Decoding Government Publications: A Reception Study of the *Metro Ezasegagasini*

By

Charmel Nikita Payet

2024

Decoding Government Publications: A Reception Study of the Metro *Ezasegagasini*

By

Charmel Nikita Payet

Student Number: 20600788

Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements of the Degree of Master of Journalism in the Faculty of Arts and Design at Durban University of Technology

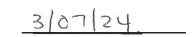**Supervisor:** Dr Sam Erevbenagie Usadolo

Co-Supervisor: Zwakele Ngubane

February 2024

DECLARATION

I, Charmel Nikita Payet, declare that the research work presented in this dissertation is my original work and all the materials used are appropriately acknowledged and explicitly referenced.

I also confirm that the dissertation has not been submitted in any of its part or entirety for any degree in any other institution of higher learning internationally or locally.

I, therefore, give permission for my work to be made available for replication and/or for reprinting, for inter-library loan, and for the title and abstract of my dissertation to be made available to other educational institutions and students that might need it.

3/07/24

ABSTRACT

The government is responsible for transparently communicating with the public about its work. To fulfil this mandate, the eThekwini Municipality distributes the bi-weekly *Metro Ezasegagasini* publication as a communication tool, with almost similar content to community newspapers. Community newspapers have survived the decline in newspapers as their news coverage is of interest and focused on the communities they cover.

This study explored how readers of the *Metro Ezasegagasini* decode the content and the influence this may have on how they perceive the municipality. The Theory of Reception was used as the analytic lens in the study because the theory focuses on the way an audience decodes text. A qualitative research approach was adopted because this study aimed to gain insight from the readers' experiences with the metro publication. Data was collected from three focus groups in rural, township, and urban settings. A thematic research approach was used to analyse the data by identifying, analysing, and then reporting on themes.

The study found that the *Metro Ezasegagasini* was fulfilling its role of educating and informing the public about developments in the city. It also emerged that the different backgrounds of participants impact how readers interact with the text and whether they view it as a credible source of information. Participants from the township and rural areas adopted a more favourable position to the publication, while participants from the urban community were more critical of the content. The study also found that participants enjoyed reading the publication because of its strong community focus. Another issue that emerged during the study was the accessibility and distribution of the publication, with many readers highlighting the lack of easy access to the publication.

Keywords: Reception theory, *Metro Ezasegagasini,* negotiated reading, oppositional reading, and preferred reading.

DEDICATION

This research is dedicated to everyone who accompanied me on this long and arduous academic journey. Life has drastically changed from when I started my master's journey to where I am now. Thank you to those who have stood alongside me and encouraged, motivated and believed in me, especially when the going got tough and I wanted to give up.

I would not have been able to do this without your love, guidance and support.

To my darling son, Ethan: You are the absolute light of my life, my heart in human form. Achieving this milestone is for you, my most favourite person in the world. I hope I inspire you to greatness because I believe you can achieve anything you want.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First, I would like to thank God for sustaining me on this journey; He has blessed me with people who have supported and motivated me. His power is made perfect in weakness. Indeed, His grace has been sufficient for me.

I also thank my supervisors, Dr Sam Erevbenagie Usadolo and Mr Zwakele Ngubane. Thank you for not giving up on me, especially for the long periods that I did not submit any work and reneged on attending our progress meetings. Your guidance has been tremendously beneficial, and I have this finished work only because of your supervision and belief that I could do it – and, of course, the threat of withdrawing as my supervisor if I did not get my act together! That was all the motivation I needed to get to work because I treasured your invaluable guidance, Sam.

To my mother, who always checked on me doing my "master's work", thank you for your support and prayers. My sister Juanique, who started this master's journey with me, come on, Sis, you can still do it!

Thank you to Mitchell, who started this journey with me five years ago and encouraged me to achieve my goals; even though life has taken us on different paths, you have been integral to helping me achieve this dream.

Finally, to Charlyne: Thank you for being a ray of sunshine and optimism. Thank you for inspiring me and encouraging me. Your faith in me is much appreciated; your encouragement to believe in myself and not set limitations or doubt myself was foundational for this achievement.

ACRONYMS

TABLE OF CONTENT

LIST OF TABLES

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

1.1   INTRODUCTION

This chapter explores the link between government publications and community newspapers to determine the impact of *Metro Ezasegagasini,* the main communication tool of the eThekwini Municipality, on residents' lives, if any. The importance of the study, its scope, and the methodology used are also discussed. A summary outlining subsequent chapters and their respective content is also provided.

1.2   BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

The government is responsible for transparently communicating with the public about its work. It is a fundamental requirement of a successful democracy to inform the public about government actions, requiring government information to be open and accessible to the public and develop tools and strategies to keep the public informed (Fairmans, Plowman and Rawlins 2007: 24).

To fulfil this mandate, the eThekwini Municipality distributes a bi-weekly publication, the *Metro Ezasegagasini,* as a communication tool – with similar content to community newspapers − to keep residents abreast of city-related developments and programmes. The information is shared because newspapers have power beyond printed pages and support a vibrant democracy by tying individuals to their local communities (Mersey 2010: 517).

Newspapers are, therefore, a powerful tool to ensure an informed and empowered citizenry. The *Metro Ezasegagasini* is the official eThekwini Municipality publication through which ratepayers and residents are informed of news and perspectives in greater Durban. It is a forum for readers' views and is published fortnightly in English and isiZulu, with 100 000 copies distributed. It is also available on the municipality's website at https://www.durban.gov.za/pages/government/reports-and-publications.

According to the report of the South African Communications Unit (2014: 1), the publication is the second main platform, after radio, through which the city's residents receive municipal information. The publication is distributed in semi-urban and township areas and to municipal offices, clinics, libraries, and Sizakala Customer

Service Centres, and some copies are inserted into mainstream newspapers.

Given the widescale distribution of the publication, this study intends to analyse how readers engage with the content and, through decoding the information, how it impacts their understanding of local government activities.

According to Moodley (2011: 17), the crisis faced by mainstream newspapers has created an opportunity for localised communication through community newspapers that carry content specific to community interests. This opportunity is why community newspapers expand their footprint: they effectively inform communities. They do this by catering to the needs of those in the community who want to be informed of local government affairs (Moodley 2011: 17).

Community newspapers are similar to the eThekwini Municipality's publication, the *Metro Ezasegagasini,* which carries local, community-focused news. Currently, no study has examined metro publications or newspapers in terms of how they have fulfilled their mandate of informing their target audiences, which is what this study aims to do.

Studies on community newspapers with a similar focus are evident, however. According to Lauterer (2006: 3), community newspapers typically cover municipal issues, school, sports and community members' achievements, like the *Metro Ezasegagasini,* the newspaper that is the focus of this study.

This study intends to add a fresh perspective to the literature on metro newspapers, especially regarding their effectiveness as a communication tool with the public and how they affect residents' opinions of the municipality.

1.3   RESEARCH PROBLEM

A community newspaper (*Fourways Review*) in Johannesburg that was examined in terms of its impact on its target audience by Potter (2016: 163) revealed that the paper impacted the community's civic life or increased their participation in civic life. In KwaZulu-Natal, a community newspaper *Izwi,* now defunct, that was written in both English and isiZulu for the Cato Manor community, provided its readers with valuable information about new roads, housing, development projects and other services offered in the area (Mhagama 2004: 77). The *Izwi* was widely read because it appealed to local needs and its door-to-door delivery system ensured that there was

even distribution of the newspaper and ensured many of its target audience had a chance of receiving it (Mhagama 2004: 79). The research about the publications above reveal that community newspapers' focus is mainly on their local communities. For example, Lauterer (2006: 3) states that community newspapers typically cover municipal issues, school, sports and community members' achievements.

Lauterer's (2006) observation is supported by Moodley (2011: 17), who suggests that the popular advantage of community newspapers is that the news content focuses purely on localised issues that impact the immediate community, which is why the news interests them.

However, none of these studies mentioned, or any other to the researcher's knowledge, have dealt with issues of metro newspapers' reception and their impact on their target audiences at the municipal-wide level, especially in the eThekwini Municipality, which is the location of this study. In this study, readers' analyses of this government publication, the *Metro Ezasegagasini,* and their experience with its content are investigated using a Reception Theory approach that discusses the meanings of a text on an audience and the effect it has on the audience, as suggested by Staiger (2005: 2).

The present study is important as it will help to examine if the paper *(*the *Metro Ezasegagasini)* is achieving its purpose of informing the municipality's residents about municipal activities that have a bearing on their lives. By seeking to investigate readers' analyses of the newspaper and the direct impact it has on them as the intended audience, this study will add a new perspective to the literature on metro newspapers, especially as it relates to their effectiveness as a tool to communicate to their public and how they affect the residents' opinions of the municipality.

1.4   AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

This study explores how readers of the *Metro Ezasegagasini* decode the content and the influence this may have on how they perceive the municipality. The meaning an individual derives from a text differs for each reader as they fill in the gaps of the text with their individual lives and experiences (Jarvis 2003: 263−264). The assumption is that a clear distinction exists between producers' encoding of media texts and audiences' subsequent decoding of the text (Durham and Kellner 2006: 95).

Therefore, this study investigates how eThekwini residents decode the information in the *Metro Ezasegagasini* and whether the meaning residents extract influences them.

The following are the research objectives of the study:

- To investigate how readers' understanding of the publication has deepened their understanding of municipal activities.
- To investigate if readers' frames of reference influence how they understand the metro publication and accept it as reliable for projecting municipal activities.
- To investigate if readers directly oppose the text or message in the publication.
- To examine if the readers' different backgrounds are evident in how they understand the publication and municipal activities.

To realise the above mentioned objectives, the following research questions will guide the study:

- How does the readers' understanding of the publication deepen their understanding of municipal activities?
- How does the reader's frame of reference affect how they decode the metro publication and accept it as trustworthy in projecting municipal activities?
- What is the nature of readers' response to the publication's text or message: direct opposition or negotiated meaning?
- How do the readers' backgrounds influence their understanding of the publication and municipal activities?

1.5 IMPORTANCE OF THE STUDY

The *Metro Ezasegagasini* is the main communication tool of the eThekwini Municipality. This study explores if this communication tool is effective by examining how readers engage with the content of the publications and if the goal of the encoder of the text of the *Metro Ezasegagasini* is achieved by how the decoder (resident) interacts with it.

Knowing if the message of the encoder and decoder are congruent is important because the municipality aims to increase the distribution of the publication to have a

wider reach. It is, therefore, important to understand the effectiveness with which media and newspapers inform the public's opinion of municipal matters.

Agee, Ault and Emery (1998, cited in Govender 2010: 1) state that the media touches people's lives at diverse levels, often without peoplse even realising the impact because community newspapers in South Africa have adapted and modelled their content to a new community way of life by offering news that meets readers' needs (Moodley (2011: 19).

This study intends to provide insight into whether the *Metro Ezasegagasini* municipal publication is achieving its goal of informing the public and increasing readers' understanding of municipal events and programmes.

1.6   SCOPE OF THE STUDY

The study is limited to three identified areas: Chesterville in Ward 24, Berea in Ward 31 and Umkhumbane in Ward 29. These are township, urban and rural areas, respectively. These areas fall under the central region of eThekwini. Presently, the publication is distributed in four regions in the municipality: north, south, west and central. The highest distribution of the *Metro Ezagagasini* is in the central region, which is why areas in this region were selected.

It is important to understand the history of Durban and the areas being sampled in the study because the history and experience of the communities may have a bearing on how the participants interact with the text of the publication that is the focus of the study.

Megebhula (1994: 60) states that Durban was established in 1824 as a colonial and commercial port. By 1911, the city included 116,000 citizens, comprising 45 percent Indian, 37 percent White and 18 percent Black (Megebhula 1994: 60). When the apartheid regime was introduced in South Africa in 1948, races were segregated into group areas. The inner city and coastal areas, excluding the port, were reserved for whites, with black townships created on the periphery of the city (Megebhula 1994: 60). Over 50 percent of Indians and almost 70 percent of Africans were moved to areas away from the inner city and thus further from their places of work. One of the areas, as described by Megebhula (1994: 62), was Chesterville. It is a rental housing

township established in the 1940s near the city centre for African families relocated from Cato Crest.

Another area is Wiggins Umkhumbane, located within Cato Manor, which has historical significance after many African and Indian people were removed from Cato Manor due to the Group Areas Act (Myeni 2005: 58). The area remained underdeveloped and neglected until the late 1980s and saw several land invasions and informal settlements established due to the vacant land (Myeni 2005: 58).

Areas such as Berea were predominantly reserved for White citizens, while the study's other areas (Chesterville and Umkhumbane) were established to cater for Black citizens. From a historical viewpoint, the experiences of residents living in the three different areas may differ and influence how they interact and decode the text of the *Metro Ezasegagasini*.

1.7   METHODOLOGY

A qualitative research approach is adopted for this study. This method is best suited for this study because the research is exploratory. It seeks to collect descriptive data to discover people's ideas, words and insights (Kothari 2004: 36; Taylor, Bogdan and DeVault 2015: 4) from the selected participants. This study employs qualitative research methods to gain insight from the reader about their experiences of the metro publication.

Qualitative data cannot be accurately measured and counted and are generally expressed in words or text rather than numbers (Walliman 2011: 72−73). Qualitative research is the preferred approach in this study. Its data analysis methods make it possible to untangle human activities and attributes, such as ideas, customs and beliefs, that cannot be pinned down and measured in any exact way, as would be the case in quantitative research, because the data are descriptive text (Walliman 2011: 72−73). This method supports the aim of the study, which is to understand better how the readers of the Metro Ezasegagasini interact with its text and their experiences of the content it carries descriptively instead of measuring predefined variables. Hence, reception studies that allow researchers to understand better how individuals engage and put meaning to the text (Brussel 2017: 1) they are reading will be used as an analytic lens in this study.

6

Focus groups were selected in the three areas using purposive sampling to ensure participants possessed the desired characteristics for the study. The selection of participants in the focus groups were identified by the researcher using criteria which was they had to be a frequent reader of the publication.

The only criterion for participating in the study was that participants were frequent readers of the publication (the *Metro Ezasegagasini*). The study aimed to understand how the Metro *Ezasegagasini* impacted readers' lives. Therefore, it was crucial to recruit participants who were regular readers of the publication. As Tongco (2007, p. 150) explains, purposive sampling involves deliberately choosing participants based on specific characteristics they possess. In this case, the desired characteristic was being a frequent reader of the Metro *Ezasegagasini.* This ensured that participants could answer the focus group questions and meaningfully contribute to discussions about the publication's influence. Eight to 10 participants were identified for each of the three focus groups used to collect data.

A thematic network analysis approach was used to analyse the data. The data analysis involved making summaries of each transcript and piece of data to condense the information gathered into key themes and topics that shed light on the research question in order to start coding (Save the Children 2017: 14). Coding involves identifying a word that descriptively captures the essence of elements in the material and involves labelling words and phrases (Save the Children 2017: 14). To make the reporting of the data less cumbersome, the descriptive codes form the basis that inform the themes. The latter are used to organise the discussion of the findings.

1.8   OUTLINE OF THE CHAPTERS

Chapter One outlined the study's aims to explore how readers of the *Metro Ezasegagasini* decode its content and how their understanding of that content may influence their perceptions of municipal activities. The chapter also explained the importance of the study as well as the research objectives and scope of the study. Following this was a discussion of the methodology used in the study.

Chapter Two provides a more detailed literature review of the role of government communication and newspaper ownership and their impact on content and the Theory of Reception.

Chapter Three is focused on the research methodology including the research design, sampling, data collection and pilot study conducted. Ethical considerations are also covered in this chapter.

Chapter Four presents the findings and analysis of data.

Chapter Five presents the study's conclusions, including a summary of the research and a discussion about its limitations.

1.9   CONCLUSION

This chapter introduced the research, outlining the rationale for the study, the aims and objectives of the study and the study's scope. The methodology employed in this study was also briefly outlined.

In the following chapter, the literature review is focused on the decoding of information by an audience, the impact the information has on them, and the Theory of Reception. The importance of government communication in a democracy and newspaper ownership's impact on the content of publications is also discussed.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter explores the literature surrounding the role of government communication, the Theory of Reception and the government's role in ensuring an informed citizenry using media such as newspapers. The impact newspaper ownership has on the content of a publication is explored in this chapter. It is important to understand how readers decode text because this study intends to analyse how readers engage with the content of the *Metro Ezasegagasini* and, if, through the decoding of the information, how the content has impacted their understanding of local government activities.

2.2 GOVERNMENT COMMUNICATION

Effective communication between government and the public is a vital tool (Fairbanks, Plowman and Rawlins 2007: 23). However, over the past several decades, scholars have noted drastic declines in public trust in government, with it being suggested that this decline is an outgrowth of poor communication between government and the public because the public feels that they are not well informed about government actions (Heise 1985, cited in Fairbanks, Plowman and Rawlins 2007: 23).

To improve communication between the government and the public, it is incumbent upon government officials to develop strategies and use platforms to disseminate information about government decisions that will have a bearing on the public. In the South African context, there are government departments with the mandate of ensuring that communication platforms are established and used to disseminate information about government policies.

The vision of the National Department of Communications is to have a vibrant and sustainable communication service for an informed citizenry and to create a positive image of South Africa (Department of Communications 2015: 3). The work of the National Department of Communications is further supported by the Government Communication and Information System (GCIS) whose aim, among others, is to drive coherent government messaging and proactively communicate with the public about

government policies, plans, programmes and achievements (Government Communication and Information System 2019: 4−5).

According to Hamilton and Kosar (2015: 1), a democratic government is obliged to inform and be transparent because citizens need to know the government's policies and plans. Hamilton and Kosar (2015) believe that the public has the right to know about government activities, such as which companies receive government contracts, how to collect insurance benefits and social security payments, and what public school educational reform will look like. However, they state that, too often, the government uses its information machinery to do more than simply inform about a policy; sometimes, it tries to persuade the public to adopt a particular position, regardless of its efficacy, thus crossing the line between informing the public and propagandising (Hamilton and Kosar 2015: 1).

Official government publications differ from community-focused publications such as the *Metro Ezagagasini*, a local government publication containing similar information to community newspapers. Community newspapers play an important role by being "relentlessly local" (Lauterer 2006: 3), focusing on council news and other community-based news and developments, which may seem too insignificant to be reported on by mainstream media but are still of interest to the community. Community newspapers also have a wide reach within their communities (Lauterer 2006: 20) and are integral in empowering communities. These reasons help explain why it is the preferred medium to keep the community informed of community issues (Dinabantu 2022).

There is a need for a reception study of government publications such as the *Metro Ezasegagasini* to specifically investigate how, in this case, eThekwini residents engage with the text and whether it affects their understanding of municipal activities.

2.3   NEWSPAPER OWNERSHIP AND IMPACT ON CONTENT

The angle taken concerning coverage of issues in a newspaper is determined by factors such as media ownership and journalist origins on content (Kiwanuka-Tondo, Albada and Payton 2012: 2). For example, journalists working for government newspapers usually adopt a "solutions" frame as opposed to their counterparts in private-owned newspapers (Kiwanuka-Tondo, Albada and Payton 2012: 2). In this regard, *The New Vision Newspaper*, which is government-owned, reported more news

stories while *The Monitor Newspaper*, which is privately-owned, incorporated more features allowing it to cover HIV/AIDS with more human elements in Uganda (Kiwanuka-Tondo, Albada and Payton 2012: 9).

