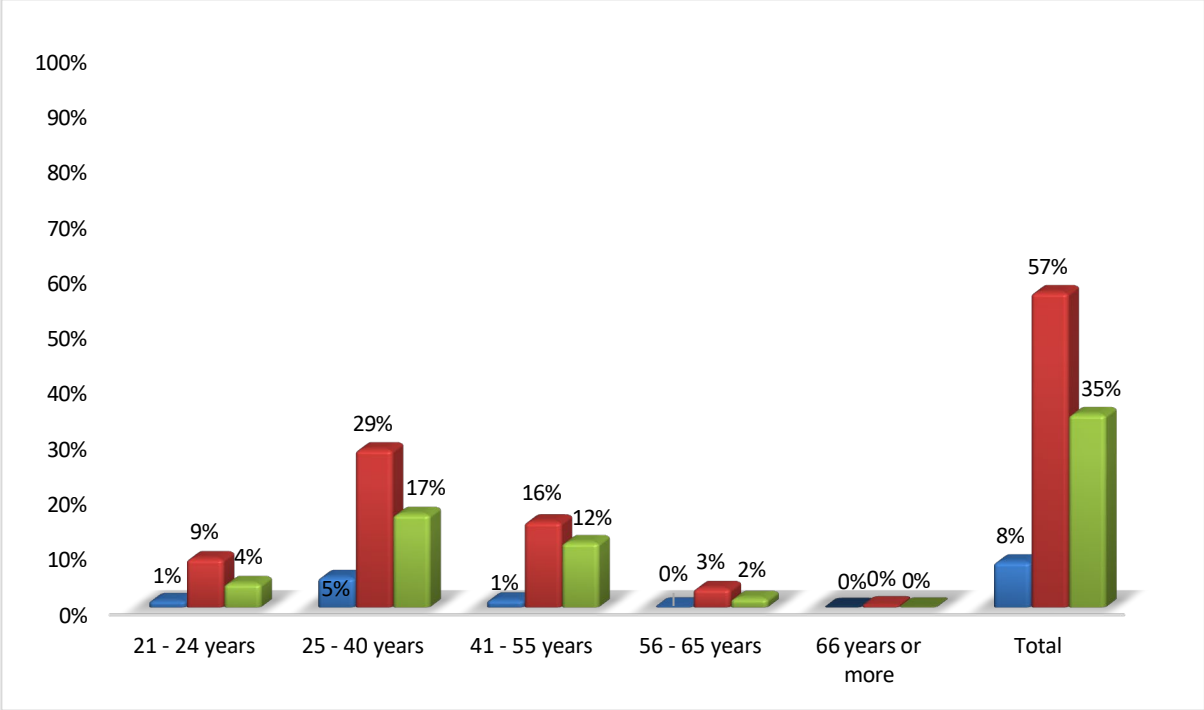

Figure 3: Internet connection in the dwelling

Source: Author's own construction (2023)
N = 7282

Geographical disparities compound these challenges, with urban respondents reporting significantly higher internet access than those in rural settings. This reflects a broader national trend in South Africa, where rural areas face systemic infrastructural deficiencies, limited broadband coverage, and unaffordable mobile data prices that severely constrain connectivity [44; 45]. According to Institutional Theory, such infrastructural limitations represent deeper organizational and systemic obstacles that hinder the equitable adoption of digital tools for governance [46]. Furthermore, the data show that respondents with tertiary education were more likely to report internet access, reinforcing the link between digital connectivity and socio-economic advantage [47]. Provincial patterns also reveal stark inequalities: Gauteng and the Western Cape showed far higher rates of internet penetration compared to under-resourced provinces like Limpopo and the Eastern Cape [48]. These findings suggest that without significant investment in broadband expansion, affordable data packages, and localized digital literacy training, social media will remain an exclusive rather than inclusive CBM mechanism. Strategic interventions at both national and provincial levels are essential to ensure that digital governance frameworks are equitably accessible to all citizens, especially those in underserved regions [49; 50].

5.2 Perceived Usefulness of Social Media for CBM

5.2.1 Perceptions of Social Media's Role in Monitoring

The findings present a mixed outlook on the perceived usefulness of social media for CBM in South Africa. According to survey data (see figure 4), 33% of respondents found social media to be accessible and practical for monitoring public services. In comparison, 21% disagreed, indicating that a substantial portion of participants either lack confidence in its effectiveness or face systemic barriers to its use. The remaining respondents expressed uncertainty or neutrality, which likely reflects limited exposure to or understanding of the use of social media for CBM purposes. This aligns with studies suggesting that

many citizens in developing contexts are only beginning to grasp digital platforms' role in enhancing governance [39; 40]. Furthermore, younger respondents were more likely to express confidence in social media's accessibility for monitoring. In comparison, older respondents and rural participants appeared less optimistic, likely due to challenges such as limited digital literacy, lack of infrastructure, and high data costs, which persist as significant barriers [41].

