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Digital media and democratization: The role of x in promoting participatory democracy in Rwanda.

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DIGITAL MEDIA AND DEMOCRATIZATION: THE ROLE OF X IN PROMOTING PARTICIPATORY DEMOCRACY IN RWANDA

By

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Digital Journalism

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APPROVAL PAGE

The Aga Khan University
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A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of
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DECLARATION

DIGITAL MEDIA AND DEMOCRATIZATION: THE ROLE OF X IN PROMOTING PARTICIPATORY DEMOCRACY IN RWANDA

I, **CHRISTOPHE HITAYEZU-579802**, declare that this thesis does not incorporate without acknowledgement any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any university and that, to the best of my knowledge, it does not contain any material previously published or written by another person except where due reference has been made in the text. The editorial assistance provided to me has in no way added to the substance of my thesis, which is the product of my research endeavours.

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Date

DEDICATION

I dedicate this thesis to my sons Bryson and Bryan as well as my wife Janviere for their encouragement and support.

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I acknowledge my family for the support they have given me. I am sincerely grateful to my supervisors, Dr. Lydia Ouma Radoli and Dr. Joyce Omwoha, for their guidance in delivering a successful document.

ABSTRACT

Amidst the ever-evolving landscape of digital media's impact on democracy, this study explored the nuanced relationship between X and participatory democracy in Rwanda. Anchored on the Theory of Public Sphere and New Media Theory, this research shed light on the multifaceted interactions between citizens and politicians on X in Rwanda. By quantifying the interactions between politicians and citizens, finding out whether accountability mechanisms exist on the platform, and citizen-driven concerns; the study aimed to offer a comprehensive understanding of X's role in promoting participatory democracy in Rwanda. Situated within the Rwandan political context, this study gains significance as it navigates the unexplored ground of X's role in democratic practices within a country with a complex political history. The emergence of X as a platform for official communication and citizen engagement in Rwanda underscores the urgency of assessing its contribution to accountability and discourse within a rapidly evolving political landscape. Employing the quantitative content analysis method, this research examined the frequency of interactions and recurring concerns that emerge from citizen-politician interactions. The quantitative approach enabled a nuanced exploration of the issues that occupy the center of political accountability discourse. Findings revealed that politicians engage either frequently or occasionally on X in interactions that gives citizens the capability to hold them accountable in shaping citizens' priorities. The study also found that various subjects are discussed on X in Rwanda, where politics and social interactions take the lead. By synthesizing the perspectives of the Theory of Public Sphere and New Media Theory, this research offers practical insights for policymakers and digital media practitioners seeking to enhance democratic engagement.

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ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

ICIJ: International Consortium of Investigative Journalists

ICT: Information and Communications Technology

RGB: Rwanda Governance Board

RURA: Rwanda Utilities Regulatory Agency

GDP: Gross Domestic Product

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

1.1 Introduction

Citizen participation is one of the critical aspects of a democracy, and it is considered an accepted foundation of democracy (Nabatchi, 2012). This study examined digital media and democratization, with the role of X in promoting participatory democracy in Rwanda informing the research. Although Matfess (2015) classifies Rwandan leadership as 'developmental authoritarianism,' which represents a form of democratic government that offers significant public works and services while exerting control over nearly every facet of society, the constitution of Rwanda (2015) positions the country as democratic, with all Rwandans having the duty to participate in the country's development. Moreover, in Rwanda, democracy is framed as a developmental necessity that must include fundamental dimensions and rights that are indispensable for the dignity of the people, a model termed consensual democracy, a democracy where people take the destiny of their communities into their own hands (Group, 2001). This is in line with 's (2011) arguments that democracy is about the will of the people. And scholars, such as Rwigema (2022) suggest Rwanda's tremendous progress politically and economically due to a such people-centred democracy.

A democracy in which citizens participate directly in political decisions and policies that affect their lives is a participatory democracy, where various approaches of pinpointing genuine citizen needs and shaping resonant national policies are employed (Nahmias, 2011). Although citizen participation can be off-line, the online form is often

used to enable governments to engage citizens better (Zheng, 2017). In a presentation by a member of the Senate's ICT Steering Committee in Rwanda Parliament, examining which strategies the Rwandan Parliament should take in order to bridge the gap and improve access to and from citizens in the information society, Gasamagera (2009) argued that ICT can be an engine for citizen democratic participation, and Rwanda Parliament has been developing strategies to engage citizens in ICT-supported democratic dialogue. Furthermore, Rwigema (2022) found that Rwanda focused on ICT to pursue a social development strategy in rebuilding human capital.

In Rwanda, internet penetration has been gradually increasing after 1994, a year in which Rwanda was considered a failed state, deeply devastated in all aspects of life, whose future was simply unclear following the 1994 genocide against the Tutsis (Rwigema, 2022). The genocide during which over one million Tutsis, one of the then ethnic groups, were killed between April and July 1994 (Butera & Dominic, 2023). In 2020, though, active internet subscribers were as high as 62.9% from which relatively high numbers use the data on mobile devices (RURA, 2020). Alongside traditional media, today, social media constitute an important source of information for citizens as a result of internet penetration and its gradual affordability (RGB, 2021). Therefore, ICT tools and internet enabled citizens to access information and services and participate in social interactions through social media platforms. While there is a lack of empirical studies focusing on the government or public use of X in Rwanda, a separate study, as cited by Cohen and McIntyre (2021), examined X's engagement among the public across nine African countries during elections. In contrast to other nations, where politicians and political parties held limited influence in conversations, Rwanda stood out, with a third of its

influential X accounts belonging to politicians. This highlights X's potential significance in the context of Rwanda's democracy.

Although Facebook takes the lead in terms of the number of users with 46.64%, between September 2021 and September 2022, X, with 23.34% of social media users, remains the most authoritative (Starts, 2023). A platform on which a high-ranking official, such as a member of parliament, a cabinet member, or top politicians with policy-making and implementation capacities, can admit mistakes and ask for an apology. In 2022, a Minister of State used X to demand pardon over a corruption case (Tabaro, 2022). Despite this level of X usage, no study is available to quantify citizens and politicians' interactions and their role on accountability. Though X was not yet to be rebranded from Twitter during the period this study focused on, the researcher has used the most current name of the platform. Twitter was rebranded as X in July 2023 after being acquired by Elon Musk (Stokel-Walker, 2023).

1.2 Background to the Study

Generally, leaders engage to address political and social concerns, such as issues related to diplomatic relations, infrastructure, and development, among others. In a study on how India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi uses X to rebrand himself, Pal, Chandra, and Vydiswaran (2016) found that X's campaign exemplifies the power of social media in shaping the citizenry's imagination of its political leader. This is complementary to what Larsson (2014) found out in Europe: to engage citizens in conversation and come across as more likeable or approachable, politicians may use social media platforms like X more frequently. However, Chatora (2012) argues that one of the key challenges facing meaningful social-media-driven citizen participation is some African governments'

increasing distrust of social media. Despite the challenges, since there are no studies available on the role of X in promoting participatory democracy in Rwanda, this unique microblogging site could contribute to that, and this study intends to analyse that contribution.

Although X may not present leadership potential for all East Africa countries, it remains a key digital player in some. Even though Ochieng (2019) acknowledges that X can be harnessed toward being a healthy public sphere, a study by Githinji (2017) found that interactions between National Executive Leaders and the public in Kenya are at low levels. However, in Tanzania, crucial national issues are discussed with greater seriousness on X, in what has been nicknamed the "X Republic" than can be found in parliament (Ulimwengu, 2022). To express the same relevance, Onyango-Obbo (2022) argued that X in particular, has transformed in Africa from being a platform for radical rudeness and dissidents to a place for mainstream political and social confrontation as well as policymaking.

Meanwhile democracy, as cited by Nahmias (2011), is a government of the people, by the people, and for the people. As recognized in the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action, democracy is based on the freely expressed will of the people to determine their own political, economic, social and cultural systems and their full participation in all aspects of their lives (Vienna, 1993). Post (2011) argues that democracy refers to the value of authorship and to a certain relationship between persons and their government, which would imply that democracy is achieved when those who are subject to the law believe that they are also potential authors of the law. However, to understand democracy in the context of Rwanda, one cannot rely on Western constructs; efforts are still needed to

understand how Rwandans define democracy and their will in how their government is structured (Nahmias, 2011).

In Rwanda, Democracy is viewed as a developmental necessity encompassing essential principles and rights for human dignity. These encompass, among other things, security, the right to life, the elimination of any form of social discrimination, the entitlement to equal opportunities, a just distribution of national resources, and the freedom to express opinions (Group, 2001). In a study by RGB (2021), the role of the media as a platform for democracy is widely acknowledged as a platform for diverse societal voices and its contribution to various democratic aspects.

Democratic participation, on the other hand, refers to a model of democratic governance that emphasizes the active participation of citizens in decision-making processes (Post, 2011). The researcher suggests the need for citizens to have access to the public sphere so that they can participate in the formation of public opinion. It requires that governmental decision-making to be somehow rendered accountable to public opinion and is characterized by a focus on inclusivity, transparency, and accountability, with an emphasis on empowering citizens to shape the policies and decisions that affect their lives, which is what this study looked at with a focus on a digital public sphere. Local governments have advocated citizen participation as an effective strategy to lower citizen mistrust levels and inform citizens about governmental actions. In Rwanda, as Gasamagera (2009) argued, it has been proved that ICTs can be an engine for citizen democratic participation.

Palanithurai (2007) argues that participation is defined as a kind of local autonomy in which individuals can direct their own growth, decision-making, and course of action.

In fact, many media houses have been critical in disseminating information and providing a forum for engagements and debate on public discourse (Kanyinga, 2014). Therefore, the forms of collaboration made possible by new digital media, including social media, have addressed some of the issues with coordination that have hampered participatory democracy arguments, and there is today more desire than ever for bottom-up democracy (Polletta, 2014). It is estimated that 21.8% of Rwandan citizens use social media (RGB, 2021), which has transformed the political communication and engagement landscape, offering new opportunities for citizens to participate in democratic processes.

The evolution of ICT led to a boom in the number of digital publications and social media that surpassed traditional media and transformed information dissemination and consumption in Rwanda. Beside traditional media, social media has gained importance as an information source for Rwandan citizens due to expanding internet access and its increasing affordability, being the third most preferred source of information after Radio and Television (RGB, 2021). Meanwhile, with nearly 400 million users globally, X users cannot be compared to Instagram's close to 2 billion users or Facebook's approximated 3 billion users. However, compared to Facebook and Instagram combined, X has a greater impact on political and sociocultural issues (Onyango-Obbo, 2022). Although the social networks with the most users worldwide in 2022 were estimated to be Facebook (2.91 billion users), YouTube (2.562 billion), WhatsApp (2 billion), Instagram (1.478 billion), WeChat (1.263 billion), TikTok (1 billion), and Facebook Messenger (998 million), with X ranking the fifteenth with approximately 436 million users worldwide, it is still considered the social network of political activism par excellence (Padilla-Castillo & Rodríguez-Hernández, 2022). As cited by Padilla-Castillo and Rodríguez-Hernández

(2022), communication studies describe X as the network that democratizes political communication and makes the citizen agenda become the political agenda and the media's agenda.

In Rwanda, X ranks as the fifth most used social media platform after WhatsApp, YouTube, Facebook and Instagram (RGB, 2021). Per definition, X, rebranded from Twitter in 2023, is a social networking or microblogging service that consists of users following each other. It was founded in 2006 in the United States of America. A post, formerly "Tweet" or a text message, is the primary form of communication on X. Posts from users create the stream of messages people attend. Any other user can easily follow unprotected accounts without having to follow them back, as the follow connection is one-way. The reply is commenting to another person's post while reposting, formerly retweeting, entails adding another person's post to your posts (Boyd, Golder, & Lotan, 2010). Since Lijphart (1997) argues that participation by citizens is necessary for the democratic responsiveness of officials, and X, that Yegen, Ayhan, and Demir (2022) argue to be a platform for public interactions that is free to join, follow, post and repost, it means that the citizens may freely interact with leaders, and vice-versa. This direct engagement narrows the gap between the citizens and the leaders. This study quantified these interactions to determine whether accountability within them exists.

Furthermore, another important aspect in participatory democracy is accountability because it's through accountability, the leadership responds to the issues raised by the citizenry or the citizenry call to action or question the leaders. When Rwanda revised its Penal code in 2017, one of three Articles that was criminalizing defamation was dropped because of citizen engagements, mainly on X. Since there is a high political and

sociocultural influence of X as an authoritative platform in Rwanda (Onyango-Obbo, 2022), they might be a role that the platform is playing in advancing accountability in Rwanda's democracy, which means that X provides an avenue where people can raise concerns and get answered by top leadership. Therefore, this study intends to find out whether this role exists and analyse prominent issues of concern.