Further disparity in how these two types of newspapers cover the same issue is highlighted by Strand (2012: 568), citing that the privately-owned *The Monitor Newspaper* includes coverage of homophobia and discrimination by allowing space for criticism of a Bill that delegitimises homophobia and problematises the proposed Anti-Homosexuality Bill for their readers as opposed to the government-owned newspaper. Therefore, by not being government-owned, *The Monitor Newspaper* is not constrained in its criticism of the Anti-Homosexuality Bill. Strand (2012: 572) found that while the two newspapers initially had an equal amount of coverage of the Anti-Homosexuality Bill, coverage in the government-owned *The New Vision Newspaper* decreased as the issue garnered international negative criticism while *The Monitor Newspaper* increased coverage of the Bill significantly.

It can be surmised that newspaper ownership directly impacts editorial decisions, which may, in turn, influence the readership's reception of newspaper content. This observation is also true of government publications more sympathetic towards critical government issues.

The influence of media owners on the editorial direction of newspapers is explored by Msiza (2017: 4). He explains that this influence usually favours the media owners' economic or political interests. His study explored the coverage of four daily South African newspapers based on their coverage of the 2016 local government elections, specifically looking at their coverage of the three largest political parties, namely, the ANC, DA and EFF. He investigated whether these newspapers' ownership impacted the coverage of the political parties or were biased for or against them in their reporting. The newspapers included in the study were *The Star, The Citizen, The Sowetan* and *The New Age.* For the study, a total of 719 articles across all the chosen newspapers were analysed during a specific time frame in the run-up to the 2016 elections.

Msiza's (2017) analysis revealed the correlation between the media owners' interests and biased reporting within their respective newspapers. He argued that while the

media may not adopt a "direct or explicit ideology, political relations with media owners can influence editorial decisions" (Msiza 2017: 4).

Msiza (2017: 4) found that the media owners of *The New Age, The Citizen* and *The Star* influenced the editorial content of their newspapers during the 2016 local government elections. While the owner's influence may not be direct on editorial content, Msiza (2017: 72) argues that the political relations of owners can influence editorial decisions on how content is covered.

He found that *The New Age* was biased towards the ANC and against the DA and EFF, while *The Citizen* was biased against the ANC. *The Star* was neutral towards all the parties (Msiza 2017: 72−73). Elaborating on the coverage of *The New Age*, he found that the newspaper had the most articles on the ANC, which were mostly positive. *The New Age* also had the least number of articles on the DA and EFF, which was mostly neutral and negative in coverage (Msiza 2017: 72−73).

The Star had the most neutral coverage of all the parties, which Msiza (2017: 73) suggests is due to the ownership structure of the newspaper, which is Sekunjalo Media Consortium as its main shareholder and the Government Employee Pension Fund (ANC involvement) as another main stakeholder. Based on his findings, he suggests that *The Star* found it challenging to report negatively on the ANC and adopted a safer neutral approach for "both journalistic as well as self-preservation interests of the editor and journalists" (Msiza 2017: 73).

Msiza (2017) found that almost a quarter of all the coverage on the selected parties came from *The New Age* (241), while *The Citizen* had the second highest number of articles (193), followed by *The Star* (180) and then *The Sowetan* (105), which had less than half the articles published by *The New Age. The Star* and *The Citizen* published similar articles on the ANC (Msiza 2017: 49).

The research found that the ANC had far more prominence than the other parties, being featured almost twice as much as the DA and three times as much as the EFF. This difference could be attributed to the ANC being the ruling party, which would result in more coverage. The ANC was also referenced on many occasions in the articles featuring the other two political parties (Msiza 2017: 66).

Msiza (2017) considers how media ownership impacts editorial content because *The New Age* was the only newspaper to have overall positive reporting about the ANC by quite a notable margin compared to the other publications. He found that it was only in *The New Age* that coverage of the DA and EFF was more negative than neutral (Msiza 2017: 66).

Msiza's (2017) findings about the influence the political climate and media ownership has on whether content is published or not is supported by a study by Mao, Richter, Kovacs Burns and Chaw-Kant (2012), who explored how three Canadian newspapers covered the topic of homelessness. The authors used the purposive sampling technique to analyse articles from the three newspapers: *The Calgary Herald, The Edmonton Journal,* and *The Globe and Mail*. Articles between 1987 and 2007 were analysed.

The Globe and Mail is a nationally distributed Canadian English-language newspaper based in Toronto and printed in six cities nationwide. At the time of the study, it was Canada's largest-circulating national newspaper and second-largest daily newspaper after the *Toronto Star.* CTV Globe Media own it. The other two newspapers in the sample, the *Edmonton Journal* and *the Calgary Herald* are owned by the Post media network (previously CanWest Global Communications Corporation), a corporate form organisation (Mao et al. 2012: 6). *The Globe and Mail* has a national readership, while the other two newspapers were chosen from Alberta because this was an Alberta-based study. The data from the *Edmonton Journal* and the *Calgary Herald* were combined to represent Alberta newspapers and then compared with the *Globe and Mail*.

Mao et al. (2012) found that the Alberta newspapers showed a very different picture from *The Globe and Mail* concerning the amount of coverage of homelessness and how they covered the different themes related to homelessness (Mao et al. 2012: 4). In essence, that two newspapers covered the same issue differently because of editorial interference based on the political climate.

Mao et al. (2012: 5) found that Alberta newspapers featured more housing-related issues than expected, while the Globe and Mail included fewer. The researchers attributed this to the housing shortage due to the urban migration to the oil sands development areas. They also found that the Alberta newspaper had fewer homeless

articles than expected, while *The Globe and Mail* had more than expected in 2003 and 2007.

The researchers found that there was ample evidence to support that editors play an important part in what is published or not, with their study finding that "newspaper ownership, the political climate and the visibility or newsworthiness of events related to the homeless population affected if the story was published" (Mao et al. 2012: 6). They support this statement with their findings that there was more news coverage on homelessness in Alberta during 2007 when specific political decisions were being made by the premier at that time. They further state that their findings indicate the differences in how social issues are covered in different newspapers in the same country, arguing that this is related to the difference in the ownership and political atmospheres in the different provinces where the newspapers are located (Mao et al. 2012: 6).

The importance of media ownership and its subsequential impact on editorial content cannot be understated. Ownership changes at major media companies should be a matter of concern to the public, argues Rumney (2015: 67). Exploring the South African media landscape over the past 20 years, he states that there is a link between ownership and media ideology (Rumney 2015: 68).

Citing an example, Rumney (2015) says two print media groups, namely, Media24 and TMG, and Primedia and e.tv, appear to remain in the old paradigm of the media as a liberal watchdog and, as such, stand accused of being insufficiently critical of the private sector and overly critical of the government (Rumney 2015: 68). In direct opposition was the launch of *The New Age*, which promised to provide balance to what the ANC government saw as unfair media coverage to show the "glass half-full" instead of "half-empty". He says it can be argued that the "subtle transmission of the ideology of the owners to journalists is inevitable" when ownership changes (Rumney 2015: 68). Abernathy (2018: 8) agrees, stating that "ownership matters". She claimed ownership directly correlates to a newspaper's editorial vision, mission and future business models (Abernathy 2018: 8).

Dogari, Shem and Apuke (2018: 230) examine ownership, funding challenges and their implications for state media survival in Nigeria. In their study, they explore media ownership and its impact on editorial content, an issue of contention in Nigeria, where

media owners – particularly the government − use the media as "a megaphone to project their ideas even at the detriment of developmental issues" despite the poor economic and managerial state in which the government-owned media find themselves (Dogari, Shem and Apuke 2018: 231).

Dogari, Shem and Apuke (2018: 238) noted that the state-owned media they reviewed were financed based on the benefits the government could gain from them, with priority not given to state-owned media. Their findings show that the government only released financial support to the media when they had an agenda to achieve, such as currying favour from the public or achieving political gains (Dogari, Shem and Apuke 2018: 238).

Some challenges facing Nigerian media include the misappropriation of funds, lack of adequate equipment and funding, low salaries, and the employment of non-professionals. The challenges affect the running and content of the media outfits and, ultimately, the sample media stations' survival in the face of these challenges, thus impacting the programme content (Dogari, Shem and Apuke 2018: 238). The authors believe these challenges can be resolved if the government provides adequate funding, does not appoint managerial posts politically, and does not censure or fire journalists for reporting the truth or who do not paint the government in a good light (Dogari, Shem and Apuke 2018: 239).

Apuke (2016: 13) explored the dynamic between media ownership and control of content in Nigeria. He explored four types of media ownership, namely, government ownership, private ownership, mixed ownership, and community ownership. His study found that media managers are often faced with the difficult task of balancing the media owners' interests against that of the public's interest. This balance must be achieved without compromising the law or ethics governing journalism (Apuke 2016: 13), irrespective of whether the media is privately or publicly owned (Apuke 2016: 13), with the owner's interest dictating how the media manager works. He says this is because media ownership determines the level of freedom for reporting on issues (Apuke 2016: 13). Apuke (2016) recommends that both private and government media be allowed to report freely without interference from internal or external forces (Apuke 2016: 13).

Apuke (2016: 13) suggests media owners attempt to achieve particular goals, be it political or economic, while others suggest this is the reason politicians in Nigeria own newspapers, which then become "agents of propaganda that will not publish anything against the owner because he who pays the piper dictates the tune" (Apuke 2016: 13). Apuke (2016) also explored the power advertisers exert on news organisations as they are a major source of revenue for media organisations (Apuke 2016: 15) and therefore have some control over editorial content.

It can be concluded that newspaper ownership has an impact, whether directly or indirectly, on editorial content. This impact may be because of the owner's political affiliations or business interests, which filter down to which stories editors allow to be covered. This impact occurs worldwide and is not isolated to South Africa.

2.4   IMPORTANCE OF COMMUNITY NEWSPAPERS

Government publications, such as the *Metro Ezasegagasini,* are important in prioritising local community news, much like community newspapers. Having strong links to the community by reporting on community-based news creates a link between a newspaper and its audience. Stories covered in community newspapers have a direct impact on the readership and the extent to which readers engage with the text (Kirkpatrick 2001: 18). Kirkpatrick (2001: 18) emphasises the importance of comprehending the news values of a community newspaper, which weighs up every potential story according to how relevant, important, or interesting it is expected to be for the local readership and can do so without competing for national or international coverage and readers.

Kirkpatrick (2001) explains that many community newspapers have survived the decline in newspapers because of the closeness of the relationships built with communities and the coverage of issues that concern the community, including the ordinary news that mainstream media would not cover (Kirkpatrick 2001: 18).

Kirkpatrick (2001) contends that community newspapers are steeped in history and have survived because of the closeness of the relationship they have built with their communities, reflecting accurately the community's values and being unafraid to raise the community's concerns (Kirkpatrick 2001: 18). Beisner (2005) agrees, stating that the role of community newspapers has remained unchanged in identifying issues that are important to a community and then informing citizens of those issues. Dinabantu

(2022: 1) writes that community newspapers affect the lives of communities as they remain an integral part of local communities due to their accessibility and coverage of issues affecting the community.

Citing his experience as a community newspaper journalist, Dinabantu (2022: 2) explained that residents' sentiments about community newspapers rest on their being important as a medium for their main news source and a platform to air their opinions on issues. The same view is shared by Moodley (2011: 104), who states that community newspapers are committed to serving and building the local community through the news and information provided.

Journalists and editors from community newspapers interviewed by Dinabantu (2022: 56) claimed their "allegiance to the community". The editors presented their newspapers as being tasked with the responsibility of informing, educating and playing a developmental role (Dinabantu 2022: 56). Given the unique space filled by community newspapers (Dinabantu 2022: 57), the close relationship the audience has with community newspapers has a direct impact on how they interact with the text and decode it.

In another study, Moodley (2011: 86) compared readers preferences of community newspapers to mainstream newspapers. She found that most respondents (97.92%) enjoyed engaging with the text from community newspapers, with none replying "no" when asked if they enjoyed reading community newspapers. This result was in comparison to 48.18% (185) of the respondents who claimed they did not enjoy reading mainstream newspapers (Moodley 2011: 89). Moodley's (2011: 90) study found that 87.5% (336) of the respondents thought that community newspapers provide better news than mainstream newspapers, with a majority stating that community news was their favourite section. This finding highlights the importance of featuring local news in community newspapers for respondents.

Furthermore, Moodley (2011: 86) found that readers engaged with community newspapers more frequently than mainstream newspapers by choice, which is determined by the content produced because community newspapers drive home the message that the community's everyday life is of interest and value. Abernathy (2018: 10) supports this deduction: The absence of community newspapers is keenly felt in communities because they are often left without a news organisation to "care about,

watch over and report on the actions of the county commission or the local school board" (Abernathy 2018: 10). She suggests that while local news about a tax increase or a zoning decision may not be important to mainstream media and make headlines, such reports are significant to communities (Abernathy 2018: 10) whom these issues will directly impact. She describes communities without a local newspaper as a "news desert" (Abernathy 2018: 16), with residents from these communities most likely to be more vulnerable citizens.

The rise of citizen journalism, or allowing readers to be part of the content produced and to see themselves featured in their local media, also impacts how the audience interacts with the publication and the text. Several community newspaper editors who participated in a study on citizen journalism found it was vital to engage a community that wants more ownership of its local media (Lewis, Kaufhold and Lasorsa: 2010). An editor emphasised that while mainstream newspapers were "dying", community newspapers are surviving because it is the only place communities can obtain local news that affects them, which places them at an advantage: Community newspapers are "community-orientated" (Lewis, Kaufhold and Lasorsa: 2010) and thus of interest and importance to the community.

Erfort (2017: 99) supports this position, stating that community newspapers are fulfilling their role of reflecting the communities they serve through their coverage of, particularly, the arts. Exploring the role of community media in South Africa, Daniels (2020: 162) said figures from the Association of Independent Publishers (AIP) show that small independent publishers that are not linked to the 'Big Four' media companies (Media24, Independent Newspapers, Tiso Blackstar and Caxton) for ownership or printing, are printing nearly eight million copies monthly and have a wide reach in targeted areas. She states that the AIP is the largest umbrella body for the community print media and has grown from 110 members to more than 250 (Daniels 2020: 162), indicating the growth, importance and wide reach of community newspapers.

Reporting on the reach of community newspapers, Daniels (2020: 162) states that community newspapers printed in the major cities, including Cape Town, Johannesburg, Durban and Pretoria, mirror the "geographic distribution of commercial newspapers", which indicates the variety and reach of community newspapers and the

unique space they fill. Being widely distributed and accessible to their communities contributes to their growth in the dying newspaper industry. In her study, Daniels (2020) examined 14 community newspapers and interviewed editors and journalists of community newspapers to better gauge their objectives and challenges. In the study, three researchers conducted a content analysis of two copies of each of the 14 titles (which equates to 28 editions). With an average of five news stories per edition, this produced a sample size of 140 stories during August 2013.

The study noted the important role community newspapers play in covering a wide range of news while providing a platform for the community to have input on editorial content. The active role the community plays in the editorial content was also emphasised in the study.

Most of the voices and the content in the 14 community newspapers were sourced from the community (61%) as opposed to press releases or official events (Daniels 2020: 165). She suggests that community newspapers contribute to the diversity of news covered by providing a voice to the community that may be marginalised by mainstream media (Daniels 2020: 165). This finding was confirmed through interviews with editors and journalists who stated that they covered local issues in their papers. They said the community actively generates news and provides feedback on news coverage (Daniels 2020: 171); therefore, the issues covered in the newspapers directly impacted and affected their communities (Daniels 2020: 171).

However, despite challenges facing community media (including insufficient advertising and a lack of resources for journalists, including computers, cameras and vehicles), their important role in informing, educating and providing a platform for reporting community issues cannot be understated. Daniels (2020: 174) surmised that "community newspapers make a considerable but small contribution."

It can, therefore, be concluded that community newspapers play an important role in communities by carrying content that is of interest and importance to the communities they serve, ensuring that communities engage with community newspapers more than mainstream media by choice, which cements the future of community newspapers in a dying newspaper age.

It is interesting to note the impact that community newspapers are major sources of information. According to Vossen (2018) newspapers are used to convey information about poverty and other social problems to western countries such the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, and Flanders. Vossen (2018) states that the views the Europeans in the mentioned countries have show that most of them use news media, particularly television and print media, as their main source of information about developing countries. This shows the influence the media has in terms of portrayal of developing economies.

Swanepoel, van der Waldt, and Steyn (2015) explored the quality of community newspapers in developing countries. Their (Swanepoel et al. 2015) research recognised the important role that community newspapers play in connecting communities. They explain that it is important that the role of community newspapers is upheld to continue to reflect cultural and economic dynamics (Swanepoel et al 2015: 2). Their research found that several factors have influenced quality in this sector, attributing this to growth in chain-owned and free newspapers (Swanepoel et al 2015: 2). However, this growth has resulted in diminished quality. They suggest the approach to to quality at community newspapers should be holistic and integrated which requires all processes to produce a quality product should be managed effectively and efficiently. This should be from the pre-production phases of news reporting and writing, to advertising procurement and page production, to printing and distribution (Swanepoel et al 2015: 2). It is important to ensure quality in community newspapers, given the vital role they play in educating and informing communities. In a study by Nishtar et al. (2004), they measured the community impact of a health education campaign using newspaper articles. They examined articles by Heartfile, the largest English newspaper in Pakistan, using newspaper donated space for 130 consecutive weeks. Of the sample group, 72 percent were regular readers with these 500 people eligible to participate in the interview. Of these participants, 93 percent remembered seeing the Heartfile articles, with 87 percent of the respondents stating that the articles significantly supplemented their knowledge about diet. With respect to exercise, these articles supplemented the knowledge of 77 percent of the respondents and in the case of smoking, knowledge was supplemented in 85 percent.

And of those interviewed, 40 percent reported that they had made some dietary changes, while 39 percent made some changes in their exercise habits while 8 percent reduced the amount of tobacco consumption as a result of reading these articles.

Nishtar et al (2004) found that newspaper articles are a useful supplement to other health education activities as part of cardiovascular disease prevention programmes which reiterates the impact that newspapers, particularly community newspapers, have on communities and having an influence on their lives.

2.5   THEORY OF RECEPTION

Reception Theory will be used as an analytic lens in this study. The theory focuses on how an audience decodes text, which is the audience's interpretations of the text and how they make sense of it (Fourie 2006: 224). Interpretation of text is defined as "the result of the process of negotiation between texts (e.g. television programmes) and readers (i.e. viewers) situated within specific social and cultural contexts" (Fourie 2006: 224).

