

**DURBAN UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY**

**REPUTATION MANAGEMENT AT LOCAL GOVERNMENT LEVEL: A CASE  
STUDY OF AMAHLATHI LOCAL MUNICIPALITY**

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**REPUTATION MANAGEMENT AT LOCAL GOVERNMENT LEVEL: A CASE  
STUDY OF AMAHLATHI LOCAL MUNICIPALITY**

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Specialising in

Public Relations in

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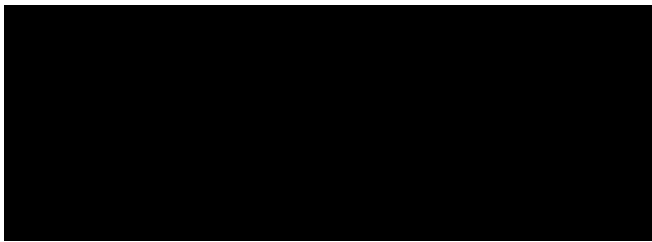
**MAY 2023**

**APPROVED FOR EXAMINATION**

Supervisor: Prof B.I Dlamini ...  ..... Date: 07/03/2024

## DECLARATION

I, **Pikolomzi Qaba (student number: 21618320)**, affirm and declare that this research project, titled ***Reputation Management in Local Government: A Case of Amahlathi Local Municipality***, was carried out and completed by myself for the degree of Master of Management Science: Public Relations at Durban University of Technology in accordance with the University's plagiarism policies, and that it has not been submitted in part or in full to any other university. Unless otherwise noted (referenced), this is my original research.



Signed.....

Date: **28 April 2023**

## DEDICATION

*KWABASEFILIPHI 4:13*

***Ndinokuzenza izinto zonke, ndikulowo undomelezayo, uKristu.***

To my Mother Nolitha Qaba, my Sister Avuyile Qaba, Gogsit, Zoleka Qaba, my Late Father Cebisa Qaba, my Late Grandmother(s) Nozizwe Qaba and Nowongile (Nonhanha) Kethabahle, Xolani and Nothemba Tobotshana, Mbasa, kumi, Omiyo, Lisa, Ibo and to all my family and friends for their unwavering support and encouragement throughout this journey. Le ngeyenu!

Furthermore, to all the individuals and communities who have inspired this research, thank you for being a source of motivation and purpose. May this project make a positive impact and contribute to a better world.

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My special thanks go to the community members of the ALM who welcomed me in their homes, management and staff of Amahlathi Local Municipality and Eastern Cape Corporate Governance and Traditional Affairs for their support and cooperation throughout the project. I would also like to thank my many advisers and mentors for their invaluable guidance and expertise.

I want to give thanks to the Lord, who gave me courage and hope, especially during the times when I wanted to give up. Uthe ngethuba ndihamba ethunzini lokufa nelobunzima wabonakala yena engumncedi. Ndilapha ndikhona ngoku ngenxa yobabalo lukaThixo.

## **ABSTRACT**

This mixed methods study, titled "Reputation Management at Local Government Level: A Case Study of Amahlathi Local Municipality" aimed to explore the Amahlathi Local Municipality's (ALM's) reputation among stakeholders, assess how media reports reflect community members' opinions, evaluate stakeholders' expectations, and identify sustainable strategies for reputation management. The research employed a convergent parallel design, with a sequential mixed method data collected and integrated during analysis. Surveys and interviews were conducted with diverse stakeholders, including residents, Eastern Cape Corporative Governance and Traditional Affairs representatives, and municipal employees. The findings revealed a mixed reputation for ALM. While some stakeholders expressed satisfaction with service delivery and infrastructure development, others criticised the Municipality for perceived corruption and lack of transparency. Stakeholders' expectations focused on improved service delivery, increased transparency, and stronger accountability. Based on these findings, the study identified sustainable strategies for managing ALM's reputation, including fostering open communication, enhancing transparency, promoting community engagement, and strengthening accountability mechanisms.