From a public policy standpoint, Rwandan government officials and institutions adopted to connect with citizens to participate in governance and development issues (Kagire & Kaitesi, 2012). Apart from President Paul Kagame who embraced X as a direct channel for engagement, using his account to interact with individuals both within and outside Rwanda, which motivated Cohen and McIntyre (2021) to describe him as a 'Digital President', Kagire and Kaitesi (2012) argue that this approach extends to other government figures, such as, among others, Louise Mushikiwabo, since when she was serving as Minister of Foreign Affairs, who employs X to provide accurate information on national matters and issues pertaining to the country and the former Minister of Health, Dr Agnes Binagwaho, who used to hold scheduled X discussions, fostering interactions with medical practitioners and the public on healthcare related issues.

X usage has been gradually increasing in Rwanda. Almost every elected or appointed leader is recommended to have a presence on X, the move that expanded to local leadership where following the President tends to be a requirement (Ncube, 2018). Even if this study looked at posts and replies of active accounts of the president, Cabinet and Parliament members, a wide picture of X in Rwandan leadership can be seen from the fact that as of August 24, 2023, President Kagame and his Office, Urugwiro Village, had 3 million and 884,6 thousand followers respectively. The Prime Minister and his Office also

had hundreds of thousands of followers. Apart from leaders, all the public institutions, from the state house to the district level, have an official presence on X. Some sectors, cells, and the lowest administrative entities, villages, followed the move. Therefore, since there is actively a good uptake of X by the leaders and public organs, citizen politician interactions on X may exist, but there is no specific study on the frequency of interactions between citizens and politicians on X, and that is what this study is going to find out.

Politicians and other officials have been known to reply to questions from citizens and comment on raised concerns. Mwai (2016) wrote that they can be accessed via X for questions or information. Which, in return, promotes transparent leadership through accountability on the platform. Thus, X's influence is big in Rwanda, and there is a conversation between politicians and ordinary citizens. So much so that there could be something that X is doing, but we don't know unless we carry out a study, and that is what this study has done.

1.3 Statement of the Problem

Although Rwanda has made remarkable progress in rebuilding institutions of government since the 1994 genocide against the Tutsi, concerns about democracy and governance remain (Arieff & Terrell, 2018). Despite the efforts, there are concerns about the extent to which citizen voices are heard (Clark, 2014). Notwithstanding that, the surge of interactions on X between citizens and politicians has become a noteworthy phenomenon, with one out of every three influential X accounts in Rwanda belonging to politicians, shaping online conversations (Portland, 2018). Although government officials use the platform to disseminate information and engage directly with citizens, no study has been done to quantify the extent to which these interactions exist systematically. Therefore,

finding out if officials address citizen concerns in such interactions on X could offer insights into the government's responsiveness and its potential implications for accountable governance.

Despite Rwanda's embracing of X as a platform for official communication (Onyango-Obbo, 2022), coupled with instances where public officials have directly addressed citizens' concerns via X, underscore the platform's potential in promoting democratic participation. However, its efficacy in fostering accountability within the democratic framework remains unclear. By examining instances where citizen grievances have led to tangible leadership reactions, the study evaluates whether the platform holds people in power accountable.

Within participatory democracy, understanding the issues that citizens predominantly hold politicians accountable for is pivotal. By scrutinizing the prevalent themes of citizen concerns, the study aimed to provide insights into the priorities and expectations of citizens from their elected representatives. Such an analysis unveiled whether X discussions are concentrated on specific issues or encompass diverse concerns, thus contributing to a comprehensive understanding of the issues driving participatory engagement on the platform.

1.4 Objective of the Study

The main objective of this study was to analyze the extent to which X plays a role in promoting participatory democracy in Rwanda.

1.4.1 Specific Objectives

1. To analyse the frequency of interactions between the citizens and politicians on X in Rwanda.

2. To assess whether X serves as a space for accountability within the Rwandan democracy.

3. To analyse the issues that the Rwandan citizens predominantly hold the politicians accountable to.

1.4.2 Research Questions

1. What is the frequency of interactions between the citizenry and politicians on X in Rwanda?

2. Does X serve as a space for accountability within the Rwandan democracy?

3. Which issues do Rwandan citizens predominantly hold the politicians accountable to?

1.5 Justification of the Study

The study on the role of X in promoting participatory democracy in Rwanda is crucial in understanding the contribution of X to democratic engagement and accountability in the country. Scholars such as Vaccari and Valeriani (2021) have emphasized the transformative potential of social media in amplifying citizen voices and facilitating political participation. However, such studies do not focus on X itself and how that political participation is in line with accountability. Which is what this study looked at.

Rwanda's unique context, with its history of the Genocide against the Tutsi and ongoing challenges in democratic development, necessitates a focused examination of what is contributing to its democratization effort, and X is one of them. Scholars like Tufekci (2017) have emphasized the need to explore the impact of digital platforms on political discourse in countries with complex histories and authoritarian legacies. However, the study does not analyse how X provides a space for citizen and politician interactions and political accountability, the aspect which this study intends to analyse. The findings of this study can inform policymakers and civil society organizations to develop strategies and policies that enhance citizen engagement and accountability in Rwanda's democratic development.

1.6 Significance of the Study

The findings of this study have the potential to inform policymakers, civil society organizations, scholars and other government stakeholders on how digital platforms like X contribute to political discourse and accountability. Moreover, as Rwanda's digital sphere continues to evolve, this study provides a valuable benchmark for assessing the role of digital media on democracy and governance in the broader African and global contexts.

1.7 Scope of the Study

The scope of this study focuses on examining the role of X in promoting participatory democracy in Rwanda. The study encompasses a range of objectives to understand the dynamics of interactions between citizens and politicians on X, assessing the platform's role as a space for accountability and analysing the predominant issues citizens hold politicians accountable to. Geographically, the study centers on Rwanda,

acknowledging the country's socio-political context. By concentrating on Rwanda, the research aimed to provide insights into how a specific nation leverages X as a medium for democratic engagement. The study examines X content over a specified period, from 1st July 2021 to 30th June 2022, a full and one of the most recent financial years in Rwanda. The findings are time-sensitive, capturing a snapshot of the digital discourse during the selected time frame.

The thematic scope encompasses a variety of subjects, including political, economic, social, technological, environmental, and legal aspects determined based on the PESTEL framework. Within a year, the research can explore how X was utilised to address issues of public interest related to democratic governance. The study involved examining posts and investigating the extent to which politicians engaged with citizens in Rwanda.

1.8 Limitations of the Study

The study has several limitations that need to be considered. The findings have limited generalizability beyond the specific context of Rwanda. Rwanda's unique political and social dynamics may not align with other countries. The study was conducted within a specific timeframe, which may constrain the depth and breadth of the analysis. Comprehensive exploration of long-term trends or extensive data collection may not be feasible within time constraints. Lastly, the researcher's own biases and interpretations may inadvertently influence data analysis and findings. Although efforts were made to minimize subjectivity, it is important to acknowledge the potential for bias in this study.

1.9 Operational Definition of Terms

Participatory Democracy: A form of governance in which the voices of various actors, such as individuals, groups, or entities, are heard and considered in the policymaking process.

Accountability: In this study, accountability refers to the responsiveness of politicians to issues raised by citizens on X.

Politicians: Persons involved in the process of public policymaking in their role as members of governments, parliaments, political parties, and other political bodies at the subnational level, such as local government, state legislature, national parliament, etc., as well as within the supranational political arena such as United Nations Security Council, European Union institutions, and so on. Many politicians get into office through a democratic election, while others are selected or appointed to a public office (Geys & Mause, 2017).

Predominant issues: The prominent and pressing topics that politicians directly address and engage with.

Issue of public concern: The matters that require politicians' attention, input, and responses due to their significance and relevance to the citizens.

1.10 Summary

This study aimed to examine the role of X in promoting participatory democracy in Rwanda's political landscape. The research seeks to explore the potential of X as a space for citizen and politician engagement and whether and on which issues citizens may prominently be holding politicians accountable through X. It analyzed data related to

politicians interactions and public sentiment on X to assess the frequency to which politicians interact with the public.

Moreover, the research had specific objectives tied to each aspect, focusing on examining the frequency of citizen and politician engagement on X, identifying whether the platform plays a role as a platform for accountability and prominent concerns the citizens hold politicians accountable to. By investigating these aspects, the findings may have implications for policymakers, stakeholders, and researchers interested in leveraging social media platforms and digital democratization in Rwanda and similar contexts. However, the study has certain limitations, including contextual generalizability, time constraints, and potential biases in interpretation.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

This chapter reviews the literature around the role of X in promoting citizen participatory democracy in Rwanda. This literature review explored the existing scholarship on using X in promoting participatory democracy. By examining the existing literature on the topic, this study aimed to provide a comprehensive understanding of the current state of research on X and digital democratization.

2.2 Theoretical Framework

This study looks at X's role in promoting participatory democracy in Rwanda. Therefore, a study on a form of new media such as X that provides a public arena for interactions is anchored on two theories. The theory of Public Sphere, first proposed by German philosopher Jürgen Habermas in 1962, suggests an area of social life where citizens can come together to discuss and debate matters of common interest. The second theory was New Media Theory, coined by Marshall McLuhan in 1964, which has emerged with advances in electronic communication technologies. While one is a classic theory and the other is modern, both theories are interconnected as they both converge towards public spaces for discussions. New Media Theory provides a lens to understand how technology changes the dynamics of public discussions, whilst the Theory of Public Sphere guides examining the quality of these interactions. Furthermore, in shaping the concept of democracy, the theories underscore the significance of informed and deliberative discourse

as essential elements for a functional democracy, emphasizing the need to exchange diverse viewpoints.

2.2.1 Theory of Public Sphere

The public sphere theory defines it as an arena for debate and discussion between private individuals, which informs citizens on social issues so they can make informed decisions about political matters (Singh, 2012). It suggests that a healthy public sphere, characterized by rational-critical deliberation, enables citizens to come together, discuss matters of public concern, and influence decision-making processes. Habermas argued that this type of discourse is necessary to ensure democratic processes and when functioning properly allows citizens to be actively engaged in shaping their own society. While this theory was on the public sphere as a platform where people gather then talk, the traditional public sphere has moved on digital space. Therefore, this shift highlights the continuing relevance of this theoretical framework in understanding public engagement in the digital age. The Theory of Public Sphere, though classic, has seen renewed relevance thanks to the emergence of social media. It has also recently been used by other authors such as Lindner and Aichholzer (2020), who described social media as the new electronic 'public sphere,' emphasizing its central role in modern online political discussions and consultations. In the context of this study, this theory is appropriate as it provides a framework to analyze whether X plays a role in participatory democracy in Rwanda.

The first tenet of this public sphere theory is based on the idea that all members within a given society have equal access to information relevant to making decisions regarding social matters (Adut, 2012). According to Habermas, all citizens have equal access to public debate without anyone having an advantage over another (Singh, 2012),

and X is of the same nature even though when it comes to digital space, this tenet might miss aspects such as differences in digital literacy and access to the internet that may affect access to it. Nevertheless, X's free accessibility still gives equal rights to access the platform and its content, and access to the content is more likely to influence interactivity. For example, anyone with access to cultural products, like books, plays, or journals, had at least a potential claim on the attention of the culture-debating public (Calhoun, 1993). In this context, since X is a public space where people have equal access and rights to engage with anyone, citizens and politicians may engage and have opinions on various issues. The frequency at which they engage and issues of discussion are what this study found out.

The second tenet emphasizes equality among participants when engaging in interactions within the public sphere. It implies that everyone should have an equal opportunity to have their voice heard, whether it comes from an influential person or not (Adut, 2012). Although the perspective adopted in Adut's article underscores that the public sphere is not always good for democracy, Habermas asserts that democracy must be viewed as a process that evolves when a particular type of social interaction prevails. In this context, X as a microblogging platform that allows equal opportunity among users, may be providing a space where ordinary citizens hold politicians accountable regardless of their levels of influence, which is what this study aimed to find out.

2.2.2 New Media Theory

The second theory is new media theory, a developing concept that emerged with advances in electronic communication technologies, including internet-empowered social networking with which people create unique identities online, often leading to real-world changes such as political movements. This creates an entirely new level of public

engagement which was not possible before digital technology came into play (Manderbach, 2012). New Media Theory focuses on the impact of digital technologies, such as social media platforms, on communication, public engagement, and the restructuring of traditional media systems. It acknowledges the transformative potential of digital media, including platforms like X, in reshaping the dynamics of political engagement. By choosing New Media Theory, the study acknowledges the distinctive characteristics of digital platforms and their potential to reshape traditional notions of participation, information dissemination, and public discourse.