Lunenburg (2010) explains communication as transmitting information and common understanding from one person to another. The communication process has two parties: the sender and the receiver. The sender initiates the communication (Lunenburg 2010: 2). From this, the receiver decodes the text. There is a clear relationship between the reader and the text. A relationship of negotiation exists between a reader and the text because a reader interacts with the text to interpret messages, which they sometimes do selectively, according to Fourie (2006: 245) and Lunenburg (2010: 2−3). This negotiation occurs because text cannot be understood independently and must be engaged with to produce meaning, as messages are often not self-explanatory (Fourie 2006: 245).

Livingstone and Das (2013: 1) define interpretation as how people make sense of their lives and the events, actors, processes and texts that they encounter to "make sense of something" (Livingstone and Das 2013: 1). The information is often selectively decoded because individuals perceive information favourably when it conforms to their existing beliefs (Lunenburg 2010: 2−3).

Hall (2006, cited in Durham and Kellner: 166) suggests that the encoding and decoding may not be perfectly symmetrical because the degrees of symmetry, which are the degrees of understanding and misunderstanding in the communicative exchange, depend largely on the established positions of the encoder-producer and the decoder-receiver. This understanding is supported by Livingstone and Das (2013), who suggest that the production of meaning at different levels is a "dynamic and mutually reinforcing cycle" and is not linear, as was previously believed. They suggest that media messages are not fixed but must be interpreted by the receiver (Livingstone and Das 2013: 2).

Therefore, text interpretation varies from person to person as each reader decodes the text using their knowledge, personal experiences and horizons of expectation during interpretation (Fourie 2006: 245).

Hall (1980, cited in Fourie: 253) suggests that an audience decodes text in three ways. The first position is dominant or preferred reading, where the reader accepts the encoder's assumptions (the text's producer). The second position is negotiated reading, where a level of compromise is seen as the audience accepting the producer's message and applying their understanding and input to reach a level of understanding of the text. The third position is oppositional, where the reader directly opposes the message produced (Fourie 2006: 253 −255). These three positions will influence the nature of the examination of the *Metro Ezagagasini*, especially the positions participants adopt when interacting with the text and why.

2.5.1 Preferred Reading

According to Petre (2009: 170), research has shown that audiences are active participants in decoding messages that the media produce. She states that the producer of the messages only has control of that message until it is released to the audience using various forms of media communication. These messages are then decoded by receptors according to their own specific cultural and social backgrounds (Petre 2009: 170).

The position that audiences are active participants in decoding messages is supported by Morley (2003: 93) when he suggests that contrary to old beliefs that TV audiences are passive consumers, they are active in "all kinds of ways" (Morley 2003: 93). In this active state, they make critical and oppositional readings (Morley 2003: 93).

Morley (2003) suggests that the model of audiences "believing any and all content" they consume has modified as audiences modify or deflect "any dominant ideology reflected in media content" (Morley 2003: 93). He surmises that the concept of preferred reading drops from view as people make meaning and take pleasure from messages (Morley 2003: 95). How the messages are encoded, therefore, can have an impact on how the audience decodes the message and receives the preferred audience position.

Perdana (2019) interviewed an audience who had watched "Sexy Killers", a documentary on coal mining in Indonesia and how it is a big business despite the environmental impact. This documentary presented disruptive information, for example, that some state officials were involved in coal mining, which "surprised the audience" (Perdana 2019: 86). It also had a wide reach as an independent film using live streaming and a YouTube channel with some 27 million views.

Perdana (2019) concluded that the documentary offered a preferred reading from the audience. Their decoding of the documentary's message, which explored the interest between government and business regarding coal mining and its subsequent impact on people's lives, was clear. Perdana (2019: 95) noted that the dominant reading is supported by scenes featuring environmental damage and the portrayal of public complaints and rich business leaders with political influence. The research found no oppositional reading, while some viewers had negotiated readings regarding certain aspects of the film. The findings suggest that if text can be produced that is relatable and evokes emotive interest in an audience, the desired position from the audience can be achieved. The documentary achieved this by showcasing how foreign business people infiltrated coal and power plants (Perdana 2019: 95).

The documentary successfully achieved this using a drone shooting technique to display a picture of the mining area adjacent to communities. It also showed a big hole, the size of a lake, of the former mine pits to support the narrative of how many children would be endangered by sinking into it. In another scene, the documentary maker tells the story of the impact mining has on shifting the ground, leading to roads collapsing and houses being cracked. They also used emotive interviews with people who are disappointed with the government, including a mother whose child drowned in an

excavated pit mine with the government taking no responsibility (Perdana 2019: 91−92).

Perdana (2019) suggests that while research has shown that audiences have to decode text based on their frame of reference, how the encoder produces the text can influence how the audience decodes it in line with the desired position.

2.5.2 Negotiated Reading

Negotiated reading is where an audience receives the text and, after careful consideration, reaches a negotiated position where they may not believe all the text from the encoder but have reached a level of understanding where they can relate and agree with aspects of the message produced.

Negotiated reading is further explained by Cohen (2002), who conducted a study examining the three positions of 251 Israeli undergraduates towards the television show *Ally McBeal.* The study aimed to explore the variables that explained how the viewers arrived at their interpretations (Cohen 2002: 253−254). Viewers were asked to choose one of three statements about the show with which they agreed. Analysis was then used to identify which factors helped to explain how the participants reached that interpretative decision.

The dominant reading would be that the show's main character, Ally, was a strong, independent and smart woman, thus a positive character and role model. In contrast, an oppositional reading would find Ally to be weak and the programme sexist in its portrayal of women. Finally, a negotiated reading would focus on the characters' relatable challenges rather than their shortcomings.

Cohen (2002: 271) found that the most popular reading was negotiated reading (46%), followed by a dominant reading at 35 percent and resistant reading at 19 percent. Elaborating on his findings, Cohen (2002) states that while viewers who fell within the dominant reading were not the largest group, they were the most distinctive.

Cohen (2002: 272) suggests that the most important element in reception is whether the intended audience accepts the position offered to them by the producer of the text, in this case, a television series. Further, he suggests that the audience which accepts the positions distinctly differs from those who decline the message, encompassing those who resist and negotiate the message.

Cohen (2002: 272) notes that while his analysis can tell little about the difference between viewers who resist and negotiate meaning, that negotiation is key to the viewers' pleasure in watching popular television is clear. Based on the popularity of the negotiated reading (46%) and the high average liking score reported by viewers who chose this reading, he suggests that negotiated reading can be pleasurable, at least for relatively educated viewers (Cohen 2002: 272).

2.5.3 Oppositional Reading

During encoding and decoding, some audience members may not receive the text and rather resist the message. Livingstone and Das (2013: 14) suggest that during reception studies, some audiences directly oppose the message; they do not accept the message or actively resist it. This resistance by audiences can be based on a myriad of reasons, including the grounds of different classes, genders, ethnicities and other cultural interests because these demographics matter when audiences decode text (Livingstone and Das 2013: 14). The authors concede that research shows that only "modest pockets of audiences" resist messages.

Lunenburg (2010) explains that there can also be effective barriers to communication during the communication process. Barriers, such misunderstanding and lack of interest among others can result in meaning and understanding not occurring (Lunenburg 2010: 3). He states that "every step in the communication process is necessary for effective and good communication. Blocked steps become barriers" (Lunenburg 2010: 4). These barriers affect good communication explaining that some barriers include physical barriers such as physical distractions like telephone calls, drop-in visitors, and distances between people (Lunenburg 2010: 4). The researcher goes on to explain that semantic barriers includes the words chosen and how they are used as well as the meaning attached to them that can cause a barrier in communication stating "the same word may mean different things to different people" (Lunenburg 2010: 4). There are also psychosocial barriers which Lunenburg (2010) lists as fields of experience (people's backgrounds, perceptions, values, baises, needs and expectations (Lunenburg 2010: 5).

The reception theory has been used in previous studies to achieve their research objectives. In the first study, researchers used the theory of reception to identify the impact of educational programmes in the development of critical thinking among

students of the Institute of Fine Arts (Mohammed and Abdullah 2023). They (Mohammed and Abdullah 2023: 5008) found that for educational programmes to achieve their goal of developing students' knowledge and provide learning opportunities, these programmes must utulise the theory of reception (Mohammed and Abdullah 2023: 5008). This is vital if the educational programme is to achieve its goal of expanding knowledge of students to meet their needs (Mohammed and Abdullah 2023: 5008). Their research concluded that an educational programme based on the reception theory develops critical thinking among students which may help them in the future (Mohammed and Abdullah 2023: 5028). This demonstrates the importance of how text is coded and subsequently decoded to derive meaning.

Another study by Briandana and Azmawati (2020) analysed audience interpretation of gender meaning in Youtube content through the lens of the reception theory utilising a focus group discussion to collect data. Their (Briandana and Azmawati 2020) study found that an audience can understand the same message produced, differently. They suggest that there are several factors that influence the different viewpoint and interpretation of gender expression such as education level, psychology, culture, experience, and social environment (Briandana and Azmawati 2020: 62). The research explored the different meaning people get from watching the videos of Jovi Adhiguna (a beauty influencer with beauty content on YouTube and Instagram). Briandana and Azmawati (2020: 58) found that most of the participants adopted a dominant position when decoding the message suggesting that this means "that the suitability of meaning between the video and audience in this case has high similarity meaning if compared to that in the negotiation and opposition".

Briandana and Azmawati (2020: 58) explain that one standard for measuring media audience is reception analysis which tries to give meaning to the understanding of media texts by understanding how the public decodes the messaging. They (Briandana and Azmawati) explain that the importance of the reception analysis is not the meaning attached to the media texts, but the interaction created between the audience and the text (Briandana and Azmawati: 2020). This is because audiences are active participants in constructing and interpreting the meaning of what they read, hear, and see. This is supported by a third study by Briandana and Ibrahim (2015) who explored the audience interpretation of Korean TV drama series in Jakarta. A finding of their study suggests that the audience members are active media text

interpreters. As active participants of the decoding message Briandana and Ibrahim (2015) explain that the audience are influenced by contextual factors which includes their identity, perception on the production of the programme, as well as the social, historical, and their political background (Briandana and Ibrahim 2015: 50).

Briandana and Ibrahim (2015) explain that through reception analysis, it can be determined how the social, educational, and cultural background of the viewers shape their readings of the values and ideologies in Korean television dramas. Their findings from the focus group discussions showed that Korean dramas have become more popular than the local Indonesian Sinetron drama (Briandana and Ibrahim 2015: 51-52). This is due to several reasons including the theme songs, the attractiveness of the actors, high quality productions, interesting and entertaining storylies, harmonious families, love relationships, and the positive social values embedded in Korean drama. Briandana and Ibrahim (2015: 53) state that their findings support Ien Ang's (1985) 'melodramatic realism' by "looking at the position of explaining emotional realism of the feeling of tragic structure", which is represented in the dramas. They conclude that Korea is recognised as a country with influential cultural industry that enables them to export popular cultural products to the world. And that university students are extremely attracted to watching Korean dramas with audience interpretation in Korean dramas among university students completely looming over the sinetron drama in Indonesia (Briandana and Ibrahim 2015: 53).

2.6 CONCLUSION

The relevant literature focusing on government communication, newspaper ownership, and how it impacts content and community newspapers was discussed. The influence of community newspapers in developing economies was also discussed in this chapter. This was followed by the theory of reception, particularly its relevant dimensions to this study such as negotiated reading, oppositional reading, and preferred reading. Previous studies that used the theory of reception to achieve their research objectives was also explored in this chapter. In the next chapter, the methodology used in this study will be discussed.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

3.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter focuses on the methodology of the research. It first discusses research paradigms, elaborating on the paradigm best suited for this study. The research design, which includes the sampling and data collection procedures and data analysis for the study, is also described, followed by the discussion of ethical considerations and the pilot study conducted.

3.2 METHODOLOGY

Research methodology is described as a way to solve the research problem systematically (Kothari 2004: 8), and it is understood as a "science of studying how research is done scientifically where the various steps generally adopted by a researcher in studying his research problem along with the logic behind them".

3.2.1 Research Paradigm

Research paradigms guide scientific discoveries through assumptions and principles, which help illuminate the quality of findings (Park, Konge and Artino 2020: 690). Fossey, Harvey, McDermott and Davidson (2002: 718) explain that a paradigm describes a system of ideas, or worldview, used by a community of researchers to generate knowledge. Three positions in research paradigms are discussed: positivism, post-positivism and interpretivism. The nature of the research to be conducted and the context influencing the selection of the appropriate paradigm (Panhwar, Ansari and Shah 2017: 43) are also discussed.

3.2.1.1 Positivism

The first position is positivism, which is aligned with the "hypotheticodeductive model of science" (Park, Konge and Artino 2020: 690). This model is a circular process that begins with theory before building a "testable hypothesis and designing an experiment through operationalising variables", identifying variables to manipulate and measure (Park, Konge and Artino 2020: 690). A study based on experimentation is then conducted, with the findings from the study ultimately being used to help inform theory and contribute to the literature (Park, Konge and Artino 2020: 690). Contributing to the literature completes the circular process because the initial starting point of this model

was the literature. Panhwar et al. (2017: 39) explain that the positivist paradigm allows researchers to secure "statistical reliance and generalisation" because this paradigm emphasises pure data as opposed to the interpretation of human experience (Panhwar 2017). Neuman (1991, cited in Khan 2014: 225) described positivist research as trying to understand events to be controlled or predicted.

Park, Konge and Artino (2020: 690) conclude that positivism is "based on the assumption that a single tangible reality exists—one that can be understood, identified, and measured". They add that this paradigm is rooted in objectivity and dismisses participants' and researchers' experiences and values as unimportant (Park, Konge and Artino 2020: 692), which means that a researcher remains objective and does not interact with participants during data collection and cannot be involved in the experiment in any meaningful way.

3.2.1.2 Post-positivism

The second position is post-positivism. Panhwar, Ansari and Shah (2017: 253) explain post-positivism as a pluralism that balances both positivist and interpretivist approaches. The balance is achieved by focusing the research on the context of experiences of the majority while also including the perspectives of historical, comparative, philosophical and phenomenological analysis (Panhwar et al. 2017: 253).

In a post-positivism approach, a researcher plays an important role as the "interpreter of data", as do the participants, in producing outcomes (Fox 2008: 4; Tashakkori, Teddlie and Sines 2012: 448). The position of post-positivism places emphasis on observation in order to grow knowledge (Fox 2008: 3), which is central to the development of understanding, taking into consideration the measurement of phenomena (Fox 2008: 3). Panhwar et al. (2017) suggest that it is an effective method because it reduces personal biases by accommodating the use of more than one research method or technique in a study. The focus is placed more on individuals or events than prediction, according to Tashakkori, Teddlie and Sines (2012). Panhwar et al. (2017: 254) state that this position helps eliminate the "forced choice" of qualitative or quantitative research and recommends selecting multiple research methods.

3.2.1.3 Interpretivism

The third paradigm position is interpretivism, which is more concerned with "in depth variables and factors in a context" from an individual's perspective (Alharahsheh and Pius 2020: 41) with a focus primarily on understanding and accounting for the meaning of human experiences and actions (Fossey et al. 2002: 720).

Alharahsheh and Pius (2020: 41) explain that interpretivism considers factors such as cultures and circumstances because it aims to gather in-depth insight from individual experiences. The position is more personalised than other paradigm positions because data depends on specific contexts, viewpoints and values (Alharahsheh and Pius 2020: 42) with the researcher's involvement.

Because of the emphasis on individual experiences to gain insight, this position assumes reality is subjective, bearing in mind that it differs from individual to individual (Alharahsheh and Pius 2020: 42). This type of research would, therefore, not provide general assumptions that apply to everyone or inform theory.

The third position of interpretivism was adopted in this study, which gained insight into how readers of the *Metro Ezasegagasini* interact with the text and if the newspaper has any bearing on their lives. This paradigm position was best suited for this research because interpretivism uses qualitative methods and allows researchers to explore individual experiences in depth through discussions (Alharahsheh and Pius 2020: 42), the data collection method employed in this study.

Panhwar et al. (2017: 39) believes that this paradigm allows researchers to better understand a social context through experiences and perceptions because the interpretivism paradigm places emphasis on humans and their understanding and experiences as opposed to being data-driven and creates depth of meaning (Panhwar et al. 2017). This position allows researchers to gain deeper insight into a particular context or phenomenon (Panhwar et al. 2017).

3.2.2 Research Design

Research design refers to the many ways in which research can be conducted to answer the question being asked (Marczyk, DeMatteo, and Festinger 2010: 22) such as sampling, data collection and data analysis. The design assists in the collection of relevant data by the researcher with more efficiency (Kothari 2004: 14). In essence, a

research design sketches the plan of how the research is going to be carried out by indicating what is going to be researched as well as the place and the time (Du Plooy and Du Plooy 2009: 85).

In this study, a qualitative research approach was adopted. This method was best suited for this study because the research was exploratory to gain insight from the reader about their experiences of the metro publication. Data was collected from three focus groups, held with between eight and ten participants, in three identified areas: Chesterville in Ward 24, Berea in Ward 31 and Umkhumbane in Ward 29. The qualitative research method supported the aim of the study, which was to understand better how the readers of the Metro *Ezasegagasini* interact with its text and their experiences of the content it carries. Participants for focus groups were selected using purposive sampling. A thematic network analysis approach was used to analyse the data. The data analysis involved making summaries of each transcript and piece of data to condense the information gathered into key themes and topics that shed light on the research question in order to start coding (Save the Children 2017: 14).

3.2.3 Research Approach

Research is defined as the pursuit of "looking to explain something" (Sukamolson 2007: 1), regardless of the research approach used. In research, three positions are usually adopted: a quantitative research approach, a qualitative research approach, or a mixed-method research approach using both qualitative and quantitative methods. The two research positions, which approach was used in this study, and why it was best suited to answer the research questions are explained below. An explanation of why the other research approaches were not best suited for the study is provided.

3.2.3.1 Quantitative Research Approach

Quantitative research is defined as research using numerical representation and observations to explain phenomena that those observations reflect, using numerical or statistical data (Sukamolson 2007: 1; Watson 2015: 1). Watson (2015) explains that quantitative research aims to gather data using measurement, which is then analysed for trends and possible relationships in order to verify the measurements made. He explains that this research approach is essentially deductive, where measurements are made, analysis is applied and conclusions are drawn (Watson 2015: 1).

Elaborating on the different types of quantitative research, Sukamolson (2007) states there is survey, correlational, experimental and casual-comparative research. Regardless of the type of research employed when using the quantitative approach, the study has to produce numbers that will be analysed and studied before a conclusion is drawn (Watson 2015: 10).

A quantitative approach was not the preferred method for this study because the research undertaken in this study was exploratory research that sought to identify ideas and insights (Kothari 2004: 36) from the participants chosen. Therefore, a qualitative research approach was adopted for this study. This research position is discussed in further detail below.

3.2.3.2 Qualitative Research Approach

Qualitative data cannot be accurately measured and counted and are generally expressed in words rather than numbers (Walliman 2011: 72−73; Smythe and Giddings 2007: 45). In contrast to the quantitative research approach, qualitative research is not usually numerical and cannot be analysed using statistics (Sukamolson 2007: 3−4). This research approach aims to understand social or human problems better and considers observations, experiences and interpretations of human perceptions of different things (Khan 2014: 225).

