

Harnessing the Power of Social Media for Promoting Transparency in Collaborative Governance through Non-State Actors: A Comparative Case Analysis of South Africa and Zimbabwe

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Abstract

Objective: Collaborative governance is an innovative approach to address complex societal challenges, involving partnerships between state and non-state actors. Consequently, social media is powerful tools for promoting transparency and accountability. **Methodology:** The study examines the role of non-state actors in leveraging social media to enhance transparency in collaborative governance initiatives. The research analyses two case studies - the #FeesMustFall campaign in South Africa and the #Tajamuka/Sesijikile campaign in Zimbabwe. **Results:** Through a qualitative analysis of the case studies, the study explores how non-state actors, such as civil society organizations and activist groups, have utilized social media to amplify their voices, mobilize public support, and exert pressure on government entities. Findings reveal that effective use of social media can empower non-state actors to overcome information asymmetries, facilitate public scrutiny, and foster collaborative problem-solving. **Conclusions:** However, contextual factors, such as political environments and digital access, shapes the dynamics of social media-driven transparency efforts.

Keywords: Non-state Actors, Collaborative Governance, Transparency, South Africa, Zimbabwe.

1. Introduction

Collaborative governance, a process where state and non-state actors work together to achieve common goals, has become increasingly important in addressing complex societal challenges (Lima, 2021; Saleh et al., 2021). In South Africa and Zimbabwe, collaborative governance has emerged as a possible answer to address issues such as poverty, inequality, and lack of service delivery (Nyikadzino & Vyas-Doorgapersad, 2023). However, concerns remain about the level of transparency and accountability in these collaborative processes.

Non-state actors, such as civil society organizations, private sector entities, and community groups, play a crucial role in collaborative governance (Hlatywayo & Mangongera, 2020). They bring diverse perspectives, expertise, and resources to the table, and can help to ensure that the voices of marginalized groups are heard. However, non-state actors often face challenges in accessing information and participating meaningfully in decision-making processes.

Social media has emerged as a powerful tool for promoting transparency and accountability in collaborative governance (Amsler & Foxworthy, 2014). It allows non-state actors to share information, interact with government officials, and monitor the implementation of policies and programs (Dlamini et al., 2018). However, the concern is that social media is using social media to spread misinformation and disinformation.

The rise of social media platforms in the early 2000s opened new avenues for citizen engagement and transparency in governance, particularly in developing countries like South Africa and Zimbabwe. As access to the internet and mobile technologies expanded, non-state actors such as civil society organizations, community groups, and activist movements began leveraging social media to (Kozanayi et al., 2023):

- a) Share information and increase public awareness on government policies and decisions.
- b) Mobilize citizens to participate in collaborative governance initiatives and monitor implementation.
- c) Hold government institutions accountable by exposing corruption, mismanagement, and lack of service delivery.
- d) Amplify the voices of marginalized communities and ensure their inclusion in decision-making processes.

Background of the study

In South Africa, the use of social media for governance transparency gained momentum in the early 2010s. Civil society groups utilized platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and WhatsApp to coordinate protests, crowdsource information, and pressurize the government on issues such as service delivery, land reform, and police brutality (Findlay & Van Rensburg, 2018; Luescher et al., 2021). For this reason, between 2015 and 2016 there were student protests and they took advantage of #FeesMustFall social network to mobilize demonstrations against the increase in university fees.

In Zimbabwe, the proliferation of social media coincided with a period of political and economic turmoil in the late 2000s and 2010s (Mutimukuru-Maravanyika, 2012). Non-state actors, including opposition parties, activists, and citizen journalists, turned to platforms like Twitter and Facebook to expose human rights abuses, criticize government policies, and organize mass protests such as the #ThisFlag, #Tajamuka, and #ZimbabweanLivesMatter movements (Murisa, 2019; Helliker & Murisa, 2020). These efforts aimed to increase transparency and accountability in Zimbabwe's governance processes.

However, the use of social media for collaborative governance has also faced challenges in both countries. Governments have at times sought to restrict or manipulate online spaces, leading to

concerns about digital authoritarianism and the spread of misinformation. Non-state actors have also grappled with issues of digital literacy, access gaps, and the need to build sustainable models for leveraging social media for long-term governance reforms. Despite these obstacles, the experience of South Africa and Zimbabwe shows the transformative potential of social media to empower, engage and make visible cooperation governance initiatives.

