

Citizen engagement in print media: A study of Short Message Service (SMS) messages published in *The Namibian*

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Abstract

This paper explores the content and communication acts of text messages in the form of SMSes written by Namibian citizens and published daily under “What you’re Saying!” in The Namibian. Its main aim is to provide insights into the realities of the population at the grassroots level, which are brought to light via the medium of the newspaper. Using the theoretical framework of medium theory and theory of Cultural Hegemony, this paper argues that citizen engagement via SMS discloses how public communication contributes to press freedom, problem-solving and nation-building in Namibia. The “What you’re saying” platform enables alternative and activist citizen participation in the discussion of their choice. This study used 286 SMS messages to identify areas of concern for Namibian citizens. The objectives were to identify and classify themes, communication acts, and frequency of keywords. The findings which reveal the concerns of the citizens, regarding education, health, service delivery, and the president; communication acts, such as complaints, criticism, suggestions, questions, or requests; and frequency of keywords related to these themes are in line with earlier studies which attribute citizen engagement in print media to the development of technology, access to the Internet and changing reading trends.

Keywords: Namibia, SMS, The Namibian, citizen engagement in print media, press freedom

Introduction

The integration of cameras, recording devices access to the Internet and software applications to enable communication worldwide has become common in recent decades due to the continuous change and improvement of communication technology. Thus, Short Message Service (SMS) has penetrated the world of communication for everyone who has access to the Internet. Subsequently, the dynamics of journalism have been transmuting from journalists reporting in print media, radio or television to citizen engagement and citizen journalism, where exciting news is communicated via various platforms or streamed live on the Internet. Whereas traditionally, the print media had to simply give out information to people that they would consume by reading, 21st-century audiences choose what they read, and can contribute content and immediately engage with current affairs, enjoy press freedom, and, as a result, can actively assist in problem-solving, and, thus, indirectly contribute to nation-building.

The use of modern communication technologies, such as PC, laptops, tablets, flash drives, and smartphones and the formal and informal dissemination of information via the Internet, such as websites and social media platforms have become enablers of such development. Smartphones, in particular, allow access to the Internet any time anywhere provided there is Internet access. Consequently, these contexts present a redefined world of journalism in general and citizen journalism in particular, where social media and newspapers allow spot feedback and updates on information. Whereas traditional journalism, which is the collection and dissemination of newsworthy information, was restricted to the traditional media, such as newspapers, magazines, TV or radio, citizen journalism employs new platforms, such as the Internet, websites, podcasts, social media, etc. It is a world where media houses can barely keep up and strive to achieve their level best. As a result, citizen engagement has changed the way journalism operates, which can be a valuable tool for aiding journalism in its pursuit for newsgathering and audience engagement. The Short Message Service has made it easier to communicate pressing issues publicly by giving a voice to the man on the street. Thus, the feature

“what you’re saying” in *the Namibian* is a very popular way of communicating complaint, unhappiness or praises publicly at the appropriate time. Therefore, the main objective of this study was to investigate the characteristics and content of the two hundred and eighty-six (286) SMSes published in *The Namibian*, under “What you’re saying”, at the beginning of the school and financial year.

Brief historical background of the feature “What you’re saying” in *The Namibian*

The Namibian is one of the major daily newspapers in Namibia. The newspaper was established in 1985 by Gwen Lister as a weekly newspaper, which initially relied on the support of donors. It aimed to promote Namibian independence from the South African government. News appears in English and Oshiwambo. Its first edition appeared on 30 August 1985 with a print run of 10,000 newspapers. *The Namibian* became a daily newspaper on 1 April 1989. Before independence, which Namibia gained on 21 March 1990, the newspaper worked courageously in difficult and often dangerous conditions. In 1990, as *The Namibian* was a supporter of the freedom fighters during the apartheid era, the newspaper was boycotted by the white minority business community to the extent that journalists and sympathizers of *The Namibian* were denied entry into shops all over the country. Nevertheless, the paper contributed immeasurably to press freedom and nation-building in Namibia.

The Namibian has never stopped being at the forefront of news reporting incorporating the latest developments in journalism, such as the feature “What You're Saying!”. These pages are dedicated to “short messages to the editor” encouraging Namibian citizens to comment on broad topics and raise questions, SMSes are quite affordable as they cost N\$1.00 for 160 characters. *The Namibian* publishes SMSes on several topics submitted by the public, usually anonymously, in its daily column “What you’re saying”. In these SMSes citizens comment, complain, give advice or raise concerns and questions publicly about their matters. The “What you’re saying” feature was introduced in July 2007 following the zeitgeist of the digital era. Starting with publishing around twenty (20) SMSes per day in 2007, this number has increased to around eighty (80), which equals a full page of the newspaper. It is evident that Namibians play an active role in social and political reporting, analysis of current issues, as well as dissemination of information. From the perspective of the media, several feedback mechanisms, such as letters to the editor, and nowadays SMSes, are offered as platforms to encourage readership engagement. Thus, this newspaper provides a conducive platform for Namibians to air their voices. In this sense, the newspaper has recognised the prints’ long-term trends of writing and not given readers a chance to participate in sharing news. As a result, it is now possible for citizens to engage and participate in effectively generating information.

Thus, the objectives of the study were to identify and classify areas of concern in these SMSes. Secondly, we aimed to identify and categorise communication acts, such as complaints, criticism, or suggestions. Thirdly, we examined the frequency of keywords and their relation to the themes. Finally, we demonstrated the relevance of citizen engagement in the feature “What you’re saying” in *The Namibian*.

Literature review

The role of the newspaper reader has changed from being a passive receiver of news and other information to actively participating in contributing and engaging with this journalism genre. This is made possible with the increased use of digital devices, which perfectly portrays the zeitgeist of the Internet era. Thus, readers choose the newspaper that they wish to read based on their needs,

interests, and the opportunity to contribute content. Journalists today typically strive to maintain objectivity, presenting stories without bias, but readers can still choose from among many different media outlets, and there are still often distinct differences in how different print media, such as newspapers, television news channels, and radio networks present news about the same issues (Walbert, 2012).