Smythe and Giddings (2007) explain that the qualitative research approach aims to find the issue of concern in its everyday context through interviews, observations, text, or the voices of those involved (Smythe and Giddings 2007: 37). It is, in essence, exploratory research because qualitative research asks a question rather than making a statement (setting a hypothesis that a researcher aims to confirm with their study). Rather, the qualitative research approach avoids assumptions, with the conclusion of answering the question posed at the beginning (Smythe and Giddings 2007: 45). Qualitative research seeks to answer the how, why and what questions of a phenomenon, according to Green and Thorogood (2014, cited in Haven and Van Grootel 2019: 232).

Haven and Van Grootel (2019: 232) explain that this research method often collects data through interviews or focus groups. The latter is the data collection method employed in this study. This choice is congruent with the aims and objectives of the

study because qualitative research aims to reveal the experiences and viewpoints of the participants of the research question.

The qualitative research approach was preferred in this study because it makes it possible to untangle human activities and attributes, such as ideas, customs and beliefs, that cannot be pinned down and measured accurately in quantitative research. In qualitative research, the data is more descriptive (Walliman 2011: 72−73). This study aimed to gain insight from the reader about their experience of the metro publication using this research approach.

Fossey et al. (2002: 717) describe qualitative research as a broad umbrella term for research methodologies that best explain a person's experiences, behaviours, interactions and social contexts, which they suggest is important for research that seeks to understand individuals and groups' subjective experiences. These experiences would be hard to measure using quantitative method approaches (Fossey et al. 2002: 718). This method supported the aim of the study, which is to understand better how readers of the *Metro Ezagagasini* interact with its text and their experiences of the content it carries descriptively instead of measuring their responses. Qualitative research was also preferred because the reception study approach, which helped understand the intended audience's perceptions of the government publication and their interpreted meaning of its content, was adopted for this study. Reception studies allow researchers to understand better how individuals engage and put meaning to the text (Brussel 2017: 1) they are reading.

3.3   POPULATION

It is important to understand the history of Durban and the areas being targeted in the study for the focus groups because the history and experience of the communities may have a bearing on how the participants interact with the text of the publication in the study. Megebhula (1994: 60) states that Durban was established in 1824 as a colonial and commercial port. By 1911, the city included 116,000 citizens comprised of 45 percent Indian, 37 percent White and 18 percent Black (Megebhula 1994: 60). When the apartheid regime was introduced in South Africa in 1948, races were segregated into group areas. The inner city and coastal areas, excluding the port, were reserved for whites, with black townships created on the periphery of the city (Megebhula 1994: 60) and with over 50 percent of Indians and almost 70 percent of

Africans being moved to areas from the inner city and thus further from their work. One of the areas, as described by Megebhula (1994: 62), was Chesterville, a rental housing township established in the 1940s near the city centre for African families who were relocated from Cato Crest.

Another area is Wiggins Umkhumbane, located within Cato Manor, which has historical significance because many African and Indian people were removed from Cato Manor due to the Group Areas Act (Myeni 2005: 58). The area remained underdeveloped and neglected until the late 1980s and saw several land invasions and informal settlements established due to the amount of vacant land (Myeni 2005: 58).

Areas, such as Berea, were predominantly reserved for White citizens, while the two other areas (Chesterville and Umkhumbane) in the study were established to cater for Black citizens. From a historical viewpoint, the experiences of residents living in the three different areas may differ and influence how they interact and decode the text of the government publication.

The participants for this study were from the areas mentioned above and may thus be influenced by their interaction with the text of the *Metro Ezasegagasini* and their understanding of the municipality and its programmes.

3.4   SAMPLING

Participants were selected in the three areas using purposive sampling until saturation was reached. Tongco (2007: 150) defines the purposive sampling technique as a type of "non-probability sampling" that can be used in both qualitative and quantitative research studies. Tongco (2007) explains that the purposive sampling technique is the "deliberate choice of an informant due to the qualities the informant possesses". In this technique, the researcher decides what the research objectives of the study are and finds people who can and are willing to provide information based on their knowledge or experience (Tongco 2007: 150). However, in adopting this research method, the question the researcher seeks to answer is of the utmost importance as the question will decide on which metholodly is best suited for the study (Tongco 2007: 150).

Ensuring the right participants for the study is vital Noy (2008: 340). According to Noy (2008: 340), participants' influence on the overall research is significant, and "nuggets

of wisdom" or additional knowledge can be gained from using the sampling method best suited for the study with the right participants. In the purposive sampling technique, the rearcher should seek out appropriate participants (Tongco 2007: 151). Tongco (2007) explains that there must be adequate preparation by the researcher about the subject area to ensure knowledgeable and reliable participants are found (Tongco 2007: 151).

For this study, the local ward councillors who work closely with community members from the three selected areas were contacted by the researcher initially to suggest participants who would be willing to participate in the study (Appendix 1). Contacting the councillors was a good starting point to identify residents willing to be part of the study. Once those participants agreed to be part of the research, they were asked to recommend more participants based on certain criteria outlined by the researcher to ensure the objectives of the study would be achieved. It is important to know what criteria will ensure a good participant in a study for purposive sampling according (Tongco 2007: 151). In this study, a requirement was that a participant had to be a frequent reader of the *Metro Ezasegagasini* to ensure they would be able to fully participate in the focus group discussions as they have interacted with the publication and have firsthand experience with it. If the participant was not a regular reader of the publication, they would not be able to meaningfully contribute to the study which is to gain insight of how readers of the publication interact with the text and whether it has any bearing on their lives. This is supported by Rai and Thapa (2015) who state that purposive sampling relies on the judgement of the researcher when it comes to selecting participants. This is done by focusing on particular characteristics of the population of interest, which will best enable the researcher to answer their research questions (Rai and Thapa 2015: 5). In this study, the criteria was to be a frequent reader of the *Metro Ezasegagasini.*

3.4.1 Sampling Size

Francis et al. (2010) explain that in studies where semi-structured interviews are conducted and analysed through content analysis, "the sample size is often justified based on interviewing participants until 'data saturation' is reached". Francis et al. (2010: 3−4) further define *data saturation* as the point at which additional interviews

would render no insights/themes because the process has been effective enough to gather sufficient insights from participants.

Francis et al. (2010) suggest that data saturation is vital in research because it addresses whether theory-based interview research has "achieved an adequate sample for content validity" (Francis et al. 2010: 4). Awareness of the data saturation point is important for several reasons. First, if the sample size is too large, researchers could waste resources as well as the time of participants; in contrast, if the sample size is too small, it could lead to the research not being transferable and thus also waste research funds and participants' time (Francis et al. 2010: 4).

Conducting three focus groups in a range of areas for this study ensured that participants were reflective of eThekwini residents and different socio-economic groups. It also ensured that the sample size was not too large or too small.

3.5   DATA COLLECTION

3.5.1 Pilot study

A pilot study was conducted before the focus groups (Appendix 4). A similar sample size of participants for a focus group (between eight to twelve participants) was used in the pilot study focus group. The pilot study assisted with finalising the questions asked during the focus groups, particularly gauging whether the questions were open-ended enough to facilitate discussion between participants. The pilot study assisted with testing the research instruments and obtaining optimal results during the data collection process.

Twelve interview schedules were distributed, with eight returned. The purposive method was beneficial because participants of various ages, races and communities were selected. Because the starting point was contacting people the researcher knew in a professional setting with knowledge of the *Metro Ezasegagasini,* those contacted could ensure that the participants were readers of the publication. Regularly reading the publication was a criterion for participation in the focus group. It is important that participants were frequent readers of the publication as this would allow them to have firsthand experience of the *Metro Ezasegagasini*. This would ensure they would be able to meaningfully contribute to the discussions and to reach the objective of the study which is to investigate if reading the publication has any impact on their lives

and if it deepens their understanding of the municipality. If a participant was not a regular reader of the publication, they would not be able to meaningfully contribute to the study. The focus group used the questions to facilitate discussions, with some amendments made when participants felt the question was not open-ended enough to allow them to discuss the issue at length.

Van Teijlingen and Hundley (2001: 1) emphasise the importance of pilot studies as a "crucial element of a good study design", which assists a researcher in gauging where the main research project may fail and testing proposed methods and instruments as well as identifying potential practical problems in following the proposed research procedure (Van Teijlingen and Hundley 2001: 1). It must be noted that while a pilot study may not guarantee the success of the full-scale study, it will assist in developing and testing the adequacy of research instruments to be used, in establishing whether the sampling frame and technique are effective, and in identifying logistical problems that might occur using proposed methods (Van Teijlingen and Hundley 2001: 2).

3.5.2 Focus Groups

Three focus groups were held: one in Chesterville in Ward 24, one in Berea/Sydenham in Ward 31 and one in Umkhumbane in Ward 29, which are township, urban and rural areas. Focus group one had eight participants, focus group two had 10 participants,while focus group three had nine participants. The only criterion to participate in the study was that the focus group participant was a frequent reader of the *Metro Ezasegagasini* publication. This criterion was important because, according to Kothari (2004: 36), "practical experience with the problem to be studied as the objective of such a survey is to obtain insight into the relationships between variables and new ideas relating to the research problem".

That participants regularly read the publication discussed was imperative because it allowed them to contribute to the focus group debate. Participants reflected the racial demographic of the ward, and the sample included all race groups. The focus groups were also split evenly between genders. Age considerations were considered to ensure a perspective from older and younger demographics. Eight to 10 participants were identified for each of the three focus groups.

Kumar (1987: 4) defines focus groups as a representation of a group in which participants talk with one another under the guidance of a moderator, with the main

37

interaction being among the participants who stimulate each other. Between eight and twelve participants from urban, rural and township areas were interviewed in focus group settings, bearing in mind that the optimal number of participants ranges between six and ten because that sized group is neither too large nor too small and can be easily managed (Kumar 1987: 4).

Acocella (2011: 1126) suggests that focus groups emphasise participants' frame of reference rather than the researcher's. Acocella (2011) adds that to obtain detailed and relevant data on the research topic, it is important that focus group participants are interested and knowledgeable on the topic and can discuss it in the time available, which can be achieved by ensuring participants in the focus group have "direct experience of the topic" (Acocella 2011: 1127).

To ensure the success of the focus group, Acocella (2011: 1127) recommends that discussions take place among participants who share similar interests and feel equal to each other even if their opinions on the topic discussed differ. Shared interests create a comfortable environment where participants feel free to express their opinions, which, according to Acocella (2011: 1127), ensures participants' involvement in the debate and data collection. Focus groups were held in Chesterville (Ward 24), Berea (Ward 31) and Umkhumbane (Ward 29). These areas fall under the central region. The publication is distributed in the municipality's four regions: north, south, west and central. The highest distribution of the *Metro Ezagagasini* is in the central region, so areas within this region were selected for holding the focus group discussions.

Semi-structured interviews with interview guides were used during the focus group discussions, facilitating open-ended questions that fostered dialogue. The discussions sought to find if reading the *Metro Ezasegagasini* influenced the participants' opinions about the municipality, whether they viewed the *Metro Ezasegagasini* as a reliable news source, and if the publication's content affected their opinions of local government. A semi-structured interview for the focus group is preferable; as explained by Kothari (2004: 36), such interviews are flexible and allow participants to raise issues and questions the researcher may not have previously considered.

The focus group sessions were an hour long, with the discussion recorded using a cellphone recording app. The recordings were later transcribed. Notes were also taken

during the focus group sessions. Audio recording is an important aspect, according to Kumar (1987: 5), who suggests focus group interviews be carefully recorded, the discussion and the moderators' observations of the participants' nonverbal behaviour be noted, and the moderators' ideas, hunches or thoughts generated during the interview be documented.

Acocella (2011: 1129) suggests that the focus group sessions be regarded as group discussions instead of group interviews where the researcher poses questions to individuals to facilitate discussion. This suggestion was considered during the focus group sessions, where participants were asked about their thoughts on an issue raised by another participant.

The focus group method of data collection was well suited for this study because it allowed data to be gathered for analysis that emanated from discussions within the focus group instead of a sit-down, more structured individual interview. The role of the researcher in focus groups is to encourage participants to talk to one another by asking questions, exchanging anecdotes, and commenting on the group's experiences and points of view (Acocella 2011: 1129). Robust discussion was achieved during the three focus group sessions with engaged and open dialogue between participants.

During the focus groups, the researcher introduced herself to the group and outlined the process for the semi-structured session. In addition, the necessary ethical considerations were explained to the participants, and the necessary documentation was signed. The focus group discussions were anticipated to be one hour with the venues booked; however, two focus groups were shorter than the allocated hour.

Participants from the focus groups in Chesterville and Umkhumbane (Wards 24 and 29) were initially reluctant to engage in discussion and often had to be prompted by the interviewer to elaborate. While all participants engaged in discussion, a few dominated the focus group sessions in these two focus groups. To prevent domination by a few participants, the researcher asked participants who were not engaging their opinions about certain issues, which encouraged all participants to engage. Participants in the focus group in Berea, Ward 31, were eager to discuss the *Metro Ezasegagasini* without much prompting.

Another consideration was that the researcher did not speak isiZulu. To ensure all participants felt comfortable during the focus group session, particularly during the

focus groups held in the rural and township settings, an official from the Community Participation and Action Support Unit, who worked in these wards, accompanied the researcher to assist with translation into isiZulu when necessary. Including a translator was a precautionary measure and was not required because all participants could speak English and conversed fluently in English, and when asked if they would prefer to speak in English or isiZulu, they said they preferred English. Language was also not an issue for the third focus group, Ward 31, where English is the predominant language. The researcher did not employ a research assistant in the focus groups; discussions were recorded on a smartphone, and notes were taken. Participants were given name badges to make taking notes and attributing comments to the correct person easier. The first two focus groups were held on the same day in Ward 24 and Ward 29, with the third focus group held in Ward 31 the following day.

3.6   DATA ANALYSIS

Qualitative data analysis is a process that seeks to reduce and make sense of vast amounts of information so that impressions that shed light on the research questions can emerge. In essence, qualitative data analysis is a process where a researcher takes descriptive information and offers an explanation or interpretation (Save the Children 2017: 14).

Braun and Clark (2012: 79) describe thematic analysis as a "method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data." A thematic network analysis approach was used in this study as one of the benefits of thematic analysis is its flexibility, which makes it a useful tool for generating detailed and complex data (Braun and Clark 2012: 78). Analysis involved making summaries of each transcript and piece of data to condense the information to key themes and topics that shed light on the research questions prior to coding (Save the Children 2017: 14).

Identifying themes during this process is vital because themes reveal something important about the data regarding a study's research questions and are not just about quantifiable measures (Braun and Clark 2012: 82). The aim is to find repeated patterns of meaning from the data collected during interviews of focus groups (Braun and Clark 2012: 86). Coding captures the essence of elements of the material descriptively. It is achieved by labelling words and phrases (Save the Children 2017: 14). To make the data reporting easy, the descriptive codes elicited are the basis that informs the

themes used in the discussion of the findings. Describing the phases in thematic analysis, Braun and Clark (2012: 86) suggest that writing is a major part of the analysis and should be prioritised and practised at the beginning of the analysis and not just at the end.

Transcribing is also important for conducting a thematic analysis of verbal data. While it may seem boring and time-consuming, it is a way to become familiar with the data (Braun and Clark 2012: 87). Braun and Clark (2012) suggest that the second phase begins once a researcher is familiar with the data and has an understanding of it and what is interesting about it. After that, the production of initial codes begins (Braun and Clark 2012: 88): identifying interesting data features.

The next step begins once all the data have been coded. This phase looks at the analysis on the broader level of themes and involves analysing the codes to form an overarching theme (Braun and Clark 2012: 89). The themes are reviewed before defining, naming and distilling the themes (Braun and Clark 2012: 91−92). Finally, a report can be produced, which begins once a full set of themes has been identified and leads to the final analysis and the write-up of the report (Braun and Clark 2012: 99). The final analysis and report aims to tell the story of the data to convince a reader of the merit and validity of the analysis and provides sufficient evidence of the themes within the data and the ethical treatment of participants when the data was collected.

A thematic analysis approach, as outlined by Braun and Clark (2012: 79), was employed. The procedure included identifying, analysing and then reporting on the themes. First, the audio recordings and the notes taken during the sessions were summarised for each group. Writing a summary of each focus group assisted with condensing the information to start the coding process (Save the Children 2017: 14). Once the focus group sessions were transcribed, key phrases across the three focus groups were identified to find repeated patterns of meaning from the data collected during the focus group sessions (Braun and Clark 2012: 86). The emerging themes identified are vital as themes reveal something important for answering a study's research questions (Braun and Clark 2012: 82)

In short, after coding the data, common themes across the three focus groups were identified, bearing in mind the initial aim of the study and research objectives. Similar

sentiments among participants were grouped to identify common themes, which were elaborated on under key themes.

3.7   TRUSTWORTHINESS OF THE STUDY

While some researchers use research assistants or outsource data collection for their studies, this was not the preferred option for this study because the integrity of the data collected depended on understanding the study's objectives and what the study was trying to achieve. According to Seale (1999: 467), the examination of trustworthiness is crucial in qualitative studies, and for this study, the ability to ensure that the data collected accurately reflected participants' experiences was one step towards ensuring the study's trustworthiness. In addition, the notion of subjectivity, reflexivity and the social interaction that characterise interviewing in qualitative study is best dealt with by a researcher who knows the background of the study and the aims and objectives to be achieved. The trustworthiness of a study can be maximised or produce a more "credible and defensible result" (Johnson 1997: 283) and, therefore, be generalisable if the researcher was involved in doing and documenting the qualitative research process (Golafshani 2003: 603).

In determining the trustworthiness of a study, four aspects need to be examined and presented: transferability, dependability, confirmability and credibility (Shenton 2004: 64; Elo et al. 2014: 1).

3.7.1 Credibility

Credibility attends to whether the study undertaken does what it initially intended (Shenton 2004: 64) and is one of the most important aspects to ensure trustworthiness in qualitative research. Stahl and King (2020: 26) note that triangulation promotes credibility in qualitative research and involves using "several sources of information to repeatedly establish identifiable patterns".

Analysing the data collected in conjunction with the initial research questions and objectives posed ensured the credibility of this study. The collected data were interpreted through the Receptive Theory lens to ensure that findings were in sync with what the researcher initially intended to investigate. Literature to support the research findings was used to analyse and understand the data, which ensured the credibility of the key themes elicited from the data.

3.7.2 Transferability

Shenton (2004) explains that transferability applies to whether the qualitative research findings can be extended to a wider population than that used in the study, given that in qualitative research, the findings are elicited from a small number of individuals or a population (Shenton 2004: 69). Stake (cited in Shenton 2004) suggests that while qualitative research findings may not apply to a wider audience, because each case may be unique, the findings can be viewed within a larger group setting. Stahl and King (2020) suggest that while qualitative methods do not aim for replication and it may be difficult to replicate qualitative data, some patterns and descriptions within one context of research may apply to another context because qualitative research "seeks to expand understanding by transferring findings from one context to another" (Stah and King 2020: 26−27).

