GOVERNMENT COMMUNICATION AND THE PARADOX OF PARTICIPATION

TOWARDS A PARTICIPATORY COMMUNICATION FRAMEWORK FOR YOUTH ENTREPRENEURSHIP IN SOUTH AFRICAN TOWNSHIPS

CLEOPATRA NTOMBIFUTHI MSIBI

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DECLARATION

Name: **Cleopatra Ntombifuthi Msibi**
Student Number: **67119735**

Degree: **Doctor of Philosophy in Communication**

Title of Thesis: **Government Communication and the Paradox of Participation: Towards a Participatory Communication Framework for Youth Entrepreneurship in South African Townships**

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ABSTRACT

This thesis interrogates the paradox that defines government communication in democratic South Africa, the persistent gap between the rhetoric of participation and the reality of bureaucratic control. This thesis interrogates a central paradox in government communication within democratic South Africa: the persistent gap between the rhetoric of participation and the reality of bureaucratic control. While government policies emphasise youth participation, empowerment, and inclusion in economic development, the communication practices that follow often contradict these intentions. Instead of fostering meaningful engagement, communication remains largely top-down, bureaucratic, and one-directional, providing information rather than creating spaces for dialogue or shared decision-making.

Consequently, participation is celebrated in discourse but constrained in practice. Youth are positioned as key economic actors, yet the very communication channels meant to support them frequently limit their agency. The promise of participatory communication therefore remains aspirational, as structural obstacles, fragmented coordination, and entrenched institutional habits continue to uphold the status quo.

Guided by the Communication for Participatory Development (CFPD) model and the Ubuntu philosophy, the study conceptualises communication as a dialogic, ethical, and relational process central to empowerment and inclusive governance. It adopts a qualitative research design involving semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions with youth entrepreneurs and government communication officials across four Gauteng townships, Soweto, Mamelodi, Thembisa, and Sebokeng. Complementary content analysis of government communication policies, including the GCIS Government Communication Policy (2018) and the Government Communicators' Handbook, provided institutional and policy context.

Findings reveal that government communication remains largely top-down, characterised by one-way dissemination through traditional media such as radio, television, and formal outreach events. These modes are poorly aligned with township youth's interactive, digital, and culturally dynamic communication preferences. Although policy frameworks espouse participatory ideals, in practice, communication tends to reproduce bureaucratic hierarchies that limit dialogue, feedback, and inclusivity. Youth participants described government messages as inaccessible, overly formal, and disconnected from their lived realities, resulting in mistrust, low participation, and alienation.

Conversely, youth expressed strong preferences for digital and community-based communication channels, particularly WhatsApp, TikTok, Facebook, and community radio, which they viewed as spaces for immediacy, authenticity, and peer learning. The study also found that while government officials recognised these gaps and endorsed participatory communication in principle, implementation was constrained by limited capacity, centralised decision-making, and rigid approval systems.

To bridge these disjunctures, the study proposes the *Framework for Participatory Communication for Youth Entrepreneurship* (FPCFYE). This model integrates the procedural logic of CFPD and the ethical sensibility of Ubuntu to transform communication from a bureaucratic task into a participatory practice of co-creation. The framework comprises three interlinked layers: enabling inputs (policy, institutional capacity, and digital infrastructure), participatory processes (dialogic co-creation, feedback integration, capacity building, and relational accountability), and transformative outcomes (trust, empowerment, and inclusive governance).

The study concludes that the challenge is not the absence of participatory policy but the absence of participatory culture. Bridging this gap requires institutional reform, ethical responsiveness, and decentralised communicative practice that recognises youth as co-authors of development. By reimagining communication as an act of care, reciprocity, and collaboration, the thesis contributes to the decolonisation of participatory communication theory and offers a practical model for transforming state–citizen relations in South Africa's township economies.

ISIFINGQO

Leli thisisi lihlole iphutha eliyingqayizivele elichaza ukuxhumana kukahulumeni eNingizimu Afrika yentando yeningi, okuwukuba khona kwesikhala esingapheli phakathi kwenkulumo yokubamba iqhaza (participation) kanye neqiniso lokulawulwa yizinhlelo zobuhlakani bezokuphatha (bureaucratic control). Ucwaningo lugxila kule ngxabano eyisisekelo ekuxhumaneni kukahulumeni ngaphakathi kwentando yeningi yaseNingizimu Afrika, lapho izinqubomgomo zikahulumeni zigcizelela ukubamba iqhaza kwentsha, ukunikezwa amandla, kanye nokubandakanywa ekuthuthukisweni komnotho, kodwa izindlela zokuxhumana ezisetshenziswayo zivame ukuphikisana nalezi zinhloso. Esikhundleni sokukhuthaza ukubandakanyeka okunengqondo nokuzwakalayo, ukuxhumana kusalokhu kungaphezulu kwehla (top-down), kunobuhlakani bezokuphatha, futhi kuhamba ngohlangothi olulodwa, kugxile ekudluliseni ulwazi kunokudala izikhala zengxoxo noma zokuthatha izinqumo ngokuhlanganyela.

Ngenxa yalokho, ukubamba iqhaza kugujwa enkulumweni kodwa kuncishiswe ekusebenzeni. Intsha ibekwa njengabalingisi ababalulekile emnothweni, kepha izindlela zokuxhumana ezihloselwe ukuyisekela zivame ukunciphisa amandla ayo okuzimela nokuthatha izinqumo. Ngakho-ke, isithembiso sokuxhumana okubandakanyayo sisalokhu siyisifiso, njengoba izithiyo zesakhiwo, ukungahleleki kokuhlanganiswa kwemizamo, kanye nemikhuba esezinzile yezikhungo kuqhubeka nokugcina isimo esikhona.

Luqondiswa imodeli ye-*Communication for Participatory Development* (CFPD) kanye nefilosofi yoBuntu, lolu cwaningo luqonda ukuxhumana njengendlela yengxoxo, enesimilo, nenobudlelwano, ebalulekile ekunikezeni amandla nasekubuseni okubandakanyayo. Lwamukela uhlelo locwaningo lwekhwalithi oluhlanganisa izingxoxo ezihleliwe ngokungaphelele (semi-structured interviews) kanye nezingxoxo zamaqembu agxilile (focus group discussions) nentsha engosomabhizinisi kanye nezikhulu zikahulumeni kwezokuxhumana emalokishini amane aseGauteng: iSoweto, iMamelodi, iThembisa, neSebokeng. Ukuhlaziywa kokuqukethwe kwezinqomgomo zokuxhumana zikahulumeni, okuhlanganisa *i-GCIS Government Communication Policy* (2018) kanye ne-*Government Communicators' Handbook*, kunikeze umongo wenqubomgomo nowezikhungo.

Imiphumela iveza ukuthi ukuxhumana kukahulumeni kusalokhu kuyindlela ehla phezulu, kugxile ekusatshalalisweni kolwazi ngohlangothi olulodwa ngezindlela zendabuko ezifana

nomsakazo, ithelevishini, kanye nemicimbi esemthethweni yokufinyelela umphakathi. Lezi zindlela azihambisani kahle nezintandokazi zokuxhumana zentsha yasemalokishini, ezisebenzisanayo, ezidijithali, neziguquguqukayo ngokwesiko. Yize izinhlaka zenqubomgomo zikhuluma ngemigomo yokubamba iqhaza, ekusebenzeni ukuxhumana kuvame ukuphindaphinda izigaba zobuhlakani bezokuphatha, okunciphisa ingxoxo, impendulo, kanye nokubandakanyeka okubanzi. Intsha ebambe iqhaza ichaze imiyalezo kahulumeni njengengafinyeleleki, esemthethweni ngokweqile, futhi engaxhumene nezimo zayo zokuphila zansuku zonke, okuholele ekungathembaneni, ekubambeni iqhaza okuphansi, nasekuzihlukaniseni.

Ngakolunye uhlangothi, intsha iveze izintandokazi eziqinile zeziteshi zokuxhumana zedijithali nezomphakathi, ikakhulukazi i-WhatsApp, i-TikTok, i-Facebook, nomsakazo womphakathi, ezibona njengezikhala zokushesha, ubuqiniso, nokufunda ngokulingana. Ucwaningo luphinde lwathola ukuthi yize izikhulu zikahulumeni zizibona lezi zikhala futhi zivuma ngokomqondo ukuxhumana okubandakanyayo, ukusetshenziswa kwalokho kukhawulelwe amandla alinganiselwe, ukuthathwa kwezinqumo okuphakathi nendawo, kanye nezinhlelo eziqinile zokugunyazwa.

Ukuvala lezi zikhala, ucwaningo luphakamisa *i-Framework for Participatory Communication for Youth Entrepreneurship* (FPCFYE). Leli fulemu lihlanganisa umqondo wokusebenza we-CFPD kanye nomuzwa wokuziphatha woBuntu, ukuze liguqule ukuxhumana lisuke emsebenzini wobuhlakani bezokuphatha liye emkhubeni wokubamba iqhaza wokudala ngokuhlanganyela. Ifulemu linezendlalelo ezintathu ezixhumene: okokufaka okwenza kube nokwenzeka (inqubomgomo, amandla ezikhungo, kanye nengqalasizinda yedijithali), izinqubo zokubamba iqhaza (ukudala ngengxoxo, ukuhlanganiswa kwempendulo, ukwakhiwa kwamakhono, kanye nesibopho sobudlelwano), kanye nemiphumela eguqulayo (ukuthembana, ukunikezwa amandla, kanye nokubusa okubandakanyayo).

Ucwaningo luphetha ngokuthi inselelo ayikona ukungabi bikho kwenqubomgomo yokubamba iqhaza, kodwa ukungabi bikho kwesiko lokubamba iqhaza. Ukuvala lesi sikhala kudinga uguquko lwezikhungo, ukuphendula ngokuziphatha, kanye nezindlela zokuxhumana ezihlakazekile ezibona intsha njengababhali ngokuhlanganyela bentuthuko. Ngokucabanga kabusha ukuxhumana njengesenzo sokunakekela, sokuphindiselana, nokubambisana, leli thisisi lifaka isandla ekuchithweni kwemibono yobukoloni emfundweni yokuxhumana

okubandakanyayo futhi linikeza imodeli esebenzayo yokuguqula ubudlelwano phakathi kukahulumeni nezakhamuzi emnothweni wasemalokishini eNingizimu Afrika.

SIFINYETO

Loluphenyo lwe thesisi liphenya ngekuphikisana lokuchaza kuchumana kwahulumende eNingizimu Afrika yentsandvo yelinyenti, lokubonakala njengesikhebesi lesingapheli emkhatsini wenkhulumo yekubamba lichaza kanye neliciniso lekulawulwa kwetinhlelo tebulawuli lobusemtsetfweni kanye nelusha lolusemabhizinisini. Lolucwaningo lugcizelela kutsi noma tinchubomgomo tahulumende tigcizelela kubamba lichaza kubantfu labasha , ekuniketweni kwabo emandla kulabo labafuna kutitfutfukisa kutema bhizinisi, tindlela tekukhulumisana letisetjentiswako ekusebenteni tivame kuphikisana naletinhloso. Esikhundleni sekukhutsata kubandzakanyeka lokunenhloso nalokujulile, kukhulumisana kusolo kugcile ekulawulweni kwaletinhlelo ngulabasemagunyeni kunekutsi labasha nabo babe nemandla ekutsatsa tincumo ngekubambisana naye hulumende.

Ngenca yaloko, kubonakala ngatsi hulumende uyakhuluma kuphela koja bese kuba yinkinga ekwenteni kuze kufezeke letinjongo tekutfutfukisa lusha. Kutfolakala kutsi lusha noma lubonakala kutsi lunemdlandla neligalelo ekutfutfukiseni imnotfo njengabo somabhizinisi, letindlela tekuchumana letisentjentiswa nguhulumende atikhoni kufeza letifiso telive ne lusha ekutseni batfutfukise umnotfo. . Ngako-ke setsembiso sekuchumana ngekuhlanganyela sihlala sisifiso, njengobe tihibe tesakhiwo, kuhlanganiswa lokuhlukene, kanye nemikhuba yesikhungo lecinile ichubeka nekugcina simo lesikhona.

Loluphenyo lucondziswa yimodeli ye-*Communication for Participatory Development* (CFPD) kanye nefilosofi yeBuntfu (Ubuntu), futsi lucabanga kukhulumisana njengenchubo yenkhulumiswano, lenesimilo, naleyakha budlelwano, lebalulekile ekuniketeni emandla nasekubuseni lokuba bandzekakanyako. Lwamukela luhlelo lucwaningo lelisezingeni loluhlanganisa tingcogco letihlelekile (semi-structured interviews) kanye netingcogco tema-group lagcilile (focus group discussions) nelusha lolubo somabhizinisi kanye netikhulu tahulumende letibuke kukhulumisana, emalokishini lamane aseGauteng: iSoweto, iMamelodi, iThembisa, neSebokeng. Kwengeta kuloko, kuhlatiywe lokucuketswe tinchubomgomo tekukhulumisana tahulumende, lokufaka ekhatsi *i-GCIS Government Communication Policy* (2018) kanye ne-*Government Communicators' Handbook*, lokunikete umhlahlandlela wetinchubomgomo kanye netikhungo.

Imiphumela yelucwaningo iveta kutsi kukhulumisana kwahulumende kusalokhu kugcile kakhulu endleleni lehla ngetulu, kugcizelela kusakatwa kwelwati ngeluhlangotsi lunye

ngekusebentisa tindlela tendzabuko letifana nemsakato, bo mabonakudze (TV), kanye nemicimbi yesikhungo lesemthethweni. Letindlela atihambisani kahle nentsandvo yelusha lwemalokishi, lese isebentisa tindlela letintsha tekuchummana. Noma tinhlaka tetinchubomgomo tikhuluma ngemigomo yekubamba lichaza, ekusebenteni kukhulumisana kuvame kuphindzaphindza tibanga tebulawuli lobusemtsetfweni, lokunciphisa inkhulumiswano, kuphendvulana, kanye nekubandakanywa lokugcwele.

Ngakulolunye luhlangotsi, lucwaningo luvete tindlela letinsha tekuchumana lesetisentjentiswa lusha lwase malokishini. Leti tifaka ekhatsi bo WhatsApp, TikTok, nabo Facebook konkhe lokutfolakala etincingweni naloku sentjentiswa kakhulu bantfu labasha. Lolucwaningo luphindze lwatfola kutsi noma tikhulu tahulumende titivuma letikhebesi ekuchumaneni nelusha, titsi tisenebulukhuni ekusebentiseni tonkhe letindlela letinsha tekuchumana ngetizatfu letinyenti lokufaka nemigomo yahulumende lolawula kusebenta kwabo.

Kute kufezeke letifiso tekutfutfukisa lusha ngekuchumana lokusezingeni, lolucwaningo luphakamisa *i-Framework for Participatory Communication for Youth Entrepreneurship* (FPCFYE). Loluhlelo lihlanganisa indlela yekusebenta ye-CFPD kanye nemtsetfo wesimilo weBuntfu (Ubuntu), ngenhloso yekugucula kukhulumisana kusuke emsebentini webulawuli lobusemtsetfweni kube ngumkhuba wekubamba lichaza wekudala ngekubambisana. Loluhlelo linetigaba letintsatfu letihlanganisanako: lokokufaka lokwenta kube nekungeneka (tinchubomgomo, emandla etikhungo), tinchubo tekubamba lichaza (kudala ngekukhulumisana, kuhlanganiswa kwemphendvulo, kwakhiwa kwemakhono, kanye netiibopho tekucinisa budlelwane), kanye nemiphumela legucula simo (kutsembana, kuniketwa emandla, kanye nekubusa lokulinganako).

Lolucwaningo luphetsa ngekutsi insayeya akusiko kungabi khona kwenchubomgomo yekuhlanganyela kepha kungabi khona kwelisiko lekuhlanganyela. Kuvala leligebe kudzinga tingucuko tetikhungo, kuphendvula ngekutiphatsa, kanye nemkhuba wekuchumana losakateke kakhulu lobona lusha njengebabhali labahambisanako bentfutfuko. Ngekucabanga kabusha ngekuchumana njengesento sekunakekela, kubuyisana, kanye nekubambisana, lethesisi ifaka sandla ekucedzeni emakoloni ethiyori yekuchumana lehlanganyelako futsi iniketa imodeli lesebentako yekugucula budlelwane bembuso netakhamuti eminotfweni yemalokishi aseNingizimu Afrika.

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CFPCFYE: A Focused Participatory Communication Framework for Youth Entrepreneurship

CFPD: The Communication for Participatory Development Model.

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CHAPTER ONE

BACKGROUND AND FRAMING THE RESEARCH PROBLEM: GOVERNMENT COMMUNICATION AND YOUTH ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Globally, youth are increasingly positioned as central actors in development agendas owing to their demographic and economic significance. Young people aged 15–24 represent approximately 16 percent of the world's population, with projections suggesting an increase of 226 million by 2055 (Sukarieh & Tannock, 2018; United Nations, 2018; OECD, 2015). This demographic shift, often described as the "youth bulge", is widely acknowledged as both a developmental opportunity and a risk. While youth populations represent potential demographic gifts that could increase per capita incomes and improve social welfare through human capital development, they simultaneously face severe economic and social exclusion from labour markets, political systems, and social institutions (Ortiz & Cummins, 2012). Boudarbat & Ajbilou, 2007). The persistence of structural inequalities, ineffective policy implementation, and inadequate access to enabling resources, including communication, continues to constrain their participation in economic life.

Youth entrepreneurship, understood as the process through which young people identify opportunities, mobilise resources, and create or manage business ventures (Subhiksha & Vennila, 2024), has gained prominence as a strategy for addressing unemployment and fostering sustainable development (Khanna, 2015; Ansell, 2016). The concept is used in this study because it positions youth not merely as beneficiaries of economic interventions but as capable economic agents whose participation can drive local development, particularly in township economies (Ogamba, 2018; Malyadri & Sumana, 2012).

Research highlights both the potential and limitations of this approach. Subhiksha and Vennila (2024), through a systematic review, show that youth entrepreneurship generates economic, social, and psychological benefits while contributing to sustainable development through job creation and innovation, emphasising the need for multi-stakeholder support. Development agencies such as the International Labour Organization, UNICEF, and the World Bank similarly frame youth entrepreneurship as a pathway to empowerment, nation-building, and

long-term development (Khanna, 2015; Bearinger et al., 2007; Ansell, 2016). However, Sukarieh and Tannock (2008) critique this framing, arguing that international organisations often deploy youth empowerment rhetoric to advance neoliberal agendas by aligning youth interests with market-driven priorities. Malyadri and Sumana (2012) identify persistent knowledge gaps concerning youth-specific entrepreneurial challenges, particularly in developing countries' informal sectors. Ogamba (2018) adds that effective youth entrepreneurship programmes require participatory engagement, the cultivation of entrepreneurship drivers, and strong support systems—yet many existing initiatives, such as Nigeria's YouWin programme, suffer from design and implementation flaws that undermine sustainable outcomes. Within this body of work, communication emerges as a crucial enabling resource: governments must not only create opportunities but also communicate effectively, fostering informed, engaged, and collaborative participation that strengthens youth ownership and enhances the legitimacy of entrepreneurship initiatives.

Yet, despite these global trends, youth have historically been positioned more as "problems to be managed" than as partners in development. Research has consistently shown that decision-making processes in many contexts marginalise youth voices, reinforcing stereotypes of dependency or apathy (UNICEF, 2017; Dooms & Fayoyin, 2022). Against this background, communication becomes critical not simply as an act of disseminating policy information, but as a dialogic and participatory process that can reshape power relations and foster agency (Waisbord, 2000; Singhal, 2003).

In South Africa, these global challenges intersect with a unique historical and socio-economic context. The country faces severe youth unemployment challenges, particularly affecting historically marginalised communities in township areas, prompting government interventions through various agencies and programs (Ndebele et al., 2022; Odeku & Rudolf, 2019). The National Youth Development Agency (NYDA), Small Enterprise Development Agency (SEDA), and other institutions have implemented entrepreneurship support initiatives, though awareness campaigns require enhancement on media platforms used by youth (Ngcobo & Khumalo, 2022). Local government plays a crucial role as a catalyst for youth entrepreneurship through funding and training opportunities, being closest to communities (Ndebele et al., 2022). However, significant challenges remain and impede progress, including financial constraints, lack of entrepreneurship education in public schools, insufficient support systems,

and local government issues such as corruption and skilled personnel shortages (Ngcobo & Khumalo, 2022; Ndebele et al., 2022).

Despite these obstacles, entrepreneurship is widely promoted as a viable solution to youth unemployment, partly because policy discourse tends to prioritise self-employment as a flexible, low-cost, and market-driven alternative to large-scale job creation (Sukarieh & Tannock, 2008; White, 2015). Governments and international development agencies increasingly frame entrepreneurship as a faster and more scalable route for youth to enter the economy, particularly in contexts where the state and private sector are unable to absorb large numbers of job seekers through formal employment programmes such as public-sector placements, military conscription, apprenticeships, or expanded industrial employment (ILO, 2020; World Bank, 2014). This almost exclusive focus on entrepreneurial self-employment reflects broader global trends that emphasise individual responsibility and economic self-reliance over structural job creation, aligning with neoliberal development models that shift the burden of economic participation onto young people themselves (Kelly, 2012; Honwana, 2014). Within this framing, entrepreneurship becomes not only an economic strategy but also a political solution to youth unemployment. Consequently, calls persist for strategic government support for black entrepreneurial activities and for accelerating effective youth policies while discarding ineffective ones (Odeku & Rudolf, 2019; Ndlovu et al., 2024). Communication strategies accompanying these initiatives range from national awareness campaigns and Youth Month activities to roadshows, social media outreach, and community-based events (Ngcobo & Khumalo, 2022; Mahase, 2022; Ziyane et al., 2023).

Research on government communication with South African township youth reveals significant structural and methodological barriers to effective engagement. Studies demonstrate that municipal communication processes are characterized by top-down, modernization-based approaches where community members, including youth, function as passive participants rather than active decision-makers (Molale, 2022). This pattern of inadequate communication between government and communities has contributed to widespread protests and feelings of alienation, particularly in townships and rural areas (Rasila & Mudau, 2012). Youth participation challenges are further complicated by misalignments between program offerings and youth aspirations. Research shows that young people prioritize career success through urban migration, paid employment opportunities, and meaningful community involvement, yet are often presented with volunteer-based, locally focused programs that conflict with these

goals (Gibbs et al., 2010). Additionally, current youth generations appear disconnected from traditional community governance structures such as ward committees, despite the potential benefits of such participation in addressing youth-specific issues (Tshishonga, 2019).

Further evidence shows that many township youth thus remain unaware of available programmes, perceive them as irrelevant, or find them inaccessible (Gwija, Eresia-Eke & Iwu, 2014; Leshilo & Lethoko, 2017). There is no doubt, therefore, that ineffective communication characterised by top-down messaging, poor channel selection, and limited feedback mechanisms is a critical barrier to youth participation (Malele et al., 2019; Stoffel, 2023). This raises an urgent question: is the way the government communicates with township youth fundamentally misaligned with their needs, contexts, and communication practices?

This study is grounded in the premise that communication is not a neutral conduit but a developmental resource capable of shaping participation, legitimacy, and social change. Drawing on the participatory communication for development paradigm rooted in Paulo Freire's work on dialogical communication and conscientization that emphasises communication as a tool for empowerment rather than mere information transmission (Servaes & Resume, 1996; Figueroa et al., 2002; Freire, 1970; Servaes, 2007; Gumucio-Dagron, 2001), the research interrogates how government communication practices influence youth economic development in Gauteng's townships. Specifically, it examines how township youth encounter, interpret, and respond to government messaging about entrepreneurship, to identify communicative constraints and opportunities for more inclusive and empowering strategies.

The study is anchored in the participatory communication theoretical tradition, which views communication as a dialogic and empowering process that enables collective meaning-making and social transformation, rather than a top-down transfer of information (Freire, 1970; Servaes, 2008; Melkote & Steeves, 2015). Within this broader paradigm, the study draws on the CFPD model (Kincaid & Figueroa, 2009) as its guiding analytical framework. While not a theory in itself, the CFPD model provides a systematic structure for applying participatory communication principles by emphasising dialogue, feedback, and collective ownership in development processes. It illustrates how communities identify problems, plan and implement actions, and evaluate outcomes through iterative, communicative engagement that fosters cultural identity, trust, and local ownership (Figueroa et al., 2002).

Servaes (2022) offers comprehensive theoretical underpinnings for development communication approaches, demonstrating how communication can be mobilised to address poverty, inequality, and social change through participatory and culturally grounded processes. In the South African context, participatory communication has been recognised as vital for sustainable development and local governance, where inclusive dialogue has been shown to strengthen transparency and community engagement (Msibi & Penzhorn, 2010). The Kungwini Local Municipality in Gauteng, South Africa study exemplifies the practical application of participatory principles at the local government level, highlighting both the potential of participatory methods to enhance development outcomes and the challenges of institutionalising them in bureaucratic systems (Msibi & Penzhorn, 2010).

However, as Servaes and Reardon (1996) caution, practitioners must avoid uncritical and universal application of participatory methodologies across all contexts, since their success depends on sensitivity to power relations, socio-cultural dynamics, and institutional capacity. Taken together, these perspectives underscore the importance of situating communication within social structures, cultural meaning systems, and processes of collective action. Accordingly, the CFPD model, grounded in the participatory communication tradition, enables this study to move beyond an instrumentalist view of government communication as "message delivery" toward a transformative understanding of communication as a process of social praxis through which marginalised youth can exercise agency in shaping their development outcomes.

Research on youth participation and governance reveals diverse approaches to empowerment through communication strategies across different contexts. In Northern Ghana, youth-led communication initiatives have demonstrated potential for enhancing governance cultures, with citizen media development enabling creative youth engagement and community mobilization (Grauenkaer & Tufte, 2018). Digital inclusion emerges as a critical factor, as evidenced in Saint-Louis, Senegal, where substantial disparities in digital access affect youth participation in urban governance, with mobile connectivity serving as the primary access point despite limited municipal support (Sow et al., 2025). However, power dynamics significantly constrain youth empowerment, as shown in Indonesia's renewable energy projects, where development communication prioritized infrastructure over active participation, with trust and power distance issues reducing youth to passive roles (Ratriyana et al., 2021). Similarly, South Africa's Children's Parliament, while facilitating upward and horizontal communication,

remains largely tokenistic and event-based rather than enabling meaningful participation (Fayoyin, 2017). Meaningful participation, in this context, refers to engagement that goes beyond ceremonial involvement and instead provides young people with real opportunities to influence decisions, participate in dialogue with government about job-creation initiatives, access platforms for skills transfer and training, learn how to navigate employment pathways, and develop entrepreneurial skills that support self-employment. The absence of such substantive engagement means that young people are often consulted symbolically rather than empowered to shape the programmes and opportunities intended for their benefit.

Despite growing scholarly interest in youth participation and governance, significant gaps remain in research on government communication as a mechanism for youth empowerment. Existing studies have tended to prioritise the design of youth-focused policies and institutions, with limited attention to how communication strategies are conceived, implemented, and received by youth across different socio-economic and cultural contexts (Hadji & Osunkunle, 2020; Dooms & Fayoyin, 2022). Comparative work remains scarce, while emerging dynamics such as the role of social media and digital platforms in township communication ecologies are often overlooked.

This study seeks to address these gaps through an empirically grounded and theoretically informed inquiry into government communication for youth entrepreneurship in Gauteng's township settings. It contributes in three key ways: first, by investigating how township youth experience and interpret government communication around entrepreneurship; second, by evaluating the alignment of existing communication strategies with participatory communication principles; and third, by proposing a youth-focused participatory communication framework for inclusive economic development tailored to South African township realities.

1.2 RATIONALE AND SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The urgency of youth economic inclusion in South Africa cannot be overstated. Youth unemployment, which is estimated at nearly two-thirds of the labour force under 35, poses not only an economic challenge but also a social and political risk to the country's developmental trajectory (Stoffel, 2023; Diraditsile, 2020). Despite successive policy frameworks, institutional structures, and financial interventions aimed at supporting youth entrepreneurship, participation and uptake in township contexts remain disproportionately low. This paradox

suggests that structural interventions, while necessary, are insufficient without inclusive, participatory, and contextually resonant communication processes.

The rationale for this study rests on the recognition that communication is not a peripheral or technical activity but a central mechanism through which public policy is translated into social meaning and citizen action (Melkote & Steeves, 2015; Servaes, 2008). Yet much of the research on youth entrepreneurship in South Africa has focused more on financial, institutional, or policy barriers (Fatoki & Garwe, 2010; Olawale & Garwe, 2010), while comparatively little attention has been directed toward the communicative dimensions of state–youth engagement. Moreover, focusing solely on the "state–youth" relationship risks overlooking the broader ecosystem of actors who influence youth entrepreneurship. Institutions such as private businesses, NGOs, community-based organisations, and development partners also play significant roles by offering training, mentorship, apprenticeships, job-placement pathways, and entrepreneurial support. However, the communicative interactions between these stakeholders and youth are similarly underexplored, despite their potential to either reinforce or disrupt patterns of exclusion. Where communication is considered, it is often reduced to awareness campaigns or information dissemination, overlooking the dialogic, relational, and empowering functions emphasised in participatory communication theory (Freire, 1970; Gumucio-Dagron, 2001).

Empirical studies demonstrate that youth in township communities often remain unaware of government programmes, perceive them as inaccessible, or distrust their relevance (Gwija, Eresia-Eke & Iwu, 2014; Kew, 2016). For instance, research in Khayelitsha township in the Western Cape Province, South Africa, revealed that more than 80% of youth were unaware of entrepreneurship support programmes, while a majority judged existing structures ineffective (Gwija et al., 2014). Although urban or metropolitan areas are generally assumed to offer better access to information, infrastructure, and economic networks, studies indicate that even youth in major cities often encounter significant gaps in awareness and access, suggesting that geographic proximity does not automatically translate into effective inclusion (Herrington & Kew, 2018; ILO, 2020). Rural youth, however, tend to face even greater disadvantages due to weaker communication infrastructures, limited institutional presence, and fewer support intermediaries, which exacerbate information asymmetries and restrict their engagement in entrepreneurship opportunities (Chigunta, 2017; Fatoki, 2014). This evidence underscores that the main barrier is not merely the availability of opportunities but the failure of communicative

strategies to bridge the gap between policy intent and youth realities across diverse contexts. As Fraser and Restrepo-Estrada (1998) argue, communication that privileges transmission over dialogue risks alienating the very communities it seeks to.

At the same time, township economies present fertile ground for youth innovation and enterprise. Dense populations create demand for diverse goods and services; rich cultural heritage sustains vibrant creative industries; and digital adoption opens possibilities for technology-driven entrepreneurship (Fatoki & Garwe, 2010; Singh & Belwal, 2008; Williams & Cowling, 2015).

The puzzle, therefore, is not whether opportunities exist, but why young people remain disconnected from them. A closer analysis suggests that the explanation lies in communicative failures: inadequate tailoring of messages to local languages and cultural idioms, limited use of platforms that align with youth media habits, weak or absent feedback loops, and insufficient youth participation in the design of communication processes (Hadji & Osunkunle, 2020; Dooms & Fayoyin, 2022).

The significance of this study lies in its contribution to scholarship, policy, and empirical understanding of development communication in South Africa. At a scholarly level, it addresses a longstanding theoretical gap by explicitly situating government communication within the participatory communication tradition (Servaes, 2008; Melkote & Steeves, 2015). Rather than instructing government on how to communicate, the study uses participatory communication theory as an analytical lens to evaluate existing practices and to illuminate how more dialogic, inclusive, and youth-responsive communication processes can enhance the relevance, uptake, and legitimacy of youth entrepreneurship initiatives. In doing so, the study not only advances theoretical debates but also offers insights into how communication can more effectively support youth engagement and developmental outcomes.

Empirically, the study provides contextually grounded insights through its focus on four township sites in Gauteng: Soweto, Mamelodi, Thembisa, and Sebokeng. Capturing the communicative experiences of township youth across diverse socio-economic, historical, and cultural settings is crucial in bringing into focus perspectives that have been largely marginalised in top-down policy discourse. These empirical findings have the potential to enrich understanding of how communication practices are interpreted and enacted within

township realities, thereby extending the scope of development communication scholarship in the Global South.

At the practical level, the study has potential to inform and strengthen public policy and professional practice by identifying the communicative shortcomings that constrain youth participation in entrepreneurship initiatives. It proposes a youth-centred participatory communication framework designed to enhance the responsiveness, inclusivity, and legitimacy of government communication strategies. In doing so, the study bridges the gap between theoretical critique and applied intervention, contributing to the development of more dialogic, equitable, and contextually grounded approaches to youth economic empowerment in South Africa.

The rationale for this research is therefore exploratory and explanatory in nature. It begins from the paradox of persistent youth unemployment and under-participation despite abundant policy interventions, and traces this back to the communicative processes that mediate policy and practice. By interrogating these processes and reimagining them through participatory communication principles, the study generates both theoretical insight and practical strategies for transforming government communication into a platform for youth empowerment. It is against this background that the research problem is formulated.

1.3 RESEARCH PROBLEM

Youth unemployment in South Africa remains alarmingly high despite successive government interventions intended to promote youth entrepreneurship, particularly within township contexts in Gauteng Province. The structural constraints that limit youth economic participation, including unequal education quality, persistent job scarcity, and spatial inequality, are well documented. However, a critical and often neglected dimension concerns the communication processes through which the government seeks to inform, engage, and mobilise young people. The issue extends beyond the existence of policies to the ways in which they are communicated, the channels through which they circulate, and the extent to which these processes enable participation, foster legitimacy, and support youth empowerment.

Existing scholarship has largely focused on policy design and programmatic shortcomings in youth development initiatives, while giving limited attention to government communication as both an enabler and a barrier to youth economic empowerment. Empirical studies show that

young people in township communities are often unaware of entrepreneurship support initiatives or perceive them as irrelevant and inaccessible (Gwija, Eresia-Eke & Iwu, 2014; Kew, 2016). Research in Khayelitsha revealed that 81 percent of youth were unaware of available entrepreneurship programmes, while 61 percent viewed government support structures as ineffective (Gwija et al., 2014). Such evidence indicates systemic failures in communication rather than deficiencies in policy content.

The persistence of these shortcomings can be attributed to the dominance of modernisation-inspired, top-down communication models that reduce government communication to one-way dissemination of information. As Servaes (2008) argues, such models seldom resonate with the linguistic diversity, media ecologies, and lived realities of marginalised youth. Moreover, they restrict opportunities for dialogue, feedback, and co-creation, thereby undermining trust, legitimacy, and sustained engagement (Fraser & Restrepo-Estrada, 1998). Communication strategies consequently risk functioning as instruments of dissemination rather than platforms of empowerment, limiting youth agency in development processes.

Participatory communication traditions offer a compelling alternative. Scholars such as Freire (1970), Gumucio-Dagron (2001), and Melkote and Steeves (2015) conceptualise communication as a dialogic and relational process in which knowledge is co-produced and marginalised groups are recognised as active participants rather than passive recipients. Within this tradition, effective communication transcends the notion of awareness-raising and instead promotes legitimacy, participation, and collective mobilisation for structural transformation (Malan, 1998; FAO, 2014). Despite this strong theoretical foundation, there remains little empirical inquiry into how government communication on youth entrepreneurship in South Africa embodies or departs from these participatory principles.

This gap represents both an intellectual and a practical challenge. Intellectually, the communicative dimensions of youth entrepreneurship promotion remain under-theorised in South African scholarship, with limited integration of government communication into broader debates on participatory development. Practically, the absence of a youth-centred participatory framework constrains the effectiveness of communication strategies aimed at addressing unemployment and fostering sustainable economic empowerment in township communities.

The study, therefore, interrogates government communication strategies for youth entrepreneurship in four municipalities of Gauteng Province with the dual purpose of critically

evaluating their current logics and practices and of developing a participatory communication framework that reimagines government communication as a platform of empowerment. Through this focus, the research is situated at the intersection of governance, communication, and youth development, contributing to both theoretical debates and policy reform.

The study proceeds by unpacking the research problem through five interrelated questions that operationalise the central inquiry and provide the analytical scaffolding for addressing its intellectual and practical dimensions.

1.4 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The central research question guiding this study is as follows:

How does the government communicate with the youth on economic development and entrepreneurship in townships?

This research question emerges from the need to critically examine the nature and effectiveness of government communication with youth in South Africa's township economies, with a view to transforming existing strategies from instruments of information dissemination into participatory platforms that recognise and promote youth agency in economic development. The question, therefore, bridges two key imperatives: first, to understand how government currently communicates with young people about economic development and entrepreneurship in township contexts; and second, to explore how such communication can be reimagined as a participatory, dialogic, and empowering process that enables meaningful youth inclusion in development.

This question reflects the understanding that government communication is not a neutral process of information transfer, but a complex and contested social practice shaped by power, participation, and legitimacy. It recognises that communication strategies can either function as enabling mechanisms that advance youth economic empowerment or as barriers that reinforce exclusion and dependence. The question, therefore, seeks to explore how communication can be reconceptualised and restructured to support youth agency, dialogue, and ownership within the context of township entrepreneurship.

To interrogate this complexity, the study disaggregates the central inquiry into five interrelated sub-questions, each addressing a critical dimension of practice, perception, theory, or

transformation. Together, these sub-questions establish the analytical framework for evaluating current approaches, identifying systemic challenges, situating them within participatory communication theory, and developing a framework that reimagines government communication as a platform for empowerment and inclusion among township youth..

1.4.1 Sub-questions

To address the central question meaningfully, it is pertinent to first establish a baseline of current state communication practice in South Africa, since these policies structure what is sayable, by whom, and through which channels. The Government Communication and Information System (GCIS) Handbook and the National Communication Strategy Framework (2025–2030) codify objectives, coordination mechanisms, and media engagement templates. They provide not only a necessary documentary corpus against which "participation" claims can be assessed in practice, they also define the official communicative repertoire and its performance criteria (GCIS, n/d).

Secondly, a rigorous analysis is required to surface the challenges and barriers that reproduce one-way modes of dissemination in government communication. Theoretical critiques within development communication literature demonstrate that top-down, information-transfer models systematically undermine agency, dialogue, and critical learning (Melkote & Steeves, 2015; Servaes, 2008). Freire's (1970) critique of the "banking" model of education is particularly instructive in revealing how communication premised on depositing information into passive recipients denies participants the capacity for reflection and transformative action. Similarly, Servaes's (1999) call for multiplicity and Melkote and Steeves's (2001, 2015) articulation of participatory paradigms emphasise communication as a process of negotiation and shared meaning-making rather than transmission. These perspectives illuminate the mechanisms through which dissemination models erode trust, silence feedback, and exclude co-production of meaning. Positioning the study within this intellectual tradition clarifies how and why government communication fails as development praxis when it privileges transmission over participation and control over collaboration.

In addition, assessing alignment with participatory communication theory requires clearly defined operational anchors such as dialogic design, co-decision-making, iterative feedback, and shared monitoring. These dimensions have long been articulated in participatory communication for development frameworks advanced by institutions such as the Food and

Agriculture Organization (FAO) and by scholars including Gumucio-Dagron (2001) and Servaes (2008). These frameworks move participation from rhetoric to method, outlining concrete procedures such as participatory rural appraisal, community facilitation, collective problem-solving, and joint evaluation. Such approaches conceptualise communication as an iterative process of engagement and learning rather than a unidirectional transfer of information. They also provide measurable indicators that enable assessment of the extent to which communication processes embody participation, inclusion, and local ownership. Situating this study within these operational traditions allows for empirical testing of how government communication practices in South Africa align with, or depart from, participatory ideals in practice.

Crucially, youth perceptions and experiences are not supplementary but central indicators of communicative effectiveness. When intended beneficiaries experience government communication as irrelevant, inaccessible, or untrustworthy, the strategy fails on its own terms. Empirical research conducted in South African township settings, such as Khayelitsha, reveals that government entrepreneurship initiatives are often perceived as fragmented, opaque, and poorly aligned with the realities of township youth (Gwija, Eresia-Eke & Iwu, 2014; Kew, 2016). Other studies similarly report weak perceived contribution of government support structures to youth entrepreneurship, with persistent awareness and accessibility gaps that underscore the need for empirical investigation through a communication lens (Akinwale, 2019).

The broader field continues to lack a context-specific, youth-centred participatory framework for government communication on entrepreneurship in township settings. Existing models seldom translate dialogic principles into institutional design, channel strategy, or evaluative practice (Servaes, 2008; Gumucio-Dagron, 2001). There is therefore a pressing need to synthesise policy analysis, theoretical critique, and youth perspectives to develop a framework that not only advances participatory communication theory but specifies the necessary transformations in message design, channel ecology, feedback architecture, and institutional accountability (Melkote & Steeves, 2015; Waisbord, 2000).

Accordingly, this study pursues five interrelated lines of inquiry that together offer a systematic pathway to unpack the central research question. The specific questions guiding this study are therefore stated as follows:

(a) What communication approaches are currently used by the government to promote youth entrepreneurship in township settings, and how accessible and relevant are these to young people?

(b)What challenges, limitations, and systemic impediments constrain the effectiveness of these government communication strategies?

(c) To what extent do current communication practices align with participatory communication theory, and where are the gaps in relation to principles of dialogue, inclusivity, and agency?

(d) How do township youth perceive and experience government communication on entrepreneurship, particularly with respect to trust, credibility, and empowerment?

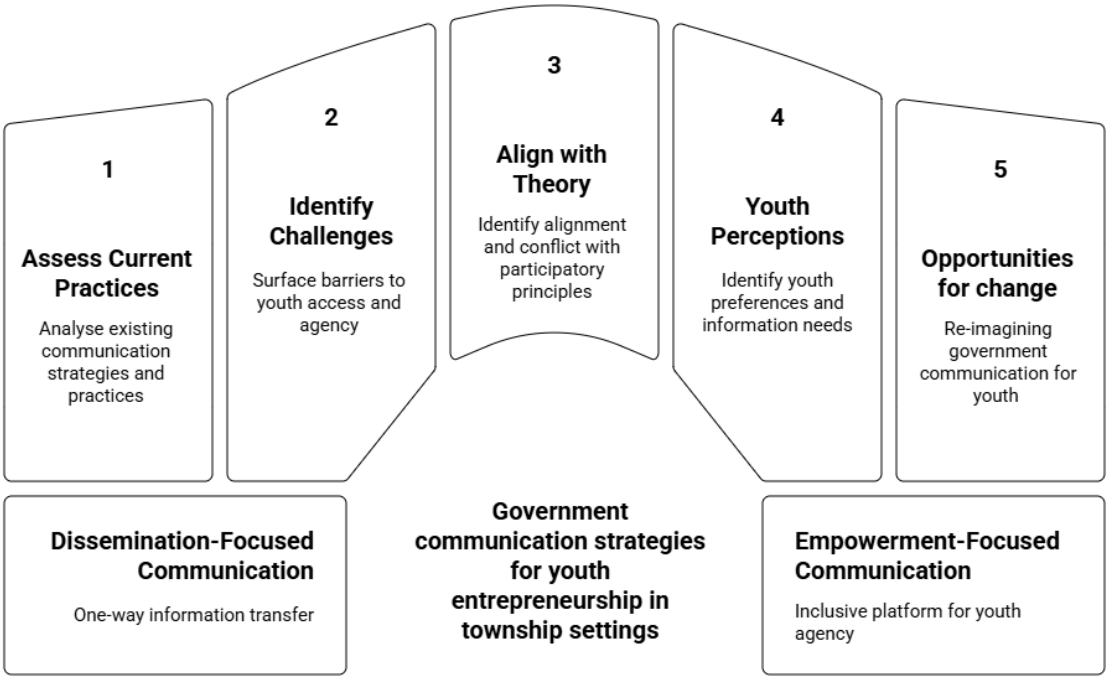
(e) What participatory communication framework can be proposed to transform government communication strategies into inclusive platforms that advance youth agency, empowerment, and sustainable economic development?

Together, these inquiries enable a retroductive movement from observation of communicative deficits to the normative reconstruction of government communication as a platform of empowerment rather than dissemination. The questions are deliberately sequenced to move from description to diagnosis, from critique to construction. The first two questions establish the empirical foundation by identifying how government communication strategies for youth entrepreneurship are currently conceived and operationalised, and by interrogating the barriers that inhibit their efficacy. The third question shifts the focus towards theoretical alignment, assessing the extent to which existing practices embody the dialogic, inclusive, and empowering principles articulated in participatory communication scholarship (Freire, 1970; Servaes, 2008; Melkote & Steeves, 2015). The fourth question brings the analysis to the experiential realm, centring youth perceptions and lived experiences as crucial indicators of communicative legitimacy and effectiveness. Finally, the fifth question advances the study's original contribution by synthesising the preceding insights into a theoretically grounded and contextually relevant participatory communication framework.

Figure 1.1 presents a framework for inquiry which was used to translate the central research question into a central task at the core and connects it sequentially to five tasks, each deriving from a respective research question outlined above. Unlike a concentric model that implies

layers, this representation emphasises progression and interdependence, showing how each sub-question extends and deepens the central inquiry. The structure highlights how operational, participatory, and theoretical dimensions combine to provide a comprehensive evaluation of communication strategies for youth entrepreneurship in Gauteng townships.

Figure 1.1 An empirical framework for transforming youth focused communication strategies from instruments of dissemination into platforms of empowerment



The questions are organised around five thematic areas. The first investigates current government communication practices to establish how youth entrepreneurship is presently communicated in township settings. This is followed by an interrogation of the challenges and barriers that limit these strategies, highlighting structural and contextual impediments. The third question examines the alignment with participatory communication theory, asking whether existing approaches embody principles of dialogue, inclusion, and multiplicity. Fourth, the questions explore youth perceptions and experiences, situating township youth as active interpreters of communication rather than passive recipients. Finally, the study synthesises these insights to propose a participatory communication framework, advancing

both theoretical debates in development communication and practical strategies for enhancing youth economic empowerment.

1.5 PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study is to interrogate and reimagine government communication strategies for youth entrepreneurship in township settings, with the objective of developing a participatory communication framework that conceptualises communication not as an instrument of dissemination but as a platform of empowerment that recognises and amplifies youth agency in development. Grounded in participatory development communication theory, the study critically examines the extent to which existing government communication practices enable or constrain youth engagement, access, and participation in entrepreneurial initiatives.

Despite the proliferation of agencies and support programmes such as those led by the National Youth Development Agency (NYDA), the Small Enterprise Development Agency (SEDA), and various provincial economic development departments, youth participation in entrepreneurship remains disproportionately low in township areas where unemployment, precarity, and poverty are most acute. This paradox suggests that structural interventions alone are insufficient unless they are accompanied by communication processes that are inclusive, contextually grounded, and dialogic in both design and implementation (Servaes, 2008; Melkote and Steeves, 2015).

The study focuses on five township sites in Gauteng Province, namely Soweto, Mamelodi, Thembisa, and Sebokeng, to examine how young people encounter, interpret, and respond to government communication on entrepreneurship. These localities were selected for their socio-economic diversity, historical significance, and demographic concentration of youth, offering a strong empirical basis for understanding how spatial, cultural, and communicative contexts shape the reception and influence of government strategies.

The study seeks to contribute to academic scholarship and public policy in several ways. It aims to:

(a) Identify and analyse the communicative gaps, limitations, and barriers within current government strategies for promoting youth entrepreneurship;

(b) Evaluate the extent to which these strategies align with or diverge from participatory communication principles such as dialogue, inclusivity, and co-creation; and

(c) Develop a contextually responsive participatory communication framework that transforms government communication into an inclusive and empowering platform advancing youth economic participation and sustainable development in township communities.

1.6 ASSUMPTIONS AND PROPOSITIONS OF THE STUDY

This study is grounded in a set of foundational assumptions and theoretically informed propositions that guide its inquiry, design, and interpretation. The assumptions reflect fundamental convictions about the central importance of communication in development processes, the role of government engagement in facilitating youth participation, and the complex social and economic realities that shape township contexts in South Africa. These assumptions provide the conceptual foundation on which the study is built and justify the choice of research design, participants, and focus areas. In contrast, the propositions express the study's core arguments, which are drawn from critical traditions in development communication and are examined through empirical analysis rather than treated as self-evident truths. Together, the assumptions and propositions frame the study's epistemological orientation and express its contribution to debates in development communication, youth studies, and public policy.

1.6.1 Assumptions of the Study

This study rests on the foundational assumption that communication is not a peripheral support activity within development policy but a constitutive practice through which policy gains meaning, legitimacy, and social effect. In the field of development communication, this view is grounded in the participatory paradigm, which regards communication as a dialogic and transformative process rather than a technical transmission of information (Freire, 1970; Servaes, 2008; Melkote and Steeves, 2015). Within the context of youth entrepreneurship promotion, communication is thus assumed to function not only as a means of sharing information but also as a potential platform for enabling awareness, stimulating participation, and fostering empowerment (Fraser and Restrepo Estrada, 1998; Gumucio Dagron, 2001).

It is assumed that the South African government at national, provincial, and local levels has developed and implemented a variety of communication initiatives aimed at township youth. These include public campaigns, community roadshows, digital media outreach, and partnerships with educational and community organisations (GCIS, n.d.; Msibi and Penzhorn, 2010). It is also assumed that township youth encounter these efforts through both formal and informal communication channels, including social media, community radio, peer networks, and institutional engagements, consistent with evidence that youth media practices are increasingly multimodal and socially mediated (Bosch, 2013; Wasserman, 2020).

A central assumption informing this study is that the persistent gap between government communication efforts and low levels of youth participation in entrepreneurship cannot be attributed simply to apathy or incapacity among young people. Instead, it reflects the inadequacy of communication strategies that remain largely unidirectional and message-centred, with limited provision for dialogue or feedback (Servaes, 1999; Melkote and Steeves, 2015). This assumption aligns with critical scholarship that argues that the success of communication in development contexts depends on its cultural relevance, linguistic accessibility, and relational trust between message sender and recipient (Gumucio Dagron, 2001).

Township communities in South Africa continue to be shaped by spatial exclusion, economic marginalisation, and unequal access to information infrastructures (Mbembe, 2017; Alexander, 2010). It is therefore assumed that these contextual conditions, poverty, digital divides, and locally embedded social practices, strongly influence how communication is produced, interpreted, and acted upon. Effective communication for development must be designed with sensitivity to these structural and cultural conditions if it is to achieve inclusion and impact (Waisbord, 2000).

The study further assumes that there is institutional willingness within government to improve communication practices in line with national policy commitments to inclusive development and youth empowerment (National Planning Commission, 2012; GCIS, n.d.). It is finally assumed that qualitative research methods such as interviews, focus group discussions, and document analysis are appropriate for capturing nuanced understandings of communicative practices, since these approaches privilege contextual interpretation and lived experience (Denzin and Lincoln, 2018).

1.6.2 Thesis propositions

The following propositions constitute the core arguments this study seeks to interrogate, substantiate, and advance. They are derived from critical development communication scholarship and empirical observations of youth entrepreneurship in township settings. Together, they articulate the study's theoretical stance and anticipated contribution.

The first proposition concerns the persistent misalignment between government communication strategies and participatory communication principles. Current strategies on youth entrepreneurship are predominantly rooted in dissemination-oriented, modernisation models rather than participatory paradigms. As such, they fail to embody principles of dialogue, empowerment, and co-ownership that are central to participatory communication (Freire, 1970; Servaes, 2008; Gumucio-Dagron, 2001). Empirical studies in South Africa reinforce this critique: for example, Mutsvairo & Karam (2018) observed that government-led communication initiatives often prioritise message delivery over engagement, thereby limiting their developmental impact. Similarly, Chasi (2015) argues that public communication frameworks tend to operate as managerial tools rather than dialogic platforms, which undermines legitimacy and limits youth voice.

The study also argues that the persistent gap in youth entrepreneurship participation is not reducible to a shortage of opportunities or resources; it is significantly shaped by ineffective communication practices. Limited awareness, low trust, and fragmented messaging represent structural communication failures that constrain access and participation more than policy design alone (Fraser & Restrepo-Estrada, 1998; Melkote & Steeves, 2015). Gwija, Eresia-Eke, & Iwu (2014) found that more than 80% of township youth in Khayelitsha were unaware of available entrepreneurship programmes, despite substantial investment in support initiatives. Kew (2016) similarly concluded that the problem lies less in the absence of resources and more in the breakdown of communicative processes that connect youth to these opportunities.

The third proposition is that the effectiveness of government communication strategies is fundamentally mediated by their responsiveness to the socio-cultural and technological realities of township youth. Communication that ignores local languages, digital divides, or everyday media practices risks alienation or irrelevance. Empirical work by Bosch (2017) demonstrates that South African youth increasingly engage with digital and social media platforms as spaces of agency. Yet, government communication remains heavily tied to

bureaucratic channels with limited interactivity. Likewise, Wasserman & Garman (2012) emphasise that development communication must be locally grounded and culturally attuned if it is to be meaningful. These insights suggest that context-sensitive approaches, those that integrate youth media habits, linguistic diversity, and cultural framing, are crucial for strengthening resonance and uptake.

Equally significant is the absence or weak institutionalisation of feedback loops and participatory design processes within government communication frameworks. In South Africa, Chiumbu (2017) has shown that while policy rhetoric often emphasises participation, institutional practice largely reproduces hierarchical and one-way communication logics. This lack of feedback infrastructure limits adaptive learning, collaborative meaning-making, and the development of youth-led communicative strategies. As a result, government messages risk being received passively or with scepticism, rather than serving as catalysts for empowerment and innovation.

Lastly, the study proposes that a youth-centred participatory communication framework is required to reimagine government communication in township entrepreneurship. Such a framework, attentive to accessibility, coherence, responsiveness, and collaboration, can transform communication from an instrument of dissemination into a platform of empowerment. This would reposition youth not as passive recipients of government messages, but as active agents capable of shaping and advancing their own economic futures (Melkote & Steeves, 2015; Servaes, 2008; Gumucio-Dagron, 2001). By integrating empirical evidence from township contexts with participatory communication theory, the framework seeks to make both a scholarly contribution and a practical intervention in the design of inclusive communication strategies for youth development.

1.7 SCOPE AND METHODOLOGICAL ORIENTATION OF THE STUDY

Given the wide-ranging nature of youth development and economic participation in South Africa, this study deliberately focuses on the intersection between government communication strategies and youth entrepreneurship within township environments in Gauteng Province. This scope is defined to ensure conceptual clarity, analytical depth, and methodological rigour. Although Chapter 4 provides a detailed account of the research design and procedures, it is important here to outline the boundaries and logic that shaped the study's focus and approach.

1.8 DELIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The research is geographically located in four township municipalities in Gauteng, namely Soweto, Mamelodi, Thembisa, and Sebokeng. These sites were selected because of their demographic density, economic marginality, and centrality in South Africa's youth development agenda. Each township represents distinctive spatial, cultural, and institutional conditions, making them appropriate for a multiple case analysis of communication practices and entrepreneurial engagement.

The study concentrates on three principal participant groups: youth entrepreneurs, government communication officials, and local economic development practitioners. This participant structure enables focused examination of the communicative relationships between the state and its intended youth beneficiaries. In order to preserve analytical focus, the study is limited to communication strategies explicitly related to youth entrepreneurship promotion. While broader factors such as education, employment, and social development intersect with this theme, they fall outside the immediate scope of investigation. The research therefore concentrates on communication as the mediating mechanism through which policy is translated into awareness, participation, and action.

Temporally, the research is limited to the period during which data was collected, in 2025. While acknowledging that communication strategies and policy frameworks may evolve, the study does not account for post-research developments. The findings, therefore, offer a time-bound snapshot of government communication practices and youth engagement patterns as they existed during the research period.

1.9. METHODOLOGICAL ORIENTATION

This study followed a qualitative, exploratory approach within the interpretive research paradigm. This orientation is suitable for understanding the complex and context-dependent experiences of township youth and the institutional logics that shape government communication. The qualitative approach is further justified through its alignment with participatory development communication theory, which emphasises dialogue, subjective experience, and the co-construction of meaning (Freire, 1970; Servaes, 2008; Melkote and Steeves, 2015).

Data were generated through multiple qualitative methods, including semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions, document analysis, and participant observation. These methods provide insight into the lived realities of both youth participants and government communicators and enable triangulation for enhanced validity and depth (Denzin and Lincoln, 2018). Exploratory research design is particularly appropriate in contexts where existing knowledge is limited, allowing for the identification of patterns, generation of insights, and understanding of emergent meanings (Zikmund, 2000; Burns and Grove, 2001).

The qualitative methodology is consistent with the study's goal of identifying the communicative barriers and enablers of youth entrepreneurship promotion. It facilitates rich, contextual analysis and captures social and cultural nuances that quantitative methods may overlook (Leedy and Ormrod, 2005; Polit and Beck, 2010). According to Neuman (2011), interpretive approaches are essential for understanding meaning within specific social and historical contexts, a view that resonates with the communicative focus of this study.

A multiple case study design was employed to investigate government communication strategies across the four township sites. This design allows comparative analysis and the identification of context-specific practices that influence the reception and impact of government communication (Baxter and Jack, 2008; Yin, 2018). The diversity of the townships provides a valuable platform for cross-case synthesis and the development of contextually grounded theoretical insights (Eisenhardt and Graebner, 2007).

This approach offers several advantages. It produces rich descriptions that reflect participants' experiences (Collis and Hussey, 2003), supports naturalistic inquiry situated in real-world contexts (Babbie and Mouton, 2001), and allows flexibility to adapt data collection as new themes emerge (Daymon and Holloway, 2011). The multiple case design also strengthens the credibility of findings through methodological triangulation and enhances the interpretive generalisability of the results (Stake, 2006; Yin, 2018).

The methodological orientation adopted in this study thus establishes the epistemological foundation for interpreting data, deriving findings, and constructing theoretical contributions in subsequent chapters.

1.10 CONCEPTUAL FOUNDATIONS AND CORE TERMINOLOGIES

A clear understanding of key concepts is essential for grounding this study within its theoretical, empirical, and contextual parameters. Given the interdisciplinary character of this research, which lies at the intersection of development communication, youth entrepreneurship, and public policy, it is necessary to define and delimit the central terms that frame the analysis. Concepts such as government communication, youth, entrepreneurship, and township are not only fundamental to the study's analytical focus but also carry particular historical, political, and ideological meanings in the South African setting.

Clarifying these concepts provides conceptual coherence and situates the study within broader scholarly and policy discourses. The definitions adopted here draw from established literature in communication for development, participatory governance, and socio-economic transformation, while also reflecting the specific institutional and social realities of South Africa's post-apartheid development context (Servaes, 2008; Melkote and Steeves, 2015; National Planning Commission, 2012). This conceptual groundwork supports the analytical frameworks employed in subsequent chapters and ensures that the study's theoretical and empirical claims are grounded in both academic rigour and contextual relevance.

Development Communication

Development communication is generally understood as a deliberate, normative, and strategic form of communication used to support specific development goals and social change processes. Scholars such as Musakophas and Poligongit (2017) and Odoom (2020) describe it as a planned communication practice that employs interpersonal and mediated techniques to facilitate understanding among stakeholders and to advance social, economic, and political development. According to Anaeto and Solo-Anaeto (2010), the defining attributes of development communication include promoting democratic participation and empowering communities to take ownership of their development initiatives.

This approach emphasises dialogue, trust-building, and shared knowledge as central mechanisms for sustaining change. Odoom (2020) notes that the core purpose of development communication is to mobilise project beneficiaries to become active participants in their own development through the systematic use of interpersonal communication, information and communication technologies (ICTs), and mass media. Historically, development

communication was influenced by Western modernisation paradigms that viewed communication as the transfer of ideas to "underdeveloped" societies (Waisbord, 2001; Mefalopulos, 2008). These early models were predominantly top-down and media-driven. Contemporary scholarship, however, marks a clear shift toward participatory perspectives that centre on local agency, cultural context, and collective problem-solving (Yar'Adua, Msughter and Aliyu, 2023). This participatory orientation aims to make development communication more inclusive, dialogic, and sustainable.