Seelye (2005) explains that in this world, "Get me rewrite" will in effect be a menu option, a way for unhappy readers to go online and offer their own versions of articles they do not like. Their hope is to convert the paper, through its Web site, *www.news-record.com*, into a virtual town square, where citizens have a say in the news and where every reader is a reporter. Seelye (2005) further believes that the so-called "The voice-of-God journalism" is being challenged by what is called participatory journalism, civic or citizen journalism. Some papers are starting to see participatory journalism as their hope for reconnecting with their audiences. Citizen journalism can appear in several forms but is usually a combination of citizen media and user-generated content. Rosen ("Citizen Journalism", n.d., para.1) offers a clear and simple definition of citizen journalism, stating that the former audience now utilise the press tools, such as print media, they have in their possession to inform one another. Radsch ("Citizen Journalism", n.d., para. 1), on the other hand, refers to it as "an alternative and activist form of news gathering and reporting that functions outside mainstream media institutions, often as a response to shortcomings in the professional journalistic field, that uses similar journalistic practices, but is driven by different objectives and ideals and relies on alternative sources of legitimacy than traditional or mainstream journalism".

Audience participation or participatory engagement occurs using a variety of media, such as the Internet. Therefore, citizen journalism, in general, and citizen engagement in print media, in particular, have, for example, helped to expose social, political, or economic matters, which were not covered by mainstream journalism. Equally important, the 21st century audiences choose what they read, and contribute content. It is an era of 'the techno world and beautiful writing' that has given ordinary people a voice, and freedom of speech and it certainly discourages the 'we write and you read' approach. Several studies confirm the shift in readership preference towards digital versions of newspaper content (Conaghan, 2015; Barthel, 2015). These digital audiences access the newspapers and platforms via their desktops, laptops, and tablets, but also increasingly through their smartphones. These studies further established that the digital audiences are between 25 – 44 years old. In addition, Barthel (2015) observes how the public conversation also gradually shifts to digital, even though, most newspaper reading still happens in print. According to readership data from Nielsen Scarborough's 2014 Newspaper Penetration Report, 56% of those who consume a newspaper read it exclusively in print, while 11% also read it on desktop or laptop computers; 5% also read it on mobile; and another 11% read it in print, on desktop and mobile. Barthel (2015) adds that more than eight in ten of those who read a newspaper do so in print. Only 5% read newspapers exclusively on mobile devices. The general demographics of newspaper readers remain consistent as well. The most likely to read newspapers are those with more education or more income. For the newspapers, this means a loss in profit as well as a decrease in the number of working journalists (Saperstein, 2014). Newspapers play very important roles in the documentation and publication of history. They publish the events in their dailies in chronological order as they happen. They also serve as a forum, where even a layman can participate in the activities of the newspapers. The public is encouraged to give suggestions and can agree or disagree with the opinions, policies, and contents. It is important to

share the opinions and content of the audience through newspapers. Wahl-Jorgensen (2015) notes the active role of the citizen in the process of newsgathering, analysing, and disseminating, which, as a result also gives marginalized communities a voice. Henceforth, citizen journalism has changed the way journalism operates, this indeed is a valuable tool in aiding journalism in their newsgathering and audience engagement. Therefore, the SMS platform published in a newspaper is an attempt to interlink the new media with traditional ones and incorporate and accommodate the audience's changing reading trends (Newman, 2018). To conclude, the SMS-featuring platform, which assists the media houses is equally important in developing the nation. A traditional world where newspapers had to simply publish information to people that they would consume by reading, is slowly vanishing, whereas changing reading trends emerge rapidly.

Theoretical framework

The Medium theory underpins this study. It was developed by Marshall McLuhan in 1964, who challenged conventional definitions when claiming that the medium is the message. He stresses how channels differ, not only in terms of their content but also concerning how they awaken and alter thoughts and senses. He popularized the idea that channels are a dominant force that must be understood to know how the media influence society and culture. McLuhan's Medium theory can be coupled with Gramsci, who provides a theory in the study of hegemony. Hegemony is created when the worldview of the ruling class is consented to as the cultural norm for society. In communication studies, investigations of hegemony are taking centre stage with the interpretive turn to investigate Namibian citizens' messages, and how they create and enact meaning. How they influence society and culture, on the other hand, is best explained as a new facet of an ideological struggle that exists under a capitalist hegemony, which is sustained through a process of structural mystification as will be discovered in this study.

Nonetheless, Medium theory focuses on the characteristics of the medium. The Medium theory concerns not only newspapers but also the Internet, digital cameras and other media. Rather, it is the symbolic environment of communicative acts, such as apologies, requests, compliments, invitations, greetings, and complaints. Thus, this study also investigates the most prominent communicative acts performed by the authors of the SMSes. This theory further states that media, apart from whatever content is transmitted, has an impact on individuals and society. Hence, the theory is used to analyse the contents of the SMSes concerning the interests of the citizens at the grassroots level. McLuhan believes that people adapt to their environment through a certain balance or ratio of the senses, and the primary medium of the age brings out a particular sense ratio, thereby affecting perception, as McLuhan's metaphors, such as "The medium is the message!"; "We live in a message."; or "The content of a new medium is an old medium" suggest. The Medium theory examines physical, psychological and social variables as the senses that are required to attend to the medium; whether the communication is bi-directional or anti-directional, how quickly messages can be disseminated, whether learning to encode and decode in the medium is difficult or simple, how many people can attend to the same message at the same moment, and so forth. Medium theorists argue that such variables influence the medium's use and its social, political, and psychological impact (McLuhan, 1964). In light of the above, the study aims to uncover the aspects of citizens' interests and communication acts of their messages.