Stahl and King (2020) suggest that "thick descriptions" are required to contextualise fieldwork information with information recorded in great detail to achieve transferability. Thick description includes taking note of the methods and time frames used in the study to ensure it has meaning to a wider audience. Methods and time frames for data collection in the original study must be completely described, as well as for the entire duration of the fieldwork. These factors influence the degree to which the completed research may have application to an additional site or context.

The bottom line for transfer is that the lessons from one study can be expanded to a wider audience in a new context, which can be achieved because of meticulous record-keeping. This study included records for every aspect of the research process. Details of why the areas selected for the focus groups were addressed, and the history and subsequent influence on participants in focus groups were also explained. During data collection, focus group discussions were audio recorded and notes taken. Participants also wore name tags to make it easy to identify them and attribute their comments, which helped to promote transferability in the study.

3.7.3 Dependability

The trustworthiness of a study is also determined by its dependability. This position states that if the research is undertaken in the same context, with the same methods, involving the same participants, a similar conclusion would be reached (Shenton 2004: 71). Shenton (2004) and Elo et al. (2014) suggest that in order to achieve the same

results, every step of the study should be recorded with great detail, including the principles used and the criteria applied as this will allow future researchers to repeat the work and obtain similar results. Recording details of the procedures employed also ensures proper processes are followed during the research (Shenton 2004: 71; Elo et al. 2014: 4).

As noted, meticulous records of the pilot study questionnaire were maintained, and during data collection, discussions were audio recorded and notes taken. These steps promoted the dependability of the research undertaken. Moreover, the procedure adopted towards distilling the findings was explained for readers to understand the process, and all other processes in the research followed the normal standards in dissertation writing and presentation.

3.7.4 Confirmability

Confirmability explores the objectivity of research. Shenton (2004: 72) suggests that the findings of a study should be a true reflection of the participants' experiences and thoughts and not those of the person conducting the research. In order to avoid "investigator bias", Shenton suggests the researcher explain why certain choices were made and why certain research methods were adopted. Explaining why certain approaches were favoured as opposed to others will assist in achieving confirmability (Shenton 2004: 72).

Confirmability in the study was ensured by outlining the reasons for selecting the research approach and procedures, the focus group areas, and the size of the focus groups. The pilot study also ensured that the questions used for discussion during the focus group were open-ended and unbiased. These measures assisted in achieving confirmability.

In any qualitative research, the aim is to "engage in research that probes for deeper understanding rather than examining surface features" (Johnson 1997: 4). The researcher was well-positioned to facilitate that aim by asking relevant questions, probing for more details during the interview process, and seeking more clarification where necessary.

It is also necessary to emphasise that the researcher strove to be unbiased and refrained from influencing the dialogue in favour of the Municipality by encouraging

discussion with neutral, open-ended questions. In addition, a pilot study was carried out to ensure that the interview guide captured the essence of what the research was designed to examine. A pilot study was necessary to test if the questions asked were biased and to detect other possible problems so that these threats to the trustworthiness of the data collected were not repeated during the real interview process. The supervising team were involved in the pilot study, especially in seeing that the questions were appropriate and fit for their purpose. They also advised how the researcher should present herself so that her affiliation with the publication did not impede her relationship with the participants and the data collected.

3.8. ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

It is important to attend to ethical considerations during the research process as research findings are only valued and trusted if the research has been carried out honestly (Walliman 2011: 42). The importance of ethical considerations from design to conclusion cannot be underestimated, according to Fossey et al. (2002: 723).

One ethical consideration in this study was the confidential treatment of the data. Another important aspect was ensuring that participants were treated with the utmost respect before, during and after the research (Walliman 2011: 42), which was achieved throughout the research process. Participation in the study was completely voluntary and with informed consent (Appendix 3). The names of the participants were not used in the study.

The purpose of the study and the participants' involvement were clearly explained before the data collection process. Participants were required to sign an informed consent form providing proof of their willingness to participate. It was also explained to participants that they could withdraw from the process if they wished to do so without any repercussions.

Participants were informed at the beginning of the study that their confidentiality was assured because their real names and addresses would not used. Pseudonyms were given to participants, and more impersonal identifying factors, such as age and gender, were used. Only the researcher and her supervisors have access to the identity information about participants. Participants were also asked to sign an informed consent form outlining the study and its objectives.

Participants were told their identities would not be revealed in the research to ensure their confidentiality. Only the researcher and her supervisors had access to the details of the participants for record-keeping purposes. The research report did not disclose participants' names; letters were used to locate participants in their focus groups, and numbers were used to differentiate between participants within focus groups. Their demographics, such as age, race and general location, were used to identify participants in the research for analysis purposes. Direct identifying details were removed from the transcripts and subsequent steps in the analysis.

The raw data is only accessible to the researcher and her supervisors. Furthermore, hard copies were kept under lock and key, and electronic copies were password protected. The maximum of R170 per person stipulated by the Durban University of Technology's Institutional Research Ethics Committee for refreshments for participants during the focus group was not exceeded.

The final ethical consideration is that the researcher is the sub-editor for the publication being analysed in the study. A written statement from the Acting Head of the unit granting the researcher approval to conduct the study regardless of the outcome with no external influence being placed on her during the study was obtained. A request from the Acting Head of the unit to report on the findings, whether negative or positive, at a weekly staff unit meeting once the project was completed was granted. The focus group interviews were handled sensitively, with participants' details not spoken and their anonymity assured.

3.9   CONCLUSION

This chapter outlined the research design for the study and the rationale for using a qualitative research approach. The chapter explained the benefits of conducting focus groups for data collection and how focus groups assisted with answering the research questions. The chapter described how participants were selected, from which areas and how the data was analysed following the focus group sessions. This chapter also covered how the data was analysed and the means for ensuring the trustworthiness of the findings. Finally, the ethics considered for the study were discussed.

CHAPTER FOUR: RESEARCH FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

4.1 INTRODUCTION

The methodology used in this study was explained in the previous chapter. This chapter will present the data collected using focus groups and thematically anaylsed in line with the research aims and objectives. The presentation includes a brief overview of the participants in the focus groups and a description of how the data were analysed and the findings.

4.2 PARTICIPANTS IN THE FOCUS GROUPS

Three focus groups were held: one in Chesterville in Ward 24, one in Berea in Ward 31 and one in Umkhumbane in Ward 29 in November 2022. Letters of information (Appendix 2) were distributed to all participants prior to the focus group session commencing. The letters outlined the scope of the study, the procedure that would be followed, and other pertinent information, including whether there would be remuneration. The letter also informed participants that they could withdraw from the study at any time if they wanted to. All participants also signed a Letter of Consent form (Appendix 3) agreeing to participate in the study.

The first focus group was held on 7 November 2022 in Chesterville, Ward 24, at the ward councillor's office. Eight participants were in the focus group: three males and five females. Participants were aged between 28 and 60.

The second focus group was held in Ward 29 in Umkhumbane on 7 November 2022 at the Wiggins Community Library. There were ten participants, including three males and seven females. They were aged between 14 and 53.

The above two focus groups requested anonymity. Hence, their ages and sex were used to identify them.

The third focus group in Ward 31 in Sydenham/Berea was held on 7 November 2022 with nine participants, four males and five females. The focus group was held at the Betchet High School.

The number of participants in each focus group was appropriate; Kumar (1987: 4) suggested that a focus group should have between six and ten participants. All

participants also had prior experience with the *Metro Ezasegagasini*, so obtaining detailed and relevant data was likely (Acocella 2011: 1126).

Digits and numbers were used to identify each focus group and its participants (see Table 1). These pseudonyms were allocated to participants in the focus groups to maintain their anonymity. Pseudonyms were only given to participants in the focus group who contributed to the discussions and whose comments were noted. Participants in Focus Group 3 declined to provide their ages.

Table 1. Focus Group Participants

Focus Group	Participant Number	Pseudonym
Focus Group 1 (FG1)	Participant 1 (55-year-old male)	FG1_P1
	Participant 2 (26-year-old female)	FG1_P2
	Participant 3 (40-year-old female)	FG1_P3
	Participant 4 (60-year-old female)	FG1_P4
Focus Group 2 (FG2)	Participant 1 (31-year-old male)	FG2_P1
	Participant 2 (53-year-old female)	FG2_P2
	Participant 3 (52-year-old female)	FG2_P3
	Participant 4 (34-year-old male)	FG2_P4
	Participant 5 (34-year-old female)	FG2_P5
	Participant 6 (15-year-old female)	FG2_P6
	Participant 7 (14-year-old female)	FG2_P7
Focus Group 3 (FG3)	Participant 1 (female)	FG3_P1
	Participant 2 (female)	FG3_P2
	Participant 3 (female)	FG3_P3
	Participant 4 (female)	FG3_P4
	Participant 5 (female)	FG3_P5
	Participant 6 (male)	FG3_P6
	Participant 7 (male)	FG3_P7
	Participant 8 (male)	FG3_P8
	Participant 9 (male)	FG3_P9

4.3 THEMATIC ANALYSIS

A thematic analysis approach was employed; it included identifying, analysing and reporting the themes (Braun and Clark 2012: 79) extracted from the data collected.

Following the three focus group sessions held over two days, each focus group session was summarised using the audio recordings and the notes taken during the sessions. Writing a summary of each focus group session assisted with condensing

the information and facilitated the coding process (Save the Children 2017: 14). Once the focus group sessions were transcribed, key phrases across the three focus groups were identified to identify emerging themes. Identifying emerging themes is focused on finding repeated patterns of meaning from data collected during the discussion in a focus group (Braun and Clark 2012: 86). Identifying emerging themes during this process is vital because themes reveal something important about the data about a study's research question (Braun and Clark 2012: 82).

Coding is done by labelling words and phrases (Save the Children 2017: 14). After coding the data, common themes across the three focus groups were identified, bearing in mind the initial aim of the study and research objectives. Similar sentiments across groups were gathered to identify common themes.

Eight common themes were initially identified during this coding process:

- Unemployment
- Education
- Community-driven
- Distribution and accessibility
- Trust
- Youth
- Digital footprint
- Reporting

The themes were aligned with the research objectives, as seen in Table 2.

4.4   COMMUNITY-DRIVEN

The *Metro Ezasegagasini* is similar to a community newspaper in that it carries local community news, which includes municipal issues, school, sports and community members' achievements (Lauterer 2006: 3). Under this group of themes, key themes that emerged during the focus group in terms of community content in the publication were considered. This search was done to answer the research objective about whether the readers' background and community affect how they interact with the publication and whether it meets their needs for understanding municipal activities.

Table 2. Research Themes

Research Objective	Thematic Group	Themes
• To investigate if the readers' frames of reference influence how they understand the *Metro* and accept it as reliable to project municipal activities.	Community driven	• Unemployment • Community
• To investigate whether the readers' understanding of the publication has deepened their understanding of municipal activities.	Educational	• Education • Reporting • Youth
• To investigate if readers directly oppose the text or message in the publication.	Trust	• Trustworthiness
• To examine if the different backgrounds of the readers influence how they understand the publication and municipal activities.	Distribution and accessibility	• Digital footprint • Distribution

4.4.1 Unemployment

All participants read the vacancy section of the publication and said they often applied for jobs with the municipality. This section proved the most popular and was read by everyone in the focus groups because most were seeking employment and often

applied for jobs with the eThekwini Municipality. They agreed this was because of the high unemployment in their communities.

In this instance, participants mostly decoded the text favourably because the content was meeting a need, which, in this case, was unemployment. Lunenburg (2010) suggests that individuals will perceive information favourably when it confirms their own beliefs because during the negotiation process when a reader interacts with text in order to derive a message, they do this selectively (Fourie 2006: 245; Lunenburg 2010: 2−3).

It can be surmised that text can be decoded favourably by a reader if it is of interest to the reader, also bearing in mind how it is packaged (Perdana 2019: 95). This claim is supported by FG2_P1 who said he read every edition of the *Metro Ezasegagasini* when he was unemployed to apply for jobs. He favourably interacted with the text when it met a need (his unemployment). However, now that he has found work, he no longer goes out of his way to obtain every edition because he no longer has needs to be met by the publication. FG2_P2 and FG2_P4, both unemployed, demonstrated the same; they used the vacancies section to apply for jobs, saying it was the first section they read. This sentiment was shared by FG2_P3, who said that "vacancies and tender sections are very important for the community, especially in rural areas where the unemployment is high". She explained that she knows that the demand for the paper is high because she works at the library where the focus group was held, and many people are disappointed when they cannot find the paper. She said they go out of their way to come to the library to get the publication. Supporting this was FG2_P5, who said the publication informed her of opportunities such as scholarships and learnerships in the city. Literature supports community newspapers' important role (such as the classified section in the *Metro Ezasegagasini)* in meeting the community's needs. Community newspapers exist to empower communities because they cover content that interests them (Lauterer 2006: 20), such as job opportunities to counter high unemployment. Community newspapers such as the *Metro Ezasegagasini* focus on council news and other community-based news and developments that are of interest to the community and have a far reach (Dinabantu 2022). Community newspapers exist to fulfil a need in communities, which the *Metro Ezasegagasini* does by advertising job vacancies and other learnerships and bursaries available in the city.

The communication process sees a message sent from a sender to the receiver (Lunenburg 2010: 2). How the receiver decodes the message is unique because the receiver interacts with the text to derive meaning (Fourie 2006: 245). It was, therefore, interesting to note to whom participants believed the job vacancies section catered. FG1_P2 said that while she browsed most of the publication, she mostly focused on the jobs section, which was the most interesting to her. She has applied for jobs but has not been employed, believing that older people benefit from being hired. FG1_P2's view was in contrast to the belief of FG1_P3, who said young people were benefitting from jobs in the city while the older people "needed the jobs to provide for their families". This contrast demonstrates that individuals interact with the text differently and derive different meanings from it, a finding supported by Kenyon, Wood and Parsons (2008: 278), who explain that audiences derive meaning using different frames of reference that fit with themselves.

4.4.2 Community

An emerging consensus from all participants was that the information carried broadly in the publication was of interest to them because it informed them of what was happening in the city and was "community-focused". This finding answers the initial research objective of whether reading the publication deepened readers' understanding of the municipality and its activities. However, the frame of reference (background) impacts how readers interact with the text.

That communities, and by default, the background from which participants hailed, influenced how they interacted with the publication and its content is supported by Fourie (2006: 245). Fourie (2006) suggests that messages are decoded on personal experiences and backgrounds. So, if participants hail from similar backgrounds and experiences, they will likely interact with the text and derive similar meanings. This is shown in the responses of the first two focus groups, which included participants from lower-income groups or previously disadvantaged communities. Participants mostly agreed with the publication's content and said it kept them informed about municipal activities. They mostly adopted a preferred reading position, defined as recipients accepting the encoder's message (Hall 1980, cited in Fourie 2006).

Participants in the third focus group who were from a slightly more 'privileged' community, while agreeing with the coverage being community-focused, were more

sceptical of the coverage, adopting a negotiated reading position, which is a level of compromise in the message sent by the encoder as per Hall (1980, cited in Fourie: 2006), in the way they engaged with the text. Their position indicates that similar backgrounds and experiences impact how readers engage and derive meaning from the text (Livingstone and Das 2013: 2).

Participant FG1_P1 often reads the publication to find out about developments in Ward 24, describing the publication as informative. He provided an example, saying he read about an upcoming conference at the Inkosi Albert Luthuli International Convention Centre, inviting informal traders to attend. He attended the conference after reading about it, which he found very helpful given that he is an informal trader. He said he would not have known about the event if it had not been featured in the *Metro Ezasegagasini*. FG1_P1 said they find business articles interesting, particularly projects in Ward 24 about how service delivery has changed people's lives. FG2_P3 was very positive about the publication, describing it as having "useful information on what's happening in the municipality".

However, participants from Focus Group 3 were more critical of the publication and its content, which also overlapped with their thoughts on government as a whole because the ruling government produced the publication. Participant FG3_P6 sees the publication as a "mouthpiece for the city leadership", saying there is a feeling from the community that the leadership of the ANC drives much of the content in the publication. Providing an example, FG3_P8 said a Peace for Sydenham Rally was recently held in the community and was entirely driven by the community with no government influence. He surmised that despite being a major community event, it was not political and not one-sided (in favour of the government); therefore, it was not covered by the publication. FG3_P3 added to this, saying that often reports about events hosted at the Durban ICC in the *Metro Ezasegagasini* paint a glowing picture, but the reality is in stark contrast because the event was poorly attended with lots of empty chairs, so the reporting is not factual. "Anyone can take a photo and claim to be doing something or honestly assisting when the reality is not that at all. It's a show to win people over," she said.

The data makes it clear that participants in the focus groups interacted with the same message of the encoder (in this case eThekwini Municipality) differently. This

difference is because audiences are active participants in decoding messages produced (Petre 2009). The encoder only has control of the message until it reaches the audience and is decoded. As illustrated above, different readers can decode the same message differently because individuals use their own cultural and social backgrounds (Petre 2009: 170), with the participants from the two similar focus groups deriving similar meanings from the message. Participants from the third focus group, who come from similar backgrounds to each other but different backgrounds to the other two focus groups, derived different meanings from the same message.

It can be concluded that while the publication was achieving its goal of educating and informing residents, there was a collective call for the stories to be more "ward-based" as compared to being generic and covering regions or the city overall, from participants with a negotiated reading and preferred reading position.

Literature supports this; communication can be a complicated process comprised of both giving and taking. As a result, there can be breakdowns in the communication process, which results in a block in the transfer of understanding (Lunenburg 2010: 4). There are many factors that serve as a barrier to communication, including heritage, biases and prejudices (Lunenburg 2010: 6), which can be obstacles in communicating effectively.

So, while the *Metro Ezasegagasini* is community-focused in its reporting, the background of participants could play a role in how they decode the text and the meaning they derive from it.

4.5   EDUCATIONAL

The government has a responsibility to inform residents about its policies and plans (Hamilton and Kosar 2015: 1). The role of community newspapers in informing the public cannot be underestimated as they play a role in empowering the public (Lauterer 2006: 20) as well as having a wide reach to do so. It is often the preferred medium to inform the community about community issues (Dinabantu 2022). This group of themes will explore whether readers' understanding of the publication deepened their understanding of municipal activities and educated them about government and its plans and policies.

4.5.1 Education

The general agreement from participants, especially Focus Groups 1 and 2, was that the *Metro Ezasegagasini* kept them informed of municipal developments. The publication was described as "informative" by FG1_P1 and "useful" by FG2_P3. Despite the extensive coverage of local news, participants supported increased citizen journalism. Citizen journalism is explained by Lewis, Kaufhold and Lasorsa (2010) as a community wanting more ownership of their local media. Focus group participants wanted more coverage of ward-based stories and what the community is doing to improve their areas, not what development was taking place in the city.

In exploring how the participants' understandings of the municipality were impacted by reading the publication, it emerged that the *Metro Ezasegagasini* appealed to different demographics depending on what interested readers and what needs they wanted to be met by it. Livingstone and Das (2013) explain that people interpret text based on their own experiences as they try to make sense of it because messages are not fixed but must be interpreted.

