

Political Communication and the Enforcement of Covid- 19 Rules in South Africa

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Abstract

Since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, several countries have attempted to respond via the introduction and adoption of strict and punitive measures to those breaking the covid-19 protocols. Relying on secondary and primary sources of data collection, this paper interrogates the various communication media that were used in sensitizing the citizenry in South Africa and their impact on enforcement as well as compliance to COVID-19 protocols. Regardless of the political dynamics and political distrust that characterize the state-citizen relations within the country, this study observes that to a reasonable extent, a uniform pattern of disseminating information both among government and private owned news sources created more awareness about the increasing spread of covid-19 and this was due to the perceived threat the pandemic posed to entire nation. Apart from the fact that this apparent uniformity in sensitization supported the enforcement of basic covid-19 protocols, it has sustained the level of awareness and compliance amidst the second wave. Therefore, beyond the COVID-19 pandemic, this study concludes that there is greater need for synergy between state and private owned media platforms in the overall interest of the country.

Keywords: Political Communication, Enforcement, Rules & Protocols, COVID-19



Introduction

The attendant ramifications associated with the outbreak of COVID-19, which compelled the government of nations to adopt varying precautionary measures aimed at checking the spread of the novel virus cannot be over-emphasized. Aside from disrupting all spheres of human endeavours evidenced in the adoption of new mechanisms that today guide human interaction, COVID-19 is reported as having led to the death of an estimated 2 million persons across the world. Also, the lockdown measures adopted by countries of the world at various stages further increased the level of unemployment (Ritchie, Ortiz-Ospina, Beltekian, Mathieu, Hassel, Macdonald, Giattino, Appel & Roser, 2021). Further, the World Health Organisation (2020) notes that aside from the increasing number of daily infections and deaths thus far recorded across the world, the socio-economic impact of COVID-19 is likely to put tens of millions of persons across the world at the risk of falling into extreme poverty, while about half of the world's workforce is may possibly loose its sources of livelihood

It should be noted that at the earliest stage of the outbreak of COVID-19, some world leaders downplayed its impact and failed to adopt strict measures aimed at checking the spread of the virus. For instance, the Tanzanian government of the late John Magufuli paid little attention to warnings expressed by the World Health Organization (WHO) pertaining to the severity of COVID-19. Following his death, there were speculations that the Tanzanian President perhaps died of COVID-19 complications. Similarly, the administrations of the former United States President, Donald Trump, and his counterpart from Brazil, Jair Bolsanora, Iranian President, as well as Hassan Rouhani, among others, are instructive in this regard. The aforementioned individuals misinformed the public through their stance on the virus and at some points failed to adopt the WHO COVID-19 protocols which include the use of facemasks and the maintenance of physical distancing (Colarossi, 2020). It is noteworthy that some of these countries ranked high in terms of the level of infections and deaths associated with COVID-19.

In a bid to check the spread and fatality rates of the virus, as well as a means of reducing the socio-economic impact of COVID-19 on its citizens, different countries have since adopted different mechanisms through varying channels of communication which they can attend to the needs of the people as well as ensure compliance to COVID-19 protocols. It is noteworthy that the lockdown/ or containment measures adopted by most countries negatively impacted on their domestic economics as evidenced by border closures. In the Middle East and Asia, the Afghanistan government in a bid to cushion the effect of the lockdown on its already dwindling economy gradually eased its lockdown measures on businesses, but adhered strictly to the use of masks and the maintenance of physical distancing in public places government (International Monetary Fund, 2020).



The Chinese government, on the other hand, through its Central Bank, increased access to loans to about \$80 billion for small and medium scale businesses struggling at the instance of the economic challenges as well as those on the verge of filing for bankruptcy. Also, interest rates and reserve requirements for commercial banks were reduced to that effect. While Germany and Japan made provisions for bailout funds such as cash payments for its citizens, small and medium scale businesses, and interest-free loans, the United Kingdom and the United States also made provisions for stimulus packages which include the payment of about 80% of salaries of workers to reduce the downsizing of workers by employers. Furthermore, reimbursement funds were paid to self-employed workers for lost wages and deferred tax payments were also adopted by some countries (Jonathan, 2020).