One of the key tenets of new media theory is that technological advances have given rise to communication technology that provides for interactivity. Manderbach (2012) argues that with interactive applications such as social media platforms like X or Facebook, users engage in conversations with others without being physically present. The internet can be a much more empowering medium than traditional media because of its unparalleled information resources, interactivity, and ability to create communities of interest across all geographical boundaries. Authors such as Berger (1998) used this theory and suggested that internet users are thus more quickly and deeply enriched by the internet, and their contribution to democracy may exceed that of people restricted to other media. As part of the new media, X has gone beyond the public sphere that Habermas talked about, and created a public sphere that provides for interactivity and instantaneous communication. In the current study, X gives Rwandan citizens the opportunity to interact with their leadership, but no studies have been done to determine the frequency of interactions, which is one of the questions this study responds to.

Another tenet of the new media theory is that technological advances have given rise to communication technology that provides for convergence. It refers to merging different forms of communication into one medium, allowing for a more efficient flow and exchange of information. Although this argument is not limited to what is discussed, it gives an idea on how issues are discussed. For social media platforms like X, convergence applies where users can post in different formats such as text messages, photos, and videos (Berger, 1998). Chen (2013) argues that convergence has enabled citizens to become more informed and engage directly with those responsible for making decisions affecting society. Since this convergence aspect plays a role in promoting engagements on social media through various forms by which issues are discussed, this must be affecting the likelihood of politicians to react on posts, which is what this study aimed to determine whether these interactions exist.

In this study, New Media Theory provides insights into the unique characteristics of X as a participatory platform, such as its real-time nature, accessibility, and interactive features. It informs the examination of how X amplifies citizen voices, encourages direct engagement with politicians, and provides opportunities for decentralized and bottom-up forms of political expression. This framework has guided the analysis of X interactions and citizen participation patterns in Rwanda. Through the lens of this theoretical framework, the study seeks to contribute to academic discourse by advancing a broad understanding of the complex interplay between X and democratic citizen participation in the specific context of Rwanda.

2.3 General and Empirical Literature Review

The general literature review delves into theoretical frameworks that underpin the study. The empirical literature review reviews previous research findings that specifically address the topics related to the role of X in participatory democracy. In the empirical literature review, a synthesis of existing studies provides an understanding of X's role in shaping political narratives, fostering citizen-politician interactions, and influencing democratic processes.

2.3.1 Digital Media and Democratization

New forms of interactive online interaction tools, such as the microblogging service X, are challenging the existing information model. As Mergel (2012) cited, X has the potential for "fast-and-furious" bidirectional exchanges with individual constituents in real-time. Moreover, the publicness of the tool allows access to the conversations because all exchanges are publicly observable, even by non-constituents, and collapses many different online audiences into one news stream. Political personalities and their respective causes command considerable authority and influence through the repeated decentralization of X narratives (Waugh, Hashemi, Rahman, Abdipanah, & Cook, 2014). Oginni and Moitui (2015) argue that political strategies are increasingly based on social media principles: dialogue and participation.

Digital media has significantly affected democratization in many countries, including Rwanda. The rise of digital media, particularly social networking sites like X, has empowered citizens by providing a platform for expression, political engagement, and the dissemination of information. The development and proliferation of the Internet have

inspired techno-utopians, activists, politicians, academics and political philosophers (Kersting, 2012). One of the key ways digital media contributes to democratization in Rwanda is by providing a space for citizens to express their opinions and engage in political discussions. X has allowed Rwandans to voice their perspectives on various issues, from governance and human rights to social and economic concerns.

Oginni and Moitui (2015) argued that social media, one of the digital media forms, has emerged as a fundamental game changer to complement the shortfalls of the traditional public policy process by connecting governments or policymakers directly to citizens. They also cited that citizen engagement must be employed to achieve policy directions that are expected to have a major impact on them. Engagement of citizens during the policy process provides an opportunity to address conflict with difficult policy choices and investigate emerging issues that need substantial learning to reach a consensus by reconciling competing interests. The authors further argue that social media provides a platform for common citizens' inputs, in the form of opinions or in some cases, expert opinions, during policy negotiation processes. The findings of Oginni and Moitui (2015)'s study that explored social media and the public policy process in Africa suggest social media use has taken a new shape with respect to citizens' engagement in the electoral process. However, its use for civic engagement in policy process remains very low. I recommend an investment in ICTs that should include building human capital and ICT literacy. Policymakers should explore online citizens' engagement and adjust policies to incorporate technology in sub-regional and national development plans.

2.3.2 Digital media and interactivity

The internet penetration rate in Africa is low but surprisingly, the continent has been experiencing a general upward trend in the use of social media (Chatora, 2012). Despite estimates suggesting increased mobile penetration and usage, the author argues that stark demographic and class inequalities still exist. Mostly, online and mobile social media remain largely tools of the urban social elite and middle-class populations. The economically wealthy are usually the ones who enjoy access to networked computing and communication and have the skills and confidence to use them, although the massive uptake of mobile money, particularly in East Africa, suggests a change in trend (Chatora, 2012).

Kersting (2012) argues that social media and "many to many" communication became more important, commending the importance of the possibility for citizens to consult dynamic or static political information of new information and communication technologies. Chen (2013) argues that the term 'social media' has become a popular way to describe a collection of online systems that allow for the production, storage, and distribution of user-generated content. To the author, social media allows for creating a virtual social space where groups of users can come together in synchronous and asynchronous interactions. These interactions can be structured in a threaded response to blog posts that are moderated, semi-structured, such as a discussion amongst groups of friends within extended Facebook social networks, or unstructured, such as in Twitter (X), where topics are not 'owned' but tied together through the ad hoc application of hashtags that can be used to locate and link together posts by a variety of different users.

Rwanda's strategic focus on ICT as a driver of economic development has resulted in significant advancements in digital infrastructure. This commitment is exemplified by initiatives such as the "Smart Rwanda Master Plan," which seeks to leverage digital technologies to foster innovation, economic growth, and good governance (MYICT, 2020). The growth of digital media is particularly evident in the proliferation of online news portals, social media usage, and e-government services portals such as Irembo, a one-stop portal for government services. It is estimated that 21.8% of Rwandan citizens use social media (RGB, 2021), which has transformed the political communication and engagement landscape, offering new opportunities for citizens to participate in democratic processes.

2.3.3 X as a space for participatory democracy

X has emerged as a dynamic and influential space for participatory democracy worldwide, and this phenomenon is no exception in Rwanda. This microblogging platform, characterized by its real-time interaction, has given Rwandans a space to engage in participatory democracy in unique and transformative ways.

One of the most significant roles of X in Rwanda's participatory democracy is its function as a platform for citizen engagement and civic participation. It enables citizens to actively participate in discussions on various issues, from politics and governance to social justice and human rights. Citizens can share their opinions, raise concerns, and engage in debates with previously unparalleled immediacy. X has thus democratized the process of contributing to the national discourse.

X has also been a tool for promoting transparency and accountability in Rwanda. In the context of participatory democracy, this is of paramount importance. The platform has been used to expose corruption, highlight human rights abuses, and report on

government activities. This transparency empowers citizens to hold their leaders accountable for their actions, contributing to a more responsive and responsible government.

Furthermore, X has provided a space for marginalized voices and civil society organizations in Rwanda. It has allowed these groups to raise their concerns, advocate for change, and mobilize support for various causes. In doing so, X has helped bridge the gap between citizens and policymakers, providing a more direct channel for expressing grievances and seeking redress.

However, it's important to acknowledge that the role of X as a space for participatory democracy is not without its challenges. Government surveillance, censorship, and concerns about online safety can impede free expression and civic participation. Striking a balance between promoting the democratizing potential of X and ensuring digital rights and freedoms remains a complex task.

2.3.4 X as an avenue for interactivity between citizens and politicians

As a critical indicator of participatory democracy, X provides a space for interactivity. In his book chapter that looked at a small administrative entity, Sataporn (2021) argues that social media can be used to enhance communication efficiency between citizens and the public and that people can use social media to raise complaints about administrative entities. This adds to the findings of an analysis of 198 students from the State University of New York at Albany campus, where Morpeau (2011) found a relationship between X and political engagement and between X and civic engagement. The study found that students who use X were more politically and civically engaged than those who did not. Moreover, the study concludes that relationships formed on X are

strongest amongst friends, emphasising that users who follow politicians and news outlets enjoy a one-sided relationship since a minority make it to interact with politicians and news outlets. On the other hand, Lin and Kant (2021) conclude that social media, including X, facilitate interactions at different levels of citizen power, though the government still plays a leading role within top-down approaches. Furthermore, the study found that social media support policies and enhance social inclusion by engaging many participants, who may not be able to participate via traditional methods.

It is true that X may or may not contribute to interactions between the citizens and politicians based on several factors such as political, cultural, or infrastructural, among others. In Rwanda, the potential for X to facilitate citizen engagement and political discourse is particularly relevant. A report by the Government (2018) suggests that the advent of online resources and social media platforms such as X and Facebook has increased social interactions between citizens and leaders. However, no study has been done to reveal the frequency of these interactions, which is one of this study's intended findings.

2.3.5 X as a space for accountability

A study by Neu and Saxton (2023) that examines the potential of X-based accountability with reference to the ICIJ's 2016 release of the Panama Papers argues that the publication of previously private information can trigger a conversation on public accountability. Yet, Alfred's (2014) study on X and corruption in Kenya's police did not find an effective contribution of X in terms of accountability. He argues that X remains a tool that citizens can use to use their communication power better and highly challenge

existing standards and main messages being disseminated by public officials. While using X to report specific cases of police corruption in Kenya appears to have been thus far unsuccessful, it remains a tool that activists have used in other contexts to mobilize around particular causes and demand the government action.

Although Alfred (2014) study does not suggest a significant contribution of X on accountability, it does not mean posting wrongdoings go unseen and unacted on. It may be because the study focused on the Police, not politicians, as this study did. Since making previously private information public can lead to accountability discussions, it might be the case for Rwandan citizens, and this study needs to be done to find out whether X provides that accountability space.

2.3.6 Prominent concerns in X discourses

Chatora (2012) defines the term social media as an internet-based tool and service that allows users to engage with each other, generate content, distribute, and search for information online. This interactive or collaborative nature of these tools makes them 'social'. The interactive nature of these web-based tools marks a paradigmatic shift in web-based communication. In the early developmental stages of the Web, Web 1.0, online information primarily in text format, was pushed to passive users whose social engagement with it was constrained because of inherent structural and technological limitations. Chatora (2012) argues that in the current phase, Web 2.0, web-based tools now facilitate social connectivity that enables users to produce, interact and share content online. Internet users have thus progressed from consumers of web-based content to 'prosumers' who also

produce content, a shift that has led to the development of many different forms of social media platforms.

Authors such as Nganji and Cockburn (2020) argue that social media is shifting the power of information into the hands of citizens, and this shift of power now means citizens can use social media to air grievances publicly and participate in politics in new ways. In Rwanda, a study by Karim et al. (2021) about domestic response to the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic found that social media has played a prominent role, with the Ministry of Health, Prime Minister Office, Rwanda Biomedical Centre, and other government offices releasing official information on X, labelling it a medium that is already frequently used for public communication in Rwanda.

X has emerged as a dynamic space where citizens actively engage in political discourse. This study delves into the heart of this digital dialogue, aiming to unveil the prominent concerns that Rwandan citizens predominantly hold their politicians accountable for on X. Since the studies acknowledge X's potential to accommodate open discussion without limitation to specific subjects, and the fact that X give equal rights of publication and opportunity for interactivity and accountability, this implies that various matters of concern are discussed, which are still unclear until this study was conducted.

A study by Cohen and McIntyre (2021) found that there is a presence of X diplomacy and soft power tactics in Rwanda, which support the idea that X is used in governance in Rwanda. However, a gap remains since the study was done on one individual, President Paul Kagame, and the result might not be generalized, which is what this study went beyond to look at politicians and citizen engagements in Rwanda. On the other hand, Karim et al. (2021) conducted a study on Rwanda's responseto COVID-19.

They argue that official X accounts have been used to disseminate daily updates containing reminders of hygiene and prevention practices and emphasize important new public health guidelines. However, this study may not inform us of prominent issues discussed on X since it focuses only on health and on a single pandemic. Therefore, this study was necessary to provide a real picture of prominently discussed issues on X between citizens and politicians in Rwanda.

A study by Ochieng (2019) that examined X political discourse in Kenya suggests that X has the potential to serve as a beneficial public sphere but lacks inclusivity in discourse. It emphasizes the importance of providing equal opportunities for discussing perspectives from various social groups. However, the study only looked at the 2017 elections in Kenya and did not expand to other issues as this study did. In fact, not all people may be interested in elections. However, all people feel involved in health, infrastructures among other developments issues, which may affect the frequency of interactions between the citizens and politicians on X. Moreover, the study analyzed only Posts from the public about elections, it did not focus on citizen-politicians' relationship with X as this study did to find out how often these interactions happen and which issues were prominently discussed.