These interpretations varied from individual to individual; for example, participant FG2_P1 said the publication has a role in informing residents about important events and agreed that the municipality was achieving this. Participant FG1_P1 said that as an informal trader in the city, he finds business articles that may positively impact him, particularly projects in Ward 24, of interest. Participants said more could be done to keep residents informed. They cited the 2022 floods, saying that not enough information was provided regarding the city's rebuilding efforts after the floods. They also suggested that stories be more ward-based so residents can know what is happening in their community. FG1_P4 said the publication achieved its goal by educating and informing residents, but she felt its coverage was heavily biased towards service delivery in eThekwini; very little of what was happening in her ward was featured. So, while the publication was broadly community-focused, coverage should focus on wards and generic community initiatives. These observations support the findings of Fourie (2006), who stated that a reader decodes text using their knowledge, experience and expectations during interpretation.

It was interesting to note that the opinions of participants from Focus Group 3 differed slightly from the other groups. While agreeing that the publication was informative for

communities, they were more critical of its coverage and subsequent impact, adopting a negotiated reading position. This position in the Theory of Reception is where an audience receives the text and, after careful consideration, reaches a negotiated position where they may not believe all the text from the encoder but have reached a level of understanding of the message. This position is in total opposition to the message received (Livingstone and Das 2013: 14). Focus Group 3 adopted this position as its members were not opposed to the text. While critical of the *Metro Ezasegagasini* and its content, the third focus group was not in total opposition or agreement with the message. The focus group raised some issues with the publication, including that residents are informed after the fact, with post-event coverage and issues not localised enough at a ward level. Coverage of issues did not include the work being done to uplift communities by residents and only reported on what the municipality was doing. Participant FG3_P3 said there was a need for more ward-based stories:

> There is service delivery taking place in every ward, and that should be highlighted. In that way, you are catering for all wards and not just one or two. Also, we are told about events after they happen; it seems more like a tick-box exercise.

Therefore, it can be concluded that readers reached a level of understanding (negotiated reading) of the publication when interacting with the text and did not dismiss and resist the information. Rather, they receive the message and decode it to reach meaning, the preferred reading position, rather than demonstrating total resistance to it (oppositional position) or believing the content (Cohen 2002).

It can be surmised that the *Metro Ezasegagasini* is achieving its goal of informing residents of work being done in communities. This is because the publication, being similar to that of a community newspaper, has survived the decline in newspapers because of its integral relationship with communities and covering issues that are of concern to them and affect them (Kirkpatrick 2001: 18; Dinabantu 2022: 1). The *Metro Ezasegagasini* is therefore accomplishing its goal and informing residents and deepening their understanding of municipal events.

4.5.2 Reporting

Community newspapers play an important role in communities due to the content they cover in their reporting. Beisner (2005) suggests that community newspapers identify

and report important issues, thus remaining an integral part of communities. The same can be said for the *Metro Ezasegagasini* and its coverage of community issues.

While most participants of the focus groups agreed that the publication was fulfilling its role in informing residents of municipal issues, they agreed that more could be done to make the publication even more community-driven and ward-based in its coverage – in essence, more community- and people-focused. This finding is similar to a reception study by Mabweazara (2006), which investigated the relationship among Bulawayo readers of the popular Zimbabwean tabloid *uMthunywa*. The study looked at the readers' perspectives of the publication. Mabweazara (2006: 76) found that readers' preferences are influenced by their ethnic identities and lived circumstances, which impact the context in which they read *uMthunywa*. The study further found that the publication's popularity lay in its community focus, with most stories about ordinary people. Mabweazara (2006: 69−70) states, "The focus of most of the stories is rooted in the lives of ordinary people. The content of the paper thus confirms that the paper puts emphasis on social issues that occur among the ordinary people as news". The publication also gives considerable attention to agricultural, education and health issues, which are developmental issues.

In this study, participant FG1_P4 cited an example of the devastating floods in 2022, where the publication did not provide enough coverage of what the city was doing to rebuild. FG3_P6 agreed, citing the same example. He said he was more informed by the mainstream media about what happened in eThekwini and the rebuilding process after the flood than the city's publication following the 2022 floods.

FG1_P4 said that while the content was heavily biased towards service delivery in eThekwini, very little of what was happening in her ward was featured and, therefore, was of little interest to her. She believes having more ward-based stories and not featuring politicians or city leadership would interest communities. FG2_P1 agreed that the publication has a role in informing residents about important events in the municipality. He said it lets the community know of major developments in the city and meeting details of importance to residents. FG2_P3 agreed, describing the publication as having "useful information on what's happening in the municipality". This observation was supported by FG2_P2, who said the publication was useful to keep residents informed. FG3_P2 believes this results from a lack of understanding of what

is important to the community. The statement was supported by FG3_P3, who said more should be done to educate residents, such as informing them of the latest grass-cutting cycle and unpacking what each department in the city does.

Providing examples of the coverage they would like to see, FG3_P9 said committees are working in wards to make a difference, and this work should be highlighted. Participants agreed that more can be done to provide a community-centric reporting approach. FG2_P3 said that while community issues are covered, the community's point of view was not reported. She said crime affects residents, so residents' views should be included when reporting on crime in the city. She said more can be done to inform residents about upcoming events and not only provide post coverage. This observation was supported by FG3_P3, who said articles should include information about what is happening in communities and not only advertise what the municipality is doing. She said ward committees are on the ground working in communities, and their work should also be featured in the newspaper, as it is very important work but is often not covered. She said there was a need for ward-based stories.

Another pertinent issue was that the coverage in the publication was post-event, and not enough was done to inform residents before an event took place in case they wanted to attend. FG3_P3 explained that the newspaper does not tell the community about upcoming events to inform residents about events in the city. Proving a solution to this, FG3_P1 suggested that the *Metro Ezasegagasini* carry a calendar of events detailing upcoming events with a focus on sports, arts and culture to be more inclusive of communities.

Supporting these sentiments is a study into the comparative preference of the isiZulu tabloid newspaper *Isolezwe* over other newspapers in the market. Wasserman and Ndlovu (2015) found that the popularity of the publication is influenced, in part, by "social/cultural identity and cultural capital, semantic noise avoidance, language use, the gratification of cognitive needs and the audience-centred definition of news". The importance of being community-focused in community newspapers to engage readers positively is reinforced. Wasserman and Ndlovu (2015) found that the popularity of IsiZulu newspapers among their isiZulu-speaking readers is largely due to the newspaper content meeting the readers' needs by being local in their coverage (Wasserman and Ndlovu 2015: 152 -153).

Therefore, while it can be concluded that participants agreed that the publication's reporting was community-focused, more can be done to be even more community-focused and inclusive. Participants also want to be further informed about events in the city before they occur so they can attend and not just read about them in post-event coverage. The angle taken in the reporting was an issue for the participants because while stories were community-based and service delivery driven, it was told through the lens of the municipality and the political leadership and not a true reflection.

4.5.3 Youth

There were several youth participants in the focus groups. An emerging theme across all three focus groups, not just the young participants, was that more concerted efforts to focus on youth-related issues were needed. Moreover, young people were not interested in the publication due to the lack of youth-focused content. This observation is supported by Lunenburg (2010: 2−3), who states that information is often selectively decoded because individuals perceive information favourably regarding their beliefs and how it speaks to their needs. Livingstone and Das (2013: 2) suggest that messages are not fixed and must be interpreted by the receiver. The interpretation of a message varies from person to person depending on their knowledge, personal experiences and expectations (Fourie 2006: 245). Therefore, for the sender to achieve their goal of the message to be received and decoded by the receiver, it is important to bear in mind that the message should be of some interest to the receiver as messages are decoded individually using a frame of reference, particularly if is of interest to the receiver.

When analysing the data, looking at the publication's impact on the youth, FG1_P2 stated that young people are not interested in the publication. She suggested a dedicated youth page focusing solely on issues affecting the youth would be of more interest, surmising that this would increase readership among young people. She said she learnt that the city has a Youth Office whose primary objective is empowering and providing opportunities for the youth. She did not learn about this office through the publication but through friends, and this is something of interest young people should know.

FG2_P7 agreed that the publication should cover content of interest to the youth, such as career guidance, to help learners choose the right career path. She said the paper reports on career expos that had already occurred and which they could not attend. She also suggested having more interactive content, such as puzzles or games. FG2_P5 suggested having themed editions where the publication could focus on all aspects of the youth and opportunities available to them solely in the entire edition. The option of themed editions is important because audiences are no longer "passive viewers" according to Kenyon, Wood and Parsons (2008): decoding is very personal and interest-driven (Kenyon, Wood and Parsons 2008: 276). Therefore, ensuring the encoded message is relevant to the receiver is important. In this instance, it would ensure the *Metro Ezasegegasini* carries information of interest to young people. Another suggestion on the part of FG3_P7 to attract the youth is to publish the publication electronically because young people are "always online and on their phones". It must be noted that the publication is available online on the municipality's website. A social media post is also uploaded to eThekwini Municipality's social media platforms with a link to download the bi-weekly publication.

FG3_P1 said the achievements of young people should be highlighted more in the publication. She cited an example of teams from the eThekwini Community Games heading to the South African Local Government Association Games and the lack of coverage. "We want to read about sports, the arts and youth programmes. The newspaper focuses on news but doesn't go beyond just the news story to how an event is changing lives," said FG3_P1.

Meanwhile, FG3_P8 said if the content were not changed to cater to the youth, they would continue not to read it. He said that having recently finished school; he was interested in learnerships and scholarships in the government and private sectors. Content to empower and help the youth should be carried in the publication. He said he would not read the publication for leisure but for the content, as suggested above.

The importance of young people as a receptive audience should not be underestimated. An empirical study by Kenyon, Wood and Parsons (2008) of young audiences aged 16 to 21 investigated how young people decode advertisements. Donohoe (1997, cited in Kenyon, Wood and Parsons (2008: 279) stated that young people are often considered cynical and sophisticated advertising audiences. The

study found that the young participants drew on a wide variety of knowledge to assist them in decoding. They found that the decoding process is "totally in the hands of the audience" (Kenyon, Wood and Parsons 2008: 279) and that regarding how the message was encoded, even if it was to have a specific meaning, it would ultimately be decoded "as seen fit" by the audience.

Therefore, it can be inferred that the publication is not meeting the needs of young people by not covering content that is of interest to them, leaving an untapped market that should be investigated to grow the publication's readership. The way young people consume news must be considered. Antunovic, Parsons and Cooke (2018) explored how young people consume news. They found that young adults, often called the "internet generation", are likelier to consume online news sources. So even if the *Metro Ezasegagasini* caters specifically to the youth in its coverage, how young people consume news must be considered to ensure the intended audience consumes the message.

4.6   TRUST

As a government publication, it is important to note whether the readers of the *Metro Ezasegagasini* trust the content and what position they adopt as media ownership has a direct impact on coverage of issues (Kiwanuka-Tondo, Albada and Payton 2012: 2; Msiza 2017). This theme is further unpacked below.

Most Focus Group 1 participants agreed they trust the publication's content with some reservations. For example, FG1_P4 believes some of the stories are true, while others are not because she has never personally met anyone who has benefitted from a government house or skills development programme, even though these people are shown in the publication. She said the lack of first-hand experience with beneficiaries makes some content hard to believe. FG1_P3 also had a negotiated position because she believes the stories are true but benefit other people, not those in need. Only one participant adopted an oppositional position, FG1_P2, who said the publication was not interesting to her because the stories were untrue.

Participants from Focus Group 2 also adopted a negotiated position. FG2_P4 said that because the *Metro Ezasegagasini* only carries the "good of government", he does not fully trust the content and whether it accurately represents eThekwini Municipality. FG2_P6 agreed, saying she believes "most of what is in the paper". She reached this

conclusion because the same stories are carried in mainstream media, which lends credence to the accuracy of articles. She said this makes the "government newspaper easier to believe".

Interestingly, most participants from Focus Group 3 adopted a direct opposition approach to the publication. They suggested some of the descriptions of the publication were farfetched (FG3_P2), racially-motivated coverage (FG3_P3) and untrue and political (FG3_P6). FG3_P9 said the coverage skewed the truth to make it seem that work was happening because there was no money for service delivery. Citing personal experience, FG3_P6 said he knew people working for the municipality who told him the opposite of what was reported in the publication, making it hard to believe the stories. FG3_P5 said it was hard to believe all the positive stories with the rampant corruption in the city, making her lose faith in the publication. FG3_P7 said that because there are never negative stories covered or comments from the watchdogs of government included in stories, it made anything the publication produces difficult to believe.

It can be surmised that the frame of reference impacts how readers engage with the text of a publication and the subsequent position they adopt. With the two lower-income (township and rural) focus groups, participants, while doubtful of the government, were more inclined to believe the publication's content, which is in contrast to the third focus group with the higher income (urban) who are more openly critical of the government and did not believe the coverage and were in opposition to the content carried.

Media ownership does influence content (Msiza 2017) because it is usually in favour of the media owners' economic or political interests (Msiza 2017: 4). Participants in the focus group were warier of the content of the *Metro Ezasegegasini* as it is a government-produced publication that they believe has an agenda to paint the government in a positive light.

4.7   DISTRIBUTION AND ACCESSIBILITY

During the focus group discussions, it emerged that the limited distribution of the *Metro Ezasegagasini* and its restricted access were among the main reasons participants could not always find a copy of the publication. The impact that community newspapers (similar to that of the *Metro Ezasegagasini*) have in communities is

important; however, sometimes, its reach is not wide enough to have the kind of impact it could have (Daniels 2021: 161).

4.7.1 Digital footprint

It was interesting to note that only participants from Focus Group 3 highlighted the lack of the digital footprint of the publication. During discussions, the other two focus groups (from rural and township) did not see a need for a digital copy if there were physical printed copies. Audiences derive meaning and interpret messages individually (Kenyon, Wood and Parsons 2008) based on their frame of reference to fit with themselves. Of the three focus groups, Focus Group 3, the more affluent community of the three groups, was the only group to highlight the digital aspect of the publication. Because they come from a similar background and experiences, they have derived similar meaning from the message that participants from the other two focus groups are, by definition, less affluent in a rural and township setting.

FG3_P4 said the digital footprint of the newspaper is not very big, which was a missed opportunity, while FG3_P8 said that more young people would read it if it were online. It was pointed out to the focus group that the publication is available online on the municipality's website (www.durban.gov.za), which they did not know about, and said this information was not communicated to residents. None of the other participants from Focus Groups 1 and 2 even mentioned the digital aspect of the publication.

The importance of newspapers going digital cannot be minimised. Cheney, Palsho, Cowan and Zarndt (2012: 73) suggest that the days of printed newspapers are numbered, and as a result, newspaper publishers are shifting their business models to digital. Moving forward, to grow the readership of the *Metro Ezasegagasi*ni, the role that social media and online platforms play in young people's lives (Vromen, Xenos and Loader 2014) has to be taken into consideration in the communication process to stay relevant and keep with the times.

4.7.2 Distribution

The *Metro Ezasegagasini*, which is similar to community newspapers, should have a far and wide reach within their communities (Lauterer 2006: 20) because the content they carry is of community interest (Kirkpatrick 2001: 18). Data emanating from the focus groups highlighted that despite the publication being "community-focused" it was

not easily accessible in communities, which is not a unique phenomenon. As Daniels (2019: 161) explains, while community newspapers have an important role in communities, their reach sometimes is not wide enough to have the kind of impact it could have. Daniels elaborates in her study of 14 community newspapers and notes that community newspapers have restricted circulation outside the target suburbs or regions and severely limited reach outside the metropoles (Daniels 2021: 175).

FG2_P3 said the frequency of the publication (bi-weekly) and its poor accessibility were an issue. She said the information was "old news" when it reached residents since the publication was produced every two weeks. She suggested it should be published once or twice weekly, similar to the printing and distribution of the *Ilanga* newspaper, to remain relevant. FG2_P6 said it was only available at municipal buildings, clinics, libraries and ward councillors' offices, which she would not visit often. She believes it would have a wider reach if it were available at tuckshops, which people frequent daily. The participant said she has to walk to the local library to get the publication, which is a far distance from her house, and often when she gets there, all the publication copies are gone. Accessibility of the publication is not unique to the *Metro Ezasegagasini*, as community newspapers navigate an uncertain future in the digital era (McQuail cited in Dinabantu 2022: 17). To mitigate this and ensure accessibility of the newspaper to readers, community media must explore online platforms such as their own websites and social media to ensure they are connecting with their readers (Dinabantu 2022: 17).

Participants from Focus Group 3. FG3_P3 said the publication is not easily accessible as it is not placed in shops which people frequent. She said it should not only be placed at municipal buildings as people do not often frequent those places. FG3_P4 said the benefit of community newspapers was that it was delivered to your door, making it convenient and more likely to read. FG3_P5 agreed about making the publication more accessible, suggesting that the publication be placed in doctor's rooms, hospitals, pharmacies and schools. FG3_P9 suggested delivering the publication to prominent people (such as the ward committee or street captions) to distribute to the community as "a lot more people would read it".

The *Metro Ezasegagasini* is printed in both English and isiZulu. FG3_P2 said that despite their predominantly English-speaking community, she often finds the isiZulu

paper is delivered to the Sydenham clinic. This results in the copies sitting there as most English-speaking patients do not take a copy. To counter issues like these, which limit readership, FG3_P1 said there needs to be monitoring and evaluation of the newspaper's distribution, which would ensure batches of the publication do not lie in places people do not frequent and that the publication is placed where it was more accessible to the public. In contrast to FG2_P3, who suggested an increase in the frequency of the publication, FG3_P1 suggested producing it only once or twice a month for a better-quality publication with a revised distribution model to ensure maximum readership.

Thus, the participants believe a better distribution model for the *Metro Ezasegagasini* should be instituted to ensure improved accessibility and growing readership.

4.8   DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS

This study aimed to explore how readers of the *Metro Ezasegagasini* decode it and the influence this may have on how they perceive the municipality. This section will discuss the findings of the research in relation to the following research objectives:

- To investigate whether the readers' understanding of the publication has deepened their understanding of municipal activities.
- To investigate if readers' frames of reference influence how they understand the metro publication and accept it as reliable about municipal activities.
- To investigate if readers directly oppose the text or message in the publication.
- To examine if the readers' different backgrounds are evident in how they understand the publication and municipal activities.

This study found that the *Metro Ezasegagasini* was fulfilling its role of educating and informing the public about city and municipal development. After reading the publication, participants felt they better understood the municipality. It also emerged that the different backgrounds impacted how readers interact with the text and whether they view it as a credible source of information. Readers adopted a negotiated reading and oppositional reading position. None of the participants adopted a preferred reading position of the publication. Three positions can be adopted as active participants in decoding messages (Petre 2009). These are preferred, negotiated, or oppositional. The preferred position is where audiences are in total agreement with

the message produced (Perdana 2019), while negotiated reading is where the audience reaches a level of compromise where they may not believe all of the messages but can relate to certain aspects (Cohen 2002). The final position is oppositional, where audiences resist the message and do not agree (Livingstone and Das 2013). Background, personal experiences and frame of reference influence individuals in the decoding process (Lunenburg 2010), which is evident in this research's findings that participants from similar backgrounds and experiences decoded the message similarly. Messages need to be interpreted by individuals and are not fixed (Livingstone and Das, 2013). Therefore, the same message will not be interpreted the same way by individuals, but the mentioned factors play a role in the decoding process.