This research contributes to the growing body of literature on reputation management at the local government level, providing valuable insights for policymakers and practitioners seeking to improve the public perception and performance of municipal institutions.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

DECLARATION .....	i
DEDICATION .....	ii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS .....	iii
ABSTRACT .....	iv
TABLE OF CONTENTS .....	v
LIST OF FIGURES .....	x
LIST OF TABLES .....	xi
LIST OF APPENDICES .....	xii
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION.....	1
1.1 Introduction .....	1
1.2 Background.....	1
1.3 Problem statement.....	2
1.4 Rationale of the Study.....	3
1.5 Aims and Objectives .....	4
1.5.1 Research objectives .....	4
1.5.2 Questions .....	4
1.6 Contribution of the study .....	4
1.6.1 Theoretical contribution .....	4
1.6.2 Policy contribution .....	5
1.7 Demarcation of the Study .....	6
1.8 Structure of dissertation .....	6
1.9 Delimitations of the study .....	8
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW.....	9
2.1 Introduction .....	9
2.2 Overview of Amahlathi Local Municipality .....	9
2.3 Factors affecting Amahlathi Local Municipality's reputation .....	11
2.3.1 Poor service delivery .....	12
2.3.2 Lack of regard for employees .....	14
2.4 Organisational reputation .....	15

2.5 Conceptual factors influencing public sector reputation .....	18
2.5.1 Transparency.....	18
2.5.2 Credibility.....	20
2.5.3 Reliability .....	21
2.5.4 Trustworthiness .....	22
2.6 Reputation management.....	23
2.7 Reputation management and local governance.....	27
2.8 The media and its impact on an organisation's reputation .....	30
2.9 Reputation management strategies .....	33
2.10 Theoretical framework .....	35
2.10.1 Stakeholder theory .....	36
2.10.2 Limitations of stakeholder theory .....	38
2.10.3 Justification of stakeholder and systems theory .....	39
2.11 Chapter summary.....	40
<b>CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY .....</b>	<b>41</b>
3.1 Introduction .....	41
3.2 Research philosophy .....	41
3.3 Approaches to theory development.....	43
3.4 Methodological choice .....	45
3.5 Research strategies .....	47
3.6 Case study .....	48
3.8 Time horizon .....	50
3.9 Techniques and procedures .....	51
3.9.1 Study population.....	51
3.9.2 Study sampling .....	51
3.9.3 Data collection method .....	53
3.9.3.1 Qualitative data collection method.....	53
3.9.3.2 Quantitative data collection method.....	54
3.9.4 Pilot study .....	54
3.9.5 Data analysis .....	56
3.9.5.1 Qualitative data analysis.....	56
3.9.5.2 Quantitative data analysis .....	57

3.10 Data reliability and validity .....	58
3.10.1 Reliability of data .....	58
3.10.2 Reliability of analysis .....	58
3.10.3 Validity .....	58
3.11 Research trustworthiness.....	59
3.11.1 Credibility .....	60
3.11.2 Transferability .....	60
3.11.3 Dependability .....	61
3.11.4 Confirmability .....	61
3.11.5 Audit trails .....	61
3.11.6 Reflexive journal .....	62
3.12 Ethical considerations .....	62
3.12 Chapter summary .....	63
CHAPTER 4: RESULTS PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION .....	65
4.1 Introduction .....	65
4.2 Quantitative data analysis .....	65
4.2.1 Age of the respondents.....	66
4.2.2 Gender of the respondents.....	67
4.2.3 Number of Years living in ALM.....	67
4.2.4 Level of education .....	68
4.2.5 Employment status .....	69
4.3 Quantitative results and discussions.....	70
cannot trust it? .....	70
4.3.2 Local Authority's Commitment to High Service Standards.....	71
4.3.3 Service Delivery Challenges in ALM.....	73
4.3.4 Understanding ALM Programmes.....	74
4.3.5 Perception of Corruption within ALM .....	75
4.3.6 Media's Role in Community Awareness of Municipality Systems .....	77
4.3.7 Media's Alignment with ALM Realities .....	78
Table 4.7: The media's narrative about ALM.....	78
4.3.8 ALM's Reputation at Stake: Challenges in Service Delivery .....	79
4.3.9 Strategic Approaches for Enhancing ALM's Reputation .....	80