2.4 Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework guiding this study is grounded in the dynamic relationship between digital media, interactions, accountability, and predominant issues. At its core, the framework recognizes the influence of the medium, X, on shaping the current political landscapes for this study. It, therefore, provides a visual representation

and relationships of the frequency of interactions, accountability, and predominant issues as key variables of this study.
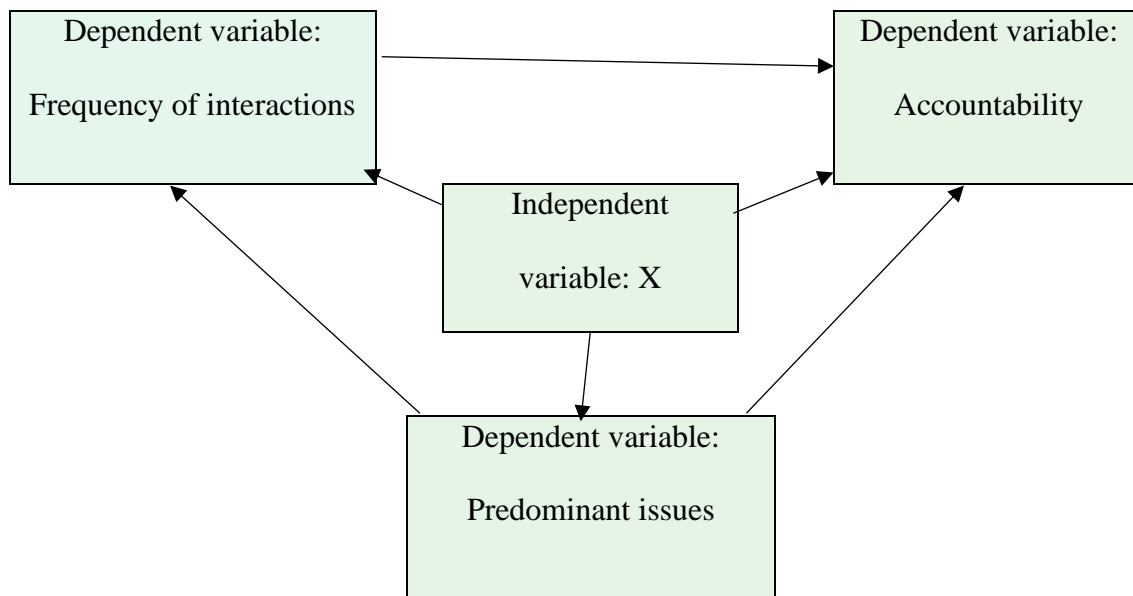
Figure 1. A Conceptual framework on politicians' interactions with citizen on X

The central concept of the framework is X, representing the social media platform that serves as the study's independent variable. Surrounding X are three interconnected dependent variables: Frequency of interactions, accountability, and predominant issues citizens hold the politicians accountable for. These elements represent the core concepts under investigation and their interplay in the context of Rwanda. The arrows illustrate relationships and influences between the key concepts. They illustrate that the frequency of interactions on X affects the level of accountability on the platform. This means the higher the interactions, the more likely accountability will happen. On the other hand, the predominant issues that citizens raise affect the frequency of interactions and accountability in a way that the more issues are discussed, the the more interactions are there and the more likely accountability to happen.

2.5 Summary

This chapter looks at the theories underpinning the research subject. Research from various regions, including Africa, has explored how X enables citizen engagement, fosters accountability, and drives transparency. However, studies focusing on X's role in enhancing democracy are still limited. This chapter looks at two theories that this study was anchored on, which are theory of Public Sphere that suggests that there exists an area of social life where citizens can come together to discuss and debate matters of common interest and the New Media Theory, which has emerged with advances in electronic communication technologies. The chapter also closely examines some scholars' work to review X as an arena for citizen engagements with leaders, X as a space to enhance accountability, and X as a space to promote transparency in leadership. The next chapter looks at the research methodology.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the research design and methodology used to analyze how the X enhances democratic, participatory democracy in Rwanda. This chapter discussed the research methods and data generation tools for the analysis. The overall design to discuss here helped the researcher determine how much X influenced democratic engagements between the citizenry and the leadership in Rwanda. It covers research design, population and sampling design, data generation methods, research procedures, data analysis methods and chapter summary. It also discusses the validity and reliability of research tools.

3.2 Research Approach and Research Design

The study used a mixed research approach by employing quantitative content analysis and key informant interviews for qualitative data. To understand interaction dynamics, this study required numerical data that allowed for a nuanced understanding of the dynamics of interactions. Widely employed in the field of communication, quantitative content analysis is a research method in which textual, visual, or aural material features are systematically categorized and recorded to be analyzed (Coe & Scacco, 2017). The frequency of posts and the number of replies were quantified, providing insights into the intensity and regularity of digital political discourse. By corroborating qualitative with quantitative data, the study drawn meaningful comparisons between different thematic categories of issues discussed. Moreover, numerical data were crucial for assessing the

statistical significance of issues within citizen-politicians' engagements. Through quantitative analysis, the study determined whether certain themes, such as politics or social issues, were more statistically significant in shaping interactions on X.

The study also employed an explanatory sequential design. As a follow-up qualitative to explain quantitative, the researcher first collected quantitative data followed by qualitative and integrated both data in order to come to a conclusion (Subedi, 2016). This is an appropriate design to analyze the citizen-politician interactions, accountability, and issues of concern on X in Rwandan democracy. This approach allowed for a thorough examination of the frequency and themes characterizing citizen-politician interactions on X without manipulating variables, ensuring a faithful representation of the complex online discourse.

3.3 Population

As defined by Shilimi (2021), population can simply be the entirety of universe that a researcher wishes to base their investigation on. This study's population comprises two primary groups: Rwandan citizens with the presence of X and Rwandan politicians who utilize the platform. In the context of citizens, the population includes individuals across diverse demographic backgrounds, varying geographic locations, and socio-economic statuses who participate who have accounts on X. The population's second component comprises Rwandan politicians who use X as a communication channel. This encompasses a range of political figures, including government officials and members of parliament.

Given the dynamic nature of X, the population is not fixed but rather evolves based on the active users and participants in digital discussions during the study period. The study's findings reflect the broader dynamics of X-based political engagement within the Rwandan context, acknowledging the diversity of viewpoints and interactions within this digital public sphere.

3.4 Target Population

As Shively (2011) argues, the target population is a group being studied, in other words, the group about which one wishes to conclude. In the case of this study, the target population was made of 140 Rwandan politicians who were in government service between July 2021 and June 2022. These are 106 and 34 parliament and Cabinet members, respectively. This study's target population comprises politicians actively engaging with political discourse on X. The study aimed to target individuals regardless of political affiliation to capture diverse political perspectives. The target population considers politicians with different roles and responsibilities, acknowledging that various political actors may exhibit distinct engagement patterns on the platform. The findings aspired to provide insights reflective of the broader patterns and interactions within the targeted groups participating in X-based political discourse within the Rwandan context.

3.5 Study Site

The study site for this research is the online platform X, specifically focusing on the digital political landscape within Rwanda. X serves as a virtual space where citizens and politicians can engage in real-time discussions, share information, and participate in shaping political narratives. This social media platform was selected as the study site due

to its prominent role in facilitating open and immediate communication, making it a critical arena for digital political discourse. Within this online space, the study site encompasses the entirety of X related to discussions originating from and about Rwanda. This includes posts and replies involving or attracting politicians' attention. The virtual boundaries of the study site are defined by the digital borders of X, allowing for the analysis of digital political engagement irrespective of geographic locations within Rwanda.

The choice of X as the study site aligns with the digital nature of current political engagement, offering a unique insight into the ways citizens and politicians utilize online platforms for communication, information dissemination, and participatory democracy.

The study site revolves around the virtual space provided by the X platform through the X App or Web. This includes examining all posts, quotes and replies generated on X by the sampled politicians during the specified time frame. While the study site was primarily virtual, it is important to acknowledge that the context of the study is Rwanda's political landscape. Thus, the findings and analysis would be specifically related to the Rwandan political environment and actors active on X during the designated period. The study site does not include physical locations or offline interactions but focuses on X's digital realm as a space for engagement and discourse during the specified time frame within Rwanda's political landscape.

3.6 Sample Size

The study employed a purposive sampling of posts posted on X between July 2021 and June 2022. Ten personal X accounts of key politicians were purposively selected based on followership and active status. An account with at least 10,000 followers was considered

to have many followers, while an account that addressed at least one public interest concern per month was considered among the active politicians' accounts. For each account, a maximum of three monthly posts were purposively selected for analysis. In total, 243 posts and replies were analysed. Determining what constitutes a robust sample size is often a dilemma that qualitative researchers frequently confront (Young & Casey, 2018). Young and Casey (2018) found that under certain conditions, researchers can achieve robust results with small sample sizes, which even help maximize limited resources.

If you look at the X profile of all politicians in Rwanda, the top ten conversant within the period of the study were @PaulKagame, @BayisengeJn, @DrDanielNgamije, @cakamanzi, @Dr_Uwamariya, @MukabalisaD, @Ngabitsinze, @MusoniPaula, @Iyamuremye_A and @MujaJeanne. These accounts that were purposively selected belong respectively to the President of the Republic, the Minister for Gender and Family Promotion, the Minister of Health, the Chief Executive Officer of Rwanda Development Board, the Minister of Education, the Speaker of Rwanda Parliament, the Minister of Trade and Industry, the Minister of ICT and Innovation, the President of Rwanda Senate and the Minister of Environment. The researcher quantified all the posts and replies by the sampled politicians.

3.7 Sampling Procedures

Researchers use a sampling procedure to thoroughly select a relatively small number of individuals from a determined population to serve as data sources or participants in a study (Sharma, 2017). As per Sharma (2017), researchers rely on sampling techniques as testing every participant in a study population is unmanageable. Baxter and Babbie (2003) highlight that purposive sampling is convenient in cases where a researcher wishes

to examine a small subset of a larger population in which many participants of the subset were easily identified but a study of them all would be nearly impossible, which applies to this study.

This study employed purposive sampling. The top ten politicians were selected based on their followership and active presence on X. This justifies that a relatively active politician with low followership might be found in the sample, same for a relatively less active with high followership. The study focused on one financial year starting in July and ending in June of the other year. Therefore, the study period is between July 2021 and June 2022, Rwanda's very recent complete financial year.

To make sense of the findings, the researcher conducted key informant interviews sampled systematically by choosing the first Rwandan X account on his X timeline that displays a stream of posts from accounts he has chosen to follow on X. After sampling one, he reloaded the page and picked the second and reload again until 5 accounts were sampled. The research looked for their contacts and contacted them for interviews.

3.8 Research Method

Quantitative content analysis and key informant interviews were employed in this study. As cited by Rourke and Anderson (2004), quantitative content analysis was defined as a research technique for the systematic, objective, and quantitative description of the manifest content of communication. Boettger and Palmer (2010) argue that quantitative content analysis can enrich research in technical communication by identifying the frequency of thematic or rhetorical patterns and then exploring their relationship through inferential statistics. The author further argues that in quantitative research, content

analysts evaluate texts for predefined terms or phrases and use inferential statistics to make conclusions about their presence, which works with this study to be conducted on X, with posts as content to analyze.

The study used a code-sheet developed using deductive coding, with which the researcher used pre-established codes developed before interacting with the data (Jenna, 2022). The codes were pre-developed with reference to the PESTEL themes. Invented by Francis Aguilar in 1967, PESTEL analysis is a framework that categorizes and analyzes an important set of external forces that might impinge, these forces may be political, economic, sociocultural, technological, ecological, or legal (Paramadita, Sasongko, & Candra, 2019). The researcher quantified all the posts from sampled politicians' accounts for objective one. A politician who made 180 or more posts and replies, at least one post every two days, was considered a very frequent X user, while a politician with 96 posts and more but less than 180 posts, was considered a frequent user. A politician who made 48 posts and more, but less than 179 posts was considered an occasional X user while those who made less than 48 posts were considered rare X users.

The content of objective two was analyzed based on whether a post responds to a concern. A post was considered as responding to a concern if it either acknowledges the citizen's concern, mentions actions, or steps to be taken to address the concern, indicates a sense of urgency and importance attached to the concern, conveys empathy and understanding towards the citizen's concern, offers updates to the government's plans related to the concern or makes a public commitment to addressing the concern. For objective three, sampled posts and replies were categorized in PESTEL themes using

descriptive coding to determine where to classify each of the posts by summarizing the content using a single word that encapsulates its general idea, as Jenna (2022) suggests.