Ongoing research and policy dialogues continue to explore how these digital tools can be harnessed to promote transparency, accountability, and inclusive decision-making in the public administration spheres. Therefore, this study explores the potential of using social media to promote transparency in collaborative governance in South Africa and Zimbabwe, based on an analysis of selected cases that are in the public domain to establish lessons that can be exchanged between these countries. Specifically, the study focuses on the role of non-state actors in using social media to hold government accountable and to ensure that the voices of marginalized citizens and groups are heard. The study addresses the research questions presented in the following section.

a. Research Questions

The study addresses the following research questions:

- How can social media be used to promote transparency in collaborative governance in South Africa and Zimbabwe?
- What are the challenges and opportunities for non-state actors in using social media to hold government accountable?
- How can social media be used to ensure that the voices of marginalized groups are heard in collaborative governance processes?

2. Literature Review of Related

This section reviews literature related to the use of social media as a tool for promoting transparency in social governance, the challenges and opportunities for non-state-actors in using social media to hold governments and government officials accountable and the ways social media can be used to ensure voices of marginalised citizens and groups are heard in collaborative governance processes.

The concept of Collaborative Governance an overview

Collaborative governance is an innovative approach that focuses on creating public value through the joint efforts of diverse stakeholders from the public, private non-profit, and private business sectors. This model represents a shift away from government-centric or market-centric governance towards a setting where these actors collaborate in policymaking and service delivery (Lee & Esteve, 2022).

This model has emerged as a response to complex societal issues, such as migration, climate change, and poverty, where there is a lack of consensus on the nature of the problem and appropriate solutions (Ansell & Torfing, 2021). Collaborative governance networks often face

fragmentation and resource constraints due to fiscal stress, leading to the search for cross-boundary arrangements for policy and management (Candel & Biesbroek, 2016).

Effective collaborative governance requires a deeper understanding of the collaborative process, the broader context, and effective management strategies and leadership roles. It is also important to be aware of the risks, constraints, and downsides associated with this approach, as elements like accountability, public value, effective outcomes, and democratic legitimacy are essential for its success (Osborne, 2010; Sørensen & Torfing, 2013).

One manifestation of collaborative governance is multi-stakeholder initiatives (MSIs), which bring together government, civil society, and the private sector to address complex development challenges. These initiatives complement the role of governments and often focus on transparency, accountability, and stakeholder participation. Examples of public governance MSIs include EITI, the Open Government Partnership (OGP), and the Post-2015 Sustainable Development Goals (Post 2015 SDGs).

While advocates of collaborative governance argue that it can enhance effectiveness, efficiency, legitimacy, and public value creation, critics raise concerns about the accountability of governance networks (Bache et al., 2014; Triantafillou & Hansen, 2022). The concept of meta-governance has emerged to address the relationship between representative governing bodies and collaborative governance networks, where the state strategically governs stakeholders and influences the formation and management of these networks through various interventions (Gjaltema et al., 2020; Hooge et al., 2022).

Using social media to promote transparency in collaborative governance

In recent years, government agencies have shown increased interest in utilizing social media to engage, mobilize, and collaborate with citizens, particularly during disasters, crises, and emergencies. This adoption of social media aligns with the emerging social government paradigm, where daily interactions between the government, citizens, and businesses rely heavily on platforms like social media (Khan et al., 2021). Social government, also known as government 2.0 or open government, involves leveraging Web 2.0 tools for communication, collaboration, and information sharing with the public (Schmidhuber & Hilgers, 2021).

According to the concept of open government theory, governments primarily adopt information technology to enhance transparency, participation, and cooperation. In the era of social computing, researchers have recognized these three elements as the first mechanism, within the paradigm of social governance (Song & Lee, 2016; Gašpar & Mabić, 2019; Zuiderwijk et al., 2021).

The literature highlights that the objective of social government is to foster public trust in government organizations through the promotion of transparency, participation, and collaboration (Jamal & Shanab, 2016). Establishing this trust opens up new avenues for citizen interaction and engagement in public issues, facilitating their collaboration (Stark & Taylor, 2014).

However, trust becomes a significant concern when government channels are not the sole sources of information about risks and protective actions during crises (Yaseen, 2023). Contradictory

information and news on social media pose a major challenge during public crises, stemming from misleading or diverse messages, conflicting decisions and statements, inconsistency between information and actions, changes in crisis status, conflicting facts and news, misinformation, rumours, and variations in citizens' perceptions, beliefs, and understanding (Gesser-Edelsburg, 2021).

While numerous studies have examined the adoption and use of social media by governments during crises, emergencies, and disasters, including the COVID-19 pandemic, there is a lack of analysis regarding their role in fostering trust in governments and the potential impact of social media contradictions during crises. Furthermore, previous research has largely overlooked determinants of attitudes toward social government communication, such as trust in government and online contradictions.