In Africa, especially Sub-Saharan, some governments adopted the distribution of essentials like food, soap, grains, (also known as food parcels) and beverages to their most vulnerable citizens. Some levels of waivers over tax and electricity tariffs were also adopted during the period of lockdown. Furthermore, stimulus packages were made available for small and medium-scale businesses as a survival mechanism. The government of Rwanda, Uganda, Kenya, Ghana, and Zimbabwe are among the countries in the sub-region that distributed food and other essentials to their citizens. For instance, the Kenyan government imported about two million bags of white maize that was distributed to its citizens. On the other hand, the South African government in partnership with some imminent individuals made provisions for cash and food items (referred to as food parcels) handed out to the state and local government for onward distribution to people in local rural communities. It was also reported that the Ghanaian government granted waivers to its citizens on electricity tariffs. All these were done in a bid to reduce the level of hardship the people faced due to the closure of the economy (Gakpo, 2020).

Ensuring compliance to COVID-19 protocols in some countries seemingly proved to be problematic. This stemmed out of the harsh economic conditions associated with the virus and/or due to the negligence on the part of the government to support its citizens through health and welfare support. Margraf, Brailovskaia and Schneider (2020) note that despite the varying mechanisms adopted by many countries aimed at sensitizing the public on the need to abide by the WHO COVID-19 guidelines, compliance differed from country to country. The study notes that while compliance rate was good in countries like the United Kingdom, Germany due to the positive government or political communication, the case could be said of countries like Poland, Russia, the United States and South Africa, among others, where adherence to COVID-19 protocols was poor. The case of the United States is instructive at the instance of a political crisis like the 'Black Lives Matter Movement' and the protest over the 2020 Presidential elections results which saw Americans come out in their thousands to express their discontent to happenings in the country. The same may be said of some countries in Africa where the attitude of the government on the fatality of the virus witnessed its citizens going against the health protocols.

Specifically, in December 2019, an unexplained pneumonia case in China was identified as a novel coronavirus causing a severe acute respiratory syndrome and was named by the World Health Organization as Covid-19. Covid-19 spread beyond China and developed into a global pandemic, characterized as such on 11 March 2020. But before this, the WHO declared it to be a public health emergency of international concern. “Respiratory syndromes linked to coronavirus excite attention on the part of the government or political communication and other organizational actors such as public health agencies because of a variety of factors, including their potential to spread rapidly through populations and become pandemic in scale, as well as their “severity” or their potential to produce life-threatening illness” (French & Monahan, 2020).

The media, both the public and private, thus play a key role at the time of such pandemics as a key source of health information for the public. For example, Zhou et al. (2020) suggest that “media reporting about the COVID-19 may influence the attitude of the public towards the disease and enhance their self-protecting awareness” and that media coverage contributes to the enforcement of the Covid-19 rules in South Africa including the prevention and control of the infection. Given this, the study specifically explores South African mainstream political communication of Covid-19, drawing on a content analysis of political communication in ten major daily and weekly newspapers. The paper explores the nexus between political communication and enforcement of the Covid-19 rules in South Africa, as communication can play a key role in shaping the public’s understanding, as well as reactions to curb transmission by obliging to enforce Covid-19 rules. The second phase of the project explores social media discourses around the pandemic, particularly focusing on the relationship between communication on social media (Facebook, Twitter) and surveillance during the Lockdown period in South Africa. People use social media to be seen, argues Marwick (2012). As a result, “social surveillance is consensual, partly because people are motivated by social status, attention and visibility to broadcast personal details. It is against this background that this study interrogates the various communication medium that was used in sensitizing the citizenry in South Africa and its impact on enforcement and compliance to COVID-19 protocols.

The paper sets out two specific tasks, which are to identify and analyse various mediums (i.e, town hall meetings or discussion, mass media, social media (SM)—Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and YouTube) of political communication through which the Covid-19 safety rules or protocols are disseminated. Second, it assesses the impact of political communication on the enforcement and compliance with Covid-19 rules. The paper is organized such that the next section focuses on the review of literature. The next section covers the theoretical framework. This is followed by the section on political communication, citizens’ engagement, and enforcement of the Covid-19 rules, before the conclusion.