Research methodology

This study follows a desktop analysis research design, which unpacks the characteristics and classifies the content of the SMS texts. It comprises a population of thousand and forty (1040) SMSes, which were published in between 1 – 28 February 2016 in *The Namibian*, of which the sample was two hundred and eighty-six (286) SMSes. The samples were selected utilising the Purposive Sampling method. The criteria used to select the sample was based on finding the most prominent themes in these SMSes. The analysis was carried out using text mining techniques, by coding, analysing and discussing themes, communication acts, and frequency of keywords, to gain insights into the interests, needs and concerns of the Namibian citizens.

Findings

Generally, The Namibian newspaper prints two pages of the 'What You're Saying'. Each page is carefully aligned in columns and the SMSes are arranged in bullet-pointed columns, following a pattern of bolded and unbolded for easy reading. Photographs are occasionally inserted to illustrate one or the other topic. The page also features the 'SMS of the Day' which is found on the top left corner and an advertisement down the right or left-hand side of the paper. Below each page of "What You're Saying", one finds a sentence that notifies readers that the opinions expressed through these SMSes are not necessarily a reflection of the view of *The Namibian* newspaper. A notice emphasises that submissions should be well thought through before being sent as only messages are published that promote fair and civil discussion. The language of these SMSes is formal. Messages are straightforward and carefully proofread, language corrected, and inappropriate language omitted. Although the SMSes are scrutinized by the editorial team, the content is never changed. Messages containing personal attacks, defamation, discriminatory remarks, or other negative content are not published. **Illustration 1** presents an example of the "What you're saying" feature.

SMS Of The Day

■ **NAMIBIAN** Police Inspector General Sebastian Ndeitunga, please tell us of the measures you have taken to address the shortage of police service vehicles. Have you started screening drivers to determine who are suitable to drive police cars? We are tired of being told of the transport shortage whenever we call the police for help. Should the shortage of police cars really stand between justice and the lives of an innocent citizens?

Food For Thought

■ IT seems the norm to casually drive through red traffic lights. This dangerous trend has forced me to slow down when approaching traffic lights indicating right of way for me. Something must be done soon to prevent accidents at intersections. Law enforcement agents should be aware of this irresponsible behaviour that is now common in Walvis Bay and everywhere around the country.

Bouquets And Brickbats

■ THANK you very much for publishing a story in your Friday edition of 29 Jan 2016, by a Zimbabwean business consultant, Runoziva Chipadza Whikai, titled, "Ministry of Home Affairs Lacks Fairness." Why is the govern-

ment spearheading such a xenophobic crusade against our neighbours when Namibians are treated with love and respect in Zimbabwe? We are all African brothers.

■ AS a patriotic citizen of this country, I fully support the sentiments made by former Prime Minister Nahas Angula and John Haufiku regarding students' demonstrations. It is true, one needs to critically think here.

■ ALTHOUGH the ministers' performance agreements are a joke, at least they have made their incompetence public. Viva nepotism, let them eat cake.

■ MY message to the 'struggle children' is that they must show responsibility and form teams to carry out community services, including repairing all damaged road signs, machines, etc in the Brakwater area. – OAP

■ WATER tariff increases to hit Windhoek residents. On what basis does the City of Windhoek increase water rates if they do not produce it? We all get water from rain which is provided by the Lord.

■ SLOWLY but surely the role of traditional leaders is diminishing. This started with traditional leaders accepting monthly allowances from the government.

■ MR Mburumba Kerina, the Ovaherero genocide is an issue only for the Ovaherero people. Stop mixing your Swapo politics with that of the Ovaherero. Go read the Bloubook.

Have Your Say
SMS your views to
99902
An SMS costs N\$1

■ **WOW!** The harambee plan looks good for Namibia and Namibians. Madam Prime Minister, all your ministers, PSEs and directors need to have the plan right in front of them 24 hours a day, seven days a week! It must form a part of their task plans. Well done! – OAP



Sheperd Bushiri

Sheperd Bushiri

■ **WONDER** Guchu, I am very impressed by your article on Sheperd Bushiri in *The Namibian*. Your investigative skills are just amazing and the way you narrated your story just excited the readers. Keep up the good work!

■ **THANK** you for the brilliant, eye-opening article on "prophet" Bushiri. Please educate yourselves on his get-rich-quick scheme. Watch videos of him on YouTube, "capturing" pics of people far away (while actually just opening a pic from the I-pad gallery). Check it out and believe in yourself, not in fraud!

■ **WHY** is our government reluctant to take steps against these bogus "prophets" who are coming from afar to swindle money from our desperate poverty-stricken people? The so-called prophet Bushiri should be arrested and made to declare what he is going to do with the money he collected from our people under the guise of blessings.

■ **BUSHIRI** was in the city! People have forgotten that they can actually pray for themselves. They believe in someone who claims to be a man of God rather than in their own selves. See how easy it is to fool black people!

■ **WOW!** That was a good piece of writing. In Namibia, we have editors and other journalists who write as if they are writing Grade 12 essays.

■ **WE** thank apostle Jimmy for bringing prophet Sheperd Bushiri to Namibia. We are truly blessed. Namibia is blessed!

■ **MONEY** does not bring blessings. How can you give N\$100 000 just to sit with a hustler that is using God's name to put bread on his table? – Jackal tactics

To The President

■ **MR President**, can you please request the minister of labour to send a credible and reliable labour inspector to talk to the manager of Eagle Night Security Services at Rosh Pinah. We refuse to work for N\$6 an hour. We are only wondering where the money this company gets from the mine is going to.

■ **WHAT** has the Presidential S&T got to do with the deaths of the people in Kunene? Let us be responsible and avoid such petty complaints because all former Presidents travelled abroad and it is part of the mandate of holding that office.

■ **I GREET** you Mr President, my father! I want to know when we, the low-income earners, will stop suffering from renting other people's houses? When will we ever be able to own affordable houses? Please come and rescue the poor people of Windhoek.

■ **PRESIDENT** Hage Geingob, how does Swapo Party define democracy? Does it mean that all these years that the Plan fighters were engaged in the liberation war were in vain? Why does it seem wrong to the Swapo leadership for members to differ on certain aspects of the party? It is just healthy and good for the party that ordinary members can also correct the politburo if they do not agree with their thinking.