4.3.10 Innovation in ALM's Service Delivery Enhancement Efforts .....	81
4.3.11 Media Spotlight on Municipality System Strengths .....	82
4.3.12 Open ended questions .....	83
4.4 Qualitative data analysis .....	84
4.4.1 Gender of Participants .....	85
4.4.2 Age of Participants.....	85
4.4.3 Level of education .....	86
4.4.4 Work experience in years .....	86
4.4.5 Positions in ALM and ECCOGTA.....	88
4.5 Thematic analysis and discussion of qualitative findings.....	89
4.5.1 Community needs and inputs .....	89
4.5.1.1 Community inputs and integration into the Municipality IDP.....	89
4.5.1.2 Lack of implementation.....	92
4.5.2 ALM reputation as untrustworthy .....	97
4.5.2.1 Revenue management .....	98
4.5.2.2 Poor service delivery .....	98
4.5.2.3 Demonstrations .....	99
4.5.2.4 Historically good reputation .....	101
4.5.2.5 Financial difficulties .....	102
4.5.2.6 Financial and audit .....	102
4.5.2.7 Political and protests .....	103
4.5.2.8 Not acknowledging past indignities .....	103
4.5.2.9 Challenges faced in terms of municipality reputation.....	104
4.5.2.10 Corruption .....	105
4.5.2.11 Political infighting.....	105
4.5.2.12 Adverse media reports .....	106
4.5.2.13 Exposing issues .....	107
4.5.2.14 Distrust.....	108
4.5.2.15 Dependant on stakeholder position.....	109
4.5.3 Brand visibility and stakeholder engagement .....	110
4.5.3.1 Social media.....	111
4.5.3.2 Radio interviews .....	112

4.5.3.3 Community forums .....	112
4.5.3.4 Private sector .....	113
4.5.3.5 Measurements lacking.....	113
4.5.3.6 Reputation management .....	114
4.5.3.7 Publicise achievements .....	114
4.5.3.8 IDP-investor relations .....	114
4.5.3.9 The local authorities' strategies .....	115
4.5.3.10 Economic development .....	115
4.5.3.11 Service delivery .....	116
4.6 Mixed method discussion of the findings (integration) .....	117
4.7 Chapter summary .....	119
CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS.....	121
5.1 Introduction .....	121
5.2 Summary of research and findings .....	121
5.2.1 ALM's reputation among its stakeholders .....	122
5.2.2 Media reports and the opinions of ALM community members in terms of reputation .....	122
5.2.3 Stakeholders' expectations of ALM.....	123
5.2.4 Sustainable strategies to manage ALM's reputation .....	124
5.3 Limitations of the study .....	125
5.4 Suggestions and implications for future research .....	126
5.5 Conclusions from the study.....	126
5.6 Recommendations arising from the study.....	127
5.7 Conclusion .....	128
REFERENCES.....	130
APPENDICES .....	154

## LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1.1: Amahlathi Local Municipality areas (in the Amathole District) .....	6
Figure 2.1: Element of good organisation reputation .....	18
Figure 2.2: Transparency model of government communication .....	20
Figure 2.3: Stakeholder model of strategic management .....	37
Figure 4.1: Age in years .....	65
Figure 4.2: Gender .....	66
Figure 4.3: Employment status .....	67
Figure 4.4: Standards of service delivery .....	70
Figure 4.5: The extent of service delivery challenges .....	71
Figure 4.6: Adequacy of information about ALM programmes .....	72
Figure 4.7: The role of media in bringing awareness about ALM's system .....	75
Figure 4.8: The media is raising awareness about the strengths of ALM's system .....	81
Figure 4.9: Gender .....	84
Figure 4.10: Age .....	84
Figure 4.11: Level of education .....	85
Figure 4.12: Work experience in years .....	85
Figure 4.13: Positions in ALM and in ECCOGTA .....	86

## LIST OF TABLES

Table 2.1: Clacification of the definition of reputation .....	17
Table 3.1: Summary of the study methodology .....	51
Table 4.1: Years living in ALM .....	66
Table 4.2: Level of education .....	67
Table 4.3: Employment status * Level of education cross tabulation .....	68
Table 4.4: Employment status and Level of education chi-square test .....	68
Table 4.5: Trust of local government .....	69
Table 4.6: Perception of ALM as corrupt .....	74
Table 4.7: The media's narrative about ALM .....	76
Table 4.8: The challenges to service delivery and reputation .....	78
Table 4.9: Implementation of reputation strategies .....	79
Table 4.10: ALM is innovative .....	80