Literature Review

Political Communication and Enforcement Defined

Political communication as a study has been in existence for a long time. Taking the *Rhetoric and Politics* written by Aristotle as a point of reference, political messages have been identified, dissected, and talked about for over 2000 years. Political communication comprises the construction, sending, receiving, and processing of messages that potentially have a significant direct or indirect impact on politics (Graber, 1993). Groups such as, political actors, citizens, journalists, members of interest groups, or private are message senders or receivers. The essential element is that the message has a great political impact on the cognitive reasoning, beliefs and behaviours of individuals, groups, institutions, and the society as a whole and the environments in which they exist (Graber, 1993:305). While there are varying definitions of the term, scholars including Denton and Woodward (1998), Hahn (2003) and Perloff, (1998) have argued that all other definitions encapsulate similar important elements.

Owing to the political impact which is at the heart of political science and are central to interest of many communications scholars, it is presumed that the field would be in the mainstream of the two disciplines based on a number articles in journals as well as university-level courses. Sadly, the reverse is the case, as political communication remains side lined in the field of political science. Although it is better in communication, it shares the limelight with many other sub-disciplinary fields' specialties. Marginality is common in interdisciplinary fields (Stout & Buddenbaum, 2002). As against intended growth expected from marginalization of disciplines, it rather impedes cross-fertilization because research published in specialized journals does not gain the wide attention of the mainstream journals, hence lags in citations in the mainstream literature. As a result, the interdisciplinary collaboration call continues to be illusory or a ruse.

Recently, social media such as Social Network Sites (SNS), weblogs, microblogging and wikis play an increasingly great role in shaping political communication around the world (Aday, Farrel, Lynch, Sides, Kelly & Zuckerman, 2010; Bankler, 2006; Bernnett, 2003; Farrel & Drezner, 2008; Sunstein, 2002). Social media may simply be put as "a group of internet-based applications building on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0 allowing for the creation and exchange of generated content by the user" (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). The social media appears to possess more promising potentials in political context as they can enhance democracy and engender citizen participation (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). Political activities may gain increasing transparency and accountability as well as citizens' trust in government policies or decisions (Paris & Wan, 2011). It is worthy of note, however, that the E-participation rests squarely not only on the process of participation, but also on the use of internet as an inclusive or exclusive instrument to create dialogues between the rulers and the ruled. Given the increasing literature with specific focus on the influence of social media in political deliberation, it is clear that social

media could be successfully adapted to contact and discuss issues with the public as well as pass across essential information to them, especially young people inspired to political topics through the use of social media as their communication platform (Chen, Tang, Li & Zhou, 2009; Kushin & Kitchener, 2009).

As previous studies have indicated, in the last few years social media have become an integral part of political communication channel (Bankler, 2006; Bernnett, 2003; Farrel & Drezner, 2008; Sunstein, 2002). However, this paper seeks to evaluate the implication of political communication for COVID-19 rules enforcement in South Africa and Nigeria. Therefore, the study will focus on how government has disseminated information to its citizens and to what extent it has impacted the enforcement and citizens' level of compliance to the Covid-19 rules. While social media (microblogging, SNS and weblogs) has increasingly gained momentum among citizens in recent years in particular, the paper does not limit itself to that alone, but also explores the potential impacts of other media outlets on the subject matter in general.

Several studies across time have explored media coverage of epidemic outbreaks and similar health crises. Covid-19 is not the first coronavirus to attract global attention. It is preceded by MERS-CoV, the Middle East Respiratory Syndrome in 2012; and SARS-CoV, Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome, which was first recognized in 2003 (French & Monahan, 2020). There has been a great deal of academic research on the 2009 H1N1 outbreak. For example, Lee and Basnyat (2012) explored how the pandemic was framed to shape public understanding of H1N1 and secure public support for the prevention and containment efforts. While media were criticized for being too alarmist, Vasterman et al (2013) showed that media were alarming only in so far as they relied on official sources (WHO and scientific experts) who were promoting alarming messages.