Government Communication

Government communication refers to the planned, coordinated, and institutionalised processes through which public authorities engage citizens to inform, educate, and promote understanding of government policies, programmes, and activities (GCIS, 2009; Pasquier, 2012). It encompasses the dissemination of public information, the cultivation of informed citizenship, and the facilitation of dialogue between the state and its people. Conceptually, the field is closely linked to political communication, which focuses on persuasion, legitimacy building, and agenda-setting in democratic societies (Kaid, 1996; McNair, 2011).

In the South African context, government communication is regarded as a key instrument for fostering transparency, accountability, and participatory democracy. According to the Government Communication and Information System (GCIS, 2009; 2018), it serves not only to explain policy and service delivery but also to strengthen relationships between government and communities through accessible and inclusive communication platforms. The GCIS emphasises that effective government communication should be developmental in orientation, grounded in consultation, feedback, and the recognition of citizens as active participants rather than passive recipients of information.

From a developmental communication perspective, government communication functions as a mechanism for participatory governance, ensuring a continuous exchange of information between the state and its citizens throughout all stages of the policy process, from conception to implementation (Heinze, Schneider and Ferie, 2013). This approach aligns with the democratic principle that citizens have a right to information and participation in decision-making (McNair, 2011; GCIS, 2018). Within this framework, government communication is central to promoting youth entrepreneurship because it facilitates access to information,

platforms, and networks that enhance young people's economic, social, and political inclusion (Hlungwani and Sayeed, 2018).

Local Economic Development (LED)

Local economic development in South Africa refers to strategies initiated by municipalities to promote job creation, economic growth, and entrepreneurship, particularly among marginalised populations (Rogerson, 2011; Nel and Rogerson, 2016). The legislative foundation of LED lies in the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (1996) and the Municipal Systems Act (2000), which require municipalities to advance local economic development. Despite these frameworks, LED initiatives face challenges such as limited funding, poor intergovernmental coordination, and urban-biased planning (Meyer, 2014; Gumede, 2019).

Municipalities often depend on external grants from provincial or national programmes, limiting the sustainability of LED interventions (Rogerson, 2018). Furthermore, the absence of youth-specific planning has constrained LED's impact on young entrepreneurs (Nel and Rogerson, 2021). Scholars argue that improved collaboration across government spheres, increased funding, and inclusive planning are essential for LED to meaningfully contribute to youth empowerment and sustainable local economies (Rogerson and Kicyira, 2020).

Participatory Communication

Participatory communication prioritizes active involvement, collaboration, and empowerment among all stakeholders throughout the communication process (Musakophas & Polnigongit, 2017; Jacobson, 2016). Unlike traditional top-down models, participatory communication fosters two-way dialogue and shared decision-making. Key principles include inclusivity, empowerment, collaboration, dialogue, and local knowledge (Kloppers & Fourie, 2018; Servaes, 2021; Clark et al., 2019). It encourages participation from diverse stakeholders, promotes self-reliance and autonomy, and equips participants with skills and resources for engagement (Servaes, 2021; Clark et al., 2019). Open dialogue facilitates co-creating solutions and tailoring strategies to meet specific socio-cultural and development needs (Malikhao & Servaes, 2005). The concept advocates for partnerships and collaboration as crucial for addressing complex issues and achieving sustainable development (Mansuri & Rao, 2013). Overall, participatory communication aims to democratize communication processes, promote

social justice, and empower individuals and communities to actively participate in decision-making (Abdullah & Muhammad, 2024; Mansuri & Rao, 2013). Embracing participatory communication in development projects involves valuing the contributions and insights of all stakeholders and transforming recipients into active participants to ensure interventions align with community needs (Mansuri & Rao, 2013).

Thusong Service Centres

Thusong Service Centres, originally established as Multi-Purpose Community Centres in 1999, are government-run facilities intended to enhance citizens' access to public information and essential services (GCIS, 2009). The term *Thusong*, meaning "a place to get help" in Sesotho, symbolises the state's commitment to equitable access and developmental communication. These centres provide multiple services, including business support, ICT access, health information, and community development programmes, particularly in rural and disadvantaged areas (Magooa, 2014). They serve as key vehicles for implementing the government's development communication strategy by promoting integration, accessibility, and citizen participation (GCIS, 2009).

Township

In South Africa, *townships* refer to historically underdeveloped urban areas that were created under apartheid legislation to segregate Black Africans, Coloureds, and Indians from economic centres. These spaces are marked by socio-economic deprivation, limited infrastructure, and spatial marginalisation (Barrar, 2010; Mthembu, 2017). Despite this history, townships remain vibrant socio-economic environments characterised by innovation, cultural dynamism, and informal enterprise. They are home to a large proportion of South Africa's youth, especially in Gauteng Province (World Bank, 2019). Internationally, townships are recognised as enduring symbols of South Africa's struggle for democracy and ongoing efforts toward inclusive development (Jürgens and Donaldson, 2012).

Youth

In South Africa, the National Youth Policy (NYP) defines "youth" as individuals aged 14 to 35, constituting 37.5% (18.34 million) of the South African population (The Presidency, 2015). Approximately 1.2 billion youth comprise 16% of the global population (United Nations,

2018). The African continent is estimated to have the most youthful population, which is projected to double by 2055 (United Nations, 2018). With these increasing numbers, the South African government aims to empower this demographic to play a meaningful role in the country's economic and social development (The Presidency, 2015). However, youth inequality concerning unequal access to opportunities, resources, and support systems presents a significant barrier to achieving this vision, particularly in low-income and disadvantaged areas such as townships, where young people face more challenges compared to their counterparts in urban and high-income areas.

Youth Entrepreneurship

Youth entrepreneurship refers to the process through which young individuals identify opportunities, mobilise resources, and establish enterprises that contribute to economic and social transformation. Unlike conventional youth employment, which situates young people as dependents within existing labour markets, youth entrepreneurship positions them as innovators and job creators who actively shape economic futures rather than merely seeking inclusion within them (Schoof, 2006; Chigunta, 2017). It entails not only self-employment but also a developmental orientation that emphasises creativity, innovation, and resilience as mechanisms for addressing structural challenges such as unemployment and poverty (Edoho, 2015; Herrington and Kew, 2018).

According to Unachukwu (2009), the entrepreneurial process among youth is characterised by the ability to identify untapped opportunities, take calculated risks, exercise vision and persistence, and collaborate with others to create value. Youth entrepreneurship therefore embodies both economic and social dimensions, as it generates livelihoods while promoting self-efficacy, civic participation, and community development (Fatoki and Garwe, 2010).

In contemporary development discourse, youth entrepreneurship is increasingly recognised as a strategic pathway for inclusive growth and sustainable development. International frameworks such as the International Labour Organization's (ILO) *Youth Employment Programme* and the African Union's *Agenda 2063* underscore entrepreneurship as a critical driver of youth empowerment and innovation-led economies (ILO, 2020; African Union, 2015). In the South African context, fostering youth entrepreneurship is central to addressing entrenched unemployment and inequality, particularly in township and rural economies where formal job opportunities remain scarce (Herrington and Kew, 2018; Ndedi, 2009). By

unlocking the productive and creative capacities of young people, youth entrepreneurship contributes not only to economic participation but also to the reconfiguration of development from dependency toward agency.

1.11 STRUCTURE AND PROGRESSION OF THE DISSERTATION

This dissertation is structured to provide a clear and logical progression from conceptual framing to theoretical grounding, methodological design, empirical analysis, and applied contribution. Each chapter builds cumulatively on the preceding one to develop a comprehensive understanding of how government communication strategies influence youth entrepreneurship in township contexts, and how such strategies may be reconceptualised to promote inclusive and participatory development.

Chapter One *– Background and framing the research problem: Government communication and youth economic development* introduces the study by situating youth entrepreneurship within South Africa's broader socio-economic and policy landscape. It outlines the motivation, scope, and rationale of the research, defines the central problem, and articulates the key research questions, purpose, and underlying assumptions. The chapter also explains the study's conceptual parameters and methodological orientation, establishing a coherent foundation for the inquiry.

Chapter Two *– Challenges of government communication and youth economic participation:* historical, empirical, and policy dimensions provides a systematic examination of existing scholarship on participatory governance, youth entrepreneurship, and township economies. It critically examines how communication practices affect youth engagement in entrepreneurship and interrogates the gaps between policy intentions and the lived realities of township youth. The chapter foregrounds the theoretical transition from dissemination models of communication to participatory approaches that prioritize dialogue, agency, and empowerment.

Chapter Three *– Theoretical foundations for participatory government communication and youth economic development* elaborates the study's conceptual architecture. Drawing on participatory communication theory and the CFPD model, the chapter integrates perspectives from youth studies and entrepreneurship theory. It establishes the analytical lens through which

the relationship between government communication and youth participation is examined and articulates the theoretical propositions that underpin the study's interpretive framework.

Chapter Four – Research methodology explains the philosophical, methodological, and procedural foundations of the research. It justifies the choice of a qualitative, interpretive, multi-case study approach and describes the techniques employed for data collection, including semi-structured interviews, focus groups, document analysis, and participant observation. The chapter also details the processes of sampling, data management, thematic analysis, and ethical compliance, ensuring transparency and methodological rigour.

Chapter Five - Thematic analysis of government communication and youth entrepreneurship presents the empirical findings and offers a thematic interpretation of the data. It identifies recurring patterns, meanings, and tensions in how youth, government officials, and local economic development practitioners perceive and experience government communication. The analysis reveals both the enabling and constraining dimensions of current communication practices within township contexts.

Chapter Six – Discussion of findings and strategic recommendations for participatory communication synthesises the empirical results in relation to the theoretical framework and research questions. It interprets the findings through the lens of participatory communication and development theory, drawing attention to the structural, institutional, and communicative gaps that hinder youth engagement. The chapter then proposes strategic recommendations aimed at strengthening inclusivity, trust, and responsiveness in government communication.

Chapter Seven – A participatory communication framework for youth entrepreneurship promotion in township settings concludes the dissertation by presenting an original, context-sensitive framework designed to transform government communication from a transactional process into a dialogic, co-created practice of empowerment. The proposed framework provides theoretical insight and practical guidance for policymakers, communicators, and development practitioners seeking to embed participatory principles within youth entrepreneurship initiatives.

Together, these chapters form a coherent, critical, and empirically grounded exploration of the communicative dimensions of youth economic development. The progression from conceptual framing to applied contribution ensures that the study not only interrogates existing practices

but also offers actionable strategies for reimagining government communication as a catalyst for inclusive and sustainable development in South Africa's township communities.

1.12 CONCLUSION

This study arises from the urgent need to interrogate not only what the South African government communicates to youth in township settings, but also how it communicates, through which intermediaries, and with what developmental consequences. At its core, the research questions the assumption that the existence of policy automatically translates into tangible public impact, particularly in contexts marked by historical marginalisation, socio-economic inequality, and spatial exclusion. The effectiveness of youth entrepreneurship initiatives is inseparable from the communicative processes that frame them, their accessibility, inclusivity, and capacity to engender participation and trust.

Engaging this problem requires an understanding that communication is not merely an administrative tool but a constitutive element of governance and development. To locate the study within this intellectual and empirical terrain, the next chapter undertakes a critical review of literature on development communication, participatory governance, youth participation, and entrepreneurial policy in South Africa and comparable contexts. Through this review, the conceptual contours of the study are refined, the research gaps clarified, and the theoretical foundations established for the analytical journey that follows.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW AND CONTEXTUALISING

CHALLENGES OF GOVERNMENT COMMUNICATION AND YOUTH ECONOMIC PARTICIPATION: *HISTORICAL, EMPIRICAL, AND POLICY DIMENSIONS*

2.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter provides the literature review by examining existing scholarship on government communication, participatory development, youth entrepreneurship, and township economies, thereby establishing the conceptual and empirical foundation for the study.

The review is structured in three parts. First, it contextualises the study by providing a historical and policy background to development communication and youth economic development in South Africa. Second, it critically examines research findings, both international and local on youth entrepreneurship and government communication. Finally, it engages with key debates and critiques surrounding the effectiveness, design, and implementation of government communication strategies. These insights inform the need for a participatory communication framework that centres youth agency and empowerment in township economic development.

2.2 HISTORICAL AND POLICY CONTEXT: Communication, development, and youth in South Africa

Understanding the relationship between communication, development, and youth economic participation in South Africa requires situating it within the country's broader historical and policy trajectory. Since the democratic transition of 1994, government communication has been reconfigured from a tool of control and exclusion under apartheid to an instrument of transparency, participation, and social transformation. This evolution reflects a gradual, though uneven, movement from top-down dissemination models toward more dialogic and citizen-centred approaches to governance. At the same time, the state's commitment to youth empowerment has expanded through successive policies and institutional frameworks that recognise young people as both beneficiaries and agents of development. Examining these intertwined trajectories of communication reform and youth economic policy provides a

necessary foundation for understanding the structural and institutional conditions that shape current government–youth engagement and the communicative challenges that continue to constrain participatory development in township contexts.

2.2.2 Development Communication and Participatory Governance

The emergence of development communication as a field is historically rooted in the post–World War II development paradigm, when communication was conceived as a tool to accelerate modernisation through the dissemination of information, technologies, and behavioural norms from "developed" to "developing" societies (Rogers, 1962; Schramm, 1964). This diffusionist model, grounded in positivist and linear notions of progress, positioned communication as an instrument of persuasion and compliance rather than dialogue or empowerment (Melkote & Steeves, 2015). Over time, critical scholars such as Freire (1970), Servaes (2008), and Gumucio-Dagron (2001) challenged this technocratic conception, arguing for a participatory approach that recognises people as active agents in defining their own development. Within this participatory tradition, communication is understood as a dialogic, relational, and transformative process through which individuals co-create meaning, negotiate power, and collectively pursue social change (Fraser & Restrepo-Estrada, 1998).

In South Africa, the tension between these paradigms has been particularly pronounced due to the country's history of racialised exclusion and authoritarian control over information. During apartheid, state communication functioned as a mechanism of propaganda and social engineering, aimed at legitimising racial hierarchy and suppressing dissent (Fourie, 2001). Information systems were centralised, censorship was institutionalised, and media ownership was restricted to protect the state's ideological dominance. This legacy left deep structural inequalities in access to communication resources, particularly in black townships and rural areas, where the state relied on coercive and manipulative communication to maintain social control (Tomaselli & Dunn, 2001).

The democratic transition of 1994, therefore, required not merely a change in policy but a transformation in the very conception of communication as a public good. The establishment of the GCIS in 1998 signified an attempt to institutionalise transparent, accountable, and participatory communication as a cornerstone of democratic governance. The GCIS was mandated to "ensure a two-way flow of information between government and citizens" and to facilitate inclusive access to public information (GCIS, 2009). Complementary initiatives such

as the Thusong Service Centres and the *Batho Pele* ("People First") principles sought to translate these ideals into practice by decentralising communication, improving service delivery, and promoting citizen engagement (DPSA, 1997; Magooa, 2014).

However, while the policy framework for participatory governance in South Africa is robust, implementation has been less transformative. Numerous studies argue that participatory processes have become institutionalised as formalities rather than as genuine exercises in deliberation (Cornwall, 2008; Sinwell, 2011; Williams, 2018). The participatory turn, rather than redistributing power, has often served to legitimise pre-determined policy decisions. In the context of local governance, public participation mechanisms such as Integrated Development Plans (IDPs), ward committees, and community imbizos are designed to ensure that development priorities are informed by community input. Yet, empirical evidence reveals that these forums are frequently constrained by bureaucratic rigidity, information asymmetry, and limited capacity for citizen influence (Draai & Taylor, 2009; Ngubane, 2019).

Molale's (2022) study in Jouberton Township illustrates this problem vividly: residents participated in IDP meetings primarily as passive recipients of information, with little opportunity to influence outcomes or challenge existing priorities. Officials dominated discussions, and feedback was often procedural, with limited follow-up or accountability mechanisms. This echoes findings from other municipalities, where participation processes have been described as "managerial rituals" that reproduce hierarchical relations between the state and the community (Buccus et al., 2007; Sinwell, 2011). Such practices exemplify what Cooke and Kothari (2001) famously termed *"the tyranny of participation"*, the tendency for participatory mechanisms to be co-opted into bureaucratic control rather than emancipatory practice.

These failures are not merely administrative but communicative. As Servaes (2020) argues, participatory communication is not about inviting people to attend meetings but about constructing shared meaning through dialogue. True participation requires processes of listening, negotiation, and feedback that recognise citizens as co-producers of policy and not as audiences for government messaging. Yet, in South Africa, government communication frequently remains anchored in the broadcast logic of press releases, media briefings, and campaigns where communication is valued for reach and visibility rather than for its relational or dialogic quality (GCIS, 2017). This emphasis on message delivery over meaning-making is particularly evident in youth-focused initiatives, where communication often adopts persuasive

or motivational tones without addressing structural barriers or listening to youth experiences (Hlungwani & Sayeed, 2018).

The persistence of this transmission model has profound implications for participatory governance. According to Melkote and Steeves (2015), top-down communication frameworks reproduce dependency by treating citizens as passive targets of information rather than as partners in decision-making. In South Africa's developmental state, this dynamic manifests as what Hendricks (2019) calls "consultative authoritarianism", a participatory veneer that masks hierarchical power relations. Public participation is invited but rarely incorporated into policy formulation or programme design. When citizens' inputs are not visibly integrated into outcomes, trust erodes, and civic engagement declines (Williams, 2018).

Several factors contribute to this communicative disconnect. Structurally, local government systems remain overstretched, with limited capacity to facilitate sustained, inclusive dialogue (Govender, 2020). Linguistically, the diversity of South Africa's eleven official languages and local idioms often undermines accessibility and inclusivity in public communication (Fourie, 2011). Culturally, bureaucratic communication styles favour technocratic language that alienates youth and grassroots audiences. Institutionally, interdepartmental fragmentation, between, for example, the Department of Small Business Development (DSBD), the National Youth Development Agency (NYDA), and municipal Local Economic Development (LED) units, results in inconsistent and incoherent communication about entrepreneurship opportunities. The consequence is a gap not only in awareness but in meaning-making, where young people fail to identify government initiatives as relevant or responsive to their lived realities (Gwija et al., 2014; Kew, 2016).

Moreover, participatory governance in South Africa has been undermined by the commodification of communication under neoliberal policy frameworks. As Sinwell (2011) and Pithouse (2008) observe, participatory processes have increasingly been appropriated as tools of social management rather than empowerment. This has led to a bureaucratic domestication of participation, where government communication serves to maintain policy legitimacy and manage dissent rather than to transform power relations. This dynamic is visible in youth entrepreneurship promotion campaigns that emphasise self-reliance and innovation without addressing systemic barriers such as spatial inequality, market exclusion, and credit inaccessibility (Ndedi, 2009; Herrington & Kew, 2018). In this way, communication

reproduces neoliberal developmental rationalities that individualise responsibility while depoliticising structural inequities.

2.2.3 Alternative Pathways: Reimagining State–Citizen Dialogue Through Participatory Communication.

However, scholarship on participatory communication offers alternative pathways for transforming state–citizen engagement. Freire's (1970) notion of dialogical communication posits that development is achieved through horizontal learning and co-creation, not through transmission. Gumucio-Dagron (2001) similarly emphasises communication for social change as a process rooted in community dialogue, cultural expression, and local agency. In governance contexts, these principles translate into participatory budgeting, community radio, and co-management forums, practices that prioritise mutual accountability and continuous feedback. Within South Africa, there have been isolated examples of such innovation, such as participatory theatre for community education and digital storytelling initiatives led by civil society organisations (Mutsvairo & Karam, 2018). Yet, these remain peripheral to mainstream government communication structures, which continue to privilege visibility metrics over dialogic engagement.

The implications of the foregoing are twofold. Conceptually, it can be argued that communication in South Africa's governance system remains trapped between two paradigms: the modernisation impulse of informing and persuading citizens, and the participatory imperative of co-creating meaning and legitimacy. Practically, it demonstrates that institutionalising participatory communication requires more than policy frameworks. It demands shifts in communicative culture, institutional incentives, and power relations. As Waisbord (2015) notes, participatory governance is sustained not through isolated projects but through a continuous negotiation of voice, recognition, and trust.

For this study, these debates highlight the communicative contradictions that underpin youth economic development. Government communication is both a symptom and a determinant of broader governance dynamics: it mirrors the state's orientation toward its citizens and simultaneously shapes how citizens perceive their agency within the developmental process. Understanding this duality is essential for explaining why, despite strong policy commitment to youth empowerment, participatory communication with township youth remains weak. Addressing this disjuncture requires not only examining the content of communication

strategies but also interrogating their communicative logic, the assumptions, power relations, and institutional practices that govern how the state speaks and listens.

2.2.4 Youth Economic Development and Entrepreneurship

Youth entrepreneurship and youth economic development are often invoked interchangeably in policy discourse, yet they represent distinct but interrelated dimensions of youth participation in the economy. Youth entrepreneurship refers to the process through which young individuals identify opportunities, mobilise resources, and establish enterprises that generate income and create employment for themselves and others (OECD, 2015; Chigunta, 2017). Youth economic development, by contrast, encompasses a broader spectrum of interventions including education, vocational training, access to finance, and policy support that enable young people to participate productively and equitably in the economy (ILO, 2020; UNDP, 2022). Together, these concepts embody the dual goals of economic empowerment and social inclusion.

Globally, youth entrepreneurship has emerged as a dominant strategy in development policy, particularly in contexts of chronic unemployment and demographic pressure. The OECD (2015) and the ILO (2020) emphasise that promoting entrepreneurship among young people can enhance innovation, diversify economies, and reduce dependence on shrinking formal employment sectors affected by automation and globalisation. Within Africa, where nearly 60 per cent of the population is under 25 years of age, entrepreneurship is viewed as both a demographic necessity and a developmental opportunity (African Union, 2015). Initiatives such as the African Youth Charter and Agenda 2063 explicitly position youth enterprise as a catalyst for inclusive growth and continental transformation.

In South Africa, the state's commitment to youth entrepreneurship has intensified in response to persistently high levels of youth unemployment, estimated at over 45 per cent for individuals aged 15 to 34 (Statistics South Africa, 2023). Since 1994, successive administrations have introduced policy instruments and institutional frameworks designed to enhance youth participation in the economy. These include the *National Youth Commission Act* (1996), the *National Youth Development Agency (NYDA)* (established in 2008), the *National Youth Policy* (2015–2020; 2020–2030), and the *Integrated Youth Development Strategy* (2019). Parallel economic initiatives such as the *Broad-Based Black Economic Empowerment Act* (2003), *Local Economic Development (LED)* frameworks, and the *National Development Plan (NDP)*

2030 have reinforced youth entrepreneurship as a national priority (The Presidency, 2015; Rogerson, 2018).

Despite these efforts, empirical evidence consistently indicates a weak translation of policy into outcomes. Studies by Gwija, Eresia-Eke and Iwu (2014), Herrington and Kew (2018), and Ndedi (2009) show that the majority of township youth remain unaware of or excluded from government entrepreneurship programmes. Many perceive such initiatives as inaccessible, irrelevant, or overly bureaucratic. For instance, research in Khayelitsha found that over 80 per cent of young people had no knowledge of available government support structures for entrepreneurship, while those who were aware often expressed mistrust in the efficiency and fairness of these programmes (Gwija et al., 2014). Similarly, Fatoki and Garwe (2010) observed that structural barriers such as limited access to finance, business training, and market networks disproportionately disadvantage youth from historically marginalised communities.

These findings reveal that entrepreneurship promotion, while rhetorically framed as empowerment, often reproduces existing inequalities. Structural barriers, including financial exclusion, inadequate digital infrastructure, and spatial disparities between urban and township economies, continue to undermine the inclusivity of youth economic participation (Mlatsheni & Ranchhod, 2017; Irungu, Ndirangu & Njoroge, 2015). Even where access to finance or training exists, such interventions frequently operate in isolation from the broader ecosystem of social support, market linkages, and institutional trust required for sustainable entrepreneurship. This fragmentation reflects what Kilimani (2017) calls *"entrepreneurship without structure"*, a developmental model that privileges individual effort while neglecting systemic enablers of opportunity.

A growing body of scholarship therefore cautions against treating entrepreneurship as a panacea for unemployment. As Edoho (2015) and Kilimani (2017) argue, entrepreneurship can only contribute meaningfully to development if it is integrated into holistic strategies that address education, labour markets, and governance. The World Bank (2019) and UNDP (2022) likewise advocate for *ecosystem approaches* that combine entrepreneurship training with job readiness programmes, vocational education, digital literacy, and access to markets. Such integrated models recognise that youth entrepreneurship is not merely an economic activity but a social process shaped by networks, institutions, and communicative environments.

2.2.5 Youth Entrepreneurship, Structural Realities, and Communicative Constraints

In the South African context, youth entrepreneurship cannot be divorced from the spatial and historical realities of township economies. Townships, as legacies of apartheid spatial planning, remain characterised by limited economic infrastructure, weak service delivery, and constrained market integration (Rogerson, 2018; Mthembu, 2017). Youth living in these areas face compounded disadvantages: inadequate access to transport, unreliable electricity, poor broadband coverage, and low exposure to entrepreneurial networks (Charman et al., 2017). Consequently, entrepreneurship tends to occur in informal or survivalist forms, with limited potential for scaling or innovation. The state's communication about entrepreneurship, often conducted through national media or urban-based institutions, frequently fails to penetrate these spaces, reinforcing both informational and symbolic exclusion (Kew, 2016).

Moreover, prevailing government narratives of youth entrepreneurship tend to emphasise individual resilience, creativity, and self-reliance, aligning with global neoliberal discourses that celebrate the entrepreneurial self (Sørensen, 2008; Dempster & Motala, 2014). While such discourses valorise youth initiative, they simultaneously obscure structural barriers and shift responsibility for economic failure onto individuals. In doing so, they reproduce what Bauman (2001) calls *"liquid modernity"*: a social order in which insecurity and risk are privatised rather than collectively addressed. This framing of entrepreneurship as personal salvation undermines the collective and participatory dimensions of development communication that could otherwise empower youth as co-architects of economic transformation.

To move beyond these limitations, scholars such as Chigunta (2017), Schoof (2006), and Fatoki and Garwe (2010) advocate for context-sensitive models of youth entrepreneurship that foreground the social, communicative, and institutional enablers of enterprise development. Effective youth economic strategies require not only access to finance and training but also spaces for dialogue, mentoring, and network formation. Communication thus becomes a structural enabler rather than a peripheral activity, it shapes how youth perceive opportunity, how they access information, and how they build trust in state institutions. As Servaes (2008) notes, development communication is most effective when it creates participatory environments where marginalised actors can articulate their needs and co-create solutions.

For this study, youth entrepreneurship is therefore understood not simply as enterprise creation but as a communicative process embedded within broader systems of policy, governance, and

social relations. The challenge lies in reconfiguring government communication so that it functions as a platform of empowerment rather than a vehicle of persuasion. This requires recognising township youth not merely as target audiences but as partners in defining and implementing economic development initiatives. Only through such participatory reorientation can communication fulfil its transformative potential in advancing youth economic development in South Africa's township economies.

2.2.6 Policy Frameworks and Governance

Youth economic development in South Africa is located within a dense policy environment shaped by both international frameworks and national developmental priorities. Globally, youth empowerment has been positioned as central to sustainable development and inclusive economic growth. The *World Programme of Action for Youth* (United Nations, 2010) underscores the need for states to promote youth participation in decision-making and employment creation, while the *African Youth Charter* (African Union, 2006) calls on member states to integrate youth issues into all sectors of policy planning and implementation. The *Sustainable Development Goals* (SDGs), particularly Goals 4, 8, and 10, further reinforce this agenda by emphasising quality education, decent work, and reduced inequalities. These frameworks converge on a participatory development paradigm, which recognises young people not only as beneficiaries of policy but as co-creators of development solutions.

South Africa's policy architecture mirrors these global aspirations through an extensive set of national instruments. The *National Youth Commission Act* (1996) laid the foundation for youth development structures, followed by the *National Youth Development Agency Act* (2008), which established the NYDA as the central coordinating institution. The *National Youth Policy (2015–2020)* and its successor *National Youth Policy (2020–2030)* set out strategic objectives to promote youth employment, entrepreneurship, and skills development. The *National Development Plan (NDP) 2030* further identifies youth economic inclusion as a pillar of South Africa's developmental state, envisioning a society in which "young people are empowered and able to realise their full potential" (The Presidency, 2015). These frameworks collectively commit the state to building an enabling environment for youth entrepreneurship through training, mentorship, access to finance, and supportive regulation.

However, despite this elaborate policy landscape, translating intent into impact remains weak. Ndhlovu (2017) and Seekings (2017) observe that policy coherence across government

departments is limited, resulting in youth economic development remaining fragmented across multiple institutions with overlapping mandates. For instance, while the *Department of Small Business Development (DSBD)* focuses on enterprise promotion, the *NYDA* coordinates youth development, and the *Small Enterprise Development Agency (SEDA)* provides business support services, yet these entities often operate in silos. This institutional fragmentation results in duplication, inefficiency, and inconsistent communication. The *Development Bank of Southern Africa (DBSA, 2022)* similarly reports that a lack of clear coordination between national and local government undermines the capacity of youth entrepreneurship programmes to scale or sustain impact.

One key dimension of this problem is the limited alignment between national frameworks and local governance systems. The *Municipal Systems Act* (2000) mandates municipalities to integrate Local Economic Development (LED) initiatives into their Integrated Development Plans (IDPs). Yet, as Meyer (2014) and Rogerson (2018) note, LED programmes are often underfunded and poorly linked to national policy priorities. Municipalities such as those in Gauteng Province, home to Soweto, Mamelodi, Thembisa, and Sebokeng, operate under severe fiscal and administrative constraints, which hinder their ability to promote youth entrepreneurship effectively. LED units frequently lack specialised personnel and technical capacity, relying on ad hoc collaborations with provincial agencies. Consequently, local government communication with youth entrepreneurs tends to be sporadic, event-based, and uncoordinated (Molale, 2022).

Access to finance remains a critical constraint despite a proliferation of funding instruments. The NYDA Grant Programme, the SEDA support mechanisms, and the *Small Enterprise Finance Agency (SEFA)* are intended to address capital shortages among aspiring entrepreneurs. Nevertheless, empirical evidence indicates that township youth continue to face barriers in accessing these funds. Gwija, Eresia-Eke and Iwu (2014) found that 81 per cent of young people in Khayelitsha were unaware of existing government support programmes, while 61 per cent considered available support structures ineffective. Similar findings were reported by Herrington and Kew (2018) in the *Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (GEM) South Africa Report*, which concluded that most young entrepreneurs remain excluded from state initiatives due to lack of awareness, procedural complexity, and limited outreach. These findings underscore that communication failures, rather than funding scarcity alone, constrain youth access to support mechanisms.

2.2.7 Policy Architecture, Governance Culture, and the Exclusion of Youth Voices

Gumede (2019) attributes this persistent disconnect to a technocratic model of governance that prioritises compliance, reporting, and bureaucratic procedure over participation and learning. Policy frameworks often assume that awareness and participation will naturally follow once programmes exist, neglecting the communicative and cultural work required to build legitimacy among target communities. The state's communication style remains largely top-down, privileging official channels such as press releases, roadshows, and social media announcements that fail to resonate with the everyday media habits and linguistic diversity of township youth (Mbatha, 2022). This results in what Servaes (2008) terms *"development communication without participation"*, a mode of engagement where information circulates but dialogue does not occur.

International comparisons provide both inspiration and caution. Kenya's *Youth Enterprise Development Fund (YEDF)* and Rwanda's *YouthConnekt* initiative illustrate the effectiveness of integrated models that combine financial assistance with mentorship, incubation, and communication-driven outreach (Edoho, 2015). These programmes emphasise participatory mechanisms such as local advisory boards, peer networks, and public-private partnerships, which foster trust and sustained engagement. However, Leshilo and Lethoko (2017) warn that uncritical adoption of such models in South Africa would risk reproducing the same technocratic tendencies that have limited local policy efficacy. They argue instead for contextually adapted frameworks that foreground participatory governance and recognise the historical legacies of inequality, spatial exclusion, and socio-economic marginalisation that shape township economies.

Furthermore, the weakness of monitoring and evaluation systems compounds the problem of policy incoherence. Graham et al. (2020) note that South African youth policies lack consistent mechanisms for measuring impact, resulting in a proliferation of pilot projects with limited scalability. Without robust feedback loops, lessons from successful interventions are seldom institutionalised, and failed initiatives are often repeated. This deficiency is not merely administrative but communicative: it reflects an absence of channels through which stakeholders, including youth beneficiaries, can provide systematic feedback. In the absence of such mechanisms, participatory governance remains rhetorical rather than substantive.

From a communication-for-development perspective, these shortcomings reveal a deeper structural issue: the separation of policy formulation from communicative practice. Development communication theory emphasises that effective governance requires not only clear policy content but also relational processes of meaning-making, trust-building, and dialogue (Melkote & Steeves, 2015; Servaes, 2020). Where communication is treated as a post-policy activity limited to dissemination rather than participation, the potential for empowerment is curtailed. In township settings, where mistrust of government is widespread and digital divides persist, communication must function as a space of negotiation and inclusion rather than persuasion.

The *Thusong Service Centres* initiative, established by the *GCIS (GCIS, 2009)*, was conceived to embody this participatory ethos by integrating government services and information within communities. While the model has succeeded in improving physical access to state information, scholars such as Magooa (2014) observe that its participatory promise remains unfulfilled, as communication continues to flow predominantly from government to citizens rather than through co-created dialogue. Similar critiques have been raised regarding IDP consultation processes, which often prioritise procedural compliance over genuine deliberation (Sinwell, 2011; Msibi & Penzhorn, 2010).

The above evinces that South Africa's youth economic development policies demonstrate strong normative alignment with international frameworks but weak operationalisation of participatory governance principles. Institutional fragmentation, financial inaccessibility, and communicative exclusion have created a disjuncture between policy ambition and youth experience. Addressing these challenges requires more than bureaucratic coordination. It demands a paradigmatic shift in how government communication is conceptualised and practised. This study argues that communication must move beyond its instrumental role of information transmission to become an enabling process that fosters dialogue, trust, and co-creation between the state and township youth. In the South African context, only through such a participatory reorientation can policy frameworks evolve from static blueprints into dynamic systems of inclusive governance that genuinely empower young South Africans to shape their economic futures.

2.3 EMPIRICAL RESEARCH ON GOVERNMENT COMMUNICATION AND YOUTH ENTREPRENEURSHIP

Empirical research on the intersection between government communication and youth entrepreneurship in South Africa reveals a persistent disjuncture between policy ambition and lived experience. While national frameworks such as the National Youth Policy (2020–2030), the National Development Plan 2030, and various local economic development strategies have prioritised youth economic inclusion, their communicative dimensions remain under-examined in both theory and practice. Most studies focus on the structural or financial barriers to youth entrepreneurship, such as limited access to credit, weak education systems, and high entry costs, while neglecting how information flows, public trust, and participatory dialogue shape the effectiveness of these interventions (Kew, 2016; Fatoki & Garwe, 2010; DBSA, 2022). Yet communication is not merely instrumental to policy delivery; it is the medium through which opportunity, legitimacy, and empowerment are negotiated.

The emerging literature identifies three interrelated empirical strands that illuminate this gap. First, studies of youth entrepreneurship in township economies highlight the paradox of high entrepreneurial aspiration amid low participation, pointing to contextual constraints such as inadequate infrastructure, limited financial access, and the informal nature of township markets (Chimucheka, 2014; Gwija, Eresia-Eke & Iwu, 2014; Ndedi, 2009). These works demonstrate that entrepreneurship in such settings is often necessity-driven rather than opportunity-driven, sustained by informal networks rather than institutional support.

Second, research on youth perceptions of government communication underscores the pervasive mistrust between young citizens and state institutions. Communication campaigns, although extensive, are often experienced as political, impersonal, or irrelevant to the everyday struggles of township youth (Wagner, 2017; Maponya, Moloto & Ndlovu, 2024). Studies further suggest that participatory or youth-led communication initiatives tend to yield greater legitimacy and behavioural impact precisely because they foster co-creation and peer-to-peer engagement (Campbell & MacPhail, 2002; Mofolo, 2020).

Third, ICT access and the digital divide have become defining variables in youth communication and entrepreneurship. The expansion of mobile and online platforms has created new possibilities for interaction between government and youth. However, these possibilities remain unevenly distributed. As Masavah, Makombe and Chikandiwa (2023) note,

structural inequalities, manifest in data costs, connectivity gaps, and digital literacy, continue to marginalise township youth from the benefits of Open Government Data (OGD) initiatives and e-governance systems.

Together, these three empirical domains provide the scaffolding for assessing how communication mediates youth participation in entrepreneurship. They illustrate that the challenge is not the absence of government initiatives but the communicative and relational failures that impede awareness, access, and trust. Understanding these dynamics is critical to the present study, which seeks to move beyond describing programme outcomes toward theorising communication as a constitutive process of development.

2.3.1 Youth Entrepreneurship in Township Economies

Youth entrepreneurship has emerged as a central pillar of South Africa's development agenda, serving both as a strategy to address chronic youth unemployment and as a mechanism to stimulate inclusive economic growth. However, despite successive policy frameworks promoting youth enterprise development, most notably the *National Youth Policy (2020–2030)* and the *NDP 2030*, empirical research consistently shows that township youth remain marginal participants in entrepreneurial activity (Kew, 2016; Fatoki & Garwe, 2010; DBSA, 2022). The paradox of high policy investment alongside low entrepreneurial uptake underscores a deeper problem: structural inequality compounded by weak communication, inadequate institutional support, and limited social trust.

Township economies occupy a paradoxical position within South Africa's post-apartheid development landscape. They are geographically close to economic hubs yet socially and economically distant from formal markets. As Charman and Petersen (2015) observe, townships are sites of both vibrant informal economic activity and enduring marginalisation. Youth entrepreneurship in these settings is frequently necessity-driven, undertaken as a survival strategy rather than as an expression of innovation or opportunity (Chimucheka, 2014). Limited access to credit, insufficient infrastructure, and weak business networks confine many youth enterprises to low-growth, low-profit sectors such as spaza shops, street vending, and small-scale services. This reality stands in stark contrast to policy narratives that promote entrepreneurship as a transformative engine of economic inclusion.

2.3.2 Empirical Barriers to Township Youth Entrepreneurship and the Communication Gap

Empirical studies consistently demonstrate that township youth face significant barriers at every stage of the entrepreneurial process. Gwija, Eresia-Eke and Iwu (2014), in a study of Khayelitsha Township, found that 81 per cent of young people were unaware of government entrepreneurship programmes, while 61 per cent viewed government support structures as ineffective. This lack of awareness reflects not only limited access to information but also weak institutional linkages between youth and local development agencies. Kew (2016) similarly reports that despite government initiatives such as the *NYDA Grant Programme* and *SEDA support structures*, only a small proportion of youth entrepreneurs benefit from these programmes, primarily due to cumbersome application processes and insufficient outreach in township communities.

Moreover, studies by Ndedi (2009) and Fatoki and Garwe (2010) indicate that youth entrepreneurs in South Africa face compounded challenges related to human capital, business experience, and social networks. Many have limited formal education or technical training, which restricts their ability to navigate bureaucratic requirements for funding and registration. In addition, weak mentorship and role modelling mean that entrepreneurship is rarely perceived as a viable career path. The *Global Entrepreneurship Monitor South Africa Report* (Herrington & Kew, 2018) highlights that fear of failure, limited business exposure, and low self-efficacy are more prevalent among youth in townships than among their urban counterparts.

From a structural perspective, township economies remain constrained by inadequate physical and financial infrastructure. The *Development Bank of Southern Africa (DBSA, 2022)* identifies poor transport connectivity, unreliable electricity, and limited access to internet services as significant obstacles to enterprise development. These constraints not only increase operating costs but also isolate entrepreneurs from broader markets. Financial institutions, including commercial banks, continue to view township enterprises as high-risk ventures, leading to limited credit provision and unfavourable lending conditions (Fatoki, 2014). Although microfinance and cooperative schemes have expanded, their reach remains minimal relative to demand.

A further layer of complexity arises from the informal nature of most township businesses. As Rogerson and Nel (2016) explain, informality offers flexibility but also precludes access to

formal financing, procurement opportunities, and state support. Government efforts to formalise these enterprises through registration and tax compliance have met resistance, partly due to mistrust and partly because the perceived costs of formality outweigh its benefits. This tension reflects what Pasquier and Fay (2017) describe as a *communication deficit in governance*, where state interventions fail to account for the lived experiences, languages, and priorities of their target populations. In township settings, policy communication often remains one-directional, focusing on information dissemination rather than on engagement or co-creation. As a result, government initiatives are frequently perceived as distant or irrelevant.

Recent empirical work by Ndebele, Moyo and Mahlangu (2022) confirms that township entrepreneurs view government communication as inconsistent and poorly targeted. Interviews with youth in Ekurhuleni and Soweto revealed that official entrepreneurship campaigns were disseminated primarily through digital and print media that did not reach the majority of township youth, who rely on community radio, social networks, and word-of-mouth channels for information. This misalignment in communication channels reflects a deeper lack of participatory strategy in government engagement with youth. Servaes (2020) and Melkote and Steeves (2015) argue that without participatory communication frameworks that enable feedback and dialogue, policy implementation remains technocratic and fails to adapt to contextual realities.

Cultural and psychological factors further constrain youth participation in entrepreneurship. Neneh (2014) observes that entrepreneurial motivation among South African youth is often undermined by social attitudes that privilege formal employment as a marker of success. In township communities, where unemployment rates among youth exceed 50 per cent, entrepreneurship is sometimes viewed as a last resort rather than an aspirational choice. This perception is reinforced by inconsistent government messaging that alternates between promoting self-reliance and promising job creation. The absence of a coherent communication narrative contributes to confusion and scepticism among young people regarding the role of entrepreneurship in addressing poverty and inequality.

Gender disparities within township entrepreneurship add yet another layer of exclusion. Studies by Chiloane-Tsoka (2013) and Msimango-Galawe (2020) show that young women face greater barriers to entry, including gendered social norms, unequal household responsibilities, and limited access to capital. Despite programmes such as the *Isivande Women's Fund* and targeted NYDA initiatives, women's participation in entrepreneurial activities remains

disproportionately low. This highlights the need for gender-sensitive communication strategies that address women's specific informational and structural needs.

Comparative regional research reinforces these observations. In Kenya and Rwanda, for instance, youth entrepreneurship programmes that integrate financial access, mentorship, and participatory communication have achieved measurable success (Edoho, 2015; Musona, 2019). These experiences underscore that sustainable entrepreneurship ecosystems depend on both resource provision and relational communication that builds trust and local ownership. In South Africa, however, government communication around youth entrepreneurship remains primarily transactional, centred on programme announcements rather than collaborative problem-solving (Molale, 2022).

The cumulative evidence from these studies reveals that the barriers to youth entrepreneurship in township economies cannot be reduced to individual deficiencies or market failures alone. Instead, they reflect systemic disconnections between government communication, institutional design, and local realities. Policy frameworks often assume that information and incentives are sufficient to stimulate entrepreneurship, overlooking the socio-cultural and communicative processes through which agency and legitimacy are constructed. As Servaes (2008) notes, development communication is effective only when it moves beyond information dissemination to include dialogue, participation, and trust-building.

Therefore, addressing the constraints facing township youth entrepreneurs requires an integrated approach that combines structural reform with participatory communication. This entails designing communication strategies that are localised, inclusive, and dialogic, not only to transmit information but also to cultivate belief in entrepreneurship as a viable and empowering pathway. Without such communicative transformation, the persistent mismatch between policy intentions and youth experiences will continue to limit the transformative potential of entrepreneurship in South Africa's townships.

2.3.3 Youth Perceptions of Government Communication

Empirical studies across South Africa consistently reveal that young people perceive government communication as distant, inconsistent, and largely ineffective in addressing their lived realities. These perceptions derive not merely from inadequate dissemination of information but from deeper issues of credibility, relevance, and inclusivity. In post-apartheid South Africa, where democratic legitimacy is tied to participatory governance, youth mistrust

of official communication represents a significant governance challenge (Wagner 2017; Molefe 2023). Government communication, often designed as top-down message delivery, fails to recognise young citizens as interlocutors in dialogue and instead frames them as passive recipients of information or beneficiaries of policy programmes (Canel & Sanders, 2012).

2.3.3.1 Mistrust and Perceived Political Manipulation

The erosion of youth trust in government communication is closely tied to unmet expectations and the politicisation of communicative spaces. As Dooms and Fayoyin (2022) observe, young South Africans often interpret government messages through the lens of political contestation, associating them with electoral propaganda rather than developmental accountability. Campaigns promising job creation and entrepreneurial support are viewed with scepticism when tangible outcomes fail to materialise. This perception of manipulation echoes earlier critiques by Ellul (1965) and Duncan (2021), who highlight how communication, when instrumentalised for persuasion, undermines its democratic potential.

Empirical research by Maponya, Moloto and Ndlovu (2024) reinforces this pattern. Their interviews with township youth revealed that official communication, whether through press briefings, social-media posts, or community meetings, is often perceived as abstract, jargon-laden, and disconnected from local realities. Many participants associated government communicators with "speaking at us rather than with us," a phrase that captures the transactional rather than dialogic nature of state–youth interaction. This aligns with Mthembu's (2018) finding that participatory platforms, such as IDP consultations, tend to be ritualistic exercises in compliance rather than genuine opportunities for deliberation. In these contexts, young people's participation becomes procedural rather than empowering, leading to disengagement and cynicism.

2.3.3.2 Credibility and Relevance Deficits

The credibility of government messages depends not only on accuracy but on resonance with audiences' lived experiences. Mthembu (2017) argues that communication credibility is co-constructed through trust, cultural affinity, and the perceived competence of messengers. Yet, government communication frequently adopts a technocratic tone that excludes youth vernacular and fails to acknowledge township socio-economic realities. Youth who experience daily unemployment, informal labour, and limited digital access find little relevance in abstract narratives of inclusive growth or entrepreneurial ecosystems.

Empirical analyses by Ndebele et al. (2022) and Gwija et al. (2014) confirm that many townships youth learn about government programmes through secondary networks, friends, radio, or social media, rather than direct official channels. This diffusion through informal intermediaries often distorts information, reinforcing scepticism about state reliability. Cornwall and Gaventa (2001) caution that such "communication deficits" deepen inequalities in participation by privileging those already embedded in institutional networks. In turn, those excluded interpret silence or opacity as deliberate marginalisation.

2.3.3.3 Implications for Participatory Governance

The cumulative evidence suggests that youth mistrust of government communication is symptomatic of a wider governance deficit. Communication in South Africa's developmental state context continues to operate through the logic of modernisation: information is transmitted from the centre to the periphery with limited feedback (Servaes 2008). Participatory governance, however, requires iterative dialogue, responsiveness, and co-production of meaning. When these qualities are absent, youth interpret government communication as a symbolic rather than substantive gesture of inclusion.

Mthembu (2018) and Molefe (2023) argue that rebuilding communicative legitimacy demands a shift from *representation* to *relationship*: from viewing youth as a constituency to be informed, to recognising them as partners in meaning-making. This entails institutional reforms such as participatory communication audits, youth advisory panels, and decentralised feedback mechanisms within government departments. Moreover, as Cornwall and Brock (2005) contend, participation must be anchored in everyday practice rather than episodic consultation, embedding dialogue within the rhythms of policy implementation.

In essence, empirical research converges on a central conclusion: young South Africans do not reject government communication per se, but the manner in which it is conducted. They seek communication that is transparent, locally grounded, linguistically inclusive, and emotionally credible, communication that recognises their lived struggles and aspirations. Youth perceptions thus serve as both critique and guide for reimagining government communication as a participatory, trust-building enterprise essential to democratic and developmental renewal.

2.3.3.4 The Relational Gap and Lack of Dialogic Engagement

Beyond information failure lies a relational gap between youth and the state. Carpentier (2016) conceptualises participation not as mere inclusion but as a redistribution of communicative power. In South Africa, however, communicative power remains centralised. Youth consultations are typically mediated by local councillors or political structures that filter or dilute authentic voices (Molefe 2023). The result is what Servaes (2020) terms "pseudo-participation," wherein engagement exists symbolically but lacks substantive reciprocity.

Moyo (2020) extends this critique to digital spaces, noting that while social media have expanded the visibility of government communication, they have not necessarily increased its dialogic quality. Government departments often use platforms such as Twitter and Facebook for unidirectional broadcasting, seldom responding to comments or facilitating interactive exchanges. Conversely, youth employ these same platforms for counter-narratives and activism, as seen in the *#FeesMustFall* movement, which demonstrates an alternative, networked form of participatory communication. The contrast between these horizontal, peer-driven communicative forms and hierarchical official messaging underscores a generational disconnect in communicative practice.

2.3.3.5 Youth-Led and Community-Based Alternatives

A growing body of research documents that youth-led and community-based interventions achieve greater legitimacy and impact precisely because they emphasise dialogue, co-creation, and peer leadership. Campbell and MacPhail (2002), in their seminal study of HIV/AIDS peer education in South African schools, found that programmes that enabled youth to design and disseminate messages among their peers fostered greater behavioural change and ownership than expert-led campaigns. This principle translates effectively to the entrepreneurial domain. When young people participate in designing communication about business opportunities or funding mechanisms, they are more likely to trust and act upon such information.

Mofolo (2020) similarly reports that community-based communication initiatives in Lesotho and South Africa, where local youth collaborate with municipal officers to produce participatory radio and social-media content, enhance mutual understanding and accountability. These initiatives operationalise what White (2004) calls communication as empowerment, a process in which communication is not a tool for control but a means of fostering agency and reflexivity. By contrast, official communication frameworks often

prioritise message uniformity over contextual adaptability, undermining the very inclusion they seek to promote.

2.3.3.6 Structural Inequalities and the Digital Divides in Communication

Digital technologies have become central to South Africa's government communication landscape, with state agencies increasingly relying on online portals, mobile applications, and social-media platforms to promote youth entrepreneurship and deliver public information (GCIS, 2019; World Bank, 2021). However, empirical research shows that these ICT-enabled strategies remain deeply uneven in their reach and impact. Township youth in South Africa continue to face persistent barriers, including high data costs, unreliable broadband connectivity, electricity disruptions, and limited digital literacy, which collectively constrain their ability to access, interpret, and act on government communication (Mkhize & Makoe, 2020; Masavah et al., 2023).

The concept of the digital divide, initially defined as disparities in physical access to computers and the Internet, has evolved to encompass differences in quality of connectivity, skills, and capacity for meaningful use (Eynon & Geniets, 2016). These digital inequalities mirror broader structural legacies of apartheid's spatial economy, where communities such as Mamelodi, Tembisa, and Soweto lag behind urban centres in both infrastructure and affordability (Gillwald, 2022). Consequently, government campaigns that migrate online often fail to penetrate township information ecosystems, reinforcing perceptions that policy communication is designed for urban and educated audiences rather than marginalised youth. Despite commitments such as the National Integrated ICT Policy White Paper (2016), fewer than 40 per cent of South Africans have reliable high-speed Internet access, and the figure drops below 20 per cent in informal settlements (World Bank, 2021).

Crucially, the digital divide is not only technological but communicative and participatory. Without stable ICT access, township youth are excluded from information on entrepreneurship programmes, funding opportunities, or training initiatives, leading to sporadic engagement and misinformation. This exclusion generates both informational deprivation and symbolic invisibility, a condition where young people feel unseen within digital governance systems (Dooms & Fayoyin, 2022). As a result, structural digital inequalities deepen mistrust in government communication and undermine participatory governance, positioning digital access as a critical determinant of citizenship, opportunity, and developmental inclusion.

2.3.4 Digital Participation and Government Communication

The persistence of the digital divide, therefore, represents not only an infrastructural failure but a communicative one. Servaes (2020) conceptualises communication for development as a social process grounded in participation, equity, and empowerment. When access to digital platforms becomes a precondition for participation, communication ceases to be universal and becomes stratified by socio-economic status. The result is what Gillwald (2022) calls "digital stratification," a new hierarchy of visibility and voice in which the connected speak louder and are heard sooner. In this sense, digital inequality undermines the democratic promise of e-government, transforming it into what Pasquier and Fay (2017) describe as technocratic transparency, openness without engagement.

Empirical evidence suggests that addressing these disparities requires more than infrastructure investment. It demands participatory digital-inclusion policies co-designed with youth communities. Pilot initiatives such as the Gauteng Digital Township Programme illustrate this potential. By providing free Wi-Fi hotspots, digital skills training, and online business incubation platforms, the programme has begun to reduce barriers for emerging entrepreneurs (DBSA, 2022). However, without continuous dialogue and adaptive communication mechanisms, even such initiatives risk devolving into technocratic exercises detached from youth realities.

As shown above, the digital divide in South Africa is not merely about access to technology but about access to participation. ICTs have created unprecedented opportunities for two-way communication between government and youth, yet these opportunities remain unrealised due to structural inequality, cost, and institutional inertia. Bridging this divide requires reframing digital communication as a participatory process grounded in inclusion, co-creation, and mutual learning. In township settings where material scarcity coexists with digital creativity, such an approach could transform ICTs from tools of exclusion into catalysts of empowerment. Understanding this dynamic is essential for re-imagining government communication as a genuinely participatory enterprise that recognises youth not as passive recipients of digital information but as active co-authors of South Africa's developmental future.

2.3.4.1 Youth Agency and Digital Innovation

Despite these barriers, youth in South African townships have creatively appropriated digital technologies to communicate, mobilise, and sustain livelihoods. Moyo (2020) documents how

young people use social media not only to access information but to build entrepreneurial ecosystems through WhatsApp business groups, Facebook marketplaces, and TikTok-based marketing. These peer-to-peer communication forms often substitute for formal government channels, providing immediacy, relevance, and cultural resonance. The participatory potential of digital media lies precisely in this bottom-up creativity. Yet, as Dooms and Fayoyin (2022) caution, government institutions have been slow to engage with these organic communication networks. Without institutional recognition and support, youth-driven digital practices remain fragmented and precarious.

Participatory communication scholars advocate for *co-creation models* in which government collaborates with youth to design digital engagement strategies (Carpentier, 2016; Servaes, 2020). This includes participatory content production, interactive feedback loops, and the use of youth ambassadors to bridge institutional and community digital spaces. Empirical evidence from Kenya and Ghana demonstrates that co-designed digital campaigns achieve higher trust and participation because they align technological affordances with local communicative cultures (Edoho, 2015; UNDP, 2022). Translating such models to South Africa's township contexts would require reimagining government communication as a *dialogic interface* rather than a digital bulletin board.

2.3.4.2 Digital Inequality as Communication Exclusion

Government communication has embraced digital tools to enhance efficiency and reach. Agencies such as the *National Youth Development Agency (NYDA)* and the *Small Enterprise Development Agency (SEDA)* use websites and social-media platforms to publicise grants, incubator programmes, and entrepreneurship training (GCIS, 2019). Municipalities have adopted WhatsApp hotlines and online service portals to facilitate citizen feedback. However, empirical evaluations reveal that these mechanisms often reproduce one-way information flows rather than fostering dialogue (Masavah et al., 2023). Youth engagement is typically measured through website traffic or social-media "likes," metrics that prioritise visibility over interaction. When communication becomes digitised without becoming participatory, it risks replicating the same hierarchical dynamics that participatory communication theory seeks to dismantle (Servaes, 2020).

Masavah et al. (2023) show that township youth remain peripheral to *Open Government Data* (OGD) initiatives because access requires not only connectivity but also data-interpretation

skills. They note that government portals often use technical language and English-only interfaces, excluding users with limited digital or linguistic literacy. Consequently, digital government platforms that aspire to transparency and inclusion may inadvertently reinforce exclusion. This "second-level digital divide", the gap between access and effective use, has profound implications for youth empowerment. Without targeted training or support, digital communication systems risk becoming elite domains accessible only to those already privileged by education and infrastructure (Eynon & Geniets, 2016).

2.3.4.3 Cost, Infrastructure, and Digital Literacy

Data affordability remains a defining constraint on youth participation in digital governance. According to the *GSMA Mobile Internet Connectivity Report (2022)*, South Africa ranks among the most expensive mobile-data markets in Africa relative to income. For township youth dependent on prepaid services, purchasing sufficient data to engage consistently with online government platforms is prohibitive. Gillwald (2022) emphasises that "data poverty" restricts access not only to information but also to social networks and opportunities for self-representation. Moreover, infrastructure deficits, such as unreliable electricity supply, limited Wi-Fi hotspots, and inadequate computer facilities, further restrict meaningful engagement. Studies of digital-learning initiatives during the COVID-19 pandemic illustrate this vividly: while universities and schools shifted online, many township students were unable to participate due to cost, connectivity, or device limitations (Mkhize & Makoe, 2020).

Digital literacy represents another dimension of inequality. Mafolo (2019) found that youth participants in Soweto's entrepreneurship programmes often lacked basic digital-skills training necessary to complete online funding applications or maintain a business presence on social media. This gap highlights a policy contradiction: while government communication increasingly assumes digital competency, few initiatives invest in cultivating those very skills. As Servaes (2020) argues, sustainable communication for development requires attention to both technological and social infrastructures, networks of meaning, trust, and capacity that enable technology to serve participatory ends.

2.3.5 Debates and Shortcomings in Government Communication Campaigns

Despite South Africa's policy commitment to inclusive and participatory governance, a growing body of scholarship identifies persistent shortcomings in the conception, design, and implementation of government communication campaigns. These shortcomings are not merely

technical failures but reflect deeper epistemological tensions between communication as an instrument of policy delivery and communication as a process of empowerment and co-creation (Servaes, 2008; Waisbord, 2015). The literature demonstrates that while official campaigns increasingly reference concepts such as participation and engagement, their operational logic remains largely transmissive, anchored in dissemination rather than dialogue, and in persuasion rather than partnership (Sinwell, 2011; Molale, 2022). The resulting disjuncture between intent and practice continues to undermine youth trust, limit inclusivity, and dilute the transformative potential of government communication.

Empirical studies of youth entrepreneurship promotion in South Africa reveal how these tensions manifest in practice. Communication campaigns, though well-intentioned, often fail to reach or resonate with their intended audiences because they are designed without meaningful youth participation, employ channels misaligned with contemporary media habits, and use bureaucratic language that alienates rather than empowers (Kilimani, 2017; Irungu et al., 2015; Mthembu, 2017). Moreover, as Bessant (2018) and Loader et al. (2014) note, the dominance of hierarchical state communication reproduces patterns of exclusion and political disaffection among youth, particularly in contexts where communication is conflated with political marketing. These practices reinforce a cycle in which communication is deployed to manage perception rather than to cultivate partnership, leading to scepticism and disengagement.

At the theoretical level, these debates engage long-standing critiques within development communication scholarship regarding the limits of the modernisation paradigm and the unrealised promises of participation (Servaes, 2020; Melkote & Steeves, 2015). In the South African case, the post-apartheid state's emphasis on consultative governance has not necessarily translated into dialogic communication cultures within public institutions (Sinwell, 2011; Dooms & Fayoyin, 2022). Government campaigns targeting youth thus operate within a hybrid terrain combining the rhetoric of empowerment with the practice of control. This contradiction calls for a critical interrogation of both the conceptual and practical underpinnings of state communication, particularly as they relate to youth agency and entrepreneurial inclusion.

The implications of the above for this research study are that the identified shortcomings in government communication form the core focus. The research will first empirically verify whether these gaps exist in the selected municipalities and how they are experienced by youth

and communication officials. These findings will guide the development of a Participatory Communication Framework that shifts communication from one-way messaging to dialogue, partnership, and co-creation. Ultimately, the study aims not only to diagnose existing problems but also to propose a transformative model that strengthens inclusive engagement, feedback processes, and accessible communication platforms.