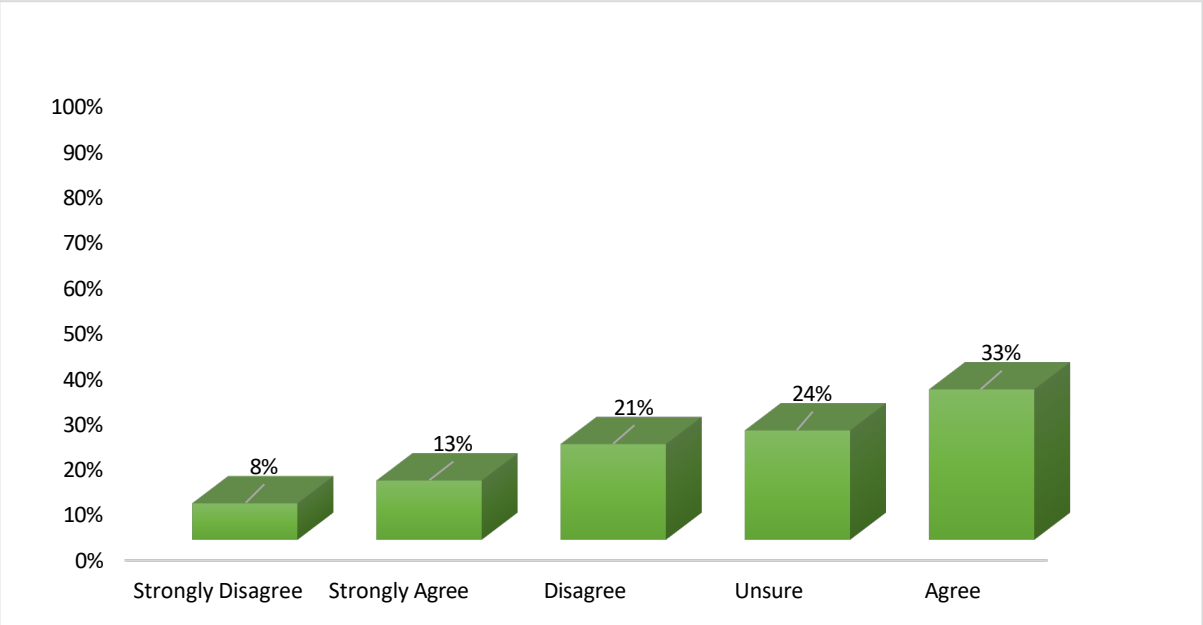

Figure 4: Perception of ease of access of monitoring service delivery via social media
Source: Author's own construction (2023)
N = 7282

When asked about the perceived effectiveness of social media for monitoring public services, 37% of respondents agreed that it is an effective tool. In comparison, 16% disagreed, and the remaining participants expressed neutrality (see Figure 5). These findings suggest that while social media's potential for CBM is recognized, doubts remain regarding its practical application. This skepticism could be attributed to systemic issues such as misinformation and institutional unresponsiveness, both of which are identified in existing research as critical barriers to the adoption of social media for governance purposes [39; 40]. Additionally, urban respondents expressed higher levels of agreement regarding social media's effectiveness than their rural counterparts, a disparity reflecting ongoing infrastructural and socio-economic inequalities [40].

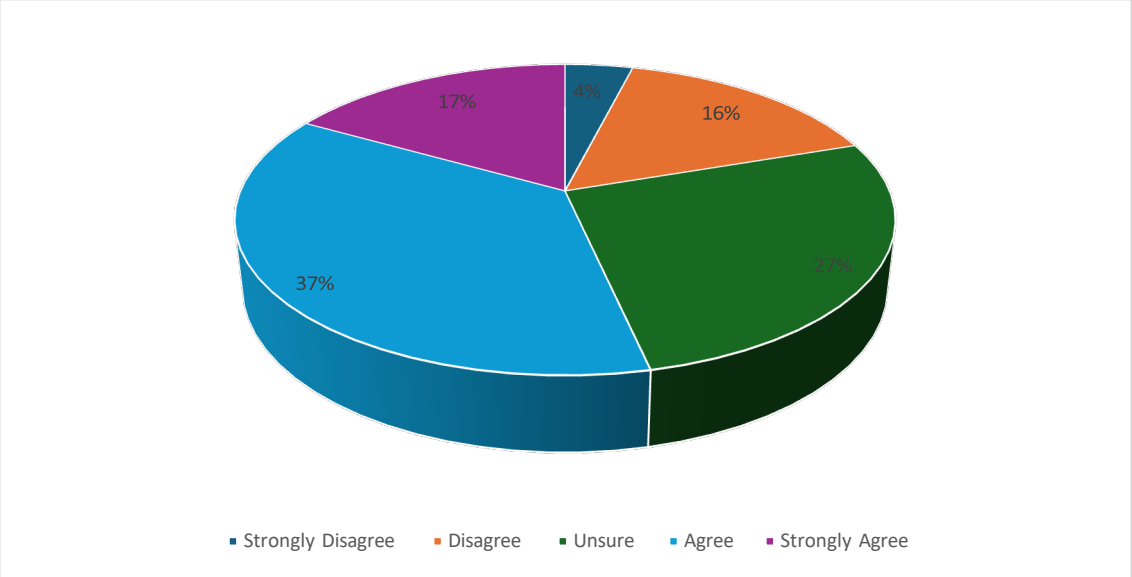

Figure 5: Perceptions of the effectiveness of monitoring service delivery via social media
Source: (Author's own construction, 2023)
N = 7282

Insights from interviews added depth to these survey findings, providing a nuanced understanding of stakeholder perceptions. Government officials, for example, acknowledged the potential of social media for real-time feedback but expressed reservations about its effectiveness due to challenges such as misinformation and resource limitations. CBOs were more optimistic, highlighting social media's role in amplifying community voices and bridging gaps between citizens and government entities. However, they also pointed to resource and digital literacy constraints as obstacles to fully utilizing these platforms for CBM. Local media representatives emphasized the speed and reach of social media, particularly in disseminating information to underserved communities, but noted the challenges of combating misinformation and maintaining credibility.