3.8.1 Pestel Framework

This framework was to construct the code sheet in relation of significant themes or issues of discourse from X. PESTEL Analysis is one of the tools used to identify and analyze key drivers of change in the organizational environment. The PESTEL Analysis, an acronym for Political, Economic, Social, Technological, Environment and legal. PESTEL analysis is an audit of the operations in order to determine the different factors and forces in the external environment that affect the success of an organization or society.

The tool allows the assessing of the current the political economic, social, technological, environment and legal factors. It is used in predicting and evaluating the future state of affairs. Buye (2021) argues that it is generally seen as part of SWOT analysis process because it can also be used to examine opportunities and threats in the organization's external environment. It is a part of the external analysis, appraisal, review and evaluation. PESTLE Analysis can assist in being acquainted with opportunities offered by existing conditions in the societal environment. It can also be used for identifying current or possible future challenges, allowing for effective planning of how to manage these challenges best.

Table 1: Pestel Framework

Issue discussed is:	If it addresses:
Political	Policies, stability or corruption
Economic	Growth, inflation, interest rate, employment, or income
Social	Population, ageing, career views, lifestyle, or cultural barriers
Technology	Technology incentives, innovation, automation
Environment	Climate change, recycling and disposal or sustainability
Legal	Antitrust, labour, copyright, data protection or health and safety

3.8.1.1 Political

Posts were categorized as political if they were addressing policies, stability, or corruption. Posts addressing policies were deemed political when discussing, critiquing, or expressing opinions about government initiatives, legislative decisions, or policy implementations. It was also considered if it encompasses discussions on the country's overall political, social, and economic stability. This could include sentiments regarding maintaining law and order, national security concerns, or broader discussions on the political climate contributing to or impeding stability. The same, those addressing transparency, accountability, and ethical conduct within the political sphere were considered.

3.8.1.2 Economic

Posts were categorized as economic if they were addressing growth, inflation, interest rate, employment, or income. Posts addressing economic growth discuss overall economic-related topics such as GDP growth, economic initiatives and development, or the impact of economic policies on the nation's prosperity. Posts categorized as economic

due to inflation address the rise or fall in the general price levels of goods and services, public sentiments regarding the effects of inflation on purchasing power, economic stability, or critiques of government measures to control inflation. Economic posts related to interest rates encompassed discussions on central bank policies, lending rates, or the impact of interest rate changes on various economic sectors. This category included posts expressing opinions on how interest rates influence investment, borrowing, and overall economic activity.

Posts categorized as economical with a focus on employment address issues related to job creation, unemployment rates, or discussions on labor market dynamics. This included sentiments on government initiatives, business activities, or economic policies impacting employment opportunities. Finally, those considered as economic posts due to being related to income were addressing discussions on personal or household income levels, income inequality, or public perceptions regarding the fairness of income distribution. This category included posts expressing opinions on economic policies influencing income disparities.

3.8.1.3 Social

Posts were categorized as social if they addressed population, ageing, career views, lifestyle, or cultural barriers. Posts categorized as social with a focus on population involved discussions on demographic trends, population growth, or concerns related to issues such as overpopulation or population decline. Social posts related to ageing discuss topics associated with aging population, including discussions on retirement, or societal attitudes toward ageing. This category included sentiments on the challenges and opportunities associated with the elderly people.

Posts addressing career views were categorized as social when they involve discussions on diverse career perspectives, job aspirations, or societal views on certain professions. This category included expressions of opinions on the evolving nature of careers and employment in the Rwandan context. Social posts related to lifestyle included discussions on various aspects of daily life, personal choices, and cultural practices. This category included posts about lifestyle trends, preferences, or societal norms influencing individual and collective lifestyles within Rwanda. Then, posts categorized as social with a focus on cultural barriers address discussions related to challenges arising from cultural differences. These posts express opinions on cultural diversity, inclusivity, or obstacles posed by cultural norms and practices

3.8.1.4 Technological

Posts were categorized as technological if they addressed technology incentives, innovation, and automation. Posts were categorized as technological, focusing on technology incentives involving discussions on government policies, initiatives, or incentives to promote and foster technological advancements. This category included posts expressing opinions on measures that encourage the adoption and development of technology within Rwanda. Technological posts related to innovation encompass discussions on new technologies or advancements in various sectors. This category also included discussions expressing opinions on the impact of innovation on industries, society, or the economy of Rwanda. Posts categorized as technological with a focus on automation addressed discussions related to the automation of processes, industries, or job functions. This included sentiments on the benefits, challenges, or societal implications of increased automation within the Rwandan context.

3.8.1.5 Environmental

Posts were categorized as environmental if they addressed climate change, recycling and disposal or sustainability. Posts categorized as environmental with a focus on climate change involve discussions on climate-related issues, including global warming, weather patterns, or the impact of human activities on the environment. This category also included posts expressing opinions on climate change policies, adaptation strategies, or environmental conservation efforts. Environmental posts on recycling and disposal included discussions on waste management practices, recycling initiatives, and proper disposal methods. This category included posts expressing opinions on recycling programs, waste reduction, or the environmental impact of specific disposal practices within Rwanda. Posts categorized as environmental with a focus on sustainability address discussions related to sustainable practices in various domains, including agriculture, energy, or urban planning. This category also included sentiments on the importance of sustainable development, conservation efforts, or environmentally friendly policies and practices.

3.8.1.6 Legal

Posts were categorized as legal if they addressed antitrust, labour, copyright, data protection or health and safety. Posts were categorized as legal because they involved discussions on issues related to competition laws or market regulations. This category included posts expressing opinions on business practices, monopolies, or legal actions aimed at ensuring fair competition within Rwanda. Legal content related to labour encompassed discussions on labour laws, employment rights, or workplace regulations. This category included discussion posts expressing opinions on labour practices, workers'

rights, or legal actions related to employment matters within the Rwandan context. Posts categorized as legal based on copyright addressed discussions related to intellectual property laws, copyright infringement, or protection of creative works. This category also included sentiments on copyright policies, legal actions against infringement, or the impact of copyright laws on content creators in Rwanda.

Legal posts based on data protection involved discussions on privacy laws, data security, or regulations governing the handling of personal information. This category included posts expressing opinions on data protection policies, breaches, or legal measures to safeguard individuals' privacy within Rwanda. Those categorized as legal based on health and safety addressed discussions related to laws and regulations governing public health, workplace safety, or emergency preparedness. This category also included sentiments on legal actions to ensure health and safety compliance, public health policies, or the impact of safety regulations in Rwanda.

3.9 Data Collection Tools

The data collection tools for this research was a code sheet. The code sheet, referred to as a codebook by Ranney et al. (2015), includes an organized list of the "codes" and specific, well-articulated definitions and examples for each code. The code sheet served as a tool to guide a researcher with coding the entire set of conversations on X consistently and reliably. The following advanced X search has been used to populate the code sheet: from: username since: 2021-07-01 until: 2022-06-30 and then "Latest" to retrieve all the posts and replies within this specific period of time.

X advanced search is a tool used to filter posts by highly specific criteria. Historians, social scientists, and analysts may use X's advanced search by date feature to better understand how public opinion has changed over time. Researchers can get historical X more easily by using this function, which lets users limit search results to specified dates. This allows researchers to trace the evolution of events, identify trends, and gain insight into how discussions have progressed on the platform. This feature enables researchers to follow the flow of discussions backwards in time, which adds to a deeper comprehension of the time-based dimensions of online interactions.

For objective one, nominal data were directly generated after quantifying all the posts. A code sheet was employed and for objective two, replies to one's own posts were not considered in the number of replies to make sure any comment counted as reply was going to someone else.

3.10 Data Collection Procedures

For this study, the data collection procedure involves several key steps. Firstly, the researcher defined the specific time period of interest and settled the parameters within the advanced search tool to filter posts accordingly. Once the time boundaries were established, the X terms of service and privacy policies were considered by the researcher to identify and formulate a precise search query designed to capture a representative sample of posts that align with the study's focus. These were the posts and replies. Next, the researcher systematically collected data by executing the advanced search queries and extracting relevant information from the retrieved posts. This included quantitative data points such as the number of posts and replies.

A quantitative study is used to conduct a statistical analysis of the collected data with the use of SPSS, a statistical software to conduct analysis such as frequency distributions. Therefore, the code sheet was employed and populated using the PESTEL framework, which encompasses Political, Economic, Social, Technological, Environmental, and Legal factors and played a crucial role in data collection for this study to systematically collect data on the concerns expressed on X. For political factors, data collection involved tracking posts related to political events and government policies. For economic factors, it captured economic concerns, while for social factors, data collection captured interactions on social matters. For technological Factors, data collection involved examining interactions on technology, while environmental factors looked at environmental concerns. On legal factors, data collection involved tracking posts that raised legal, safety, or health concerns and related discussions.

3.11 Pre-testing of Data Collection Tools

A pre-test on the Facebook account of President Paul Kagame was used to pre-test the code-sheet for one year, 2018. It was a preliminary evaluation conducted on a small scale to refine the methodology, validate coding, and ensure the reliability of the chosen approach. It provided an opportunity to fine-tune the research process, identify potential challenges, and optimize data collection strategies before applying them on a larger scale.

3.12 Validity and Reliability of Research Tools

Validity of a research tool examines what the tool measures and how well it does so while reliability refers to the faith that one would have in the data obtained from using a certain tool (Mohajan, 2017). Mohajan (2017) argues that reliability is about the faith

that one can have in the data obtained from the use of an instrument, that is the degree to which any measurement tool controls for random error. As Adcock and Collier (2001) mentioned, Methodologists offer two accounts of the relation between reliability and validity. Where validity is sometimes assumed as exclusively including bias, that is error that takes a consistent direction or form. From this viewpoint, validity involves systematic error, whereas reliability involves random error.

3.13 Data Analysis and Presentation Plan

Data was cleaned and entered into an excel sheet. The researcher used SPSS to analyse data based on the frequency of occurrence of different categories. This study's findings are presented in descriptions and explanations, with quantification and statistical analysis playing a subordinate role. The results were presented in charts and other relevant graphical representations that helped provide descriptive, explanatory, and interpretive analysis. In presenting the quantitative data, for instance, the researcher used pie charts for illustration as well as descriptive text to present qualitative findings.

3.14 Ethical Considerations

The study design dictates that the researcher deals with publicly accessible X content. Therefore, this means that the researcher did not deal with human subjects. In terms of the regulatory requirements, the researcher searched for ethical clearance from Aga Khan University and afterwards applied for a research permit in Rwanda through the Rwanda National Commission for Science and Technology.

3.15 Summary

This chapter provides a systematic and comprehensive approach to understanding the role of X in participatory democracy in Rwanda. Employing a mixed-method research approach, the study aimed to capture the dynamics of digital interactions between citizens and politicians on the platform. The population comprises Rwandan politicians actively participating in digital political discourse on X. Using a purposive sampling technique, the study intends to extract a representative sample, ensuring diversity in perspectives and engagement patterns. To achieve the research objectives, a code-sheet was employed for content analysis. The data collection process involves the extraction of posts, quotes, and replies over a specified period. A code sheet was used as data collection tool, and the research did a pretesting to ensure the code sheet would give the best possible result. Authorizations was sought and the data were analyzed and presented in text and pie charts..

CHAPTER FOUR

DATA ANALYSIS, PRESENTATION, AND INTERPRETATION

4.1 Introduction

This study sought to establish the role of X in promoting participatory democracy in Rwanda. The researcher sought to determine whether there are interactions between citizens and politicians in Rwanda, whether X plays a role in accountability in Rwanda, and explore which prominent issues are discussed on X in Rwanda. This chapter presents the findings, analysis, and interpretations from the analysis of X content posted by ten politicians in one year. The chapter constitutes the heart of this research endeavour, where the collected data undergoes careful examination, thoughtful presentation, and meaningful interpretation. Through statistical measures, thematic coding, and content analysis, this chapter endeavours to uncover patterns, trends, and insights that shed light on the interplay between citizens and politicians on X.

The presentation involves a systematic organization of findings into tables and charts, enhancing the clarity and accessibility of the research outcomes. The interpretation delves beyond the surface, drawing connections between observed patterns and theoretical frameworks, such as the public sphere and new media theory. This chapter details X's role in promoting participatory democracy in Rwanda, offering insights that contribute to the broader discourse on the connection of digital media, political communication, and democratic engagement.

4.2 Presentation, Analysis, and Interpretation

The presentation and interpretation of the analyzed data were anchored within the study objectives. In chapter three, the researcher indicated that the study adopted an explanatory sequential mixed method research design. Thus, data collected using a code-sheet were analyzed with the use of SPSS and further corroborated with qualitative findings. Table and pie charts were employed to present the results. The inclusion of tables and pie charts in presenting research findings serves as a choice to enhance the accessibility, clarity, and comprehensibility of the data. Tables offer a concise, organized format for numerical information, enabling readers to grasp frequencies across different thematic categories and objectives easily. Pie charts, on the other hand, provide a visual snapshot of the distribution of themes, emphasizing the relative importance of each category of analysis.