The following interrelated themes provide a critical bridge between the empirical evidence reviewed earlier and the participatory theoretical framework elaborated in the next chapter.

2.4 INSTRUMENTAL VERSUS EMPOWERMENT MODELS

The tension between *instrumental* and *empowerment* approaches lies at the heart of contemporary debates on government communication and development practice. Whereas the instrumental model conceptualises communication as a unidirectional process of information transfer aimed at behavioural change or policy compliance, the empowerment model understands communication as a dialogic and participatory process through which citizens co-create meaning, exercise agency, and contribute to social transformation (Servaes, 2008; Freire, 1970; Melkote & Steeves, 2001). This distinction has profound implications for how government engages youth in development programmes, particularly in societies such as South Africa, where historical inequalities have shaped patterns of voice, participation, and legitimacy.

2.4.1 From Transmission to Transformation

The instrumental model has its roots in modernisation theory, which emerged in the 1950s and 1960s as the dominant paradigm of development communication. Scholars such as Lerner (1958) and Schramm (1964) viewed communication as a technical tool for disseminating innovations and accelerating societal modernisation. The underlying assumption was that the "right" information, delivered efficiently through mass media, could persuade populations to adopt new behaviours aligned with national development goals. In this paradigm, communicators are experts, audiences are targets, and success is measured through message reach and behavioural conformity (Mefalopulos, 2008).

However, as early as the 1970s, critical scholars began to challenge this technocratic logic. Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970) introduced a radically different view of communication grounded in dialogue, mutual learning, and conscientisation, the process

through which people become aware of their social conditions and act collectively to transform them. Freire (2000) rejected the "banking model" of communication, where knowledge is deposited in passive recipients, arguing instead for communication as a shared act of knowing between equals. This epistemological shift from transmission to transformation redefined the communicator's role from persuader to facilitator, and from authority to partner.

Building on Freire, Servaes (2008) and Malikhao & Servaes (2005) articulated the *participatory communication paradigm*, which reconceptualises communication as a horizontal process of social negotiation. Here, communication is inseparable from culture and power; it is not an instrument to impose change but a means to enable collective decision-making. As Servaes (2020) emphasises, empowerment emerges not from information delivery but from people's ability to define problems, articulate solutions, and influence decisions affecting their lives. This paradigm thus marks a move from communication *about* people to communication *with* people.

2.4.2 Instrumentalism in Government Communication Practice

Despite rhetorical shifts toward participation, government communication in South Africa remains largely anchored in instrumental traditions. The Government Communication and Information System (GCIS, 2018; 2020) defines communication as the strategic dissemination of government messages to inform and persuade the public. This orientation privileges top-down campaigns, centrally crafted narratives, and performance metrics that assess outputs (e.g., number of media releases or social-media impressions) rather than outcomes such as public empowerment or trust. Sinwell (2011) critiques this approach as a continuation of modernisation logic under a democratic guise: citizens are informed, not engaged; they are consulted, not co-deciders.

Empirical studies reinforce this critique. Hadji and Osunkunle (2020), in their evaluation of South Africa's *16 Days of Activism* campaign, found that communication was primarily one-directional, with limited audience feedback or adaptation. Similarly, Molale (2022) observed that municipal-level participatory forums such as IDP meetings often function as formalities, ritual performances of consultation without genuine deliberation. These examples illustrate how instrumentalism persists even within ostensibly participatory frameworks, reducing communication to a mechanism for legitimising predetermined policies rather than fostering empowerment.

2.4.2.1 The Empowerment Model and Dialogic Engagement

In contrast, the empowerment model positions communication as a process of co-creation and critical engagement. Freire's (1973) dialogic method remains central: communication is valuable not for transmitting information but for generating consciousness and collective action. Melkote and Steeves (2001) define empowerment communication as that which enhances people's capacity to understand their social reality, make informed choices, and organise for change. This conception aligns closely with Gumucio-Dagron's (2019) emphasis on "communication for social change," which prioritises community ownership, cultural relevance, and sustainability over message control.

In South Africa, this paradigm has found expression in community media, participatory radio, and youth-led digital activism. Molefe (2023) and Mbatha (2022) document how participatory communication initiatives have enabled township youth to redefine narratives around entrepreneurship and governance by producing local media content. These initiatives operationalise empowerment by transforming youth from passive audiences into communicative agents and producers of meaning, rather than merely consumers of policy information. Importantly, they also challenge the state-centric notion that legitimacy flows from the top down; instead, legitimacy is co-constructed through dialogue, transparency, and mutual recognition.

2.4.2.2 Power, Voice, and the Politics of Participation

The divergence between instrumental and empowerment models is ultimately a question of power. As Melkote (1991) observes, communication cannot be separated from structures of domination; who speaks, who listens, and who decides are inherently political questions. The instrumental approach, by privileging efficiency and message consistency, centralises communicative power within institutions. Empowerment approaches, by contrast, seek to democratise that power by redistributing communicative agency to marginalised actors. Yet, as Gumucio-Dagron and Tufte (2006) caution, participation itself can become co-opted when reduced to tokenistic involvement without structural change. True empowerment requires not only access to communication channels but also influence over agenda-setting and policy direction.

Sinwell's (2011) ethnography of participatory governance in Johannesburg vividly illustrates this paradox: while public meetings and community forums proliferated after 1994, decision-

making authority often remained bureaucratically centralised. Citizens were invited to participate in discussions but rarely to shape outcomes. The empowerment model thus challenges institutions to move beyond procedural inclusion toward substantive co-governance. As Manyozo (2017) argues, participatory communication must be rooted in *praxis*, a continuous cycle of reflection and action that transforms both communicators and the social structures within which they operate.

2.4.2.3 Implications for Youth- Focused Government Communication

In the context of youth entrepreneurship and economic participation, the persistence of instrumental communication undermines the very objectives it seeks to achieve. Youth cannot be empowered through information alone; empowerment demands recognition, dialogue, and shared authorship of policy narratives. Servaes (2020) notes that empowerment communication requires communicators to act as facilitators of community dialogue rather than experts dictating solutions. Applied to government communication, this implies rethinking the role of state communicators, from disseminators of official messages to brokers of collaborative meaning-making processes.

This shift is particularly crucial in township contexts where mistrust of government communication is entrenched (Molefe, 2023; Dooms & Fayoyin, 2022). Empowerment-oriented strategies such as co-creating campaign messages with youth groups, employing peer communicators, and integrating feedback mechanisms into policy cycles can enhance both the legitimacy and effectiveness of communication. As Gumede (2022) argues, the success of youth development programmes depends less on the volume of information transmitted than on the inclusivity of the communicative process through which that information is negotiated.

The above debate between instrumental and empowerment models defines the ethical and practical boundaries of government communication in South Africa's developmental democracy. Instrumental approaches, rooted in modernisation and managerialism, prioritise message control and measurable outputs but risk perpetuating alienation and passivity among citizens. Empowerment approaches, grounded in Freirean and participatory traditions, emphasise dialogue, reflexivity, and the redistribution of communicative power. Bridging these paradigms requires reimagining communication not as a tool of governance but as a domain of citizenship, an interactive space where meaning, accountability, and development are co-

constructed. Such a transformation is essential if government communication is to contribute meaningfully to the inclusion and empowerment of South Africa's youth.

2.4.2.4 Youth Exclusion from Strategy Design

A persistent weakness in government communication for youth entrepreneurship lies in the marginal participation of youth themselves in the design and conceptualisation of communication strategies. Although official documents frequently refer to "youth engagement" or "stakeholder participation," policy processes and communication planning are still dominated by state actors, consultants and senior officials who operate far removed from the everyday realities of township youth (Ndhlovu 2017; Kilimani 2017). The result is a recurring pattern of policy–practice misalignment, where communication strategies are conceived for young people rather than with them. This exclusion, which assumes different dimensions discussed below, undermines both the legitimacy and the effectiveness of communication, reducing what could be participatory dialogue into managerial dissemination.

2.4.3 Structural and Institutional Exclusion

At the institutional level, communication planning within government departments follows bureaucratic routines that prioritise compliance, message uniformity, and central coordination. Mefalopulos (2008) argues that development communication often becomes subordinated to institutional imperatives of control, efficiency, and risk avoidance, leaving little room for participatory design. In South Africa, this pattern is reflected in the implementation of youth entrepreneurship initiatives under agencies such as the National Youth Development Agency (NYDA) and the Small Enterprise Development Agency (SEDA). These institutions routinely announce support schemes and training opportunities through centrally managed campaigns but seldom involve youth in defining the communication goals, tone or delivery mechanisms (Irungu et al., 2015).

Empirical assessments confirm that the planning of such campaigns remains largely technocratic. Kilimani (2017) observes that youth-focused communication programmes are usually conceptualised within government departments without prior consultation with intended beneficiaries, relying instead on assumptions about what youth "need to know." Similarly, Mbatha (2022) found that communication strategies designed for township entrepreneurship projects tended to adopt a prescriptive tone, presenting government information as complete and unquestionable rather than as an invitation to dialogue. These

institutional tendencies perpetuate an asymmetrical power relation in which youth are recipients rather than co-authors of communication.

2.4.3.1 Policy Rhetoric versus Participatory Practice

Policy frameworks such as the National Youth Policy (2015–2020) and the National Development Plan 2030 affirm that young people should be partners in development. Yet, implementation continues to rely on top-down decision-making (Ndhlovu 2017). The contradiction between rhetorical participation and practical exclusion has been a recurring critique in South African governance. As Servaes (2020) notes, participation that is not embedded in institutional culture becomes symbolic, serving to legitimise existing programmes without redistributing communicative power. Youth forums and consultative meetings are often scheduled after strategies have been drafted, functioning as spaces of validation rather than co-creation.

The implications of this procedural tokenism are significant. Communication campaigns that lack youth input frequently fail to resonate with their intended audiences. A study by Irungu et al. (2015) on youth entrepreneurship communication in Kenya revealed that programmes designed without youth participation generated low awareness and limited uptake, even when resources were available. Comparable patterns have been observed in South Africa, where communication about funding, training, and incubation programmes seldom translates into participation because the language, imagery, and channels employed do not reflect youth realities (Mbatha 2022).

2.4.3.2 The Epistemic Dimension of Exclusion

Beyond institutional structures, youth exclusion from strategy design is also epistemic. It reflects whose knowledge counts in defining communication priorities and success. Moyo (2020) argues that African youth are often positioned as consumers of global development discourses rather than producers of knowledge about their own contexts. This epistemic marginalisation extends to communication planning, where expertise is associated with professional communicators rather than community members. Freire's (1970) concept of "dialogue as liberation" underscores thatattributed to professional communicators rather than to empowerment begins when marginalised voices contribute to defining the problem itself. Without such dialogic inclusion, communication remains prescriptive and risks reinforcing dependency rather than agency.

In township settings, the epistemic gap manifests in the neglect of local communicative cultures. Mbatha (2022) observes that youth in Soweto and Mamelodi engage predominantly through informal networks, social media groups, and community gatherings. Yet, government campaigns continue to rely on conventional media releases and policy briefs. The absence of participatory design processes means government communicators often misread youth's communicative preferences, resulting in low message relevance and credibility. As a result, even when information about entrepreneurship support reaches township audiences, it often fails to motivate engagement or sustained participation.

2.4.3.3 The Importance of Co-design and Feedback Mechanisms

The international literature provides ample evidence that co-designed communication strategies yield higher impact. The OECD (2015) and UNDP (2022) both emphasise that participatory policy communication enhances transparency, accountability and behavioural ownership. When youth are involved at the design stage, defining objectives, content and communication channels, they develop a sense of co-ownership that increases trust and uptake. Edoho (2015) similarly argues that the success of entrepreneurship initiatives depends not only on financial inputs but also on social and communicative structures that empower participants to shape and sustain programmes. These findings suggest that youth participation in communication design is not simply a normative ideal but a practical necessity.

In South Africa, isolated examples of youth-led communication demonstrate this potential. Moyo (2020) documents how youth collectives have used digital storytelling to reinterpret government entrepreneurship messages, transforming them into culturally resonant narratives. Likewise, Mbatha (2022) highlights community radio collaborations where youth presenters translate policy information into local idioms, humour, and experiential storytelling, significantly increasing reach and comprehension. These cases show that when youth participate in communication design, campaigns become more authentic, relatable and dialogic.

2.4.3.4 Reframing Participation as Co-Governance

Scholars increasingly advocate for reframing youth participation from consultation to co-governance. Servaes (2020) and Gumucio-Dagron (2019) call for participatory structures where citizens are not invited to comment after decisions are made but are engaged from the outset as partners in framing issues and solutions. Applied to youth entrepreneurship, this

means institutionalising participatory design teams that include youth representatives, local entrepreneurs and communicators who jointly develop strategy content and delivery. Such an approach would align communication practice with the principles of participatory development communication articulated by Melkote and Steeves (2001) and resonate with Freire's (2000) vision of empowerment through dialogue.

Institutional reforms are necessary to sustain this shift. Kilimani (2017) suggests creating youth advisory councils within government communication units, while Mbatha (2022) recommends devolving campaign resources to community-based partners who can adapt messages to local contexts. These proposals address both procedural and cultural dimensions of exclusion, acknowledging that participation requires shared decision-making power, not mere consultation. Without such reforms, the gap between communication and empowerment will persist.

In light of the foregoing, it is evident that youth exclusion from the design of communication strategies represents a critical barrier to effective participatory governance in South Africa, a claim that this study seeks to examine and verify through empirical investigation.

The persistence of top-down planning not only limits message resonance but also perpetuates the very disempowerment that development communication seeks to redress. Evidence from both local and international contexts demonstrates that co-designed, youth-led communication fosters greater legitimacy, uptake, and sustainability. Moving beyond rhetorical inclusion toward genuine partnership demands a paradigm shift from designing *for* youth to designing *with* youth. Such a transformation would reposition communication as a process of shared authorship and collective agency, central to the realisation of the goals of participatory development and youth empowerment.

2.4.4 Communication Channel Mismatch

A recurring theme in the literature on government communication and youth engagement is the persistent mismatch between the media channels the government uses and young people's communicative preferences. While youth in South Africa increasingly access information through digital platforms, especially mobile phones, social media, and peer-based networks, government communication strategies continue to rely heavily on traditional broadcast and print media (Ukpong 2016; Tiwari and Verma 2018). This disconnect reflects not only institutional inertia but also a deeper conceptual problem: the continued treatment of

communication as transmission rather than interaction. As a result, communication campaigns often fail to reach, engage, or empower the intended youth audience, particularly those in township contexts characterised by dynamic, informal, and digitally mediated communicative ecologies (Gillwald 2022; Moyo 2020).

2.4.4.1 The Persistence of Traditional Media Paradigms

Government communication in South Africa has historically been modelled on the logic of the mass media era, privileging one-way channels such as radio, television, and newspapers. This model assumes that exposure to information leads to awareness, and awareness leads to behaviour change, a linear assumption rooted in modernisation theory (Servaes 2008). The Government Communication and Information System (GCIS 2018) still identifies media liaison and public information dissemination as its core functions, indicating a continued reliance on legacy media rather than on participatory or interactive forms of engagement. Pasquier (2012) notes that this mass-mediated logic is typical of bureaucratic communication systems that prioritize consistency and message control over adaptability and dialogue.

However, contemporary youth audiences operate within a radically different media environment. In South Africa, more than 85% of youth aged 18–34 use mobile devices as their primary source of news and information, while less than 20% regularly read printed newspapers (Gillwald 2022). Studies show that township youth rely extensively on platforms such as WhatsApp, Facebook, TikTok, and YouTube to access both social and economic information (Moyo 2020; Mbatha 2022). These platforms are not only sources of content but also spaces for identity construction, networking, and collaborative problem-solving. They enable dialogic, horizontal forms of participation, in contrast to the vertical structure of official communication channels.

The persistence of traditional media usage in government communication can be explained by institutional lag, the slow adaptation of bureaucratic systems to social and technological change. Tiwari and Verma (2018) argue that government communication agencies globally have been reluctant to relinquish control over the message environment, fearing that digital platforms may undermine official credibility or expose the state to public criticism. This risk-averse orientation leads to overreliance on centrally managed, scripted content that lacks spontaneity or authenticity. In the South African context, Mefalopulos (2008) warns that such

rigidity contradicts the participatory ethos of development communication, which depends on open feedback and negotiated meaning.

This institutional lag contributes to declining credibility among youth audiences. Empirical studies demonstrate that young people view government messages delivered through official channels as remote, outdated, and politically motivated (Wagner 2017; Maponya et al. 2024). Mbatha (2022) found that youth in Mamelodi and Thembisa perceived government campaigns about entrepreneurship support as bureaucratic noise, technically correct but emotionally disconnected from their lived realities. The lack of interactivity also prevents government communicators from receiving timely feedback on message effectiveness, leading to repeated cycles of low uptake and policy misalignment.

2.4.4.2 Youth-Driven and Hybrid Communication Practices

Despite structural and digital barriers, township youth have developed hybrid communication practices that combine digital and face-to-face modalities. Studies show that youth-led initiatives such as WhatsApp groups, podcasts, and community radio talk shows effectively share information on entrepreneurship, mentorship, and funding opportunities, often surpassing official campaigns in reach and credibility due to their grounding in shared experience and trust (Mbatha, 2022; Molefe, 2023). These practices exemplify *communication for social change*, emphasising dialogue and cultural relevance over institutional authority (Gumucio-Dagron, 2019).

However, government agencies rarely integrate these youth-driven networks into strategic communication frameworks. Youth media spaces are typically treated as supplementary outreach channels rather than participatory partners in co-creating content, timing, and format, limiting opportunities for mutual accountability and inclusion (Servaes, 2020; Manyozo, 2017).

While digital technologies offer potential for participatory engagement, unequal access reinforces exclusion. High data costs, intermittent electricity, and limited connectivity constrain many township youth's ability to participate in digital spaces, reproducing socio-economic divides (Gillwald, 2022; Masavah et al., 2023). Moreover, online engagement is often expressive rather than deliberative, allowing youth to share opinions without influencing policy or accessing opportunities (Bessant, 2018; Servaes, 2020). Without participatory design,

digital communication risks replicating historical asymmetries of voice, undermining its potential as a tool for empowerment.

The argument in this thesis is that addressing the communication channel mismatch requires more than technological adaptation. It demands a paradigm shift in how government conceptualises its communicative role. Development communication scholars such as Servaes (2008) and Melkote and Steeves (2001) argue for a pluralistic channel ecology that integrates traditional, digital, and interpersonal modes based on context and audience preference. Within this ecology, success is not measured by message reach but by participation, dialogue, and social learning.

For South Africa's township youth, this would entail complementing traditional media campaigns with co-created digital storytelling, interactive online workshops, and feedback-driven communication through social media platforms. It would also involve supporting youth-led content production initiatives that translate policy information into relatable narratives. As Moyo (2020) notes, youth trust communicators who "speak their language" both literally and symbolically through authenticity, immediacy, and shared experience.

To achieve this transformation, institutional cultures must shift from communication control to communication facilitation. Government communicators should act as enablers of dialogue rather than gatekeepers of information, creating participatory spaces across multiple media forms. This approach would not only modernise communication practice but also strengthen democratic accountability by recognising youth as active interlocutors in governance.

It is evident from the foregoing that the mismatch between government communication channels and youth media practices reflects the deeper disjuncture between bureaucratic rationality and participatory democracy. While youth navigate fluid, interactive, and networked communication environments, government continues to operate within hierarchical, message-centred paradigms. Bridging this gap requires institutional reform and conceptual renewal: communication must evolve from a vehicle for information delivery to a participatory infrastructure that connects policy to lived experience. Only through such alignment can government communication serve as a genuine platform for empowerment and inclusive development.

2.4.4.3 Complex and Bureaucratic Messaging

A further limitation of government communication in South Africa lies in the linguistic, stylistic, and conceptual complexity of its messaging. The effectiveness of government communication in promoting youth entrepreneurship depends not only on the choice of channels but also on the accessibility, clarity, and tone of its messages. Yet, research consistently shows that government communication in South Africa and across the Global South is often characterised by bureaucratic language, abstract policy terminology, and rigid formalism that, as discussed below, alienate rather than empower its intended audiences (Shanahan and Elliott 2009; Madiba 2013; Mbatha 2022). This communication style reflects deeper institutional cultures of hierarchy and technocracy that prioritise administrative precision over inclusivity, clarity, and dialogue. The result is what Rico (2014) describes as "semantic gatekeeping," where meaning is obscured by jargon, acronyms, and overly technical phrasing that render communication inaccessible to lay audiences.

2.4.4.4 The Linguistic and Cognitive Barriers of Official Discourse

Government communication documents, speeches, and campaigns often employ technocratic vocabulary derived from policy and bureaucratic environments. Phrases such as "economic activation," "youth capacitation," and "entrepreneurial value chain integration" are commonplace in official texts but rarely resonate with young people navigating township realities (Mbatha 2022). Such language reflects the cognitive distance between policymakers and their constituencies. As Madiba (2013) argues, this linguistic disconnect mirrors the legacy of apartheid-era bureaucracy, which privileged formal English as a language of authority and marginalised indigenous languages and oral forms of communication. In multilingual societies like South Africa, where meaning and identity are intimately tied to language, the use of inaccessible terminology deepens perceptions of exclusion and mistrust (Rico 2014).

Linguistic inaccessibility is not a superficial problem but a communicative injustice. Servaes (2020) contends that equitable communication requires that messages be not only understandable but also culturally congruent with audiences' experiences. When policy messages are delivered in a language that fails to reflect the socio-cultural realities of township youth, the government's efforts to mobilise participation risk appearing distant, elitist, or paternalistic. Madiba (2013) advocates for multilingualism and contextual translation as key strategies for participatory governance, arguing that language choice should be viewed as a political decision that affects whose voices are heard and whose knowledge is recognised.

2.4.4.5 Bureaucratic Formalism and the Culture of Administrative Control

Beyond linguistic barriers, government communication is constrained by bureaucratic formalism, a preference for procedural correctness and hierarchical validation over responsiveness and empathy. Shanahan and Elliott (2009) describe this pattern as communication-as-administration, in which information is designed to manage perception rather than facilitate understanding. In this model, communication becomes an extension of institutional control, reflecting the priorities of reporting and accountability frameworks rather than the lived realities of citizens.

In South Africa, these tendencies manifest in the tone and structure of official campaigns, which often rely on top-down directives and formulaic slogans. For example, youth entrepreneurship campaigns tend to emphasise compliance, applying for funding through approved channels, rather than creativity, collaboration, or shared ownership of development goals. Mbatha (2022) observes that this bureaucratic tone discourages youth participation by positioning young people as clients of government services rather than as partners in development. Similarly, Cornish and Dunn (2009) argue that such messaging frameworks replicate colonial communication patterns, where information flows from the centre to the margins with minimal feedback or contextual adaptation.

This administrative orientation is reinforced by the institutional configuration of communication departments, where public relations and policy compliance take precedence over participatory engagement (Pasquier 2012). The Government Communication and Information System (GCIS 2018) prescribes strict protocols for message approval and dissemination, resulting in delayed, sanitised communication that lacks immediacy and relevance. Such bureaucratic rigidity is fundamentally at odds with the rapid, interactive, and conversational communication modes favoured by youth in digital and social media spaces (Moyo 2020; Gillwald 2022). The problem of bureaucratic messaging extends beyond technical language to the politics of tone.

2.4.4.6 Symbolic Exclusion and the Politics of Tone

Rico (2014) and Servaes (2020) emphasise that tone conveys implicit power relations: whether the communicator speaks *to* or *with* the audience. In many government campaigns, the tone is didactic, prescriptive, and paternalistic, echoing the deficit view of youth as passive recipients

who must be instructed and guided. This tone is particularly evident in entrepreneurship campaigns that frame young people as "beneficiaries" rather than co-creators of solutions.

Research by Mbatha (2022) and Molefe (2023) reveals that township youth often perceive such communication as condescending, reinforcing their sense of marginalisation. Instead of building trust, bureaucratic messaging amplifies alienation by reminding audiences of institutional authority and distance. This dynamic is further compounded by visual and symbolic cues embedded in communication materials, such as formal imagery, official logos, and scripted spokespersons, that signify hierarchy rather than inclusivity (Shanahan and Elliott 2009).

Participatory communication scholarship challenges these hierarchies by redefining the communicator–audience relationship as one of dialogue and co-learning. Freire (1970) conceptualises communication as a mutual process of discovery that affirms people's capacity to name and transform their world. Translating this principle into practice requires communicative tone and style that recognise youth as knowledge bearers and collaborators. Servaes (2020) argues that tone must convey respect, empathy, and openness for empowerment to be achieved.

2.4.4.7 Simplification, Visualisation, and Participatory Framing

Addressing the problem of bureaucratic messaging requires both structural reform and creative redesign. Shanahan and Elliott (2009) propose that effective public communication should follow three principles: simplification, visualisation, and participation. Simplification does not mean reducing complexity; it means translating abstract policy ideas into concrete, relatable terms. Visualisation involves using infographics, narratives, and storytelling techniques that connect policy goals to everyday experiences. Participation means involving the intended audience in message formulation, thereby ensuring cultural and linguistic relevance.

In the South African context, these principles align closely with the goals of participatory communication for development. Mbatha (2022) demonstrates that youth entrepreneurship programmes, which incorporate peer storytelling and local idioms, through community radio, social media, and live dialogues, achieve greater comprehension and trust than formal press releases or ministerial statements. Moyo (2020) similarly notes that digital co-creation, where youth generate content that translates policy into accessible narratives, enhances both engagement and legitimacy. These practices embody the shift from bureaucratic

communication to dialogic exchange, enabling government to speak with rather than at its citizens.

Complex and bureaucratic messaging represents one of the most significant barriers to participatory government communication in South Africa. The dominance of technocratic language, procedural formalism, and hierarchical tone reflects institutional habits that privilege authority over accessibility. Such communication not only limits comprehension but also reproduces social distance between the state and township youth, undermining trust and participation. Overcoming these challenges requires reimagining government communication as a process of co-creation grounded in simplicity, multilingualism, empathy, and visual storytelling. By embracing participatory design principles and linguistic inclusivity, government communication can evolve from a bureaucratic instrument into a catalyst for youth empowerment and democratic dialogue.

2.4.4.8 Alienation through Exclusionary Representation

Alienation is reinforced by the ways youth are represented or misrepresented in government narratives. Loader et al. (2014) argue that youth are often constructed as "targets of policy" rather than as autonomous actors. In South Africa, this framing manifests in paternalistic slogans that exhort youth to be "active citizens" or "future leaders," subtly deferring agency to a distant future while denying it in the present. Moyo (2020) observes that such symbolic infantilisation deepens frustration among young people who already experience marginalisation in labour markets and political institutions.

Communication strategies rarely feature youth voices as authoritative sources of knowledge. Instead, official materials tend to showcase model beneficiary entrepreneurs who embody state success stories while ignoring the structural barriers that prevent most youth from similar achievements (Mbatha 2022). This selective visibility creates what Rico (2014) calls "representational injustice": communication that rhetorically celebrates inclusion while substantively maintaining exclusion.

2.4.4.9 Distrust, Political Alienation, and the Crisis of Legitimacy

Distrust between the South African state and its youth is a central barrier to effective government communication. This distrust is deeply rooted in historical, structural, and communicative failures that have shaped post-apartheid governance. Communication intended

to inform or empower frequently produces alienation when it appears manipulative, politicised, or disconnected from the lived experiences of young people—particularly those in township environments (Bell et al., 2008; Loader et al., 2014; Mbatha, 2022; Moyo, 2020). For many youths, government messages evoke memories of exclusion, unmet promises, and symbolic rather than substantive engagement.

At the heart of this alienation are the communicative dynamics that undermine credibility. Servaes (2020) argues that when governments use communication as a tool of persuasion and control rather than dialogue and accountability, trust collapses. Youth often perceive government outreach as politically motivated, especially during election cycles, casting doubt on its developmental intent (Ndhlovu, 2017). This politicisation erodes the moral authority of public messages, especially among younger audiences who are highly sensitive to perceived inauthenticity and inconsistency (Bell et al., 2008).

The absence of sustained feedback mechanisms compounds the problem. Government campaigns tend to be episodic and event-driven, with few channels for youth to evaluate performance or shape policy. The result is a one-way communication model that reaffirms state dominance rather than fostering participation.

These dynamics signal a broader *legitimation crisis*, where official rhetoric about empowerment, opportunity, and inclusion diverges sharply from the realities of unemployment, bureaucratic inefficiency, and corruption. As Ndhlovu (2017) notes, communication cannot be credible when governance itself lacks credibility; even sophisticated messaging is dismissed as propaganda when material conditions contradict official narratives.

Digital communication has intensified this crisis. While social media expands opportunities for engagement, it also enables youth to scrutinise, contest, and reinterpret government claims collectively. In networked environments, credibility is constructed through peer validation rather than institutional authority (Abidin, 2018). South African youth routinely use digital platforms to fact-check, parody, or challenge official narratives, transforming government communication into a site of resistance rather than compliance (Moyo, 2020).

2.4.4.10 Cultural Disconnection and the Affective Deficit

Distrust also has cultural and affective dimensions. Communication that fails to resonate emotionally with audiences cannot foster identification or solidarity. Shanahan and Elliott

(2009) argue that affective resonance, trust, empathy, and hope are central to sustaining participatory engagement. Yet, as discussed earlier, bureaucratic and formal messaging styles lack warmth, humour, and relatability. In township contexts, where oral performance, storytelling, and humour constitute vital communicative resources, the state's rigid communication tone appears sterile and alien. Mbatha (2022) found that youth participants frequently described official messages as "cold," "condescending," or "not speaking our language."

The affective deficit in government communication thus contributes to what Loader et al. (2014) term "emotional disenfranchisement", a condition where citizens disengage not because they reject the state's goals but because they feel unacknowledged as emotional and cultural beings. Participatory communication theory, rooted in Freire (1970) and later elaborated by Gumucio-Dagron (2019), insists that empowerment begins when people see themselves reflected in the communicative process. Where this recognition is absent, alienation prevails.

2.4.4.11 Rebuilding Trust through Participatory and Relational Communication

Rebuilding trust requires more than rebranding or media diversification; it demands a shift in communicative ethics. Servaes (2020) proposes a model of sustainable communication grounded in dialogue, reciprocity, and mutual accountability. Such an approach repositions communication as a relationship rather than a transaction. For government–youth relations, this entails sustained engagement through platforms that allow listening, co-creation, and feedback. Youth participatory forums, community radio dialogues, and collaborative digital storytelling offer promising avenues for such relational communication (Mbatha 2022; Moyo 2020).

Importantly, trust cannot be engineered through messaging alone; it must be earned through consistent action. Mefalopulos (2008) emphasises that credibility in development communication is inseparable from transparency and responsiveness. When communication acknowledges past failures, admits uncertainty, and demonstrates learning, it begins to repair legitimacy. This humility contrasts with the defensive, self-promotional tone that characterises much of government messaging. In participatory frameworks, admitting mistakes is not a weakness but a communicative strength that signals accountability and shared humanity.

Abidin (2018) underscores the potential of influencer collaborations and peer-led initiatives to bridge trust gaps. Youth are more likely to believe messages delivered by relatable intermediaries who share their social and cultural background. Partnering with local

entrepreneurs, artists, and social media influencers can humanise government communication, provided these collaborations are genuine and not tokenistic. As Mbatha (2022) observes, youth trust is relational: it flows from perceived authenticity and continuity rather than from formal authority.

In conclusion, distrust and political alienation represent both a symptom and a cause of the communication failures that undermine youth participation in development. When government communication is perceived as distant, politicised, or insincere, it loses the capacity to mobilise and inspire. Rebuilding trust requires a communicative transformation grounded in transparency, empathy, and co-creation. Participatory communication provides a viable framework for this transformation, as it replaces persuasion with dialogue and control with collaboration. Only when youth perceive government communication as credible, responsive, and inclusive can it evolve from an instrument of legitimation into a medium of empowerment and collective agency.

2.5 CONCLUSION

Overall, the literature review shows that the weaknesses in government communication with township youth arise from deeper structural and ideological patterns, particularly the continued reliance on one-way, message-driven approaches that prioritise control over dialogue. These practices are misaligned with the communicative realities of young people and contribute to their exclusion, limited participation, and declining trust.

While the literature highlights gaps in participation, media relevance, language accessibility, and credibility, most of these insights emerge from broad or national analyses. This study, therefore, examines how these shortcomings manifest in the specific township contexts of the target population. By engaging youth and aspiring entrepreneurs, as well as government officials, the research seeks to verify the extent to which these problems are experienced locally. Also, it investigates how such challenges can be addressed by exploring communicative practices that already resonate with youth, identifying existing spaces for dialogue and co-creation, and considering how government communication can be reshaped to be more participatory, responsive, and youth-centred.

In this way, the literature review provides the conceptual foundation for analysing government–youth communication as both a challenge and an opportunity for transformation. This leads

directly to the next chapter, which outlines the theoretical foundations of participatory communication and explains how these frameworks will guide the study's investigation into creating more inclusive, dialogic communication processes that support youth economic development in township contexts.

CHAPTER THREE

THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS FOR PARTICIPATORY GOVERNMENT COMMUNICATION AND YOUTH ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

3.1 INTRODUCTION

Communication lies at the heart of development, shaping how societies imagine progress, negotiate meaning, and enact collective change. Yet in many state-led initiatives, communication remains narrowly conceived as a tool for persuasion and message delivery rather than as a social process through which development is debated, co-created, and sustained. This reduction of communication to a technical exercise has constrained its potential to transform the relationship between the state and its citizens, particularly the youth who are often positioned as passive recipients of information. Understanding government communication as a participatory rather than an instrumental process, therefore, becomes a crucial theoretical and practical challenge.

The purpose of this chapter is to establish the conceptual foundations for analysing government communication through the participatory communication paradigm. Participatory communication theory rejects notions of communication as linear transmission and instead locates it within dialogic, relational, and culturally embedded processes of meaning making (Servaes 2008; Melkote and Steeves 2015). It recognises that communication is not simply about what is said or transmitted but about who speaks, who listens, and how mutual understanding is achieved. This perspective is particularly relevant in South African township contexts, where youth entrepreneurship unfolds within environments marked by historical marginalisation, spatial inequality, and complex socio-political dynamics.

Development communication scholarship has undergone several transformations since the 1950s, moving from modernisation and diffusion approaches towards participatory and dialogic models. The earlier traditions, influenced by scholars such as Lerner (1958) and Rogers (1962), conceived communication as an instrument for transferring innovations and modern values from developed to developing societies. These frameworks privileged top-down flows of information and placed the state and external experts at the centre of change. Over time, critical scholars such as Freire (1970), Servaes (1999), and Gumucio-Dagron (2001)

challenged this orthodoxy, arguing that development cannot be imposed through information diffusion but must be generated through dialogue, trust, and collective agency.

Participatory communication thus represents more than a methodological alternative; it embodies a different philosophy of development that values diversity, local knowledge, and social learning. Within this perspective, communication becomes an enabling condition for empowerment, transforming people from passive recipients of policy into active participants in shaping the decisions that affect their lives (Melkote and Steeves 2015; Mefalopulos 2008). The shift from persuasion to participation redefines the role of government communicators as facilitators of dialogue rather than transmitters of information.

This theoretical reorientation holds particular significance for understanding how government communication influences youth economic participation. Programmes designed to promote youth entrepreneurship often rely on mass media campaigns, awareness drives, and information sessions that prioritise message dissemination over engagement. These approaches assume that information alone is sufficient to stimulate behaviour change, overlooking the structural and communicative barriers that shape how young people interpret and act upon government initiatives. A participatory communication framework challenges these assumptions, asserting that empowerment emerges not from exposure to messages but from involvement in their creation and circulation.

Accordingly, this chapter develops the theoretical scaffolding for such an analysis. It proceeds through five interrelated sections. The first traces the evolution of development communication theory, contrasting the modernisation and diffusion of innovations paradigms with the participatory turn that reshaped the field. The second explores the philosophical and epistemological foundations of participatory communication, highlighting Freire's dialogical ethics, the relational ontology underpinning participation, and the epistemic shift from persuasion to co-creation. The third examines the Communication for Participatory Development (CFPD) model developed by Figueroa, Kincaid, and colleagues, highlighting its operational relevance to government–youth interaction. The fourth section introduces African and Ubuntu-informed perspectives that extend participatory theory into relational and ethical dimensions of community engagement. The final section synthesises these perspectives to construct the analytical lens guiding this study.

Together, these sections construct a theoretical architecture that positions communication not as a neutral conduit but as a practice through which power, meaning, and participation are continuously negotiated. Understanding this process is essential to reimagining government communication for youth entrepreneurship as an inclusive, empowering, and dialogic enterprise that aligns with democratic principles and the realities of South African townships.

3.2 THE EVOLUTION OF DEVELOPMENT COMMUNICATION THEORY

The history of development communication reflects broader ideological shifts in how development itself has been conceptualised, pursued, and contested. Since its emergence in the post-World War II era, communication for development has evolved through several distinct paradigms and theoretical shifts that mirror changes in global power relations and theoretical understandings of social change. The intellectual trajectory from modernisation and diffusion frameworks to participatory approaches represents not only a methodological transformation but also a philosophical redefinition of communication's role in human development (Servaes 2008; Melkote and Steeves 2015). It forms the conceptual basis for re-examining government communication not as information control but as participatory governance in action.

The origins of development communication are rooted in the modernisation paradigm that dominated the 1950s and 1960s. This perspective viewed development as a linear process of economic and social progress through which "traditional" societies would evolve towards the standards of the industrialised West (Lerner 1958; Schramm 1964). Communication was positioned as a tool to facilitate this transformation, primarily through the dissemination of innovations, values, and technologies from "modern" centres to "backward" peripheries. In this framework, mass media were celebrated as catalysts for social change capable of diffusing new ideas and behaviours that would modernise rural populations (Rogers 1962; Schramm 1964). Within this paradigm, government communicators and external experts occupied positions of authority, while citizens were treated as passive targets of persuasion. The focus on behavioural change through message exposure reflected a belief that information alone could transform societies.

This early phase reflected a deeply technocratic and ethnocentric worldview. Development was treated as a universal project, while communication was reduced to a technical function of information transmission. The direction of influence was top-down: experts produced messages, and recipients were expected to adopt prescribed practices. Freire (1970) famously

critiqued this orientation as a “banking model” of communication in which information was deposited into passive subjects rather than co-created through dialogue. The assumption that underdevelopment could be solved through exposure to mass media ignored the structural inequalities, power imbalances, and cultural diversities that defined postcolonial societies (Melkote 1991; Waisbord 2001).

By the late 1960s and early 1970s, growing disillusionment with modernisation theory and its communication models gave rise to alternative perspectives. Empirical studies demonstrated that despite extensive exposure to media campaigns, many development initiatives failed to produce sustainable behavioural or economic change (Beltrán 1976; Rogers 1976). Although the diffusion model provided structure for planning information campaigns, it failed to account for power relations, cultural diversity, and socio-economic inequality. Freire (1970) famously described such top-down approaches as the “banking model” of communication, in which information is deposited into passive recipients rather than co-constructed through dialogue. Similarly, Servaes (1999) and Waisbord (2001) observe that the diffusion paradigm assumed universal applicability of Western values and ignored local epistemologies and participatory decision-making processes.

The dependency theory movement, particularly influential in Latin America, reframed development as a process constrained by global economic structures rather than by local cultural deficiencies. Scholars of the Latin American dependency school, such as Cardoso and Faletto (1979) and Beltrán (1976), argued that underdevelopment was not a stage preceding modernity but a structural condition produced by global economic inequalities. Within this critique, communication was reconceptualised as a political process embedded within relations of domination and resistance, rather than a neutral technology of enlightenment (Beltrán 1979). In this context, communication began to be viewed less as a neutral channel and more as a site of ideological contestation. It was implicated in maintaining dependency by privileging Northern knowledge systems and suppressing Southern voices. Here, Development outcomes depended not only on message design but on who controlled communicative resources and whose perspectives defined reality. This critical turn opened space for more democratic and reflexive communication practices that recognised local agency and cultural specificity (Mefalopulos 2008).

The participatory turn in communication theory emerged in this context of critique and rethinking. Scholars such as Freire (1970), Servaes (1999), Gumucio-Dagron (2001), and

Melkote and Steeves (2015) articulated a new vision of communication as dialogue, reciprocity, and collective learning. Emerging from this critique, participatory communication repositioned people as active agents in shaping their own development. Freire's (1970) dialogic pedagogy provided the philosophical foundation for this shift, emphasising conscientization, the process through which individuals become aware of their socio-political conditions and act collectively to change them. Development communication was redefined as a process of horizontal dialogue through which communities identify problems, deliberate on solutions, and mobilise collective action (Gumucio-Dagron 2001; Servaes 2008). Freire's philosophy of dialogical action emphasised that liberation could not be achieved through top-down instruction but through horizontal communication that allows the oppressed to name their world and act upon it. Communication in this sense is an act of knowing and transformation, not a vehicle for transmitting externally defined knowledge. Servaes (2008) later extended this argument by proposing that development communication must reflect cultural diversity and plurality rather than impose a singular model of progress.

Gumucio-Dagron (2001) synthesised these ideas within what he termed "communication for social change", which treats communication as a process of negotiation through which communities define their own priorities, resources, and strategies. This approach rejects the notion of communication as a one-time intervention and instead frames it as an ongoing, iterative dialogue that builds trust and shared ownership. Participation becomes both a right and a method, a way of achieving equity and a means of sustaining development outcomes (Mefalopulos 2008). Participation thus became both a normative ideal and a methodological principle. It demanded that communication practitioners facilitate listening, trust, and co-decision rather than persuasion. As Tufte and Mefalopulos (2009) note, the participatory approach views communication as a cyclical process of dialogue, reflection, and adaptation that builds local ownership and sustainability. This reconceptualisation transformed the field from an information-delivery model into a process-oriented framework for social learning and empowerment.

Parallel developments in international organisations reflected this theoretical shift. UNESCO and FAO began to promote communication for development programmes that emphasised participation, local knowledge, and empowerment (FAO 2014). The 1970s and 1980s saw the institutionalisation of participatory methodologies such as participatory rural appraisal (Chambers 1994) and participatory learning and action (White 1994), which integrated

communication into the broader framework of community development. These methods prioritised listening, dialogue, and feedback as integral elements of development practice.

Within African scholarship, this participatory turn resonated strongly with indigenous philosophies of communication grounded in communalism, consultation, and collective responsibility. The African philosophy of Ubuntu, often summarised as "a person is a person through others," aligns closely with participatory principles by emphasising relational interdependence and moral accountability in communication (Mabovula 2011; Fourie 2008). This philosophical correspondence underscores that participatory communication is not merely an imported Western corrective but one that finds deep roots in African communicative traditions.

Contemporary participatory communication theorists such as Servaes (2020) and Manyozo (2017) argue that the paradigm's significance lies in its redefinition of development as a communicative process rather than an economic outcome. Manyozo (2012; 2017) argues that genuine participatory communication in Africa must be rooted in indigenous epistemologies and oral traditions that value consensus, storytelling, and collective responsibility. Development occurs when communities engage in dialogue that enables them to articulate their needs, make collective decisions, and hold institutions accountable. Within this framework, government communication must move beyond persuasion to facilitation, enabling citizens, particularly marginalised groups such as township youth to participate meaningfully in governance and economic life.

The intellectual movement from modernisation to participation therefore marks a paradigmatic reorientation in both theory and practice. Communication is no longer understood as a means of transferring information from those who "know" to those who "do not", but as a process of co-producing meaning and action. In participatory communication, dialogue replaces transmission, mutual understanding replaces persuasion, and empowerment replaces compliance. This paradigm reframes the role of the state: rather than communicating *about* development, governments must communicate *through* participatory processes that recognise citizens as partners in knowledge production and policy formulation (Melkote & Steeves 2015). It thus provides the theoretical foundation upon which this study examines government communication as both a site of struggle and a potential arena of transformation in South Africa's youth development landscape.

This evolution from diffusion to dialogue marks a paradigmatic reorientation in both theory and practice. Communication is no longer conceived as a mechanism for transmitting external knowledge but as a social practice for co-creating meaning and agency. For this study, this intellectual trajectory justifies examining government communication not merely as a technical exercise in information management but as a participatory process that can either reproduce or transform power relations in youth economic development.

The African re-grounding challenges the view of participation as merely a methodological import from Latin America or the global North. Instead, it asserts its deep cultural continuity with African notions of sociality and deliberation. Within the South African context, where historical inequalities continue to shape access to resources and voice, these perspectives underline the necessity of viewing participation not as procedural inclusion but as relational repair between state and citizen.

Having traced this historical and conceptual evolution, the next section explores in greater depth the philosophical and epistemological assumptions underpinning participatory communication theory, with particular attention to its dialogic ethics, its view of power and knowledge, and its implications for reimagining government–youth relations in development contexts.

3.2.1 Philosophical and Epistemological Foundations of Participatory Communication

Participatory communication rests on a distinctive philosophical and epistemological orientation that redefines how communication is understood and practised in development. Rather than conceiving communication as the transfer of information from an active sender to a passive receiver, participatory approaches conceptualise it as a process of mutual meaning-making rooted in dialogue, reciprocity, and collective action (Freire 1970; Servaes 2008; Melkote and Steeves 2015). This view positions communication not as a technical instrument but as a social practice through which people engage in naming, understanding, and transforming their world. For this reason, participatory communication provides both an ethical and analytical foundation for re-examining government communication strategies aimed at promoting youth entrepreneurship in South African townships.

3.2.2 Freire's Dialogic Theory and the Ethics of Participation

The most enduring philosophical influence on participatory communication derives from Paulo Freire's theory of dialogic education and social transformation. In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970), Freire challenged the "banking" model of communication in which knowledge is deposited into passive subjects. He proposed instead a dialogic process grounded in praxis, the integration of reflection and action through which individuals become aware of, and act to transform, their conditions of oppression. Dialogue for Freire is not a technique of persuasion but an ethical relationship based on humility, trust, and respect for the capacity of all people to know and decide. Through this dialogic engagement, the oppressed become subjects of their own history rather than objects of development interventions.

This dialogic orientation has shaped the development communication field. Freire's thought represents a fundamental shift from instrumental to transformative communication. It challenges the assumption that knowledge and authority flow in one direction from experts or institutions to communities and instead argues that all participants possess valid knowledge shaped by their lived experience. As Servaes (1999) observes, this dialogic conception of communication "transforms development into a process of shared discovery rather than instruction." Gumucio-Dagron (2001) similarly frames participatory communication as *horizontal dialogue* that enables communities to define their own development priorities, while Mefalopulos (2008) highlights its cyclical nature: reflection, consultation, decision, and action.

Within the context of this study, Freire's dialogic philosophy provides a critical lens for evaluating government–youth communication in township economies. Youth entrepreneurship policies in South Africa often rely on information dissemination, awareness campaigns, and training workshops that assume behavioural change will follow message exposure. Freire's insights suggest that such one-way strategies neglect the dialogic conditions necessary for empowerment. Dialogue, as an ethical and political act, demands that youth be recognised as agents of knowledge, whose perspectives and experiences shape, not merely receive, government communication.

3.2.3 Relational ontology and the African humanist perspective

Underpinning participatory communication is a relational ontology, the belief that human beings exist and act through relationships with others. Communication, from this standpoint, is not a transaction between isolated individuals but an expression of interdependence and

mutual recognition. This view aligns closely with African humanist philosophies such as *Ubuntu*, which emphasise communal solidarity, empathy, and moral accountability (Mbigi and Maree 1995; Fourie 2008; Mabovula 2011, Lubombo, 2015). The maxim *umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu*, "a person is a person through other persons" encapsulates a worldview in which identity and knowledge are co-constructed through dialogue and reciprocity.

Ubuntu offers an ontological and ethical foundation for participatory communication in African contexts (Lubombo, 2015). Whereas Freire provides the critical pedagogy of dialogue, Ubuntu situates that dialogue within the moral fabric of community life (Lubombo, 2015). Both reject domination and alienation as antithetical to authentic communication. In the South African context, where apartheid's legacy fractured social trust and produced enduring inequalities, an Ubuntu-informed communicative ethic foregrounds healing, inclusion, and shared responsibility (Lubombo, 2018). As Moyo (2005) and Manyozo (2017) argue, participatory communication in Africa is not an imported methodology but a continuation of indigenous traditions of deliberation and consensus-building found in village assemblies, storytelling, and oral performances.

A relational ontology also carries epistemological implications. It challenges Cartesian notions of isolated rational subjects and instead recognises that knowledge is produced through interaction, empathy, and collective reasoning. This principle is particularly relevant to township-based youth entrepreneurship initiatives, where communication between government and communities often fails due to hierarchical assumptions about authority. Viewing communication through an Ubuntu lens shifts the emphasis from control and compliance to inclusion and co-creation. It also calls attention to the ethical dimension of participation, where listening becomes an act of recognition and participation an affirmation of shared humanity.

The convergence between Freire's humanism and Ubuntu's ethics of relationality is particularly significant for post-apartheid South Africa, where the restoration of social trust and collective agency remains an unfinished task. As Moyo (2005) and Manyozo (2017) observe, the principles of dialogue and consensus are deeply embedded in African communicative traditions that long predate Western models of development. Thus, participatory communication in the South African context is not an imported paradigm but a return to culturally grounded modes of community engagement. For this reason, a relational ontology provides an appropriate philosophical foundation for analysing the communicative disconnection between state institutions and township youth in entrepreneurship programmes.

3.2.4 The Epistemic Shift from Persuasion to Co-creation

The epistemological foundations of participatory communication differ fundamentally from those of the modernisation and diffusion paradigms. Early development models assumed that social change could be induced through persuasive message design and behavioural conditioning (Lerner 1958; Rogers 1962; Schramm 1964). Knowledge was treated as an objective commodity produced by experts and transmitted to beneficiaries. Participatory communication rejects this logic, arguing instead that knowledge emerges through dialogue and shared experience (Servaes 2020; Melkote and Steeves 2015).

Freire's notion of *praxis*, reflection and action upon the world to transform it, captures this epistemic shift. Communication becomes a process through which people discover meaning together and act upon that understanding. Similarly, Habermas's theory of communicative action (1984) provides a parallel argument: legitimacy and social integration are achieved when communication is oriented toward mutual understanding rather than strategic manipulation. However, participatory communication extends Habermas's rationalist framework by recognising affective, cultural, and embodied dimensions of dialogue (Tufte 2017; Gumucio-Dagron 2019). It acknowledges that meaning is not produced solely through reasoned argument but also through shared emotion, experience, and cultural expression.

This epistemic shift replaces persuasion with co-creation as the central principle of communicative practice. Meaning is generated collectively rather than imposed from above. Habermas's theory of communicative action (1984) provides a philosophical parallel, asserting that legitimacy arises from intersubjective agreement achieved through rational discourse. Yet participatory communication moves beyond rationality to include affective and cultural dimensions of dialogue (Tufte 2017; Gumucio-Dagron 2019).

This epistemic transformation has direct implications for government communication. When state communication operates within a persuasion model, it assumes that information asymmetry is the primary barrier to participation. In reality, as Ndhlovu (2017) and Sinwell (2011) demonstrate, barriers often lie in relational and institutional asymmetries, youth feel unheard, unseen, or uninvited into processes that affect them. Co-creation, therefore, becomes an epistemological and political necessity. It demands spaces where knowledge circulates horizontally and where the experiential insights of youth are treated as legitimate contributions to development planning.

Within youth entrepreneurship programmes, co-creation might manifest in the collaborative design of communication campaigns, participatory monitoring systems, or youth-led evaluation mechanisms. Such practices embody what Tufte (2017) calls "communication as engagement," in which dialogue is both the means and the end of development. They enable a transition from transactional communication where governments speak *to* youth, to relational communication where governments learn *with* youth.

3.2.5 Ethical and Practical Implications for Government–Youth Communication

The philosophical and epistemological commitments outlined above carry profound ethical implications. Freire's dialogic ethics and Ubuntu's relational morality converge on the principle that participation is not simply a procedural requirement but a moral duty grounded in respect for human dignity. Communication that excludes, dominates, or manipulates violates this ethic. Genuine participation requires that institutions listen with humility, share power, and remain open to being transformed by the dialogue itself (Melkote 2003; Servaes 2020).

Participation is thus an ethical project grounded in respect for human dignity and autonomy. Freire (1970) describes dialogue as an act of love and courage because it affirms the humanity of both speaker and listener. Servaes (2008) and Melkote (2003) similarly argue that participatory communication operationalises democratic values such as inclusion, transparency, and accountability. Within African thought, these ethical commitments find resonance in Ubuntu's concern for social harmony and justice (Mabovula 2011).

For government communication, this ethical perspective implies a shift from managing public opinion to facilitating meaningful engagement. Communication that merely informs citizens of existing policies, without inviting their voices into the process, cannot claim to be participatory. The ethical test, therefore, lies in whether communication structures allow youth to articulate their own needs, challenge assumptions, and co-shape development interventions.

The philosophical and epistemological foundations of participatory communication have direct implications for this study's central concern: the transformation of government communication for youth entrepreneurship from instruments of dissemination into platforms of empowerment.

In the context of South African youth entrepreneurship, this ethical stance reframes government communication as a site of accountability and partnership. Policies and programmes that aim to empower youth cannot succeed if their communicative foundations reproduce exclusion.

Instead, participatory communication calls for sustained dialogue across multiple levels namely local, provincial, and national where youth voices are incorporated not only in programme implementation but also in policy design and evaluation. This is particularly relevant to township settings, where communication failures often mirror structural inequalities in access, representation, and trust (Mthembu 2018; Hlungwani and Sayeed 2018).

Understanding communication as relational, dialogic, and co-creative provides a lens for interrogating whether current strategies in Gauteng's township contexts enable or constrain youth agency. These principles justify the study's emphasis on dialogue, inclusion, and shared meaning-making as the essential criteria for evaluating the participatory quality of government communication.

Participatory communication's philosophical and epistemological underpinnings rooted in Freire's dialogic theory, Ubuntu's relational ontology, and the epistemic shift from persuasion to co-creation form the normative and analytical foundation for this study. It offers both a theoretical and ethical response to the paradox identified in Chapter One, persistent youth unemployment despite extensive policy intervention. The challenge is not only to design better programmes but to transform the communicative processes through which such programmes are conceived, conveyed, and enacted. The next section operationalises these philosophical commitments through the CFPD model, which provides the analytical framework for examining how government communication can move from information dissemination to participatory governance.

3.3 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND ANALYTICAL MODEL

The Communication for Participatory Development (CFPD) Model

The theoretical framework of this study draws primarily on the CFPD model, which provides an operational bridge between the philosophical foundations of participatory communication and the practical analysis of real-world development processes. The CFPD model, developed by Figueroa and Kincaid (2001), represents one of the most comprehensive frameworks for understanding communication as a process of collective change. It integrates theoretical insights from Freire's dialogic pedagogy, Habermas's communicative action, and participatory development theory into a single cyclical model of communication, action, and transformation. Unlike linear diffusion models that treat communication as message transmission, the CFPD

model shown in Figure 3.1 conceives it as an iterative process of *community dialogue* and *collective action* through which participants define problems, plan responses, and evaluate outcomes (Kincaid and Figueroa 2009; Lennie and Tacchi 2013).

Figure 3.1: The Communication for Participatory Development (CFPD) Model (Kincaid and Figueroa, 2009).

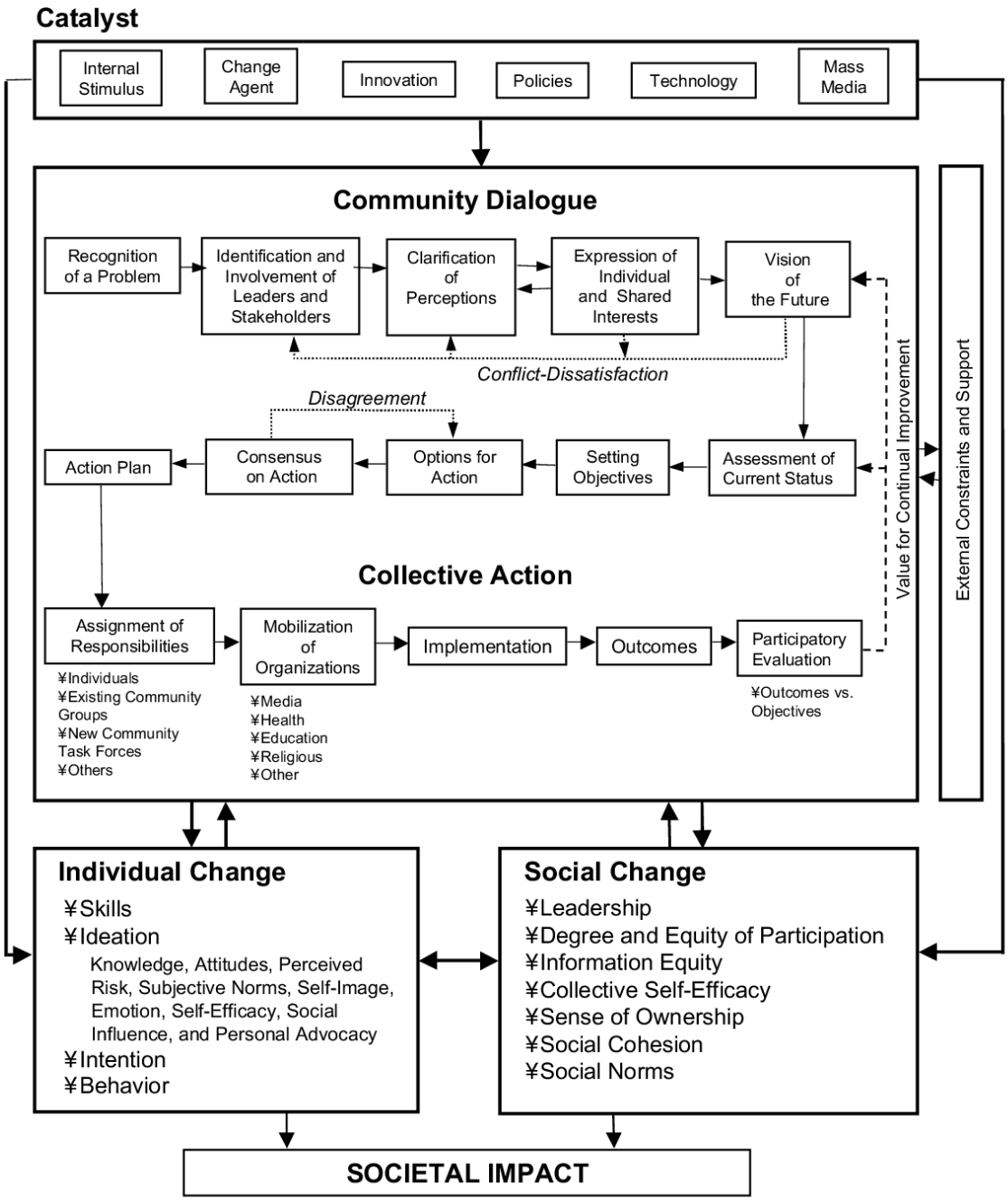


Figure 3.1 illustrates the cyclical and reflexive nature of this model, showing the continuous flow between catalysts, community dialogue, collective action, and social change. The model recognises communication as both a social catalyst and a mediating process linking individual, social, and structural transformation. Its architecture consists of five interrelated levels namely: *catalyst*, *community dialogue*, *collective action*, *individual and social change*, and *societal impact*.

These levels are not sequential but cyclical, reinforcing the model's emphasis on reflexivity and feedback. This conceptualisation provides an analytical bridge between the philosophical premises of participatory communication discussed earlier and their practical application in contexts such as youth entrepreneurship promotion. It treats participation as both a means and an end, an ongoing process through which communities negotiate meanings, build consensus, and exercise agency.