Open Government and Social Media

The concept of open government is not a new one, with Sweden implementing the world's first freedom of information legislation as early as 1766 (Stubbs & Snell, 2014). However, the recent global interest in open government can be attributed to the Open Government Initiative launched by the U.S. administration of President Barack Obama in 2009, as well as advancements in technology that enable better access to information, innovative collaboration, and utilization of available data (Gil-Garcia et al., 2020).

At its core, open government can be seen as an endeavour to provide government documents and information through the Internet (Fourcade & Gordon, 2020; Porwol et al., 2022). However, contemporary open government differs from its traditional counterpart in that it encompasses not only transparency and public accountability but also participation, collaboration, and innovation (Sandoval-Almazán et al., 2021).

Given the relatively new approach to open government, scholars have sought to develop frameworks that enhance understanding of the concept and facilitate effective implementation of open government initiatives (Hansson et al., 2015). For example Meijer et al. (2012) propose a conceptualization of open government based on the principles of vision (transparency) and voice (participation). Neuron et al. (2019) suggest a public value assessment tool rooted in the public value perspective, which allows officials to assess the value generated by open government initiatives. Additionally, Pirannejad and Ingrams (2022) have developed an open government implementation model, advocating for a gradual approach that outlines four stages: increasing data transparency, improving participation, enhancing open collaboration, and achieving ubiquitous engagement.

Opportunities and Challenges for non-state actors in using social media to hold government accountable

Social media refers to electronic communication platforms that enable users to create online communities and share information, ideas, personal messages, and other content. It provides a means for people to connect with others using the Internet and various services (Carmi & Yates, 2020). Different types of social media include micro-blogs (e.g., X), social networking sites (e.g.,

Facebook and LinkedIn), and platforms for photo/video sharing and podcasting (e.g., Flickr and YouTube) (Gunawong, 2014).

Around 2009, public agencies began adopting social media and utilizing its potential for public purposes. These agencies have incorporated various social media applications as new channels of communication between themselves and the general public. Examples of such applications include Facebook, Flickr, Twitter, YouTube, RSS, LinkedIn, Ustream, and Scribd, with Twitter being the most popular (Mabić et al., 2017). Social media has also been used as a tool for city marketing in Chinese cities like Hangzhou, Nanjing, and Xi'an (Zhou & Wang, 2014).

Khan and Khan (2019) argue that public agencies can achieve the goals of open government, such as transparency, participation, and collaboration, through the use of social media. Transparency, in particular, can be promoted by disseminating information through social media platforms like Twitter, blogs, and Facebook (Grimmelikhuijsen & Meijer, 2015). However, some critics contend that a focus solely on information provision does not significantly enhance public understanding of complex issues and policies, nor does it encourage meaningful participation in policy deliberation (Uddin, 2020). Concerns have also been raised regarding the use of social media to promote transparency, such as challenges related to the preservation of government information, access to digital-born information, and the digital divide (Martorana & Rizzo, 2024).

While social media offers new avenues for information sharing, participation, networking, and communication, it is not without challenges. These challenges include issues of bias, privacy, credibility, self-censorship, and opinion polarization. Biases across social media platforms due to the digital divide can result in uneven representation and limited participation from certain groups (Shen et al., 2021; Lin, 2022). The credibility of information shared through social media can be questioned due to the absence of professional gatekeepers and variations in interpretation (Westerman et al., 2014). Self-censorship can influence what content is shared and who can access it (Warner & Wang, 2019). Finally, social media can contribute to opinion polarization by either exposing individuals to diverse views or reinforcing echo chambers of like-minded individuals (Kaylor, 2019). In collaborative planning practices, these challenges may have a greater impact compared to other forms of urban planning, affecting the inclusivity and consensus-building aspects of collaborative planning (Cheng, 2013).

Using social media to ensure the voices of marginalized groups are heard in collaborative governance processes

Social media platforms offer a range of features that enable individuals and organizations to connect, share information, and engage in collaborative planning processes. These platforms have become powerful tools due to their wide user base, real-time nature, and open accessibility, allowing for the involvement of a large number of participants (Nardi et al., 2022). Social media supports four main functions in the context of collaborative planning: information sharing, social networking, citizen participation, and communication (Bertot et al., 2012; Cho & Melisa, 2021).

Information sharing involves the dissemination of information from various sources to a wide audience in real time, facilitating the rapid spread and accessibility of both top-down and bottom-up information related to planning events and policies. Social networking entails the formation

of networks among individuals and organizations, often transcending geographical boundaries, to facilitate collective actions (Criado et al., 2020). The open and flexible structure of social media platforms allows any participant to become a node in the network.