## LIST OF APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Ethical clearance .....	149
Appendix 2: Letter of information and consent form – questionnaire .....	150
Appendix 3: Consent form IsiXhosa .....	155
Appendix 4: Consent form isiXhosa .....	157
Appendix 5: Interview guide – English .....	158
Appendix 6: Interview consent form – English .....	159
Appendix 7: Questionnaire – English .....	160
Appendix 8: Questionnaire – isiXhosa .....	162
Appendix 9: Pilot study report .....	165
Appendix 10: Request for permission – Amahlathi Local Municipality .....	167
Appendix 11: Permission granted – Amahlathi Local Municipality .....	169
Appendix 12: Request for permission – Eastern Cape Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs .....	170
Appendix 13: Permission granted – Eastern Cape Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs .....	172
Appendix 14: Editing certificate .....	173
Appendix 15: Turnitin report.....	175

# CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 Introduction

Service delivery protests in many parts of South Africa have become more violent over the last decade. For government organisations, reputation is a significant issue because it shapes public trust and confidence in these organisations. The general public has antagonistic views of the Amahlathi Local Municipality (ALM) and believes that it is incapable of meeting the local citizen's expectations (Hendrik and Isaac, 2020). Chapter 1 of this study explores reputation management at ALM, a crucial aspect in today's interconnected world. As reputation is closely tied to an organisation's success, understanding how to manage it effectively is critical. This chapter provides an overview of the importance of reputation management, the current state of reputation management in the Municipality, and the challenges it faces in managing its reputation. This chapter sets the stage for the rest of the study, which delves into reputation management at ALM.

## 1.2 Background

Service delivery protests in many parts of South Africa have become more violent over the last decade (BusinessTech, 2021). For government organisations, reputation is a significant factor. Poor reputation management leads to civic dissatisfaction and disengagement, as well as negative attitudes, such as the widespread belief that government policies and public officials are incompetent and corrupt (Da Silva and Batista, 2007: 27). Media reports show that many people believe that the Amahlathi Local Municipality is the worst performing municipality when it comes to mismanagement of funds, lack of oversight and accountability and the failure to provide services to its electorate (Piliso and Maliti, 2020: 1). Negative public sentiment manifests itself in a variety of ways; for example, the Municipality has experienced a high level of service delivery protests (Hendrik, 2018: 4; 2020: 3; Dayimani 2018: 4 and DispatchLIVE, 2019: 6). Protesters typically point to municipal authorities' lack of accountability and public participation as factors aggravating their service delivery issues (Nkomo, 2017). Protests have intensified in the Eastern Cape, where

communities perceive basic amenities such as water, electricity, and housing to be of poor quality (Matebese and Botes, 2017: 21).

Negative media coverage has also been shown to influence citizens' perceptions and behaviour of government. According to Lui and Wong (2012), negative media coverage, such as scandal reports, erodes trust in the government and raises cynicism. Such coverage can dissuade individuals from participating in government and give the impression that all public sector organisations and employees are untrustworthy and uninterested in their community's needs. The Auditor-General of South Africa (2020: 162) has painted an adverse picture of wasteful, irregular, and unauthorised expenditure under the theme: "not much to go around, yet not the right hands at the till". The Auditor-General paints an unfavourable image of billions of rands in funds granted to municipalities being managed "in ways contradictory to the prescripts and recognised accounting norms" in the latest local government general report.

While public-sector reputation management is becoming more prominent in the public debate, it has garnered little attention in the scholarly literature, despite the fact that internationally most public sector organisations have persistently negative reputations stemming from poor service delivery, mismanagement, and ethical misconduct, among other allegations (Waeraas and Byrkjeflot, 2012: 185). An investigation into the ALM's reputation is required to establish how the Municipality might be encouraged to improve its performance and so be able to achieve its goals. This research will take place in ALM among stakeholders relevant to the Municipality.