3.3.1 Catalyst: Initiating Participatory Processes

The model begins with a catalyst, an event or condition that stimulates recognition of a problem or an opportunity for improvement. Catalysts may arise internally within communities or externally through government policy, technological innovation, or socio-economic pressures.

In the context of this study, catalysts include persistent youth unemployment, policy interventions such as the NYDA programmes, and government-led communication campaigns intended to stimulate entrepreneurship in township economies. The presence of a catalyst alone, however, does not guarantee transformation. Catalysts are only transformative when they prompt inclusive communicative processes that bring diverse stakeholders into deliberation. Without community engagement, catalytic events often lead to top-down responses that reproduce dependency rather than foster empowerment. The CFPD framework, therefore, emphasises that effective catalysts must trigger horizontal communication between institutions and communities, fostering joint problem recognition.

3.3.2 Community dialogue: Negotiating meaning and building consensus

The second and most crucial component of the CFPD model is *community dialogue*, the participatory space where individuals and groups deliberate on shared issues. Dialogue allows participants to exchange perceptions, clarify misunderstandings, explore alternatives, and

develop a shared vision of the future. Unlike consultation exercises that merely collect feedback, dialogue is an iterative process of negotiation and meaning-making grounded in mutual respect (Figueroa et al. 2002; Tufte and Mefalopulos 2009).

The CFPD model stresses that disagreement and conflict are not signs of failure but essential moments of clarification that enrich understanding (Figueroa et al. 2002). The process culminates in consensus on action, an agreed definition of the problem, and the goals to be pursued. In this study, community dialogue is the stage at which township youth, government officials, and intermediary organisations (such as SEDA or Thusong Centres) deliberate on barriers to youth entrepreneurship, identify communication gaps, and co-create potential solutions. Community dialogue thus serves as the analytical lens through which government–youth engagement is examined. It asks whether township youth have meaningful opportunities to voice their concerns, whether government communicators listen and adapt, and whether participatory platforms such as Thusong Service Centres, community workshops, or digital forums function as dialogic spaces rather than one-way information channels. As Freire (1970) and Servaes (2008) emphasise, dialogue is not a technique but an ethical stance: it affirms the equality of participants and the legitimacy of diverse knowledges.

3.3.3 Collective action: Translating dialogue into practice

Once dialogue generates shared understanding, participants move towards *collective action*, the implementation of jointly defined solutions. In the CFPD model, collective action embodies the operationalisation of participation. It converts shared ideas into coordinated practice. Community members, institutions, and intermediary organisations assume complementary roles, mobilising resources and skills to achieve common goals (Kincaid and Figueroa 2009). Here, responsibilities are assigned, community organisations are mobilised, and implementation begins. The process draws on existing networks, including local business associations, community task forces, media, educational institutions, and faith-based organisations. The goal is to convert shared understanding into coordinated practice.

For Figueroa and Kincaid (2001), collective action represents the operationalisation of dialogue, in which reflection gives rise to practice. In participatory communication, implementation is not the domain of external experts but a collaborative endeavour involving the community as both designers and executors of change. In this study, collective action encompasses co-created initiatives among government agencies, youth groups, and local

economic development actors. Examples include collaborative entrepreneurship hubs, mentorship networks, and communication campaigns designed with youth input. The presence or absence of collective action indicates whether government communication transcends consultation to enable youth participation in the actual design and execution of entrepreneurship initiatives.

3.3.4 Participatory Evaluation: Reflection, Feedback, and Learning

The CFPD model embeds *participatory evaluation* within collective action as a continuous process of reflection, assessment, and feedback. Participatory evaluation involves collective reflection on progress, learning from outcomes, and revising strategies accordingly. Feedback loops ensure that knowledge generated through experience informs subsequent cycles of dialogue and action (Lennie and Tacchi 2013). It examines whether outcomes correspond with objectives and whether the process remains inclusive, transparent, and empowering. Participatory evaluation also generates new insights that feed back into subsequent cycles of dialogue and action, reinforcing adaptability and learning (Lennie and Tacchi 2013).

In government communication systems, participatory evaluation translates into institutional responsiveness, the capacity to adapt strategies based on youth feedback. The study therefore examines whether communication platforms provide mechanisms for feedback, whether youth voices influence future interventions, and whether policy communication evolves through iterative learning. In township contexts, where policy fatigue and mistrust are prevalent (Ndhlovu 2017; Maponya et al. 2024), such feedback mechanisms are critical to restoring credibility and participation.

3.3.5 Individual and Social Change

The model identifies two interdependent levels of transformation: individual change (micro-level) and social change (meso-level). It posits that sustained community dialogue and collective action result in both *individual* and *social* change. Individual change refers to shifts in skills, knowledge, attitudes, and behaviours that enhance self-efficacy and agency. Social change encompasses broader shifts in leadership, participation, social cohesion, and collective ownership (Figueroa and Kincaid 2001). The interaction between these two levels generates the momentum for transformation beyond the project or campaign.

In township settings, this dimension is particularly salient. In entrepreneurship, individual change might manifest as enhanced entrepreneurial awareness, motivation, or skill acquisition among youth, while social change emerges through strengthened trust, peer collaboration, and community-driven initiatives. Youth who gain information, confidence, and entrepreneurial skills through participatory processes can become catalysts for local innovation and use these skills and strategies to identify opportunities to create their own enterprises within the community.

At the same time, social change manifests when communities develop supportive norms, trust in institutions, and shared aspirations for economic participation. Communication acts as the bridge between these levels. It enables individuals to connect personal aspirations with collective strategies, reinforcing both agency and solidarity. Thus, communication that empowers youth individually while strengthening social solidarity contributes to both economic and democratic renewal.

3.3.6 Societal Impact

At the macro level, the model culminates in *societal impact*, the long-term structural effects of participatory communication on governance, policy, and social justice, that is the institutionalisation of participatory communication within governance systems. When iterative cycles of dialogue, action, and evaluation become embedded in public administration, they reshape how policies are designed, implemented, and assessed. This represents the transition from *project-based participation* to *systemic participatory governance* (Servaes 2020; Gumucio-Dagron 2019).

For this study, societal impact is assessed in terms of whether participatory communication within youth entrepreneurship programmes leads to enduring structural changes such as the incorporation of youth advisory councils, open data portals, or co-created monitoring frameworks. The goal is to determine whether communication fosters not only temporary collaboration but also institutional transformation toward inclusivity and accountability.

3.4 ANALYTICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF THE CFPD MODEL FOR THIS STUDY

The CFPD model provides the central analytical framework for this study's interrogation of government communication on youth entrepreneurship in South African townships. The

model's conceptual depth and cyclical structure make it especially appropriate for analysing the complex interplay between policy, communication, and participation. It serves both a diagnostic and generative function: diagnostically, it exposes weaknesses such as limited feedback mechanisms, bureaucratic communication styles, and the exclusion of youth voices; generatively, it offers a normative guide for designing communicative processes that are dialogic, inclusive, and empowering.

At the most fundamental level, the CFPD model reframes communication as a *social practice* rather than a technical process of information transfer. This distinction is vital for understanding the communicative failures that often undermine South Africa's youth entrepreneurship initiatives. In contrast to transactional models, in which government agencies act as message senders and citizens as passive receivers, the CFPD model advances a transformative view in which citizens are co-creators of meaning and partners in policy formulation. This orientation demands epistemic openness, the recognition that legitimate knowledge resides not only within formal institutions but also in the lived experiences, local languages, and social networks of communities (Melkote and Steeves 2015; Gumucio-Dagron 2019).

When applied to youth entrepreneurship in township settings, the CFPD framework allows for an analysis of communication at multiple levels: interpersonal, organisational, and systemic. Township youth remain a dynamic yet marginalised constituency whose engagement with government entrepreneurship programmes is constrained by both structural inequalities and communicative disconnects. The model provides a lens to explore how institutional narratives, media channels, and participatory platforms shape, or restrict, the agency of young people to engage with and benefit from development interventions (Ndhlovu 2017; Mthembu 2018). In this regard, participatory communication becomes not only a development strategy but a form of social repair, capable of rebuilding trust and legitimacy in contexts marked by historical exclusion and fragile state–citizen relationships.

In practical terms, this study applies the CFPD model to interrogate four critical dimensions of government communication for youth entrepreneurship, namely:

(a) **Dialogic inclusion** focusing on whether government communication enables genuine participation and voice.

(b) **Reciprocity and trust,** examining whether feedback mechanisms and accountability processes exist.

(c) **Relevance and cultural resonance,** particularly on whether communication aligns with youth realities and languages, and

(d) **Empowerment and sustainability,** exploring whether communication facilitates long-term capability and ownership.

(e) **Diagnostic tool for young entrepreneurs to identify market niche to establish business,** by providing youth with the knowledge, skills, and insights to recognise market gaps, assess community needs, and identify viable opportunities for establishing their own enterprises.

Each dimension reflects one or more of the model's core dimensions namely *community dialogue*, *collective action*, *participatory evaluation*, and *social change* within the specific institutional and socio-economic realities of South African four township case studies (Soweto, Mamelodi, Thembisa, and Sebokeng) and across participant groups (youth entrepreneurs, government communicators, and local development practitioners).

Township youth occupy a liminal space in South Africa's development landscape, strategically positioned as the target of entrepreneurship policy yet often excluded from the communicative processes that shape those policies. The CFPD model enables analysis of this paradox by situating communication at the intersection of structure and agency. It interprets government communication as both a reflection of institutional logics and a site where youth agency can be either constrained or enabled (Ndhlovu 2017; Mthembu 2018).

Applying the CFPD framework thus allows this study to address a central empirical question: To what extent do government communication practices enable township youth to move from passive awareness to active participation in entrepreneurship initiatives? In contexts characterised by inequality and mistrust, the CFPD model highlights the role of participatory communication in rebuilding relational trust, facilitating learning, and strengthening collective efficacy.

Methodologically, the CFPD model underpins the study's analytical strategy by providing the scaffolding for coding, categorising, and interpreting qualitative data from township youth, government officials, and local economic development practitioners. Key thematic categories such as *dialogue*, *trust*, *reciprocity*, *accessibility*, and *relevance* are examined in relation to the

model's iterative cycle of participation and feedback. This enables systematic comparison across township cases and facilitates synthesis of perspectives across participant groups.

Conceptually, the CFPD model positions communication as both the *subject* and *mechanism* of development. This duality is central to the research problem articulated in Chapter One, the paradox of persistent youth unemployment and low entrepreneurial participation despite extensive policy interventions. The model enables the study to interpret this paradox not merely as a policy failure but as a communicative disjuncture: a breakdown in dialogue, mutual recognition, and co-creation between state and citizen.

Building on these insights, the study proposes in Chapter Seven an *adapted participatory communication framework for youth entrepreneurship*. This framework integrates the CFPD principles with contextual determinants unique to township settings, including socio-economic marginalisation, digital exclusion, and the relational ethic of Ubuntu. It is both diagnostic and prescriptive, evaluating existing government communication practices against participatory ideals while offering a conceptual pathway toward more inclusive, responsive, and youth-centred engagement.

The analytical utility of the CFPD model in this study lies in its ability to link participatory communication theory to empirical investigation. Table 3.1 below illustrates how the major stages of the CFPD process, ranging from the initial catalytic stimulus to societal impact are operationalised within the context of this study. The table aligns each component of the model with its corresponding analytical focus and empirical indicators as applied to government communication for youth entrepreneurship in township settings.

CFPD Stage / Component	*Core Processes (Figueroa & Kincaid, 2001)*	*Analytical Focus in This Study*	*Indicators in Township Contexts*
Catalyst	Triggering event or recognition of a problem through innovation, policies, or internal stimulus.	Identification of structural and communicative barriers to youth entrepreneurship participation.	Youth unemployment, policy interventions and government campaigns on entrepreneurship.
Community Dialogue	Recognition of problems, clarification of perceptions, exchange of ideas, expression of shared interests, and visioning for the future.	Evaluation of participatory spaces where youth and government engage in dialogue.	Consultation meetings, workshops, youth summits, Thusong Service Centres, digital platforms, and SM engagement.
Consensus and Collective Action	Setting objectives, forming action plans, assigning responsibilities, and mobilising community organisations.	Assessment of how dialogue outcomes translate into joint action for entrepreneurship	Co-created initiatives, partnerships between youth and municipal actors, mentorship or incubation programmes
Participatory Evaluation	Continuous reflection, feedback, and assessment of progress against objectives.	Analysis of institutional responsiveness and feedback loops within communication systems.	Mechanisms for youth feedback, policy adjustments, and communication redesigns.
Individual Change	Development of new skills, attitudes, and behaviours that enhance agency and participation.	Examination of how communication influences youth awareness, confidence, and entrepreneurial action.	Shifts in youth knowledge of programmes, perceived self-efficacy, and engagement with entrepreneurship opportunities.
Social Change	Collective outcomes such as improved leadership, participation, social cohesion, and information equity.	Exploration of communication's role in fostering trust, legitimacy, and social capital within township communities.	Evidence of collective mobilisation, youth-led associations, improved perceptions of government legitimacy, and participatory governance practices.
Societal Impact	Institutionalisation of participatory practices and transformation of governance systems.	Whether communication contributes to systemic change	Policy reforms, integration of participatory mechanisms into government communication frameworks.

Table 3.1: CFPD model in the study of government communication and youth entrepreneurship in township contexts

This framework guides the data analysis presented in subsequent chapters and provides a coherent structure for interpreting the communicative dynamics between government and youth. It enables a critical interrogation of how communication mediates power and participation in development practice, and it advances the central proposition that *effective government communication for youth entrepreneurship requires dialogic, relational, and iterative engagement that transforms recipients into partners in development*. This proposition forms the foundation for interpreting the empirical findings presented in the subsequent chapters and the development of an *adapted participatory communication model for youth entrepreneurship* (see Chapter Seven) which integrates the CFPD principles with contextual factors unique to South African township environments such as socio-economic marginalisation, digital inequalities, and the ethos of Ubuntu.

3.5 UBUNTU – INFORMED CRITIQUE AND EXTENSION OF THE CFPD MODEL

While the CFPD model has become one of the most comprehensive frameworks for participatory communication in development contexts, its conceptual foundations reveal epistemic and cultural limitations when applied to African realities. The model emerged primarily from Latin American and Western traditions of participatory thought, drawing heavily on Freire's dialogic pedagogy and Habermas's communicative action (Figueroa et al. 2002; Kincaid and Figueroa 2009). Although these influences provide a powerful corrective to diffusion-based models, they remain embedded within epistemological assumptions that privilege rational discourse, consensus through reason, and procedural participation. From an African perspective, this orientation neglects the affective, moral, and relational dimensions of communication that are central to community life. Ubuntu, as an indigenous philosophy of being and knowing, offers both a critique and an extension of CFPD by re-centring participation within the ethical fabric of human interdependence.

3.6 THE EPISTEMIC LIMITS OF CFPD

The CFPD model conceptualises participation as a process of collective dialogue and action aimed at achieving social change. Yet its operational logic often privileges process over relationship. Participation is structured through stages, catalyst, dialogue, collective action, and evaluation, which risk becoming technocratic if detached from the moral obligations that bind communicators and participants. Scholars such as Lennie and Tacchi (2013) and Servaes (2020) caution that while the CFPD model is flexible, it remains prone to instrumentalization

when adopted by state or donor institutions. Its cyclical structure, though inclusive in theory, may in practice reproduce hierarchical relations if the ethics of care, empathy, and mutual accountability are absent.

Ubuntu exposes this limitation by insisting that participation cannot be reduced to coordinated activity or procedural inclusion. It is, at its core, a moral encounter premised on recognition of shared humanity. Whereas CFPD frames participation primarily as a methodological cycle, Ubuntu views it as an ontological condition: one participates because one exists through others (*umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu*). This ontological grounding transforms the meaning of dialogue from negotiation of interests to affirmation of mutual personhood. In township contexts, where historical marginalisation has fractured trust between citizens and the state, this distinction is crucial. Dialogue must be restorative as well as deliberative; it must heal social relations, not merely facilitate information exchange.

Ubuntu also challenges the CFPD model's implicit rationalism by broadening the notion of communication to include affective, spiritual, and cultural dimensions. As Fourie (2008) and Mabovula (2011) argue, communication in the African humanist tradition is not a transaction but a process of building and maintaining social harmony. Its goal is not only mutual understanding but relational balance. In this sense, Ubuntu transforms participatory communication from an act of coordination into a moral responsibility to sustain the well-being of the community.

Freirean dialogic theory assumes equality in dialogue as a precondition for empowerment. Ubuntu deepens this by framing equality as a moral duty rather than a procedural assumption. Dialogue becomes a practice of empathy, an ethical readiness to listen, accommodate, and act in ways that preserve the dignity of others. For government communication, this implies that engagement with township youth must move beyond consultation exercises to embody respect, humility, and responsiveness. The test of participatory quality thus lies not only in the presence of dialogue but in the quality of the relationships it nurtures.

A further critique concerns the CFPD model's residual focus on community processes that are often externally initiated or facilitated by development agencies. Even in its participatory form, CFPD tends to conceptualise change as something catalysed from outside the community, by policies, programmes, or communicators who enable collective dialogue. Ubuntu reverses this

orientation by locating agency within the community itself. Change is not introduced but emerges from the moral and social energies of the collective.

As Manyozo (2017) and Chasi and Rodny-Gumede (2020) note, African communication systems historically relied on endogenous structures, *lekgotla*, *indaba*, and communal storytelling, as participatory platforms that required no external catalyst. By foregrounding these indigenous practices, Ubuntu calls for the decolonisation of participatory communication models that continue to depend on external facilitation. It invites a re-imagining of government communication as partnership rather than provision, where the state participates in community processes rather than communities participating in state projects.

In the context of youth entrepreneurship, this shift has profound implications. Government programmes often treat young people as the objects of empowerment rather than as co-producers of development. Ubuntu's ethic of mutuality reframes this relationship: youth and state exist in reciprocal dependence. Effective communication therefore requires not only the dissemination of opportunities but also the creation of dialogic structures in which youth shape the language, tone, and direction of entrepreneurship initiatives.

The CFPD model assumes that successful communication culminates in social and societal change. Yet the mechanisms of accountability it envisages remain largely procedural, feedback loops, evaluation reports, or iterative dialogues. Ubuntu critiques this proceduralism by proposing *relational accountability*, a moral commitment to responsiveness grounded in empathy and collective responsibility (Ramose 2002; Mabovula 2011). Accountability in an Ubuntu framework is not imposed from above but enacted through relationships of trust and mutual recognition.

Applying this insight to government communication implies that success should be measured not only by awareness or participation metrics but by the quality of relationships forged between institutions and citizens. A communication strategy that informs but does not transform relational dynamics fails the test of Ubuntu. This approach thus extends the CFPD model by embedding evaluation within moral practice: communicative success is achieved when participation strengthens solidarity and restores the moral legitimacy of governance.

The integration of Ubuntu and CFPD creates a hybrid theoretical framework particularly suited to analysing communication in South Africa's township economies. CFPD offers a processual

map of participation involving dialogue, action, and feedback while Ubuntu supplies the ethical substance that animates those processes. Together, they advance a conception of communication as both structural and moral transformation: structural in its institutional re-organisation of dialogue, and moral in its restoration of dignity and relational trust.

In this study, the Ubuntu-informed extension of CFPD provides three critical analytical insights:

(a) Participation as moral praxis: Here, communication must embody respect, empathy, and reciprocity, not merely enable interaction.
(b) Agency as relational: Empowerment arises through community interdependence rather than individual autonomy.
(c) Accountability as ethical responsiveness: Effective communication is judged by its capacity to repair trust and affirm shared humanity.

By combining the CFPD model's processual logic with Ubuntu's ethical humanism, the study constructs an integrative framework for analysing government communication as both a site of institutional practice and a moral encounter between state and citizen. Ubuntu enriches participatory communication theory by rooting it in African epistemologies that value dialogue, empathy, and collective responsibility. In doing so, it provides the ethical and cultural complement to the CFPD model's procedural logic. The synthesis of these two frameworks allows this study to conceptualise government communication not simply as an administrative function but as a moral and social relationship that can either empower or alienate.

For youth entrepreneurship in township contexts, this theoretical convergence offers a pathway to reimagine communication as an instrument of both participation and social repair. It asserts that inclusive development requires communicative justice the recognition of all voices as equal and the creation of dialogic spaces where shared meaning and action emerge. This integrative framework underpins the analytical approach employed in the empirical chapters that follow, guiding the interpretation of how government communication practices facilitate or constrain youth participation and agency in South Africa's township economies.

The resulting analytical model is therefore both normative and diagnostic. It evaluates existing government communication practices against participatory ideals, while also offering a conceptual pathway for more inclusive and responsive engagement.

3.7 CONCLUSION

The insights derived from this framework inform the development of an adapted participatory communication model for youth entrepreneurship presented in Chapter Seven. That model synthesises CFPD principles with contextual realities of South African township life, particularly socio-economic marginalisation, digital inequality, and the ethical imperative of Ubuntu, thereby advancing a relational and inclusive approach to government communication for development. The next chapter outlines the methodological framework that operationalises these theoretical insights, detailing how data are generated, analysed, and interpreted to assess the participatory quality of government communication in South Africa's township contexts.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

4.1 INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this study is to examine how government communication strategies influence youth participation in entrepreneurship in South Africa's township contexts and to assess whether these strategies embody participatory communication principles. This methodological chapter explains how the research design, paradigm, and methods were selected and operationalised to address this purpose. The study sought to generate contextually grounded and empirically informed insights to inform the redesign of government communication practices to be more dialogic, inclusive, and empowering for township youth.

The chapter builds upon the theoretical framework developed in Chapter Three, which established communication as a relational and participatory process rather than a linear act of transmission. From this standpoint, government communication is interpreted as a social practice that both reflects and shapes relations of power, legitimacy, and participation. The methodological choices made in this study, anchored in the transformative paradigm and qualitative approach executed through a multi-case design, flow directly from this interpretive position. The transformative paradigm provides a philosophical foundation for studying the experiences of marginalized groups, such as township youth, by combining inquiry with social justice and empowerment (Mertens, 2009; Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017).

Qualitative inquiry is used to explore participants' lived experiences and meanings within their socio-economic and communicative contexts. This approach recognizes that human experience is complex, subjective, and contextually situated (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). It allowed for the interpretation of how youth and government officials co-construct meaning around entrepreneurship communication, revealing gaps between policy intent and lived reality.

The research adopted a multi-case study design across four Gauteng townships, namely Soweto, Mamelodi, Thembisa, and Sebokeng. Each site serves as a bounded case representing distinct yet comparable socio-economic and communicative contexts. This design enabled analytic comparison across cases to identify patterns of convergence and divergence, thereby strengthening the study's explanatory power (Stake, 2006; Yin, 2018). Within each case, the

unit of analysis is the communicative process surrounding youth entrepreneurship promotion, while the embedded units include youth (both active and aspiring entrepreneurs), government communication officials, municipal local economic development (LED) practitioners, and Thusong Service Centres.

To obtain a holistic understanding, the study employed four complementary methods: semi-structured interviews, focus groups, participant observation, and document analysis. These methods collectively enabled triangulation to enhance the depth, reliability, and validity of findings (Patton, 2015). Semi-structured interviews captured personal narratives and interpretations; focus groups revealed interactive, collective perspectives; participant observations at Thusong Service Centres documented communicative practices in natural contexts; and document analysis situated these experiences within broader institutional and policy frameworks.

The methodological design is explicitly linked to the analytical dimensions of the CFPD model and the Ubuntu-informed participatory ethics discussed in Chapter Three. These frameworks inform the study's epistemological stance, which values co-created knowledge, reflexivity, and communicative equality between researcher and participants. The remainder of this chapter explains how these philosophical and theoretical foundations translate into empirical procedures.

4.2 PHILOSOPHICAL AND METHODOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS OF THE STUDY

The methodological foundation of this study is grounded in an understanding that social reality is neither fixed nor singular but continuously constructed through human interaction, discourse, and power relations. Ontologically, the study adopts a constructivist position, which recognises that multiple realities exist and are shaped by social, cultural, historical, and institutional contexts (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Mouton, 1996). Reality is viewed not as an external phenomenon to be measured but as a negotiated space of meaning in which actors, government communicators, youth entrepreneurs, and communities co-create their social worlds. Within the South African context, this view is particularly pertinent: the lived realities of township youth are products of material conditions, historical inequalities, and the communicative systems that mediate their access to state structures. Thus, government communication is not merely an instrument of policy delivery but a constitutive process through which social

relations, legitimacy, and power are continually reproduced or contested (Fairclough, 1995; Servaes, 2008).

Epistemologically, the study is informed by relational and dialogic epistemologies, which hold that knowledge is co-constructed through social interaction, dialogue, and reflexivity (Freire, 1970; Chilisa, 2012). Knowledge does not exist independently of the knower; rather, it emerges from engagement, negotiation, and shared interpretation between the researcher and participants. This perspective rejects positivist notions of objective or value-free inquiry, recognising instead that all knowledge production is situated within particular historical and cultural frameworks (Hesse-Biber, 2013). In this view, participants are not passive data sources but epistemic partners whose lived experiences and interpretive insights are central to understanding how government communication shapes, and is shaped by, youth participation in entrepreneurship. The epistemological stance therefore privileges subjective meaning, local narratives, and community wisdom as legitimate forms of knowledge.

This relational epistemology is further strengthened by African humanist perspectives, particularly the philosophy of *Ubuntu*, which views knowledge as inherently communal, ethical, and oriented toward collective flourishing (Ramose, 2002; Metz, 2015; Chasi, 2021). Ubuntu-inspired methodologies challenge extractive research practices by foregrounding empathy, reciprocity, and relational accountability (Chilisa, 2012). Within this framework, the act of inquiry becomes a moral encounter aimed at restoring relational balance between researcher and participants, as well as between citizens and state institutions. Ubuntu thus extends Freire's (1970) dialogic principles by embedding them in an ontological ethic of interdependence and mutual respect. Applied to this study, it underscores that the relationship between government and township youth must be communicative, participatory, and grounded in recognition of shared humanity.

The study is situated within the transformative paradigm, which integrates these ontological and epistemological assumptions into a broader commitment to social justice, equity, and empowerment (Mertens, 2009; Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017). The transformative paradigm posits that research should expose and challenge structural inequalities while amplifying marginalised voices. It views reality as socially constructed through historical and political forces that privilege certain groups and silence others, making the task of research not only interpretive but also emancipatory (Mertens, 2010; Chilisa, 2012). In this paradigm, knowledge production is a collaborative process in which participants and researchers co-create understanding to

influence practice and policy. The approach is therefore particularly relevant for examining the power asymmetries inherent in government communication systems and for envisioning more participatory, inclusive models of engagement.

Consistent with this philosophical foundation, the study employs a qualitative research approach to explore the perceptions, experiences, and communicative realities of township youth. Qualitative inquiry privileges depth over breadth, focusing on meanings, processes, and experiences rather than numerical generalisations (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Creswell & Poth, 2018). It is best suited for exploring complex social realities, such as those surrounding youth entrepreneurship and public communication, where context and interpretation are crucial. As Babbie and Mouton (2001) and Neuman (2011) observe, qualitative research allows for the exploration of multiple perspectives within their natural settings, producing contextually grounded insights that quantitative approaches often overlook. This approach also permits flexibility and reflexivity, enabling the researcher to adapt to emerging themes and participant perspectives throughout the research process (Trochim, 2006).

The qualitative and transformative orientations paradigm aligns with the study's central aim: to understand how government communication strategies influence youth entrepreneurship and how participatory frameworks can enhance their inclusivity and effectiveness. While it seeks to understand how youth entrepreneurs experience and interpret government communication, it also aims to identify communicative practices that may be restructured to foster greater inclusivity and responsiveness. In doing so, the research acknowledges the interplay between structure and agency, that is how institutional communication frameworks condition youth participation, and how youth, in turn, reinterpret or resist these frameworks. This philosophical and methodological synthesis establishes the foundation for the research design presented in the following section, which operationalises these assumptions into concrete strategies for inquiry, data collection, and analysis.

4.3 RESEARCH DESIGN

The research design represents the strategic framework through which the study's philosophical assumptions are translated into practical inquiry. It specifies how data are generated, interpreted, and validated to answer the central research question: how government communication strategies support or constrain youth entrepreneurship within the participatory communication paradigm. In Mouton's (1996) terms, research design is the "plan or blueprint"

that links theory to empirical observation in a systematic and coherent manner. Yin (2014) similarly defines it as a logical structure that connects the research problem to the data collected and the conclusions drawn.

Given the study's interpretive and transformative commitments, a qualitative, multi-case, exploratory design was adopted. This design allowed for a nuanced examination of communication practices across different township contexts, foregrounding local meanings and lived experiences rather than imposing universal generalisations (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). It supported the goal of understanding not only *what* government communication strategies exist but *how* they are experienced, interpreted, and negotiated by youth and institutional actors within specific socio-cultural environments.

4.3.1 Rationale for a Qualitative, Exploratory Design

Exploratory designs are appropriate when a phenomenon has not been adequately theorised or empirically described (Stebbins, 2001; Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2007). Although previous studies have examined government communication and youth development in South Africa, few have explored these issues through the lens of participatory communication or situated them within township-specific realities (Mthembu, 2017; Ndhlovu, 2017). The exploratory orientation thus enables the identification of patterns, meanings, and processes that may not be visible through prestructured hypotheses or quantitative measures.

The qualitative approach allows the study to capture subjective perceptions, contextual nuances, and institutional dynamics in ways that quantitative methods cannot (Babbie & Mouton, 2001; Neuman, 2011). It privileges depth over breadth, seeking to uncover *how* communication is practised, *why* it is experienced as empowering or alienating, and *in what contexts* it either facilitates or obstructs youth entrepreneurship. This approach aligns closely with the participatory communication paradigm, which emphasises dialogue, reflexivity, and the co-construction of meaning between researcher and participants (Servaes, 2008; Freire, 1970; Melkote & Steeves, 2015).

The exploratory dimension is equally important within the transformative paradigm. As Mertens (2009) argues, transformative research is not only descriptive but interrogative: it seeks to uncover underlying structures of inequality and identify pathways for change. The exploratory design, therefore, serves two purposes. Analytically, it enables the discovery of new insights about communicative processes and institutional practices. Practically, it supports

the generation of contextually grounded recommendations for reforming communication strategies to promote more inclusive youth participation.

4.3.2 Multi-Case Study Strategy

To operationalise this exploratory orientation, the study employed a multi-case study strategy focusing on four township contexts in Gauteng Province: Mamelodi (City of Tshwane), Soweto (City of Johannesburg), Thembisa (City of Ekurhuleni), and Sebokeng (Sedibeng District). As Yin (2018) and Stake (2006) note, case study research is particularly suitable for investigating complex social phenomena in their real-life contexts. A multi-case design, rather than a single case, enhances the robustness of findings by enabling cross-case comparison and analytic generalisation (Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007; Baxter & Jack, 2008).

Each township represents a distinct communicative and socio-economic environment, offering insight into how structural inequalities, institutional practices, and cultural dynamics shape youth interactions with government communication systems. The diversity of the cases provides a comparative framework for identifying both shared challenges and context-specific variations. By analysing similarities and differences across the four sites, the study develops a richer, more transferable understanding of participatory communication in township development.

The multi-case strategy also aligns with the study's CFPD (Communication for Participatory Development) theoretical framework. The CFPD model emphasises iterative dialogue, collective action, and feedback as essential to participatory processes (Figueroa & Kincaid, 2001; Lennie & Tacchi, 2013). Case studies are ideally suited for tracing these iterative processes within concrete settings, allowing the researcher to examine how communication catalyses or inhibits community participation, entrepreneurship, and institutional responsiveness.

The choice of a qualitative, multi-case, exploratory design ensured methodological coherence with the study's ontological and epistemological assumptions. It reflects the constructivist view that reality is context-bound and interpreted through social interaction, and it embodies the epistemological stance that knowledge emerges through dialogue and reflexivity rather than measurement or prediction (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Chilisa, 2012).

Furthermore, the design's interpretive orientation reinforced the study's transformative objectives. By embedding inquiry within real-world township contexts, it provided a platform for marginalised voices to articulate their perspectives on government communication and entrepreneurship. In doing so, it operationalised the Ubuntu-informed ethics of relationality, empathy, and mutual accountability discussed in Chapter Three.

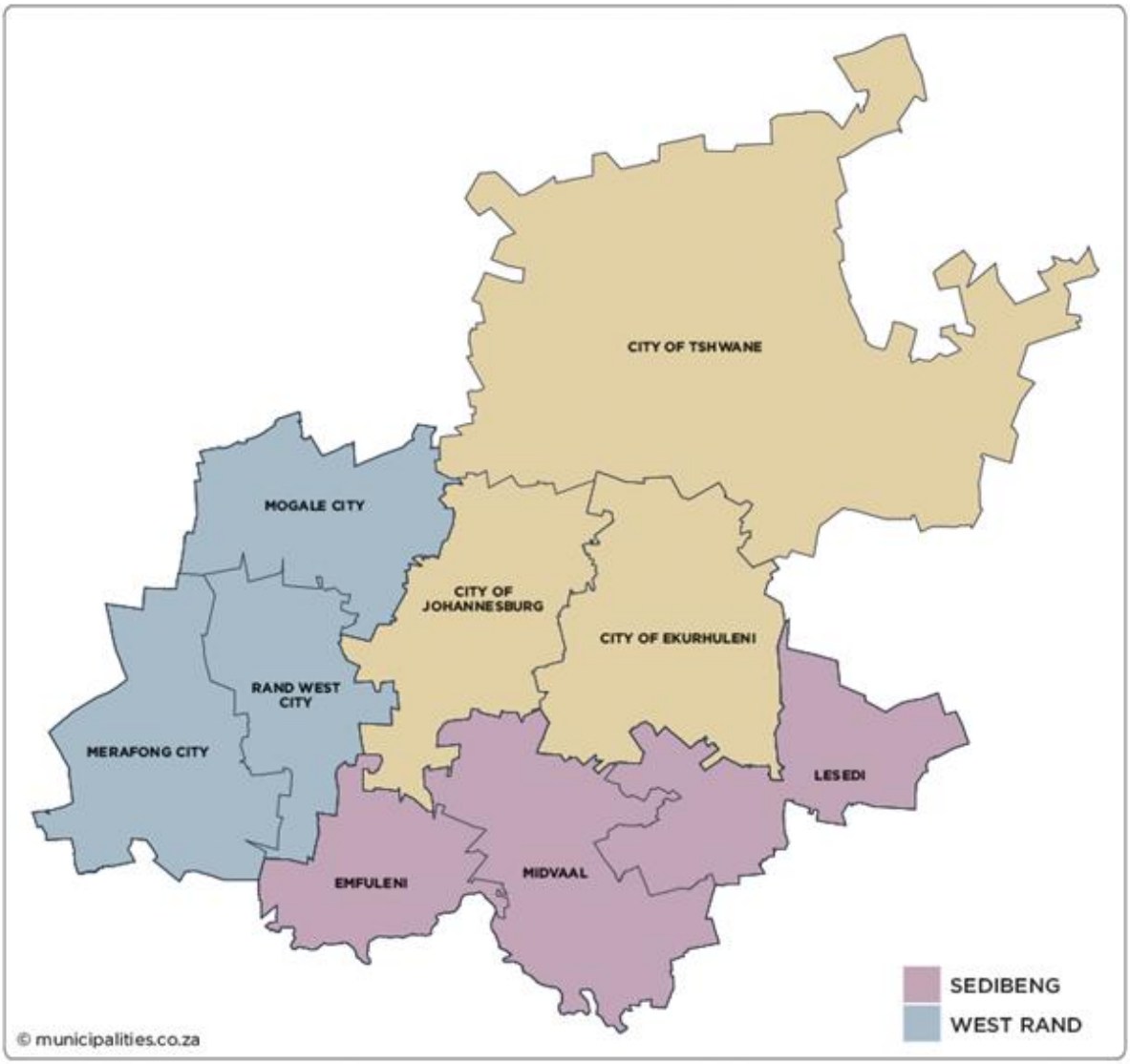
This design therefore served both analytical and emancipatory purposes: it facilitated deep contextual understanding while contributing to the reimagining of government communication as a participatory, dialogic, and socially responsive process. The subsequent sections detail how the study's design was implemented, covering the study setting, target population, sampling strategy, and data collection methods.

4.3.3 Study Setting

The study setting refers to the environment where data is collected, encompassing the location's social, physical, geographical, and environmental characteristics. Observing and documenting these characteristics is crucial for identifying opportunities and mitigating challenges that could influence the research process (Majid, 2018). The study setting is integral to research as it provides the contextual backdrop for understanding the phenomenon being investigated. It directly influences how participants interact, respond, and behave during data collection, affecting the findings' validity, reliability, and generalizability (Maxwell, 2013). For instance, Creswell (2014) highlights that familiar or comfortable settings facilitate open communication, while formal or unfamiliar environments may inhibit participants' willingness to share freely.

From a methodological perspective, the setting also impacts the choice of research approach. Qualitative studies, in particular, benefit from naturalistic environments that allow for real-world observations and enhance the richness of the data (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). The social norms, cultural values, and physical surroundings inherent to the setting can shape participants' behaviours and responses, which must be carefully considered when planning and conducting the study (Guba & Lincoln, 2005). Practical aspects such as accessibility, safety, and logistical considerations further underscore the importance of selecting a suitable setting (Patton, 2015). Interpreting findings within the context of the study setting provides critical insights into how environmental factors may have influenced participants' responses. This contextual understanding enhances the validity and applicability of the research (Yin, 2014).

Figure 4.1 Gauteng Municipalities (Source: Wikipedia)



The study was conducted in four township communities within Gauteng Province, South Africa Mamelodi (City of Tshwane), Soweto (City of Johannesburg), Thembisa (City of Ekurhuleni), and Sebokeng (Emfuleni Municipality, Sedibeng District).

These townships represent historically marginalised urban spaces situated on the peripheries of major metropolitan centres. Each community embodies both the enduring legacies of apartheid spatial planning and the contemporary challenges of youth unemployment, inequality, and limited access to entrepreneurial infrastructure (Turok, 2012; Mthembu, 2017; Ndhlovu, 2017).

The selection of these sites was informed by their socio-economic diversity and their significance in Gauteng's local economic development landscape. Gauteng is South Africa's smallest yet most economically active province, contributing over one-third of national GDP (Stats SA, 2022). Yet, its township economies remain structurally disconnected from formal markets, constrained by infrastructural deficits, limited access to credit, and uneven policy implementation (Rogerson, 2019). These conditions make the province an ideal context for examining how government communication strategies seek, or fail, to bridge the gap between policy rhetoric and lived experience in promoting youth entrepreneurship.

Townships are not merely physical spaces but communicative environments shaped by networks of social relations, informal economies, and hybrid information systems. As Alexander (2010) and Khunou (2015) observe, township residents rely on complex interpersonal and digital communication ecosystems that blend formal government messaging with peer networks, community media, and localised forms of trust. This social fabric is crucial for understanding how young people encounter, interpret, and act upon government communication about entrepreneurship opportunities. Consequently, studying these settings allows for an analysis of how communication operates not only as a policy instrument but also as a lived social practice.

The four selected townships were purposefully chosen to reflect spatial, demographic, and economic variation while remaining comparable in terms of youth development challenges.

(a) Mamelodi, located east of Pretoria, has a dense youth population and a growing informal business sector, often supported by local innovation initiatives.
(b) Soweto, South Africa's largest township, combines rich civic activism with complex economic stratification and remains a focal point for government and NGO youth development projects.
(c) Thembisa, within the City of Ekurhuleni, reflects rapid urbanisation and a strong culture of youth entrepreneurship, yet faces persistent service delivery and communication gaps.
(d) Sebokeng, part of the Vaal industrial corridor, has experienced prolonged economic stagnation and limited local government outreach, making it a critical case for assessing communication deficiencies.

These localities thus capture the diversity of township realities within a shared structural context, aligning with Yin's (2018) argument that multiple cases strengthen analytic generalisation and transferability. Each township functions as a bounded case within which the dialogic and participatory dimensions of government communication can be explored in depth. The comparative logic enables the identification of both recurring themes and context-specific variations, thereby supporting a robust interpretation of how participatory communication principles are enacted, or neglected, in youth entrepreneurship initiatives.

The study setting also includes Thusong Service Centres, established by the GCISas decentralised communication hubs to promote access to government information and services (GCIS, 2021). These centres are integral to the fieldwork because they function as communication nodes where youth interact with government representatives and programmes. Observing these spaces provides insight into the material and relational dimensions of participation, how communication infrastructures, interpersonal exchanges, and institutional routines mediate state–citizen engagement at the local level (Nchabeleng, 2019; DPSA, 2013).

In summary, the Gauteng township settings provide a rich empirical environment for interrogating the participatory quality of government communication. Their socio-economic contrasts, institutional configurations, and communicative ecosystems enable the study to examine how dialogue, trust, and inclusivity are produced or constrained within public communication practices. The following section discusses the population and sampling strategies adopted to engage participants embedded in these diverse but interrelated contexts.

4.3.4 Population and Sampling

The definition of the study population and the rationale for sampling are central to ensuring that the research captures the diversity of voices necessary to interrogate the participatory quality of government communication. In qualitative research, the goal of sampling is not statistical representation but the inclusion of participants who can provide information-rich cases relevant to the research problem (Patton, 2015; Babbie & Mouton, 2001). The population and sampling procedures in this study were therefore guided by the transformative and participatory principles articulated in Chapter Three, prioritising engagement with individuals and institutions whose experiences illuminate how communication either enables or constrains youth entrepreneurship in township contexts.

4.3.5 Study Population

A study population refers to the complete group of individuals or elements that share characteristics relevant to the phenomenon under investigation (Polit & Hungler, 1999; Mouton, 1996). In this study, the population comprised two interrelated categories:

1. Primary participants comprising township youth (aged 18–35) who are either active entrepreneurs or aspiring to establish enterprises.
2. Institutional actors, including government communication officials and local economic development practitioners, engaged in implementing youth entrepreneurship support initiatives.

The focus on youth aged 18–35 aligns with South Africa's official definition of youth (National Youth Commission Act No. 19 of 1996). This demographic is of particular interest because it represents both the most economically active and the most vulnerable segment of the population. According to Stats SA (2022), youth unemployment in South Africa remains above 45%, with township-based youth disproportionately affected. These conditions highlight the urgency of examining how communication strategies function as tools for empowerment or exclusion in the promotion of entrepreneurship.

Engaging both youth and institutional actors reflects the study's epistemological commitment to co-constructed knowledge (Freire, 1970; Chilisa, 2012). Government communication cannot be meaningfully analysed from the perspective of one group alone. The inclusion of both sides of the communicative relationship such as message producers and recipients allowed the study to explore the dialogic interface between state and citizen. This dual focus supports the CFPD model's (Figueroa & Kincaid, 2001) emphasis on feedback, reciprocity, and collective action as essential features of participatory development.

(a) Accessible population

The accessible population consisted of individuals and organisations who met the inclusion criteria and were available for direct participation. These included:

- Youth entrepreneurs currently operating small businesses in Mamelodi, Soweto, Thembisa, and Sebokeng.

- Aspiring youth entrepreneurs comprising unemployed or informally employed youth expressing interest in entrepreneurship.
- Government communication officials, particularly from the Government Communication and Information System and relevant municipal departments responsible for youth and economic development communication.
- Municipal LED officials engaged in planning, coordinating, and monitoring youth entrepreneurship initiatives.

This configuration ensured that the study captured both policy intent and everyday experience. The inclusion of Thusong Service Centre personnel and users also allowed for the examination of communication in action within government-established participatory spaces.

4.3.6 Sampling Strategy

The study employed purposive sampling, a nonprobability technique suitable for qualitative and transformative research, in which participants are selected for their relevance, experience, and capacity to offer deep insight (Sandelowski, 1995; Palinkas et al., 2015). Purposive sampling was particularly appropriate because the aim was to understand complex social processes rather than to generalise findings to a larger population. This approach resonates with the transformative paradigm's ethical imperative to amplify marginalised voices (Mertens, 2009; Chilisa, 2012) and with the CFPD model's principle of engaging relevant stakeholders in iterative dialogue.

Sampling in this study was informed by four interrelated considerations designed to ensure methodological rigour and conceptual coherence with the study's participatory orientation. Relevance served as the primary inclusion criterion, with participants purposefully selected for their direct involvement in, or exposure to, government communication and youth entrepreneurship initiatives. This ensured that the data would reflect the lived realities and institutional dynamics central to the research questions. Diversity was equally important, as the sample was constructed to include variation across gender, occupational status, and geographic location. This heterogeneity allowed the study to capture the multiplicity of township experiences and to recognise that youth entrepreneurship and government communication are not monolithic phenomena but are mediated by context-specific social and cultural conditions. Accessibility served as a practical and ethical consideration, guiding the selection of participants from communities and institutions that could sustain meaningful researcher–

participant engagement throughout the fieldwork. Finally, information richness was prioritised to secure participants capable of providing detailed, reflective, and contextually grounded accounts that would illuminate the communicative and structural processes shaping youth entrepreneurship. Together, these considerations ensured that the sample was both theoretically purposeful and empirically productive, aligning with the study's transformative and participatory principles. This strategy aligns with Creswell's (2014) emphasis on selecting participants who can best help the researcher understand the problem and the research question. It also embodies the Ubuntu-informed ethic of inclusivity by recognising the epistemic legitimacy of both youth and institutional actors as co-producers of meaning.

(a) Inclusion and exclusion criteria

Explicit inclusion and exclusion criteria were established to ensure that the selected participants were directly relevant to the research problem and capable of contributing substantively to the study's analytical objectives. The criteria were guided by the principles of relevance, diversity, accessibility, and information richness, as outlined in the sampling rationale. Participants were included if they met the following conditions:

- They were youth aged between 18 and 35, consistent with the South African policy definition of youth as set out in the *National Youth Policy (2020–2030)*.
- They were residents of the four selected Gauteng townships, namely Mamelodi, Soweto, Thembisa, and Sebokeng, each representing a distinct socio-economic and communicative context within the province.
- They were actively engaged in entrepreneurship (operating formal or informal businesses) or aspiring entrepreneurs seeking to establish enterprises within their communities.
- Government and municipal participants were officials directly involved in communication or youth economic development functions, specifically within the GCIS and Local Economic Development (LED) units.

Exclusion criteria were applied to maintain conceptual precision and data quality. Individuals were excluded if:

- They fell outside the designated age range, as their experiences would not reflect the targeted youth demographic.

- They were government officials not engaged in youth-related or communication-focused initiatives.
- They lacked direct or indirect exposure to entrepreneurship or government communication, as this would limit their capacity to provide relevant insights.

These inclusion and exclusion criteria ensured that the study's participants were not only demographically aligned with the research focus but also experientially and contextually positioned to contribute to a nuanced understanding of government communication and youth entrepreneurship. By narrowing participation to those directly affected by or involved in these communicative processes, the study maintained both analytical coherence and participatory integrity, privileging those whose voices are most often marginalised in policy discourse.

(b) Sample size and composition

Qualitative research prioritises depth of insight over numerical representativeness (Mason, 2010; Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Accordingly, the study's final sample comprised 56 participants and 15 documentary sources selected to ensure rich, contextually grounded insights into the communicative dimensions of youth entrepreneurship in township settings (see Table 4.1). This sample included 24 youth participants (six from each township: three active and three aspiring entrepreneurs), 4 officials from the GCIS engaged in local outreach functions, and 4 municipal officials responsible for youth economic development through LED units. Additionally, 24 participants took part in focus group discussions, distributed evenly across the four study sites to provide collective perspectives on communication effectiveness and participatory engagement.

Complementing the primary data, 15 documentary sources including government communication strategies, youth development policies, annual reports, and local economic development frameworks were purposively analysed to situate the field findings within an institutional and policy context. The inclusion of documentary data enhanced triangulation and interpretive validity (Bowen, 2009), allowing for a multidimensional understanding of how communication structures shape youth engagement with entrepreneurship programmes.

The sample size was determined by the principle of *data saturation*, the point at which no new themes or insights emerged from the data (Guest, Bunce & Johnson, 2006). Saturation was continuously assessed during fieldwork, ensuring that participant inclusion was purposeful and analytically sufficient without unnecessary expansion of the dataset.

Triangulation was employed as a core methodological strategy to enhance the credibility, depth, and interpretive validity of the study's findings. In qualitative research, triangulation refers to the integration of multiple data sources, methods, or perspectives to examine a phenomenon from complementary vantage points (Denzin, 1978; Flick, 2018). This approach mitigates the limitations inherent in relying on a single source of evidence and strengthens the robustness of interpretations by cross-verifying emerging themes (Patton, 2015; Creswell & Poth, 2018).

The use of semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions, participant observations, and document analysis in this study reflects a deliberate methodological design aimed at capturing both the discursive and structural dimensions of government communication. Interviews with youth and officials provided individualised, reflective accounts of experience and practice, while focus groups generated collective narratives that revealed shared meanings and contested interpretations (Morgan, 1998).

Data Source	*Description and Role in Study*	*(n =)*	*Sampling Rationale*
Youth Entrepreneurs	Active township youth (aged 18–35) operating small or micro-enterprises in Mamelodi, Soweto, Thembisa, and Sebokeng.	12	Provide first-hand accounts of engagement with government communication and entrepreneurship support programmes.
Aspiring Youth Entrepreneurs	Unemployed or informally employed youth expressing interest in starting businesses.	12	Capture perceptions of government communication accessibility and motivational barriers to participation.
GCIS Officials	Government communication practitioners responsible for local outreach and youth-targeted campaigns.	4	Offer institutional insights into message design, dissemination, and feedback mechanisms.
Municipal LED Officials	Local economic development officers coordinating youth entrepreneurship initiatives.	4	Provide policy and operational perspectives on interdepartmental communication and implementation.
Focus Group Participants	Mixed groups of active and aspiring youth entrepreneurs (six per township).	24	Generate collective reflections on government communication practices and participatory processes.
Documentary Sources	Government policies, white papers, annual reports, communication strategies, and academic texts.	15	Contextualise field data, enabling triangulation and policy analysis.
Total Sample	Combined total of human participants and documentary sources.	71 (56 ppl + 15 docs)	Ensures data saturation, triangulation, and contextual depth.

Table 4.1: Composition of study sample and data sources

Observations conducted at Thusong Service Centres offered empirical insight into communicative practices in situ, allowing the researcher to examine how state–citizen interaction unfolds in real time. Documentary analysis, in turn, grounded these experiential accounts within the institutional and policy architecture that structures government communication.

This multi-method configuration aligns with the transformative paradigm underpinning the study, which emphasizes epistemic inclusivity, reflexivity, and the validation of multiple knowledge forms (Mertens, 2009; Chilisa, 2012). By integrating the perspectives of both government actors and township youth, the research design operationalized the dialogic and participatory principles central to the CFPD model (Figueroa & Kincaid, 2001). Triangulation thus served not only a methodological purpose but also ethical and epistemological ones: it ensured that diverse voices were represented, contradictions were explored, and power imbalances in meaning-making were partially redressed.

Through this integrative approach, the study established a reflexive and iterative analytical process in which data from one method informed the design and interpretation of others. The convergence and divergence of insights across data sources provided a nuanced understanding of how communication both reflects and reproduces the structural and relational dynamics of youth entrepreneurship in South Africa's township economies. In this way, triangulation became an essential tool for linking empirical observation with theoretical interpretation, ensuring that the study's findings are both credible and transformative in their implications.

4.4 METHODS OF DATA COLLECTION

The empirical data collection in this study was guided by the transformative and participatory orientation outlined in Chapter Three. The aim was not merely to extract information from participants but to create dialogic encounters through which knowledge could be co-constructed. In this spirit, the data collection process sought to reflect the values of respect, reciprocity, and relationality that underpin both participatory communication theory (Servaes, 2008; Melkote & Steeves, 2015) and the Ubuntu-informed ethic of human interdependence (Mabovula, 2011; Chilisa, 2012).

Consistent with the qualitative, exploratory design, multiple methods were employed to capture the lived experiences, perceptions, and communicative realities of township youth and

government actors. These included semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions, participant observations, and documentary analysis. Each method was selected for its capacity to illuminate a distinct dimension of the phenomenon under investigation, while together they enabled triangulation and the iterative validation of emerging insights (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Patton, 2015).

The sequencing of data collection was deliberately flexible, allowing iterative reflection and adaptation as themes emerged from the field. Initial interviews provided baseline perspectives that informed subsequent focus group discussions, while observations and document analysis contextualized the communicative dynamics within institutional and policy frameworks. This adaptive strategy ensured that the research process remained sensitive to participant feedback, reflective of evolving insights, and aligned with the dialogic and reflexive principles central to the CFPD model (Figueroa & Kincaid, 2001).

4.4.1 Semi-structured Interviews

Semi-structured interviews served as the primary data collection method for exploring the lived experiences, perceptions, and reflections of youth entrepreneurs, aspiring entrepreneurs, and government officials regarding government communication and youth entrepreneurship. The method was appropriate for the study's interpretivist and transformative orientations, as it enabled participants to share their experiences in their own words while allowing the researcher to probe, clarify, and explore emerging issues in greater depth (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009; Mertens, 2009; Chilisa, 2012). This flexibility facilitated the generation of rich, contextualized data that would not have been possible through more structured methods.

A total of 32 semi-structured interviews were conducted across the four selected townships in Gauteng. The sample comprised 24 youth participants (six from each township), including three active youth entrepreneurs and three unemployed aspiring entrepreneurs. In addition, four Government Communication and Information System (GCIS) officials responsible for implementing government communication programmes within the selected townships and four Local Economic Development (LED) officials responsible for youth economic development programmes and policies in the respective municipalities were interviewed.

Youth participants were purposively selected with the assistance of Community Development Workers (CDWs), who facilitated access to entrepreneurs and aspiring entrepreneurs who met the inclusion criteria. Government officials were identified through the relevant GCIS regional

offices, Thusong Service Centres, and Municipal Local Economic Development units based on their direct responsibility for implementing government communication and youth economic development initiatives within the selected municipalities. The researcher formally requested permission from the respective institutions before contacting the officials to arrange individual interviews at times and venues convenient to them.

The interview schedules were tailored to each participant group. Youth interviews explored experiences of accessing and interpreting government communication, awareness of entrepreneurship support programmes, and perceived communication barriers. Interviews with GCIS and LED officials focused on communication strategies, stakeholder engagement practices, institutional challenges, and opportunities for strengthening participatory communication with township youth. This enabled the study to capture both community and institutional perspectives, providing a comprehensive understanding of the communication processes influencing youth entrepreneurship.

To protect participants' identities and maintain confidentiality, pseudonyms were assigned to all participants and used consistently throughout the study. The participant coding system is presented in Table 4.2, which provides the pseudonyms used for each participant category and study site. These codes are used consistently throughout the presentation and discussion of the findings in Chapter Five, with participant quotations cited by the relevant pseudonym to support the systematic presentation, analysis, and interpretation of the findings by participant category and study site, while preserving participant anonymity.

Table 4. 2: Participant Coding Index Used in the Study

Participant Category	Participant Codes	Description
Youth Entrepreneurs – Soweto	SYP1–SYP3	Active youth entrepreneurs from Soweto
Aspiring Youth Entrepreneurs – Soweto	SYP4–SYP6	Aspiring youth entrepreneurs from Soweto
Youth Entrepreneurs – Mamelodi	MYP1–MYP3	Active youth entrepreneurs from Mamelodi
Aspiring Youth Entrepreneurs – Mamelodi	MYP4–MYP6	Aspiring youth entrepreneurs from Mamelodi
Youth Entrepreneurs – Thembisa	TYP1–TYP3	Active youth entrepreneurs from Thembisa
Aspiring Youth Entrepreneurs – Thembisa	TYP4–TYP6	Aspiring youth entrepreneurs from Thembisa

Youth Entrepreneurs – Sebokeng	SBYP1–SBYP3	Active youth entrepreneurs from Sebokeng
Aspiring Youth Entrepreneurs – Sebokeng	SBYP4–SBYP6	Aspiring youth entrepreneurs from Sebokeng
Government Communication and Information System Officials	GCIS1–GCIS4	Government communication officials
Local Economic Development Officials	LED1–LED4	Local Economic Development officials

4.4.2 Focus Group Discussions

Focus group discussions complemented individual interviews by creating dialogic spaces where participants could collectively reflect on, contest, and refine their understandings of government communication and youth entrepreneurship. Within the framework of participatory communication and the transformative paradigm, the purpose of the FGDs was not only to elicit opinions but to foster co-construction of meaning through interaction. As Morgan (1998) notes, focus groups produce data through conversation rather than interrogation, enabling participants to articulate their experiences in relation to others' narratives. This aligns with the Ubuntu ethic of relationality, which views knowledge as emerging from human connectedness and shared reflection (Chilisa, 2012; Mbigi, 2005).

The focus group method was particularly well-suited to this study's concern with communicative participation because it embodies the principles of dialogue and horizontal exchange that underpin CFPD (Figueroa & Kincaid, 2001). Unlike interviews, which centre on individual experience, focus groups allow for collective sense-making, participants build on one another's contributions, challenge assumptions, and reveal the social norms and collective values that shape communicative behaviour. As Kitzinger (1994) observes, the dynamic interplay among participants generates data on both the content of opinions and the processes of interaction through which those opinions are formed and negotiated.

Four focus groups were conducted, one in each township with six participants per group. Each session brought together a mix of active and aspiring youth entrepreneurs, selected purposively to ensure diversity in gender, age, and business experience. This composition encouraged the emergence of multiple perspectives and highlighted how social and economic differences mediate access to communication and entrepreneurial opportunities. The relatively small group

size allowed for rich, sustained dialogue, ensuring that every participant could contribute meaningfully while maintaining manageable facilitation (Krueger & Casey, 2015).

Discussions were structured around open-ended prompts that explored:

- the accessibility, relevance, and credibility of government communication.
- the perceived responsiveness and inclusivity of government messaging.
- experiences of participation and feedback mechanisms; and
- perceptions of trust, cultural resonance, and digital access.

These themes were not imposed rigidly; rather, they functioned as dialogic entry points that allowed participants to steer the discussion toward issues they considered significant. This flexibility reflects Patton's (2015) assertion that qualitative inquiry should be adaptive and responsive to the context of meaning-making. The facilitator's role was to guide conversation flow, probe for depth, and ensure equitable participation, while maintaining a non-hierarchical stance that respected participants as knowledge holders rather than participants (Cornwall & Jewkes, 1995).

To enhance linguistic inclusivity, discussions were conducted in the language preferred by participants including English, isiZulu and Setswana and later translated and transcribed into English for analysis. This multilingual approach honoured the linguistic diversity of the participants and minimised the risk of epistemic distortion that may occur when participants are required to express complex ideas in non-native languages (Chilisa, 2012; Madondo, 2018). Each focus group lasted approximately 90 minutes and was held in accessible community spaces such as youth resource centres, Thusong facilities, or local halls familiar to the participants.

The interactive and performative nature of the FGDs allowed the researcher to observe how ideas were negotiated, contested, and reinforced within a group setting. For instance, participants' disagreements often revealed deeper tensions around access to information, perceptions of state responsiveness, and the legitimacy of government programmes. Laughter, silence, and collective affirmation were treated as meaningful communicative acts that signalled emotional investment and shared understanding (Bloor et al., 2001).

Ethical standards were upheld throughout the process. Participants were fully briefed on the study objectives and consented to participate in the group, acknowledging the collective nature of the discussions. Given the reduced anonymity inherent in group settings, additional measures were taken to protect confidentiality; participants were reminded not to disclose each other's contributions outside the session, and pseudonyms were assigned in transcripts. The researcher was attentive to power dynamics within the groups, particularly gendered and age-based hierarchies, ensuring that marginalized voices were not overshadowed by more vocal participants.