Citizen participation refers to the varying levels of citizen power that can be enhanced through social media, ranging from tokenism to partnership and delegated power. Social media offers greater accessibility to the majority of citizens, enabling "mobile participation" and overcoming the constraints associated with traditional methods.

Government-led social media participation initiatives in the Netherlands, such as the ibike campaign and the Utrecht Elektrisch project, have demonstrated the potential to engage a large number of citizens and incorporate their inputs into the planning process (Shete et al., 2020). However, citizen power often remains at the levels of consultation and placation, with the final decision-making authority resting with the government and experts (Kwamie et al., 2016).

The study of social media communication and interactions offers valuable insights into real-world processes, enabling citizen-sourcing and the interpretation of phenomena and actions through automated methods. Social media technologies enhance the communication and collaboration potential between governments and communities.

3. Methodology

The research methodology used in the study is summarised in this section. Firstly, the study employed a comparative case study design to analyse and compare the use of social media for promoting transparency in collaborative governance through non-state actors in South Africa and Zimbabwe (Bartlett & Vavrus, 2016). One case study was selected in each country and the case studies are #Tajamuka/Sejikile in Zimbabwe and the #FeesMustFall in South Africa. This approach allowed for an in-depth exploration of the specific contexts, strategies, and outcomes in each country, while also facilitating cross-case comparisons to identify similarities and differences.

Data Collection

For the purpose of ensuring robust findings and corroborating findings obtained from different perspectives, the study relied primarily on documentary analysis whereby the research studies the two case study campaigns as reported in several media and academic studies on the two campaigns (Williams, 2015). The studies were examined separately and no comparison was made of the successes realised by these campaigns for purposes of informing the use of social media constructively for purposes of enhancing transparency and accountability of public officials by non-state actors including citizens (Goodrick, 2020). The data collection methods used are presented hereunder.

Document Analysis

This entailed the researcher analysis of relevant government documents, policy papers, reports, and social media posts from non-state actors to understand the policy landscape, collaborative governance initiatives, and the role of social media in promoting transparency. Studies about the

selected case studies are reviewed to understand how social media has been used in South Africa and Zimbabwe for purposes of achieving collaborative governance and transparency. Lessons are drawn and compared between the two countries for purposes of informing the actions and activities of non-state actors in collaborative governance.

Interviews

To corroborate documentary analysis, the researcher conducted semi-structured interviews with key informants from government agencies, non-state actors, and citizens in both countries. This provided insights into the perspectives, experiences, and challenges related to using social media for transparency in collaborative governance.

a. Data Analysis

The study used a combination of qualitative content analysis and comparative analysis. The study used thematic analysis to analyse the data from document analysis and interviews to identify key themes, patterns, and insights related to the use of social media for promoting transparency in collaborative governance, in addition, data from both countries was compared and contrasted to identify similarities and differences in the approaches, challenges, and outcomes. This allowed for a deeper understanding of the contextual factors influencing the effectiveness of social media in promoting transparency in collaborative governance.

b. Ethical Considerations

The study was conducted in an ethical manner by adhering to the following ethical considerations important for this study:

- c. Informed consent was obtained from all interview participants in the study.
- d. Confidentiality and anonymity were maintained throughout the research process.
- e. Data will be stored securely and ethically.
- f. Outcomes and Contributions of the Study

This study provides valuable insights into the potential and challenges of using social media for promoting transparency in collaborative governance through non-state actors. The findings contribute to the development of more effective strategies for using social media to enhance transparency and accountability in governance processes in developing countries at different stages with lessons drawn from Zimbabwe being infused with lessons drawn from South Africa. Furthermore, the comparative analysis provides critical insights into the contextual factors influencing the effectiveness of social media in collaborative governance in different countries and contexts.

4. Results and Discussion

This section presents the results and findings from the study, starting with a presentation of the summary of the two main case studies. This is followed by a comparative analysis of the two case studies and then finally a best-case scenario case study is given to draw lesson for improving

the use of social media in collaborative governance to enhance accountability and transparency by public servants. The findings are important for non-state actors from Zimbabwe as well as those drawn from other regions.

Presentation of case studies analyses

The selected case studies are presented firstly before comparing them, to draw lessons. Firstly, a presentation of the #Tajamuka/Sesijikile from Zimbabwe is presented briefly and it is analysed in the context of the study. This is followed by the #FeesMustFall campaign from South Africa which is also briefly presented and analysed in the context of the study. Thereafter a comparison of the two case studies highlighting common areas and differences in the two selected case studies. Box 1 presents an overview of the #Tajamuka/Sesijikile case study.