Similarly, Wallis and Nerlich (2005) explored the UK Press' framing of the 2003 SARS epidemic, while Roche and Muskatvich (2003) argued that North American media coverage of the West Nile virus provided limited information to help citizens reduce their personal risk. Similarly, the 2014 Ebola health crisis and media coverage thereof has been explored, with researchers showing how historically, traditional news organizations have contributed to public fear and panic by emphasizing risks and uncertainties (Kilgo et al., 2019).

However, a related study (Uzuegbunam, et al, 2016) which investigated the coverage of the Ebola Virus Disease in the Nigerian media found that the media were alive to their agenda-setting functions since they not only gave salience to the issue but equally focused more on the preventive measures as against the morbid or the sensational. Furthermore, in an exploration of the media coverage of the Zika crisis, Ribeiro et al (2019) argued that a dominant war frame shaped social representation and policy responses, while simultaneously masking social and gender inequalities. Finally, in the case of the pandemic



under discussion, Covid-19, Wen et al (2020) have argued that media coverage led to increased racial discrimination against Chinese nations abroad. In general, previous research has shown the key role played by media in informing citizens during times of epidemics and other health crises. Some researchers went so far as to argue that news media coverage can also influence public opinion (Sell et al, 2016), while simultaneously affecting people's perceptions of personal risk.

Enforcement in the context of this paper means compliance or obeying government directives or rules. Governance is about ruling, rule of law, and service delivery to the people (Afolabi and Agunyai 2017). Enforcement is the ability to implement, apply, and comply with directives made by constituted authority. It involves the 'Will' to do something or apply and carry-out certain government decision. While political communication contains the dissemination of information or messages, which are usually in forms of instructions, directives, guides, rules or regulations to be carried out by the people to whom the instructions or directives are given, enforcement is the actual practice of compliance and being obedient to the rules or regulations. The outbreak of the Covid 19 came with lots of rules and directives aimed at safeguarding the citizens against the disease. These rules were new, stringent, and restrictive as they locked people to their homes. In some countries, people show strong disdain for Covid-19 rules. This accounts for the reason why some countries such as South Africa deployed the army to enforce compliance to Covid 19 rules. Enforcement could be voluntary or by force. For instance, the use of soldiers to ensure that South Africans comply with the Covid-19 rules is forced enforcement. Ciara (2020) notes that the citizens need more political communication and awareness to comply or enforce Covid 19 rules. This goes to show that political communication is a causal of enforcement of government directives or rules. Ciara (2020) cautioned the government of the excessive use of force on citizens for compliance. This is because it exacerbates hostility and strains the relationship between the government and citizens.

From the foregoing, it can be deduced that political communication is capable of influencing rapid and quick compliance to Covid19 rules. This is evidently seen in the submission made by Merkel (2018) that continual and prompt communication in terms of awareness, public education or enlightenment by the government to the people would improve the level of trust on government by the people and enhance compliance with government decisions or directives. Thus, relating this submission to the Covid-19 pandemic, it could be inferred that prompt, proper and adequate political communication, where citizens are continually engaged by the government in fruitful discussion and decisions is capable of increasing the level of compliance to the Covid 19 rules.



Theoretical Framework

Theories of political communication studies are drawn mainly from fields like political science, psychology, sociology and communication. The mixture of disciplines is no surprise owing to the fact that political communication deals with the substance of politics along with human behaviours in response to political messages. However, for clarity and explanation's sake, the study adopted communication theory.

Communication theory is a familiar approach in many disciplines. It was originally used in the Engineering discipline, especially 'cybernetics' which itself depicts that the movement of a stimulus connected to another stimulus engenders free movement, prior to its usage in the social sciences (Weiner, 1961). Given the argument in literature that albeit communication is critical to political process, it has been often ignored in the theoretical discourse of political science. As a way of addressing this anomaly, Karl Deutsch, among others scholars, championed the communication theory to the study of politics, and claimed that 'cybernetics', the science of communications and control, "shows a rotation from drives to steering in the centre of interest" (Deutsch, 1963:76).