From an analytical standpoint, FGDs generated a collective portrait of township youth's communicative ecologies, revealing both convergences and divergences in experience. The data illuminated patterns of shared frustration, for example, inadequate feedback mechanisms and limited visibility of youth-targeted communication, as well as emergent forms of agency, such as peer-to-peer information sharing and digital self-organization. These insights enriched the study's interpretive depth, situating individual narratives within broader social contexts and aligning with the transformative aim of identifying dialogic pathways for more inclusive communication practice.

Thus, focus group discussions served not only as a data collection technique but as a microcosm of participatory engagement, a methodological enactment of the very communicative ideals the study investigates. They reflected the transition from communication *about* participation to communication *as* participation, producing knowledge that is dialogic, contextual, and ethically grounded in the principles of relationality and co-creation.

4.4.3 Participant Observation

Participant observation was employed as a complementary method alongside interviews and focus group discussions to generate contextual and experiential insights into the communicative environments in which government information is produced, disseminated, and received. In qualitative and participatory research traditions, observation provides a naturalistic and immersive lens through which social practices can be understood as they unfold in real time rather than as retrospectively narrated accounts (DeWalt & DeWalt, 2011; Kawulich, 2005). It enables the researcher to apprehend the subtle, routine, and often taken-for-granted interactions that constitute the lived reality of communication, what people do and how they do it, rather than merely what they say they do (Flick, 2014).

This approach resonates with the transformative and Ubuntu-informed epistemology guiding the study. Both perspectives prioritise embodied engagement and relational knowledge involving learning from people within their natural contexts rather than studying them from afar (Chilisa, 2012; Mbigi, 2005). Observation thus functioned not merely as a technical method of data collection, but as an ethical stance of attentiveness: to be present, to witness, and to interpret communication as a situated social practice embedded in relationships of power, trust, and meaning-making (Finlay, 2002; Pink, 2013).

The observation focused on three Thusong Service Centres located in Mamelodi, Thembisa, and Soweto, government-established multi-service hubs designed to enhance citizens' access to information, public services, and participatory platforms. These centres represent the institutional interface between government communication structures and community publics, making them critical spaces for examining the communicative enactment of developmental and participatory ideals (GCIS, 2021; Nchabeleng, 2019). The Sebokeng township was excluded from this component because it lacked a functional Thusong facility.

A non-participant observational stance was adopted. The researcher positioned herself as an unobtrusive observer, avoiding direct engagement with centre staff or clients during active service hours to preserve the natural rhythm of interactions. This approach was consistent to observe authentic communicative behaviours rather than responses to researcher presence (DeWalt & DeWalt, 2011). Each centre was visited for five non-consecutive days over three weeks, with observations conducted during morning and midday sessions, peak times for community visits.

Field notes documented both descriptive and reflective data. The descriptive component captured observable activities, including how youth engaged with available materials, how officials interacted with clients, the accessibility and placement of visual communication (posters, brochures, noticeboards), and the extent to which digital platforms (computers, screens, or social media announcements) were used. The reflective component included interpretive comments on tone, atmosphere, body language, and the relational dynamics between officials and visitors. Observations also noted who spoke, who listened, and who appeared excluded or hesitant to engage, aligning with the study's interest in power, participation, and voice within communicative encounters (Freire, 1970; Servaes, 2008).

From an analytical standpoint, observation provided a means of triangulating findings from interviews and focus groups by situating reported experiences within their observable contexts (Yin, 2018; Patton, 2015). For instance, while officials described Thusong Centres as inclusive spaces that promote access to information, the researcher observed that communication was often unidirectional, dominated by printed materials or top-down announcements, with limited opportunities for feedback or dialogue. Such discrepancies between policy discourse and practical communication were significant in illuminating the structural blockages identified by the CFPD model.

The following focal areas guided the observational framework:

- Communication environment: assessing the spatial arrangement, signage clarity, and youth-friendliness of the centres.
- Information dissemination modes: identifying dominant channels (verbal, print, digital) and the accessibility of these to diverse users.
- Youth engagement patterns: noting the visibility and participation levels of young people in communicative exchanges.
- Feedback mechanisms: examining whether opportunities existed for reciprocal communication, such as suggestion boxes or interactive sessions.
- Staff–client interactions: observing tone, attentiveness, and responsiveness in engagements between officials and youth visitors.

In keeping with ethical research standards, the study obtained prior authorisation from the GCIS Gauteng Office and verbal permission from Thusong Centre managers. Because observations occurred in public service settings, formal individual consent from visitors was not required; however, all observations were conducted discreetly, and no identifying information was recorded. Field notes anonymised any incidental references to individuals and focused exclusively on communicative processes rather than personal attributes or transactions.

Participant observation yielded invaluable contextual evidence of how communication unfolds within bureaucratic spaces, that is how information is displayed, how it circulates, and how it is mediated by material, technological, and interpersonal factors. It illuminated the symbolic dimension of participation, showing that accessibility is not merely a matter of physical presence but of communicative openness, relational trust, and institutional empathy. By grounding abstract concepts of participation in the sensory and spatial realities of township life,

this method contributed a phenomenological depth to the analysis, complementing the narrative richness of the interviews and the collective insights of the focus groups.

In sum, observation in this study functioned as an ethnographic act of witnessing: a methodological means of understanding government communication not as a text to be decoded but as a lived, embodied, and relational practice shaped by everyday interactions, institutional logics, and socio-economic constraints. It thereby reinforced the study's overarching aim, to reconceptualize communication for development as a dialogic, participatory, and humanizing process grounded in context and relational ethics.

4.4.4 Documentary Analysis

Documentary analysis was an essential methodological component of this study, complementing interviews, focus groups, and observations by situating participants' lived experiences within the institutional and policy frameworks that structure government communication and youth entrepreneurship. As Bowen (2009) argues, documents provide a stable source of evidence that can be reviewed repeatedly, offering insights into the intentions, rhetoric, and silences of policy and administrative discourse. Within the transformative and participatory research paradigm guiding this study, documentary analysis was not treated as a detached textual exercise but as a means of interrogating the **discursive power** of communication, how texts construct publics, shape participation, and reproduce or challenge social hierarchies (Fairclough, 2003; Gumucio-Dagron, 2019).

The analysis encompassed both primary and secondary documents. Primary sources included official communication policies, strategic frameworks, annual reports, white papers, and policy statements produced by the GCIS and relevant municipal structures. These texts, such as the *Government Communication Policy* (GCIS, 2018) and the *Government Communicators' Handbook* (GCIS, 2020), provided insight into the formal mandates and institutional logics that underpin state communication practices. They illuminated the normative models of communication privileged by government, often framed around message dissemination, policy visibility, and branding, while also revealing the limited articulation of participatory communication principles within bureaucratic discourse (Heath, 2013; Grainger, Munro & Wilkins, 2010).

Secondary sources included scholarly publications, independent policy reviews, and development agency reports addressing communication, youth participation, and

entrepreneurship in South Africa (Gumede, 2019; Graham, Mlatsheni & Smith, 2020). These documents contextualised the official narratives within broader debates on state–citizen communication, youth empowerment, and socio-economic inclusion. By juxtaposing policy rhetoric with critical scholarship, the analysis sought to expose the tension between communication as governance and communication as participation, a central theme of this study (Melkote & Steeves, 2015).

Analytically, the study employed an interpretive and critical discourse approach to document analysis. Following Bowen's (2009) framework, each document was subjected to iterative reading to identify patterns, assumptions, and omissions relevant to the study's objectives. The analysis focused on three interrelated dimensions:

1. Discursive framing – examining how youth, entrepreneurship, and communication were represented linguistically and conceptually in policy texts. This included attention to the metaphors and narrative structures that position youth as either beneficiaries, partners, or problems within development communication discourse.
2. Institutional logic – analysing the operational principles guiding government communication practices, such as centralised message control, risk management, and compliance with administrative hierarchies (Heath & Palenchar, 2018).
3. Participatory potential – assessing the extent to which the texts endorsed or constrained dialogic engagement, citizen feedback, and local ownership of communication processes.

The CFPD model (Figueroa & Kincaid, 2009) provided a diagnostic framework for coding and interpreting documentary evidence. Texts were examined for indicators corresponding to the model's key stages, *dialogue, collective action, and feedback*, to evaluate whether government communication processes move toward participatory cycles or remain confined within instrumental, top-down paradigms. Where gaps emerged, such as the absence of structured feedback mechanisms or the dominance of one-way public information campaigns, these were analysed as symptoms of underlying institutional and epistemic barriers.

Ubuntu ethics further enriched the analytical lens by foregrounding the relational and moral dimensions of communication (Mabovula, 2011). From this perspective, documentary analysis was not limited to identifying what policies say but also *what they fail to acknowledge*: the affective, communal, and ethical obligations inherent in state–citizen communication. Policies

that frame youth merely as economic actors, without recognising their social embeddedness and collective agency, were interpreted as inconsistent with Ubuntu's emphasis on reciprocity, mutual care, and human dignity (Chilisa, 2012; Kloppers & Fourie, 2018).

The documentary corpus comprised 15 key texts, including government policies, strategic frameworks, communication guidelines, youth entrepreneurship reports, and relevant academic analyses. Each document was catalogued, coded, and cross-referenced with empirical data from the field. This triangulation strengthened the study's validity by correlating institutional claims with on-the-ground experiences of youth and officials. The analysis revealed significant misalignments between the participatory ideals articulated in policy discourse and the hierarchical practices observed in implementation, a finding that substantiates the study's argument regarding the communicative disjuncture between state intentions and citizen engagement.

In methodological terms, documentary analysis served both diagnostic and generative purposes. Diagnostically, it exposed structural silences, bureaucratic rationalities, and technocratic language that limit participatory transformation. Generatively, it offered conceptual resources for reimagining communication policy in alignment with dialogic and Ubuntu-informed frameworks. The integration of CFPD and Ubuntu perspectives thus enabled a contextually grounded critique of government communication: one that recognises its developmental potential while insisting on ethical reciprocity, inclusivity, and mutual accountability.

Through this interpretive and comparative engagement with policy texts, the study positioned government communication not merely as an administrative function but as a moral and relational practice integral to democratic development. Documentary analysis, therefore, enriched the empirical findings by linking everyday communicative experiences to the institutional architectures and discursive logics that shape them, providing a critical bridge between the lived realities of township youth and the structural narratives of the state.

4.4.5 Recording, field notes, and transcription

The integrity and interpretive depth of qualitative inquiry depend on meticulous documentation of the research process. Recording, field notes, and transcription were therefore employed as complementary procedures to ensure the reliability, reflexivity, and analytic richness of the data corpus. As Henning, van Rensburg, and Smit (2004) observe, qualitative data are not

simply collected but constructed through careful recording and reflective engagement; they embody the researcher's interaction with social meanings as they unfold in context.

All interviews and focus group discussions were audio-recorded using a high-resolution digital device to capture both verbal content and paralinguistic cues such as tone, pauses, and emphasis. Audio recording ensured accurate data capture and freed the researcher to focus on the relational dynamics of the interaction rather than extensive note-taking (Hesse-Biber, 2013). Participants' consent was obtained before recording, and they were reminded that the recordings would remain confidential and be used solely for research purposes.

Field notes constituted a crucial interpretive layer, capturing the researcher's observations, sensory impressions, and analytical reflections during and immediately after each engagement. Following the guidance of Lincoln and Guba (2005) and Emerson et al. (2011), the notes were divided into *descriptive entries*, documenting factual details such as the setting, gestures, and conversational flow, and *analytic memos* that recorded emergent insights, emotional tone, and possible interpretive leads. This dual structure served two purposes: to preserve the contextual authenticity of the encounters and to make visible the researcher's reflexive process of meaning-making.

Prior to coding, all interviews and focus groups were transcribed verbatim to preserve linguistic integrity and contextual cues (Gibbs, 2007; Guest, MacQueen & Namey, 2012). Transcription was approached as both a technical and interpretive act. Each recording was transcribed verbatim within forty-eight hours of data collection to minimize loss of contextual memory. The process adhered to the standards outlined by Guest, MacQueen, and Namey (2012), maintaining the participants' linguistic nuances, including code-switching, idiomatic expressions, and non-standard grammar. This approach honoured the linguistic diversity of township communication and upheld the epistemic inclusivity central to the study's Ubuntu-informed framework (Chilisa, 2012).

The transcripts were anonymized through coded identifiers (e.g., YF2_SOW) and stored securely in password-protected digital folders, with anonymized identifiers replacing personal names to protect confidentiality. The transcripts were repeatedly cross-checked against audio files for accuracy, and reflective annotations were inserted in the margins to trace interpretive decisions. This iterative process ensured a transparent *audit trail* (Yin, 2018), enhancing the

dependability of the analysis and providing a coherent link between the raw data and emergent themes.

The cleaned data were then imported into Atlas.ti 8, a computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS) that supports systematic coding and retrieval of textual data (Friese, 2019; Silver & Lewins, 2014). The software allowed the researcher to segment, annotate, and link data efficiently while maintaining a transparent audit trail.

The act of importing data into Atlas.ti symbolised a methodological shift from collection to interpretation. At this stage, raw narratives were transformed into analysable text units, consistent with Creswell and Poth's (2018) "data analysis spiral," in which data management, reflection, and interpretation proceed in a cyclical, iterative manner. Memoing within Atlas.ti further enhanced reflexivity by capturing analytic reflections and emergent theoretical connections (Miles, Huberman & Saldaña, 2014).

From an epistemological standpoint, recording and transcription are not neutral acts but situated interpretive practices (Finlay, 2002). In this study, they were guided by the principle of relational accountability, an ethical and methodological commitment to faithfully represent participants' voices while acknowledging the researcher's interpretive presence. Field notes, therefore, functioned not only as technical artefacts but as dialogic reflections that deepened the researcher's engagement with the communicative processes being studied.

Together, the systematic recording, rich field notes, and rigorous transcription procedures constituted an integrated data management strategy that balanced methodological rigour with ethical sensitivity. They ensured that the voices of township youth, government communicators, and local development officials were captured and interpreted within their relational, linguistic, and cultural contexts, laying the empirical foundation for the thematic and discourse analyses discussed in the next section.

4.5 THEMATIC DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

Data analysis in this study followed an iterative and interpretive process to derive meaning from participants' narratives, observational insights, and documentary evidence. Consistent with the transformative paradigm underpinning the research, the analysis aimed not merely to describe experiences but to interrogate how power, participation, and communication intersect

to shape youth entrepreneurship in township contexts (Mertens, 2009; Chilisa, 2012). The process was both inductive and theoretically informed, moving between the participants' lived experiences and the theoretical constructs of participatory communication and Ubuntu ethics to construct a contextually grounded understanding of government communication.

Qualitative analysis is rarely linear. As Creswell and Poth (2018) and Henning et al. (2006) note, interpretation begins the moment data collection starts, with researchers continuously reflecting on emergent patterns, contradictions, and meanings. This study, therefore, adopted a *spiral model of analysis* (Creswell & Poth, 2018), in which data were revisited repeatedly through successive cycles of reduction, coding, interpretation, and synthesis. The process emphasized *hermeneutic iteration*, a back-and-forth movement between parts (individual statements, incidents, and documents) and the whole (the broader communicative and structural realities of township development).

At the core of the analytical framework were two complementary theoretical lenses: the CFPD model (Figueroa & Kincaid, 2009) and Ubuntu ethics (Mabovula, 2011; Nzimakwe, 2014). The CFPD model provided a procedural schema for analyzing communication as a participatory process, focusing on the stages of *dialogue*, *collective action*, *reflection*, and *feedback*. Ubuntu, in turn, grounded the interpretation in a relational epistemology that values human connection, empathy, and shared moral accountability. Together, these frameworks enabled both structural and ethical readings of the data: identifying where participatory communication processes succeed or fail and interrogating how relational and communal values manifest, or are eroded, in state–citizen interaction.

The first stage of analysis involved data organization and familiarisation. All transcripts, field notes, and documents were imported into *Atlas.ti 9*, which served as both a repository and an analytic tool. Files were systematically labelled according to data source (e.g., "YEnt_Soweto_03" for youth entrepreneurs or "GCIS_Mam_01" for officials) to facilitate traceability. The researcher immersed herself in the data through repeated reading and memoing, noting initial impressions, striking metaphors, and recurring communicative themes such as "visibility," "trust," "access," and "voice."

Next, the data underwent open coding, a process of segmenting and labelling meaningful units of text. Codes were initially descriptive, identifying what was being said or observed (e.g., *no feedback mechanisms*, *information travels by word of mouth, a bureaucratic tone*). These

preliminary codes were then refined through axial coding into conceptual categories that reflected relationships among communication practices, institutional structures, and participant perceptions. Examples included *hierarchical communication flows*, *youth agency and resistance*, and *dialogue and inclusivity*. This iterative refinement ensured that emerging patterns remained anchored in participants' expressions while progressively linked to theoretical constructs (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

4.5.1 Thematic Analysis Process

Thematic analysis in this study was conceived as both a systematic and interpretive process of meaning-making, aimed at identifying patterned relationships within the qualitative dataset. It sought not only to classify recurring ideas but also to interpret how these patterns reflected the underlying communicative, structural, and ethical dimensions of government engagement with youth entrepreneurship. As Braun and Clarke (2006) conceptualise it, thematic analysis offers flexibility while maintaining methodological transparency, allowing the researcher to trace the movement from descriptive coding to theoretically informed interpretation.

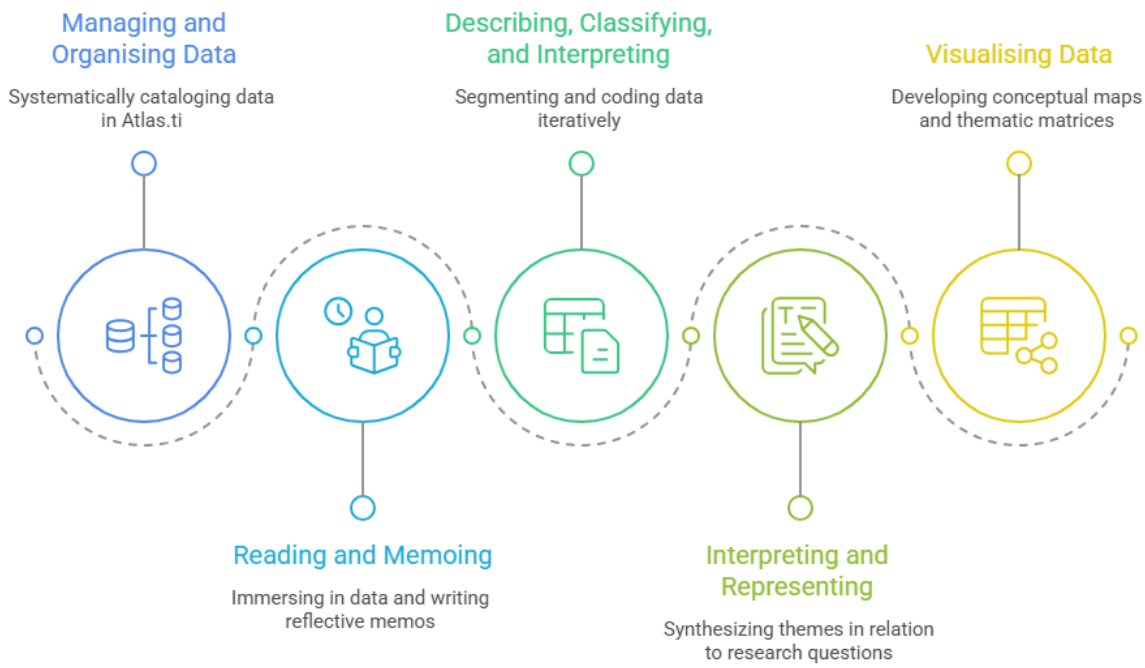
Consistent with Nieuwenhuis (2007), the analysis was understood as an ongoing, recursive process in which *data collection, processing, and interpretation* were intertwined rather than discrete stages. This simultaneity facilitated reflexivity and allowed the researcher to refine emergent categories through constant interaction with the data. Gibbs (2007) similarly emphasises that thematic analysis aims not merely to order qualitative data but to extract coherent, conceptually robust insights from complexity, a principle particularly relevant in studies situated within diverse and dynamic social contexts such as South Africa's townships.

The study employed Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase model as a procedural scaffold but integrated it within a broader interpretive logic informed by abductive reasoning (Timmermans & Tavory, 2012). This approach allowed movement between inductive insights emerging from participants' narratives and deductive expectations derived from the CFPD model and Ubuntu-informed ethics. Thus, data interpretation became a dialogic process between empirical evidence and theoretical reflection.

The analysis process followed a spiral pattern rather than a linear trajectory (de Vos et al., 2005; Vosloo, 2014). The researcher continuously cycled between immersion, coding, and thematic synthesis, allowing earlier interpretations to be re-examined as new insights emerged. This non-linear engagement reflected the hermeneutic principle that understanding evolves through

iterative interaction between parts and wholes (Gadamer, 1989). The process aligned with Creswell and Poth's (2018) *data analysis spiral* shown in Figure 4.2.

Figure 4.2 The Data Analysis Spiral. Adapted from Creswell and Poth (2018, p.186)



As shown on the Figure above, the data analysis spiral comprises the following interconnected stages:

1. Managing and organising data – Transcripts, observation notes, and documents were systematically catalogued in Atlas.ti to enable efficient retrieval and cross-referencing.
2. Reading and memoing – The researcher immersed herself in the corpus, writing reflective memos to capture early impressions, contradictions, and contextual nuances.
3. Describing, classifying, and interpreting – Data were segmented and coded iteratively, with categories refined through constant comparison across participants and sites (Charmaz, 2006).
4. Interpreting and representing – Themes were synthesized in relation to the research questions, theoretical models, and township context, ensuring conceptual coherence.

5. Visualizing data – Conceptual maps and thematic matrices were developed to illustrate interconnections among communicative processes, power dynamics, and participatory potential.

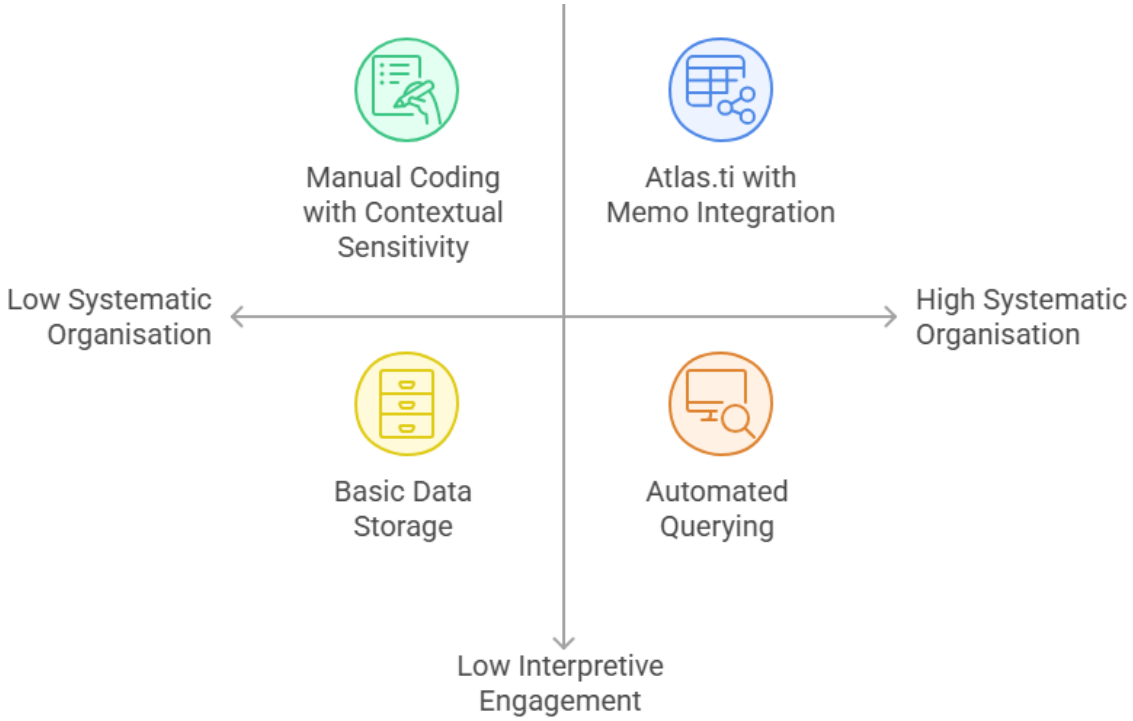
This flexible, iterative method facilitated interpretive depth and analytical saturation, ensuring that emerging patterns were substantiated across multiple data sources and levels of meaning.

4.5.2 Computer-Assisted and Manual Analysis

The study utilized Atlas.ti 9 alongside manual coding to balance systematic organization with close interpretive engagement. Atlas.ti was instrumental in managing large volumes of unstructured data and maintaining an auditable analytic trail, while manual engagement ensured sensitivity to context, tone, and cultural nuance that software alone could not capture (Welsh, 2002). As shown in Figure 5.1, manual coding with contextual sensitivity occupied the interpretive axis, allowing the researcher to engage directly with textual nuance, emotion, and meaning embedded in participants' narratives (Charmaz, 2006; Gibbs, 2007).

In contrast, Atlas.ti enhanced systematic organization by facilitating memo integration, automated querying, and visual mapping, which supported transparency and traceability (Friese, 2019; Silver & Lewins, 2014). The intersection of these two modalities of high interpretive engagement and high systematic organization enabled a methodologically balanced approach that combined the rigour of data management with the reflexivity essential to qualitative inquiry (Miles, Huberman & Saldaña, 2014; Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Figure 4.3: Balancing Systematic Organization and Interpretive Engagement in Data Analysis



This hybrid approach thus ensured that coding remained both empirically robust and ethically grounded within the participatory and Ubuntu-informed ethos of the study.

4.5.3 Coding and Interpretation

The coding process in this study was guided by the interpretive–transformative paradigm, which emphasizes meaning-making as a socially constructed and participatory process (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Mertens, 2009). Coding, therefore, served not merely as a technical act of categorization but as an interpretive dialogue between data, theory, and context. Within this philosophical orientation, communication was understood as relational and co-constructed; thus, coding was used to surface both the explicit and tacit meanings embedded in participants' narratives (Charmaz, 2006). Drawing on the CFPD model and Ubuntu-informed ethics (Servaes, 2008; Letseka, 2012; Nzimakwe, 2014), the process sought to remain sensitive to the voices, agency, and lived realities of township youth.

The coding strategy combined deductive and inductive logics to ensure that theoretical coherence co-existed with openness to emergent meaning. Deductive codes were generated from the study's conceptual framework, research questions, and the CFPD's dimensions of dialogue, empowerment, and collective action (Servaes, 2008; Gumucio-Dagron, 2019). These

a priori codes, such as government communication channels, youth participation, feedback mechanisms, and barriers to access, provided an analytical scaffold to examine the alignment between policy intent and communicative practice.

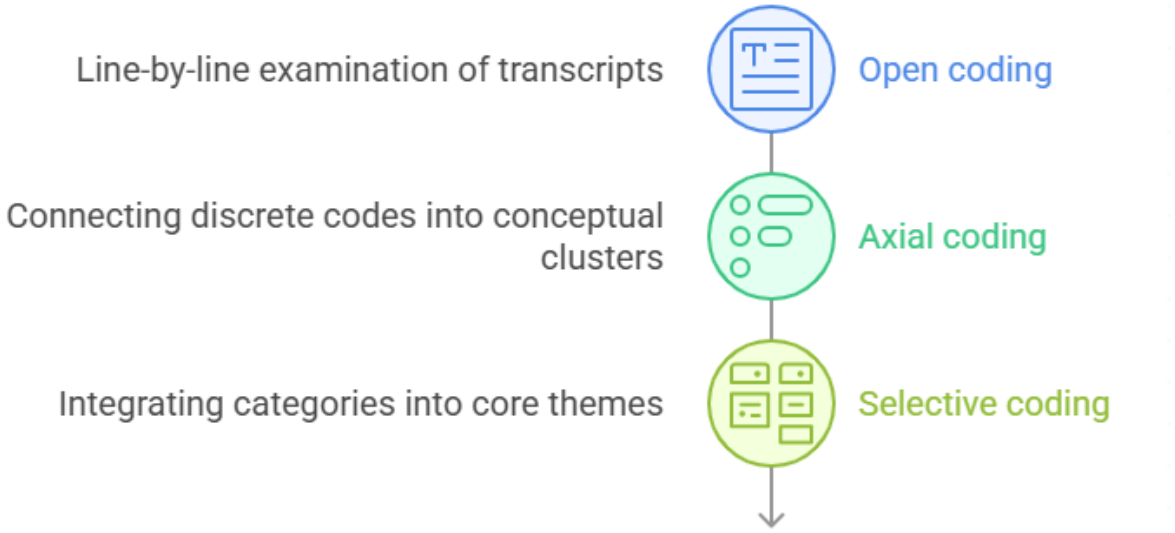
At the same time, inductive coding was employed to capture unanticipated insights arising from participants' lived experiences, consistent with grounded-theory reasoning (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Charmaz, 2006). Through repeated engagement with transcripts and field notes, new codes emerged, including distrust in government, informal information networks, digital exclusion, entrepreneurial motivation, and institutional fatigue. These reflected the affective, cultural, and structural dimensions of communication that were not captured by pre-existing theoretical categories.

The synthesis of these two approaches reflects Braun and Clarke's (2006) conception of thematic analysis as both flexible and theoretically informed. Deductive coding maintained fidelity to the study's theoretical commitments, while inductive coding allowed empirical nuance to shape the analytical outcome. This interplay mirrored the dialogic principle central to participatory communication, where meaning arises through mutual exchange rather than imposition (Melkote & Steeves, 2015).

Iterative coding and theme development

The analysis shown in Figure 4.3 unfolded through three iterative cycles involving open, axial, and selective coding, each building greater abstraction while remaining grounded in participants' words (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Charmaz, 2006). The coding process began with open coding, which entailed a meticulous line-by-line reading of the transcripts to identify discrete ideas, experiences, and expressions that captured participants' realities. During this phase, the researcher paid close attention to the language, tone, and context of participants' narratives. For instance, when a youth participant remarked, *"We only hear about entrepreneurship workshops through friends,"* this response was coded under categories such as *limited access to information, informal networks, and a visibility gap*. These initial codes represented the raw conceptual fragments that formed the foundation for deeper analytical development.

Figure 4.4: Iterative Coding and Theme Development



Through axial coding, these discrete codes were then examined for relationships, interconnections, and causal linkages. Patterns began to emerge across interviews and focus groups, revealing how individual experiences were shaped by broader communicative and structural conditions. Codes such as *limited information access* and *visibility gap* were clustered into the broader category of *communication barriers*, which described the systemic disconnect between government information channels and the everyday realities of township youth.

Finally, during selective coding, the analysis moved from categorization to integration. Broader conceptual patterns were synthesized into core themes that captured the study's central analytical processes. These themes, *trust and credibility*, *dialogue and participation*, *institutional responsiveness*, and *youth agency*, reflected the dynamic interplay between communication practices and youth empowerment. Together, these stages transformed fragmented textual data into a coherent narrative that illuminated how government communication either fosters or constrains participatory engagement in youth entrepreneurship.

Throughout these cycles, codes were constantly compared across cases, consistent with the constant comparative method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The iterative revisiting of earlier coding decisions reflected the spiral logic of qualitative analysis, enabling refinement as new insights emerged (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Reflexive memos were written after each coding session to record interpretive decisions, uncertainties, and theoretical linkages (Finlay, 2002). This process not only enhanced transparency but also deepened engagement with the data, aligning with Lincoln and Guba's (1985) emphasis on credibility and confirmability in naturalistic inquiry.

Hierarchical coding and theoretical alignment

Thematic organisation was strengthened through **hierarchical coding** within Atlas.ti, which grouped related subcodes under broader analytical themes (Friese, 2019; Miles et al., 2014). This method provided both conceptual clarity and analytical flexibility, enabling the exploration of relationships among micro-level experiences, meso-level institutional practices, and macro-level policy narratives.

For example, the parent theme Government communication strategies and approaches encompassed subcodes such as official channels, digital platforms, community outreach, and youth-specific programmes. Similarly, the theme Youth experiences and perceptions contained subcodes like trust and credibility, dialogue spaces, bureaucratic barriers, and empowerment narratives.

The hierarchical structure reflected the CFPD model's cyclical progression from sharing information to dialogue, collective action, and evaluation (Gumucio-Dagron, 2019). By mapping codes in this way, the analysis could trace how communicative practices either facilitated or obstructed participatory engagement.

Moreover, this relational coding approach resonated with Ubuntu's humanistic ethos, which values interconnectedness and mutual recognition (Letseka, 2012; Nzimakwe, 2014). In interpreting youth narratives, the researcher remained attentive to the communal meanings and moral sensibilities that shape communication in township settings. This ensured that coding preserved the social texture of participants' experiences rather than fragmenting them into abstract categories.

4.5.4 Reflexivity and Analytical Rigour

Given the interpretive nature of qualitative inquiry, reflexivity was integral to maintaining analytical rigour. The researcher functioned as the primary instrument of data collection and analysis, acknowledging that interpretation is shaped by positionality, values, and prior

assumptions (Finlay, 2002; Mertens, 2009). Reflexive journals and analytic memos were maintained throughout the process to document evolving interpretations and potential biases.

To ensure credibility, peer debriefing sessions were conducted with fellow researcher's familiar with participatory communication and qualitative analysis. These sessions provided external perspectives that challenged interpretive assumptions and refined thematic boundaries (Tobin & Begley, 2004). Dependability was achieved through meticulous documentation of analytical steps within Atlas.ti, creating a traceable audit trail of decisions (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Furthermore, confirmability was reinforced through triangulation of data sources, interviews, focus groups, observations, and documentary analysis, thereby allowing themes to be validated across multiple perspectives (Miles et al., 2014). The researcher's engagement with participants was guided by Ubuntu ethics of respect and empathy, ensuring that analysis honoured the integrity of participants' voices.

The ultimate purpose of coding extended beyond categorizing data; it served to build theoretical insight into how communication processes influence youth participation in entrepreneurship. The thematic patterns revealed complex interplays of trust, access, and representation that either enabled or constrained participatory dialogue. These findings were interpreted through the lens of the CFPD model, which conceptualizes communication as a continuum from monologic information transfer to dialogic engagement (Servaes, 2008; Gumucio-Dagron, 2019).

The alignment between emergent themes and Ubuntu's relational ontology further illuminated how communication can become an ethical practice of recognition and solidarity (Letseka, 2012). In this sense, the coding process became both analytical and moral, linking the micro-level experiences of township youth to the macro-level transformation of governance and communication systems.

Thus, the movement from raw text to conceptual abstraction provided not only empirical grounding for the study's findings but also a theoretical bridge to the participatory framework elaborated in Chapter 3. The final themes distilled through this process form the basis of the analysis presented in the next chapter.

As already highlighted, the interpretive logic guiding the analysis combined the diagnostic precision of the CFPD model with the moral and relational sensibility of Ubuntu. The CFPD framework structured the inquiry around key participatory dimensions to enable assessment of where communication processes either facilitated or constrained empowerment. Ubuntu extended this analysis by situating communication within a moral economy of interdependence and care (Mabovula, 2011; Nzimakwe, 2014). Thus, each theme was examined not only for its procedural implications but also for its ethical significance in advancing relational accountability between state and citizen.

By moving cyclically between empirical patterns and theoretical constructs, the analysis achieved what Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014) describe as *analytic thickness*: a synthesis that is both contextually grounded and conceptually rich. The resulting thematic framework captured the communicative issues and possibilities inherent in government efforts to foster youth entrepreneurship. These findings are elaborated in the subsequent chapter.

Throughout this process, the CFPD model provided diagnostic markers for assessing participatory quality. For example, "dialogue" was coded by evidence of reciprocal interaction between officials and youth, "collective action" by instances of joint planning or co-creation of initiatives, and "feedback" by systems enabling responsiveness. The absence or weakness of these elements indicated structural and communicative disjunctures. Ubuntu's emphasis on mutual recognition further deepened the analysis by illuminating *the moral texture of communication*, how participants felt seen, heard, or ignored within government interfaces.

Interpretation extended beyond the textual level to encompass *contextual triangulation* between interviews, observations, and documents. Patterns identified in policy texts (e.g., rhetorical commitment to participation) were compared with field realities (e.g., unidirectional message dissemination) to expose the dissonance between policy intent and practice. This triangulated approach enhanced the *credibility and confirmability* of findings (Lincoln & Guba, 2005; Yin, 2018).

Throughout the analytic journey, reflexivity remained central. The researcher maintained analytic memos documenting interpretive choices, emotional responses, and positionality reflections, acknowledging that meaning-making is shaped by the researcher's standpoint as both a scholar and a socially situated observer (Finlay, 2002; Hesse-Biber, 2013). Reflexive

engagement ensured that analysis was not merely descriptive but *dialogic*, a process of continuous negotiation between data, theory, and researcher consciousness.

Ultimately, the analysis sought to transform empirical data into *praxeological insight*, knowledge that not only explains but also informs practice. By integrating the procedural clarity of the CFPD model with the ethical sensitivity of Ubuntu, the interpretive framework bridged structure and agency, theory and praxis. It illuminated how participatory ideals can be operationalised within government communication to foster youth empowerment and collective development.

In this sense, data analysis was not a technical endpoint but a transformative act of understanding, a process through which the voices of township youth and state communicators were brought into conversation, revealing both the constraints and possibilities of communication as a vehicle for participatory development in South Africa.

4.5.5 Trustworthiness and Methodological Rigour

Ensuring trustworthiness and methodological rigour was a central concern of this study, given its interpretive and participatory orientation. In qualitative research, the concepts of reliability and validity are reconceptualized as *trustworthiness*, which encompasses credibility, dependability, confirmability, transferability, and authenticity (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Mertens, 2009). These principles rest on the researcher's interpretive integrity, reflexivity, and systematic adherence to methodological procedures (Patton, 2015). Because the researcher serves as the principal instrument of data generation and analysis, credibility in qualitative inquiry depends less on statistical precision and more on reflexivity, ethical awareness, and methodological transparency (Tobin & Begley, 2004; Hesse-Biber, 2013).

In recognition of the limitations of traditional validity metrics in interpretive research (Vosloo, 2014; Huberman & Miles, 2002), this study adopted qualitative criteria suited to its epistemological stance. *Credibility* was established through prolonged engagement in the field and iterative validation of emerging interpretations. The researcher revisited transcripts, memos, and analytic notes multiple times, cross-checking insights across interviews, focus groups, and document analysis. Peer debriefing sessions provided opportunities for critical dialogue and helped to guard against interpretive bias, ensuring that the findings faithfully reflected participants' lived experiences (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Dependability was maintained by creating a detailed audit trail that documented each step of the research, from data collection and transcription to coding and theme development. This record ensured that the analytic process was both traceable and logically replicable, aligning with Riege's (2003) emphasis on methodological consistency throughout the qualitative research cycle. Similarly, *confirmability* was strengthened through systematic documentation of interpretive decisions. Coded transcripts, reflective journals, and analytical memos provided evidence of how conclusions were reached, enabling external scrutiny and verification (Mertens, 2010). Reflexive journaling also allowed the researcher to acknowledge and interrogate her positionality, recognising that qualitative meaning is always co-constructed between researcher and participants (Finlay, 2002).

To enhance *transferability*, the study provided rich, contextual descriptions of the four township settings, detailing their socio-economic environments, communication infrastructures, and participant demographics. Such thick description allows readers to assess whether the study's insights are applicable to other contexts sharing similar structural and cultural characteristics (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Finally, *authenticity* was preserved through an ethical and empathetic portrayal of participants' voices, consistent with the study's Ubuntu-informed framework (Mabovula, 2011). By privileging participants' own language, metaphors, and cultural expressions, the analysis foregrounded relational ethics, mutual respect, and recognition of community-based knowledge (Chilisa, 2012).

These strategies ensured that the study's methodological foundations were both rigorous and value-driven. The resulting findings, therefore, reflect not only the empirical realities of township youth and government communicators but also the ethical and epistemological commitments that underpin participatory and transformative research.

4.5.6 Ethical Considerations

Ethical integrity forms the moral and procedural foundation of qualitative inquiry. It ensures that research upholds the dignity, rights, and agency of participants while maintaining the trustworthiness of findings (Arksey & Knight, 1999; Orb, Eisenhauer & Wynaden, 2001). In keeping with the University of South Africa's Research Ethics Policy, this study adhered to rigorous ethical protocols from the design stage through to data dissemination.

Given the study's transformative and Ubuntu-informed orientation, ethics was understood not merely as a procedural requirement but as a relational and participatory practice rooted in care, mutual respect, and shared accountability (Mertens, 2009; Chilisa, 2012; Nzimakwe, 2014).

4.5.7 Informed Consent

Informed consent was central to ensuring voluntary participation and safeguarding autonomy. All participants were briefed in plain, accessible language about the study's purpose, objectives, data collection methods, potential risks, and anticipated benefits. They were explicitly informed that their participation was voluntary and that they could withdraw at any stage without providing a reason or suffering any consequences (Orb et al., 2001).

Written consent was obtained prior to all interviews and focus groups, and verbal consent was secured for non-participant observations where written documentation was impractical. Participants were also advised that data would be used exclusively for academic purposes and that confidentiality measures were in place. This iterative consent process, revisited throughout the fieldwork, reflected the study's commitment to continuous ethical engagement rather than one-off compliance.

The approach aligns with participatory research ethics, which recognize consent as an ongoing process of *negotiation and dialogue* rather than a static contractual formality (Mertens, 2009).

4.5.8 Confidentiality and Anonymity

Confidentiality was rigorously maintained throughout the research process to protect participants from potential reputational, social, or institutional risks. Personal identifiers were removed from all transcripts, field notes, and documents. Each participant was assigned a coded reference based on demographic and locational identifiers (for example, *YF2_SOW* representing a female youth entrepreneur from Soweto).

All digital files were stored on password-protected, encrypted devices accessible only to the researcher. Printed notes and consent forms were securely locked in a cabinet and will be destroyed after the mandated five-year retention period.

Anonymity was preserved in both data presentation and dissemination. Only aggregated findings and illustrative quotations are reported, ensuring that no individual or institution can be directly identified. These procedures are consistent with the ethical principles of privacy,

respect, and protection from harm, as articulated by the American Anthropological Association (AAA, 2012) and the University's ethics code.

4.5.9 Non-maleficence and Beneficence

The principle of **non-maleficence**, avoiding harm, guided all data collection activities, complemented by the principle of **beneficence**, which emphasizes promoting participants' well-being. Interviews and focus groups were conducted in safe, familiar, and non-threatening environments such as community halls or business premises. Special sensitivity was applied when engaging unemployed youth or participants describing experiences of exclusion or frustration with government programmes.

No intrusive, stigmatizing, or emotionally distressing questions were posed. Participants were offered debriefing opportunities after each session, allowing them to reflect or withdraw any information they had shared if they felt uncomfortable.

Beneficence was promoted by ensuring that the research process itself was meaningful to participants. Discussions were structured to affirm youth experiences, stimulate reflection, and create opportunities for shared learning. These actions align with Ubuntu's ethic of humaneness and care, which emphasizes relational responsibility and communal flourishing (Mabovula, 2011; Nzimakwe, 2014).

(a) Honesty, transparency, and relational trust

Integrity and transparency underpinned all interactions with participants and institutional stakeholders. The researcher clearly articulated the study's aims and limitations to avoid any misunderstanding regarding its scope or expected outcomes.

The research did not employ deception, manipulation, or advocacy that could compromise participant autonomy. Instead, it cultivated *relational trust* through open communication, respect, and reciprocity. This reflects Ubuntu's moral imperative of *"I am because we are"*, in which trust and care are central to ethical practice (Nzimakwe, 2014; Letseka, 2012).

Regular feedback sessions were held with community and institutional stakeholders to discuss emerging insights. By prioritizing transparency, the study enhanced its credibility and fostered relationships that extended beyond data extraction into genuine collaboration.

(b) Institutional permissions and compliance

Institutional and governmental permissions were secured before fieldwork commenced. Formal approval for data collection was obtained from the GCIS Gauteng Provincial Office, municipal Local Economic Development units, and the University of South Africa's Research Ethics Committee. The ethics clearance process verified that the study's design met standards of risk minimization, confidentiality, and informed consent.

Additionally, municipal officials were briefed on the study's objectives to ensure alignment with local administrative protocols. The researcher adhered to the principles of the *Protection of Personal Information Act* (POPIA, 2013), ensuring that data management complied with South African legal and institutional frameworks.

(c) Reciprocity and dissemination ethics

In keeping with the transformative and participatory orientation of this study, ethics extended beyond data protection to include reciprocity and mutual benefit. Participants were offered the option to receive summaries of the study's findings and recommendations. This ensured that knowledge generated through their contributions was returned to the community in an accessible and useful form (Chilisa, 2012).

This reciprocal dissemination practice reflects the *ethic of care and accountability* embedded in Ubuntu, which views research as a shared social enterprise rather than a one-sided process of extraction. It also resonates with participatory communication values that foreground dialogue, feedback, and collaborative learning as integral components of ethical scholarship (Melkote & Steeves, 2015).

The ethical framework guiding this study combined procedural rigour with relational sensitivity. By integrating established institutional ethics with Ubuntu's relational principles, the research upheld the dignity, safety, and agency of all participants. It further embodied the transformative paradigm's commitment to justice, empowerment, and reciprocal knowledge production.

4.6 CONCLUSION

This chapter has outlined the methodological logic, design, and ethical framework underpinning the study. By integrating the transformative paradigm with participatory and Ubuntu-informed approaches, the methodology was crafted to explore government communication not as a linear process of message transmission but as a relational, dialogic, and power-mediated social practice.

The chapter demonstrated how the chosen qualitative multi-case design, supported by rigorous sampling, data collection, and analysis procedures, ensured the trustworthiness and contextual validity of findings. The reflexive and ethically grounded approach further safeguarded participant dignity while maintaining analytical depth.

The next chapter presents the empirical findings, tracing how government communication strategies are enacted, interpreted, and contested in township contexts. Through the analytical lenses of the CFPD model and Ubuntu ethics, it illuminates the communicative disjunctures, participatory gaps, and opportunities for co-creation that define youth engagement in South Africa's township economies.

CHAPTER FIVE

THEMATIC ANALYSIS OF GOVERNMENT COMMUNICATION AND YOUTH ENTREPRENEURSHIP

5.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents and interprets the empirical findings on government communication and youth entrepreneurship in South African townships. The findings are based on a qualitative thematic analysis of data collected through semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions, participant observation, and document analysis. The analysis is informed by the Communication for Participatory Development (CFPD) model and the Ubuntu-informed relational paradigm, which guided the examination of the inclusivity, responsiveness, and participatory nature of government communication.

A total of 32 participants took part in the study, comprising 12 youth entrepreneurs, 12 aspiring youth entrepreneurs, 4 Government Communication and Information System (GCIS) communication officials, and 4 Local Economic Development (LED) officials. Participants were purposively selected from four township communities in Gauteng Province: Soweto (City of Johannesburg Metropolitan Municipality), Mamelodi (City of Tshwane Metropolitan Municipality), Tembisa (City of Ekurhuleni Metropolitan Municipality), and Sebokeng (Emfuleni Local Municipality, Sedibeng District Municipality). Each township contributed three youth entrepreneurs and three aspiring entrepreneurs, while one GCIS official and one LED official from each municipal area participated in the study.

To maintain participant confidentiality, pseudonyms are used consistently throughout this chapter. The participant coding system presented in **Table 5.1** provides a reference for the pseudonyms used to identify participant categories and study sites. Accordingly, participant quotations are cited using the relevant pseudonyms, enabling readers to identify the participant category and study location while maintaining participant confidentiality.

In addition to the interviews, four focus group discussions were conducted, one in each township, with six participants per group. Participant observation was undertaken at the Thusong Service Centres in Soweto, Mamelodi, and Tembisa to examine government communication practices within community service environments; Sebokeng was excluded

from this component because it did not have a functional Thusong Service Centre. Document analysis of relevant government policies, reports, and communication frameworks complemented the primary data and provided institutional context for interpreting the findings.

The findings are presented thematically, drawing on participants' narratives and observational evidence to examine how government communication influences youth participation, access to entrepreneurial opportunities, trust, and institutional responsiveness. The analysis addresses the study's central research question by demonstrating how government communication processes enable or constrain the participatory engagement of township youth in entrepreneurship initiatives. The themes presented in this chapter provide the empirical foundation for the discussion and development of the participatory communication framework presented in Chapter Six.

Table 5.1: Participant Coding Index Used in the Study

Participant Category	Participant Codes	Description
Youth Entrepreneurs – Soweto	SYP1–SYP3	Active youth entrepreneurs from Soweto
Aspiring Youth Entrepreneurs – Soweto	SYP4–SYP6	Aspiring youth entrepreneurs from Soweto
Youth Entrepreneurs – Mamelodi	MYP1–MYP3	Active youth entrepreneurs from Mamelodi
Aspiring Youth Entrepreneurs – Mamelodi	MYP4–MYP6	Aspiring youth entrepreneurs from Mamelodi
Youth Entrepreneurs – Thembisa	TYP1–TYP3	Active youth entrepreneurs from Thembisa
Aspiring Youth Entrepreneurs – Thembisa	TYP4–TYP6	Aspiring youth entrepreneurs from Thembisa
Youth Entrepreneurs – Sebokeng	SBYP1–SBYP3	Active youth entrepreneurs from Sebokeng
Aspiring Youth Entrepreneurs – Sebokeng	SBYP4–SBYP6	Aspiring youth entrepreneurs from Sebokeng
Government Communication and Information System Officials	GCIS1–GCIS4	Government communication officials
Local Economic Development Officials	LED1–LED4	Local Economic Development officials

5.2 GOVERNMENT COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES AND PRACTICES

As established in the literature review, how government institutions communicate with young people is central to how development policy becomes lived experience. Communication is not a neutral exercise in information transfer; rather, it is a discursive arena in which power, participation, and legitimacy are continuously negotiated (Servaes, 2008; Melkote & Steeves, 2015). Findings across the four township sites reveal that the effectiveness of government communication concerning youth entrepreneurship is profoundly shaped by the accessibility, inclusivity, and relational adequacy of the channels used. Although government institutions employ multiple platforms, including community radio, print media, roadshows, and digital social media, these modes are often poorly aligned with the communicative habits, temporalities, and digital ecologies of township youth. The result is a persistent mismatch between institutional communication design and audience realities, which compromises both the reach and credibility of entrepreneurship messages.

Against this backdrop, the findings discussed in this section explore how government communication strategies and practices manifest across the four township contexts of Soweto, Mamelodi, Thembisa, and Sebokeng, and how these practices are perceived and experienced by both youth and government officials. The discussion unfolds through three interrelated dimensions: first, the accessibility and inclusivity of communication channels; second, the institutional logic that structures government communication practices; and third, the communicative preferences expressed by youth participants. These dimensions expose not only the operational strengths and weaknesses of existing systems but also the deeper epistemological and ethical tensions that constrain the enactment of participatory communication within the public sector.

Situating government communication within an ethical and relational framework informed by *Ubuntu* underscores that authentic engagement extends beyond policy dissemination to encompass relationships of trust, reciprocity, and mutual recognition between the state and its citizens (Mabovula, 2011; Nzimakwe, 2014). Within this perspective, communication becomes a moral practice, a process of *being-with-others*, that reflects both the procedural and affective dimensions of participation. The empirical findings presented below demonstrate how the absence of such relational ethics limits the transformative potential of government communication and curtails its ability to empower youth as co-creators of development in township economies.

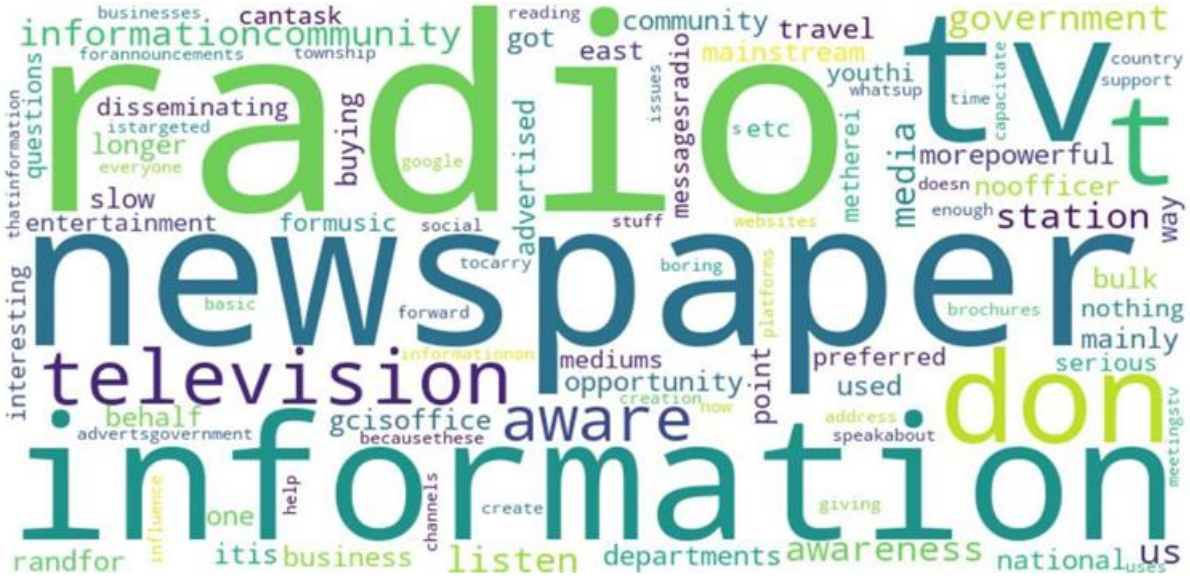
5.2.1 Communication channels and accessibility in youth entrepreneurship outreach

Across the four township sites, the findings reveal a significant gap between the government's communicative intentions and the everyday information worlds of young people. Although government officials described their outreach as "multi-platform," combining community radio, local print, *imbizo* campaigns, and digital media, youth participants experienced these efforts as fragmented, inconsistent, and often irrelevant to their lived realities. This divergence illustrates what Servaes (2008) and Melkote and Steeves (2015) describe as a structural disjuncture between institutional communication design and the dialogic conditions required for participatory development.

Analyzing government communication channels reveals distinct patterns across traditional, digital, social media, and interpersonal methods. The government employs a range of platforms depending on the nature of the message and the target audience. The findings indicate a blend of top-down and dialogic approaches. Top-down methods include media briefings broadcast on national radio and television, updates posted on official government websites, and printed publications distributed through local offices. In contrast, dialogic forms of communication are evident in outreach initiatives such as awareness campaigns, imbizo gatherings, and township roadshows, which encourage more direct, participatory engagement with community members.

These multiple platforms are visualized in Figure 5.1, which presents a word cloud of the main channels identified across the four township sites.

Figure 5.1: Word Cloud – Government Communication Channels



While the existence of multiple channels suggests institutional awareness of communication diversity, the youth participants' experiences paint a more complex picture. Despite the availability of various platforms, many participants described them as outdated or one-way.

(a)Television

Television remains central to government communication strategies due to its perceived reach, credibility, and authority. Officials explained that it "gives our messages a sense of authority" and remains widely accessible across socio-economic contexts. However, for most township youth, television is no longer a serious source of information. 95 percent of participants associated it primarily with entertainment rather than with development messages.

SYP2 (Active youth entrepreneur, Soweto) remarked:

"TV for me is for music and entertainment, not for serious government messages."

TYP4 (Aspiring youth entrepreneur, Thembisa) added:

"At home, my parents watch the news, but I am scrolling through social media because that is where I get updates".

These perspectives reveal a generational and cultural shift in media consumption. Television still enjoys symbolic authority among government officials but lacks resonance with younger audiences, who prioritize immediacy, participation, and interactivity. This misalignment exemplifies what Waisbord (2005) calls the visibility fallacy, the assumption that visibility

through mass exposure equates to engagement. While television remains valuable for raising awareness, it cannot substitute for youth-centred dialogue and participatory engagement.

While television reflects the government's continued reliance on highly centralized and image-driven communication, radio emerged as the next major channel through which officials attempt to extend their reach, offering greater accessibility and linguistic diversity but still constrained by similar one-way tendencies.

(b) Radio

Radio remains one of the most extensively used channels for government communication, prized for its reach, affordability, and linguistic inclusivity. Officials consistently described it as an indispensable medium for disseminating public information. Highlighting radio's perceived universality and accessibility, GCIS2 noted that:

Radio still reaches everyone, even those without smartphones.

For government communicators, radio represents both a familiar and trusted platform, one that transcends literacy barriers and geographic divides, particularly in communities where internet connectivity is unreliable. This enduring institutional faith in radio echoes earlier development communication traditions that positioned mass media as the cornerstone of outreach and education (Lerner, 1958; Schramm, 1964).

However, the findings from the four townships reveal a more complex and differentiated picture of radio's role. Youth participants increasingly distinguish between national and community-based stations, drawing sharp contrasts in tone, content, and relevance. National broadcasters, particularly the SABC and other mainstream outlets, were described as formal, distant, and politically loaded.

TYP1 (Active youth entrepreneur, Thembisa) commented:

Those SABC programmes are too serious and too far from our lives. They speak about policy, not about how to actually start or grow a business.

By contrast, community radio stations such as Mams FM, Jozi FM, and Thetha FM were regarded as authentic, conversational, and culturally resonant. MYP3 (Active youth entrepreneur, Mamelodi) explained:

Community radio talks about our music, our businesses, and our hustle.

SBYP5 (Aspiring youth entrepreneur, Sebokeng) added:

> *We listen to Mams FM because it feels like us. It talks about what is happening here*.

These accounts underscore community radio's capacity to embed communication within local experiences, languages, and identities. This participatory potential supports Bosch's (2014) and Chinyowa's (2005) arguments that community radio, when locally owned and community-driven, functions as a deliberative space where marginalized voices can challenge institutional narratives. In this sense, community radio embodies Freire's (1970) notion of dialogic communication, one that fosters listening, reflection, and collective action rather than passive reception.

Yet, despite its participatory promise, community radio remains underutilized by government communication structures. Officials acknowledged logistical and resource challenges, including limited budgets, short campaign timelines, and bureaucratic constraints that often favour established national partnerships. GCIS3 admitted:

> *Community stations are powerful, but we don't always have the time or budget to do partnerships with them. We rely on the SABC because it is faster to reach a national audience.*

This reliance on mainstream broadcasters illustrates what Servaes (2008) terms a modernization logic, the assumption that development communication must prioritize scale and reach over local ownership and inclusion. Consequently, government communication through radio often reproduces a unidirectional, message-driven model rather than fostering the two-way, relational engagement that participatory theory advocates.

For township youth, this approach limits both access and resonance. Although radio remains one of the few accessible platforms, its effectiveness depends on tone, interactivity, and local embeddedness. Participants expressed a desire for programmes that allow for direct engagement, such as live call-ins, youth panels, and business mentorship slots.

SYP5 (Aspiring youth entrepreneur, Soweto) remarked:

Radio can work if they let us speak too, not just listen. We have ideas, not just questions.

Such insights point toward a hybrid communication approach that combines radio's accessibility with dialogic principles of participation and mutual exchange. Without this shift, radio risks remaining a one-way instrument of visibility rather than a catalyst for youth empowerment.

While radio continues to provide an important bridge between the state and citizens, its participatory potential remains constrained by institutional inertia and a preference for control over conversation. Another traditional medium, print media, despite its historical prominence, also faces even greater challenges in connecting with South Africa's digitally oriented youth.

(c)Print media

Print media, particularly newspapers, occupy a visible yet declining position within the government's communication repertoire. They are still used for publishing official notices, tender announcements, and awareness campaigns. This reflects a long-standing belief in the legitimacy and permanence of the printed word. For many government communicators, newspapers offer a sense of formal authority and record-keeping that digital media are perceived to lack. GCIS1 explained:

We still use newspapers because they give our information an official status. Once it's printed, it becomes a reference point.