Table 2: Stakeholder Perspectives on Social Media for CBM

Stakeholder Group	Perceived Benefits	Perceived Challenges	Illustrative Quotes
Government Officials	- Allows for real-time citizen feedback	- Misinformation undermines credibility - Resource constraints and institutional capacity limitations	"False narratives often escalate quickly" (CRE3).
CBOs	- Amplifies marginalized voices	- Resource constraints in mobilizing digitally excluded populations - Challenges engaging rural and low-literacy populations	"Social media provides a platform for communities to highlight issues" (JRE10).

Local Media	- Rapid dissemination of local issues to the community - Enhances awareness of public service failures	- Struggles to maintain credibility due to misinformation	"Social media quickly informs communities about local issues" (HRE8).

The generational and regional disparities observed in the survey data (see figure 6) are consistent with global trends, where younger and urban populations tend to perceive digital tools as more accessible and effective due to higher levels of digital literacy and infrastructure availability [30; 33]. These disparities likely contribute to the skepticism expressed by older and rural respondents, who face more significant barriers to digital participation. Additionally, the neutrality expressed by a considerable proportion of respondents may reflect the limited institutionalization of social media in governance, as highlighted in the literature. The absence of structured processes for addressing citizen feedback on social media likely undermines confidence in its effectiveness, a finding corroborated by the views of government officials, who pointed to resource and policy gaps as key challenges.

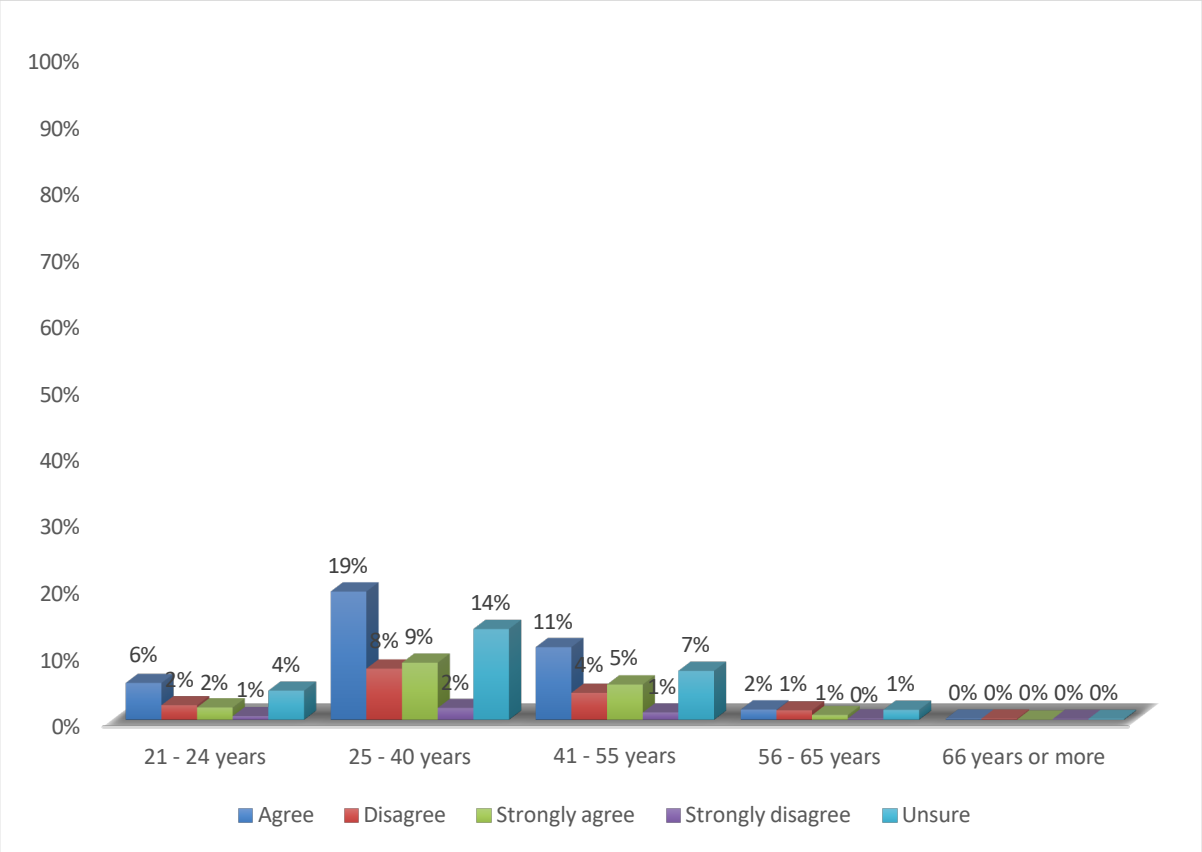

Figure 6: Social media as an effective tool for monitoring by age
Source: Author's own construction (2023)
N = 7282