To Deutsch (1963), when applied to politics, emphasis is on decisions, control and communication as against power, which has been at the heart of politics. Holistically, the assumption of the theory is hinged on how information is sent or shared and processed. Communications approach to the study of politics assumes that the behaviour and survival of political systems can best be analysed in terms of communications. Corroborating this assertion, Isaac (1985:289) asserts that communications theory is an approach to political and social analysis emphasizing the communication process, and posits that how information is received and processed is the most fundamental aspect of any political system. He believes that a political system can best relate to and cope with its environment only through communication (Isaac, 1985:290). Thus, the main concepts of the theory can widely be categorized into two. Firstly, ideas that relate to the operative structures through which the process is done. And secondly, ideas that explain the dynamics and the process of information movement. The knowledge of the inter-connected relationship between the concepts are germane to the understanding of the communication theory (Deutsch, 1963; Isaac, 1985).

However, the proponents of the theory claimed that communication is not the only topic that should interest political scientists. As Deutsch (1963) puts it, "it is communication, which represents the ability to transfer messages and show reaction to them that makes organisations" (Deutsch, 1963:77). According to him, the role of communication is fundamental to any thorough analysis of political organisations and systems (Deutsch, 1963). Given illustration above, the study adopted this theory in a bid to analyse how communications from various stakeholders (Governments at all levels, Health Officials,



etc.) about the COVID-19 pandemic has enforced compliance among the residents of the country under investigation. Communication via diverse channels (mass media, social media, the internet, etc.) is central to the enforcement of Covid-19 rules among the people of both countries as it is the basis for forming public opinion, which is presumed the wellspring of good governance in functional democratic countries. It is fair to say that the availability of and accessibility to information for citizens of South Africa and Nigeria about COVID-19 go a long way in influencing public perception on the importance of abiding by the rules in order to curtail the spread.

It must be stated that the communication theory is more concerned with the process through which decisions are made, in contrast to the neutral consequences of the decision. This, however, means that the 'theory' places more emphasis and importance on steering and coordination, than on the destination of information. Thus, it can be said that this theory is virtually interested in the problems of dynamics, and the flow of information, which links steering with movement that constitutes the basic unity of analysis.

Political leaders, politicians and governments have long recognized the implications of communication for the system. All citizens and office holders, political or non-political, are dependent upon the information they receive and the effectiveness of the messages they transmit. Most of the government decisions, electorate choice of votes and citizens participation in politics are borne out of information, messages or facts and figures received through communications. Communication theory treats the government as a decision-making system based on various information flows, that is, information flowing from the masses, media, groups (ethnic, religious, pressure group, professionals, political parties, national assembly etc.) are all channels or means from which information flows and serves as the basis of government decisions.

The theory lays much emphasis on 'change' and it is the flow of information that triggers the change in the suitable receiver. This change could be in form of enforcement. For this paper it is obeying the Covid-19 safety rules. This theory is applicable to this study in that the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic in South Africa brought to the fore the importance of communication, which is aimed at providing daily briefing about the activities and plans of government in curtailing the spread of the virus. In order to achieve that, the South African government established the so called 'Command Council', a team of medical experts as well as politicians. Political communication, which to a larger extent lays much emphasis on information and promotes effective participation of the citizens in the enforcement of the Covid-19 rules. It further exposes plans of the government towards the Covid-19 to the public, thereby promoting accountability and enhancing political communication. All these in turn engender or promote the enforcement of the Covid-19 safety protocols in South Africa.



This underscores the fact that the idea of political communication to engender compliance to Covid-19 rules was borne out of the quest or demands and needs from various groups, elites, and media as well as for political development, among others. The internet gives citizens the opportunity of the unrestricted access to political information or communication. Hence, political communication is inter-fused and is no longer an exclusive right of the politically and economically privilege elite. The interactive communication opportunity that the use of internet provides makes it a basic tool of political communication emphasized by Karl W. Deutsch. This to a larger extent has helped to foster political communication and enforcement of the Covid-19 rules in South Africa.