4.8.1 Increasing Understanding of the Municipality After Reading the *Metro Ezasegagasini*

The study found that reading the *Metro Ezasegagasini* increased readers' understanding of municipal events and development taking place in the city. The study found that participants enjoyed reading the publication because of the strong community focus, largely due to the publication carrying relevant content of interest to communities. The most popular section of the publication (especially in the rural and township areas) was the job vacancy section, which participants said they read in every publication. The study has also revealed that readers think that while being educated and informed by the publication, they want it to be even more community-focused by covering specific wards. It was also found that readers want to participate more actively in news coverage, and what residents are doing in communities to be highlighted. The publication's important role in informing and empowering residents was demonstrated when participants said they wanted to be informed of events before they took place so they could attend, which indicates that readers care about the development and activities taking place in the city and the *Metro Ezasegagasini* as a trusted source to inform them of these developments.

The study also revealed a missed opportunity among the youth, who are not frequent readers of the publication. Participants wanted interesting and specific news for young people and even suggested having a whole page or edition dedicated to this issue. The study found that how young people consume news should be considered, with

suggestions to drive the publication's online presence to meet the needs of a youth-targeted audience.

4.8.2 Influence Background Plays in Forming Opinion of the Publication

The study found a stark contrast between the participants in the three focus groups and their opinion of the *Metro Ezasegagasini*. The two focus groups (Chesterville and Umkhumbane) are township and rural areas catering to mostly Black residents. There was a more positive consensus from these focus groups about the publication's content and its impact on informing and educating them. This perception differed for participants from the focus group in the Berea, who were more critical of the publication and its content. Their views mostly emanated from their feelings about the government. They were the only focus group to be openly critical of the government, calling the publication propaganda and an ANC mouthpiece.

It can be surmised that the background or the area that participants come from influences how a reader decodes the text and the meaning they derive from it.

4.8.3 Trusted Source of Information

The study found that most participants from Focus Group 1 adopted a negotiated reading position, which is where an audience receives the text and, after careful consideration, reaches a negotiated position where they may not believe all the text from the encoder but have reached a level of understanding where they can relate and agree with aspects of the message produced (Cohen 2202). Participants from Focus Group 1, while agreeing that the publication was informative and of interest in the community, were critical of some aspects of the *Metro Ezasegagasini*. A participant said that while they enjoyed reading about service delivery and its impact on people's lives, it was difficult to believe that it was true because it was happening in other wards, and no development was occurring in their ward. Therefore, participants adopted a negotiated position as they believed most of the content and viewed the publication as a reliable source of information; they were sceptical of certain aspects, such as the only positive reporting of the government with no negative or controversial topics covered. They viewed this as one-sided reporting. However, despite these sentiments, the participants did not oppose the message.

Only one participant from these two focus groups was in direct opposition to the content and did not believe any of the content to be true. This position is where the reader directly opposes the message produced (Fourie 2006: 253−255). The participant from Focus Group 1 said they did not believe any of the content to be true and said the publication was not interesting to her.

While most participants from Focus Groups 1 and 2 had a negotiated position, the same could not be said for the participants from Focus Group 3, who adopted an oppositional reading approach to the publication. Participants did not trust the publication as a reliable news source and were far more critical of the government, saying it was a mouthpiece for the government, and while the *Metro Ezasegagasini* paints a glowing picture of service delivery in the city, this was far from the reality.

The study found that the reasons for adopting the negotiated reading position differed according to the participants. Some reasons for the first two focus groups were not being personal beneficiaries or knowing someone personally who has benefitted from city initiatives. Other reasons were that the publication only carried the good the government was doing and never any of the negative or topical issues, making it hard to believe all the articles in the publication. There is a correlation between media ownership and the influence this has on editorial content (Msiza 2017: 4). Msiza's (2017) work explored the relationship that ownership and the impact on content and found that this influence is usually in favour of the media owner's economic or political interests. Msiza's (2017) analysis revealed the correlation between the media owner's interests and the biased reporting within their respective newspapers.

Participants who adopted the oppositional approach believed the publication to be farfetched, have racially motivated coverage, and be untrue and political. They believed the content to be untrue and in favour of the government and was not a true reflection of service delivery in eThekwini. Interestingly, none of the participants adopted a preferred reading position where they agreed with the encoded message. Mao et al. (2012) found, like Mzisa (2017), that editors play an important role in what is published with "newspaper ownership and the political climate", among others, impacted editorial decisions.

It can be surmised that readers of the *Metro Ezasegagasini* generally trust the publication as a credible source of news and development taking place in eThekwini.

4.8.4 Accessibility

An interesting theme emerged from the study around the accessibility and distribution of the publication. Most participants did not easily access the publication for various reasons. These included not having a reason to visit municipal buildings, which is the only place the publication is delivered or the limited copies of the publication being finished when they tried to access it. This observation shows a demand for publication in communities (particularly rural and township). However, the same cannot be said in urban areas, with stacks of the publication being left at the library and clinics. However, the distribution issue needs to be examined as isiZulu copies are being delivered to the urban area, which is not their target market.

4.9   CONCLUSION

This chapter presented and analysed the data gathered for this study. It focused on how readers of the *Metro Ezasegagasini* interacted with the text and the meaning they derived from it, focusing on whether it increased their understanding of the municipal and development and trusted it as a credible source of information. The impact of readers' backgrounds on decoding the text was also explored. A thematic analysis approach was adopted to group the data into four themes. These themes were further broken down into sub-themes, which helped answer the research questions and objectives at the beginning of this research study. The following chapter will present the summary and recommendations.

CHAPTER FIVE: SUMMARY, FINDINGS AND CONCLUSION

5.1 INTRODUCTION

The preceding chapter analysed the data and discussed the research study's findings. This chapter will outline the study's chapters and their role in addressing the initial research questions. A summary of the findings and suggestions for further research is included.

5.2 OVERVIEW OF THE CHAPTERS

Chapter One unpacked the rationale for the study, looking at why it is important to research the impact government publications have on communities. The chapter explored the link between government publications and community newspapers and outlined the main objective of the study, which was to determine what impact, if any, the *Metro Ezasegagasini* has on residents' lives. This chapter also provided insight into whether the eThekwini Municipality is fulfilling its mandate to inform and educate the public about municipal events and outlined the research questions and objectives guiding the study related to the above overarching objective.

Chapter Two provided a detailed literature review surrounding the role of government communication, newspaper ownership, the impact on content, and the role of community newspapers. The final section of Chapter Two outlined the Theory of Reception for this study. The three positions were described: preferred, negotiated and oppositional. An audience decoding text adopts one of these positions based on several factors further explored in this chapter.

Chapter Three outlined the qualitative research methodology employed in this study, including the research paradigm, and elaborated on the interpretivism paradigm, which was best suited for this study. The research design, a pilot study and the rationale for holding focus groups to collect data were elaborated on in this chapter. The ethical considerations to be taken into account were also explained.

Chapter Four outlined the thematic data analysis approach used to analyse the data to identify themes. A summary of each theme, as well as the findings of the study as related to the initial research objectives, were outlined.

5.3   SUMMARY OF THE FINDINGS

The study aimed to provide a new perspective to the literature on metro newspapers as an effective communication tool. The study aimed to discover how the readers of the *Metro Ezasegagasini* decode it and the impact, if any, it has on their understanding of the municipality and municipal issues.

The study found that the publication was useful to keep residents informed about issues and developments in the city. Readers found the community-centric information of interest to them and a reflection of what was happening in the city. However, it emerged that readers want the content in the *Metro Ezasegagasini* to be even more community-focused, honing in on specific wards and not general reports about events in eThekwini. Coverage of youth-related issues was also identified as a need. With the job vacancy section of the publication being the most popular, readers requested that youth learnership opportunities be highlighted, as well as other job opportunities in other spheres of government and not just local government.

Regarding the *Metro Ezsegagasini* as a trusted, credible source of information, the study revealed a mix of negotiated and oppositional readings being adopted, largely due to the almost always positive coverage of issues in the publication, the lack of service delivery in the city not being reflected in the content, and not being a personal beneficiary or knowing someone personally who has benefitted from municipal development are some of the reasons for the positions adopted. However, the coverage of similar issues in mainstream media also led readers to trust the publication's content.

The study also revealed that readers' background impacts their interaction with the text and subsequent decoding. The readers from an urban area were more critical of government and the government publication while readers from the township and rural areas were more trusting of government and the government publication.

Another issue that emerged during the study was the accessibility and distribution of the publication, with many readers lamenting the lack of easy access to the publication. Participants pointed out that copies were often finished when they tried to obtain an edition, and the isiZulu version of the publication was delivered to a predominantly English-speaking community.

5.4 REVISITING RESEARCH OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The study explored how readers of the *Metro Ezasegagasini* decode the publication and the influence this may have on how they perceive the municipality.

The objective was achieved through the following research objectives.

- To investigate whether the readers' understanding of the publication has deepened their understanding of municipal activities.
- To investigate if the readers' frames of reference influence how they understand the metro publication and accept it as reliable for reflecting municipal activities.
- To investigate if readers directly oppose the text or message in the publication.
- To examine if the readers' different backgrounds are evident in how they understand the publication and municipal activities.

Each research objective will be elaborated upon further, and it will be outlined how the findings of the study addressed that particular objective,

5.4.1 To investigate whether the readers' understanding of the publication has deepened their understanding of municipal activities

The first research objective was to investigate whether the reader gained a deeper understanding of municipal activities and the municipality overall after reading the municipal publication. This objective was satisfactorily addressed during the data collection and subsequent coding process. During the data analysis, it emerged that most participants read the publication for the job vacancy section because they were unemployed and seeking employment. This motivation was particularly true for the rural and township area focus groups. The *Metro Ezasegagasini* carries similar content to that of community newspapers, which interests the community (Lauterer 2006: 20; Dinabantu 2022). Because the publication was community-focused, the content was of interest to participants and increased their understanding of the municipality and its activities. Participants described the publication as "informative" and "useful". Some participants did suggest that coverage could be even more community-focused and narrowed down to a particular ward as opposed to general news about eThekwini, which would ensure the publication is even more community orientated. Despite this observation raised by participants, there was a consensus on the informative role of *Metro Ezasegagasini*. During the data analysis, it emerged that the *Metro*

Ezasegagasini appealed to different demographics depending on what was of interest to them and what need they wanted to be met by the publications. So, it can be concluded that the publication is achieving its role of informing the public about municipal activities based on the study's findings.

5.4.2 To investigate if the readers' frame of reference influences how they understand the metro publication and therefore accept it as reliable for reflecting municipal activities

The study's second objective was to investigate if readers' frames of reference influenced how they interacted with the publication and whether they accepted it as a source of information. The communities and, by default, their backgrounds affected their interaction with the publication and its content. In the first two focus groups, which were lower-income groups and more previously disadvantaged communities, participants mostly agreed with the publication content and said that it kept them informed of municipal activities. They mostly adopted a preferred reading position. Participants from the third focus group, a slightly more 'privileged' community, while agreeing with the coverage being community-focused, were more sceptical of coverage and adopted a negotiated reading and oppositional position in how they engaged with the text. Therefore, the frames of reference (including their background and communities) affected how readers interacted with the publication and whether they viewed it as a reliable source of information. Despite the publication being government-owned, participants from lower socio-economic backgrounds were more amenable to the publication and its content. In contrast, participants from a more privileged socio-economic background were more critical of the publication, its content and the government that produced it.

5.4.3 To investigate if readers are in direct opposition to the text or message in the publication

The third research objective was to investigate what position readers adopted, namely, preferred, negotiated, or oppositional, when interacting with the *Metro Ezaszegagasini.* Most first and second focus group participants agreed on trusting the publication's content. These participants resided in rural and township areas. In contrast, most participants from Focus Group 3 (an urban area) adopted a negotiated reading and direct oppositional approach to the publication. As mentioned in the

previous research objective, the background of participants influenced how they interacted with the text, which is confirmed by the positions adopted by the participants when they decoded the text.

It can be surmised that the frame of reference impacts how readers engage with the text of a publication and the subsequent position they adopt. With the two lower-income (township and rural) focus groups, participants, while sceptical of the government, were more inclined to believe the publication's content. In contrast, in the third focus group with higher incomes (urban), participants were more openly critical of the government and did not believe all the coverage. Participants adopted a negotiated reading position as some people found some of the content to be true, while some participants were in total opposition and did not believe any of the content in the publication.

5.4.4 To examine if the different backgrounds of the readers are evident in the way they understand the publication and, in turn, municipal activities

The study's fourth and final research objective explored whether the different backgrounds of readers impacted their understanding of the publication and municipal events. During the coding process, it emerged that the digital footprint and distribution of the publication impacted how readers engaged with the publication. Participants from Focus Group 3 (the urban area) highlighted the lack of a digital footprint for the publication. During discussions, the other two focus groups (from rural and township areas) did not see a need for a digital copy if there were physical printed copies. Data from the focus groups highlighted that despite the publication being "community-focused", it was not easily accessible in communities. Concerns were raised that the publication was printed bi-weekly and did not always have the most up-to-date news. Another challenge raised by participants was that the publication was only available at Municipal buildings and not where people frequented. Also, the incorrect language paper was distributed (isiZulu publication delivered to a mostly English-speaking community), which also limited interaction with the publication. A better distribution model for the *Metro Ezasegagasini* would be to ensure improved accessibility and growing readership, including highlighting that it is available online.

5.5   CONTRIBUTIONS OF THE STUDY

The study set out to investigate the impact, if any, that a municipal government publication has on readers' lives and whether it affects their understanding of municipal events. Exploring this issue was pertinent because no research has been undertaken, to the researcher's knowledge, of the effectiveness of government publications.

The research findings assist in understanding the role government publications play in communities and how it can be improved to meet the interests and needs of communities who are the target audience. Key issues around the publication's digital footprint, accessibility and distribution also were explored in this study. The study contributes to knowledge in terms of Reception Theory as it applies to community newspapers.

5.6   RECOMMENDATIONS TO ETHEKWINI MUNICIPALITY

While the study achieved the main research objective of the impact the *Metro Ezasegagasini* has on readers and their understanding of municipal activities, some key issues emerged that the municipality should consider. These issues include a more community-focused reporting approach and highlighting service delivery and development in specific wards. More pre-event coverage instead of post-event reporting should also be considered to encourage residents to attend events of interest to them. Including residents in covering the news and soliciting their opinions would promote interaction with residents and ownership of the publication by readers. Covering all issues, including negative or controversial topics, would also increase the publication's credibility among readers; it would be seen as a credible, truthful and reliable source of information. The lack of youth-focused content emerged from the data, which the municipality should explore. Another issue arising from the study was the accessibility and distribution of the publication. The municipality should further explore accessibility and distribution to ensure the publication being produced is reaching its intended audience and is easily accessible to achieve its goal of educating and informing the public.

5.7   RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY

The study explained the impact the *Metro Ezasegagasini* has on readers' lives and the impact it has on their understanding of municipal activities and development. However,

this study was limited to only three focus groups in three areas. Expanded research incorporating more areas will strengthen findings if similar sentiments are shared by readers from other communities. Including a wider range of communities would also provide further insight into whether backgrounds impact how readers interact with a publication and whether it informs their understanding of its content.

5.8   LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

A study's limitations are potential weaknesses that are usually out of the researcher's control at the level of the research design and other factors that the researcher has selected (Theofanidis and Fountouki 2018: 156).

A limitation of this study was that focus groups were only held in three areas due to time and budgetary constraints when there are 110 wards in eThekwini Municipality. Expanding the research to include more wards would assist with comparisons between rural, township and urban areas. Another limitation was the research design: data were collected during focus groups. While participation from all participants was encouraged, a few participants in the focus groups dominated discussions. Perhaps another data collection approach could be used instead of focus groups, namely one-on-one interviews or survey questionnaires. The former would allow rich participant data to be collected and analysed. The latter would ensure a larger sample in more wards is included. Both alternative approaches may assist participants to be more open to providing their thoughts and perspectives compared to a group setting.

5.9   CONCLUSION

This chapter presented a brief overview of the previous four chapters and a detailed summary of the findings. The discussion revisited the research objectives initially outlined in Chapter 1 and showed how the study's findings addressed those objectives. A discussion of the study's contributions and recommendations to eThekwini Municipality based on the findings followed. Finally, recommendations for further study and the limitations of the research work were included in this chapter.

REFERENCES

Abernathy, P.M. 2018. *The expanding news desert*. Chapel Hill, NC: Center for Innovation and Sustainability in Local Media, School of Media and Journalism, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

Acocella, I. 2012. The focus groups in social research: advantages and disadvantages. *Quality and Quantity,* 46: 1125–1136.

Alharahsheh, H.H. and Pius, A. 2020. A review of key paradigms: positivism vs interpretivism. *Global Academic Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences* 2(3): 39−43.

Antunovic, D., Parsons, P. and Cooke, T.R. 2018. 'Checking' and googling: stages of news consumption among young adults. *Journalism*, *19*(5): 632−648.

Apuke, O.D. 2016. Exploring the issue of media ownership and control in Nigeria. *New Media and Mass Communication*, 56: 13−16.

Beisner, T.J. 2005. *The role of community newspapers as a promotional tool and the problems therein.* Institute for rural journalism and community issues.

Braun, V. and Clarke, V. 2012. Thematic analysis. *Research Methods in Psychology.* *2*(1): 57–71.

Briandana, R. and Azmawati, A.A., 2020. New media audience and gender perspective: A reception analysis of millenials interpretation. *International Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences Research*, *6*(1), pp.58-63.

Briandana, R. and Ibrahim, I.S., 2015. Audience interpretation on Korean TV drama series in Jakarta. *Jurnal Komunikasi Borneo*, *4*(1), pp.45-55.

Brussel, L. 2017. The right to die: a Belgian case study combining reception studies and discourse theory. *Media, Culture and Society*, *40*(3): 381−396.

Cohen, J. 2002. Deconstructing Ally: explaining viewers' interpretations of popular television. *Media Psychology*, *4*(3): 253−277.

Daniels, G. 2021. Community newspaper voices: local and black, but the glaring gap is women. In *Media Diversity in South Africa* (pp. 161−177). Routledge.

Department of Communication. 2015. Available: https://www.doc.gov.za/content/about-us (Accessed 7 March 2019).

Dinabantu, K.S. 2022. *The normative role of the corporately owned community newspapers in the digital era: District Mail, Northern News and Eikestad Nuus in South Africa*. M.A, Stellenbosch University.

Dogari, K.A., Shem, W., Apuke, O.D. 2018. Media ownership, funding and challenges: implications for state owned media survival in Nigeria. *New Media and Mass Communication,* 8(3): 230−240.

Du Plooy, G.T. and Du Plooy, G.M. 2009. *Communication research: techniques, methods and applications*. Cape Town: Juta and Company Ltd.

Durham, M. and Kellner, D. 2006. *Media and cultural studies: Keyworks*. 2nd ed. London: Blackwell Publishing.

Elo, S., Kääriäinen, M., Kanste, O., Pölkki, T., Utriainen, K., Kyngäs, H. 2014. Qualitative content analysis: a focus on trustworthiness. *SAGE Open,* 1−10.