Box 1: An Overview of the #Tajamuka/Sesijikile Social Media Campaign in Zimbabwe

Origins and Goals:

Launched in 2016 by young activists and civil society organizations.

Aimed to address worsening economic and political conditions in Zimbabwe.

Advocated for economic reform, end to political repression, and greater accountability in governance.

Key Features:

Utilized social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and WhatsApp to spread its message and mobilize supporters.

Hashtag #Tajamuka/Sesijikile became the rallying symbol, unifying participants and facilitating online discussions.

Driven by ordinary citizens sharing their experiences, concerns, and hopes for a better Zimbabwe.

Emphasized peaceful protests and civil disobedience as means of expressing dissent.

Outcomes and Impact:

Increased public awareness of Zimbabwe's challenges both domestically and internationally.

Led to a series of peaceful protests and demonstrations across the country.

Government responded with a mixture of repression and concessions, including deployment of security forces and arrest of protest leaders.

Fostered national dialogue about national issues and potential solutions, contributing to a more engaged citizenry.

Continues to inspire activism and advocacy for change in Zimbabwe, even though its initial momentum has subsided.

Challenges and Limitations:

Government repression and censorship of online content posed significant challenges.

Internal divisions within the movement sometimes hampered its effectiveness.

Limited reach primarily to urban populations with access to social media, potentially excluding marginalized groups.

The #Tajamuka ("We have Rebelled" in Shona) social media campaign in Zimbabwe was a grassroots movement that aimed to address the country's socio-economic and political challenges (Muchacha & Moyo, 2017). Launched in 2016, the campaign quickly gained momentum through platforms like Twitter and Facebook (Matsilele, 2022). As described in the text,

#Tajamuka/Sesijikile was a significant movement that mobilized Zimbabweans to demand change and address their nation's problems (Mutanda & Chisambiro, 2023). Although its immediate goals were not fully achieved, the campaign contributed to a more engaged citizenry and demonstrated the power of social media to amplify voices and drive change (Hove & Chenzi, 2020).

While there have been limited studies on the impact of social media in collaborative justice, the #Tajamuka/Sesijikile campaign stands out as one of the most prominent in Zimbabwe, with far-reaching effects on the country's governance. One notable impact was the six-day internet shutdown in early 2019, instigated by the Zimbabwean government after realizing the campaign's potential to mobilize youth and organize demonstrations against poor governance (Matsilele, 2022). This realization also led the Government of Zimbabwe to become more active on social media platforms, with government ministries establishing an online presence to engage with citizens.

The #Tajamuka/Sesijikile campaign has served as a model for other social media-driven collaborative governance efforts in Zimbabwe. A 2023 study confirms that the movement successfully utilized platforms like Facebook and WhatsApp to encourage the ruling ZANU PF party to address pressing socio-economic and political challenges. The #Tajamuka/Sesijikile campaign demonstrated the critical role that non-state actors can play in driving social progress and reminding the government of its obligations. However, the Zimbabwean government is often accused of heavy-handedness towards such non-state actors, particularly during the Mugabe era, when threats and actions were taken against movements perceived as a threat to the ruling party's stability.

The #Tajamuka/Sesijikile campaign's concerns resonated with widespread discontent over issues like cash shortages, hyperinflation, human rights abuses, police brutality, undermining of the rule of law, corruption, and the country's economic collapse. Had the government been more tolerant of peaceful demonstrations, the campaign's potential for significant success could have been higher (Matsilele & Ruhanya, 2020). During the same time that #Tajamuka/Sesijikile campaign was launched several other campaigns which amongst them was also significant was the #ThisFlag which was launched by an activist pastor. The focus of the #ThisFlag and #Tajamuka/Sesijikile all resonated with the concerns of the citizens of Zimbabwe and the focus of the campaigns was restoration of justice and economic status for the benefit of the Zimbabwean citizenry who had been seriously affected by the poor governance of the country.

An overview of the case study of the #FeesMustFall is presented and analysed in Box 2, focusing on a brief presentation about the history of the campaign and the contributing factors. The purpose of the presentation is to unpack the prognosis of the campaign. This meant to showcase the gaps in the current studies.

Box 2: Overview of the #FeesMustFall in South Africa

The #FeesMustFall student protests in South Africa, which took place from 2015 to 2016, were a significant social movement aimed at addressing issues of affordability and accessibility of higher education. Social media played a crucial role in organizing and mobilizing the protests, as well as raising awareness and garnering support. Here are some details and outcomes of the #FeesMustFall social media campaign in South Africa:

Context- the protests were a response to proposed fee increases by South African universities, which were seen as exacerbating the already high cost of education and limiting access for economically disadvantaged students. The movement originated primarily among university students, but it gained widespread support and participation from various sectors of society.