■ **COMRADE President**, please consider some of the criticism about your ministers as a way to make you aware of the things that are being kept away from you, like the ministry of education not being able to plan in advance for places at schools and the ministry of health not having enough nurses at hospitals and clinics in the rural areas.

■ **WE** believe that our beloved President Hage Geingob will deliver on his promise to make Namibia a beautiful place for its citizens to live in. However, our main concern is whether all the ministers are willing to pull together with their commander to bring prosperity to the Land of the Brave.

■ **MR President**, we agree that to rule a country is not child's play. However act on the minor complaints from the masses – like the lack of action from the police to stop domestic violence; the labour ministry's never-mind attitude towards workers' complaints and the ministry of agriculture not looking after the water needs of the masses, especially in the rural areas.

Regional Issues

■ **GOBABIS** municipality chief executive officer, when will the pipe burst issue be solved. Year in and year out, there is never a solution to the simplest of jobs in the town.

■ **GOBABIS** municipality, until when do you expect the community of Gobabis to survive without water? We have been without water for more than two days now.

■ **NWR** management, I recently visited the Waterberg Resort over Christmas and was truly disappointed by the lack of good service from the staff as well as the after-care service from the resort. Please work on it.

■ **COUNCILLOR** of Oshikango constituency, when will you give us

electricity at Omahene's shebeen at Onengali village? You have been promising us this since 2009.

■ **MINISTER** of education, help our Grade 10 pupils of Lüderitz Junior Secondary School. How will the results ever improve if you take experienced, national market teachers from Grade 10 maths and English classes and replace them with inexperienced teachers? The principal and management do not consider the future of our children.

■ **THANK** you Rössing for evicting us from your houses and contributing to the housing demand in the country. We wanted to buy the houses but not at those exorbitant prices. Some of us stayed for more than 10 years paying market-related rent. The best you could have done is to deduct some of that money from the selling price.

■ **ELCRN**, I hope that the synod at Okahandja elects competent and capable leaders that can give the church direction and debate constructive theological issues, and not concentrate on petty issues to destroy certain people that they regard as a threat. I wonder whether the current church council debates the lessons that one can draw from the Reformation? — Concerned parishioner

Health

■ **PS** of health Andreas Mwombola, I want to know why registered nurses who go for post-graduate studies at Unam get S&T and are provided with accommodation by the ministry while the enrolled nurses for the bridging course get no benefits apart from tuition fees. We, the enrolled nurses for the bridging course from other regions, are suffering a lot in Windhoek.

■ **MINISTER** of health and social services, please explain why our qualified children are sitting at home unemployed while you are still employing people from countries like Kenya. Foreigners are occupying most of the key positions at the state clinics, and attending every single workshop in order to claim S&T and certificates of attendance, while the Namibians have to hold the fort.

■ **I AM** really disappointed in this Friendly Shop next to the service station in Wanaheda. Can a health inspector from the municipality inspect this shop, especially the butchery? They are selling rotten meat and flies are buzzing all over the place. Help us so that these people upgrade the butchery. A lot of people will get sick from their meat.



Bernard Haufiku

■ **MINISTER** of health Bernard Haufiku, the matron of Mpungu Health Centre in Kavango West region should be told to be more considerate and respectful towards the patients.

■ **HOW** does the recruitment policy at Swakopmund State Hospital work?

Tell it like it is!

MAKE your views known. It costs N\$1 for 160 characters. You will receive an acknowledgement for 'telling it like it is!' Selected views will be published in the newspaper. We are subsidising the costs and are not making profit from this service to the public.

Official responses only may be emailed to: smsfeedback@namibian.com.na
NB: We would also like to call on members of the public to exercise good judgement when sending their comments to the newspaper. *The Namibian* publishes the SMSes to promote fair and civil discussion.

VACANCY

Time for a career change? Apply for the following vacancy:
Personal Assistant to the Managing Director (1x Windhoek)

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CLOSING DATE: 15 February 2016

www.mtc.com.na

Please note that the opinions expressed do not necessarily reflect the views of *The Namibian*.

Illustration 1: "What You're Saying". Source: The Namibian (3 February 2016).

The "What you're saying" page has several features. They are divided into 11 categories, which are: *the SMS of the Day, Food for Thought, Bouquets and Brickbats, To the President, Regional Issues, Health, Politics, In Response, Labour, Service, Lost and Found, Police Matters, Education* and other topics that are making headlines in the country. The *SMS of the Day* represents the most interesting SMS submitted. *Food For Thought* should encourage the community to think about matters affecting

society. It could be informative, warning, advocatory, or a simple pointer on human rights, gender equality, and minority rights. *Bouquets and Brickbats* refer to complementary and adverse comments. The category *To the President* presents SMSes addressed directly to the President, Hage Geingob, or the Presidential Office. These messages frequently include pieces of advice, and encouragement to act or report hardships that people go through in various regions, especially rural areas. The category *Politics* deals with SMSes related to a variety of political issues. It is via political SMSes most politicians find out about the public's opinion on various topics.

In general, the examined messages contain political, social, and educational content, which is in line with Conaghan's (2015) and Barthel's (2015) statement that citizen engagement has assisted in exposing social, political, or economic issues, that are not covered by mainstream journalism. Messages related to the theme of Health, for instance, include accounts of happenings at hospitals and clinics. They complain about or appraise the service delivery of those institutions. Furthermore, some SMSes advise, while others criticize the Minister of Health and his Permanent Secretary on what to do. Another group of SMSes addresses issues related to police matters. They criticize where police do wrong and praise when the police do well. Educational matters can be found under social issues. These text messages concern issues surrounding the education system as well as the Ministry of Education. Some offer their advice to the minister. *In response* are SMSes that answer people's queries or give clarification to uncertain arguments. Some writers stay anonymous while others' names appear when responding to queries or providing information. SMSes advise the Minister, Prime Minister, and the President on how to rule and manage issues affecting the nation. Texts on service delivery expose companies' performance regarding customer satisfaction.