Erfort, C. 2017. *The state of arts and entertainment reporting in Cape Town's community newspapers*. M.A, Stellenbosch University.

Fairbank, J. Plowman, K. and Rawlins, B. 2007. Transparency in government communication. *Journal of Public Affairs,* 7(1): 23–37.

Fossey, E., Harvey, C., McDermott, F., Davidson, L. 2002. Understanding and evaluating qualitative research. *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Psychiatry* 36: 717–732.

Fourie, P. 2006. *Media studies volume 2: content, audiences and production*. Cape Town: Juta Education.

Fox, N.J. 2008. Post-positivism. *The SAGE encyclopedia of qualitative research methods, 2*: 659−664.

Francis, J.J., Johnston, M., Robertson, C., Glidewell, L., Entwistle, V., Eccles, M.P. and Grimshaw, J.M. 2010. What is an adequate sample size? Operationalising data saturation for theory-based interview studies. *Psychology and Health*, *25*(10): 1229−1245.

Golafshani, N. 2003. Understanding reliability and validity in qualitative research. *The Qualitative Report*, *8*(4): 597−607.

Govender, N., 2010. *The influence of the print media in portraying women in sport: A case study of The Independent on Saturday*. Doctoral dissertation, Durban University of Technology.

Government Communication and Information System. 2019. Available: https://www.gcis.gov.za/content/about-us (Accessed 7 March 2019).

Hamilton, J. and Kosar, K. 2015. How the American government is trying to control what you think. *The Washington Post*, 24 September. Available: https://www.washingtonpost.com/posteverything/wp/2015/09/24/the-new-propaganda-how-the-american-government-is-trying-to-control-what-you-think/?noredirect=on&utm_term=.39581913c3d6. (Accessed 7 March 2019).

Haven, T.L. and Van Grootel, L. 2019. Preregistering qualitative research. *Accountability in Research 26*(3): 229−244.

Jarvis, C. 2003. Desirable reading: the relationship between women students' lives and their reading practices. *Adult Education Quarterly*, *53*(4): 263−264.

Johnson, B.R. 1997. Examining the validity structure of qualitative research. *Education*, *118*(3): 282−292.

Kenyon, A.J., Wood, E.H. and Parsons, A. 2008. Exploring the audience's role: a decoding model for the 21st century. *Journal of Advertising Research*, *48*(2): 276−286.

Khan, S.N. 2014. Qualitative research method: grounded theory. *International Journal of Business and Management*, *9*(11): 224−233.

Kirkpatrick, R. 2001. Are community newspapers really different? *Asia Pacific Media Educator*, 10: 16−21.

Kiwanuka-Tondo, J., Albada, K.F., Payton, F.C. 2012. Media ownership and news framing: an analysis of HIV/AIDS coverage by Ugandan press. *African Journal of AIDS Research*, *11*(4): 361–371.

Kothari, C.R. 2004. *Research methodology: methods and techniques.* 2nd revised ed. New Delhi: New Age International Limited Publishers.

Kumar, K. 1987. *Conducting group interviews in developing countries* (Vol. 8). Washington, DC: US Agency for International Development.

Lauterer, J. 2006. C*ommunity journalism: relentlessly Local.* 3rd ed. North Carolina: The University of North Carolina Press.

Lewis, S. C., Kaufhold, K., Lasorsa, D. L. 2010. Thinking about citizen journalism: the philosophical and practical challenges of user-generated content for community newspapers. *Journalism Practice*, *4*(2), 163−179.

Livingstone, S. and Das, R. 2013. *Interpretation/reception.* London School of Economics and Political Science.

Lunenburg, F.C. 2010. Communication: the process, barriers, and improving effectiveness. *Schooling*, *1*(1): 1−11.

Mabweazara, H.M. 2006. *An investigation into the popularity of the Zimbabwean tabloid newspaper, uMthunywa: A reception study of Bulawayo readers.* Doctoral dissertation, Rhodes University.

Mao, Y., Richter, M.S., Kovacs Burns, K. Chaw-Kant, J. 2012. Homelessness Coverage, Social Reality, and Media Ownership: Comparing a National Newspaper with Two Regional Newspapers in Canada. *Mass Communication and Journalism,* 2(7): 1−7.

Marczyk, G.R., DeMatteo, D. and Festinger, D., 2010. *Essentials of research design and methodology* (Vol. 2). New Jersey: John Wiley and Sons.

Megebhula, P.H. 1994. Evictions in the new South Africa: a narrative report from Durban. *Environment and Urbanization*, *6*(1): 59−62.

Mersey, R. D. 2010. Reevaluating Stamm's theory of newspapers and communities in a new media environment: toward a new theory based on identity and interdependence. *Northwestern University Law Review, 104*(2): 517−536.

Mhagama, P.E. 2004. *The role of community media in development: a case study of the Cato Manor development project*. M.A., University of KwaZulu-Natal.

Mohammed, M.A.J. and Abdullah, F.M., 2023. The effect of an educational programme based on reception theory on the development of critical thinking. *Journal of Survey in Fisheries Sciences, 10*(3S), pp.5008-5031.

Moodley, P. 2011. *Mainstream newspapers versus community newspapers: An investigation into readers preferences*. M.A, University of Zululand.

Morley, D. 2003. Active audience theory: pendulums and pitfalls. *Television: critical concepts in media and cultural studies* (pp. 93−9). Oxfordshire: Routledge.

Msiza, N. 2017. *Editorial politricks: A content analysis of selected newspapers' coverage of the ANC, DA, and EFF during the 2016 local government elections in South Africa*. M.A, University of South Africa.

Myeni, W.V. 2005. *Assessing local job creation and employment sustainability within Greenfields housing projects: case studies of Wiggins Umkhumbane and Westrich (Durban).* Doctoral dissertation, University of KwaZulu-Natal.

Nishtar, S., Mirza, Y.A., Jehan, S., Hadi, Y., Badar, A., Yusuf, S. and Shahab, S., 2004. Newspaper articles as a tool for cardiovascular prevention programs in a developing country. *Journal of health communication, 9*(4), pp.355-369.

Noy, C. 2008. Sampling knowledge: the hermeneutics of snowball sampling in qualitative research. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology 11*(4): 327−344.

Panhwar, A.H., Ansari, S., Shah. A.A. 2017. Post-positivism: an effective paradigm for social and educational research. *International Research Journal of Arts and Humanities, 45*(45): 253−259.

Park, Y.S., Konge, L., Artino, A.R. 2020. The positivism paradigm of research. *Academic Medicine*, *95*(5): 690−694.

Perdana, D.D. 2020, March. Reception analysis of related audience by watching "Sexy Killers", the documentary film. In *2nd International Media Conference 2019 (IMC 2019)* (pp. 86−98). Atlantis Press.

Petre, R. 2009. Translations of American Myths, Icons and Brands in Post-Communist Romanian Culture. *Media theory and reception.* Ovidus University of Constanta, Romania. 170−177.

Potter, D.A. 2016. *An exploration of a community's expectation of a community newspaper: a case study of* Fourways Reviews. M.A., University of South Africa.

Rai, N. and Thapa, B., 2015. A study on purposive sampling method in research. *Kathmandu: Kathmandu School of Law*, *5*(1), pp.8-15.

Rumney, R. 2015. 20 Years of Changes in Media Ownership. *Rhodes Journalism Review,* 35: 66−69.

Save the Children. 2017. *Methods of data collection and analysis*. The Open University and Save the Children Resource Centre. Available: https://resourcecentre.savethechildren.net/library/save-childrens-monitoring-evaluation-accountability-and-learning-meal-introductory-course (Accessed 24 March 2019).

Seale, C. 1999. Quality in qualitative research. *Qualitative Inquiry*, *5*(4): 465−478.

Shenton, A.K. 2004. Strategies for ensuring trustworthiness in qualitative research projects. *IOS Press: Education for Information 22*, 63–75.

Smythe, L. and Giddings, L.S. 2007. From experience to definition: addressing the question 'What is qualitative research?' *Nursing Praxis in New Zealand*, *23*(1).

South African Communications Unit. 2014. Additional funding for Metro Ezasegagasini Newspaper. Durban: Government Printer.

Stahl, N.A. and King, J.R. 2020. Expanding approaches for research: understanding and using trustworthiness in qualitative research. *Journal of Developmental Education*, *44*(1): 26−28.

Staiger, J. 2005. *Media reception studies*. New York: New York University Press.

Strand, C. 2012. Homophobia as a barrier to comprehensive media coverage of the Ugandan anti-homosexual bill. *Journal of Homosexuality*, *59*(4): 564−579.

Sukamolson, S. 2007. Fundamentals of quantitative research. *Language Institute Chulalongkorn University*, *1*(3): 1−20.

Swanepoel, T., Van der Waldt, G. and Steyn, E., 2016. A quality management model for community newspapers: the case of developing countries. *Total Quality Management & Business Excellence*, *27*(9-10), pp.1191-1209.

Tashakkori, A., Teddlie, C. and Sines, M.C. 2012. Utilising mixed methods in psychological research. *Handbook of psychology*, *2*: 428−450.

Taylor, S.J., Bogdan, R., DeVault, M. 2015. *Introduction to qualitative research methods: a guidebook and resource*. London: John Wiley and Sons.

Theofanidis, D. and Fountouki, A. 2018. Limitations and delimitations in the research process. *Perioperative Nursing-Quarterly Scientific, Online Official Journal of GORNA*, *7*(3): 155−163.

Tongco, M.D.C., 2007. Purposive sampling as a tool for informant selection. *Ethnobotany Research and Applications*, 5:147-158.

Van Teijlingen, E. and Hundley, V. 2001. The importance of pilot studies. *Nursing Standard*, *16*(40), 33-36.

Vossen, A.M.J.M., 2018. *Framing global poverty: European newspapers, NGOs and citizens and poverty in developing countries*. Tilburg: Uitgeverij Wereldpodium/Lenthe Publishers.

Vromen, A., Xenos, M.A. and Loader, B. 2015. Young people, social media and connective action: from organisational maintenance to everyday political talk. *Journal of Youth Studies*, *18*(1): 80−100.

Walliman, N. 2011. *Your research project: designing and planning your work*. London: Sage Publications.

Wasserman, H. and Ndlovu, M. 2015. Reading tabloids in Zulu: A case sttudy of Isolezwe. *Communitias 20*: 140-158.

Watson, R. 2015. Quantitative research. *Nursing Standard*, *29*(31): 44-8.

Zarndt, F., Connexions, G. and Cheney, D., 2011. The future of online newspapers. *Proceedings of the Charleston Library Conference.* Available: https://docs.lib.purdue.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1150&context=charleston (Accessed 13 August 2023).

APPENDIX 1: REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH

22 January 2021

Request for Permission to Conduct Research

Dear Councillor

My name is Charmel Payet, a Master of Journalism student at the Durban University of Technology. The research I wish to conduct for my Master's dissertation is Decoding Government Publications: A Reception Study of the *Metro Ezasegagagsini.*

I am hereby seeking your consent to assist in identifying participants from your ward to participate in a focus group.

Focus groups will be held in Chesterville in Ward 24, Berea in Ward 31 and Umkhumbane in Ward 29.

Each focus group will have between 8 to 12 participants and will be reflective of the racial demographic of your ward, which will include all race groups from the above-listed communities. The focus groups will also be evenly split between genders, with age consideration taken into account to ensure a perspective from older and younger demographics.

The first focus group will be held in March 2021 with the other two focus groups being held in April 2021.

I have provided you with a copy of my proposal, which includes copies of the data collection tools and consent and/or assent forms to be used in the research process, as well as a copy of the approval letter I received from the Institutional Research Ethics Committee (IREC).

If you require further information, please do not hesitate to contact me at charmel.payet@durban.gov.za or call 083 310 8516. Thank you for your time and consideration in this matter.

Yours sincerely,

Charmel Payet

Durban University of Technology

PLEASE SIGN BELOW:

I hereby grant permission for Charmel Payet to undertake a focus group in my ward.

Sign:_____

Date:_____

APPENDIX 2: LETTER OF INFORMATION

**LETTER OF
INFORMATION**

Title of the Research Study: Decoding Government Publications: A Reception Study of the Metro Ezasegagagsini

Principal Investigator/s/researcher: Charmel Payet, Bachelor of Technology Journalism

Co-Investigator/s/supervisor/s: Dr Sam Usadolo, PhD and Zwakele Ngubane, MA: Culture, Communication and Media Studies

Brief Introduction and Purpose of the Study: This study will investigate how readers of the government publication, the Metro Ezagagasini, interpret and interact with its content. There is no study that has explored metro publications or newspapers and whether they are achieving their mandate of informing their target audience, which this study intends to do.
A reception study approach will be used in this study, which will explore how audiences understand the provided text and whether it has any influence on them.
The present study is important as it will help to understand if the publication is achieving its purpose of informing the municipality's residents about the municipal activities that have a bearing on their lives. By seeking to investigate the readers' analysis of the newspaper and the direct impact it has on them as the intended audience, this study will provide a new perspective to the literature on metro newspapers, especially as it relates to their effectiveness as a tool to communicate to their public and how they affect the residents' opinion of the municipality.

Outline of the Procedures: Data will be collected from three focus groups of between eight to twelve participants, to be held in three eThekwini areas, namely, Chesterville, Berea and Umkhumbane. You, as participants, will be asked open-ended questions in order to engage in dialogue about the Metro Ezasegagagsini publication. Focus group sessions will be an hour long, held at a venue in the community identified. Participants will only be identifiable by their name tags, with only the researcher being privy to their contact details and other personal information. Notes will be taken during the discussion as well as recorded on a Dictaphone. An isiZulu translator will also be present to assist with any translations, if necessary.

Risks or Discomforts to the Participant: There are no perceived risks or discomfort anticipated for participants taking part in the study.

Benefits: The potential output from this research is that it can guide the eThekwini Municipality to provide content in the municipal publication that is relevant to what readers want, to forge a relationship of trust between the local government and the reader, and to ensure that the publication that is being produced fulfils its mandate to inform and educate eThekwini residents.

Reason/s why the Participant May Be Withdrawn from the Study: You, as a participant, are free to withdraw from this study at any stage without any repercussions. The researcher will endeavour to ensure that you feel comfortable and are reassured of your confidentiality from the start to the end of the study and are free to ask questions from the researcher at any stage.

Remuneration: Participants will not receive remuneration for their involvement; however, refreshments will be provided at the focus group sessions within the maximum amount per person as stipulated in the Durban University of Technology's Institutional Research Ethics Committee

Costs of the Study: Participants will only be required to incur the cost of travelling to the venue where the focus group will be held, which will be conveniently located in their community to minimize transport costs.

Confidentiality: Your confidentiality as a participant will be assured as your real names, birth dates, identity numbers, and addresses will not be used in the study, with pseudonyms given and other identifying factors, such as age and gender, used to identify you. Only the researcher and her supervisors will have access to information about participants.

Research-related Injury: No research-related injuries are anticipated as the research to be undertaken is qualitative.

Persons to Contact in the Event of Any Problems or Queries:

Please contact the researcher, Charmel Payet (083 310 8516), my supervisor (031 373 2837) or the Institutional Research Ethics Administrator on 031 373 2375. Complaints can be reported to the DVC: Research, Innovation and Engagement Prof S Moyo on 031 373 2577 or moyos@dut.ac.za.

APPENDIX 3: CONSENT FORM

CONSENT

Statement of Agreement to Participate in the Research Study:

☐ I hereby confirm that I have been informed by the researcher, <u>Charmel Payet</u>, about the nature, conduct, benefits and risks of this study - Research Ethics Clearance
Number: _____ ,

☐ I have also received, read and understood the above- written information (Participant Letter of Information) regarding the study.

☐ I am aware that the results of the study, including personal details regarding my sex, age, date of birth and initials will be anonymously processed into a study report.

☐ In view of the requirements of research, I agree that the data collected during this study can be processed in a computerised system by the researcher.

☐ I may, at any stage, without prejudice, withdraw my consent and participation in the study.

☐ I have had sufficient opportunity to ask questions and (of my own free will) declare myself prepared to participate in the study.

☐ I understand that significant new findings developed during the course of this research, which may relate to my participation, will be made available to me.

_____   _____   _____   _____

Full Name of Participant   **Date**   **Time**   **Signature/Right**
Thumbprint

I, Charmel Payet, herewith confirm that the above participant has been fully informed about the nature, conduct and risks of the above study.

_____   _____   _____

Full Name of Researcher   **Date**   **Signature**

_____   _____   _____

Full Name of Witness (If applicable)   **Date**   **Signature**

_____   _____   _____

Full Name of Legal Guardian (If applicable) Date   **Signature**
please note the
following:

Research details must be provided in a clear, simple and culturally appropriate manner, and prospective participants should be helped to arrive at an informed decision by use of appropriate language (grade 10 level)

- use Flesch Reading Ease Scores on Microsoft Word, select a non-threatening environment for interaction and the availability of peer counselling (Department of Health, 2004).

If the potential participant is unable to read/illiterate, then a right thumbprint is required, and an impartial witness who is literate and knows the participant, e.g., parent, sibling, friend, pastor, etc., should verify in writing, duly signed, that informed verbal consent was obtained (Department of Health, 2004).

If anyone makes a mistake completing this document, e.g., a wrong date or spelling mistake, a new document has to be completed. The incomplete original document has to be kept in the participant's file and not thrown away, and copies thereof must be issued to the participant.

References:

Department of Health: 2004. *Ethics in Health Research: Principles, Structures and Processes*
http://www.doh.gov.za/docs/factsheets/guidelines/ethnics/

Department of Health. 2006. *South African Good Clinical Practice Guidelines*. 2nd Ed. Available at: http://www.nhrec.org.za/?page_id=14

Department of Health. 2006. *South African Good Clinical Practice Guidelines*. 2nd Ed. Available at: http://www.nhrec.org.za/?page_id=14

APPENDIX 4: PILOT STUDY QUESTIONS

Decoding Government Publications: A Reception Study of the Metro Ezasegagasini

<div style="background:blue;color:white;padding:10px">

Name:_____

Age:_____

Area residing in:_____

</div>

PILOT STUDY QUESTIONS

1. What is your view or opinion of the publication?

   _____

   _____

   _____

   _____

2. What do you think is the purpose of the publication, and do you believe it serves this purpose?

   _____

   _____

   _____

   _____

3. Do you think it presents a true reflection of what is taking place in eThekwini?

   _____

   _____

   _____

   _____

4. Do you find it useful, and why? Please elaborate/explain.

_____

_____

_____

_____

5. The publication is divided into news, sports, job vacancies and tenders. Which of these sections interests you and why?

_____

_____

_____

_____

6. Do you understand the content of the different sections of the publication?

_____

_____

_____

_____

7. Does reading the publication improve your understanding of the municipality and its programmes?

_____

_____

_____

_____

8. Does reading the publication help you to understand local government and its function?

_____

_____

9. What do you not like or agree with in the publication and why?

10. Who do you think is the targeted demographic of the publication?

11. Do you trust the information in the publication and view it as accurate?

THANK YOU!