4.2.1 Response Rate

Given the dynamic nature of X, the response rate fluctuated across different timeframes and thematic areas. The study acknowledges that not all politicians have actively engaged on X, and the response rate depended upon the prevalence of digital political discourse during the study period. Efforts were made to capture a representative sample, ensuring a balanced and diverse selection of posts and reply across various themes to enhance the generalizability of findings. To mitigate potential biases associated with the response rate, the study employed a purposive sampling technique to extract posts that authentically reflect the interactions and discussions within the Rwandan context. Ethical considerations, including privacy protection and responsible data handling, were prioritized to uphold the integrity of the research process.

For a total number of X accounts, the study targeted 10 politicians. The 10 accounts of Rwandan politicians were sampled, and data were collected from 655 posts and replies they posted between the 1st of July 2021 to the 30th of June 2022. The researcher targeted a maximum of 3 posts, replies, or both per month for each account to make a total of 36 posts and replies per account for one year of study. Thus, 360 posts and replies were targeted for analysis. During data collection, 243 posts were collected. This was because some accounts did not reach at least 3 posts or replies for some months, and in some cases, some months did not see any post or reply.

To collect qualitative data, the researcher conducted key informant interviews. All the 5 users of X in Rwanda who were contacted were interviewed as interactors with politicians. The participants were 3 from the City of Kigali, one from the Northern Province and another from the Eastern Province.

Table 2: Representation of sample size in quantitative content analysis

Politician	Posts and replies analyzed	Percent
@cakamanzi	36	14.8
@PaulKagame	33	13.6
@MujaJeanne	32	13.2
@BayisengeJn	28	11.5
@MusoniPaula	25	10.3
@Ngabitsinze	23	9.5
@DrDanielNgamije	22	9.1
@Iyamuremye_A	20	8.2
@Dr_Uwamariya	19	7.8
@MukabalisaD	5	2.1
Total	243	100.0

4.2.2 Findings

The study had three specific objectives, to analyse the frequency of interactions between the citizens and politicians on X in Rwanda, to assess whether X is serving as a space for accountability within the Rwandan democracy and to analyse the issues that the Rwandan citizens predominantly hold the politicians accountable to. The study's findings enlighten the dynamic political interactions and citizen participation within Rwanda, with a specific focus on the role of X as a platform for citizen-politician interaction. Through a thorough analysis of the X activities of ten sampled politicians, this research unveils a vibrant landscape where politicians actively contribute to and engage in conversations with citizens.

The frequency of interactions on X underscores the platform's significance as a dynamic space for real-time communication. Furthermore, the study delves into the nuanced aspects of accountability and responsiveness, revealing that politicians not only disseminate information but actively address public concerns, thus fostering a sense of transparency and citizen-centric governance. The thematic examination of discussions, ranging from politics and social issues to legal matters, economics, and technology, provides a comprehensive understanding of the multifaceted nature of online political discourse. These findings collectively underscore X's essential role in shaping a participatory form of democracy in Rwanda, offering insights into the evolving dynamics of digital media and governance.

4.2.2.1 The frequency of interactions

Research objective one sought to analyze the frequency of interactions between politicians and citizen on X. This study quantified all the posts and replies of each of the

sampled accounts for a period of one year and found that a total of 655 posts and replies were posted, from which 494 were replying to other users' content. A politician who made 180 or more posts and replies, at least one post every two days, was considered a very frequent X user, while a politician with 96 posts and more but less than 180 posts, was considered a frequent user. A politician who made 48 posts and more, but less than 179 posts was considered an occasional X user while those who made less than 48 posts were considered rare X users.

Table 3: Frequency of interactions

Politician	Total Post and replies	Replies and quoted posts	Frequency
@cakamanzi	243	230	Very frequently
@MujaJeanne	106	93	Frequently
@Ngabitsinze	58	27	Occasionally
@PaulKagame	56	3	Occasionally
@BayisengeJn	51	42	Occasionally
@MusoniPaula	48	38	Occasionally
@Dr_Uwamariya	35	30	Rarely
@DrDanielNgamije	29	25	Rarely
@Iyamuremye_A	24	5	Rarely
@MukabalisaD	5	1	Rarely
Total	655	494	

The study found four of the ten politicians use X occasionally, while two are frequent users. This indicates an active engagement by politicians on X, showcasing a commitment to using the platform as a channel for communication and interaction with the public. The fact that 75.4% of posts were replies underscores a commitment to responsive communication. They are actively addressing and engaging with the concerns, queries, or comments raised by citizens on X, indicating a will to participate in a dialogue rather than using the platform only as a unidirectional communication tool.

The frequency of interactions, especially through replies, suggests a level of accessibility and openness on the part of politicians. Politicians contribute to a more approachable online presence by actively responding to citizens' posts, fostering a sense of direct communication between elected officials and the public. Moreover, the substantial number of replies reflects a move beyond one-way communication. They are disseminating information and participating actively in conversations initiated by citizens, contributing to a more dynamic and interactive online political conversation.

The replies also recognise the potential for establishing a direct connection with citizens. The significant level of interaction, particularly through replies, positions X as a prominent platform for public discussions and citizen-politician engagement in Rwanda. This finding suggests that X serves as a space where citizens can directly communicate with politicians, contributing to a more participatory form of digital democracy.

Qualitative data also suggest a good use of X by politicians. 4 of the 5 participants suggested that generally, politicians in Rwanda use X frequently. However, one of the participants described some politicians as "technophobes", fearing to make use of technological advances.

4.2.2.2 X as a space for accountability within the Rwandan democracy

The study found that 75.4% of all the posts responded to a concern raised by other X users, which suggests a high rate of responsiveness of politicians. From the 243 posts and replies analyzed, 31.3% representing 76 replies directly addressed a concern of public interest after a citizen calls them to account, by either acknowledging the concern, mentioning action, or steps to be taken to address the concern. Therefore, Rwandan

democracy is one of the contributing assets which narrows a gap between citizens and politicians by making possible direct politician-citizen interactions on issues of public interest.
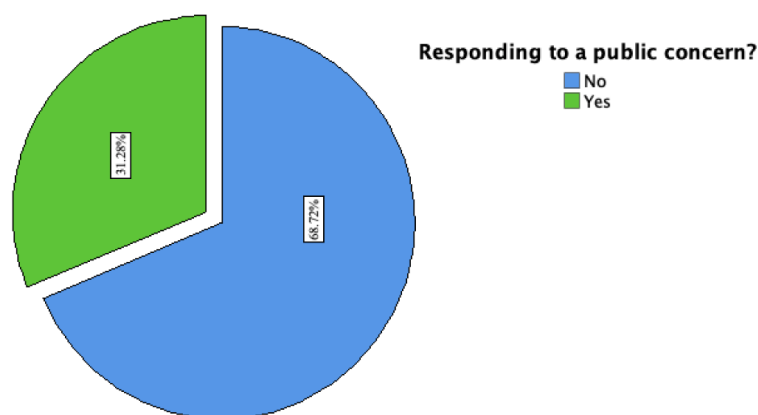

Figure 2: Politicians' responsiveness to issues of public concern on X

The fact that 75.4% of posts were replies suggests a commitment to responsive communication, which is critical for accountability. Politicians actively engaging with citizens' inquiries or concerns on X establishes a willingness to be responsive and accountable in a public digital space. Moreover, 31,3% of all the replies specifically responded to concerns of public interest highlights a direct link between the presence of politicians on X and addressing issues that matter to the public. This shows a proactive approach to using X as a platform for public accountability.

Politicians responding to concerns of public interest contribute to transparent communication. The openness to address these concerns in a public forum like X fosters transparency in governance, allowing citizens to benefit from the way elected officials respond to issues raised by the public. The 31.3% of the replies acknowledging public interest concerns signify a recognition of the importance of public sentiment. By publicly

acknowledging and responding to these concerns on a public platform, politicians contribute to a more transparent and accountable political discourse. In addition to this, it also indicates a citizen-centric approach to X engagement. Politicians are using the platform for self-promotion or dissemination of messages and actively engage with and respond to the public's needs and concerns.

The responsiveness to public concerns on X can potentially contribute to improved governance. Politicians can build trust, demonstrate accountability, and contribute to more informed and engaged citizenry by actively addressing issues that matter to the public. The rate of replies to public concerns underscores a sense of social responsibility on the part of politicians.

Qualitative data also revealed that X plays a role in holding politicians accountable. A respondent said that when you bring attention to inadequate service delivery on X, officials often contact you privately for additional information, resolving many issues. She suggested that X plays a role in ensuring leaders are held accountable. What sets X apart is its public nature; when a problem is highlighted, many others who may have experienced similar situations speak out, which allows for a collective engagement through comments, prompting swift attention from politicians and facilitating easy resolution of the issues.

> X helps in holding politicians accountable, I can mention a very recent example, I hope you have seen a citizen who posted about a construction issue at a modern village developed by an investor known as 'Dubai' claiming that his houses were substandard. Those in charge of permitting process were held accountable. This is a small example, but there so many other where citizens inquire to their leaders mainly for case of misuse of office. Briefly, X helps our Rwandan society to hold politicians accountable, another responded said.

Another participant stressed that with the possibility to tag many people, politicians must react on a post addressed to them on X because other people and their superiors are tagged and made aware of what is not going on well. There was also a participant who argued that X plays a crucial role in promoting democratic principles because when citizens want to criticize leaders or hold them accountable, they use X. He suggested that there are so many examples in Rwanda where ordinary citizens without any influential status tweeted and that resulted in leadership changes, either good or bad. Another argument is that some politicians opt not to address concerns publicly on X and instead choose to act privately to ensure the resolution of raised issues. To sum up, all the views expressed during the interview, comment X as a platform that provides a space for accountability in Rwanda.

4.2.2.3 Issues that the Rwandan citizens predominantly hold the politicians accountable to

To find out the prominently discussed issues on X, this study was guided by the PESTEL framework, where a code sheet was populated based on political, economic, social, technological, environmental and legal-related content. Some posts were found to fit in one or more than one category while others did not match the requirement to be allocated in any of the categories. The findings highlight a substantial concentration of discourse on specific matters, constituting a significant portion of the conversation. The large representation of these issues suggests a concentrated focus on specific political, social, or economic aspects, potentially reflecting the nation's current concerns or priorities in Rwanda.

Political issues

As per the PESTEL framework, a post or reply mentioned or related to policies, stability, or corruption. This study found that 41.6% of the content was informing or addressing political concerns. This most discussed subject was about policies, stability, or corruption.

Table 4: Political content

	Frequency	Percent
Political	101	41.6
Non-political	142	58.4
Total	243	100.0

The high percentage of content dedicated to politics indicates a clear prominence of political concerns on X in Rwandan context. It indicates that these public figures are actively engaging on X. This aligns with the objective of understanding the issues citizens prioritize when engaging with politicians on X. The substantial presence of political discussions suggests a strong influence of politicians in shaping discussions on X in Rwanda. This underscores the platform's importance as a space where citizens can access political updates and contribute to shaping political narratives.

Given that politics is a significant portion of the discussions, it implies that citizens are using X as a platform to hold politicians accountable. The findings suggest that citizens express their concerns, opinions, and expectations about governance and political discourse. The prominence of political discussions offers valuable insights for policymakers and politicians. It indicates a need for robust communication strategies on X, addressing citizens' specific political concerns. This information can inform policy adjustments, communication approaches, and initiatives that respond directly to citizen expectations.

Social

The study found that 31.3% of the content was related to social issues. These posts or replies were either talking about population, ageing, career views, lifestyle, or cultural issues.

Table 5: Social content

	Frequency	Percent
Social	76	31.3
Non-social	167	68.7
Total	243	100.0

The substantial presence of social issues in 31.3% of the content indicates a noteworthy emphasis on matters related to societal well-being. The prominence of social issues suggests that citizens are actively using X as a platform for discussions related to societal cohesion. It indicates a desire for politicians to address pressing social challenges. While politics remains a predominant theme (41,6%), the significant presence of social issues complements political discussions. This underscores the multifaceted nature of citizen engagement on X, where political and social concerns coexist and intertwine.

Legal

The study found that 12.8% of the content was related to legal issues, including antitrust, labour, copyright, data protection or health and safety posts.

Table 6: Legal content

	Frequency	Percent
Legal	44	18.1
Non-legal	199	81.9
Total	243	100.0

The prevalence of legal issues comprising 18,1% of content highlights a relatively good focus on legal discourse within the digital political landscape. This finding

underscores that politicians, as key figures in governance, actively use the platform to communicate and engage with legal, health and safety matters. The specificity of this focus on legal concerns signals a conscious effort by politicians to address, advocate for, or discuss legal issues with their online audience. The prevalence of legal content suggests a strategic use of X as a channel for legal advocacy, potentially influencing public perceptions of the government's adherence to legal principles and commitment to transparency.