The number of SMSes published per day depends on the number of text messages received during the week. For example, the visit of the controversial Prophet Shepherd Bushiri who visited Namibia in February was the talk of the town during that month. The research found that he was amongst the most talked about people for that month.

However, this study limits its focus on the following four categories:

- SMSes addressed to *the President*
- SMSes concerning *health issues*
- SMSes concerning *education*
- SMSes related to *service delivery*

The table below indicates the number of SMS sent per week in February 2016 according to the above-mentioned categories.

Table 1: Number of SMSes

Theme	Week 1	Week2	Week3	Week 4	Total SMS	%
Education	35	11	17	26	89	31%
To the President	36	13	14	22	85	30%
Health	18	14	11	21	64	22%
Service delivery	16	8	5	19	48	17%
Total SMSes: 286						100%

SMSes on education

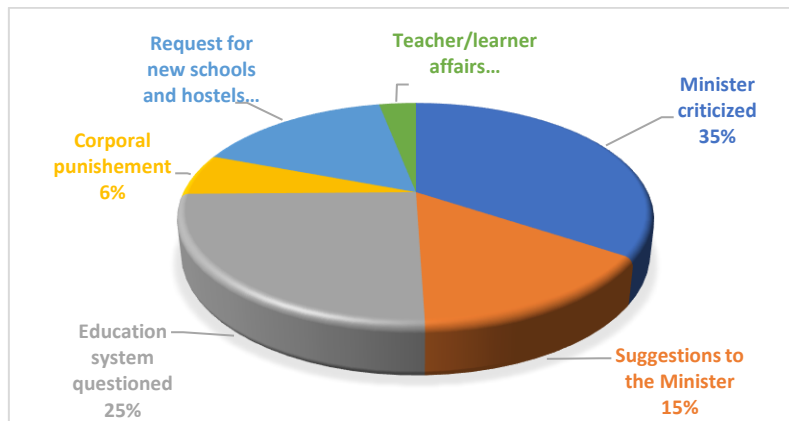
The analysis shows that of the six subtopics, two are rather negative and distrustful of the education system, whereas a third message suggests how to improve education in Namibia and ask for new schools and hostels, which demonstrates that these citizens indeed care about the education of their children.

However, more than one-third of the SMSes criticize the Minister, which is quite a substantial amount. The remaining topics include questions about the education system, which are also addressed to the Minister indirectly, and corporal punishment.

Table 2: Smses on Education

Communication act	Theme: Education	Number of SMSes
Criticism	Minister criticized	34
Suggestion	Suggestions to the Minister	15
Question	Education system questioned	25
Complaint	Corporal punishment	6
Request	Request for new schools and hostels	16
Complaint	Teacher /learner affairs	3
	Total	89

Figure 1 : SMSes on education

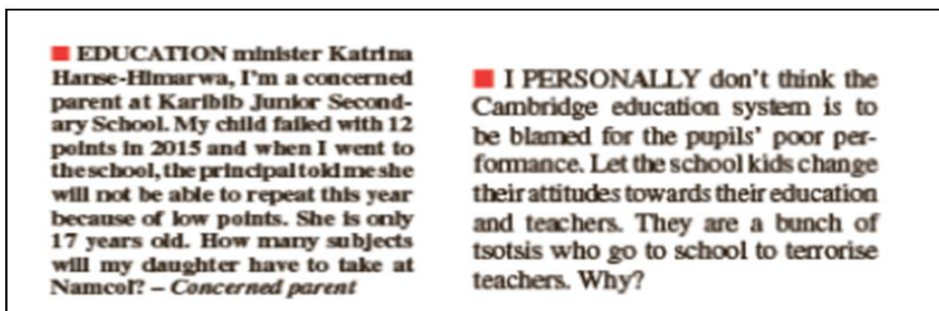


As presented in the above table and pie chart, the study reveals that, overall, a little less than one-third, 31%, of the SMSes were about the topic of education. The results further indicate that, in this group, 35% of SMSes criticised the Minister of Education. People complained about her not visiting schools in the regions and paying attention to schools in Windhoek only. Another complaint was of her not responding to educational matters. Some felt that she did not care about teachers by not supporting proper remuneration of teachers. Another blame was for her supporting and driving unattainable expectations for the teachers who have more than 35 learners in their classes and no proper teaching equipment. Some learners and parents are angry with the Minister for raising the passing point from 23 points to 25 points in Grade 10 and raising points from 25 to 27 in Grade 12. The messages expressed that writers seem to believe a rise in points would contribute to unemployment because if one did not obtain enough points, he/she would not be able to go to a tertiary institution and would be forced to stay home or look for temporary jobs. 25% of people expressed their grievance with the Local Namibian education system. Most of them claimed that it contributes to the high failure and drop-out rate in schools.

In 2016 Namibia had been independent for 26 years, nevertheless, it still did not have enough schools and hostels for learners. 16% of people wanted the government to build new schools and hostels for learners because children were still taught under trees and in shacks, especially in the Ohangwena region. To resolve most of the problems, 15% of the writers suggested the Minister should resolve some of these problems. Honorable Katrina Hanse-Himarwa, for example, was advised by the public to visit various schools in the region to see for herself how delapidated the schools were. It was also suggested that NSFAP should automatically allocate loans, grants and bursaries to orphans and less privileged children. Six percent of the SMSes talked about the mistreatment of learners by the teachers, who were supposed to be caregivers, mentors and teachers. People also complained about school and university fees. Some SMSes raised grievances related to teachers rendering bad service as well as not being qualified.

Messages regarding teachers’ immoral behaviour towards learners accounted for 3%. These messages were directed to the government and demanded an investigation into the matter as abuse causes long-term damage to a child. Lastly, some messages were from teachers addressing perceived mistreatment they suffer because of the educational system. Some reasons mentioned were exploitation, underpayment and not being respected.