On the other hand, CBOs and local media representatives demonstrated a more positive outlook on social media's role in CBM, emphasizing its participatory potential. However, their perspectives also underscored the need to address digital literacy and access disparities to maximize the reach and impact of these platforms. These findings suggest that while social media holds significant promise as a tool for CBM, its perceived usefulness is shaped by systemic barriers and stakeholder-specific challenges, as noted in prior research. The contrast between optimistic and skeptical views highlights the complexity

of integrating social media into CBM frameworks and the necessity of addressing underlying disparities to realize its potential fully.

5.2.2 Barriers to Social Media Use for CBM

The study identifies a range of systemic, institutional, and socio-economic barriers that hinder the adoption of social media for CBM in South Africa. Key challenges include trust deficits, fear of surveillance, government unresponsiveness, authenticity concerns, privacy issues, misinformation, digital literacy gaps, and the persistent digital divide. As summarized in Table 3, these barriers interact to create an environment where citizens—particularly those in marginalized communities—are reluctant or unable to engage meaningfully in digital monitoring processes. Respondents expressed deep skepticism toward government intentions, viewing digital initiatives as performative rather than substantive. Statements like "citizens feel their complaints are often ignored" (JRE10) and "people hesitate to engage online because they fear being monitored" (HRE8) reflect broader concerns about government transparency, data misuse, and retaliation. These concerns are compounded by weak privacy safeguards and South Africa's history of service delivery failures, making social media an untrusted space for civic engagement [41; 42; 43; 44; 45].

Table 3: Thematic Summary of Barriers to Social Media Use for CBM

Barrier	Description	Interconnected Effects
Trust Issues	Low trust in government and institutions undermines citizen participation.	Reduces citizen willingness to engage in CBM initiatives.
Fear of Surveillance	Fear that social media monitoring could lead to retaliation or misuse of data.	Discourages citizens from reporting issues via social media.
Lack of Responsiveness from Authorities	Authorities often fail to act on issues raised by citizens, leading to frustration.	Erodes confidence in the impact of citizen-based monitoring.
Authenticity Concerns	Difficulty verifying the credibility of social media content discourages engagement.	Undermines trust in the platform as a reliable medium for monitoring.
Privacy Concerns	Concerns about data protection and misuse hinder citizens' willingness to participate.	Restricts citizens' participation due to safety and ethical concerns.
Digital Divide	Unequal access to technology creates barriers for marginalized communities.	Excludes disadvantaged groups, weakening representativity in CBM efforts.
Misinformation	False or misleading information circulating on social media reduces credibility.	Dilutes the effectiveness of valid concerns raised on social media.
Limited Digital Literacy	Limited understanding of social media tools restricts effective citizen participation.	Limits the use of digital tools in marginalized and rural areas.

Institutional shortcomings further exacerbate these barriers. Respondents highlighted the lack of capacity within government structures to respond effectively to digital feedback, with CRE3 noting, "posts rarely lead to actionable outcomes because we lack the capacity to process them systematically." Without structured mechanisms or adequate training, public agencies struggle to turn digital input into policy or service improvements, reinforcing citizen disengagement [47; 48]. Additionally, the prevalence of misinformation diminishes the perceived reliability of social media, with GRE7 remarking that "misinformation makes it harder for citizens to trust any information, even if it's accurate" [49; 50; 51]. Privacy concerns—especially among older and rural respondents—were frequently cited, as many people are unsure how their data will be used and protected (IRE9) [52; 53]. The digital divide also remains a formidable obstacle, with high data costs and poor rural infrastructure excluding large segments of the population from digital participation [55]. Collectively, these barriers emphasize the urgent need for robust data protection, increased institutional responsiveness, digital literacy initiatives, and infrastructural investment to ensure that social media can fulfill its promise as an inclusive CBM tool.

5.3 Enabling Factors for Social Media Adoption in CBM

The adoption of social media for CBM in South Africa is supported by a range of enabling factors that go beyond digital access to include psychological, social, and institutional dynamics. Key enablers

identified in this study include perceived ease of use, perceived usefulness, social influence, and trust in the platform, all of which are contextualized within South Africa's socio-political landscape. WhatsApp and Facebook emerged as dominant platforms due to their user-friendly interfaces, particularly among younger demographics. As Respondent IRE9 noted, "WhatsApp is easy to use, even for people who are not tech-savvy," aligning with TAM's emphasis on usability as a core adoption driver [66]. Perceived usefulness was another strong enabler, with WhatsApp groups being used to raise community issues quickly and efficiently—paralleling the use of FixMyStreet in the UK [67]. In addition, social influence played a motivating role, especially among youth groups. As JRE10 stated, "If everyone is using it to communicate with government, people will follow," reflecting the growing normalization of social media as a tool for civic engagement [68].