Hashtag #FeesMustFall- the hashtag #FeesMustFall became the rallying cry and central organizing symbol of the movement. It was used extensively on social media platforms, particularly Twitter, to share information, mobilize supporters, and document protest actions.

Online Mobilization- Social media platforms, especially Twitter, were instrumental in mobilizing and coordinating protesters. Activists used hashtags, retweets, and mentions to spread information about protests, organize meetings, and encourage participation. They also shared videos, photos, and personal stories to highlight the impact of high fees on students and advocate for change.

Amplification of Voices- Social media provided a platform for marginalized and underrepresented voices to be heard. Students were able to express their frustrations, share personal stories, and articulate their demands, reaching a wider audience beyond traditional media outlets. This helped in building solidarity and generating public support.

Information Sharing- Social media platforms were used to disseminate real-time information about protest actions, locations, and developments. This allowed for quick mobilization and increased participation in demonstrations. It also facilitated the sharing of legal advice, safety guidelines, and resources for protesters.

Awareness and Public Debate- The #FeesMustFall campaign sparked widespread public debate and discussion about the cost of education and the social inequalities it perpetuated. The online conversations and media coverage generated by social media played a crucial role in raising awareness of the issues and putting pressure on policymakers to address them.

Engagement with Authorities- Social media facilitated direct engagement between protesters and university authorities, government officials, and other stakeholders. Activists used platforms like Twitter to share demands, voice concerns, and seek dialogue with decision-makers. This engagement helped to keep the issues at the forefront of public discourse and influenced policy discussions.

Outcomes and Impact- The #FeesMustFall movement had both immediate and long-term impacts:

Immediate Impact: The protests led to temporary fee freezes and reductions in some universities, preventing immediate fee increases. However, the outcomes varied across institutions.

Public Discourse: The movement brought the issue of affordable education to the national and international spotlight, triggering broader discussions on the systemic challenges faced by South African students.

Policy Reforms: The protests influenced policy reforms, such as the provision of fee-free university education for students from low-income households through the introduction of the National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS) in subsequent years.

Activism and Student Empowerment: The protests empowered students to engage in activism, develop leadership skills, and continue advocating for educational reforms beyond the immediate demands of the movement.

It is important to note that the outcomes and impact of the #FeesMustFall campaign are complex and multifaceted. While the movement succeeded in raising awareness and initiating policy changes, the broader issues related to the affordability and accessibility of education in South Africa remain ongoing challenges that require sustained efforts and systemic reforms.

The #FeesMustFall campaign was started by South African students in October 2015 to lobby the government for funding of university education (Khan et al., 2022). The goal was to challenge the government to address past imbalances created by the discriminatory apartheid system (Cini, 2019). The #FeesMustFall movement emerged from the earlier #RhodesMustFall campaign at the University of Cape Town, which focused on decolonizing education and removing the statue of Cecil John Rhodes, a colonial figure (Bosch, 2016).

The first #FeesMustFall protests began in Johannesburg after the University of Witwatersrand (Wits) announced a 10.5% increase in student fees for 2016, which students found unaffordable (Tshishonga, 2019). The university administration argued that government subsidies were

insufficient to cover the rising costs. The #FeesMustFall campaign initially aimed to lobby against fee increases and then expanded to demand free education, as promised in the Freedom Charter.

The #FeesMustFall protests were initially limited to Wits but quickly spread to other universities, triggered by the storming of Parliament in Cape Town (Baillie-Stewart, 2017). Digital activism, facilitated by social media, played a crucial role in the growth and coordination of the #FeesMustFall movement (Bosch & Mutsaers, 2017). The campaign was one of the largest and longest-lasting hashtag campaigns in Africa, along with other notable movements such as the #ArabSpring, #ThisFlag, #BringBackOurGirls, and #SayNotoXenophobia.

Comparative analysis of #Tajamuka/Sesijikile and #FeesMustFall

A brief comparison of the two case studies is presented in Box 3.

Box 3: Comparison of #Tajamuka/Sesijikile and #FeesMustFall

Both #FeesMustFall and #Tajamuka/Sesijikile were social media campaigns that emerged in response to socio-economic and political challenges in South Africa and Zimbabwe, respectively. While they shared some similarities, they also differed in several key aspects.

Similarities:

Social Media Mobilization: Both campaigns effectively utilized social media platforms like Twitter and Facebook to mobilize citizens, raise awareness, and organize protests. Hashtags like #FeesMustFall and #Tajamuka/Sesijikile served as unifying symbols and facilitated online discussions.