This institutional attachment to print reflects what Servaes (2008) and Melkote and Steeves (2015) term the residual modernization paradigm, in which communication is conceptualized as a unidirectional process of informing the public rather than engaging them.

However, among township youth, the printed newspaper is widely regarded as a relic of an earlier era of communication. Across Soweto, Mamelodi, Thembisa, and Sebokeng, participants consistently described newspapers as outdated, inaccessible, and irrelevant to their daily lives. MYP2 (Active youth entrepreneur, Mamelodi) observed:

It is unnecessary to buy a paper when you can get everything online.

TYP2 (Active youth entrepreneur, Thembisa) added:

It feels old-fashioned to read newspapers; I only check the news on my phone.

For many participants, the physicality of newspapers, once associated with credibility and routine, has become a barrier rather than a virtue. Participants cited the purchase cost, the inconvenience of carrying papers in taxis or informal workspaces, and the overwhelming, text-heavy layout as deterrents. SBYP3 (Active youth entrepreneur, Sebokeng) remarked:

> *You spend money and time reading about things that do not talk to you. Most of those stories are for people in Sandton, not us.*

These views reinforce Wimmer and Dominick's (2011) argument that generational media preferences are shaped by technological access and evolving literacy practices. They also resonate with Prinsloo's (2003) notion of "situated literacies," which highlights that reading and meaning-making are socially embedded acts, influenced by class, geography, and culture. For township youth, digital media, particularly smartphones, have become not only more accessible but also more congruent with their daily rhythms of mobility, work, and peer communication.

Moreover, the linguistic and stylistic conventions of print media further alienate younger audiences. Several participants criticized the use of formal bureaucratic language in government notices, which they found intimidating or difficult to interpret. SYP4 (Aspiring youth entrepreneur, Soweto) observed:

> *Those government ads in newspapers are full of big words. You must be educated to understand them.*

This perception of linguistic distance echoes Tomaselli and Dunn's (2001) critique of South African media's "elitist grammar," which privileges middle-class readerships and excludes youth who communicate in multilingual, hybrid registers that combine English with local languages and township vernaculars.

Despite these challenges, print media continue to serve symbolic and administrative functions for government communicators. Newspapers remain a preferred channel for fulfilling legal disclosure requirements and for reaching institutional stakeholders such as NGOs, schools, and municipal offices. Yet, as youth participants pointed out, these practices rarely translate into

meaningful engagement or behavioural change. MYP2 (Active youth entrepreneur, Mamelodi) explained:

> *You see those adverts about funding or tenders, but by the time you apply, the deadline has passed. It feels like those things are not meant for us.*

This statement illustrates how traditional media often perpetuate exclusion through both design and timing. The delayed cycles of print publication stand in sharp contrast to the immediacy of digital communication that youth rely on for real-time updates.

Furthermore, the decline in youth readership is compounded by the broader structural contraction of South Africa's print industry. Circulation figures for major newspapers such as The Sowetan, City Press, and The Star have steadily fallen over the past decade (Audit Bureau of Circulations, 2023), mirroring global trends of declining print consumption among younger demographics. Consequently, government investment in print advertising may yield diminishing returns, particularly for youth-oriented campaigns.

For many young people, print is perceived as a static, one-way channel that fails to accommodate the interactivity, feedback, and immediacy they value in their digital environments. From a participatory communication perspective, the continued prioritization of print reflects an institutional orientation toward information control rather than dialogue (Freire, 1970; Tufte, 2017). Reconfiguring this approach would require integrating print as a complementary, rather than primary, channel, used strategically alongside community-based and digital platforms that invite co-creation and feedback.

As the next section illustrates, social and digital media platforms increasingly occupy this communicative space, offering township youth greater immediacy, interactivity, and relational engagement than traditional print outlets can provide.

(d)Social media and digital platforms

Social media and digital platforms have become central spaces for communication among township youth, offering immediacy, interactivity, and a sense of personal relevance that traditional media often lack. Across all four townships, participants consistently identified platforms such as WhatsApp, TikTok, Facebook, and Instagram as their primary sources of information, social interaction, and entrepreneurial networking. These spaces, they argued,

represent not just channels of entertainment but vital arenas for learning, collaboration, and identity construction. TYP5 (Aspiring youth entrepreneur, Thembisa) stated:

> *We live online. If the government wants to talk to us, they must come where we are.*

This statement encapsulates the youth's expectation that communication should be both accessible and participatory. For them, digital platforms are not supplementary but central to their communicative existence. WhatsApp, in particular, emerged as a preferred tool due to its accessibility, affordability, and conversational intimacy. MYP2 (Active youth entrepreneur, Mamelodi) explained:

> *WhatsApp is quick and personal. You can ask questions, share updates, and even start business groups.*

This preference highlights the relational dimension of digital communication, where interaction unfolds through dialogue rather than formal announcement. As Freire (1970) and Servaes (2008) argue, genuine participation depends on horizontal exchange and co-creation of meaning, qualities that these digital platforms inherently enable. Through WhatsApp groups, Facebook pages, and TikTok communities, young entrepreneurs share business opportunities, funding alerts, and motivational content, often serving as substitutes for formal government communication that fails to reach them directly.

However, participants also noted that official government messages rarely appear in their online spaces, creating a vacuum filled by peers and informal networks. SYP1 (Active youth entrepreneur, Soweto) remarked:

> *We only hear about entrepreneurship workshops through friends or WhatsApp groups. You never see posters or government messages that talk directly to us.*

Such observations underscore the emergence of peer-mediated communication ecologies, where information circulates through trust-based interpersonal networks rather than institutional channels. This bottom-up model of communication aligns with Melkote and Steeves's (2015) call for participatory communication systems that value community knowledge and local ownership. Yet it also exposes a structural weakness within government communication systems: the inability to adapt to the digital lifeworlds of their intended beneficiaries.

While youth participants celebrated the openness and immediacy of social media, government officials expressed ambivalence toward these platforms. Several GCIS and municipal communication officers acknowledged the power of social media but lamented institutional constraints that limited their use. GCIS4 explained:

> *We know social media is powerful, but our systems make it hard to post freely. Everything needs clearance*.

This bureaucratic rigidity reflects what Tufte (2017) terms the control mentality of public communication, in which message discipline and institutional authority are prioritized over responsiveness and engagement. Rather than leveraging social media as participatory tools, government communicators tend to treat them as extensions of traditional publicity functions, spaces for announcement rather than dialogue.

Consequently, official social media accounts are often inactive, one-directional, or overly formal in tone. Youth participants described government pages as "boring" or "not updated." MYP6 (Aspiring youth entrepreneur, Mamelodi) noted:

> *Even when they post on Facebook, it feels like a copy-and-paste from a press release. It's not talking to us.*

This critique resonates with Gumucio-Dagron's (2019) notion of the institutional fear of participation, where engagement is perceived as risky, unpredictable, or politically sensitive. The absence of conversational content, such as live Q&A sessions, youth spotlights, or interactive storytelling, undermines the relational and empowering potential of these platforms.

The data also reveal significant inequalities in digital access and skills. While smartphone penetration is high, inconsistent internet connectivity, high data costs, and limited digital literacy constrain full participation. Several participants mentioned relying on "free-mode Facebook" or borrowing Wi-Fi access from local businesses. SBYP5 (Aspiring youth entrepreneur, Sebokeng) remarked:

Sometimes I only go online when I'm at the library or a friend's house because data is expensive.

This digital divide illustrates Warschauer's (2003) argument that access to technology does not automatically translate into inclusion or empowerment. Without structural interventions, such as subsidised data plans, digital-skills training, and youth-centred online portals, the participatory promise of digital communication remains unevenly realised.

Despite these barriers, digital platforms continue to function as critical spaces for youth-led participation, creativity, and self-organization. The findings reveal numerous examples of young people using TikTok to promote local products, Facebook to crowdsource business advice, and WhatsApp to form savings groups or share funding opportunities. These practices exemplify what Castells (2012) terms networked agency, the capacity of individuals to mobilize resources, ideas, and social capital through connected networks.

For government communication, this represents both a challenge and an opportunity. The challenge lies in overcoming bureaucratic inertia and risk aversion; the opportunity lies in co-creating communication ecosystems that reflect the participatory logic of the digital age. Embedding Ubuntu principles within this context, emphasizing empathy, reciprocity, and relational care, could transform these digital interactions from transactional exchanges into spaces of collective empowerment (Mabovula, 2011; Nzimakwe, 2014).

As these findings indicate, youth engagement through social media cannot be reduced to platform adoption alone. It requires a shift in communicative ethos from control to collaboration, from messaging to dialogue. The next section examines government websites and online service portals, which, although designed for information dissemination, often fall short of facilitating the kind of interactive, user-centred engagement that township youth value.

(e)Government Websites

Government websites play a prominent role in official communication strategies, serving as the primary digital repositories for government documents, policies, application forms, and updates on youth entrepreneurship programmes. For many officials, these websites represent an efficient, transparent, and cost-effective means of communication that consolidates diverse information streams within a single, authoritative platform. LED2 explained:

> *Everything is in one place. We upload forms, opportunities, and reports, so young people can access whatever they need at any time.*

This perspective reflects an administrative logic rooted in information management rather than communicative engagement. As government communicators emphasized, websites are valued for their permanence, scalability, and traceability, features that align with bureaucratic priorities of control and accountability (McQuail, 2010). However, the data from township youth paint a markedly different picture, one that exposes the gap between institutional design and user experience.

Youth participants across all four townships described government websites as inaccessible, outdated, and alienating. TYP4 (Aspiring youth entrepreneur, Thembisa) remarked:

> *The websites are not user-friendly. You can spend hours finding what you need.*

TYP2 (Active youth entrepreneur, Thembisa) added:

> *The information is old, and there is no place to ask questions.*

These frustrations speak to broader issues of digital usability and communicative relevance. While internet access has expanded significantly in South Africa, the effectiveness of online engagement depends not only on connectivity but also on the quality of design and interactivity (Warschauer, 2003; Nyamnjoh, 2017). For many township youth, government websites remain text-heavy, bureaucratically structured, and linguistically formal, qualities that discourage sustained engagement.

Participants described navigation difficulties, slow loading times, and broken links as common barriers. Some complained that websites were "not designed for phones," highlighting the disconnect between web interfaces and the mobile-first digital habits of young people. SYP1 (Active youth entrepreneur, Soweto) explained:

> *Most of us use phones, not computers. The websites don't open properly on phones, and you can't download those big documents with limited data.*

This mismatch between technological design and user context echoes Prinsloo's (2003) argument that digital literacy is culturally situated and mediated by material conditions such as device type, data cost, and network reliability. The assumption that access to online platforms equates to participation ignores the structural and economic realities of digital engagement in low-income urban settings.

Moreover, the tone and layout of government websites were perceived as cold and impersonal. Participants repeatedly described them as "bureaucratic" and "distant," reinforcing the perception of government as unapproachable. This sentiment reflects what Habermas (1989) termed the colonization of the lifeworld, where institutional communication systems impose formal, procedural language on citizens' everyday communicative environments, thereby eroding opportunities for genuine dialogue.

A more relational approach could reposition these websites as spaces of interaction rather than documentation. Participants proposed several practical improvements, including live chat functions, mentorship portals, and youth discussion forums. MYP1 (Active youth entrepreneur, Mamelodi) suggested:

> *It would help if you could ask questions online and get quick responses, rather than just reading PDF documents.*

Such proposals reflect an underlying desire for communication grounded in responsiveness and care, values central to the Ubuntu ethic of engagement (Mabovula, 2011; Nzimakwe, 2014). Within this framework, government websites would serve not merely as tools for information dissemination but as relational interfaces that embody empathy, accountability, and mutual recognition.

This transformation would also align with participatory communication theory, which advocates two-way, inclusive communication models that prioritise listening, dialogue, and co-creation (Servaes, 2008; Tufte, 2017). Integrating feedback mechanisms, language diversity, and multimedia storytelling could enhance accessibility while fostering a sense of belonging among youth users.

Ultimately, while government websites hold potential as gateways to opportunity, their current design and communicative ethos limit their impact. For township youth, they represent static bureaucratic spaces rather than interactive arenas of empowerment. Addressing these limitations requires more than technological upgrades. It demands a paradigmatic shift from information provision to relational engagement, where digital communication is grounded in the ethics of participation, reciprocity, and Ubuntu.

Community communication emerged as an additional and significant channel of government engagement, encompassing physical and interpersonal platforms such as Thusong Service Centres, community dialogues, and outreach events. These face-to-face encounters play a crucial role in shaping the communicative relationship between the state and township youth, revealing how direct interaction can either strengthen, mediate, or fail to complement the broader digital and mass media communication strategies.

(f) Interpersonal and community communication

Interpersonal and community communication formed an important component of government outreach through *imbizo* gatherings, roadshows, and Thusong Service Centres. Government officials often described these initiatives as participatory platforms intended to bring services closer to communities and facilitate dialogue between citizens and the state. However, youth participants presented a contrasting perspective, perceiving many of these encounters as symbolic exercises rather than genuine engagements. As SBYP4 (Aspiring youth entrepreneur, Sebokeng) observed:

"We do not take those events seriously because they are mostly for votes, not for business."

This perception suggests that while such forums may enhance government visibility, they frequently fail to cultivate trust or sustained participation.

Despite these criticisms, several youth participants expressed a strong desire for more direct and consistent interpersonal engagement with government representatives. SYP3 (Active youth entrepreneur, Sebokeng) remarked:

"If the government wants us to listen, they should come to us like during elections, but talk about real things, not promises."

This sentiment highlights a yearning for dialogic communication grounded in transparency, accountability, and mutual respect.

Similarly, Thusong Service Centres, initially established as one-stop access points for government services, were largely viewed by youth as irrelevant to entrepreneurial needs. MYP4 (Active youth entrepreneur, Mamelodi) explained:

"Those centres are for people fixing IDs and electricity; there is nothing there for young businesspeople."

This perception was corroborated by LED3, who acknowledged that the centres were underutilized due to the absence of digital facilities, business advisory services, and youth-oriented programming.

These findings underscore that communicative accessibility cannot be reduced to physical presence or infrastructural provision. Rather, it must be understood as a relational process rooted in empathy, trust, and recognition. Such dimensions align closely with the Ubuntu-informed view of communication as a moral and social practice that affirms shared humanity (Mabovula, 2011; Nzimakwe, 2014). In the absence of these ethical and affective components, institutional outreach risks becoming an exercise in administrative performance rather than a meaningful act of engagement that can empower township youth.

Across the four township contexts, the findings reveal a consistent mismatch between the state's information-driven communication model and young people's preference for dialogue, immediacy, and authenticity. Traditional communication channels prioritize control and coverage, whereas youth participants value trust, responsiveness, and cultural resonance.

From an Ubuntu-informed perspective, authentic communication entails reciprocity and recognition, requiring government to listen as much as it speaks. To achieve this, government communication must evolve from mass dissemination to relational engagement by integrating digital and community-based platforms co-designed with young people. This transformation aligns with Servaes's (2020) participatory communication framework, which conceptualizes development as a dialogic and inclusive process rooted in mutual respect.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that although the government communication system across the four townships is extensive in the number of communication channels employed, it remains relatively shallow in meaningful interaction. Existing communication practices continue to be constrained by bureaucratic rigidity and by the assumption that information dissemination is synonymous with participation. Reconfiguring government communication towards a more dialogic and participatory model, therefore, requires a fundamental shift from message control to relationship building, and from information transmission to the co-creation of meaning. Only

through such a transformation can communication function as a vehicle for empowerment rather than a mechanism that inadvertently reproduces exclusion.

5.3 COMMUNICATION APPROACHES AND PRACTICES

Government communication on youth entrepreneurship is not only shaped by the choice of media channels but also by the underlying approaches and institutional logics that inform how communication is conceived, structured, and enacted. Across the four township sites, findings reveal that the government's communication with youth entrepreneurs remains largely entrenched in a top-down, transmission-oriented model that privileges message delivery over participatory engagement. While government officials frequently invoke participatory rhetoric, the evidence suggests that implementation remains constrained by bureaucratic hierarchies, rigid protocols, and a culture of managerial control. Within this communicative environment, youth engagement tends to occur on government-defined terms: episodic, event-driven, and largely symbolic. This approach, while efficient for disseminating policy information, is at odds with the developmental communication philosophy, which emphasizes dialogue, inclusion, and co-creation as core principles of democratic governance (Servaes, 2008; Melkote & Steeves, 2015).

This section analyses the underlying logics and everyday practices that shape the design and enactment of government communication across township contexts. It explores the persistence of one-way messaging and centralized control, the uneven compliance with participatory communication principles, and the challenges of engaging heterogeneous youth audiences. It further examines the absence of institutionalized feedback systems, the disconnect between bureaucratic formality and youth cultural expression, and the emerging yet limited attempts by communicators to adopt more inclusive and dialogic approaches. Through these dimensions, the section exposes the tension between communication as management and communication as relationship, a tension that defines the evolving landscape of government–youth interaction in South Africa's developmental state.

5.3.1 Top-Down Communication vs. Interactive Approaches

Findings across the four township sites reveal that government communication with youth entrepreneurs remains largely anchored in a top-down, one-way model centred on information dissemination rather than participatory engagement. Communication is frequently treated as an administrative function for transmitting official messages, rather than a social process of

dialogue and shared meaning-making. This approach contradicts the principles of the developmental communication philosophy, which emphasizes dialogue, participation, and co-creation as central to inclusive governance (Servaes, 2008; Melkote & Steeves, 2015).

Youth participants consistently expressed frustration at being “talked at” rather than invited into dialogue. They described government communication as “formal,” “repetitive,” and “out of touch” with their lived realities. Several participants called for more interactive and accessible platforms, such as participatory workshops, community-based forums, and real-time digital engagement, through which they could contribute to decision-making. TYP2 (Active youth entrepreneur, Thembisa) observed:

They just tell us what is happening; they never ask what we need

SYP4 (Aspiring youth entrepreneur, Soweto) added:

We want to talk with them, not just listen to announcements

These accounts highlight what Freire (1970) terms "banking communication," in which information is deposited into passive recipients without reciprocal exchange or critical reflection.

This communicative pattern has tangible consequences. Participants reported feeling excluded from policy processes and alienated from programmes meant to support them. They attributed this disconnection to the state’s reliance on predetermined messages designed at the national level with little input from township communities. The result is a model of communication that prioritizes control and compliance over participation and responsiveness.

Government officials interviewed in the study acknowledged these limitations, noting that communication practices often default to one-way dissemination because of bureaucratic rigidity, resource constraints, and risk-averse institutional cultures. GCIS2 admitted:

We are expected to deliver messages, not to debate them.

Another explained that while participatory communication is embedded in policy frameworks, implementation remains inconsistent due to limited capacity, training, and coordination between national, provincial, and local structures. These admissions echo Tufte’s (2017)

critique of the control mentality that dominates public communication, where message discipline is valued more than genuine engagement.

Nevertheless, some officials expressed a growing awareness of the need to move toward more dialogic approaches. Several recognized that incorporating youth feedback, participatory message design, and collaborative forums could enhance trust, message relevance, and policy uptake. GCIS3 explained that,

> *We see the value in listening more. It builds credibility and shows that the government cares.*

This recognition signals a gradual shift from a monologic to a more reflexive communication ethos, even if the institutional mechanisms to sustain such transformation remain underdeveloped.

The findings, therefore, expose a persistent tension between policy intention and communicative practice. While participatory communication is rhetorically endorsed, it remains largely absent in implementation. Bridging this gap requires more than rhetorical commitment; it demands structural and cultural change within government communication systems. As Gumucio-Dagron (2001) and Manyozo (2017) argue, transforming communication into a participatory process entails decentralizing authority, redistributing communicative power, and valuing citizens as co-producers of knowledge rather than mere recipients of information.

Both youth and government officials converge on the view that the current system is inadequate for fostering meaningful participation. Shifting from one-way dissemination to interactive engagement requires not only institutional capacity-building but also a reimagining of communication as a relationship rather than instruction, a process rooted in dialogue, trust, and shared decision-making consistent with the ethical imperatives of Ubuntu (Mabovula, 2011; Nzimakwe, 2014).

5.3.2 Compliance with participatory communication approaches

The findings reveal significant inconsistencies between the participatory ideals embedded in government communication policy and the realities of how these approaches are practiced within township youth entrepreneurship initiatives. Although national frameworks such as the

NDP and the Government Communication Policy espouse principles of inclusivity, transparency, and dialogue, the actual implementation remains largely technocratic and top-down. Government communication continues to be framed as a function of information control and compliance rather than as a social process of co-creation, reflection, and empowerment.

Across the four township sites, youth participants consistently described their engagement with government communication as limited, procedural, and one-directional. Workshops and outreach programmes were often perceived as administrative briefings rather than participatory spaces for problem-solving or joint learning. MYP1 (Active entrepreneur, Mamelodi) observed:

"They ask us to attend meetings, but they don't create space for us to contribute our own ideas."

SYP1(Active entrepreneur, Soweto) added:

> *We are only invited to listen; it feels like everything is already decided.*

These perceptions echo Freire's (1970) critique of banking communication, in which information is deposited into passive recipients rather than co-produced through dialogue and praxis. Within such a framework, communication serves to inform or instruct, not to transform.

This communicative disjuncture reflects the first two stages of the CFPD model, the catalyst and community dialogue, where the process often fails to advance beyond mere message dissemination. In theory, the CFPD model posits that development communication should move in a cyclical process from problem identification through dialogue to collective action and participatory evaluation (Figueroa & Kincaid, 2001). However, in practice, the dialogue phase remains weakly institutionalized within government structures. The findings suggest that participatory intent exists rhetorically but lacks procedural mechanisms to translate dialogue into shared planning and accountability.

Even within flagship programmes such as the NYDF and the Innovation Hub, youth involvement was restricted to the consumption of information rather than active co-design. Youth participants were rarely consulted about communication content, format, or delivery. TYP5 (Aspiring entrepreneur, Thembisa) remarked:

> *They assume they know what we need, but they never ask us.*

This exclusion reflects what Arnstein (1969) terms tokenism, a form of pseudo-participation that appears to include while maintaining institutional control.

Government communication officials interviewed in the study acknowledged these challenges, attributing them to structural constraints such as limited budgets, lack of digital infrastructure, and bureaucratic inertia. GCIS4 explained:

> *We are required to communicate, not to deliberate. Our job is to inform.*

GCIS2 added:

> *We recognize the importance of listening, but it is difficult when there are so many layers of approval before anything can be said publicly.*

These statements illustrate what Servaes (2008) and Tufte (2017) describe as the control mentality in institutional communication, in which dialogue is constrained by the fear of losing authority or inviting critique.

Despite these challenges, the data also point to pockets of reflexivity among officials. Several expressed willingness to experiment with community-based co-design, participatory media content, and youth advisory forums. LED1 commented:

> *We are learning that participation cannot come at the end; it must start with the planning*.

Such sentiments reflect the CFPD model's later stages, collective action and participatory evaluation, which emphasize iterative learning and feedback as essential components of empowerment (Lennie & Tacchi, 2013). However, these practices remain isolated rather than systemic, often dependent on individual commitment rather than institutional culture.

From a philosophical standpoint, the findings affirm the epistemological critique advanced in participatory communication theory. As Melkote and Steeves (2015) argue, development communication grounded in modernization logic treats knowledge as a commodity transmitted from experts to beneficiaries. By contrast, a participatory epistemology is consistent with Freire's dialogic pedagogy and Ubuntu's relational ethics. views knowledge as co-created through shared experience and mutual recognition (Mabovula, 2011; Nzimakwe, 2014). The

absence of such dialogic engagement in current government communication practices results in alienation rather than empowerment, leaving youth feeling invisible within structures ostensibly designed to support them.

Both youth and officials converged on the need to transform communication from a unidirectional transaction into a reciprocal process grounded in trust, empathy, and recognition. From an Ubuntu-informed perspective, genuine participation requires being with others, a moral and relational stance that values presence, attentiveness, and care in communication. Embedding these principles into government communication systems would move practice closer to the CFPD model's vision of dialogue leading to collective action and shared accountability.

These findings demonstrate that government communication remains in the lower rungs of participatory practice, oscillating between information-sharing and consultation but rarely achieving co-decision or empowerment. Achieving compliance with participatory communication principles will require both structural reform and epistemic transformation: shifting from communication about youth to communication with youth; from informing to listening; and from message delivery to mutual learning. Only through such a transformation can communication become a vehicle for inclusion and co-creation in the pursuit of youth economic development.

5.3.3 The Government's Central Messaging and a Universal Approach

Findings across the four township sites further reveal that government communication about youth entrepreneurship remains highly centralised, guided by a universal messaging framework that privileges administrative coherence over contextual responsiveness. Key messages are conceived and approved at the national level, then cascaded through provincial and municipal communication offices with minimal local adaptation. This approach reflects what Servaes (2008) describes as the diffusion paradigm, a top-down model of communication in which the state acts as the primary source of information and citizens as passive receivers. The resulting uniformity of messaging, though intended to ensure policy consistency, often strips communication of the nuance, cultural sensitivity, and linguistic diversity needed to resonate with township youth.

Youth participants frequently expressed frustration at what they perceived as impersonal, bureaucratic, and irrelevant messaging. SYP6 (Aspiring youth entrepreneur, Soweto) remarked:

We need real talk, not just policy language

Meanwhile, TYP3 (Active youth entrepreneur, Thembisa) added:

They use big words that don't speak to our situation.

Such comments highlight the communicative gap between the formal, institutionally approved discourse of government and the lived realities of youth navigating precarious urban economies. The language of policy, though well-intentioned, is experienced as distant and exclusionary, failing to inspire participation or convey practical value.

The findings further show that this universal approach disregards the heterogeneity of youth experiences. While students expressed the need for career guidance and academic support, unemployed youth prioritized access to job opportunities and training, and aspiring entrepreneurs sought business mentorship, funding, and regulatory clarity. Yet, government messaging treats all these subgroups as a homogenous category, "the youth", with identical needs and aspirations. MYP5 (Aspiring youth entrepreneur, Mamelodi) remarked:

A student and an entrepreneur don't need the same information.

This homogenization of audiences undermines the principles of audience segmentation and participatory message design that are central to effective development communication (Melkote & Steeves, 2015; Manyozo, 2017).

From the perspective of the CFPD model, this pattern represents a stagnation at the *message design* stage without progression toward the dialogic and collaborative phases that encourage local ownership and feedback (Figueroa & Kincaid, 2001). In theory, the CFPD process encourages contextualizing communication interventions through *community dialogue* and *collective action*; however, the findings show that communicators often lack the institutional flexibility to adapt messages to diverse audiences. GCIS3 conceded:

We try to adapt messages where possible, but there is little flexibility. The key themes and directives come from national, and we are expected to implement them as they are.

This comment illustrates how hierarchical decision-making and rigid bureaucratic systems prevent communicators at local levels from exercising creative agency or contextual sensitivity.

The centralization of message development also reflects what Tufte (2017) and Gumucio-Dagron (2019) term the control mentality of institutional communication, where coherence and visibility are prioritized over inclusivity and engagement. Officials interviewed in the study rationalized this approach by emphasizing the need for message consistency, brand identity, and accountability. However, this preoccupation with uniformity produces messages that are often detached from township realities and fail to address the specific socio-economic challenges youth face in their communities. SBYP2 (Active youth entrepreneur, Sebokeng) noted:

They tell us about big projects, but not about how we can be part of them.

From an Ubuntu-informed ethical perspective, this centralized and impersonal model neglects the relational dimension of communication that values dialogue, empathy, and mutual recognition (Mabovula, 2011; Nzimakwe, 2014). In Ubuntu philosophy, authentic communication is grounded in *being-with-others*, a form of relational accountability that acknowledges diversity and shared humanity. The absence of locally grounded, participatory communication processes therefore represents not only a procedural gap but also an ethical failure to recognize youth as partners in development rather than as targets of policy.

Ultimately, the findings suggest that while a centralized communication strategy may ensure message consistency, it undermines the responsiveness and co-creation necessary for effective participatory development. Bridging this gap requires devolving communicative authority to provincial and local communicators, enabling them to tailor messages to community realities and foster interactive dialogue. As Servaes (2020) and Lennie and Tacchi (2013) argue, communication for development becomes transformative only when it moves beyond uniformity toward contextualization, when communities are not merely informed but also involved in defining the meanings, languages, and goals of communication.

5.3.4 Challenges in Engaging the Youth

The findings reveal that meaningful engagement with township youth in government entrepreneurship initiatives remains limited despite widespread acknowledgment of youth as critical drivers of innovation and economic renewal. A central challenge lies in the diversity and complexity of youth entrepreneurial needs, which government programmes often address in fragmented and inconsistent ways. While some young people require mobilization and motivational support to begin their entrepreneurial journey, others are already running small enterprises and require funding, mentorship, and market access. Government interventions, however, tend to target specific stages of the entrepreneurial process, such as business registration or financing, rather than providing integrated, flexible support throughout the entire development cycle.

Government officials recognized this limitation. GCIS1 commented that:

> *Their involvement is complicated because they have vast needs. While some still need to be mobilized and motivated to register businesses, others are already registered and looking for capital to start.*

This observation reflects the institutional challenge of addressing a heterogeneous youth population through uniform programming. It also reveals the structural misalignment between the government's centralized planning model and the localized realities of youth entrepreneurship.

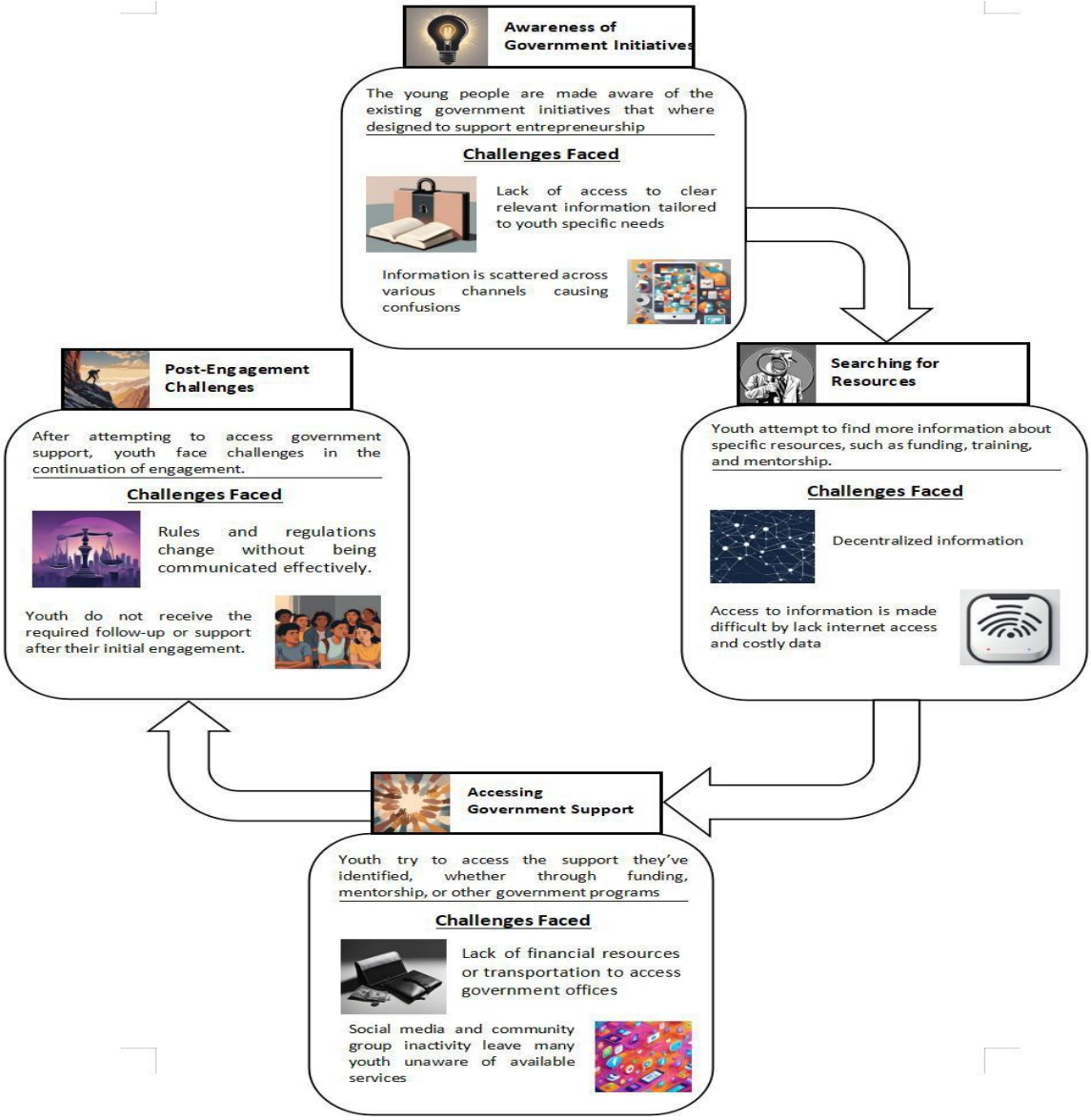
Further complicating youth engagement is the fragmentation of government communication systems. Participants consistently described these systems as "confusing," "inconsistent," and "unclear." Youth participants expressed frustration with the absence of a single, coordinated source of information. TYP6 (Aspiring youth entrepreneur, Thembisa) remarked:

> *It's difficult. Too many people to ask. We need one place to get information rather than scattered sources in many places.*

This lack of integration across government departments, compounded by frequently changing procedures and policies, leaves youth uncertain about where to seek assistance.

The journey map presented in Figure 5.9 visualizes the fragmented and cyclical experience of township youth as they attempt to navigate government entrepreneurship initiatives. It shows that while young people are initially made aware of available programmes, the information they receive is often scattered across multiple platforms, poorly coordinated, and rarely tailored to their specific needs. When youth seek resources such as funding, mentorship, or training, they encounter decentralized, inconsistent information systems compounded by high data costs and unreliable internet access.

Figure 5.2 Journey Map: Challenges in engaging youth at different stages of implementation.



Those who manage to reach the stage of accessing government support encounter further barriers, including limited financial means, transport difficulties, and weak interdepartmental

coordination. Even after initial engagement, communication lapses persist. Rules and procedures change without clear notification, and follow-up support is often absent. Collectively, these experiences depict a communication process that is linear, fragmented, and transactional rather than interactive or developmental.

In contrast to the dialogic and cyclical processes envisioned in participatory communication theory (Servaes, 2008; Tufte, 2017), the map reveals a model that privileges dissemination over engagement. An Ubuntu-informed interpretation underscores that effective communication must be relational and continuous, nurturing trust, empathy, and shared accountability between the state and youth. Strengthening these communicative linkages is therefore essential for transforming government communication from bureaucratic procedure into a participatory partnership that enables youth empowerment.

These findings illustrate the limitations of the government's communication model within the CFPD framework. Rather than progressing through iterative cycles of dialogue, collective action, and evaluation (Figueroa & Kincaid, 2001), government engagement with youth often remains trapped in fragmented, message-driven outreach. The absence of holistic, coordinated platforms not only limits access to accurate information but also undermines youth trust in public institutions.

From an Ubuntu-informed perspective, effective communication entails empathy, responsiveness, and recognition of shared humanity (Mabovula, 2011; Nzimakwe, 2014). The failure to engage youth as relational partners in dialogue, rather than as administrative subjects of communication, reveals a moral gap as much as a procedural one. Without a shift toward more inclusive and integrated engagement mechanisms, youth participation in entrepreneurship initiatives will continue to be mediated by confusion and exclusion, weakening the transformative potential of public communication.

5.3.5 Lack of Participatory Platforms and Feedback Systems

A key finding of the study is the persistent absence of participatory platforms and feedback systems that enable sustained dialogue between government communicators and youth entrepreneurs. Although young people are positioned as central to national economic development strategies, their voices are notably absent in the design, implementation, and evaluation of communication interventions. The prevailing communication culture privileges

dissemination over dialogue and control over collaboration, reinforcing the view of youth as passive recipients rather than active co-producers of meaning.

Youth participants repeatedly highlighted the lack of mechanisms for two-way communication. SYP1 (Active youth entrepreneur, Soweto) stated:

> *There is no opportunity or platform for suggestions and feedback.*

SYP3 (Active youth entrepreneur, Soweto) added:

"They tell us what is planned, but they don't ask what we think should be done. Yet some of us have taken the initiative to create our own channels of communication, such as social media platforms and podcasts, to share information, discuss local challenges, and explore entrepreneurial ideas amongst ourselves.

These informal communication strategies demonstrate how youth actively seek to participate and create opportunities, even when official channels fail to facilitate meaningful engagement.

These perspectives align with Freire's (1970) critique of monologic communication, which deposits information rather than generating understanding through dialogue. Such one-way engagement limits reflexivity, innovation, and accountability, core principles of both participatory communication and the CFPD model (Servaes, 2008; Tufte, 2017).

Government officials confirmed these gaps, acknowledging that youth feedback is neither systematically captured nor formally integrated into communication planning. GCIS2 mentioned that:

When we meet the youth during workshops, stakeholder forums, or other programmes, we don't have specific feedback sessions

These encounters are typically event-based, short-lived, and lack continuity. The absence of institutionalised feedback loops means that communicators cannot effectively monitor message reception, evaluate programme impact, or adapt strategies in response to youth realities.

This structural omission contradicts the CFPD model's emphasis on cyclical communication processes where planning, action, and evaluation are interdependent and participatory (Lennie & Tacchi, 2013). It also undermines the Ubuntu ethic of reciprocity, which views

communication as a moral relationship grounded in listening and mutual respect. Without formal mechanisms for feedback, whether through digital suggestion tools, co-design forums, or youth advisory panels, the communicative relationship between government and youth remains extractive rather than empowering.

The findings thus call for the institutionalization of participatory communication systems that embed feedback at every stage of the policy cycle. This would transform communication from a one-time activity into an ongoing relationship, enhancing trust, transparency, and the relevance of government interventions to the dynamic needs of township youth.

5.3.6 Cultural Relevance

The findings reveal that government communication frequently fails to reflect the cultural realities, linguistic practices, and communicative identities of township youth. Across the four townships, participants consistently described government messaging as formal, bureaucratic, and disconnected from the everyday language and experiences of young people.

Township youth occupy dynamic communicative spaces shaped by hybrid languages such as Tsotsitaal and Is'camtho, contemporary youth culture, Amapiano music, and digital influencers who shape peer communication and identity. Yet, government communication largely continues to rely on formal institutional language and conventional communication styles, creating both linguistic and emotional distance between communicators and their intended audiences. As TYP3 (Active Youth Entrepreneur, Thembisa) observed:

"Government talks like it's addressing a boardroom, not us."

This statement reflects a broader perception that government communication often privileges administrative language over conversational engagement, making official messages appear distant, impersonal, and disconnected from the realities of township youth. Participants argued that messages become more meaningful when they reflect local expressions, cultural references, and the lived experiences of young people.

Interestingly, participants at the Mamelodi focal group identified the Gauteng Provincial Government's *Nasi iSpani* youth employment initiative as an example of a campaign that successfully bridged this cultural divide. By deliberately adopting township slang and Tsotsitaal, the campaign sought to connect with young people through language that resonates

with their everyday lives. The phrase *Nasi iSpani* ("Here is a job" or "Here is work") reflects a deliberate attempt to position government as more accessible and relatable, particularly to young people, rather than relying on bureaucratic terminology. The campaign embraced colloquial township language and culturally familiar imagery to communicate employment opportunities. Reflecting on this approach, MYP6 (Aspiring Youth Entrepreneur, Mamelodi) explained:

"When they use our slang or music, it feels like they understand us, like the Nasi iSpani campaign by Gauteng."

Participants viewed such culturally embedded communication as more authentic and engaging because it acknowledged their identities, aspirations, and social realities. These findings illustrate what Tufte (2017) describes as cultural proximity, the alignment of communication content, language, and symbolism with the cultural identity of intended audiences. Communication that resonates culturally is more likely to foster trust, identification, and meaningful participation than communication grounded solely in bureaucratic conventions.

Government communication officials similarly recognized the importance of cultural relevance but acknowledged that institutional constraints often limit their ability to adapt messages to local contexts. GCIS4 explained:

"We understand that our messaging doesn't always land with young people as it should, but we are bound by government protocols. We try to balance clarity and professionalism."

Likewise, GCIS1 added:

"Most messages are developed at the national level and implemented at the provincial or local levels, so there's little room to localize."

These admissions expose the tension between bureaucratic standardization and the contextual flexibility required for participatory communication. While the government seeks consistency and policy coherence, rigid approval processes often prevent communicators from adapting language, imagery, and messaging to the cultural realities of different communities. Consequently, communication designed to ensure uniformity may inadvertently undermine inclusivity and audience relevance.

From a participatory communication perspective, cultural relevance extends beyond stylistic considerations; it represents an ethical commitment to recognizing people's identities, languages, and knowledge systems (Servaes, 2008; Melkote & Steeves, 2015). The continued reliance on formal institutional discourse risks alienating young people whose everyday communication is fluid, multilingual, creative, and deeply embedded within township culture. This disconnect reflects what Nyamnjoh (2017) characterizes as epistemological exclusion, whereby dominant institutional languages marginalize local ways of knowing, speaking, and interpreting social reality.

Within an Ubuntu-informed framework, cultural resonance represents more than linguistic adaptation; it embodies mutual recognition, respect, and relational accountability. Authentic communication requires the government not merely to translate messages into local languages but to communicate in ways that affirm young people's identities, experiences, and aspirations. Similarly, the CFPD model emphasizes that communication should emerge through dialogue with communities rather than being designed exclusively within institutional structures (Figueroa & Kincaid, 2001). Achieving this requires involving youth in message design, incorporating culturally meaningful symbols, narratives, and idioms, and partnering with local creatives, digital influencers, and community communicators who already enjoy legitimacy within township communities.

Taken together, these findings demonstrate that culturally relevant communication is not simply a branding strategy but a prerequisite for meaningful participation. Campaigns such as *Nasi iSpani* illustrate that when the government speaks the language of its intended audiences both literally and culturally, communication becomes more accessible, credible, and empowering. These insights provide an important foundation for understanding youth preferences for government communication. The following section, therefore, examines the communication channels, messaging styles, and participatory approaches that township youth believe would make government communication more accessible, relatable, and dialogic.

5.4 YOUTH PREFERENCES IN GOVERNMENT COMMUNICATION

Understanding youth preferences in government communication provides critical insight into how participatory ideals can be translated into practice. Whereas the preceding analysis revealed gaps in the inclusivity and cultural responsiveness of existing communication strategies, this section foregrounds the qualities and communication channels that township

youth themselves value most. Their preferences are not merely matters of taste or convenience but expressions of agency, indicators of how young people seek to participate in shaping development discourse and practice.

Situated within the CFPD model (Figueroa & Kincaid, 2001) and the Ubuntu-informed relational ethic (Mabovula, 2011; Nzimakwe, 2014), these preferences reveal the communicative conditions that foster trust, reciprocity, and inclusion. The CFPD model emphasizes dialogue, mutual understanding, and collective decision-making as the foundation of development communication. When viewed through this lens, youth preferences represent a normative critique of existing top-down systems, signalling a desire for communication that is interactive, transparent, and relational rather than directive or bureaucratic. Similarly, Ubuntu underscores communication as an ethical encounter rooted in shared humanity and mutual respect, reminding us that genuine participation begins with listening.

Across the four township sites under study, youth participants consistently expressed a desire for communication that is immediate, authentic, and co-created. They favoured digital and social media platforms that allow two-way interaction, visual storytelling, and peer-driven engagement, while also valuing face-to-face forums that build trust and recognition. Their preferences highlight a communicative logic grounded in relationality and responsiveness: they want to be spoken *with*, not *to*.

This section presents and analyses these preferences as they emerged from interviews and focus group discussions. The analysis highlights the divergence between youth and government communication practices and focuses on three interlinked dimensions: preferred communication channels, preferred messaging tone and style, and preferred forms of participation and feedback. Together, these insights illuminate what an inclusive, youth-centred communication ecosystem might look like within the context of South Africa's participatory development agenda.

5.4.1 Divergence between youth and government communication practices

While public institutions continue to rely on traditional, top-down dissemination via radio, television, and formal outreach events, youth participants strongly prefer interactive, digital, and community-based forms of engagement. This divergence reflects more than a generational

gap in media consumption. It reveals a deeper epistemological divide between institutional communication logics and the dialogic, relational practices valued by young people.

The evidence across the four township sites indicates that government communicators privilege control, reach, and message consistency, whereas youth value immediacy, authenticity, and responsiveness. This contrast echoes the arguments of Servaes (2008) and Melkote and Steeves (2015) that modern communication systems within state institutions often remain shaped by the transmission model, in which communication is viewed as the delivery of information rather than the facilitation of participation. Within this framework, dialogue becomes secondary to visibility, and information flow replaces mutual understanding.

Figure 5.3: Word cloud on youth preferences

From the perspective of the CFPD model discussed earlier, this imbalance represents a failure of communicative reciprocity. Youth preferences for conversational and interactive platforms such as WhatsApp, Instagram, and community dialogues (see Figure 5.3, suggest a yearning for horizontal communication spaces in which their experiences and aspirations inform development discourse. This echoes Freire's (1970) notion of dialogue as an act of knowing, where participants collectively construct meaning rather than receive predefined truths. It also resonates with the Ubuntu ethic articulated by Mabovula (2011) and Nzimakwe (2014), which conceives communication as a moral practice rooted in recognition and interdependence.

As illustrated in Figure 5.3, youth preferences in government communication are dominated by interactive, digital, and socially embedded platforms. The most frequently mentioned terms, such as social media, WhatsApp, TikTok, community, events, and workshops, reflect a strong orientation toward participatory and dialogic communication spaces. Youth participants consistently emphasized that social media enables more meaningful engagement and faster access to information. One participant noted,

I prefer social media; it is fast. Meetings and engagements allow me to ask questions and get answers quickly. I don't like radio or TV because you can't ask questions and it's just advertising.

This perception reinforces Freire's (1970) critique of one-way "banking communication," which limits the audience to passive recipients rather than active participants.

These platforms are valued for their immediacy, interactivity, and personalization, allowing youth to access information quickly, exchange ideas, and maintain dialogue within their peer networks (Bosch, 2017; Willems, 2019). In particular, WhatsApp has become a central channel for everyday communication among South African youth because of its low data costs, group-based interaction, and ability to integrate text, audio, and visual communication (Mare, 2020; Walton & Pallitt, 2012). Similarly, TikTok and Instagram offer creative, visually driven environments that enable young people to express identity and engage with public issues in ways that feel authentic and entertaining (Bosch, 2021).

TYP3 (Active youth entrepreneur, Thembisa) argued:

"TikTok is more effective for Gen Z, replacing the likes of Google. It's important that government organizations make use of this platform."

SYP2 (Active youth entrepreneur, Soweto) added:

"Their social media presence is important too because we are always on social media. This is how we engage amongst ourselves."

These insights resonate with Bosch's (2021) findings that South African youth increasingly use TikTok and other visual platforms as primary sources of information, blending entertainment with civic expression.

The prominence of terms such as community, township, and meetings in the figure also underscores the continued importance of face-to-face and locally grounded communication. Youth participants associate community gatherings, outreach events, and township meetings with authenticity and trust, particularly when these are mediated by local influencers, peers, or community leaders. This finding is consistent with Bosch (2014) and Chiumbu (2016), who highlight the enduring relevance of community media in fostering deliberation and participation in African contexts. The co-existence of digital and interpersonal communication echoes Servaes's (2008) and Tufte's (2017) conception of hybrid communication ecologies, networks that combine digital immediacy with the social intimacy of local interaction.

Conversely, the less prominent presence of *television* and *newspapers* in the word cloud suggests declining youth engagement with traditional media formats. Several studies have shown that South African youth increasingly regard television as a space for entertainment rather than civic or educational messaging, and newspapers as inaccessible and outdated due to cost and convenience factors (Wasserman, 2010; Kupe, 2019). These trends mirror the broader global shift in youth media consumption toward mobile-first, interactive communication that supports personal agency and social participation (Buckingham, 2015; Loader, Vromen & Xenos, 2014).

Overall, the communicative preferences reflected in Figure 5.3 point to not only an epistemological shift from one-way transmission to relational, participatory, and multimodal engagement but also to a generational and cultural divide that is not simply technological but philosophical. Institutional communication continues to operate from an epistemology of authority that privileges official knowledge, while youth demand a communication culture of co-creation that affirms their lived realities. This disjuncture explains why government messages, though widespread, often fail to inspire participation or build trust. As several youth participants observed, "government talks at us, not with us." Such sentiments underscore the relational deficit that weakens communication legitimacy in township contexts.

Youth expectations for more participatory and responsive communication point to the need for a reorientation from message delivery toward meaning making. Within the theoretical framework of this study, this shift aligns with the CFPD emphasis on community dialogue and feedback as the foundation of empowerment. It also affirms the argument advanced in Chapter Three that participatory communication is not only a methodological choice but an ethical stance that recognises the agency of citizens as co-authors of development. This affirms the

CFPD argument that development communication achieves its potential when it prioritizes spaces of interaction and co-creation rather than message control (Figueroa & Kincaid, 2001; Servaes, 2008). Within an Ubuntu-informed ethic, these preferences also demonstrate that communication is not only about access to information but about relational recognition and shared humanity (Mabovula, 2011; Nzimakwe, 2014).

While youth preferences are examined in greater detail below, it is important to note here that despite the evident divergence between government practices and youth expectations, there are also notable points of convergence, as illustrated in Figure 5.4.

5.4.2 Comparative alignment between government strategies and youth preferences

Table 5.1 illustrates a persistent structural and epistemological divide between institutional and youth communication cultures. As shown, government strategies emphasize control, uniformity, and procedural compliance, whereas youth communication practices value authenticity, immediacy, and cultural resonance. The small area of overlap, primarily on social and mobile media platforms, presents a strategic opportunity to develop an Ubuntu-informed, dialogic communication model that integrates the state's legitimacy with youth creativity and agency. Bridging these paradigms requires not just technological adaptation but a philosophical shift toward communication as relational engagement, a process of mutual recognition and co-creation between the state and its citizens.

Dimension	*Government strategies*	*Common channels*	*Youth preferences*
Communication model	Predominantly *top-down*, message dissemination; focus on visibility, compliance, and control.	Social media platforms (Facebook, Twitter, TikTok) recognised by both, though used differently.	Prefers *interactive, participatory* dialogue that allows feedback and co-creation.
Message design and tone	Formal, policy-driven, and bureaucratic language; national-level templates with limited localisation.	Co-designed community campaigns using local idioms and youth influencers.	Informal, authentic, and culturally resonant tone using Tsotsitaal, Amapiano culture, and relatable visuals.
Communication platforms	Reliance on traditional mass media (TV, radio, newspapers) and static websites; limited digital innovation.	Community radio and Facebook pages have overlapping reach; both value WhatsApp for immediacy.	Digital-first engagement through WhatsApp, TikTok, Instagram, and peer networks.
Participation and feedback	Minimal feedback loops; interactions confined to scheduled events and formal processes.	WhatsApp and live social media sessions provide shared potential for two-way engagement.	Prefers ongoing dialogue, real-time interaction, and accessible online support systems.
Cultural alignment	Communication framed within institutional norms; limited sensitivity to youth subcultures and language.	Youth-driven outreach via community radio, local music events, or influencer-led TikTok content.	Seeks recognition of youth identity, creativity, and township lifestyle.
Access and usability	Structured around compliance and infrastructure; websites often outdated and non-interactive.	Zero-rated websites, WhatsApp groups, and radio call-in programmes bridge accessibility.	Values low-cost, mobile-optimised, easily accessible platforms.
Policy institutional logic	Centralised national directives with rigid protocols; focus on message control and risk management.	Hybrid strategies integrating official authority with localised, youth-led dialogue.	Prefers decentralised, responsive communication that adapts to context and feedback.
Underlying communication philosophy	Rooted in modernisation and information-transfer models.	Ubuntu-informed participatory model combining state structure and community participation.	Grounded in *dialogic*, *relational*, and *participatory* communication ethics.

Table 5.2: Comparative analysis of government communication strategies and youth preferences

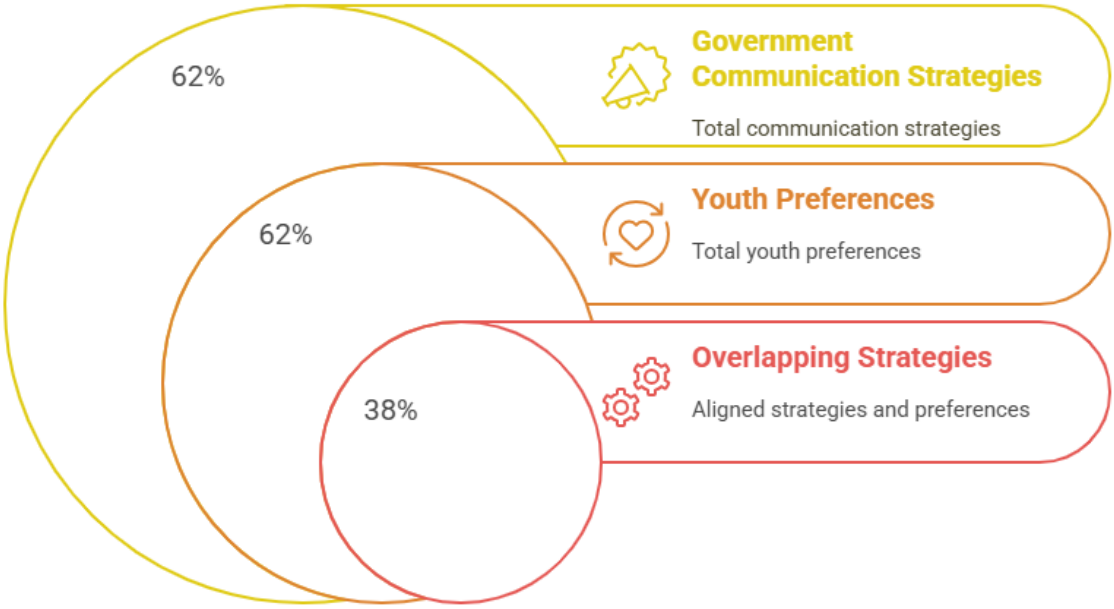
Figure 5.4 illustrates the degree of convergence between government communication strategies and youth preferences. The figure shows that only about 38 percent of communicative practices shown in Table 5.1 overlap, while 62 percent of government strategies and youth preferences remain misaligned. This partial convergence highlights a persistent gap between institutional communication priorities and the dialogic, participatory modes valued by young people.

The government's dominant strategies, situated in the left circle, continue to rely on traditional, one-directional channels such as radio, television, and official websites. These reflect what Servaes (2008) describes as a modernization paradigm, privileging message control and uniform dissemination over feedback and interaction. Conversely, the youth's preferences, represented on the right, are grounded in interactive, peer-based, and digital platforms, particularly WhatsApp, TikTok, Instagram, and community-based dialogues, which embody a participatory communication logic (Tufte, 2017; Figueroa & Kincaid, 2001).

The 38 percent overlap between the two spheres suggests limited spaces of communicative convergence, mainly around hybrid outreach events and community radio platforms. These shared spaces align with Bosch's (2014) notion of community media as a participatory bridge that connects state-led communication with local audiences. However, even within this overlap, the nature of engagement remains largely consultative rather than collaborative, reflecting what Gumucio-Dagron (2019) calls "managed participation," in which citizens are invited to listen but not to shape the content of communication.

The data, therefore, point to a dual communication system: one institutional and hierarchical, the other relational and emergent. Within the theoretical framework of the CFPD model, this disjuncture illustrates a breakdown in dialogic balance, where communication fails to evolve into a reciprocal process of meaning-making. From an Ubuntu perspective (Mabovula, 2011; Nzimakwe, 2014), authentic engagement demands mutual recognition and empathy, qualities that are often constrained by bureaucratic procedure and risk aversion in public communication.

Figure 5.4: Government communication alignment with youth preferences



Reducing the misalignment gap requires reconfiguring institutional communication from mere information delivery to co-creative interaction. This involves recognising youth as communicative agents whose knowledge, cultural practices, and media choices contribute to shaping development discourse. As such, future government communication strategies would benefit from embracing hybrid, participatory designs that merge institutional legitimacy with the immediacy, authenticity, and interactivity preferred by township youth.

Now we turn to the analysis of the youth preferences as they emerged from interviews and focus group discussions. As already alluded to, the focus is on three interlinked dimensions: the preferred channels of communication, the preferred tone and style of messaging, and the preferred forms of participation and feedback.

5.4.3 The Preferred Channels of Communication

Findings from both interviews and focus group discussions reveal a pronounced disjuncture between the government's communication platforms and those preferred by township youth. Mainstream government channels such as the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC), official websites, newsletters, and print publications are widely perceived by youth

as outdated, inaccessible, and irrelevant to their everyday communication ecologies. Participants consistently described these platforms as belonging to "another generation," associated with formality, bureaucracy, and a lack of responsiveness.

MYP2 (Active youth entrepreneur, Mamelodi) explained:

"I don't even watch the SABC. I get everything on WhatsApp or TikTok. That's where we are. That's where they should be."

SYP6 (Aspiring youth entrepreneur, Soweto) similarly observed:

"Those websites and newsletters are not for us; they are for older people. We prefer things that are fast and interactive."

These accounts highlight the growing importance of digital and peer-driven platforms as dominant spaces for social interaction and information exchange among township youth. This shift aligns with broader global patterns in youth media use, in which immediacy, interactivity, and authenticity are increasingly valued over institutional authority (Bosch, 2017; Couldry & Hepp, 2017). For these youth, platforms such as TikTok, WhatsApp, and Instagram enable participatory, conversational communication that mirrors the horizontal, relational ethos central to participatory communication theory (Servaes, 2008; Tufte, 2017).

However, the state's continued reliance on traditional mass media reflects what Waisbord (2014) calls the bureaucratic rationality of public communication, an approach that prioritizes message control, reach, and compliance over relational engagement. Youth participants repeatedly expressed frustration with this one-way mode of communication. TYP1 (Active youth entrepreneur, Thembisa) explained:

"Government communication is too formal. It's like they are making announcements, not talking to us."

SBYP4 (Aspiring youth entrepreneur, Sebokeng) described this disconnect vividly:

"The problem is they still use old channels. We are on social media every day, but their messages are on TV and the radio. Who even listens to that anymore?"

These voices demonstrate what Servaes (2008) and Melkote and Steeves (2015) identify as a structural disjuncture between institutional communication design and the dialogic conditions required for participatory development. The communication ecology of township youth operates within digital networks, community-based platforms, and peer exchange systems, in contexts where communication is fluid, relational, and co-constructed.

Government communication officials interviewed in the study acknowledged this disjuncture and the limitations of their current platform choices. GCIS3 reflected:

"We know our platforms don't always resonate with the youth. But we're working within existing infrastructure and compliance requirements, which prioritize traditional media."

GCIS1 added:

"There's a growing recognition that we need to do more on platforms like TikTok and WhatsApp. But building the capacity to use the right tone and content authentically requires training, partnerships, and policy changes."

These accounts reflect institutional awareness of the need for reform but also point to bureaucratic and structural barriers that constrain innovation. Such barriers are consistent with what Tufte (2017) calls the *control mentality* in development communication, where public institutions equate authority with formality, and risk aversion prevents experimentation with participatory and informal communication modes.

From an Ubuntu-informed perspective, this gap is not merely technological but relational. It signifies a deeper ethical and epistemological distance between the communicative logics of the state and the lived experiences of its citizens (Lubombo, 2015, 2018; Mabovula, 2011; Nzimakwe, 2014). Ubuntu-based communication places emphasis on presence, empathy, and mutual recognition, principles that are undermined when communication is mediated through distant bureaucratic channels. As Lubombo (2018) argues, authentic public communication must reflect *being-with-others* rather than *talking-at-others*; it must affirm the relational dignity of participants and recognize them as co-authors in the meaning-making process.