Enabler	Description	Illustrative Examples	Stakeholder Perspectives
Perceived Ease of Use	The simplicity of using social media platforms facilitates adoption among users, especially younger demographics.	Platforms like WhatsApp and Facebook, known for their intuitive interfaces, dominate usage in South Africa.	"WhatsApp is easy to use, even for people who are not tech-savvy" (IRE9).
Perceived Usefulness	Social media's utility in raising awareness, sharing information, and reporting issues enhances its appeal.	WhatsApp groups are used to report community service delivery problems directly to local stakeholders.	"It's useful for quickly raising issues that affect the community" (GRE7).
Social Influence	The role of peers and social networks in encouraging the use of social media for CBM.	Youth groups promoting social media campaigns for governance accountability in urban areas.	"If everyone is using it to communicate with government, people will follow" (JRE10).
Sense of Belonging	Social media fosters a sense of community by connecting citizens with shared concerns.	Local WhatsApp groups discussing community challenges and solutions.	"It makes us feel connected to others who care about the same issues" (HRE8).
Trust in the Platform	Confidence in the credibility and reliability of platforms to facilitate engagement and deliver results.	Platforms like Twitter are seen as credible tools for disseminating real-time updates and amplifying voices.	"Twitter gives a platform to make issues visible to everyone, including officials" (CRE3).
Access to Technology	Increasing penetration of smartphones and affordable data packages enabling broader use of social media.	High smartphone ownership rates among younger demographics; mobile networks improving coverage in rural areas.	"Most people in the community have smartphones now, even in rural areas" (BRE2).
Positive Social Norms	Growing cultural acceptance of social media as a legitimate platform for engagement and monitoring.	Social media is increasingly viewed as an expected channel for citizen feedback.	"People expect the government to use social media now; it's becoming normal" (FRE6).
Relative Advantage	Perception that social media provides unique benefits over traditional CBM methods like in-person reporting.	Social media allows for real-time updates and engagement, unlike manual complaint forms.	"It's faster and easier than going to an office to file a complaint" (DRE4).
Competitive Pressure	Peer pressure within communities and among government agencies to adopt social media as a tool for governance.	Municipalities adopting platforms like GovChat to remain competitive with modern governance trends.	"Departments feel they need to use these tools because others are" (CRE3).
Ability to Connect	Social media enables citizens to easily interact with government, peers, and stakeholders.	Platforms facilitate direct communication with local officials and community leaders.	"Social media helps us reach people who can actually make a difference" (JRE10).

Trust in platforms like Twitter, valued for real-time updates and public visibility, was another enabler, as emphasized by Respondent CRE3: "Twitter gives a platform to make issues visible to everyone, including officials," echoing experiences in cities like Seoul [69]. Sense of belonging and ability to connect were also essential, with respondents reporting that social media fosters community cohesion and enables direct communication with officials and peers. Respondent HRE8 shared, "It makes us feel connected to others who care about the same issues." Broader enablers like access to technology, positive social norms, relative advantage over traditional reporting, and competitive pressure among municipalities also contribute to adoption. These factors collectively illustrate that while infrastructure remains essential, social and institutional perceptions are equally critical for enabling social media integration into CBM frameworks.

5.4 Intersection of Access, Perception, and Institutional Readiness

The adoption and effectiveness of social media for CBM in South Africa hinge on the interconnected dynamics of access, public perception, and institutional readiness. Survey data show that only 35% of respondents have home internet access, while 8% explicitly lack connectivity, exposing persistent digital inequalities that disproportionately affect rural and low-income communities. High data costs and poor network coverage in underserved areas severely limit digital participation, as noted by government official CRE3: "Without stable internet access, these platforms can never reach their full potential." This digital divide reflects the systemic constraints emphasized by Institutional Theory, which argues that unequal access to infrastructure reinforces broader socio-economic disparities [70]. Consequently, the citizens who experience the worst service delivery are often the least able to participate in digital monitoring efforts, undermining the inclusivity and effectiveness of CBM.

Equally important are citizen perceptions of social media's utility and institutional capacity to act on feedback. Although 33% of respondents believe social media is a practical tool for public service monitoring, 21% remain skeptical due to concerns over misinformation, lack of responsiveness, and privacy risks. As HRE8 put it, "People don't trust that their complaints will be taken seriously," underscoring how past inaction erodes trust. This aligns with the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), which highlights that perceived usefulness and institutional responsiveness are central to adoption [71; 72]. Institutional readiness is also a critical factor: government officials cited a lack of clear protocols, training, and coordinated policy frameworks as barriers to operationalizing social media for CBM. As ARE1 stated, "There is no clear protocol for handling citizen feedback received through social media." The fragmented implementation of platforms like GovChat reveals that despite some promise, CBM effectiveness is limited by inconsistent governance structures [73; 74]. To harness the full potential of social media in governance, South Africa must address digital access, improve public trust, and implement coherent, scalable e-governance strategies.