Illustration 2: Examples of SMSes on the topic of education



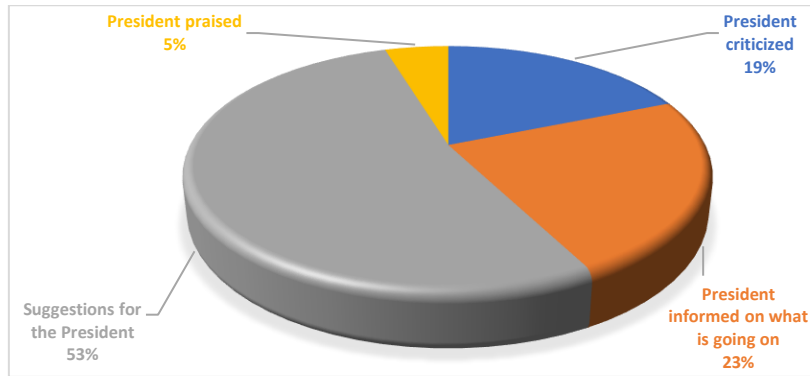
The President

Of the eighty-five SMSes during February 2016, more than half presented suggestions for improvement. This shows that the Namibian citizens think critically and creatively, but also that they know what is right and wrong. A little less than half of the SMSes were dedicated to informing the president about the state of affairs at the grassroots level and thus criticising the president. Surprisingly, only a mere 5 % had content praising the president and his actions.

Table 3: Categories of the SMSes on the President

Communication act	Theme: President	
Criticism	President criticized	16
Information-giving	President informed on what is going on	20
Suggestion	Suggestions for the President	45
Review	President praised	4
	Total	85

Figure 2: SMSes on the President



The SMSes addressed to the President represented 30% of the total sample. This is an indication that people care about their country and participate in the political debate. The diagram above illustrates that more than half of all messages to the President are suggestions for the President on a variety of issues. This shows people’s opinions and interest in problem-solving on a national level. Suggestions to the President are followed by pieces of advice ranging from how to improve conditions at the international airport to advice on how to, for example, select people for hero’s status.

This study shows that the writers elucidate their views in these messages to be heard as they are aware that their messages via this platform might contribute to the development of this country. This example is addressed to the highest authorities in the Government:

Mr. President and Madam Prime Minister, yes, there are lots of problems in our country, but also lots of good things and good opportunities! Please concentrate on: the greed of those who have the wealth; the corruption of our leaders and the daily abuse, theft and waste created by many of our people in charge, especially in the civil service. A drastic money-saving action must be taken now, no excuses and no delays, just deal with in now, please-OAP. (The Namibian, February 2016)

This study also indicates that another 23% of presidential SMSes inform the Head of State of the happenings in their respective areas. Many farm workers who are exploited by their employers make use of this platform. This is an indication that Namibia has freedom of speech and citizen engagement is practiced even in remote rural areas. Finally, 19% of SMSes are related to criticism. The criticism directed at the President is frequently related to issues with the government. In other words, for any dissatisfaction with the public sector the President is blamed. In addition, disappointment and grievance are expressed about the country’s wealth not being distributed equally, housing issues, and the high corruption rates among civil servants. Lastly, only 5 % of the messages praise the President’s administration.

Illustration 3: Examples of Smses to the President

■ **DEAR President, please move the parliament to Ramatex for the following reasons: lawmakers will get closer to the poor people. (Some of them may have forgotten how a ghetto looks like.) Residents of Katutura will be able to walk to parliament and watch proceedings. It will save money (about N\$700 million) from the amount which is earmarked for the new parliament.**

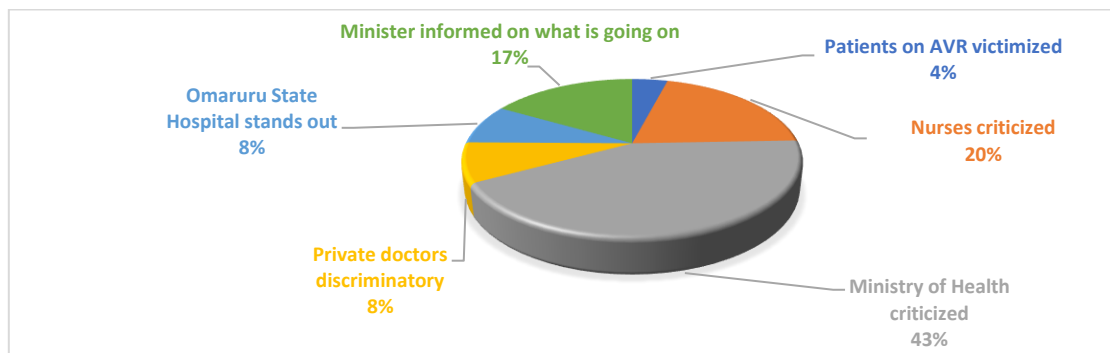
■ **MR President, we are in a crisis and we may not have water by August – in five months’ time. Some possible solutions are: reduce mains pressure and fix all leaks and broken pipes countrywide. Stop the use of hose-pipes for all car-cleaning businesses and stop watering government and municipality gardens. Also, control beer and soft drink businesses, public toilets, institutions and schools. Lead by good example! – OAP**

SMSes on health issues

Table 4: Summary of the SMSes about health issues

Communication act	Theme: Health	
Complaint	Patients on AVR victimized	2
Criticism	Ministry of Health and Social Services (MHSS) and nurses criticized	21
Reviews	Private doctors discriminatory (Omaruru State Hospital stands out)	8
Information giving	Minister informed on what is going on	7
	Total	48