### **1.3 Problem statement**

The reputation of local government institutions, such as the ALM, plays a crucial role in shaping public trust and confidence in these organisations (Yang and Holzer, 2006). A strong reputation fosters positive stakeholder relationships, encourages civic engagement, and ultimately supports effective service delivery (Grimmelikhuijsen *et al.*, 2013). However, recent media reports (Dayimani, 2022) and scholarly research by Meyer *et al.* (2021) suggest a growing concern among stakeholders regarding the ALM's reputation, with issues such as perceived corruption, lack of transparency, and inadequate service delivery being raised. This situation may jeopardise the

Municipality's ability to meet the expectations and needs of its constituents, potentially hindering social and economic development within the region (Van Ryzin, 2011).

Despite the importance of reputation management in local government settings, there is limited empirical evidence on how stakeholders perceive the ALM and the factors contributing to its reputation (Wæraas and Byrkjeflot, 2012). Furthermore, there is a lack of research on sustainable strategies that can be employed by the ALM to address these concerns and enhance its reputation among stakeholders (Meyer *et al.*, 2021). This study, therefore, seeks to fill this knowledge gap by exploring the ALM's reputation among stakeholders, examining how media reports reflect the community's opinions, assessing stakeholders' expectations, and identifying sustainable reputation management strategies for the Municipality.

#### **1.4 Rationale of the Study**

The study will explore reputation management at ALM for several reasons. Firstly, reputation is a valuable asset for organisations, particularly for local governments such as the ALM. A good reputation can attract investment, increase trust, and improve stakeholder relations. Secondly, the reputation of local governments can be significantly impacted by the media and social media, which can spread information quickly and widely. This makes it essential to understand how local governments can effectively manage their reputation.

Thirdly, the study of reputation management at ALM will provide valuable insights into the challenges faced by local governments in managing their reputation and best practices for addressing these challenges. Fourthly, this study will contribute to the broader public relations and reputation management field by offering a case study of how a local government can effectively manage its reputation. Fifthly, the results of this study are helpful in the ALM and other local governments in improving their reputation management strategies, which could positively impact the communities they serve.

Overall, the study exploring reputation management at ALM is essential for advancing our understanding of how local governments can effectively manage their reputation and for improving the reputation management practices of local governments in general.

## **1.5 Aims and Objectives**

The study explore sustainable strategies to build reputation management in Amahlathi Local Municipality.

### **1.5.1 Research objectives**

- To explore Amahlathi Local Municipality's reputation among its stakeholders;
- To explore how media reports reflect the opinion of Amahlathi community members in terms of reputation;
- To explore stakeholders' expectations of Amahlathi Local Municipality; and
- To identify sustainable strategies to manage Amahlathi Local Municipality's reputation.

### **1.5.2 Questions**

- What is Amahlathi Local Municipality's reputation among its stakeholders?
- To what extent do media reports reflect Amahlathi community members' opinions regarding the Municipality's reputation?
- What are Amahlathi Local Municipality stakeholders' expectations?
- What sustainable strategies exist to manage Amahlathi Local Municipality's reputation?

## **1.6 Contribution of the study**

The present study makes two significant contributions in terms of theory and policy:

### **1.6.1 Theoretical contribution**

This study offers several important theoretical contributions to the fields of public administration, local government, and reputation management. Exploring the ALM's reputation among stakeholders and examining the role of media reports in shaping community opinions, it provides empirical evidence to support and extend existing theories on the relationship between local government reputation and stakeholder perceptions.

The research also contributes to the understanding of stakeholders' expectations in local government settings, broadening the theoretical framework on how public institutions can enhance their performance and service delivery by addressing these expectations. Furthermore, by identifying sustainable strategies for reputation management in the ALM, the study advances the development of best practices and guidelines for local governments in managing their reputation and fostering trust among stakeholders.

The study used a sequential mixed methods approach with a convergent parallel design, thereby providing a valuable methodological contribution by demonstrating the potential of combining quantitative and qualitative data to yield more comprehensive insights into complex phenomena, such as reputation management. This research, therefore, not only addresses gaps in the current literature, but will also serve as a foundation for future studies on reputation management in local government settings, paving the way for developing more effective policies and practices to improve public perception and trust in municipal institutions.

### **1.6.2 Policy contribution**

This study offers valuable policy contributions that can inform decision-making processes and guide practical improvements in local government reputation management. By examining the ALM's reputation among stakeholders, the study highlights key areas of concern that policymakers and municipal authorities should address in order to enhance public trust and confidence in the local government.