6. Implications of Findings

The findings of this study reveal that the adoption of social media for CBM in South Africa is shaped by a complex interplay of systemic, institutional, and socio-economic factors, with significant implications for digital inclusion and participatory governance. Digital access remains a critical determinant, as higher connectivity among urban populations enables greater engagement, while rural and low-income communities remain largely excluded—reinforcing the structural inequalities identified in Institutional Theory. This exclusion threatens the legitimacy and effectiveness of CBM efforts by sidelining the very groups most affected by poor service delivery. Simultaneously, public perception of social media's usefulness is undermined by widespread distrust in government, misinformation, and a lack of institutional responsiveness—factors that align with the Participatory Governance Framework, which stresses that trust and visible action are essential for sustained citizen engagement. Institutional readiness further constrains CBM potential, with the study identifying fragmented municipal policies, insufficient training, and the absence of standardized feedback mechanisms as core challenges. As platforms like WhatsApp and Twitter become increasingly embedded in civic life, concerns around surveillance, privacy, and content credibility underscore the contested nature of digital spaces. To avoid reinforcing existing power asymmetries, the study argues that social media must be integrated into CBM through targeted reforms—expanding access, building trust, enhancing institutional capacity, and embedding clear governance protocols that ensure meaningful, inclusive, and accountable digital participation.

7. Conclusion and Future Research Directions

Social media has emerged as a powerful tool for communication, engagement, and participatory governance, yet its application in CBM remains constrained by systemic, institutional, and socio-economic barriers. The findings of this study illustrate how digital inequalities, trust deficits, and institutional unpreparedness collectively shape the feasibility of social media as a governance tool in South Africa. While the increasing adoption of social media presents opportunities for enhancing citizen engagement, the persistent reluctance of government institutions to embrace these platforms for accountability mechanisms reflects broader governance challenges. The study highlights how access

disparities exclude marginalized populations from meaningful participation in CBM, reinforcing pre-existing inequalities in digital governance. Furthermore, the absence of clear institutional protocols, combined with fears of surveillance and misinformation, limits these platforms' perceived credibility and effectiveness in holding public institutions accountable. However, the study also identifies enabling factors—such as the growing normalization of digital engagement, the influence of peer networks, and the demonstrated potential of localized social media-driven initiatives—that suggest a pathway for broader adoption if systemic barriers are addressed. These findings align with global experiences, where the success of technology-driven CBM initiatives has depended not just on access to digital platforms but also on institutional willingness, public trust, and structured policy interventions. The South African context underscores the need for governance frameworks that do not merely incorporate social media as a supplementary communication tool but integrate it into structured participatory governance models. Without addressing digital divides, strengthening institutional capacity, and fostering public confidence, social media-driven CBM initiatives risk being ineffective or reinforcing governance asymmetries. As digital technologies continue to evolve, future research and policy efforts must remain focused on aligning digital inclusion, regulatory frameworks, and institutional responsiveness to ensure that social media can function as a meaningful tool for accountability rather than just a symbolic platform for engagement. Future research should explore the scalability and sustainability of grassroots and citizen-led initiatives—such as community WhatsApp groups—as formal mechanisms for participatory governance within CBM frameworks.

8. Recommendations

Several targeted recommendations must be implemented to address the systemic, institutional, and socio-economic barriers limiting the adoption of social media for CBM in South Africa. First, strengthening trust through transparent engagement processes is essential, given the widespread skepticism about government responsiveness. Establishing formal mechanisms where authorities publicly acknowledge citizen feedback, provide updates on actions taken, and create clear follow-up processes will enhance credibility. Additionally, proactive communication addressing surveillance and data privacy concerns is necessary to reassure users. Institutional capacity must also be improved, as findings highlighted resource and skills deficits among government officials managing social media interactions. Training programs should equip officials with the ability to engage with citizens effectively, while dedicated CBM units within municipalities or provincial departments can standardize and streamline responses. Developing clear operational guidelines for CBM-related social media use will further improve institutional coherence. Another critical aspect is mitigating misinformation, as the spread of false information erodes trust in CBM platforms. Collaborative efforts between government bodies, civil society, and social media platforms should establish verification mechanisms and fact-checking processes. Public education campaigns on identifying credible information and integrating artificial intelligence moderation tools can also help mitigate misinformation risks. Additionally, privacy concerns must be addressed through robust data protection policies aligned with global best practices, with clear public communication ensuring citizens understand how their data is safeguarded.

Beyond institutional readiness and trust-building, expanding digital access remains a fundamental requirement, particularly for rural and low-income populations. The study's findings reinforce the need for targeted interventions to address digital disparities. Policymakers should explore partnerships with telecommunications providers to introduce subsidized data packages for CBM engagement, particularly through platforms like GovChat. Establishing community internet hubs and mobile data subsidy programs will further ensure that marginalized populations can participate meaningfully in digital governance. Furthermore, localized and citizen-led initiatives should be leveraged to strengthen CBM at the grassroots level. Existing informal monitoring mechanisms, such as community WhatsApp groups, can be scaled into formalized governance processes through municipal support, funding, and technical assistance. Tools tailored to user needs, particularly multilingual and disability-accessible platforms, should be prioritized to ensure inclusivity. Additionally, social media should be strategically leveraged to amplify marginalized voices, with municipal authorities actively monitoring community-driven digital campaigns and hashtags to incorporate citizen feedback into service delivery planning. Establishing formal collaborations with crowdsourcing platforms that aggregate citizen concerns can further enhance the effectiveness of CBM. These recommendations align directly with the study's findings, providing actionable steps to overcome barriers, enhance institutional responsiveness, and

foster greater trust in the use of social media for CBM in South Africa. By addressing these challenges, the potential of digital platforms to improve transparency, accountability, and participatory governance can be fully realized.