Economic issues

The analysis found that 15.2% of the content mentioned or related to economic issues. These posts or replies were either talking about growth, inflation, interest rate, employment, or income.

Table 7: Economical content

	Frequency	Percent
Economical	37	15.2
Non-economical	206	84.8
Total	243	100.0

This result indicates that economic concerns, while present, do not occupy the forefront of discussions on X within the Rwandan context. Although it is a notable subject, its prominence is surpassed by political and social discussions, which command a larger share of the X discourse.

Political and social subjects, which ranks higher in discussion frequency, may be of greater concern or relevance to citizens when engaging with politicians on X. However, while not the most discussed, the 15.2% devoted to economic issues still signifies a significant level of attention. Moreover, politicians are using the platform to address,

discuss, or advocate for economic matters, reflecting a multifaceted approach to public engagement. Economic discourse on X by politicians has the potential to impact public trust. By effectively communicating about economic matters, politicians can enhance transparency and demonstrate a commitment to addressing economic challenges, influencing citizens' perceptions of their competency and responsiveness.

Environmental

The study found that 12.8% of the content was related to the environment. The content was either talking about climate change, recycling and disposal or sustainability.

Table 8: Environmental content

	Frequency	Percent
Environmental	31	12.8
Non-environmental	212	87.2
Total	243	100.0

The presence of environmental issues in 12.8% of the content underscores the integration of environment themes within the political discourse on X. This underscores the recognition of the platform's significance in shaping public perceptions and addressing citizen concerns related to the environment. The specific environmental content reveals that politicians are aware of the multifaceted challenges within the environmental landscape and actively seek to articulate their environmental priorities and policies. The alignment of these environmental discussions with national priorities, or potential deviations, further provides insights into how politicians use X to communicate their environmental governance strategies.

Technology

The study found that 9.9% of the content was related to technology. The content was either talking about technology incentives, innovation, and automation. This subject was the least discussed.

Table 9: Technological content

	Frequency	Percent
Technological	24	9.9
Non-technological	219	90.1
Total	243	100.0

The finding that technology-related discussions comprise 9.9% of content reveals a nuanced facet of the digital political landscape in Rwanda. While less dominant than other themes, technology-related discussions highlight the platform's recognition as a conduit for conveying politicians' viewpoints on technological progress. The nuanced understanding of this least discussed issue serves as a starting point for deeper exploration into how politicians navigate the intersection of technology, governance, and public discourse on X in the Rwandan context.

The study sought to find out prominently discussed issues on X, the results suggest that politics and social are the most prominent subjects discussed. The overall result suggests that people are likely to discuss subjects related to their professional areas, in this case, politicians posting political content, and as a social network, social interaction being a common reason of being on the platform. In the context of Rwandan democracy, the result suggests that although it is at relatively different levels, all development issues appear in direct interactions between politicians and the citizens.

Whether politics and social issues are the most discussed by politicians on the platform, qualitative data suggests the predominancy of politics and social interactions, followed by other areas such as entertainment and sports, which should not be overlooked. A participant expressed his argument that all aspects of life are subject to discussion on X, with a predominant focus on political and social matters. He says discussions on X differ from platforms like Facebook or Instagram, as issues are addressed politicised or intellectually. Like all the participants interviewed, another one affirmed that politicians primarily share content related to politics, both at the local and international levels. Following that, they discussed social issues, with additional categories for entertainment and sports on the platform.

However, all the participants expressed concerns that X is not a platform every Rwandan can access. In rural areas, a significant portion of the population faces challenges in accessing smartphones due to financial constraints. Additionally, there is a notable lack of technological literacy among smartphone owners coupled with challenges in affording smart devices themselves, leading to difficulties in utilizing X. Furthermore, the affordability of internet data presents another barrier.

4.3 Summary of Key Findings

The frequency of interactions observed in this study, where ten politicians collectively generated 655 posts in a year, with 75.4% being replies, holds significant implications for understanding digital political engagement in Rwanda. The research has excluded replies and quoted posts to own politicians' posts to ensure feedback goes to a different user. The results suggests that Rwandan politicians were engaging on X.

The noteworthy volume of posts indicates a robust and consistent presence of politicians on X, portraying the platform as an essential arena for communication in the political landscape. This frequency suggests a commitment by politicians to use X as a tool for engaging with citizens, disseminating information, and participating in real-time conversations. It reflects a move towards a more interactive and participatory approach in which politicians actively contribute to the ongoing discourse. Additionally, the 31,3% replies signify a willingness to address their queries or concerns directly.

Not all the replies or quoted posts were considered responding to an issue, only those responding to a question on public interest has been considered as such. The 31.3% of the total replies observed in this study represent a critical facet of the digital political landscape, indicating a proactive engagement by politicians with citizens on X. These replies go beyond mere communication; they signify a commitment to accountability. Politicians actively participating in conversations, directly addressing individual concerns, and responding to queries underscore the platform's role as a space for accountable governance. Essentially, these replies contribute to a citizen-centric political discourse. Each reply directly acknowledges the public's voice, fostering a sense of accessibility amongst politicians.

This two-way communication model on X bridges the gap between elected officials and the public and amplifies the platform's potential as a tool for direct citizen engagement and a mechanism for enhancing political accountability. The 31.3% replies reflect a political landscape where responsiveness and direct interaction contribute to a more participatory and accountable form of governance in Rwanda. In this study, the term accountability has been operationalized as responsiveness of politicians to citizens'

concerns. The result suggests a reasonable contribution of the platform in holding politicians to account by directly confronting them online and securing their direct answers without any administrative channel involved.

The analysis of content subjects on X reveals a diverse array of discussions among Rwandan politicians and citizens. The predominant issues, politics, constitutes 41,6% of the content, emphasizing the platform's central role in political discourse. Social issues, legal matters, economic concerns, and technology collectively form the remaining 58.4%, indicating the multifaceted nature of citizen-politician interactions. The findings underscore X's role as a dynamic space where a wide range of societal topics is discussed, contributing to a comprehensive understanding of the issues that resonate most within the digital political landscape in Rwanda. The result of this study reveals that political and social subjects are the most addressed on the platform. Although it shows a role of the platform in promoting political discourses, it has a relatively less contribution in development related discussions.

4.4 Summary

This chapter is an analytical core, where the collected data is systematically processed, presented, and meaningfully interpreted to address the research objectives. Conducting explanatory sequential design, the data analysis involved quantitative then qualitative research approaches, allowing for a comprehensive exploration of digital political discourse on X in Rwanda. The presentation of findings is structured thematically, aligning with the predefined categories. Visual aids such as pie charts and tables are employed to enhance the clarity and accessibility of results. The narrative presentation offers a detailed exploration of the data to provide a comprehensive picture of X's role in

promoting participatory democracy in Rwanda. This chapter briefly presents, analyses, and interprets the study's findings. The findings in this chapter are based on analysis of X content, called posts, quoted posts and replies as per the platform's terms. The findings suggest a high rate of politicians' responsiveness towards citizens' concerns in Rwanda. The discussions were found to be mostly about political and social issues.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSIONS, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Introduction

This chapter presents a summary of key findings on the role of X in promoting participatory democracy. The discussions are done in the backdrop of the theory of the public sphere and the New Media theory. This chapter serves as the finale of this research journey, providing a thoughtful analysis and synthesis of the findings to derive meaningful understandings. This chapter delves into the implications of the study's results, explores their significance in the broader context and offers practical recommendations and future research directions.

The discussion section critically interprets the findings, drawing connections between observed patterns and the theoretical frameworks that guided the study. The conclusions section synthesizes the key takeaways from the study, summarizing the main findings and their implications. It offers a reflective analysis of how X functions as a tool for participatory democracy in Rwanda, highlighting its strengths and potential challenges. Based on the study's findings, the recommendations section provides actionable insights for policymakers and other stakeholders. It outlines practical steps to harness the positive aspects of digital political discourse on X while addressing potential challenges.

5.2 Discussions of Key Findings

5.2.1 Analysis of frequency of interactions between the citizens and politicians on X in Rwanda.

In the first objective, the researcher sought to determine the frequency of interactions between politicians and citizens on X. The findings show that most of the politicians in Rwanda use X either frequently or occasionally. With 75.4% of the total posts being replies to citizen's posts, this signifies active interactions. This indicates that X is not merely an update posting platform for politicians but a space for regular and dynamic interaction. As per the theory of public sphere, X is one place where people gather for discussions of public interest. To more of what the theory suggest, X does not only provide a space for discussions of public interest but also for social discussions as well as a place for shaping political identity and posting what politicians accomplished and what they intend to accomplish to safeguard their political status.

5.2.2 Assessing whether X serves as a space for accountability within the Rwandan democracy.

When it comes to issues of public concern, such as advocacy and injustice, the response rate starts decreasing, this can be justified by either the nature of the platform, which is social interactions where engagements are dominated by social discussions or administrative reasons where politicians may not be comfortable to address some issues publicly. However, what objective two of this study intended to find out, a reasonable response rate still shows X's potential in narrowing the gap between politicians and citizens and promoting accountability through the politician's responsiveness to citizens' concerns.

The study's findings disagree with Alfred (2014), who does not suggest a significant contribution of X on accountability. This could be because his study had a focus on X and corruption in Kenya's police which might not be necessary be the same context for Rwanda and broader interactions rather than only looking at corruption. But this study agrees with his argument that X is a tool that citizens can use to use their communication power better and highly challenge existing standards and main messages being disseminated by public officials.

5.2.3 Analysis of the issues that the Rwandan citizens predominantly hold the politicians accountable to

The third objective sough to find out prominently discussed issues on X between the politicians and the citizens. The study found that political, economic, social, technological, environmental, and legal are all discussed, but a few show a high rate for a reason that can only be shown by another study. The results show that political and social discussions are the most prominent, with a rate of 41.6% and 31.3% respectively. In fact, most posts are either about what they have been up to, what's happening, what's planned or simply best wishes such as congratulatory messages, birthdays, farewells, and encouragements among others.

In line with the findings of this study, Nganji and Cockburn (2020) argued that social media is shifting the power of information into the hands of citizens, and this shift of power now means citizens can use social media to air grievances publicly and participate in politics in new ways. The findings show the power of citizens in a virtual confrontation between them and the politicians resulting from citizen-initiated posts in any sector of

development. In addition, the coexistence of multiple subjects of discussion, with varying degrees of prominence, suggests a diverse set of concerns among citizens.

The possibilities for interactions are made possible by electronic communication technologies, the findings are aligned with the New Media theory. X, as per the theory, provides for interactivity, which is demonstrated by a good reply rate of 75.4% within the politicians-citizens engagements. Therefore, the results show a high possibility for of having an issue seen and replied by the President of the republic or a cabinet member regardless of citizen's status.

The result also complements with Cohen and McIntyre (2021)'s findings, suggesting that X is used in governance in Rwanda. As their study focused on one person, President Paul Kagame, this study gives a wider picture of the use of X in Rwanda political landscape. Moreover, as the findings of this study suggest, the good uptake of X usage in Rwanda by politicians and the citizens is not only for personal astonishment, but plays a role in putting them much closer and making direct interactions possible.

The same agreement goes to Morpeau (2011) study, which argues that there is a relationship between X and political engagement as well as between X and civic engagement. This study's findings reveal a positive relationship linked to the interactions between citizens and politicians on X within the Rwandan context. The observed X-driven accountability, where citizens actively hold politicians responsible for their actions, validates the broader notion that X fosters civic engagement. The direct and immediate nature of interactions on X contributes to an informed and engaged citizenry, allowing for the rapid dissemination and engagement with information.

The findings of this study align with the theoretical frameworks of the public sphere and new media. As conceptualized by Habermas, the public sphere theory posits that a healthy democracy thrives on open and inclusive public discourse where citizens engage in rational deliberations. In Rwanda, X serves as a dynamic digital public sphere, providing a platform for citizens to actively participate in political discussions and express their views directly to politicians. This aligns with the democratic ideal of fostering a space for public deliberation and the exchange of diverse opinions.

Furthermore, the new media theory, which explores the transformative impact of digital technologies on communication, resonates strongly with the study's findings. As a new media platform, X facilitates immediate and interactive communication between citizens and politicians. The direct engagement observed on the platform exemplifies the democratizing potential of new media, breaking down traditional communication hierarchies. Politicians disseminate official information directly, and citizens, in turn, hold them accountable in real-time. This dynamic interaction reflects new media's shift in power dynamics, where individuals can actively shape the political narrative.