Political Communication, Citizens Engagement and Enforcement of the Covid-19 Rules

In the exercise of government response to the Covid-19 pandemic, political communication interfaces with the citizens in order 'to give people a voice in the enforcement of Covid-19 protocols (Sell et al., 2016). These represent government citizens engagement practices that are dependent on political communication. For instance, political communication has prospects in helping to overcome government–citizen detach that has been worsened by 'lack of knowledge about, and low trust in government, along with low participation and satisfaction levels'(Hansard Society, 2010: 4). Political communication can help government become 'more responsive to the needs to inform or carry-along the citizens on matters of emergencies like the Covid 19 pandemic (Norton, 2012: 414), thus promoting 'more open and outward-facing' practices towards addressing the growing level of distrust (Merkel, 2018) in government.

The initiatives to deploy communication are in tune with a broader citizens' engagement in present-day governance and deeper use of periodic and daily briefing or communications by state or government actors (Hendriks & Kay, 2019: 25). A country's decision to use political communication for an enforcement of certain government policy or programme is reflected in the activities of governance institutions across regions (Griffith & Leston-Bandeira, 2012; Joshi & Rosenfield, 2013). Specifically, governments across the globe, including Africa, are exploring the role of political communication as a 'core enabler of greater openness, accessibility and accountability' (IPU, 2016). Readiness to use and the success of usage, however, draw on issues such as institutional characteristics and supporting political dynamics (Blumenau, 2020; Leston-Bandeira, 2012a). These issues, in turn, describe whether the tools are used for substantive citizens engagement or as podiums to circulate information.

In Africa, for instance, despite operating in contexts often depicting over-bearing executive domination in a region of the 'Big Man'(Azevedo-Harman, 2011: 65), governments use of political communication to govern and control countries' resources 'have been



flourishing' (Gyimah-Boadi, 2015: 102) as shown by the various methods through which they perform their statutory duties in the democratic process (Hyden, 2019). However, these accounts of progress in government's actions or activities sparingly capture the aspects of citizens' engagement on the one hand, and how effective communication promotes enforcement of public policy on the other hand. Relatedly, research on government-citizens engagement, including the communication component, has mostly been about carrying-along the masses about government's decisions. Little is known about how political communication engenders the enforcement of government policies (Downs, 2014), especially in respect of enforcing compliance to Covid-19 rules.

In dispersed contexts, beyond proximity to the people, governments exercise substantive powers on many public-centric and social welfare issues (de Bruyn, 2013; Squire, 2018). For instance, during global emergencies like the outbreak of Covid-19, several policies were rolled out by the government as rules to be followed by the people. These rules are public-centric issues that require the cooperation of the citizens for enforcement. The efficacy and outcomes of government policy decisions are often a function of how actual implementation is done and complied with by the people. This raises the concerns to scrutinize the activities of government in respect of the use of political communication and citizen education (Downs 2014). Relative to political communication, government often experiences unique challenges in aspects such as trust of the information, compliance with instructions in the communication and enforcement (de Bruyn, 2013; Fashagba & McMahon, 2015; Hansard Society, 2010; Wolak, 2017). Investigating the connection between political communication and enforcement, therefore, enhances an understanding of how these aspects influence, and are influenced by, the willingness and capacity of government to communicate with people on issues of national emergencies.

As Sell et al. (2016) noted, advancements in technology and the ever-increasing public demands make it useful for governments to establish a clear online political communication presence. In the specific case of state or local government, slow progress in maximizing political communication—where political will and capacity meet with relevant tools—involves a greater risk because whether or not they engage, citizens will use communication platforms to discuss about them and their administration. For instance, citizens used several platforms such as social media, print media, and public media, among others, to communicate and share information about government's Covid-19 safety rules or protocols in South Africa. They (citizens) were very active on social media during the Covid-19 lockdown order. This goes to show that effective political communication gives direction to the citizens on the management of national pandemic in a country (Sell et al., 2016). Thus, it is fair and adequate to add the government's voice, thereby shaping public discourse (Covid 19 issue) through citizens engagement. But to what extent do political communication in South Africa engages the citizens towards enforcement of the Covid-19 rules? In seeking answers, emphasis is placed on South Africa, one of Africa's largest democracy and 'most well-industrialized (Angerbrandt, 2020). The paper seeks answers to



the questions of whether and how the predominance of political communication in everyday talk and briefing about the Covid-19 rules could be leveraged for enhanced citizens engagement and the enforcement of the Covid 19 safety rules.