Citing Related Work

There are no in the current document.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

HISTORY DATES

References

[1] Chadwick, A. (2009). Web 2.0: New challenges for the study of e-democracy. The Journal of E-Democracy, 7(4), 10-15.
[2] OECD. (2021). Digital Government Review of Norway. OECD Publishing.
[3] Bertot, J. C., Jaeger, P. T., & Grimes, J. M. (2012). Using ICTs to create a culture of transparency: E-government and social media as openness and anti-corruption tools for societies. Government Information Quarterly, 29(3), 365-374.
[4] Meijer, A., & Bolívar, M. P. R. (2012). The implementation of social media for participation in the public sector. In Proceedings of the 2012 International Conference on e-Government.
[5] UNDP. (2021). Participatory Governance and Citizen Engagement: A Global Perspective. United Nations Development Programme.
[6] Eom, T., Park, J., & Yoo, C. (2018). The use of social media for citizen participation in local government: The case of SeeClickFix. Public Administration Review, 78(5), 812-821.
[7] Howard, A., & Parks, L. (2012). The Australian Government's engagement with social media. Australian Journal of Political Science, 47(2), 229-245.
[8] ICASA. (2022). South Africa's Internet Usage Statistics 2022. Independent Communications Authority of South Africa.
[9] Statistics South Africa. (2022). The role of digital platforms in public service delivery in South Africa.
[10] Afrobarometer. (2023). South Africa's Digital Divide: Bridging the Gap. Afrobarometer Report No. 45.
[11] Draai, S. (2010). Governance, transparency, and the challenges of implementing e-governance in South Africa.
[12] Farelo, T., & Morris, M. (2006). E-Government Policy Framework in South Africa.

[13] Matsilele, T. (2019). Public Perceptions on Digital Governance and Accountability in South Africa. South African Journal of Public Administration.
[14] Peled, A., & Unkule, G. (2016). FixMyStreet: The use of social media in citizen-based monitoring. International Journal of Urban Governance, 8(2), 145-160.

[15] Almalki, M., & Mohammed, M. (2018). Adaa: Enhancing citizen participation through social media in Saudi Arabia. Government Information Quarterly, 35(4), 581-594.

[16] Okolloh, O. (2009). Ushahidi: Mapping post-election violence and the use of social media in disaster management. Journal of African Technology and Development, 6(3), 220-234.

[17] Charowa, K., Gavaza, F., & Mavodza, M. (2020). GovChat: Leveraging social media for improving service delivery in South Africa. African Journal of Public Administration, 28(3), 320-332.

[18] Charowa, K., Gavaza, F., & Mavodza, M. (2020). GovChat: Leveraging social media for improving service delivery in South Africa. African Journal of Public Administration, 28(3), 320-332.

[19] Chege, M., & Kiunguyu, A. (2019). Ushahidi and citizen engagement: Lessons from Kenya's election monitoring. International Journal of Political Participation, 22(1), 67-81.

[20] Doppelt, B. (2013). SeeClickFix: A platform for citizen engagement and accountability. Urban Affairs Review, 48(2), 239-256.

[21] Matsilele, T. (2019). Public Perceptions on Digital Governance and Accountability in South Africa. South African Journal of Public Administration.

[22] ICASA. (2022). South Africa's Internet Usage Statistics 2022. Independent Communications Authority of South Africa.

[23] Ogunlana, A., & Olalekan, O. (2018). #EndSARS and social media's role in mobilizing advocacy. Nigerian Journal of Political Science, 35(1), 59-72.

[24] Mawela, S. (2017). Digital literacy and the implications for social media use in governance. South African Journal of Information Studies, 22(2), 45-53.

[25] Afrobarometer. (2023). South Africa's Digital Divide: Bridging the Gap. Afrobarometer Report No. 45.

[26] Farelo, T., & Morris, M. (2006). E-Government Policy Framework in South Africa.

[27] Draai, S. (2010). Governance, transparency, and the challenges of implementing e-governance in South Africa.
[14] Peled, A., & Unkule, G. (2016). FixMyStreet: The use of social media in citizen-based monitoring. International Journal of Urban Governance, 8(2), 145-160.

[15] Almalki, M., & Mohammed, M. (2018). Adaa: Enhancing citizen participation through social media in Saudi Arabia. Government Information Quarterly, 35(4), 581-594.

[16] Okolloh, O. (2009). Ushahidi: Mapping post-election violence and the use of social media in disaster management. Journal of African Technology and Development, 6(3), 220-234.

[17] Eom, T., Park, J., & Yoo, C. (2018). The use of social media for citizen participation in local government: The case of SeeClickFix. Public Administration Review, 78(5), 812-821.