Demand for Change: Both movements aimed to address systemic issues and advocate for change. #FeesMustFall focused on reducing university fees and increasing access to education, while #Tajamuka/Sesijikile sought broader economic and political reforms.

Peaceful Protests: Both campaigns emphasized peaceful demonstrations and civil disobedience as means of expressing dissent and putting pressure on authorities.

Government Response: Both governments responded with a mix of repression and concessions. While cracking down on protests, they also made some attempts to address public grievances.

Differences:

Focus: #FeesMustFall had a specific focus on education affordability, while #Tajamuka/Sesijikile addressed a broader range of issues, including economic hardship, political repression, and corruption.

Leadership: #FeesMustFall was primarily driven by student organizations, while #Tajamuka/Sesijikile involved a broader coalition of activists and civil society groups.

Outcomes: #FeesMustFall achieved some immediate successes, such as temporary fee freezes and increased government funding for universities. However, the broader issue of education affordability remains a challenge. #Tajamuka/Sesijikile, while raising awareness and inspiring activism, did not achieve its immediate goals of significant political and economic reforms.

Long-Term Impact: Both movements continue to inspire activism and advocacy for change in their respective countries. #FeesMustFall has contributed to ongoing discussions about education reform, while #Tajamuka/Sesijikile has empowered citizens to demand accountability and better governance.

While #FeesMustFall and #Tajamuka/Sesijikile shared similarities in their use of social media and advocacy for change, they differed in their specific focus, leadership, and outcomes. Both movements have had a lasting impact on their respective countries, demonstrating the power of social media to mobilize citizens and spark dialogue around critical issues.

Overall, from the presentation in Box 3, it is evident that both the #Tajamuka/Sesijikile and #FeesMustFall movements demonstrate the power of digital activism and social media in mobilizing large-scale protests and campaigns for social and political change in Africa. The case studies have been reviewed in empirical studies to different extents and the #FeesMustFall campaign appearing bigger and more impactful than #Tajamuka/Sesijikile. The territorial

circumstances of the two countries affected the popularity of the two campaigns. It is however, apparent that these have potential to shape the practice of collaborative governance by non-state actors in the two countries and in other countries with similar circumstances.

Lessons on the effective use of social media by non-state actors to contribute in collaborative governance can be drawn from the Open Government Partnership (OGP) in Mexico. Although South Africa is a member of the OGP but Zimbabwe is not a member of the OGP lessons and challenges which are presented in Box 4 are important. Special emphasis is the importance of using social media as tools for enhancing participation by non-state actors in the efforts meant to improve collaborative governance. The OGP is a voluntary, multilateral initiative that aims to secure concrete commitments from national and local governments to promote transparency, empower citizens, fight corruption, and harness new technologies to strengthen governance. The OGP was started in 2011 and by the year 2023, the OGP had 78 participating countries and 76 local governments drawn from around the world. A summary of the implementation of the OGP in Mexico is presented in Box 4.

As shown in Box 4, there are several lessons that South African and Zimbabwean government officials and non-state actors for purposes of improving social media participation in collaborative governance and achieving the desired effectiveness. The case studies presented in this study shows the level of variance which may not necessarily be too varied from what Mexico experienced during their initial implementation of the OGP. For Zimbabwe, it is imperative to consider joining the OGP and ensure there is openness in the governance processes. Whilst for South Africa, significant progress has been made and the country may be at a better place towards the achievement of greater success in the transparency of government activities and the contributions of non-state actors are more acceptable. Details about the lessons that the two countries may both draw from the Mexican case study are presented as part of the conclusions and recommendations for the study which are given in the following section.

Box 4: Case Study: Mexico's Open Government Partnership Journey

Mexico joined the Open Government Partnership (OGP) in 2011, becoming one of the founding members of the initiative. As a middle-income country with a history of democratic reforms and a vibrant civil society, Mexico's participation in the OGP was seen as an important step in advancing transparency, accountability, and citizen engagement in governance.

The Challenges:

Despite Mexico's initial enthusiasm for the OGP, the implementation process faced several challenges:

Coordination and Ownership: Lack of clear leadership and coordination within the Mexican government, with multiple agencies and ministries involved in the OGP process.

Insufficient ownership and commitment from high-level political leadership, which hindered the sustained implementation of OGP commitments.

Civic Engagement and Transparency: Distrust between the government and civil society, with concerns about the genuine inclusion of civil society organizations in the OGP process.

Limited access to information and data, which undermined the transparency and accountability goals of the OGP.

Monitoring and Accountability: Weak mechanisms for monitoring and evaluating the implementation of OGP commitments, making it difficult to track progress and hold the government accountable.