Figure 3: SMSes on health services



As shown in the above pie chart, messages on the topic of health rank third place representing 22% of the total population. Slightly over one-third (35%) of the messages criticize the Ministry of Health and Social Services. People mostly complained about the bad service rendered by nurses countrywide. They plead with the Minister to intervene in this matter so that they are more considerate and respectful towards the patients. A message from Walvis Bay, for example, raised a concern regarding nurses who inhumanly treat patients. Other SMSes report about bad services at state hospitals and clinics, such as Katutura State Hospital's Antenatal Care, Swakopmund State Hospital, Karibib Clinic, Khomas Medical Services, Katima Mulilo State Hospital, Keetmashoop State Hospital and Gobabis RMT. The authors of the messages also include nurses, who complain about working conditions of different sorts, such as uniforms not being available on time or not receiving overtime payment for several months. These nurses turned to the media as the matter had not been dealt with at the level of the Regional Director of the Health and Labour Union. One-fifth (20%) criticize nurses mainly who offer bad service to patients. A few of the writers wanted the Minister of Health to visit the Katima Mulilo State Hospital maternity ward, as there seems to be a lack of qualified personnel. As a result, they claim that newborns die, or midwives express their unwillingness in a derogatory manner when called for assistance. A total of 17% of SMSes include information about the states in the hospitals. Only 8% of messages share the good news, such as that Omaruru State Hospital was one of the hospitals with a reputable status. Patients and visitors commend its cleanliness and reputable status. Another 8% of SMSes talked about private doctors who refuse to assist patients with Government Medical Aid (PSEMP) as government medical aid delays paying the bills and, thus, patients feel discriminated against. Similarly, 4% of the messages' content concerns victimisation of HIV patients.

Illustration 4: SMSes on the topic of health services

■ **WHAT** is going on at the Keetmanshoop State Hospital? Do the doctors know what it means to be a doctor and the nurses what it means to be a nurse? It seems that some of these people are just working for the money. People's lives mean nothing to them. I hope that God will have mercy on them.

■ **MINISTER** Bernard Haufiku, your nurses at the maternity ward of the Katitma Mulilo State Hospital need urgent help. I think they need training in the field of interpersonal relations! They are a threat to society. How can you fail to endorse the correct time and date of a birth while doing your job as a midwife? Shame on them! It's an experience I went through personally!

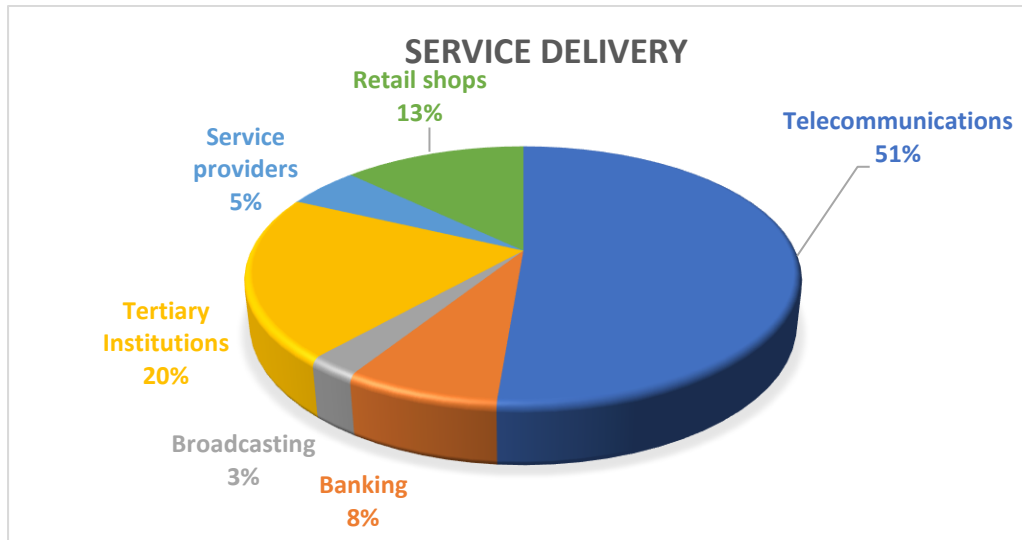
Service delivery and companies

Below are companies that were mentioned in the SMS regarding either bad or good service.

Table 5: Summary of the SMSes about Service delivery

Communication act	Service delivery	
Complaints/comment	Telecommunications: MTC, Telecom	20
comment	Banks: Standard Bank Rundu Branch, First National Bank Mariental	3
comment	NBC: Damara Nama Radio service	1
comment	Tertiary Institutions: IUM, UNAM, NUST	8
comment	Service provider: NATIS Walvis Bay, City of Windhoek - Parks and Garden Department	2
comment	Retail Shops: Pick'n'Pay Grootfontein, Mondesa Woermann Brock, Namib Mills	5
	Total	48

Figure 6: Summary of the SMSes on Service delivery



The above table and pie chart show the summary of the SMSes regarding Service delivery. This theme is the least talked about yielding 17% of the total sample. In this category, writers expressed their dissatisfaction with the customer services they receive from different companies. This study ascertains that 99.99% of these SMSes are negative describing unsatisfactory and substandard customer service they receive from these businesses. The diagram illustrates that slightly more than half (51%) of these complaints are related to the telecommunication industry of which half were addressed to MTC's service delivery issues. The main concerns were network coverage problems in

some parts of Namibia, especially in rural areas, some towns, and the coast.

The study also reveals that there are several grievances towards tertiary institutions, as the pie chart above shows. One-fifth (20%) of SMSes are from students regarding local universities. Issues comprised high university fees, the lack of hostels and the lack of library books. Students also protested the bad services rendered by university staff members, in particular at IUM and UNAM. When requesting academic records, they were either not available or unnecessarily delayed. If they received them, they were faulty.

Retail shops were also mentioned, which represented 13% of the complaints. Woermann Brock, Pick'n'Pay and Namib Mills were mentioned as not being up to standard regarding customer service. SMSes on banking services represented 8%. Customers complained about the E-Wallet service of First National Bank not working properly. Regarding Standard Bank, customers complained about employees who pursue private business at work and do not help clients.