[18] Chege, M., & Kiunguyu, A. (2019). Ushahidi and citizen engagement: Lessons from Kenya's election monitoring. International Journal of Political Participation, 22(1), 67-81.

[19] Doppelt, B. (2013). SeeClickFix: A platform for citizen engagement and accountability. Urban Affairs Review, 48(2), 239-256.

[20] Bonsón, E., Casaló, L. V., & Escobar-Rodríguez, T. (2012). Local e-Government 2.0: Social media and citizen participation in local governments. Online Information Review, 36(4), 1-20.

[21] OECD. (2021). Digital Government Review of Norway. OECD Publishing.

[22] Loader, B. D., & Mercea, D. (2011). Social media and democratic engagement: What does the evidence say? Information, Communication & Society, 14(6), 703-719.

[23] Matsilele, T. (2019). Public Perceptions on Digital Governance and Accountability in South Africa. South African Journal of Public Administration.

[24] Charowa, K., Gavaza, F., & Mavodza, M. (2020). GovChat: Leveraging social media for improving service delivery in South Africa. African Journal of Public Administration, 28(3), 320-332.

[25] Scott, W. R. (2014). Institutions and Organizations: Ideas, Interests, and Identities. SAGE Publications.

[26] Farelo, T., & Morris, M. (2006). E-Government Policy Framework in South Africa.

[27] Draai, S. (2010). Governance, transparency, and the challenges of implementing e-governance in South Africa.

[28] ICASA. (2022). South Africa's Internet Usage Statistics 2022. Independent Communications Authority of South Africa.
[28] Meijer, A., Bolívar, M. P. R., & Jansen, D. (2012). Social media and public governance: The evolution of government use of social media for public engagement. *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory*, 22(4), 1-15.

[29] Loader, B. D., & Mercea, D. (2011). Social media and democratic engagement: What does the evidence say? *Information, Communication & Society*, 14(6), 703-719.

[30] Mawela, S. (2017). Digital literacy and the implications for social media use in governance. *South African Journal of Information Studies*, 22(2), 45-53.

[31] Afrobarometer. (2023). South Africa's Digital Divide: Bridging the Gap. *Afrobarometer Report No. 45*.

[32] ICASA. (2022). South Africa's Internet Usage Statistics 2022. *Independent Communications Authority of South Africa*.

[33] Scott, W. R. (2014). *Institutions and Organizations: Ideas, Interests, and Identities*. SAGE Publications.

[34] Davis, F. D. (1989). Perceived usefulness, perceived ease of use, and user acceptance of information technology. *MIS Quarterly*, 13(3), 319-340.

[35] OECD. (2021). *Digital Government Review of Norway*. OECD Publishing.

[36] Matsilele, T. (2019). Public Perceptions on Digital Governance and Accountability in South Africa. *South African Journal of Public Administration*.

[37] Farelo, T., & Morris, M. (2006). *E-Government Policy Framework in South Africa*.

[39] Scott, W. R. (2014). *Institutions and Organizations: Ideas, Interests, and Identities*. SAGE Publications.

[40] ICASA. (2022). South Africa's Internet Usage Statistics 2022. *Independent Communications Authority of South Africa*.
[41] National Digital Inclusion Report (2023). Internet Connectivity and the Digital Divide in South Africa.
[42] Statistics South Africa (2022). *Internet Access and Digital Participation Report*.
[43] Independent Communications Authority of South Africa (ICASA). (2022). *South Africa's Digital* Connectivity Landscape.
[44] Report on Public Trust and Social Media Governance in Africa (2022).
[45] Data Privacy and Surveillance Risks in Digital Governance (2021).

[46] South African Human Rights Commission (2023). Digital Rights and Freedoms Report.
[47] Participatory Governance Frameworks in Africa (2022). OECD Digital Policy Brief.
[48] Institutional Challenges in E-Governance Adoption (2023).
[49] Fake News and Public Perception Study (2022).
[50] Policy Gaps in South Africa's Social Media Regulations (2021).
[51] The Role of Social Media in Governance: An Empirical Analysis (2023).
[52] South African Cybersecurity and Privacy Laws (2022).
[53] Barriers to Digital Inclusion: A Policy Review (2023).
[54] Public Perceptions of Misinformation and Government Trust (2023).
[55] Digital Transformation and Internet Accessibility in South Africa (2022).
[56] Institutional Readiness for Digital Governance in Developing Countries (2023).
56] Peled, A., & Unkule, D. (2016). FixMyStreet: An Evaluation of an Innovative Governance Model.
[57] Mawela, N. (2017). Digital Engagement and Social Media in South Africa: Patterns of Adoption and Impact.
[58] Bonsón, E., et al. (2012). Governance, Social Media, and Transparency: A Participatory Framework.
[66] Davis, F. D. (1989). Perceived Usefulness, Perceived Ease of Use, and User Acceptance of Information Technology.
[67] Peled, A., & Unkule, D. (2016). FixMyStreet: An Innovative Community Governance Model.
[68] Bonsón, E., et al. (2012). Public Engagement and Social Media in Governance.
[69] Eom, S. J., et al. (2018). Adoption of Twitter for Municipal Governance: Case Study of Seoul.
[70] ICASA, (2022). South Africa's Internet Usage Statistics.