Lack of sustained engagement and follow-up on the implementation of OGP action plans.

The Role of Social Media:

To address these challenges, civil society organizations in Mexico leveraged social media to enhance their participation and influence in the OGP process:

Information Sharing and Transparency: Civil society groups used social media platforms like Twitter and Facebook to share updates, reports, and analysis on the OGP implementation in Mexico.

This increased transparency and enabled wider public access to information about the government's progress on OGP commitments.

Stakeholder Mobilization and Coordination: Social media facilitated coordination and collaboration among civil society organizations involved in the OGP, allowing them to align their positions and amplify their collective voice.

Online discussions and campaigns helped mobilize support and build a broader coalition to advocate for more ambitious OGP commitments.

Advocacy and Pressure Building: Civil society organizations leveraged social media to raise public awareness about the OGP and the government's performance in implementing its commitments.

They used platforms like Twitter and online petitions to put pressure on the government, calling for greater transparency and more meaningful civic participation.

The Impact:

The strategic use of social media by civil society organizations in Mexico has had a significant impact on the OGP implementation process:

Increased Transparency: Social media-driven information sharing has improved access to data and made the government's OGP commitments and progress more transparent.

Strengthened Civic Engagement: Online mobilization and coordination have empowered civil society organizations to participate more actively in the OGP process and hold the government accountable.

Improved Commitment and Action: The public pressure and advocacy campaigns on social media have prompted the government to take more ambitious actions and fulfill its OGP commitments.

Enhanced Monitoring and Evaluation: The use of social media has enabled more effective monitoring and evaluation of the OGP implementation, leading to greater accountability.

The Mexico case study demonstrates how non-state actors, particularly civil society organizations, can leverage social media to overcome challenges and play a more influential role in the collaborative governance of the Open Government Partnership. By utilizing digital platforms, they have been able to amplify their voices, foster greater transparency and accountability, and work more effectively with the government to achieve the OGP's objectives.

5. Conclusions and Recommendations

Based on the results presented and discussed in the preceding the following are the conclusions drawn for the study: There is potential for non-state actors such as civil society groups to use social media platforms like Instagram, X and Facebook to share updates, reports, and analyses on the collaborative governance initiatives of the governments in both countries. Social media-driven information sharing by non-state actors is expected to improve access to data and make the government's commitments to collaborative governance and the realization of progress towards such commitments more transparent. This is now possible as governments in the two countries are now very active social media players which was not so with Zimbabwe's previous regime. The public pressure and advocacy campaigns on social media have in South Africa and Zimbabwe have prompted the governments to take more ambitious actions and fulfil their collaborative governance commitments. Despite such pressure and advocacy campaigns realizing different levels of such the #Tajamuka/Sesijikile campaign has led to several professionals and academics in Zimbabwe and in the diaspora realizing the potential of influencing government strategies and governance processes through social media campaigns. This has led to the changes in certain government policies after social media outcries by citizens led by certain non-state professional actors. Using social media has helped in closing the gaps of limited access to information and data, which undermined the transparency and accountability goals of the collaborative governance in the two countries. Social media has become a robust tool that non-state actors can take advantage of in order to make information about government policies more readily available for purposes of enhancing accountability and transparency at all levels of government including central governments, local governments as well as by state entities and public utilities. Therefore, the voices of the voiceless can now be heard by those in government and their concerns can be addressed easily as there is no protocol to be followed by generating appropriate #tags on social media and their voices can go across the globe and become viral. The study therefore recommends the following courses of action in order to achieve better transparency by governments in Zimbabwe and South Africa and strengthening the roles and participation of non-state actors:

There is need for better coordinated approaches to the collaborative governance engagements from both the perspectives of the governments and from the non-state actors in the two countries. This is necessary for better engagements and responses to issues raised. This is supported by the outcomes of the #FeesMustFall and the #Tajamuka/Sesijikile where there was coordination of the players for example, university students were coordinated in their campaign for fees reduction. Similarly, civil society organisations in Zimbabwe were coordinated and this led to successful mobilization of youths in the #Tajamuka/Sesijikile campaign activities. Non-state actors in Zimbabwe should collaborate instead of competing for attention with the Government as the presentation of disaggregated individual perspectives from several stakeholders may weigh down the perceived significance of their submissions. It is important for non-state actors to engage experts and present their submissions with experts backing them up. Zimbabwe is recommended to join the Open Government Partnership (OGP) in other for the Government to have international commitments towards collaborative governance. This is important because the Government of Zimbabwe and its Local Governments use the participatory budgeting

approach which would significantly benefit from the use of social media in engaging citizens during budget consultative meetings.

Conflict of Interest

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest.

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