The high level of engagement underscores the platform's efficacy as a real-time communication tool. Politicians actively respond to citizen concerns, fostering a dynamic and participatory environment. This strength lies in its ability to bridge the communication gap, enabling citizens to voice their opinions directly to policymakers. The study's results strongly suggest that X plays a role in fostering accountability within the Rwandan democracy. The study underscores that government officials, including the President, actively utilize X for official communication. This reflects a positive integration of the platform into the official communication strategy, enhancing transparency and direct citizen-government interaction. However, potential challenges arise regarding what it takes

to engage a digital platform like X, which is mainly digital literacy and access to internet that likely limit citizens access to politicians. In addition, the presence of various issues with different prevalences on X can indicate areas that might require legal adjustments. Policymakers can use this information to identify gaps or areas of concern within the legal framework, prompting initiatives for reform or improvement.

5.3 Conclusion and Implications for Practice

From the findings, the researcher can conclude that X gives accessibility to high-ranking politicians by the ordinary citizens in Rwanda, where members of the public can address a question directly to a politician and get a response. Based on the findings, X provides a space for accountability in Rwanda by active responsiveness of politicians providing direct responses, promising follow-ups or directly tasking their staff members for actions. It can also be concluded that political and social issues are the most prominent on Politician X accounts.

The high level of interaction, particularly through replies, positions X as a prominent platform for public discourse and citizen-politician engagement in Rwanda. This finding suggests that X serves as a space where citizens can directly communicate with politicians, contributing to a more participatory form of digital democracy. The prominence of political discussions indicates a need for strong communication strategies on X, addressing the specific concerns citizens raise. This can inform policy adjustments, communication approaches, and initiatives that respond directly to citizen expectations. Understanding the specific issues discussed on X allows for targeted policy responses that address citizens' concerns and contribute to effective economic governance.

5.4 Recommendations

The findings of this study are not only useful in citizen outreach planning but also in shaping up efficient ways to know citizens' concerns and issues impending citizens' development and well-being for a better and citizen-centered public service as it is stipulated in the constitution of Rwanda (2015) where citizens have the responsibilities to participate in the country's development. Although all development issues are not equally addressed on X, the results show the presence of engagement and responsiveness by politicians to issues addressed by ordinary citizens. However, not all citizen issues get addressed since there might be even more issues that have not been noticed due to several factors, such as internet access and digital literacy.

In agreement with what was recommended by Oginni and Moitui (2015), the government should invest in ICT and human capital ICT literacy and for policymakers to explore online citizens' engagement and adjust policies to incorporate technology in national development plans. In pursuing a more inclusive and participatory democracy in Rwanda, it is crucial to invest in digital literacy. The government and non-governmental organizations should foster collaboration to develop and implement comprehensive digital literacy programs. These programs should target citizens across diverse demographics, stressing the responsible use of digital platforms and effective engagement in political discourse. Furthermore, integrating the digital literacy unit into the national basic education curriculum will ensure that future generations are equipped with the necessary skills to navigate the digital landscape responsibly, fostering a population skilled at using online platforms for meaningful civic participation.

In addition, addressing the digital divide through enhanced internet access is crucial. Investment in expanding and improving internet infrastructure, particularly in rural areas, is paramount. By investing in developing reliable and high-speed internet connectivity, the government can enable more citizens, regardless of geographic location, to actively participate in online political discussions. Cooperation with internet service providers to develop affordable internet packages is equally essential to ensure that cost is not a barrier to internet access. Furthermore, establishing community internet centres in rural areas can serve as shared access points for citizens who may not have individual access. These centers can play a dual role by providing internet access and serving as hubs for digital literacy training.

Public awareness campaigns should be launched to promote online civic engagement and emphasize the importance of responsible use of social media platforms, particularly those like X, in shaping political discourse. These campaigns should encourage citizens to leverage these platforms for meaningful contributions to public discussions and dispel myths surrounding the digital divide. Briefly, the researcher recommends investing in digital literacy to empower citizens lacking skills to navigate and critically engage on X and investment in internet infrastructure and affordability to ensure every citizen has access to the internet.

5.5 Areas for Further Research

While this study provides a comprehensive overview of the major topics discussed on X by politicians in Rwanda, further research could delve deeper into the nuanced subcategories within each thematic area. An in-depth analysis of specific issues within politics, social issues, legal matters, economics, and technology would offer a more

granular understanding of online political discourse dynamics. The study also raises awareness of the potential rural-urban digital divide but does not provide concrete evidence to support this opinion. Further research should systematically investigate the variations in digital political engagement between rural and urban areas. This could involve surveys, interviews, or focus group discussions with citizens from diverse geographic contexts to ascertain the factors influencing online political participation. Understanding the nuances of rural-urban dynamics would contribute to more targeted and effective digital inclusion strategies.

While the study highlights the nature of interactions on X, further research could explore the direct impact of politicians' online engagements on policy formulation and decision-making processes. Analyzing cases where public concerns raised on X result in policy adjustments or government actions would provide insights into the tangible outcomes of digital political discourse. Finally, expanding the scope to include other social media platforms would offer a comparative analysis of each platform's role in participatory democracy. Investigating whether the dynamics observed on X are mirrored or differ on platforms like Facebook or Instagram could provide a more complete understanding of politicians' digital engagements and citizens' preferences. This comparative approach would contribute to a broader comprehension of the digital political landscape in Rwanda.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: In-depth Interview Guide

My name is Christophe Hitayezu, a student at the Aga Khan University's Graduate School of Media and Communications. I am undertaking a study on the role of X in promoting participatory democracy. The purpose of this study is to analyse how often politicians use X and how that usage plays a role in accountability as well as the prominent issues they spend time on I am humbly asking to interview you as a Rwandan who has presence on X to share your personal opinions on questions regarding X and democracy in Rwanda. Your participation will help me to corroborate findings of quantitative content analysis that I conducted before this interview. In this study, the term accountability has been operationalized as the responsiveness of politicians on X while politicians refer to persons involved in the process of public policymaking. The issues of discussion refer to the prominent topics that politicians directly address and engage with on X while participatory democracy refers to the engagements of politicians with the citizens on X on concerns of public interest.

Please note:

- Your responses will be kept completely confidential, and as a participant you will remain anonymous.
- The findings of the study will be published only in aggregate form, based on the average responses from all the participants and the emergent themes from the interviews.
- Your participation in this research is voluntary. You have the right to withdraw at any point during the study, for any reason, and without any prejudice.
- The interview should take around 10-15 minutes to complete and your time is appreciated.

Appendix B: Key Informant Interview Questions

1. How often do you use X?
2. What do you use X for?
3. In your observation, does X help citizens in democratic participation? How?
4. In your opinion, how can you describe X's role in holding politicians accountable?
5. Quantitative data shows that political and social issues are the most discussed on X in Rwanda, what is your opinion on these findings? Are there other issues you think are prominently discussed?
6. What challenges affect citizen's access to politicians on X?
7. What suggestion can you give towards addressing the challenges the citizens face to access politicians on X?

Appendix C: Code Sheet

To develop the Cod-sheet, a deductive coding has been employed, with which the researcher made use of pre-established codes developed before interacting with the data (Jenna, 2022). The codes were pre-developed with reference to the PESTEL framework. PESTEL standards for political, economic, social, technological, environmental, and legal as key drivers of change in an organizational structure. The researched counted all the posts and replies on sampled accounts to determine the frequency of interactions. The researcher has then sampled a maximum of three monthly posts or replies. For each posts a code of 100 was given if it is a political post, 101 if economical, 102 if social, 103 if technological, 104 if environmental or 105 if the post is legal. A descriptive coding has been used to determine where to classify a post of a reply. Jenna (2022) suggests that descriptive coding aims to summaries the content using a single word or noun that encapsulates the general idea of the data. The posts have also been analyzed against their relevance. Any post or reply that directly respond to an issue of public concern has been coded 100 and considered accountable, these are the posts or replies from a politician that respond to a question or promise for follow-ups or directly tasks a staff member for actions, while a post or reply that does not address a citizen concern has been coded as 200 as considered non-accountable. In this study, an issue of public concern refer to the matters that require politicians' attention, input, and responses due to their significance and relevance to the citizens.

Sampled X accounts

- Paul Kagame - @PaulKagame: President of the Republic of Rwanda
- Bayisenge Jeannette, PhD - @BayisengeJn: Minister for Gender and Family Promotion
- Dr. Daniel Ngamije - @DrDanielNgamije: Minister of Health
- Clare Akamanzi - @cakamanzi: Chief Executive Officer of Rwanda Development Board
- Dr. Valentine Uwamariya - @Dr_Uwamariya: Minister of Education
- Mukabalisa Donatille - @MukabalisaD: Speaker of Rwanda Parliament, chamber of Deputies
- Jean Chrysostome Ngabitsinze, PhD - @Ngabitsinze: Minister of Trade and Industry
- Musoni Paula - @MusoniPaula: Minister of ICT and Innovation
- Augustin Iyamuremye - @Iyamuremye_A: President of Rwanda Senate
- Mujawamariya Jeanne d'Arc - @MujaJeanne: Minister of Environment

Sampled Period

July 01, 2021, to June 30, 2022

Frequency of interactions

100: Very Frequently (180 + posts and replies)
200: Frequently (96-179 posts and replies)

300: Occasionally (48-95 posts and replies)
400: Rarely (0-47 posts and replies)

Presence of accountability (Value of the Politician's response)

100: Accountable - The post or reply responds to an issue of public concern. A politician responds to a question or promise for follow-ups or directly tasks a staff member for actions
200: Non-accountable – The post or reply does not respond to an issue of public concern

Issues of discussion

100: Political – The posts mentioning or talking about policies, stability or corruption
101: Economical – The posts mentioning or talking about growth, inflation, interest rate, employment, or income
102: Social – The posts mentioning or talking about population, ageing, career views, lifestyle, or cultural barriers
103: Technological - The posts mentioning or talking technology incentives, innovation, automation
104: Environmental - The posts mentioning or talking climate change, recycling and disposal or sustainability
105: Legal - The posts mentioning or talking antitrust, labour, copyright, data protection or health and safety

Appendix D: AKU Ethics Review Committee Approval Letter

THE AGA KHAN UNIVERSITY

Graduate School of Media and Communications

REF: AKU-GSMC/ERC/2023/032

Date: November 24, 2023.

Dear Christophe Hitayezu (Student No. 579802)

RE: DIGITAL MEDIA AND DEMOCRATIZATION: THE ROLE OF TWITTER IN PROMOTING PARTICIPATORY DEMOCRACY IN RWANDA

This is to inform you that Aga Khan University – Graduate School of Media and Communications Ethics Review Committee has reviewed and approved your above research proposal. Your approval period is November 24, 2023, to November 23, 2024, and your application's approval number is AKU-GSMC/ERC/2023/032.

This approval is subject to compliance with the following, under the supervision of your two supervisors:

1. Only the approved documents including the informed consent form and the data collection instruments will be used.
2. Any changes, made on the approved documents that may increase the risks or affect the welfare or safety of the participants or compromise the integrity of the study must be reported to GSMC within the shortest time possible. The amended documents will be taken through a fresh review and the due process of approval.
3. In the event that the research cannot be completed within the one-year approved period, the researcher will request for renewal of approval 30 days prior to the end of the approved period.
4. The researcher will be required to submit a comprehensive progress report when applying for renewal of approval.
5. Submission of an executive summary report to the GSMC's Ethics Review Committee within 90 days of completion of the study.
6. Produce all the data collected using the approved tools as and when required by the Ethics Review Committee within the 90 days of completion of your study.

Prior to commencing your study, you will be required to obtain a research permit from the National Commission for Science, Technology, and Innovation (NACOSTI). You can access the application portal from the website on https://www.nacosti.go.ke/.

Please feel free to contact me should you require any further information.

Yours sincerely

Prof Nancy Booker
Dean

Appendix E: Introductory Letter from AKU

THE AGA KHAN UNIVERSITY

Graduate School of Media and Communications

National Council for Science and Technology
P. O. Box 2285
Nyarugenge, Kigali

November 24, 2023

Dear Sir/Madam.
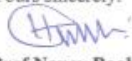
CHRISTOPHE HITAYEZU (STUDENT NO. 579802)

Christophe Hiytayezu is a registered student at the Aga Khan University, Graduate School of Media and Communications. He is enrolled in the Master of Arts in Digital Journalism Programme and has completed his course work. He is now working on his Master's thesis. Mr. Hitayezu's topic is **"Digital Media and Democratization: The Role of Twitter in Promoting Participatory Democracy in Rwanda."**

The purpose of my writing is to request you to assist Mr. Hitayezu complete this important academic exercise. Any information collected will be used solely for academic purposes. Upon completion of the research, Mr. Hitayezu's thesis will be available at our library. He will also submit two hard copies and one soft copy in pdf of his completed work to your department.

We appreciate your support to our student towards his successful completion of his thesis research.

Please feel free to contact me should you require any further information.

Yours sincerely.

For **Prof Nancy Booker**
Dean