Political Communication Platforms and Enforcement of Covid 19 Rules

The political communication literature has engaged with different aspects of social media and websites within the wider background of citizen engagement (Bernardes & Leston-Bandeira, 2016; De Barros et al., 2016; Griffith & Leston-Bandeira, 2012). This cardinal turn in research reinforces the gradual shift from a situation where political communication was 'one of the understudied areas in mass communication (Leston-Bandeira, 2012b) to the more prevalent focus on specific methods, forms and tools of political communication. Research has grown to link political communication with citizens' reactions against compliance to government rules or regulations, and using modern tools of communication such as new media (Leston-Bandeira, 2012b: 265)

Advancement in patterns, tools and methods of communication, as well as the rate at which governments use them often make it difficult for earlier works to explain succeeding conditions properly. For instance, while the earliest studies found that government used conventional media tools mainly for executive administrative activities (Coleman,1999), subsequent improved communication tools (such as Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram among others) enabled more interactions and conviviality with the people amid limitations of inadequate resources and skilled staff, as well as fake information (Dai & Norton,2007; Leston-Bandeira,2007, 2012a). However, evidence showed that political communication is built on the tool of social media. That is, social media, especially the Facebook, is now a popular medium for the dissemination vital government decisions or directives. IPU (2018) reveals that social media has overthrown television and radio as the most widely patronized media by the government to communicate with citizens, since 2016. This suggests that most governments now use social media platforms and online technology in getting across their plans and programmes to their citizens (Leston-Bandeira & Bender, 2013).

In South Africa, the government communicates with the people through the public (government financed media) and private media. Evidence (Ciara 2020) showed that both media outlets or platforms showed a great deal of expertise in their effective way of reporting daily briefing about Covid-19 safety protocols. The jingles, songs and continual airing of the Covid-19 disease both on private and public media had greater impacts on the compliance with the Covid 19 rules (Marius 2020).

The daily up-to-date analysis of the events and incidences of the Covid-19 in terms of the number of daily infections, admission into hospitals or isolation centres and deaths increases the level of awareness of people in the country to embrace the and comply with the rules (Marius, 2020). Besides, constant political communication and daily briefing



about the Covid-19 disease which usually occurs in different social media platforms across the country are instrumental to the keeping of, or adherence to Covid-19 rules at household level. Similarly, the continual advertisements by the of World Health Organization and the United Nations about the Covid-19 on the television, radio and other social media outlets have yielded positive results in making people to believe the government approach and response to the Covid-19 in South Africa (Africa CDC, 2020).

A critical look at the above submissions showed that in South Africa, political communication is disseminated via various medium such as the public and private media, that, is television and radio, social media-Facebooks, Instagram, and WhatsApp, among others. For instance, in countries like Nigeria, the government uses the WhatsApp platform to get feedback on the contact tracing of suspected persons with Covid-19. In addition to this, self-assessment to randomly detect if a person has Covid-19 is done via WhatsApp through software shared by the government. A lot of positive returns or gains/impacts have been achieved through the conveyance of government instructions or rules on Covid 19 via these media platforms. Some of these impacts include:

- Citizens' engagement as stakeholders in the fight against the deadly disease unlike before when government is overburdened or stressed.
- Secretly learning, by many citizens, about the prevention and management of the virus through robust and effective political communication.
- The enhancement of communication through collective responsibility and nation-wide uniform approach in addressing the Covid-19 pandemic.
- The reduction of the rate of death and infection, which could have been worse, if there was no communication.
- Enabling the citizens to demand accountability and follow-up on government's plans or response approach to the disease.

Conclusions

The adoption and use of the digital tools or technologies, public or private media and social media for political communication during and post-Covid 19 is expected to keep rising among citizens due to their simplicity and accessibility. It is crucial that the government, contribute substantially to the discussions and promote citizens engagement in the management of the Covid-19. This will require government to substantively prioritize and investment in political communication, while also enhancing the skills of government officials who man the media platforms and create an enabling political and administrative environment. Given this, this study has provided some useful information on the proactiveness of political communication on the enforcement of the Covid-19 rules in South Africa



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