For youth in this study, communication that fails to reflect their lifeworld's also fails to command trust or attention. As SBYP3 (Active youth entrepreneur, Sebokeng) put it:

Government messages feel like they come from another planet. If they want us to listen, they must speak our language and come to where we are.

Officials reported emerging initiatives to bridge this divide, including collaborations with youth-led media organizations and local digital influencers. However, they acknowledged that these efforts remain small-scale and hampered by funding limitations and rigid administrative protocols.

Ultimately, the findings demonstrate that effective communication with township youth requires more than platform diversification; it demands a reorientation of the philosophy of communication. As Servaes (2020) argues, meaningful participation emerges not from dissemination but from dialogue, while Lubombo (2015, 2018) emphasizes that in the African communicative ethos, mutuality and recognition form the foundation of understanding. Unless government communication adopts these dialogic and culturally responsive practices, its messages will continue to circulate without resonance or relational depth.

(a) Social media and digital platforms

Social media emerged as the most influential communication space for township youth, shaping not only how they access information but also how they construct social identities, form communities of practice, and engage with institutional discourses. Platforms such as WhatsApp, TikTok, Facebook, and Instagram were consistently identified as the preferred channels through which youth encounter, discuss, and evaluate government entrepreneurship initiatives. These platforms are valued for their immediacy, interactivity, and affordability, features that align with the youth's fast-paced, mobile, and networked communication cultures (Bosch, 2017; Couldry & Hepp, 2017).

Participants at the Thembisa focal group discussions repeatedly stressed that government communication must "come to where they are, like online platforms" echoing the participatory ethos articulated in development communication theory, which emphasizes dialogue and co-presence as prerequisites for meaningful engagement (Servaes, 2008; Tufte, 2017).

SYP3 (Active youth entrepreneur, Soweto) described how social media supports their everyday interactions, noting:

"WhatsApp is quick and personal. You can ask questions, share updates, and even start business groups. That's how we keep each other informed."

For many participants, social media represents not merely a source of entertainment but an ecosystem for self-expression, networking, and collaborative learning. This finding resonates with Castells' (2009) concept of networked individualism, which views online platforms as spaces where young people construct relational identities and exchange information horizontally, outside formal institutional structures.

SBYP1 (Active youth entrepreneur, Soweto) illustrated this point by explaining that,

> *"We only hear about entrepreneurship workshops through friends or WhatsApp groups. You never see posters or government messages that talk directly to us".*

Such accounts demonstrate that youth communication operates within informal networks of trust rather than institutional publicity mechanisms. Information circulates relationally through peers, digital communities, and social collectives, reflecting Freire's (1970) notion of dialogic communication embedded in lived social experience. From an Ubuntu-informed perspective, these digital networks embody the values of *being-with-others* and *mutual care*, emphasising that communication is not only about information sharing but about sustaining relational and ethical bonds (Lubombo, 2015, 2018; Mabovula, 2011; Nzimakwe, 2014).

However, while social media offers clear potential for dialogue, its institutional use within government communication structures remains inconsistent and highly regulated. Officials interviewed in this study acknowledged both the opportunities and anxieties associated with online engagement.

GCIS2 noted that

> *"We know social media is powerful, but our systems make it hard to post freely. Everything needs clearance".*

LED2 added that:

> *"Sometimes social media becomes a space for criticism, and this makes departments cautious. We need to balance speed with accuracy".*

These accounts highlight what Tufte (2017) refers to as the *control mentality* within bureaucratic communication systems, where message discipline and risk management override the pursuit of participatory dialogue. Waisbord (2014) similarly identifies this as institutional risk aversion, where dialogue is viewed as unpredictable and therefore avoided. Gumucio-Dagron (2019) describes this dynamic as an institutional fear of participation, whereby the potential for critique is misinterpreted as a threat rather than an opportunity for learning and responsiveness.

Despite these constraints, youth participants viewed social media as an essential feedback mechanism and a potential bridge for relational communication between government and citizens. Engagement through likes, comments, and shares was perceived as informal yet meaningful feedback that signals attentiveness and care.

MYP6 (Aspiring youth entrepreneur, Mamelodi) reflected that:

> *"When people comment or share, it shows they are listening or that they care. That's the space where government should respond".*

Nonetheless, the study found that most government communicators use social media primarily as a one-way broadcast tool rather than an interactive platform. This mirrors the transmission model of traditional media, which prioritizes message delivery over co-creation and fails to capitalize on the dialogic affordances of digital platforms (Servaes, 2020).

From an Ubuntu-informed standpoint, this underutilization of social media represents a missed opportunity to practice communication as a relationship of *being-with* rather than *speaking-at* others (Lubombo, 2018). Authentic communication is not achieved through visibility alone but through relational presence and responsiveness, qualities that digital media, when used dialogically, can nurture.

Participants proposed several practical ways to make digital communication more responsive and youth-centred. SYP5 (Aspiring youth entrepreneur, Soweto) suggested:

"Government should have official WhatsApp groups where you can ask questions directly, like a helpline."

TYP4 (Aspiring youth entrepreneur, Thembisa) recommended:

"They can even use influencers from our areas to explain opportunities in ways we understand."

These suggestions reinforce the participatory principle that communication must be co-created rather than imposed. As Melkote and Steeves (2015) and Tufte (2017) argue, participatory development requires that communities not only receive messages but actively shape them. This aligns with Ubuntu's emphasis on respect, reciprocity, and recognition, an ethic of communication that affirms the dignity and agency of every participant (Lubombo, 2015; Mabovula, 2011).

In sum, social media is not merely a youth preference but a socio-cultural infrastructure that embodies the dialogic, participatory, and relational ethics central to both development communication and Ubuntu frameworks. To realize its full potential, government communication must move beyond a broadcast model toward one of co-creation and dialogue. Only by reimagining digital platforms as interactive public spheres, spaces of listening, exchange, and shared meaning, can the state engage youth as partners rather than passive audiences.

(b) TikTok's growing influence

TikTok emerged as one of the most dynamic and transformative digital spaces in the communication landscape of township youth. The platform is widely used not only for entertainment but also for learning, discovery, and social connection. Participants described it as a tool for accessing entrepreneurship-related content, discovering funding opportunities, and engaging with relatable stories shared by peers and influencers. Its visual and interactive nature, involving short videos, creative editing, and algorithm-driven visibility, aligns with what Deuze (2011) terms the participatory turn in media culture, where citizens become both producers and consumers of information.

Youth participants consistently positioned TikTok as more relevant and accessible than formal government platforms. The app was described as a "go-to" space for learning and inspiration, offering practical knowledge through short, engaging content rather than lengthy, bureaucratic communication.

MYP4 (Aspiring youth entrepreneur, Mamelodi) explained:

"TikTok is more effective for Gen Z. It has replaced Google because you can find everything there, from business ideas to how to apply for funding."

Similarly, SYP2 (Active youth entrepreneur, Soweto) added:

"Government should be visible on TikTok because that's where we are. We follow influencers and small business owners who explain things in ways we understand."

These accounts highlight the platform's unique blend of immediacy, entertainment, and social learning, qualities that government communication has yet to leverage effectively. TikTok operates as an interactive public sphere where information flows horizontally, inviting participation and creativity rather than passive reception. This resonates with Freire's (1970) argument that dialogue and shared experience are fundamental to transformative communication, and with Servaes's (2008) view of communication as a process of mutual learning and negotiation rather than instruction.

Despite recognizing TikTok's relevance, government officials acknowledged the institutional barriers preventing its full adoption. Many described uncertainties about how to use the platform in ways consistent with government protocols and professional standards.

LED3 reflected that,

> *We know TikTok is where young people are, but we do not have the skills or policy framework to use it properly. It is difficult to combine government communication with informal styles.*

GCIS2 explained that:

> *Approval processes are long, and by the time you get permission to post, the trend has already passed. We cannot work at the same speed as social media.*

These observations underscore a structural tension between the fast-paced, participatory logic of social media and the hierarchical, procedural logic of bureaucratic communication systems. Waisbord (2014) describes this as *institutional inertia*, in which communication practices remain bound to formal routines that inhibit adaptability and innovation.

The reluctance to adopt platforms like TikTok also reflects deeper epistemological divides between institutional and popular modes of communication. While government systems are anchored in what Habermas (1989) termed *administrative rationality*, youth communication thrives within what Fraser (1990) called *counterpublics*, spaces of creativity and alternative discourse where meaning is produced collectively and performatively. Within these spaces, authenticity and cultural resonance outweigh formality and authority.

Nevertheless, isolated examples of adaptation illustrate TikTok's potential as a participatory tool for public engagement. Municipalities such as the City of Johannesburg have successfully integrated TikTok into their communication strategy, attracting large youth followings and using the platform for community updates, service information, and youth awareness campaigns. Their content often employs humour, visual storytelling, and relatable narratives, elements that enhance accessibility and identification. In contrast, municipalities such as Emfuleni and the GCIS Gauteng Office remain inactive on the platform, reflecting uneven digital capacity and institutional hesitation.

From an Ubuntu-informed perspective, TikTok represents a digital space where relational ethics, care, connection, and mutual recognition can be practiced through creative communication. Its participatory format allows for the humanization of government communication, aligning with Lubombo's (2015, 2018) view of Ubuntu as an ethic of *being-with* others through dialogue and shared experience. When communication is localized, visual, and co-created, it affirms the dignity of the audience and fosters a sense of belonging and trust (Mabovula, 2011; Nzimakwe, 2014).

TYP4 (Aspiring youth entrepreneur, Thembisa) summarised this view succinctly:

> *TikTok makes information feel real and close to us. When people like us explain opportunities, we believe them more than when they come from government adverts.*

These findings reaffirm that TikTok's appeal lies not merely in its format but in its ethos, its capacity to enable participation, authenticity, and identification. For government communication to resonate with township youth, it must embrace this ethos by integrating co-created, influencer-led, and visually engaging content that aligns with youth media practices.

TikTok represents a paradigm shift in communicative practice. It can serve as a digital manifestation of participatory and Ubuntu-informed development grounded in trust, relational dialogue, and collective authorship. However, realizing this potential will require government institutions to reconfigure their communication strategies to be more flexible, co-creative, and culturally responsive.

(c) Facebook and Twitter

Facebook and Twitter continue to play a visible role in government communication, serving as official channels for disseminating policy updates, event announcements, and service information. These platforms represent the government's most formalised entry into the digital sphere and are widely used by municipalities across Gauteng. Data obtained from the study revealed substantial follower bases. The City of Johannesburg had approximately 333,000 followers, the City of Tshwane 264,000, and the City of Ekurhuleni 262,000. The Government Communication and Information System (GCIS) Gauteng Provincial Office maintained smaller followings, with roughly 1,600 followers on Facebook and 4,000 on Twitter. These figures demonstrate both the potential reach and the institutional visibility of local government on digital media platforms.

However, the findings also reveal that government use of these platforms largely replicates a traditional, one-way mode of communication. Officials primarily utilize Facebook and Twitter to broadcast official information rather than to cultivate participatory dialogue. This approach aligns with what Habermas (1989) termed *administrative rationality*, in which communication functions as a mechanism of control and legitimacy rather than as a forum for deliberation. The absence of interactive engagement limits opportunities for co-creation, transparency, and responsiveness, key principles of participatory communication emphasized by Servaes (2008) and Tufte (2017).

For township youth, these platforms represent both potential and frustration. Many participants reported following government accounts but noted that their attempts to interact or seek clarification often went unanswered. SYP5 (Aspiring youth entrepreneur, Soweto) explained:

> *You comment on a post asking for more information, but no one replies. It feels like they post and disappear.*

TYP4 (Aspiring youth entrepreneur, Thembisa) added that,

> *They post about events that already happened or programmes that ended. It's not helpful for us who want to plan or attend.*

These reflections underscore what Waisbord (2014) describes as *institutional inertia*, a tendency among public institutions to prioritise message control over engagement. While Facebook and Twitter theoretically enable participatory dialogue, the government's approach remains primarily informational, thereby reinforcing existing hierarchies between state communicators and citizens.

Government officials acknowledged this challenge, noting that while they value digital visibility, they face constraints in terms of policy, staffing, and response capacity. One GCIS official commented:

We are aware that young people want fast responses, but we don't always have the personnel to monitor and reply in real time. Our communication is expected to go through approval before posting.

This comment reflects the bureaucratic logic of institutional communication, where immediacy is sacrificed for procedural compliance. The result, as noted by Carpentier (2011), is that participation becomes *invited* rather than *negotiated*. Citizens are permitted to speak but seldom heard within decision-making structures.

Nonetheless, the findings suggest that youth see potential in these platforms to foster meaningful connections when used more interactively. They expressed a desire for direct engagement through live sessions, polls, and feedback mechanisms that allow their voices to shape public programmes. MYP3 (Active youth entrepreneur, Mamelodi) explained:

> *If the government could go live on Facebook to discuss youth funding or business support, people would tune in and ask questions. We don't need long events, just real conversations.*

Such insights highlight the importance of relational engagement in line with Ubuntu's ethic of reciprocity and dialogue (Lubombo, 2015; Mabovula, 2011). In this framework, Facebook and Twitter are not merely channels for information dissemination but potential spaces for shared

meaning-making, mutual respect, and community trust. As Nzimakwe (2014) and Lubombo (2018) argue, communication that embodies Ubuntu principles fosters inclusivity and ethical connectedness by treating participants as partners rather than passive recipients.

The current state of government communication on Facebook and Twitter, therefore, reflects a missed opportunity to embody participatory and Ubuntu-informed values in practice. The prevalence of unidirectional messaging reinforces perceptions of distance and exclusion among township youth. Yet, the same platforms hold transformative potential if repurposed as spaces for ongoing conversation and co-creation. SBYP5 (Aspiring youth entrepreneur, Sebokeng) expressed:

> *We are online every day; they just need to meet us halfway.*

In conclusion, while Facebook and Twitter offer established frameworks for institutional communication, their full potential as participatory tools remains unrealized. Reconfiguring their use to encourage interaction through comment engagement, live Q&A sessions, youth takeovers, and responsive moderation would mark a shift from bureaucratic dissemination to dialogic participation. Such a transformation would align government practice with the participatory ideals articulated by Servaes (2008) and the relational ethics of Ubuntu.

(d)WhatsApp as a preferred communication tool

Among all digital platforms discussed, WhatsApp emerged as the most preferred and trusted communication tool among township youth. Its immediacy, accessibility, and conversational nature make it uniquely suited for participatory engagement. For most participants, WhatsApp is not merely a messaging app but a social infrastructure that sustains personal, business, and community interactions. As Castells (2009) observes, digital networks such as WhatsApp embody networked individualism, enabling citizens to participate in decentralized, personalized, and community-driven information flows.

Participants consistently emphasized that WhatsApp enables direct and authentic communication in ways that government channels do not. MYP1 (Active youth entrepreneur, Mamelodi) emphasized that:

> *WhatsApp is quick and easy. You can ask questions, get answers, and share links without wasting time.*

Similarly, SYP2 (Active youth entrepreneur, Soweto) reflected:

> *It's better because we already use it every day for business. If the government used WhatsApp groups for updates or mentorship, more people would join.*

These reflections illustrate how WhatsApp aligns with what Servaes (2008) and Tufte (2017) describe as dialogic communication, communication that privileges reciprocity, inclusion, and co-creation of meaning. The platform's conversational features, group chats, voice notes, and multimedia sharing allow participants to transcend the formality and distance that characterize traditional communication systems.

For government communicators, WhatsApp presents a paradox: while it offers proximity and immediacy, it also challenges bureaucratic control. Several officials acknowledged its value but expressed concern about maintaining professionalism and compliance with data policies. GCIS3 stated:

> *We know WhatsApp works best for reaching young people, but there are no official guidelines on how to use it. It's still seen as too informal.*

GCIS1 added that:

> *We sometimes use WhatsApp internally, but not publicly. The problem is accountability; once you start chatting, it's difficult to monitor the process.*

These reservations mirror what Waisbord (2014) describes as *institutional caution*, a tendency within bureaucracies to resist informal and participatory media practices for fear of losing control of the message. Yet, as Lubombo (2015, 2018) and Mabovula (2011) argue from an Ubuntu perspective, meaningful communication requires relational proximity and responsiveness. WhatsApp offers precisely such an ethic of relationality; it collapses hierarchical boundaries and fosters a sense of presence, care, and mutual recognition between communicators and audiences.

The study found that youth participants valued this relational intimacy as a marker of trust. SBYP5 (Aspiring youth entrepreneur, Sebokeng) explained:

> *When you get a WhatsApp message, it feels personal. Even if it's from an organization, it feels like someone is talking to you, not at you.*

SBYP1(Active youth entrepreneur, Sebokeng) added:

> *I'd trust a WhatsApp message from a youth officer more than a Facebook post from a government page.*

These statements suggest that authenticity, immediacy, and personal engagement are central to credibility in communication. WhatsApp's interpersonal orientation thus operationalizes the participatory ideals articulated by Freire (1970) and Servaes (2020): that genuine dialogue is not mediated by institutional authority but by shared experience and mutual learning.

Government officials in the study acknowledged these dynamics and proposed integrating WhatsApp-based initiatives into their outreach strategies. Some cited pilot projects in municipal youth offices that used WhatsApp groups to share business training opportunities, job postings, and funding alerts. However, these initiatives remain localized and largely unsystematic. GCIS3 remarked that:

> *We have seen that WhatsApp can really connect us to the youth, but the challenge is coordination. Everyone starts their own groups, and there's no framework for managing them professionally*.

This observation points to the need for institutional frameworks that balance openness and accountability, allowing for real-time interaction without undermining governance principles. As Carpentier (2011) notes, participation requires both *access* and *influence*: citizens must not only speak but also see their contributions reflected in decisions and feedback.

From a broader theoretical perspective, WhatsApp exemplifies what Lubombo (2015) and Nzimakwe (2014) term *Ubuntu communication*, communication rooted in relational ethics, empathy, and mutual recognition. Unlike mass communication platforms, WhatsApp enables dialogic proximity that humanizes public engagement. In this sense, its integration into government communication strategies could embody the moral and participatory ideals at the core of South Africa's developmental communication philosophy.

TYP4 (Aspiring youth entrepreneur, Thembisa) summarised this aspiration poignantly:

> *If the government spoke to us on WhatsApp, it would show they care about real conversations, not just public announcements.*

WhatsApp offers a practical and ethical opportunity for reimagining government–youth communication. Its dialogic, low-cost, and relational features align with participatory communication theory and Ubuntu-informed principles of respect, care, and reciprocity. Institutionalizing its use through verified channels, moderated groups, and youth co-administrators could transform WhatsApp into a key platform for participatory governance and inclusive policy dialogue.

5.4.4 Community Media Channels

Direct, face-to-face communication remains an essential yet underutilized component of government engagement with township youth. According to the *Government Communicators' Handbook* (GCIS, 2018), direct communication includes interpersonal forums such as community meetings, Imbizo gatherings, workshops, and door-to-door campaigns. These spaces are intended to facilitate participatory dialogue, transparency, and accountability by allowing citizens to interact directly with government representatives. However, this study's findings reveal that these channels are often constrained by political symbolism, bureaucratic control, and a lack of genuine dialogue.

Many youth participants perceived such engagements as performative rather than participatory. They described government outreach events as opportunities for visibility rather than spaces for meaningful interaction. SBYP5 (Aspiring youth entrepreneur, Sebokeng) expressed scepticism:

> *These events feel more like political rallies than opportunities to help us build businesses or learn something useful.*

SBYP2 (Active youth entrepreneur, Sebokeng) added that:

> *They come here during campaigns, talk about opportunities, and then disappear. There's no follow-up, no contact person, nothing.*

These perceptions reveal a broader problem of *instrumental communication*, where engagement is reduced to information delivery rather than collaborative meaning-making.

Freire (1970) cautioned against such "banking" approaches to communication, which treat audiences as passive recipients of pre-packaged messages rather than as partners in the process of dialogue and transformation. In the context of township youth engagement, this approach undermines trust and fosters disillusionment with public institutions.

Government officials interviewed for this study acknowledged the shortcomings of existing outreach methods. GCIS1 explained:

> *We recognize that our outreach is not landing as intended. We must move beyond just information sessions and build real relationships on the ground.*

LED2 reflected on the dominance of political considerations in shaping outreach activities:

> *Many events are planned through political offices rather than communication departments. So, the focus shifts from development to publicity.*

These admissions echo findings in Mukhudwana (2014), who observed that political imperatives often distort the developmental intent of government communication, especially during election cycles. Instead of facilitating participatory spaces, outreach events become arenas for political branding, thereby reinforcing hierarchical power relations rather than dismantling them.

From an Ubuntu-informed perspective, this dynamic represents a breakdown in *relational ethics*. Ubuntu, as discussed by Lubombo (2015, 2018) and Mabovula (2011), positions communication as an ethical encounter grounded in empathy, respect, and mutual recognition. Effective interpersonal communication, therefore, requires not only physical presence but also *affective presence*, a commitment to listening, humility, and reciprocity. When youth perceive outreach encounters as tokenistic, the moral fabric of participatory governance is eroded.

Despite these challenges, both youth and officials recognized the enduring value of direct, interpersonal engagement when executed authentically. SYP2 (Active youth entrepreneur, Soweto) remarked:

> *If you want to talk to us, come to us as politicians do during elections, but talk about real things, not promises.*

TYP4 (Aspiring youth entrepreneur, Thembisa) highlighted the power of relational communication:

> *When someone from the government actually sits with you and listens, you start to believe that they care. That's when you want to participate.*

These reflections demonstrate that the desire for face-to-face communication persists, but it must be grounded in sincerity and responsiveness. For many youths, trust is built not through mass messaging or formal campaigns but through continuous, respectful dialogue in familiar community spaces.

Government officials acknowledged this insight and proposed ways to revitalize interpersonal engagement. Some suggested partnerships with youth-led organizations, peer mentors, and local entrepreneurs to co-host dialogues and community workshops. LED3 indicated:

> *Young people respond better when they see someone like them leading the discussion. We are exploring collaborations with influencers and small business owners who can speak their language*.

This aligns with Tufte's (2017) advocacy for horizontal communication, communication that privileges shared experience and community ownership over hierarchical instruction. Similarly, Carpentier (2011) emphasizes that participatory spaces must allow citizens not just access but also influence over the communication process.

However, officials also noted that implementing such relational approaches requires policy reform and investment in resources. The rigid institutional frameworks that prioritize compliance and protocol often leave little room for informal or community-driven dialogue. GCIS1 commented:

> *Our challenge is balancing accountability with flexibility. We want to open up communication, but every message still has to go through approvals.*

This bureaucratic rigidity mirrors what Gumucio-Dagron (2019) describes as the institutional fear of dialogue, a tendency among bureaucracies to avoid participatory processes due to perceived risks of losing control. Yet, as this study shows, avoiding dialogue only widens the gap between state communicators and youth audiences, reinforcing alienation and mistrust.

To restore the credibility and effectiveness of direct communication channels, a paradigmatic shift is required. Interpersonal engagement must evolve from event-based mobilization toward ongoing relational communication embedded in community life. This would entail reimagining Thusong Service Centres, youth desks, and outreach programmes as spaces of *dialogic co-creation* rather than information distribution. Such an approach would operationalise the Ubuntu ethic of *being-with*, engagement grounded in empathy, trust, and shared humanity (Lubombo, 2015; Nzimakwe, 2014).

Community media remains a vital yet underdeveloped tool in government–youth relations. Its transformative potential lies not in the frequency of events but in the quality of relationships it nurtures. By moving from visibility-driven outreach to participatory partnership, government communication can begin to bridge the distance between institutional structures and the lived realities of township youth.

5.4.5 Community Outreach Events

Community outreach events such as *Imbizo* programmes, Youth Month celebrations, and government roadshows are intended to operationalise the participatory ideals of South Africa's development communication framework. These events, coordinated mainly through the Government Communication and Information System (GCIS) and municipal communication offices, are designed to bring government closer to the people by providing information, promoting transparency, and creating platforms for public dialogue. However, the findings of this study reveal that in practice, these events often function as symbolic exercises rather than genuine participatory encounters.

Many youth participants expressed scepticism about the authenticity and developmental impact of such outreach programmes. They described them as highly formalized, politically choreographed, and rarely responsive to local realities. SYP6 (Aspiring youth entrepreneur, Soweto) explained:

> *We attend these government events, but most of the time, they are just speeches. They talk about policies, not the real struggles we face every day.*

Similarly, SBYP1 (Active youth entrepreneur, Sebokeng) added:

> *We don't take those events seriously because they are mostly held for votes and visibility in townships. They come, take pictures, make promises, and disappear until the next campaign.*

These accounts reveal a recurring pattern of *performative communication*, events that are highly visible but limited in dialogic depth. As Mukhudwana (2014) and Waisbord (2014) observe, political communication in developing democracies often prioritises message control and public spectacle over meaningful engagement. This approach reinforces hierarchical power relations, transforming what should be participatory encounters into opportunities for one-way persuasion and image management.

Government officials interviewed acknowledged these limitations, attributing them to institutional and political constraints. LED2 explained:

> *Most outreach events are managed from political offices, so they focus more on visibility and attendance numbers than on impact. We sometimes don't even choose the locations ourselves.*

GCIS3 added:

> *Our intention is always to engage communities, but the format doesn't always allow for dialogue. It's mostly speeches and presentations.*

These reflections mirror Habermas's (1989) concept of the colonization of the public sphere, where administrative imperatives overshadow communicative rationality. In this sense, the *Imbizo* and similar forums risk becoming spaces for symbolic participation where citizens are invited to listen rather than to deliberate, question, or co-create policy.

Despite these shortcomings, youth participants consistently expressed a desire for face-to-face engagement that is continuous, responsive, and centred on their lived realities rather than on one-off political events. MYP3 (Active Youth Entrepreneur, Mamelodi) remarked:

"Don't only come when it is a political election campaign. Come regularly, sit with us, understand our businesses, and help us solve the challenges we face."

Similarly, TYP4 (Aspiring Youth Entrepreneur, Thembisa) emphasized the importance of sustained engagement beyond public meetings:

"After these meetings, there should be someone we can still contact. We need follow-up, not just speeches, because that's when the real challenges begin."

These reflections demonstrate that township youth are not rejecting interpersonal engagement or government outreach initiatives. Rather, they are calling for these platforms to become sustained spaces for dialogue, problem-solving, and collaborative action. What participants seek is not the abandonment of *Imbizo* and similar forums, but their transformation from episodic information-sharing events into participatory spaces characterized by listening, responsiveness, and mutual accountability. As Freire (1970) argues, communication that lacks reciprocity cannot facilitate empowerment; instead, it reinforces dependency by positioning citizens as passive recipients rather than active partners in development.

From an Ubuntu perspective, the limitations of these outreach events represent a breakdown in *relational ethics*, the moral foundation of dialogue based on mutual recognition, empathy, and care (Lubombo, 2015, 2018; Mabovula, 2011). Authentic communication within this framework is not a one-time encounter but an ongoing relationship that honours presence and listening. The absence of feedback mechanisms and continuity after events thus violates the Ubuntu principle of *being-with* others in sustained reciprocity.

Several government communicators in the study recognized this gap and suggested reforms. LED3 remarked:

> *We need to rethink how we do outreach. Instead of big tents and long speeches, maybe smaller community sessions with local mentors and facilitators would work better.*

This suggestion resonates with Tufte's (2017) call for small-scale participatory communication, approaches that privilege intimacy, inclusion, and sustained dialogue over mass communication events. Such decentralized models allow citizens to contribute meaningfully and co-produce knowledge in spaces where their voices carry weight.

Furthermore, integrating digital communication tools into outreach activities could bridge generational and logistical divides. Hybrid engagements that combine physical gatherings with

WhatsApp or live-streamed Q&A sessions could embody the participatory ideals of accessibility and inclusion. SYP4 (Aspiring entrepreneur, Soweto) suggested:

> *They can keep the events but also go live on social media so that more people can join and ask questions in real time.*

This aligns with Servaes's (2008, 2020) argument that participatory communication must evolve with technological affordances to remain relevant and democratic. Digital integration would also reflect Lubombo's (2018) Ubuntu-based emphasis on relational presence that transcends physical boundaries through care-centred interaction.

While community outreach events remain a central feature of South Africa's government communication strategy, their effectiveness depends on their ability to transcend political performance and embody participatory ethics. To achieve this, outreach must shift from visibility-driven programming toward co-created spaces of dialogue where youth voices inform both process and policy. Reframing these events through an Ubuntu lens repositions them as moral, dialogic encounters rather than administrative rituals, sites where citizenship is practised through listening, reciprocity, and shared humanity.

5.4.6 Thusong Service Centres

Thusong Service Centres were conceptualized as decentralized nodes of participatory communication and service delivery, designed to bridge the gap between government and citizens, particularly those in marginalized and underserved communities. Established under the Government Communication and Information System (GCIS), these centres are intended to provide "one-stop" access to state information, administrative services, and development opportunities. In theory, they embody the participatory and integrated communication ideals articulated in South Africa's *White Paper on Transforming Public Service Delivery* (Republic of South Africa, 1997) and the *Government Communicators' Handbook* (GCIS, 2018). However, the findings of this study suggest that in practice, Thusong Service Centres have largely fallen short of their transformative potential.

Across all four township sites, participants consistently described the centres as poorly aligned with their information needs and entrepreneurial aspirations. The dominant perception was that

Thusong Centres function primarily as bureaucratic service points rather than dynamic communication spaces. MYP3 (Active youth entrepreneur, Mamelodi) remarked:

> *Those centres are for people fixing IDs and electricity, not for business. There's nothing there for young entrepreneurs.*

Similarly, SBYP5 (Aspiring entrepreneur, Sebokeng) added:

> *I went there to ask about funding opportunities, but they just gave me a pamphlet and told me to check the website. That's not helpful when you don't have data or a laptop.*

These accounts reveal a recurring pattern of *procedural communication*, in which engagement is reduced to the distribution of information without dialogue, mentorship, or follow-up. This observation resonates with Freire's (1970) critique of "banking" models of communication, in which institutions "deposit" information rather than co-create knowledge with communities. Instead of serving as participatory platforms for problem-solving, Thusong Centres have become extensions of administrative bureaucracy, reproducing hierarchies of access and expertise.

Government officials interviewed acknowledged these limitations. GCIS3 conceded:

> *Youth don't really use Thusong Centres. We mostly see adults coming for documents or housing forms. We need to make them more youth-friendly and digital.*

LED1echoed this sentiment:

> *The centres have infrastructure, but they lack energy. They need to be revitalized through programmes and people who understand youth issues.*

These admissions reflect what Tufte (2017) describes as the *implementation gap* between participatory policy rhetoric and practice. While institutional frameworks promote inclusivity, the operational reality often defaults to compliance, with little innovation or responsiveness.

The study further found that the communication environment within the centres remains largely analogue. Posters, flyers, and brochures dominate the information landscape, while digital access points are limited, unreliable, or outdated. Youth participants noted that even when

information is available, it is often presented in inaccessible language or bureaucratic jargon. TYP5 (Aspiring entrepreneur, Thembisa) explained:

> *You find documents in English with big words. Even if it's about youth programs, it doesn't sound like it's talking to us.*

This disconnect reinforces the argument advanced by Melkote and Steeves (2015) that development communication must not only inform but also *empower*, transforming information into action through contextual relevance and shared meaning. In the absence of such dialogic mediation, communication risks becoming an exercise in symbolic participation.

From an *Ubuntu* perspective, these findings indicate a deeper erosion of relational ethics within institutional communication. As Lubombo (2015, 2018) and Mabovula (2011) argue, Ubuntu demands communication that is responsive, caring, and co-constitutive, a process of *being-with* others in mutual recognition. Yet the Thusong Centres' practices, dominated by transactional exchanges, fail to embody this ethos. Engagement becomes procedural rather than relational, and the human connection that underpins participatory development is lost.

Some officials recognised this dissonance and proposed ways to revitalise the centres as authentic participatory spaces. GCIS2 remarked:

> *We need to repurpose the centres as youth innovation hubs, equip them with Wi-Fi, digital tools, and business mentorship programmes.*

Another official suggested a partnership with youth-led organizations to animate the centres through events, peer-learning circles, and entrepreneurship clinics:

> *If we work with local influencers, small-business owners, and creative-industry mentors, the centres can become real spaces for growth and exchange.*

These suggestions align with Carpentier's (2011) emphasis on *maximalist participation*, where citizens are not only heard but also empowered to influence and co-create institutional processes. Such a shift would require not just infrastructural investment but also a reconfiguration of the communicative culture within the centres, from service provision to relationship-building.

Youth participants echoed these sentiments, articulating a desire for relational rather than transactional engagement. SYP2 (Active youth entrepreneur, Soweto) said:

> *We don't just want to collect forms. We want to talk to people who can guide us, tell us about funding, and check in later to see if we made progress.*

This emphasis on ongoing dialogue rather than episodic encounters reflects the participatory values central to both the CFPD model and Ubuntu ethics. It calls for a reconceptualization of Thusong Centres as *living communication spaces*, sites of co-learning, mentorship, and continuous engagement between state and citizens.

In sum, the foregoing analysis of government communication channels across township contexts reveals a persistent tension between policy intention and communicative practice. Despite the formal commitment to participatory governance articulated in national frameworks such as the Batho Pele White Paper (Republic of South Africa, 1997) and the Government Communicators' Handbook (GCIS, 2018), government engagement with youth entrepreneurs remains largely unidirectional. The state continues to rely heavily on top-down, institutional channels, television, radio, printed notices, and formal outreach events that privilege dissemination over dialogue.

Youth participants across Soweto, Mamelodi, Thembisa, and Sebokeng consistently described these modes as distant and ineffective. They identified a clear preference for digital, interactive, and community-based platforms that allow for immediacy, conversation, and relational connection. Platforms such as WhatsApp, TikTok, and community radio were repeatedly valued for their accessibility and cultural familiarity, demonstrating that participatory communication for youth is as much about *belonging* and *identity* as it is about information exchange.

These findings resonate with Servaes's (2008) argument that communication for development must shift from message delivery to dialogue, from doing communication to people toward communicating with them. Yet, as Tufte (2017) and Waisbord (2014) note, such transformation is constrained by bureaucratic logics of control that prize uniformity and risk aversion over responsiveness. The continued preference for centralized media and scripted messaging reflects what Habermas (1989) described as the colonization of the public sphere, wherein administrative rationality supplants authentic communicative interaction.

From an *Ubuntu* perspective, this disjuncture is not merely technical but ethical. As Lubombo (2015, 2018) and Mabovula (2011) have argued, communication within an Ubuntu framework is relational; it seeks to affirm mutual recognition, dignity, and empathy. When government messaging becomes impersonal and procedural, it violates the moral expectation of engaging in genuine dialogue with citizens. Youth disengagement, therefore, can be understood not only as a failure of channel selection but as a symptom of a deeper erosion of communicative ethics.

The evidence further shows that while both youth and officials acknowledge the growing importance of digital and social media, their orientations diverge. Youth view these platforms as participatory ecosystems that sustain sociality, creativity, and peer learning. Government communicators, by contrast, often treat them as broadcast extensions of institutional authority. This epistemological gap, between dialogic participation and informational control, reproduces what Gumucio-Dagron (2019) terms the fear of participation, a reluctance to relinquish communicative control to the very public institutions that aim to serve.

At the interpersonal level, outreach events and Thusong Service Centres illustrate the paradox of participatory rhetoric without participatory substance. While designed to foster inclusion, these spaces are frequently dominated by hierarchical performances, formal speeches, and bureaucratic procedures. Youth perceive them as politically choreographed rather than relationally grounded. Officials, meanwhile, cite structural and resource limitations that constrain deeper engagement. The resulting communication ecology is fragmented, anchored in policy ideals but disconnected from the lived realities of township youth.

Taken together, the findings underscore the need for a paradigmatic shift from *instrumental* to *relational* communication. Participatory development cannot occur through message transmission alone; it requires spaces of co-creation, feedback, and mutual learning. Integrating youth-preferred digital and community channels with responsive face-to-face dialogue could revitalize government communication as a vehicle of inclusion rather than exclusion.

Ultimately, these insights illuminate a broader ethical imperative within South Africa's developmental state: to humanize communication by re-centering Ubuntu values of care, listening, and reciprocity in public discourse. As the government seeks to empower youth entrepreneurs, genuine participation will depend less on the proliferation of channels than on their capacity to sustain trust and shared meaning.

The following section turns to the analysis of youth perceptions of government communication, exploring how young people interpret government messages, assess institutional credibility, and construct their own communicative agency within this uneven landscape of participation and control.

5.5 YOUTH PERCEPTIONS ON GOVERNMENT COMMUNICATION

Youth perceptions of government communication on economic development and entrepreneurship reveal persistent frustration and disengagement. Young people in Gauteng's township contexts often experience government messages as unclear, inaccessible, and detached from their lived realities. Communication intended to inform and empower instead reproduces exclusion, as official information is framed in bureaucratic language and delivered through channels that do not align with the youth's digital, social, and cultural practices. Rather than fostering participation, these practices reinforce distance and mistrust between young citizens and public institutions.

This section examines how unclear, inaccessible, and top-down communication generates alienation, weakens trust, and limits meaningful youth participation in government-led development initiatives. It situates these perceptions within broader debates on participatory communication and relational ethics, emphasizing that communicative disconnects are not merely technical failures but rather reflections of deeper structural and cultural divides in the way the state engages its young citizens.

5.5.1 Clarity of Messaging

The findings reveal a widespread perception among township youth that government communication on economic development and entrepreneurship is unclear, overly technical, and disconnected from their lived realities. Participants repeatedly described official communication as "speaking past them," rather than to them. These perceptions affirm Servaes (2008) and Melkote and Steeves (2015), who argue that when development communication prioritizes transmission over dialogue, it reproduces power hierarchies rather than promoting participation.

Youth participants emphasized that messages about opportunities, grants, and entrepreneurship support are often presented in technical terms that presume familiarity with government procedures and acronyms. MYP5 (Aspiring entrepreneur, Mamelodi) explained:

> *By the time you finish reading government documents, you are more confused than when you started.*

Others described linguistic exclusion as a key barrier to accessibility, underscoring that messages are often crafted in English, without translation into local languages or adaptation to youth idioms. MYP6 (Aspiring entrepreneur, Mamelodi) added that:

> *They should speak our language, not just English. Sometimes you read something about funding or training, but it is not clear who qualifies or how to apply. You end up asking people instead of understanding from the government itself.*

These accounts reveal that lack of clarity in public communication is not merely a linguistic issue but a relational one. As Freire (1970) observed, the absence of dialogue transforms communication into an act of domination. When the state "speaks" in ways that exclude, it reproduces structural distance between itself and the people it claims to serve. This perspective was consistently echoed during the Sebokeng focus group discussions**,** where participants associated unclear and poorly coordinated communication with mistrust, exclusion, and disengagement. Participants expressed concern that information about government programmes often reached them too late or lacked sufficient detail, reinforcing perceptions that opportunities were inaccessible, selectively communicated, or politically motivated.

Government officials interviewed in this study acknowledged the problem, admitting that the imperative to comply with administrative protocols often outweighs the need for audience-friendly communication. GCIS3 commented that

> *Our reports and campaigns are designed for compliance, not comprehension.*

GCIS1 explained that

> *Translation and simplification are rarely budgeted for, even though we know they are important.*

Such reflections expose what Gumucio-Dagron (2019) terms the "institutional fear of dialogue," where communication becomes a performance of accountability rather than an invitation to participation.

From the perspective of the CFPD framework, clarity and accessibility are essential for meaningful engagement, as they create shared spaces for understanding and dialogue (Tufte, 2017). When communication is opaque, it denies interlocutors the capacity to interpret and respond, thereby negating participation. Similarly, within an Ubuntu-informed framework, clarity embodies ethical responsibility and mutual recognition (Mabovula, 2011; Nzimakwe, 2014; Lubombo, 2015, 2018). To communicate clearly is to affirm the humanity and agency of the other and, as Lubombo (2018) argues, to acknowledge that respect and empathy are foundational to any act of public communication.

Officials interviewed expressed cautious optimism that institutional reforms could improve clarity in communication. Some suggested greater use of visual formats, short-form messaging, and vernacular translation to enhance understanding. These proposed measures resonate with arguments that clarity is both a moral and methodological imperative in participatory communication. Here, simplifying language and localizing content do not dilute professionalism but instead deepen democratic engagement.

The persistence of unclear communication thus signals more than a technical failure; it reveals an epistemological tension between bureaucratic control and dialogue. Ubuntu ethics, as articulated by Lubombo (2015, 2018) and Mabovula (2011), further challenge such practices by proposing communication as a relational act grounded in mutual recognition and care. When communication excludes the voices of the youth it seeks to serve, it violates both participatory and Ubuntu ideals of shared humanity and collective empowerment.

Consequently, the perceptions gathered in this study provide critical insights into the limitations of current government communication strategies. They reveal the need to shift from message transmission to relationship building, from abstract policy rhetoric to culturally grounded dialogue that resonates with township youth's identities and aspirations.

5.5.2 Relevance and Reach of Economic Development Information

Another indication from the findings is that township youth perceive government communication on economic and entrepreneurship programmes as poorly targeted, unevenly distributed, and misaligned with their everyday realities. Participants across the four townships emphasized that information about government support structures such as the NYDA, SEDA, and LED offices rarely reaches them in a timely or accessible manner. This limited reach undermines awareness and participation, reinforcing the sense that development communication is directed at an abstract public rather than the communities it intends to serve.

Youth participants frequently expressed frustration that government initiatives are communicated after deadlines have passed or through channels they seldom use. SBYP6 (Aspiring entrepreneur, Sebokeng) bemoaned that:

> *We only hear about these programmes when it's too late to apply. It's like they talk to themselves first and remember us last.*

Another echoed this sentiment, stressing the unequal distribution of information across township spaces.

In some areas, they hold roadshows and tell people what's available. But in others, we never see them. It depends on who you know or where you stay.

Such accounts expose what Melkote and Steeves (2015) describe as structural exclusion in development communication, in which messages fail to reach the very groups they are designed for, thereby entrenching inequality rather than alleviating it.

Accessibility remains a persistent constraint. Many participants rely on informal networks and peer discussions to learn about available opportunities, rather than official channels. TYP5 (Aspiring entrepreneur, Thembisa) reflected that:

> *Finding information is difficult if you don't participate in social media, where people talk about these things. Government websites are confusing and travelling to offices costs money.*

The issue of affordability recurred across interviews. Youth participants linked their limited access to high data costs and unreliable public transport. TYP6 (Aspiring entrepreneur, Thembisa) added that:

> *Accessing government information is hard because checking websites requires internet and data, which are expensive.*

These barriers demonstrate how structural inequities, such as economic, spatial, and infrastructural, shape communicative exclusion. The CFPD framework positions such conditions as central to understanding participation: communication cannot be participatory if the channels themselves reproduce marginalization (Servaes 2008). Similarly, within Ubuntu-informed communication ethics, relevance is relational. It depends on whether communicators listen to the lived contexts of those they address (Mabovula 2011; Lubombo 2018).

Government officials interviewed acknowledged these limitations. Several conceded that information dissemination remains concentrated in urban centres and that outreach often relies on local political events rather than sustained communication plans. GCIS4 explained that:

> *Coverage depends on available budgets and coordination between departments*

GCIS2 also confirmed that:

> *Resources are limited, so messages are standardized nationally rather than localized.*

These reflections reveal an institutional logic that privileges efficiency and visibility over contextual sensitivity. Nonetheless, some communicators highlighted emerging practices aimed at addressing these shortcomings. These include partnerships with community radio stations, collaborations with municipal youth desks, and the introduction of mobile information kiosks. Officials expressed optimism that integrating digital tools with community-based communication could extend reach while improving relevance. Yet, they admitted that without proper coordination and localization, these innovations risk reproducing the same centralized approach under a digital guise.

It can be argued that the issue of reach and relevance is not simply a matter of logistics but of epistemology, conjuring the question of whose knowledge and experience shape communication design. The persistence of generic, one-size-fits-all messages reflects a state-

centered understanding of development that privileges uniformity over diversity. As Lubombo (2015) argues, communicative justice in post-apartheid South Africa requires attentiveness to social difference and lived experience.

These findings unarguably show that youth perceptions of limited reach and relevance demonstrate that government communication remains largely detached from township realities. Bridging this gap demands more than technological upgrades; it requires a paradigmatic shift toward participatory listening, locally grounded message design, and sustained presence within youth communities. Within the frameworks of CFPD and Ubuntu, relevance is achieved when communication resonates culturally, responds practically, and restores trust by recognizing youth not as passive audiences but as partners in dialogue.

5.5.3 Government Support and Resource Availability

Findings also reveal widespread frustration among township youth regarding the accessibility and consistency of government support for entrepreneurship. While participants acknowledge that multiple programmes exist, including those facilitated by the NYDA, SEDA, and local LED offices, they experience these initiatives as fragmented, bureaucratic, and difficult to navigate. The process of seeking information, submitting applications, and accessing mentorship or funding is often described as exhausting and demotivating.

Youth participants repeatedly expressed that bureaucratic hurdles and unclear processes deter them from applying for available support. SBYP6 (Aspiring entrepreneur, Sebokeng) remarked:

> *By the time you get through the paperwork, you have already given up. It's too complicated, and you don't even know who to ask for help.*

While SBYP5 (Aspiring entrepreneur, Sebokeng) added that the lack of sustained guidance contributes to a sense of abandonment once programmes are announced. He said:

> *They give us information and then disappear. We need ongoing support, not just one-time workshops.*

These reflections highlight that information alone does not equate to empowerment. As Freire (1970) argues, communication must go beyond transmission to enable critical consciousness

and agency. The current system, by contrast, reinforces dependency and exclusion. Youth expressed that even when they access official spaces, interactions feel procedural rather than relational, with little empathy or follow-up from government representatives.

GCIS2 acknowledged these shortcomings and explained that:

> *Our communication tends to stop at information sharing because of capacity constraints*

LED1 conceded that:

> *Mentorship and follow-up require resources and time, which we often do not have*

These admissions underscore the institutional focus on visibility and compliance rather than relationship-building. From the CFPD perspective, genuine empowerment occurs only when communication is embedded in dialogue and reciprocity. Similarly, within Ubuntu-informed communication, sustained engagement reflects moral responsibility and collective care (Mabovula 2011; Lubombo 2015, 2018). The absence of continuity, therefore, undermines trust, as youth interpret the government's presence as transactional rather than transformative.

MYP2 (Active youth entrepreneur, Mamelodi) articulated this perception clearly:

> *Sometimes they come here with cameras, take pictures, and leave. After that, there is nothing. It feels like it's just for publicity.*

MYP1(Active youth entrepreneur, Mamelodi) added that opportunities often seem designed for a select few.

> *"The government speaks about helping youth, but when you try to access support, it feels like a closed club".*

Together, these accounts illustrate a communication deficit that extends beyond messaging. It also reflects a broader failure to enact participatory ethics in programme implementation. The limited coordination among departments and the absence of feedback mechanisms compound this challenge, resulting in inconsistent service delivery across township sites.

Officials acknowledged the need for stronger collaboration between agencies. Some suggested developing a centralised digital platform for youth business support, while others proposed that local facilitators or peer mentors could provide continuous guidance after initial engagements. Such measures would resonate with the participatory principles advocated in CFPD, where communication is understood as a sustained process of co-learning rather than an event. As Lubombo (2018) argues, sustainable communication in community contexts depends on relational accountability, the obligation to remain present, responsive, and connected to those served.

The youth perceptions of government support underscore a conceivable critical paradox. Programmes exist, but communication gaps make them appear invisible or inaccessible. The lack of follow-up, coordination, and clarity undermines confidence in public institutions. Addressing these limitations requires transforming communication from a bureaucratic procedure into an ongoing, trust-based partnership that aligns with the Ubuntu ethic of relational engagement. Only then can support mechanisms move beyond symbolic inclusion toward meaningful empowerment.

5.5.4 Engagement with Government Programmes

Engagement with government entrepreneurship programmes among township youth remains limited and fragmented. While youth are frequently identified as the cornerstone of national economic transformation, their active participation in state-led initiatives is constrained by poor accessibility, bureaucratic rigidity, and inconsistent outreach. The findings show that government communication continues to rely on one-directional dissemination rather than sustained, dialogic interaction. This reinforces what has been described as a linear model of participation, in which engagement is measured by attendance or compliance rather than by genuine involvement in decision-making.

Youth participants consistently emphasized the logistical and structural barriers that impede participation. According to SYP6 (Aspiring youth entrepreneur, Soweto),

> *If you don't have transport or the right network, you're left out.*

SYP4 (Aspiring youth entrepreneur, Soweto) also remarked that events were often held at short notice or in distant venues.

Most workshops are in town, not in the township. You hear about them too late, and there's no money for transport.

Such accounts reveal how socio-economic inequalities intersect with communication failures to produce exclusion. The content and structure of these initiatives further alienate young people. Several participants described workshops and training sessions as repetitive and uninspiring, offering little room for engagement. MYP1 (Active youth entrepreneur, Mamelodi) observed that:

It's always the same script, no real engagement with our ideas.

While TYP3 (Active youth entrepreneur, Thembisa) conceded that,

We sit there listening, but nothing changes. They don't ask what we need; they just tell us what they are doing.

These expressions of disillusionment echo Freire's (1970) critique of "banking communication," where knowledge is deposited rather than co-created. Government officials acknowledged these challenges. GCIS3 admitted that:

Youth events are sometimes too formal and protocol-driven, which limits interaction.

GCIS1 also agreed that,

Communication is often designed to showcase visibility rather than to listen.

These admissions highlight what Fourie (2009) terms the performative logic of South African public communication, where participation is symbolic, serving political accountability rather than community empowerment.

Despite these challenges, officials recognized the need for more inclusive formats that foreground youth agency. They cited examples of pilot initiatives incorporating participatory dialogue and co-creation. LED3 explained:

When youth are involved in planning, turnout and satisfaction improve.

LED1 reflected on the benefits of feedback-oriented workshops:

When we give young people the platform to speak, they identify real issues that we sometimes overlook.

Such reflections align with the CFPD principle that participation must be both a process and an outcome, not an afterthought but a core element of design and evaluation (Manyozo 2012; Melkote & Steeves 2015).

The study also reveals that participants across all four focus group discussions viewed communication as a process of relationship-building rather than a series of isolated events. Rather than simply receiving information or collecting application forms, participants expressed a desire for ongoing engagement with government officials who could provide guidance, explain available opportunities, offer mentorship, and maintain follow-up support throughout their entrepreneurial journey. These discussions stressed the importance of sustained interpersonal relationships, continuous communication, and institutional responsiveness as essential components of meaningful youth participation in government entrepreneurship programmes.

This call for continuity resonates with Ubuntu's emphasis on relational ethics, the notion that communication acquires meaning through care, presence, and mutual recognition (Lubombo 2015; Mabovula 2011). For youth, effective engagement means ongoing accompaniment rather than one-off announcements or ceremonial outreach.

Government communicators acknowledged that their current systems do not easily support such sustained interaction. Limited budgets, high staff turnover, and a focus on event-based communication hinder follow-up. GCIS4 explained,

We would like to do more continuous engagement, but our structures are not built for that.

This structural weakness reflects what Gumucio-Dagron (2019) identifies as the institutional fear of decentralization, an aversion to losing control over the message.

Yet within these constraints lie opportunities for transformation. The success of smaller, youth-led collaborations points to the potential of hybrid engagement models combining digital dialogue and face-to-face mentoring. Officials cited partnerships with community-based organizations and youth influencers as emerging practices that balance institutional authority

with grassroots credibility. These models reflect the participatory ideals advanced by Cornwall (2008) and Chilisa (2012), who advocate for communication that is both co-produced and contextually embedded.

In sum, the findings portray a dual reality involving government structures that promote participation rhetorically but implement it procedurally, and youth who remain eager but excluded collaborators. Real engagement requires reimagining government communication as a continuous, trust-building relationship rather than a sequence of campaigns. Grounded in CFPD and Ubuntu, such a shift would entail institutional humility involving listening, co-learning, and sharing ownership of knowledge with young people whose voices have too often been marginalized in policy discourse.

5.5.5 Awareness and Perceived Usefulness of Economic Development Programmes

As already intimated, youth awareness of economic development opportunities remains low across the four township sites, despite an apparent proliferation of government initiatives. Programmes such as the NYDA and SEDA were frequently mentioned but seldom understood in depth. Many participants reported discovering opportunities only through informal social networks, indicating weak institutional visibility and fragmented communication.

This concern emerged consistently during the Mamelodi, Thembisa, and Soweto focus group discussions, where participants expressed frustration that information about government entrepreneurship programmes seldom reached them in a timely manner. Participants indicated that they frequently became aware of funding opportunities, training programmes, or business support initiatives only after application periods had closed or after other beneficiaries had already accessed them. The discussions further revealed that the fragmented and inconsistent dissemination of information undermined confidence in government communication and limited young people's ability to participate effectively in economic development programmes.

These sentiments reveal that access to opportunities is often mediated by word of mouth rather than through structured communication channels, reinforcing the pattern of exclusion documented earlier in this study.

Beyond access, perceptions of usefulness were shaped by the misalignment between programme design and the lived realities of township entrepreneurship. These programs are

useful for those who can navigate the system, but for the rest of us, they remain out of reach. The training they offer is too generic. It doesn't speak to how businesses survive here in the township.

Such accounts echo Manyozo's (2012) critique that development initiatives frequently treat local communities as homogeneous recipients rather than as diverse, context-specific partners. This uniformity limits both practical relevance and perceived legitimacy.

Government officials recognized this issue, acknowledging that awareness campaigns remain urban-centred and largely event-based. GCIS2 remarked:

> *We know that most of our campaigns are concentrated in metros. It is difficult to sustain township-level visibility with limited budgets.*

LED2 further explained:

> *We rely heavily on national media and websites, but those do not always reach our intended audiences. We are exploring community-based collaborations to close this gap.*

These reflections suggest an awareness of structural weaknesses but also point to an institutional model still dominated by top-down dissemination rather than participatory co-design. The findings further reveal that many youth view government programmes as bureaucratic and inaccessible, eroding trust in their usefulness.

This perception aligns with Sonderling's (1997) assertion that participatory rhetoric often masks hierarchical control, transforming development into a process that sustains dependence rather than empowerment. Officials defended existing programmes by citing regulatory and accountability requirements that limit flexibility. According to GCIS1,

> *We cannot change the processes overnight. There are systems that ensure fairness and prevent misuse of funds.*

While such caution is necessary, CFPD theory emphasizes that accountability should coexist with accessibility. Lubombo (2018) argues that Ubuntu-inspired communication redefines

accountability as responsiveness, the moral duty to listen, adapt, and accompany communities rather than to regulate them merely.

The youth's low confidence in government programmes reflects a breakdown of relational trust. This is not simply a problem of information delivery but of ethical communication. As Mabovula (2011) and Lubombo (2015) argue, authentic participation emerges when citizens experience the state as attentive, caring, and present. The perceived absence of such engagement contributes to what Waisbord (2014) describes as communicative dissonance, where institutional narratives of empowerment are contradicted by citizens lived experiences of exclusion.

Despite these concerns, the findings also point to practical opportunities for strengthening government communication. Participants in the Thembisa focus group discussions consistently advocated for communication systems that align with their everyday digital practices. They recommended that the government disseminate information through mobile-friendly, interactive, and community-based platforms, particularly WhatsApp and TikTok, rather than relying predominantly on posters, formal government websites, and other traditional communication channels that they regarded as less accessible and less responsive to their information needs. These suggestions highlight young people's preference for communication that is immediate, conversational, and embedded within the digital spaces they routinely use.

However, Government officials expressed openness to these ideas, though they noted implementation barriers.

> *We are beginning to experiment with WhatsApp information groups, but we must balance innovation with security and approval protocols.*

Such initiatives, though limited, signal a gradual recognition that inclusivity requires meeting young people within their communicative ecologies.

From a theoretical perspective, awareness and perceived usefulness reflect the relational quality of communication. When information flows are unidirectional, participation becomes tokenistic. When it is dialogic and iterative, communication becomes an act of empowerment. The Ubuntu framework reminds us that relevance and usefulness are relational constructs; they emerge when communication honours mutual recognition and shared purpose.

In conclusion, youth perceptions of awareness and usefulness demonstrate the enduring tension between visibility and inclusion in government communication. While information may circulate widely through official media, it rarely penetrates the social spaces where young people live, learn, and create. Bridging this divide requires a shift from visibility-driven communication to participatory co-creation, in which both content and process reflect the values of care, responsiveness, and mutual recognition that lie at the heart of CFPD and Ubuntu-informed practice.

5.5.6 Satisfaction and Suggestions for Improvement

Overall, township youth expressed low levels of satisfaction with government communication on entrepreneurship and economic development. The findings point to widespread frustration with how information is packaged, distributed, and followed up. Youth described official communication as complex, fragmented, and inaccessible, creating barriers to engagement and limiting their ability to benefit from available opportunities. These perceptions underscore what Servaes (2008) and Manyozo (2012) describe as the enduring legacy of *modernization-oriented communication*, which privileges transmission and visibility over participation and inclusion.

Across the focus group discussions conducted in Mamelodi, Sebokeng, and Thembisa, participants consistently reported difficulties accessing clear, accurate, and timely information about government entrepreneurship programs. Many described the communication process as fragmented and poorly coordinated, making it difficult to identify opportunities before application deadlines had passed.

Similarly, participants highlighted the complexity and inconsistency of government communication, arguing that bureaucratic procedures and dispersed information often discouraged youth participation. Participants remarked:

"The information is everywhere but nowhere. You hear about things when they are already closed, or you don't understand the requirements."

These sentiments were echoed across the focus group discussions in Mamelodi, Sebokeng, and Thembisa, illustrating a shared perception that government communication systems remain difficult to navigate and insufficiently responsive to the information needs of township youth entrepreneurs.

These expressions reveal how institutional opacity undermines the communicative relationship between the state and young citizens, reproducing the very inequalities participatory communication seeks to address.

Government officials were aware of these frustrations, acknowledging that communication systems are not user-friendly and often fail to accommodate different literacy levels. GCIS1 remarked:

> *Our messages are clear to us, but we forget that not everyone speaks our policy language. We need to simplify without losing credibility.*

GCIS3 added:

> *We are trying to revise our templates and forms, but it is a slow process. Sometimes clarity and compliance pull in opposite directions.*

These reflections illustrate the institutional tension between accountability and accessibility. This tension, CFPD scholars such as Waisbord (2014) argue, can only be resolved by shifting from an administrative to a relational understanding of communication.

Language emerged as one of the strongest determinants of satisfaction. Youth participants at the focal group discussions repeatedly called for simpler, localized communication that reflects their linguistic and cultural realities.

> *They should speak our language, not just English. Sometimes, even the translated documents sound too formal.*

This aligns with the Ubuntu-informed argument that authentic participation requires communicative proximity, the ability of the state to speak with rather than to its citizens in ways that recognize their epistemic and cultural agency. Many participants also emphasized the need for communication that reflects township life and youth identity. According to participants at the Mamelodi focal group discussions:

> *They need to communicate the way we do, through WhatsApp, Facebook, and short videos. If they want us to listen, they should come to us, not expect us to come to them.*

These accounts reveal an appetite for participatory co-creation, where government messages are not merely broadcast but collaboratively designed with youth input. This desire for dialogue resonates with CFPD principles that define participation as an iterative process of listening, feedback, and joint decision-making (Tufte, 2017; Gumucio-Dagron, 2019).

In contrast, several government officials, such as GCIS2, admitted that while social media engagement is expanding, responsiveness remains limited.