Government institutions are classified as service providers, such as NATIS and the City of Windhoek. Service providers were represented in 5% of the text messages. NATIS customers complained about slow and unfriendly service, and City of Windhoek clients criticised the availability of City Police Officers on duty who were "nowhere to be found" when needed for emergencies. People also voiced their disapproval of the City of Windhoek's bus service, it being unprofessional regarding departure times and cleanliness. Lastly, 3% of the complaints were related to the services of The National Broadcasting Corporation (NBC).

Illustration 5: SMS example on the topic of Service Delivery

■ MTC Namibia, we need network coverage at Nepara village. We are tired of climbing trees in search of proper network coverage. We don't want to disturb the snakes in their comfort zone.

■ MTC Namibia, get serious with the internet network. Why only 2G and E network at Harmony Centre? We need 3G or 4G network, please.

Companies and ministries

This study reveals that MTC was the most commented-on company regarding customer service. Around half (51%) found fault with the customer service received from MTC. For example, one anonymous writer complained about "Aweh-Aweh" airtime that promises 100 free minutes on the MTC website, yet only half was provided (The Namibian, 8 February 2016). The above scenario forced MTC to act appropriately and promptly. It acknowledged wrongdoing with an apology, additionally, the company, provided the benefits as initially marketed on its website. In addition, MTC had to pay a fine to CRAN (Communication Regulatory Association of Namibia).

Frequency of keywords used

The lexical frequency used in the SMSes was also examined to get a glimpse into the public mind. The most frequently used word is 'president'. It is mostly used as a salutation but also occurs in text. Some salutations address the President as Comrade President. By using this title, writers accord respect and credence to the President, considering the office he occupies. The word appeared seventy-eight (78) times in the total of two hundred and eighty-six (286) SMSes examined. The word "services" appears fifty-two (52) times, and just like other most common words, it appeared in any of the themes. The

word “minister” appeared thirty-six (36) times, most SMSes don’t mention the minister’s name and just address them as minister. “Unprofessional”, also appeared twenty-nine (29) times, the word was mostly used when describing services, which often ended with “unprofessional staff members”.

Table 6: Frequency of occurrence of keywords

Word	Frequency of occurrence	Average occurrence
<i>president</i>	78	3,6
<i>services</i>	52	5,5
<i>minister</i>	36	7,9
<i>unprofessional</i>	29	9,8

The most frequently used words confirm the figures generated by the messages regarding the classified themes. They are congruent to the figures regarding topics, and messages to the president and ministers, as well as to the theme of service delivery in the various governmental and parastatal organisations, and organisations and businesses in the private sector. In other words, “president” appeared in every 3,6th SMS, “services” in every 5,5th SMS, “minister” in approximately every 8th and “unprofessional” in approximately every 10th of the 286 SMSes.

Discussion

Based on the findings regarding the published SMS messages on messages to the President, matters related to health and health services, education and service delivery, it can be stated that the topics identified run concurrent with Conaghan (2015) and Barthel’s (2015) report which mentions that citizen engagement in print media contributes to unfold social, economic or political matters. The communication acts identified and presented above, which include complaints, praises, suggestions, comments, criticism, reviews, etc. can be confirmed with Walbert (2012) who states that readers choose and contribute content based on their needs and interests. Furthermore, we can see how citizen engagement in the form of SMS messages published in *The Namibian* contributes to informing the nation of issues at the grassroots level, which confirms Rosen’s (“Citizen Journalism, n.d., para. 1) claim that citizens nowadays possess the newspaper to inform each other. Similarly, it corroborates Wahl-Jorgensen’s (2015) observation that it provides a platform for the voices of citizens in marginalised groups. In addition, the above findings demonstrate how newsgathering through citizen engagement has changed the way journalism operates, as it proves to be a valuable tool in contributing to journalism (Newman, 2018). Regarding the frequency of keywords used, we note that President, Minister, services, and unprofessional rank on top. This is yet another confirmation that political issues and matters related to the economy are predominant as mentioned by Conaghan (2015) and Barthel (2015). These messages are excellent examples of how citizens can participate in problem-solving and nation-building at large, mainly due to Namibia being the top-ranking African country exercising press freedom (Press Freedom Index Africa, 2023).

Conclusion

To conclude, of the two hundred and eighty-six (286) SMSes analysed, it was confirmed that the issues raised are of serious concern for the Namibian citizen. The issues raised are related to the themes of education and educational facilities, which topped all other categories, health and service delivery in health institutions, the President and service delivery at various organizations in the public, parastatal and private sectors. This type of citizen engagement with public issues via a daily newspaper gives a

voice to the Namibian citizens on a public platform to a country-wide audience. The messages published are a reflection of the state of mind and emotions of the general population. Overall, the details of the insights into the realities of the population at the grassroots-level, depict a picture of a state of discontent with a variety of activities of the Office of the President, ministers and public institutions, and also grievances with service delivery in the public and the private sector.

Most important and noble, the “What you’re saying” platform publishes suggestions for improvement in those areas. This shows that this type of engaging platform is a useful addition to the traditional way of journalistic reporting as it provides room for staying abreast with legitimate concerns of the ordinary citizen, which might otherwise not be prioritized. It further offers the opportunity, not only to react publicly but to note and table concerns for discussion and decision-making at higher levels to improve service delivery and the states in the regions of Namibia. Thus, this type of participatory citizen engagement proves to be a meaningful tool concerning problem-solving and, in the long run, can contribute to nation-building in Namibia, as problems that might have stayed unseen, are brought to light using this platform. Lastly, it needs to be pointed out that SMSes on the topic of education excelled in the other categories, representing 31% of the total number. This reflects the significance and magnitude of the issues. The authors of these messages primarily expressed grievance against the Namibian education system and the Minister of Education. In second place were the SMSes to the president which represent 30%, followed by Health issues which make up 22% of the total population and, lastly, service delivery with 17%.

Further research on SMSes in “What you’re saying” and their contents could be conducted. Comparative as well as new studies could be carried out to determine whether this type of citizen engagement has an impact on the betterment of service delivery and other grievances, as well as the development of the state of the country in general.

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