The findings related to stakeholders' expectations shed light on the specific needs and priorities of the community, enabling policymakers to focus their efforts on areas that are most important to the constituents. By addressing these expectations, local governments can demonstrate responsiveness and commitment to meeting the needs of their stakeholders, thus improving public perception and trust.

The identification of sustainable strategies for managing the ALM's reputation provides actionable recommendations that can be adopted by local governments to strengthen their reputation management efforts. These strategies, such as fostering open communication, enhancing transparency, promoting community engagement, and strengthening accountability mechanisms, can be tailored to the unique context of

individual municipalities and used as a blueprint for other local governments facing similar challenges.

In addition to its direct relevance for the ALM, the study's policy contributions can be applied more broadly to inform best practices and guidelines for reputation management in local government settings. By implementing these recommendations, municipalities can not only improve their reputation among stakeholders but also foster an environment that encourages civic engagement, facilitates effective service delivery, and ultimately contributes to the overall social and economic development of their communities.

### 1.7 Demarcation of the Study

This study focuses on the ALM, a Category B municipality situated in the Amathole District of the Eastern Cape Province. The Chris Hani District borders it to the north, Buffalo City Metro to the south, Mngquma and Great Kei to the east, and Raymond Mhlaba to the west. It is an administrative area and one of six municipalities in the district. Figure 1.1 shows the ALM map indicating different towns where the study was conducted.

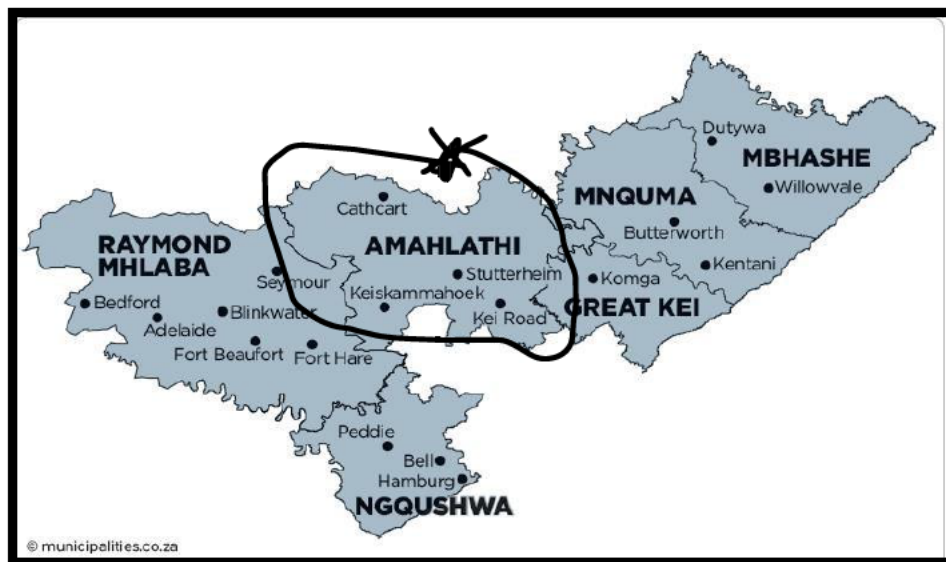


Figure 1.1: Amahlathi Local Municipality areas (in the Amathole District) Source: municipalities.co.za

### 1.8 Structure of dissertation

Chapter 1 Introduction: This chapter introduces the research topic, providing background information on the importance of reputation management in local

government settings, with a focus on the ALM. It outlines the research objectives, presents the problem statement, and highlights the study's significance in terms of theoretical and policy contributions. The chapter also provides an overview of the research design and methodology employed in the study.

Chapter 2 Literature Review: The literature review synthesizes relevant scholarly research and theories on reputation management in local government contexts. This chapter discusses the role of stakeholder perceptions, and community expectations in shaping a municipality's reputation. It also reviews existing literature on sustainable strategies for reputation management and identifies gaps in the current body of knowledge that the study aims to address.

Chapter 3 Research Methodology: This chapter details the research methodology and design used in the study, namely, a mixed methods approach with a convergent parallel design. It explains the rationale for selecting this approach, the process of data collection and analysis, and the ethical considerations involved in the research. The chapter also discusses the sampling techniques, data collection instruments, and data analysis methods employed in both the quantitative and qualitative components of the study.