> *We are on Facebook and Twitter, but we cannot respond to every comment. There are no dedicated teams for that.*

Such admissions highlight the resource and capacity constraints that hinder participatory digital engagement, reinforcing the need for institutional restructuring rather than superficial adaptation. Beyond communication formats, participants at the Thembisa focal group discussions linked dissatisfaction to a lack of follow-through after initial engagement.

> *They give us information once, but there's no support after that. We need mentorship and follow-up, not just campaigns.*

This reinforces the argument that communication without continuity lacks moral integrity. Within an Ubuntu framework, communication entails a sustained ethical relationship grounded in care and accountability. Once information is given, the communicator assumes responsibility for accompanying the recipient through its application.

Youth also offered constructive suggestions to improve satisfaction and engagement. They proposed greater localisation of programmes, collaboration with township influencers, and the inclusion of youth representatives in message planning and evaluation. According to the Thembisa focal group discussions, the youth said:

> *Not all townships are the same. We need programmes that fit our specific challenges. If they worked with us instead of just for us, these things would make more sense.*

Government officials like GCIS1 responded positively to such proposals, acknowledging the potential of partnerships with youth-led media, creative collectives, and small business forums.

We are beginning to explore partnerships with young content creators because they understand how to reach their peers. It's a learning process for us too.

From a theoretical standpoint, satisfaction is both an outcome and a measure of communicative justice. Within the CFPD paradigm, satisfaction reflects whether communication enables agency, builds trust, and nurtures mutual accountability (Servaes, 2020). In Ubuntu ethics, satisfaction is relational, it emerges when participants feel seen, heard, and respected (Mabovula, 2011; Lubombo, 2018). When communication remains top-down, formal, and unresponsive, satisfaction declines because citizens experience alienation rather than recognition.

Across all four township sites, there appears to be a communication system marked by both persistent shortcomings and untapped opportunities. While government institutions have established multiple communication structures from the GCIS to municipal outreach programmes, these often function within a logic of information management rather than participatory engagement. This reflects what Servaes (2008) and Manyozo (2012) term the "technocratic orientation" of communication for development: one that prioritizes message control, uniformity, and visibility over local responsiveness, relational depth, and dialogue.

Despite these limitations, the findings also reveal promising opportunities for transformation. Youth participants consistently expressed a desire for communication that is conversational, localized, and technologically accessible. They suggested that government communications should work with local influencers and social media content creators to translate their messages into their world.

Such perspectives reveal a readiness among township youth to co-create content and act as partners in communication rather than passive audiences. This participatory potential aligns directly with CFPD's emphasis on horizontal dialogue and local agency (Tufte, 2017; Manyozo, 2012).

Officials also recognized emerging opportunities to build more inclusive communication ecosystems. LED2 reflected that:

We are starting to realize that social media can be more than just a noticeboard. It can help us listen and learn.

GCIS1 reflected that

> *Working with young people as partners could help us rebuild trust. But we need guidelines that make this collaboration possible within government systems.*

These statements suggest a shifting institutional awareness of the need for communicative reform, moving from compliance-driven communication to relationship-based engagement.

Structural opportunities also lie in the growing digital literacy of township youth and the proliferation of community-based media. As Bosch (2014) and Chiumbu (2017) note, these spaces enable participatory storytelling and citizen agency, offering fertile ground for collaboration between government communicators and youth-led initiatives. The challenge, therefore, is not the absence of platforms but the absence of dialogic intent.

In an Ubuntu sense, the transformation of government communication is not merely procedural but ethical. It demands a reorientation from seeing youth as *targets* of communication to recognising them as *partners in meaning-making*. Ethical communication rests on the ongoing commitment to accompany, listen, and reciprocate. Such an approach aligns with the relational ethic that underpins participatory communication, ensuring that messages are not only heard but also co-owned.

5.6 PARTICIPATORY IDEALS AND BUREAUCRATIC REALITIES: Analysis of government communication frameworks

The analysis of interviews and focus group discussions was complemented by a critical review of key documentary sources, including the GCIS Government Communication Policy (2018), the Government Communicators' Handbook, and several national and provincial communication strategies and reports. This section offers a complementary perspective on how the South African state conceptualizes and operationalizes communication for development, particularly concerning youth entrepreneurship and economic inclusion, vis-à-vis the youth experiences on the ground.

Collectively, the official policy documents present communication as a strategic instrument for democratic participation and social transformation. They articulate an ideal of government communication that is inclusive, developmental, and citizen-centred, grounded in accountability, transparency, and responsiveness. Yet, as the preceding empirical analysis

demonstrates, there is a pronounced disjuncture between these policy ideals and their practical realization. Integrating both sources of evidence exposes the paradox between what the state communicates *about* communication and how communication is actually experienced by its intended beneficiaries.

5.6.1 The GCIS Government Communication Policy

Approved in August 2018, the *Government Communication Policy* provides the overarching framework guiding communication activities across all levels of government. It defines communication as a participatory process that is integral to social and economic development. The policy explicitly promotes citizen-centred communication, multilingual inclusivity, and interactive feedback between government and the public. It calls for a developmental orientation that is educational rather than instructional, and dialogic rather than persuasive.

A major strength of the policy lies in its alignment with the CFPD approach. It resonates with Servaes' (2008) and Tufte's (2017) argument that communication should enable mutual understanding, dialogue, and empowerment rather than function as a one-way conduit for information transfer. The policy's emphasis on ethical and developmental communication also echoes the Ubuntu ethic of relational care and reciprocity as articulated by Lubombo (2015, 2018) and Mabovula (2011).

However, the earlier findings reveal a persistent implementation gap. Youth participants and government officials alike noted that, despite the policy's participatory rhetoric, communication practices remain largely bureaucratic and unidirectional. This pattern reflects what Manyozo (2012) calls the rhetorical adoption of participatory discourse, in which governments symbolically endorse dialogue while maintaining hierarchical, message-driven systems.

Furthermore, although the policy acknowledges diverse tools, ranging from community radio to social media, it lacks explicit mechanisms for adapting them to the communicative realities of different publics. The emphasis on "reach" over "resonance" leads to limited contextualization. Consequently, the policy serves as a robust normative framework but offers limited operational guidance for enacting participatory communication in dynamic, youth-driven township contexts.

5.6.2 The Government Communicators' Handbook

The Government Communicators' Handbook, developed by the GCIS, serves as a practical guide for communicators at the national, provincial, and municipal levels. It promotes coherence, professionalism, and ethical standards, and outlines the principles of developmental communication, namely dialogue, consultation, and feedback, as central to effective public service communication. The handbook further emphasizes the need for integrated communication systems, multi-platform strategies, and coordination across government spheres.

While the handbook's vision mirrors participatory communication ideals, its implementation reveals structural contradictions. The reflections shared by officials throughout this study point to systemic limitations, including capacity constraints, centralized decision-making, and risk aversion, that inhibit participatory practice.

The findings also suggest that political influence and media biases compromise the handbook's ethical aspirations, undermining public trust, especially among youth audiences who value authenticity and immediacy (Bosch, 2014; Chiumbu, 2017). Yet, despite these challenges, both the policy and the handbook offer clear opportunities for transformation. They provide a conceptual and ethical foundation that, if operationalized, could advance dialogic and participatory governance. Bridging the policy-practice gap requires institutional reform to empower local communicators, decentralize decision-making, and embed youth voices in planning, messaging, and evaluation processes.

5.6.3 Policy–Practice Alignment and the Role of Participatory Frameworks

Cross-referencing documentary analysis with field data reveals a consistent pattern: government communication frameworks in South Africa are participatory in theory but bureaucratic in practice. This reflects Waisbord's (2014) critique that participatory communication is often "institutionally scripted" rather than lived. The CFPD and Ubuntu frameworks are useful in interpreting this paradox. From a CFPD perspective, communication should be a co-creative process grounded in dialogue and problem-solving (Servaes, 2020). From an Ubuntu perspective, communication carries an ethical obligation to be-with others, to listen, to empathize, and to recognize mutual humanity (Lubombo, 2018; Mabovula, 2011).

In practice, however, communication remains transactional and compliance-driven. As the GCIS officials put it, they deliver information because it's required. Engagement is ideal, but deadlines and protocols make it difficult. Youth participants expressed similar scepticism about the authenticity of outreach efforts, observing that policies and handbooks sound good on paper, but nothing changes for us on the ground. The challenge, therefore, lies not in the absence of participatory frameworks but in the absence of participatory culture.

Nonetheless, the documents analyzed remain valuable institutional starting points. Their shared principles of dialogue, inclusivity, feedback, and ethical engagement are fully consistent with CFPD theory and Ubuntu ethics. Realizing these ideals requires bridging bureaucratic and cultural divides, including devolving authority, investing in digital participatory tools, and cultivating an institutional ethos of relational communication within the public sector.

5.7 CONCLUSION

This chapter has shown that while South Africa's government communication frameworks, anchored in the Government Communication Policy and the Government Communicators' Handbook, espouse strong participatory and developmental ideals, their implementation remains constrained by bureaucratic systems, limited capacity, and insufficient feedback mechanisms. The paradox of participatory ideals and bureaucratic realities exposes a persistent gap between rhetoric and lived experience.

From a theoretical standpoint, the findings reaffirm that communication for development cannot succeed without relational integrity, mutual respect, and ethical responsiveness. As Lubombo (2018) and Tufte (2017) argue, the power of communication lies not in information delivery but in co-creation and presence. Bridging the divide between policy and practice, therefore, requires a strategic reorientation, one that transforms communication from a bureaucratic obligation into a participatory, youth-engaged, and Ubuntu-inspired process of dialogue and empowerment.

The next chapter builds on this analysis to propose strategic recommendations and an integrated framework to align South Africa's government communication practices with its participatory commitments.

CHAPTER SIX

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS AND STRATEGIC RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PARTICIPATORY COMMUNICATION

6.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter interprets the empirical findings presented in Chapter Five through the analytical lenses of the CFPD model and Ubuntu philosophy, both of which informed the study's conceptual framework. These frameworks collectively foreground participation, dialogue, and reciprocity as the ethical and operational foundations of democratic communication. The purpose of the chapter is to close the loop on five interrelated questions that guided the study:

1. What communication approaches are currently used by the government to promote youth entrepreneurship in township settings, and how accessible and relevant are they?
2. What systemic constraints limit the effectiveness of these approaches?
3. To what extent do current practices align with participatory communication theory?
4. How do township youth perceive and experience government communication?
5. What participatory framework can be proposed to transform government communication into an inclusive platform for youth agency and empowerment?

Together, these questions anchor a discussion that exposes the paradox between policy aspirations and practice realities, while charting pathways for transforming state communication into a genuinely participatory process of social change.

6.2 GOVERNMENT COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES AND THEIR INFLUENCE ON YOUTH PARTICIPATION

The findings presented in Chapter 5 reveal that government communication on youth entrepreneurship, though espoused in official policies as participatory, remains largely characterized by one-way, top-down dissemination. Despite policy frameworks that promote inclusivity and dialogue, the communicative practices observed continue to prioritize information control over participatory engagement. Officials described their primary channels, radio, television, roadshows, and formal events, as effective tools for public communication. Yet these media reflect a continuing dependence on modernization-inspired paradigms, in which communication is viewed as the transmission of knowledge from experts to passive

audiences (Servaes 2008; Tufte 2017). This orientation assumes that providing information is sufficient to stimulate behavioural change among youth, thereby overlooking the interactive and culturally dynamic communication spaces in which township youth actually participate.

As the empirical findings demonstrate, this communication model results in limited youth participation. Young people rarely see themselves as partners in development; instead, they are positioned as recipients of policy messages and targets of campaigns. This outcome illustrates what Manyozo (2012) describes as the persistence of informational monologue in development practice where participation is rhetorically endorsed but procedurally constrained. In the context of this study, the disjuncture between state communication and youth realities is not simply technical but structural and epistemological. The government's reliance on rigid bureaucratic hierarchies and approval chains has institutionalized a culture of risk aversion and delayed responsiveness. Communication officers, operating under strict procedural guidelines, struggle to adapt messages to the rapidly shifting digital and social ecologies of township youth.

These institutional patterns mirror what Waisbord (2014) terms' scripted participation,' in which dialogue is managed through formal consultation rather than genuine co-creation. As a result, government communication tends to perform participation rather than embody it. The relational distance between communicators and youth, evident in the use of formal language, hierarchical tone, and inaccessible media, weakens trust and legitimacy. Consequently, communication intended to enable inclusion ends up reinforcing exclusion, as youth disengage from initiatives they perceive as alien and bureaucratic.

Viewed through the CFPD lens, these practices neglect the dialogic process central to empowerment. CFPD, as elaborated in Chapter 2, emphasizes the horizontal exchange of meanings, mutual learning, and shared ownership of communication. By contrast, government practices in this study remain vertical, driven by message dissemination and compliance to procedure. From the perspective of Ubuntu, this communicative imbalance also constitutes an ethical failure. Ubuntu frames communication as a relational act grounded in empathy, mutual recognition, and care (Lubombo 2018; Mabovula 2011). When communication is stripped of these ethical dimensions, it becomes an exercise in control rather than connection.

The contradiction between participatory policy rhetoric and bureaucratic communication practice is therefore not merely administrative. It reflects an underlying tension between technocratic and relational paradigms of governance. The government's communication

system, while institutionally comprehensive, lacks mechanisms for real-time dialogue and shared problem-solving with youth audiences. As discussed in Chapter 4, both the Government Communication Policy (2018) and the Government Communicators' Handbook advocate two-way engagement, yet the empirical evidence from Chapter 5 shows limited translation of these ideals into everyday practice. Youth participation in entrepreneurship initiatives is thus constrained less by a lack of information than by the absence of communicative relationships that foster ownership, trust, and responsiveness.

Addressing this gap requires reframing communication as an ongoing social process rather than a discrete bureaucratic function. A participatory communication model grounded in CFPD and Ubuntu principles can conceivably reposition government communication as facilitative rather than directive, one that listens as much as it speaks, and that values community dialogue as a means of co-producing meaning. Such a shift would not only enhance youth participation in entrepreneurship programmes but also advance the broader democratic promise of communication as a space of ethical encounter and shared development.

6.3 SYSTEMIC IMPEDIMENTS TO PARTICIPATORY COMMUNICATION

Findings across interviews identified bureaucratic hierarchies, centralized approval structures, and limited institutional capacity as major impediments to participatory communication. Government officials themselves acknowledged these challenges, noting that decision-making on communication strategies is often concentrated at national or provincial levels, leaving local communicators with little flexibility to innovate or tailor messages to community realities.

This structural rigidity reflects what Waisbord (2014) calls institutionally scripted participation, a form of symbolic inclusion that reproduces control rather than dialogue. The Government Communicators' Handbook espouses participatory ideals, but their operationalization remains constrained by managerial logics of compliance, reporting, and message discipline. These frameworks focus on coordination rather than collaboration, leaving limited space for youth input in planning and evaluation.

Moreover, systemic issues such as fragmented communication mandates, resource shortages, and political gatekeeping further weaken implementation. Departments and agencies operate in silos, often duplicating efforts or competing for visibility rather than aligning around

participatory goals. Officials noted that risk aversion discourages experimentation with digital tools or influencer-based communication, despite their demonstrated success among youth.

From a CFPD standpoint, such structural impediments hinder the dialogic processes that underpin empowerment. Communication becomes instrumental rather than relational, valued for dissemination efficiency rather than participatory quality. From an Ubuntu lens, this reflects a moral failing in governance: communication stripped of responsiveness and empathy cannot fulfill its ethical obligation to "be with" rather than "speak at" others (Lubombo 2015).

Transformative participation, therefore, requires institutional reform, including decentralized communication authority, interdepartmental collaboration, and participatory performance indicators that reward the quality of engagement rather than the quantity of messages.

6.3.1 Alignment with Participatory Communication Theory

The extent to which current government communication aligns with participatory communication theory is, at best, partial. As shown in the document analysis, official policy frameworks recognize dialogue, feedback, and inclusivity as communication principles. Yet, as empirical data demonstrated, implementation remains skewed toward informational outreach rather than dialogic engagement.

From the CFPD perspective, communication should be cyclical and interactive, creating space for negotiation, local knowledge sharing, and co-decision-making (Servaes 2020; Tufte 2017). Current practice, however, remains linear and event-based. Youth are invited to listen, not to co-design. Participatory intent is undermined by what Manyozo (2012) describes as "technocratic participation," where engagement is procedural and symbolic rather than empowering.

In contrast, Ubuntu philosophy deepens this critique by highlighting the ethical dimension of communication. Lubombo (2018) and Mabovula (2011) contend that dialogue must be grounded in relational accountability and mutual recognition. Yet, findings revealed that youth experience communication as impersonal, bureaucratic, and politically driven. Genuine dialogue requires not only new methods but also new moral sensibilities, in which listening, empathy, and care guide the communicative relationship between state and citizen.

Aligning practice with theory, therefore, means institutionalizing dialogic processes. This may include focus groups, co-creation labs, youth-led media collaborations, and community digital platforms that translate participatory ideals into lived practice.

6.4 YOUTH PERCEPTIONS AND PREFERENCES REGARDING GOVERNMENT COMMUNICATION

Chapter 5 further revealed that township youth perceive government communication as distant, inaccessible, and often irrelevant to their lived realities. While young people acknowledge the existence of government programmes aimed at supporting entrepreneurship, their experiences with communicating about these initiatives are marked by frustration and mistrust. This discontent stems from three interconnected factors: the lack of clarity and cultural resonance in messaging, limited access to communication channels, and the absence of genuine opportunities for dialogue and feedback. Together, these factors contribute to a perception that government communication speaks *about* youth rather than *with* them.

As discussed earlier, communication in the South African public sector continues to operate within an administrative rationality that privileges information dissemination and institutional visibility over participatory engagement. Youth respondents, however, situate meaningful communication within networks of trust, immediacy, and shared understanding. Their communication preferences, particularly for social and digital platforms such as WhatsApp, TikTok, and community-based online groups, reflect a desire for interaction, responsiveness, and authenticity. These preferences demonstrate a shift from hierarchical information consumption to participatory co-creation, where knowledge circulates horizontally through social networks. Bosch (2014) and Prinsloo (2003) argue that such digital and community-based communication spaces constitute new public spheres in which marginalised voices can express agency, negotiate meaning, and build solidarity.

From the perspective of the CFPD approach, these preferences signify an alternative communicative logic, one grounded in dialogue, connectivity, and co-presence rather than transmission. Tufte (2017) observes that participatory communication succeeds when it cultivates horizontal relationships of trust, enabling communities to articulate their own priorities and influence decision-making. In contrast, the government's reliance on impersonal and formal media channels has alienated youth from entrepreneurship initiatives. As

demonstrated in Chapter 5, young people regard these channels as bureaucratic, slow, and detached from the immediacy of their everyday communication ecologies.

Ubuntu further illuminates the moral and relational dimensions of this disconnect. Lubombo (2018) and Mabovula (2011) contend that communication, in the spirit of Ubuntu, must be founded on empathy, recognition, and mutual respect. Yet youth participants consistently described government communication as one-directional and emotionally distant, a process that informs but does not listen. The absence of ubuntu-informed dialogue deprives communication of its humanizing potential. Instead of fostering belonging and partnership, it perpetuates asymmetrical power relations between the state and the citizen.

These perceptions also reveal a broader epistemological tension between formal institutional authority and lived community knowledge. Manyozo (2012) warns that conceptualising communication as the transfer of expert information excludes experiential knowledges through which communities make sense of their realities. In this study, youth participants' reliance on informal networks such as friends, peers, and social media groups for entrepreneurship information reflects a reclamation of communicative agency outside state structures. This trend underscores the limitations of state-centric communication systems that fail to accommodate participatory feedback or to locate knowledge production within local experience.

Addressing this misalignment requires rethinking not only the media of communication but also the relational ethics that underpin them. Youth preferences for immediacy, interaction, and co-creation call for a shift from informational outreach to conversational engagement. This entails adopting digital communication strategies that are dialogic, youth-led, and embedded in community contexts. As the findings in Chapter 5 suggested, youth favour communication that is visually engaging, linguistically inclusive, and culturally attuned to township creativity and entrepreneurship. These preferences resonate with CFPD's insistence on cultural grounding and local ownership of messages (Servaes 2008; Gumucio-Dagron 2019).

For government communication to earn legitimacy among township youth, it may be useful to embody both procedural inclusivity and ethical responsiveness. This means recognizing youth not as passive audiences but as co-creators of meaning and strategy. In practical terms, communication planning processes should incorporate youth input at design and evaluation stages, thereby transforming communication from a bureaucratic function into a participatory partnership. By integrating CFPD's dialogic methodology with Ubuntu's ethics of care and

recognition, government communication can move closer to becoming a relational process that not only informs but also affirms and empowers.

6.5 INSTITUTIONAL AND POLICY FRAMEWORKS GOVERNING COMMUNICATION FOR YOUTH ECONOMIC INCLUSION

The documentary analysis of the GCIS Government Communication Policy and the Government Communicators' Handbook (see Chapter 5) revealed strong rhetorical commitment to developmental and participatory communication. Both documents promote inclusivity, feedback, and dialogue as foundational principles. However, their implementation is constrained by bureaucratic inertia and resource asymmetries. This paradox between participatory ideals and administrative realities reflects what Manyozo (2012) describes as *symbolic participation*, where policies espouse dialogue while institutions continue to communicate vertically.

Furthermore, while policy documents encourage multi-platform and multilingual communication, they lack explicit strategies for adapting messages to diverse youth audiences. The emphasis remains on reach rather than resonance, a problem that mirrors the broader literature on government communication in post-apartheid South Africa (Bosch 2014; Chiumbu 2017). Theoretically, this misalignment underscores the need to move from procedural to relational participation. Within Ubuntu epistemology, effective communication requires *being-with* others, an ethical stance that transcends compliance to embody care and accountability (Lubombo 2018).

These findings collectively point to a systemic implementation gap: the frameworks exist, but their participatory promises remain unrealized. Bridging this gap demands institutional reform that empowers communicators at local levels and embeds participatory accountability mechanisms.

6.6 RECOMMENDATIONS: Towards a participatory communication framework for government–youth communication

As outlined in the empirical framework presented in Figure 1.1 of Chapter 1, the study systematically examined government communication on youth entrepreneurship through an analytical framework. It:

1. assessed existing communication strategies and practices.
2. identified the systemic and institutional barriers that constrained youth access and agency.
3. aligned these findings with participatory communication theories to reveal areas of convergence and conflict with CFPD and Ubuntu.
4. analysed youth perceptions, preferences, and information needs; and

Drawing on these tasks, the study now turns to reimagining government communication as a relational and co-creative process. To achieve that, a focused participatory communication framework for youth entrepreneurship is recommended for development and institutionalisation across all levels of government. This framework must be anchored in CFPD principles, which not only espouse but also respect dialogue, mutual learning, and empowerment. This must be guided by Ubuntu ethics, which foreground care, respect, and relational accountability in communication.

In a practical sense, the framework should prioritise five interlinked processes that operationalise participation as both a structural and ethical practice.

6.6.1 Decentralized Engagement

Government communication planning and implementation should be devolved to municipal and community levels to enhance contextual relevance and responsiveness. Current practices, as revealed in Chapter Five, are overly centralized, resulting in uniform messages that neglect township diversity. Decentralisation would allow local communicators and youth structures to design and adapt messages to reflect community priorities, languages, and media habits. This approach is consistent with CFPD's emphasis on local ownership and Ubuntu's notions of proximity and care, in which dialogue occurs within shared spaces of experience rather than in distant bureaucratic centres. Municipalities should therefore be empowered with both resources

and discretion to co-develop communication plans with youth forums, small business networks, and local influencers.

6.6.2 Dialogic Co-Creation

Government communication must evolve from a unidirectional delivery of information to a collaborative process of message creation. Establishing youth advisory councils, digital storytelling hubs, and co-creation labs within local communication structures can institutionalize two-way dialogue between communicators and youth. These spaces should enable young people to shape the themes, tone, and format of their communication in ways that resonate with their lived experiences. Such participatory content development aligns with Tufte's (2017) conceptualization of communication as co-creation and with Ubuntu's ethos of collective authorship, where voice and belonging are mutually constitutive. Beyond message design, youth should also be involved in monitoring communication campaigns to ensure continuous engagement rather than event-based.

6.6.3 Feedback Integration

Findings across interviews and document analysis exposed the absence of systematic feedback mechanisms between the government and youth audiences. To address this, communication systems must integrate structured, cyclical feedback loops that collect, analyze, and act on youth input. This could involve digital feedback portals, community WhatsApp channels, or participatory evaluation forums held quarterly at the municipal level. Feedback must be actionable, not merely symbolic, informing adjustments to policy, programming, and communication approaches. From a CFPD standpoint, this constitutes the reflexive moment where communication becomes learning; from an Ubuntu perspective, it represents the ethical obligation to listen, respond, and remain accountable. Institutionalizing feedback as a standard operating practice would therefore build credibility, transparency, and trust between the government and youth citizens.

6.6.4 Capacity Building

The transition from top-down communication to participatory dialogue demands new competencies among government communicators. Capacity building should therefore prioritize training in facilitation, dialogic listening, intercultural competence, digital

storytelling, and ethical engagement. Workshops and mentorship programs can be introduced in collaboration with universities, communication scholars, and youth-led media organizations. Such initiatives would strengthen communicators' ability to use social and digital media strategically, to manage participatory processes, and to cultivate empathy in engagement. Capacity development must be ongoing, linked to performance indicators that reward participatory excellence rather than mere compliance. This aligns with Servaes' (2008) argument that development communication succeeds only when practitioners internalize participatory values and methods.

6.6.5 Relational Accountability

Finally, participatory communication requires a moral foundation grounded in relational accountability, a concept deeply rooted in Ubuntu ethics and supported by CFPD's human-centred paradigm. Government communicators must see communication not merely as a task but as a relationship of mutual recognition. Relational accountability implies transparency, consistency, and empathy in all public interactions. It involves acknowledging youth not as passive recipients but as co-participants whose perspectives carry epistemic value. Institutionalizing such accountability demands ethical guidelines that encourage humility, listening, and responsiveness, particularly in digital spaces where misinformation and cynicism can easily erode trust. As Lubombo (2018) and Mabovula (2011) emphasize, communicative relationships must embody care and recognition to generate authentic participation.

By advancing these interlinked processes, government communication can transition from a system of bureaucratic compliance to one of collaborative co-creation. Such a shift would not only improve message relevance and accessibility but also rebuild trust and legitimacy among township youth. The proposed framework, therefore, redefines communication as a process of accompaniment, an ongoing partnership between the state and young citizens in the co-production of developmental knowledge and opportunity.

Anchored in CFPD's dialogic processes and Ubuntu's relational ethics, the framework offers a practical and normative pathway for transforming public communication into a participatory practice that affirms youth agency, strengthens democratic accountability, and contributes to inclusive economic development.

6.7 CONCLUSION

The chapter highlighted that government communication on youth entrepreneurship in South Africa remains predominantly top-down, bureaucratic, and misaligned with the lived realities of township youth. Despite policy commitments to participation, communication practices continue to limit dialogue, weaken trust, and restrict youth influence in decision-making. The chapter identified key gaps and proposed strategies to shift communication towards more inclusive, co-creative, and accountable practices grounded in both the CFPD model and Ubuntu philosophy.

These recommendations set the stage for the next chapter. Chapter Seven introduces the Framework for Participatory Communication for Youth Entrepreneurship (FPCFYE), **a** process-oriented model developed from the study's findings, designed to transform government communication at strategic, operational, and relational levels. The framework integrates five core processes: decentralized engagement, dialogic co-creation, feedback integration, capacity building, and relational accountability.

CHAPTER SEVEN

A FRAMEWORK FOR PARTICIPATORY COMMUNICATION FOR YOUTH ENTREPRENEURSHIP

7.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents the proposed *Framework for Participatory Communication for Youth Entrepreneurship* (FPCFYE) developed from the study's empirical findings, theoretical foundations, and policy analysis. The framework provides a process-oriented model designed to transform government communication from a bureaucratic, top-down system into a dialogic, inclusive, and ethical practice of engagement. It builds on the gaps and opportunities identified in previous chapters, translating them into actionable pathways for communication reform.

The proposed framework functions at three interconnected levels, namely strategic, operational, and relational, and is structured around five interlinked processes, namely decentralized engagement, dialogic co-creation, feedback integration, capacity building, and relational accountability.

7.2 THEORETICAL ANCHORAGE OF THE FRAMEWORK

The FPCFYE is theoretically anchored in the CFPD model and the Ubuntu philosophy. These two perspectives are complementary. While CFPD provides the methodological foundation for dialogic, inclusive, and empowering communication, Ubuntu offers an ethical and relational grounding that situates communication within human connectedness and moral responsibility.

From the CFPD standpoint, communication is not a tool for disseminating information but a social process through which individuals and institutions negotiate meaning, co-create knowledge, and act collectively towards development goals (Servaes 2008; Tufte 2017; Manyozo 2012). The model challenges the modernization paradigm's one-way transmission of messages, replacing it with participatory dialogue where citizens are recognized as co-authors of development. In the context of youth entrepreneurship, CFPD frames communication as a continuous cycle of listening, engagement, and mutual learning between government and youth, where both parties shape and refine policies through shared ownership.

Ubuntu philosophy, as elaborated by Lubombo (2015, 2018) and Mabovula (2011), deepens this understanding by embedding communication within an ethical system of care, reciprocity, and respect for human dignity. It regards communication not simply as the exchange of information but as an encounter between morally interdependent beings. In this sense, communicative practice becomes an act of relational accountability, one that honours the humanity of both speaker and listener. Ubuntu thus repositions communication as an ethical commitment to being *with* others, rather than acting *upon* them, echoing Freire's (1970) notion of dialogic pedagogy as a foundation for liberation and empowerment.

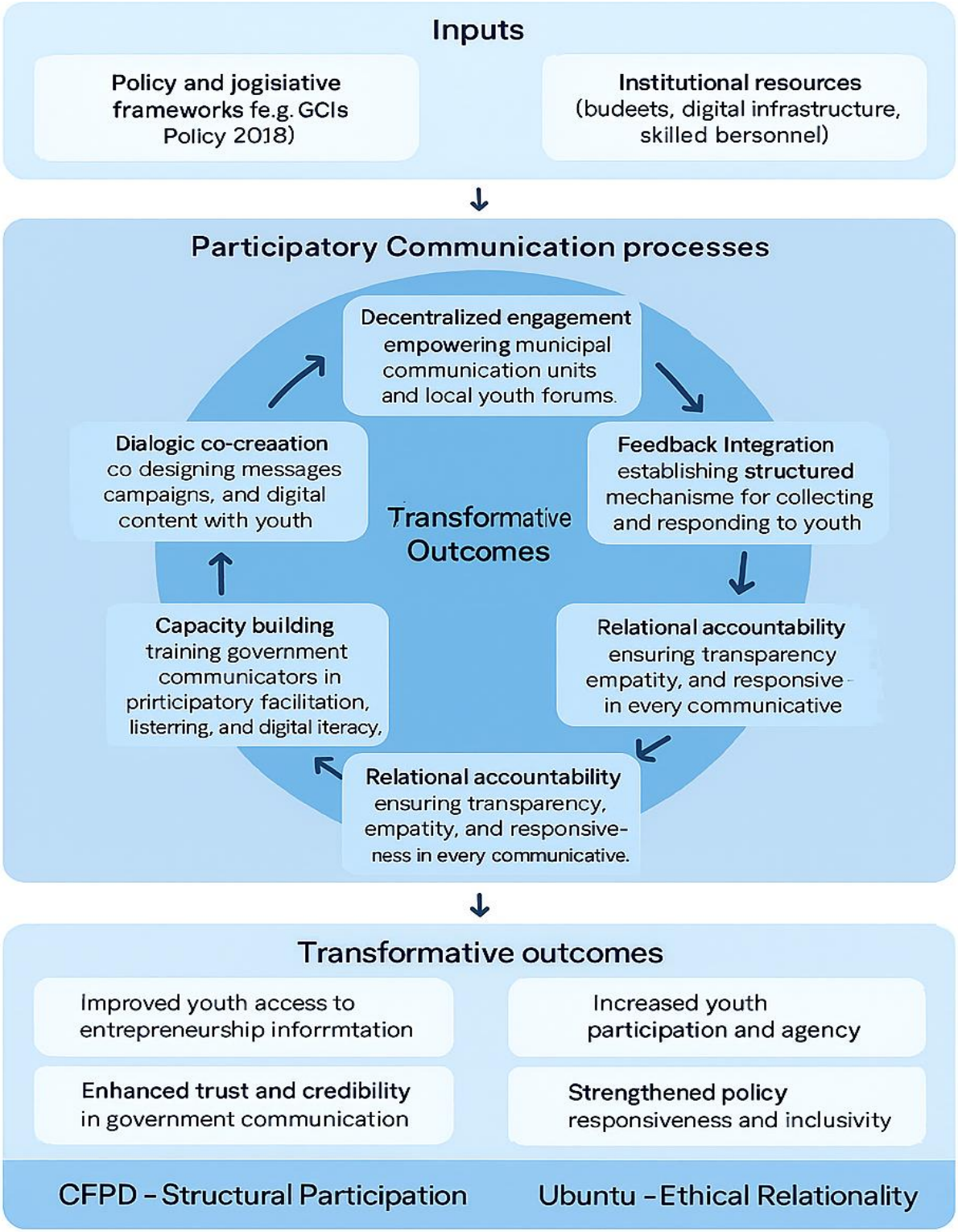
By integrating CFPD's procedural emphasis on participation and Ubuntu's ethical emphasis on relationality, the FPCFYE establishes a comprehensive framework where communication is both structurally participatory and morally grounded. This synthesis ensures that government communication with youth is not only effective and inclusive but also anchored in empathy and shared purpose.

7.3 FRAMEWORK OVERVIEW

The proposed framework operates as an iterative and adaptive model that enables communication to evolve through ongoing reflection and feedback. Rather than a linear sequence, the process follows a circular, dynamic flow in which learning, engagement, and adaptation continuously reinforce one another. This iterative nature ensures that government communication remains responsive to youth realities and adaptable to changing socio-economic conditions.

Figure 7.1 illustrates this framework as a circular model depicting the continuous flow between inputs, participatory processes, and transformative outcomes. The figure encapsulates how ethical and dialogic communication can bridge the gap between institutional design and lived youth experiences, transforming government communication into a vehicle for inclusive development. The framework comprises three concentric and interconnected layers - inputs, processes, and outcomes - that form a single dynamic cycle of participatory communication. These are described further below.

Figure 7.1 A Focused Participatory Communication Framework for Youth Entrepreneurship (FPCFYE)



7.3.1 The FPCFYE Concentric and Interconnected Layers

As already highlighted, the framework comprises three concentric and interconnected layers, namely inputs, processes, and outcomes that form a single dynamic cycle of participatory communication. The CFPD model and the Ubuntu philosophy together establish the framework's twin pillars: the structural and the moral. CFPD guarantees procedural participation and shared ownership, while Ubuntu ensures ethical responsibility and affective connection. Together, they transform communication from a bureaucratic exercise into a participatory process that fosters belonging, empowerment, and collective transformation.

7.3.1.1 The Enabling Environment (inputs)

The outer layer of the framework represents the enabling environment, which establishes the structural and institutional foundations necessary for participatory government communication. Inputs represent the foundational enablers of participatory communication. These include enabling policies, institutional resources, digital and physical infrastructure, and youth networks that facilitate access to information and interaction. Policy coherence, adequate funding, and institutional capacity-building are essential to sustain these inputs and ensure that communication systems are inclusive and responsive.

These inputs provide the conditions under which dialogic engagement can occur and be sustained. Without these systemic enablers, including policy coherence, institutional resources, supportive networks, and an inclusive media ecology, the participatory ideals of CFPD and Ubuntu cannot be effectively realized.

Policy and legislative frameworks such as the *GCIS Government Communication Policy* (2018) and the *Government Communicators' Handbook* provide the formal architecture for communication within South Africa's democratic governance system. These policies articulate the normative commitment to developmental and citizen-centred communication, emphasising inclusivity, transparency, and accountability. However, as demonstrated in Chapter 5, implementation has been uneven, with bureaucratic centralisation and political interference diluting participatory intent. For the FPCFYE to function, these frameworks must be operationalised through clear mandates that embed participatory principles into municipal and departmental communication strategies. This means aligning institutional practice with the CFPD principle of dialogue (Servaes 2008; Tufte 2017) and the Ubuntu ethic of relational care

(Lubombo 2018; Mabovula 2011), ensuring that communication is both empowering and morally grounded.

Institutional resources form the second pillar of the enabling environment. Effective participatory communication requires not only adequate funding but also skilled personnel and robust digital infrastructure. As identified in the empirical findings, capacity deficits and fragmented institutional systems undermine youth engagement. Thus, government departments must prioritise investment in human capital through specialised training in participatory facilitation, active listening, and ethical communication. Digital infrastructure, including high-speed internet and integrated communication platforms, must be expanded to bridge the persistent digital divide that marginalizes township youth (Warschauer 2003; Bosch 2014). These resources create the practical foundation for communication systems that are not only functional but inclusive.

Youth networks and community organizations constitute vital social infrastructure within the enabling environment. These networks, ranging from local entrepreneurship forums to digital youth collectives, serve as conduits for knowledge exchange and grassroots mobilization. Integrating them into official communication planning allows government communicators to tap into existing trust networks and social capital. Within the Ubuntu framework, such partnerships exemplify the principle of *being-with-others*, creating horizontal connections that transcend bureaucratic hierarchies. Co-creating with youth networks transforms them from passive recipients of policy messages into active co-authors of development narratives.

The digital and media ecosystems provide the communicative landscape through which participatory engagement unfolds. The rise of mobile and social media platforms has fundamentally reshaped the way township youth access and share information. As shown in Chapter 5, platforms such as WhatsApp, TikTok, and community radio are not just tools of entertainment but spaces of civic interaction and identity formation. For participatory communication to be meaningful, government communicators must adapt to these digital ecologies, embracing multi-platform strategies that balance traditional media reach with the immediacy and interactivity of digital spaces. The CFPD approach views these environments as dialogic arenas, while Ubuntu situates them as ethical spaces of encounter where listening and responsiveness must guide every communicative act.

Together, these inputs provide the framework's structural and ethical scaffolding, ensuring that communication processes are both institutionally supported and socially embedded.

7.3.1.2 Participatory Communication Processes (core mechanisms)

At the core of the FPCFYE lies the middle layer, representing the participatory mechanisms through which communication becomes interactive, adaptive, and empowering. This layer embodies the CFPD emphasis on processual participation and Ubuntu's moral commitment to relational integrity. The processes are mutually reinforcing, with two-way arrows symbolizing continuous cycles of learning, feedback, and transformation between the government and youth stakeholders. Processes encompass the participatory mechanisms through which communication occurs. These include decentralized engagement, co-creation of content, structured feedback loops, and capacity-building initiatives. Within this layer, communicators and youth jointly design messages, evaluate their impact, and refine communication approaches through iterative dialogue. These processes operationalize the CFPD principles of inclusion and collaboration while embodying Ubuntu's ethic of mutual recognition and care.

Decentralised engagement refers to devolving communication planning and implementation to municipal levels and community-based youth forums. This localisation enhances contextual relevance and ensures that communication reflects the specific economic and cultural realities of township youth. By empowering local communication units, government institutions can move beyond the one-size-fits-all approach identified in Chapter 5. Decentralization operationalizes the CFPD principle of *ownership* (Servaes 2008), making participation not only symbolic but substantive.

Dialogic co-creation transforms communication into a collaborative act. It entails co-designing messages, campaigns, and digital content with youth participation at every stage, from conception to dissemination. Such collaboration draws on Freire's (1970) notion of dialogue as praxis, in which communication becomes a site of mutual learning and transformation. In practical terms, co-creation could involve youth advisory councils, participatory design workshops, or digital storytelling initiatives that foreground youth voices. These processes translate Ubuntu's ethic of empathy and recognition into communicative practice, reaffirming the youth as legitimate partners in governance.

Feedback integration institutionalises structured mechanisms for capturing, analysing, and responding to youth input. It moves beyond symbolic consultation by embedding evaluation loops within communication cycles. This may involve online surveys, community feedback platforms, or participatory review forums that document how input has influenced decision-making. Feedback integration operationalises what Tufte (2017) calls *communication for social change*, a process where reflection leads to adaptation, and adaptation enhances trust.

Capacity building is both a prerequisite and an ongoing process. For government communication to be genuinely participatory, communicators must be trained not only in digital literacy but also in facilitation, listening, and ethical engagement. As highlighted by Waisbord (2014), institutional hierarchies often constrain communicators to act as message transmitters rather than facilitators of dialogue. Capacity building redefines their role as *cultural brokers* who mediate between state structures and community lifeworlds. This process strengthens institutional sensitivity to youth culture, ensuring that communication is grounded in understanding rather than authority.

Relational accountability anchors all the preceding processes within an ethical framework of transparency, empathy, and responsiveness. It embodies Ubuntu's insistence that communication is a moral relationship, not merely an administrative function. Relational accountability requires government communicators to demonstrate sincerity in engagement, to report back on outcomes, and to maintain trust through consistent dialogue. It represents the moral culmination of participatory practice where institutions communicate *with* rather than *to* the people.

The interdependence of these five processes forms a cyclical and reflexive system in which dialogue and action reinforce each other, ensuring that communication is an evolving practice rather than a fixed procedure.

7.3.1.3 Transformative Outcomes

The inner layer of the framework represents the transformative outcomes that emerge when participatory communication is institutionalized and sustained. These outcomes signify both instrumental gains and more profound relational transformations in governance culture.

Outcomes constitute the transformative results that arise from sustained participatory practice. These include enhanced youth empowerment, trust in public institutions, increased civic engagement, and improved coordination between government and communities. More importantly, outcomes signify the emergence of relational accountability, where communication becomes an enduring partnership rather than a series of disconnected campaigns.

First, youth access to entrepreneurship information improves as communication becomes more localised, interactive, and user centred. Instead of relying on fragmented channels, young entrepreneurs can access integrated platforms co-managed by government and youth networks.

Second, trust and credibility in government communication are enhanced through transparency and consistent responsiveness. When feedback is acknowledged and acted upon, the perceived distance between government and youth diminishes, strengthening civic legitimacy.

Third, youth participation and agency expand as youth transition from passive beneficiaries to co-creators of development processes. This aligns with CFPD's goal of empowerment through communication and Ubuntu's vision of mutual flourishing.

Fourth, policy responsiveness and inclusivity improve when communication processes inform real-time adjustments in programme design and implementation. Participatory dialogue ensures that policies reflect lived realities rather than bureaucratic assumptions.

Finally, the framework fosters a culture of ethical and dialogic governance, where communication itself becomes a mode of democratic practice. Here, participatory communication transcends its instrumental value and becomes constitutive of citizenship and belonging.

7.3.1.4 Operational Logic of the Framework

The FPCFYE translates the theoretical synthesis of CFPD and Ubuntu into a pragmatic implementation framework. Its operational logic is cyclical and adaptive: inputs generate enabling conditions, participatory processes activate engagement, and outcomes feed back into policy learning and institutional reform. In this sense, the framework is not a static blueprint but a living system responsive to context, reflexive in operation, and anchored in ethical and participatory practice.

7.3.1.4.1 Inputs: Creating an enabling environment

The success of the FPCFYE depends primarily on institutional readiness and on creating an environment that nurtures participation. As the findings in Chapter 5 revealed, government communication remains constrained by centralisation, fragmented responsibilities, and limited digital infrastructure. Addressing these systemic barriers requires a structural shift that embeds participatory communication goals directly within institutional planning and budgeting cycles.

Government departments and agencies should integrate communication for participation into their strategic plans, aligning them with the developmental imperatives outlined in the *GCIS Government Communication Policy* (2018) and the *Government Communicators' Handbook*. Dedicated budget lines for public engagement, digital participation tools, and feedback systems must be institutionalised rather than treated as ad-hoc project expenses.

Expanding digital access is critical to bridging the communication divide that marginalises township youth. Partnerships with telecommunications providers can enable zero-rated access to entrepreneurship portals and social-media channels, while public Wi-Fi zones in Thusong Service Centres and youth offices can democratise information flow. These actions are consistent with the CFPD principle of access as a precondition for participation (Servaes 2008; Tufte 2017).

At the same time, policy coherence must be achieved through alignment among the GCIS, NYDA, and SEDA, whose overlapping mandates often lead to duplication and mixed messaging. Coordinated communication strategies, shared databases, and joint monitoring frameworks would help establish a unified ecosystem of youth-centred communication. Within an Ubuntu perspective, such coherence represents not only administrative efficiency but also ethical responsiveness, an institutional demonstration of solidarity and mutual respect (Lubombo 2018; Mabovula 2011).

Municipal youth offices, when adequately resourced, can serve as communication intermediaries, connecting national policies with community realities. Their proximity to youth populations positions them ideally to act as listening posts, amplifying local voices in the policy cycle.

7.3.1.4.2 Processes: Operationalizing participation

At the heart of the framework are the five participatory processes: decentralized engagement, dialogic co-creation, feedback integration, capacity building, and relational accountability. Together, they constitute the operational core through which CFPD's participatory ideals and Ubuntu's ethical principles are enacted.

These processes must function iteratively, meaning that insights from each cycle of participation feed directly into planning, implementation, and evaluation. Rather than discrete events, participation becomes an ongoing communicative rhythm embedded in governance practice.

Each local communication structure, whether a municipality or a youth office should operate as a *participation hub*. Quarterly co-creation sessions involving youth entrepreneurs, local officials, and community stakeholders can serve as structured spaces for deliberation, problem-solving, and joint content design. These forums would allow youth to articulate information needs, evaluate government campaigns, and propose new strategies, thus institutionalising the co-creation ethic central to CFPD.

Hybrid engagement platforms can merge traditional and digital modalities. For example, WhatsApp groups can facilitate real-time dialogue and mobilisation; live digital forums can host participatory policy consultations; and local storytelling events can nurture shared understanding and community identity. As Chapter 5 demonstrated, township youth inhabit both physical and digital communication worlds, an integrated approach ensures that participation is culturally and technologically inclusive.

Capacity-building initiatives must run parallel to these engagement activities. Training programmes for government communicators in participatory facilitation, listening, and ethical digital interaction are essential for sustaining dialogic practice. In turn, youth participants require mentorship and digital-literacy support to navigate and contribute meaningfully to engagement platforms. These reciprocal forms of capacity enhancement operationalise Ubuntu's ethic of interdependence and learning through relationship.

Finally, relational accountability must underpin every stage of interaction. Transparent reporting, follow-up on feedback, and public sharing of communication outcomes help

institutionalise trust. In practical terms, this means publishing participation summaries, acknowledging youth contributions, and communicating how their input has shaped policy or practice. Accountability thus becomes dialogic rather than administrative, a shared moral responsibility rather than a compliance exercise.

7.3.1.4.3 Outcomes: Transformative impact

When implemented as an integrated cycle, the FPCFYE yields transformative outcomes at multiple levels of social organisation, namely the individual, institutional, and societal levels.

At the individual level, youth gain equitable access to entrepreneurship information, develop digital competencies, and build trust in government institutions. Communication becomes a pathway to empowerment, enabling young entrepreneurs to exercise agency and co-create solutions rather than wait for assistance.

At the institutional level, communication shifts from being reactive and fragmented to being adaptive, evidence-based, and participatory. Feedback mechanisms inform programme design and performance evaluation, producing a continuous learning loop within government systems. Over time, this fosters what Waisbord (2014) terms "communicative accountability," where responsiveness to citizens becomes a core measure of institutional success.

At the societal level, the framework fosters a broader culture of ethical, dialogic governance. As participatory practices become embedded, democratic participation deepens and policy legitimacy strengthens. This reflects CFPD's ultimate goal of empowerment through dialogue and Ubuntu's moral vision of coexistence and solidarity (Lubombo 2018; Mabovula 2011).

In this way, the operationalisation of the framework bridges the gap between participatory ideals and bureaucratic realities. It transforms communication from a tool of information management into a dynamic process of co-creation and relational transformation, ensuring that government communication does not merely *speak about* youth development but *speaks with* youth in the ongoing pursuit of inclusive, sustainable change.

7.4 PATHWAYS FOR IMPLEMENTING THE FRAMEWORK

For the FPCFYE to move beyond conceptual articulation toward institutional adoption, its rollout must be deliberate, phased, and learning-oriented. Implementation should prioritise institutional readiness, local experimentation, and iterative evaluation to ensure that participatory communication becomes a sustained practice rather than a symbolic reform. The following phased pathway translates the framework's logic into actionable steps that embed the principles of *dialogue*, *co-creation*, and *ethical relationality* into government communication systems.

Phase 1 – Policy integration and institutional alignment

The first step is to embed participatory communication as a formal performance criterion within existing institutional frameworks. Government departments, particularly the GCIS, NYDA, and SEDA, should integrate participatory indicators into strategic and annual performance plans. These indicators could include measures of youth involvement in campaign design, responsiveness to feedback, and the extent of co-created initiatives.

A comprehensive **policy review and harmonisation process** should follow, aligning disparate communication policies across government spheres with youth-centred participatory standards. This would address the duplication and incoherence identified in Chapter 5, ensuring that the values of CFPD (dialogue, inclusion, empowerment) and Ubuntu (empathy, mutual care, and accountability) are systematically embedded in communication norms and procedures.

Institutional alignment also requires establishing **inter-agency coordination mechanisms**, such as a National Participatory Communication Steering Committee, to synchronise planning and evaluation across departments.

Phase 2 – Pilot projects and local co-creation labs

The second phase centres on testing the participatory model through carefully designed pilot initiatives at the municipal level. Selected municipalities particularly those with strong youth entrepreneurship ecosystems should serve as *co-creation labs* for participatory communication.

Each pilot site would design and implement youth entrepreneurship communication campaigns through participatory processes involving youth forums, local communicators, and

community-based organisations. These pilots would generate context-specific insights on how participatory methods can operate within existing bureaucratic and digital constraints.

Digital engagement tools such as WhatsApp Business lines, mobile apps, or community digital portals should facilitate two-way communication, feedback tracking, and the sharing of success stories. By experimenting within controlled environments, government communicators can learn how to balance institutional accountability with the flexibility demanded by participatory practice.

These pilots embody the CFPD principle of *learning by doing* (Servaes 2008) and reflect Ubuntu's ethic of *relational experimentation*, where collective growth arises through ongoing interaction and reflection.

Phase 3 – Capacity development and mentorship

The third phase focuses on sustaining participatory competence through continuous learning and professionalisation. Participatory communication requires new skill sets, facilitation, listening, and collaborative digital storytelling that are not traditionally emphasised in bureaucratic communication training.

To address this, partnerships should be established between government departments, universities, and professional associations (such as the Public Relations Institute of Southern Africa) to co-develop accredited training programmes in participatory and ethical communication.

Mentorship networks can pair experienced practitioners with emerging government communicators and youth leaders to foster mutual learning. This aligns with Ubuntu's philosophy of *becoming through others* and CFPD's view of participation as a transformative educational process (Freire 1970; Tufte 2017).

Capacity development should also extend to youth participants, ensuring they possess the digital and organisational literacy required to engage effectively in co-creation and monitoring activities.

Phase 4 – Evaluation, learning, and scaling-up

The final phase institutionalises participatory monitoring, evaluation, and learning. Traditional evaluation approaches often privilege quantitative metrics over qualitative experiences of participation. The FPCFYE calls for the adoption of participatory evaluation tools including reflective storytelling, digital feedback dashboards, and community scorecards that capture the depth of dialogue and empowerment generated by communication processes.

Data and insights from pilot projects should feed into iterative learning loops, allowing for refinement of policies and scaling of effective practices across provinces. A national Participatory Communication Observatory, hosted by the GCIS in collaboration with universities, could track progress, document best practices, and disseminate learning.

Scaling-up should be adaptive rather than uniform, allowing regional and local variations to inform the model's evolution. This ensures that the framework remains context-sensitive, resilient, and ethically grounded.

The phased implementation plan ensures that the FPCFYE evolves through practice and reflection. It begins with policy embedding, proceeds through experimentation, invests in capacity development, and culminates in institutionalised learning and scale. Each phase is iterative, feeding insights into the next. Collectively, these pathways operationalise the dual logic of CFPD and Ubuntu, ensuring that communication for youth entrepreneurship becomes a process of shared creation, mutual accountability, and ethical governance.

7.5 LIMITATIONS OF THE MODEL

While the FPCFYE presents a coherent and theoretically robust vision, several limitations must be acknowledged. First, the model assumes institutional readiness and political will for decentralization, which may not be uniform across government spheres. Implementation depends on leadership commitment, adequate resources, and a supportive policy environment, factors that are often unevenly distributed.

Second, the framework's reliance on digital and hybrid participation platforms presupposes consistent internet access and digital literacy among youth and government communicators. The persistent digital divide in South African townships may constrain the inclusivity of participatory mechanisms, particularly for marginalized or offline populations.

Third, cultural and bureaucratic inertia may hinder the adoption of dialogic practices within institutions historically structured around compliance and control. Shifting organisational cultures from message delivery to mutual learning requires sustained advocacy and behavioural change.

Fourth, the framework's evaluative mechanisms though participatory still require empirical testing to establish indicators that balance qualitative engagement with policy accountability. Without institutionalisation in monitoring systems, participatory outcomes risk remaining anecdotal rather than measurable.

Lastly, while grounded in South Africa's socio-political and ethical context, the model's context specificity limits its direct transferability. Its normative assumptions, particularly those derived from Ubuntu, require careful adaptation when applied to other cultural or regional settings.

Recognizing these limitations does not diminish the framework's value; rather, it underscores the complexity of institutionalizing participatory communication in bureaucratic environments and highlights the need for ongoing reflexivity in both research and practice.

7.6 CONCLUSION

This chapter has synthesized the empirical insights and theoretical analyses presented throughout the study into an integrated *Framework for Participatory Communication for Youth Entrepreneurship* (FPCFYE). The framework addresses the fundamental question of how government communication can be transformed from a predominantly top-down, bureaucratic function into an inclusive, dialogic, and ethically grounded process that empowers youth as active participants in development.

Drawing from the empirical evidence in Chapter 5 and the discussion in Chapter 6, the chapter argued that while government communication frameworks in South Africa espouse participatory principles, their implementation remains inconsistent and constrained by bureaucratic rigidity. The framework, therefore, provides a pragmatic and theoretically grounded response to this gap, aligning institutional practice with the participatory ideals articulated in the CFPD model and the ethical humanism of Ubuntu.

The FPCFYE is structured around three interrelated layers:

- Inputs, which create the enabling environment through policy alignment, institutional resources, digital infrastructure, and youth networks.
- Processes, which operationalise participation through decentralised engagement, dialogic co-creation, feedback integration, capacity building, and relational accountability.
- Outcomes, which represent transformation at individual, institutional, and societal levels, including enhanced access to information, increased trust and participation, and the institutionalisation of ethical and dialogic governance.

The phased implementation pathway comprising policy integration, pilot projects, capacity development, and participatory evaluation ensures that the framework evolves through learning, adaptation, and contextual responsiveness.

Theoretically, this chapter advanced an integration of CFPD and Ubuntu as dual anchors of participatory communication. CFPD provides the procedural foundation of inclusion, dialogue, and empowerment, while Ubuntu contributes an ethical orientation rooted in care, reciprocity, and shared humanity (Lubombo, 2018; Mabovula, 2011; Servaes, 2008). The framework thus redefines communication not as message transmission but as *a moral and relational process* through which democracy and development are co-created.

Empirically, the framework responds to the realities uncovered in township contexts, youth disengagement, limited access to credible information, and structural barriers within state institutions. It translates these challenges into opportunities for co-creation and collective learning, showing how participatory communication can rebuild trust and legitimacy between government and youth.

Practically, it offers policymakers and communication practitioners a structured yet flexible mechanism for institutional reform. It demonstrates that participatory communication is not a peripheral activity but a central condition for developmental governance.

7.7 AREAS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

While this study has proposed and conceptually developed the FPCFYE, further scholarly and applied research is necessary to refine, validate, and extend its propositions. The framework's

interdisciplinary and context-specific nature invites a range of research directions that can deepen theoretical understanding and enhance its practical relevance.

Future research should empirically test the FPCFYE through pilot implementation in selected municipalities. Such studies could assess the framework's operational feasibility and its impact on youth engagement, trust in government, and entrepreneurial participation. Longitudinal mixed-methods approaches would allow tracking changes in communicative behaviour and institutional responsiveness over time, thereby evaluating the framework's transformative potential in real-world contexts.

Comparative research across provincial and regional contexts would illuminate how differing governance structures, socio-economic conditions, and cultural norms influence the success of participatory communication models. These studies could identify enabling factors and systemic constraints that mediate institutional adaptation, contributing to the contextual refinement of participatory frameworks in diverse African settings.

Collectively, these avenues of inquiry would strengthen the empirical foundation of the FPCFYE, extend participatory communication theory within African epistemologies, and contribute to the global discourse on ethical and dialogic governance.

7.8 FINAL REFLECTIONS

This study has explored the central paradox that underpins government communication in South Africa: while official policies proclaim participatory ideals, institutional practices often reproduce exclusionary and hierarchical communication patterns. This contradiction, described here as the paradox of participation, lies at the heart of government–youth relations in township settings. It reflects a deeper tension between the normative discourse of democracy and the procedural realities of bureaucracy. The study's overarching argument is that communication, as practised by government agencies, remains simultaneously a site of promise and of constraint. It aspires to inclusion yet frequently enacts control.

In addressing this paradox, the study advanced the thesis that participatory communication, grounded in the ethical and dialogic principles of CFPD and Ubuntu, provides a viable framework for transforming government communication into a process of empowerment and relational accountability. The Framework for Participatory Communication for Youth

Entrepreneurship (FPCFYE) proposed in this chapter operationalises this transformation. It redefines communication as both an epistemic and a moral act, enabling the co-production of meaning, policy, and action between state institutions and youth citizens.

The empirical analysis demonstrated that government communication remains largely top-down, reliant on traditional media, and compliance-driven. Youth participants, however, articulated preferences for interactive, localised, and culturally resonant communication spaces. This divergence revealed not only a generational gap but also an epistemological divide between institutional rationality and lived experience. In policy terms, both the GCIS Communication Policy (2018) and the Government Communicators' Handbook espouse participatory communication, yet implementation remains inconsistent. The study therefore argued that the challenge is not the absence of participatory policy, but the absence of participatory practice.

The proposed framework offers a response to this paradox. By embedding dialogic co-creation, feedback integration, and relational accountability within institutional communication processes, it demonstrates how participatory ideals can move from rhetoric to praxis. Its ethical anchorage in Ubuntu further ensures that communication transcends procedural inclusion to embody care, reciprocity, and shared humanity. In this sense, the FPCFYE transforms communication from a bureaucratic function into a relational act of governance.

Theoretically, this study contributes to the decolonisation of communication for development by situating CFPD within an African philosophical context. It extends the field by showing that participatory communication is not merely a technical method but a moral orientation, a way of being with others in the pursuit of justice and collective flourishing. Empirically, it offers new insights into how township youth engage, interpret, and resist state communication, illuminating their communicative agency as central to democratic renewal.

The paradox of participation thus becomes productive rather than paralyzing: it exposes the distance between aspiration and reality while also signalling the space in which transformation must occur. Bridging this distance requires institutional humility, ethical leadership, and the recognition that communication is not an event but a continuous, co-created process of becoming.

Ultimately, this thesis reaffirms that communication is development, not when it disseminates information, but when it builds relationships; not when it instructs, but when it listens; not when it governs, but when it collaborates. The journey from government communication to participatory communication is, therefore, not merely administrative but civilizational. In the spirit of Ubuntu and the praxis of CFPD, this study calls for a reimagined communicative order, one in which the state and youth co-author the narrative of development and participation is not paradoxical but lived.

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