Chapter 4 Results and Findings: The results and findings chapter present the key findings of the study, organised according to the research objectives. It includes a discussion of the ALM's reputation among stakeholders, an analysis of media reports reflecting community opinions, an assessment of stakeholders' expectations, and a presentation of sustainable strategies identified for managing the Municipality's reputation. The chapter also integrates the quantitative and qualitative data to provide a comprehensive analysis of the research findings.

Chapter 5 Conclusion and Recommendations: The final chapter concludes the study by summarizing the main findings, discussing their implications for theory and policy, and providing recommendations for the ALM and other local governments seeking to improve their reputation management efforts. This chapter also highlights the study's limitations and suggests areas for future research, emphasising the potential for further exploration and development of reputation management strategies in local government settings.

## **1.9 Delimitations of the study**

Delimitations are, in essence, the limitations consciously set by the authors themselves. They are concerned with the definitions that the researchers decided to set as the boundaries or limits of their work so that the study's aims and objectives do not become impossible to achieve. In this respect, it can be argued that delimitations are in the re-searcher's control. Thus, delimitations are mainly concerned with the study's theoretical background, objectives, research questions, variables under study and study sample. In this study, the qualitative process of the study included a limited number of ALM municipal workers. This delimitation was put in place because only a few people know the municipal internal processes regarding reputation management, and it would have been difficult for the study to interview many people.

## **1.10 Chapter Summary**

The first portion of this research delves into South Africa's developing issue of violent protests against service delivery, with a focus on the Amahlathi Local Municipality (ALM). The chapter emphasises the importance of reputation to government entities, presenting it as fundamental to public trust. The background part describes the protests against service delivery, the negative coverage that ALM has gotten, and the perception that its performance is inadequate. The problem statement emphasises the negative consequences of a deteriorating image, such as civic discontent and barriers to social and economic growth. The explanation supports the study's focus on ALM and emphasises the need of understanding reputation management in local government. The research will look at ALM's reputation, media coverage, stakeholder expectations, and long-term management approaches. These aims, goals, and research questions serve as the basis for the enquiry. The chapter concludes by emphasising the study's value in increasing knowledge and driving real-world developments in local government reputation management by presenting theoretical and policy contributions. The final outline of the dissertation acts as a guide for the chapters that follow.

## CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1 Introduction

This chapter examines the literature on reputation management and describes the ALM. Reputation management is complex and multifaceted that requires examination of various aspects that affect reputation. An overview of ALM as a public sector organisation is followed by an analysis of the factors affecting its reputation. The crux of this study is sustainable strategies for local government reputation management, and it would be unfair to look at strategies without first understanding the factors influencing reputation and reputation management.

The chapter proceeds to examine the different schools of thought on the reputation of public sector organisations. Reputation management and various techniques for reputation management are studied in the succeeding subsections of the chapter. The chapter focuses on reviewing the literature to situate reputation management within the context of an organisational framework, and to explain the various elements that contribute to organisational reputation.

### 2.2 Overview of Amahlathi Local Municipality

The ALM is a Category B municipality situated in the Amathole District of the Eastern Cape Province. The Chris Hani District borders it to the north, Buffalo City Metro to the south, Mnquma and Great Kei to the east, and Raymond Mhlaba to the west (Mawela, Ochara and Twinomurinzi 2017: 14). It is an administrative area and one of six municipalities in the District. Amahlathi is an isiXhosa name that means a place where many trees are grouped, a *'forest'*. Forests are a vital feature of the area (Mawela, Ochara and Twinomurinzi 2017: 14). The Municipality has the ideal of pursuing economic and social foresight for development. Reaching the corresponding goals is facilitated by joint initiatives with five other local municipalities within the District, sharing experiences and information, and improving the conditions to foster intragroup trade and investment flows (Mawela, Ochara and Twinomurinzi 2017: 14).

The ALM has been struggling with a whole range of problems that are predominantly the result of an inability to deal effectively with the consequences of recent trends and

events. The main problem areas include economic growth, rural finance, social development, environmental quality, and governance (Mawela, Ochara and Twinomurinzi, 2017: 15). Continuous structural changes in manufacturing and built environment services sectors, combined with global competition, have put significant strains on the Municipality (Ngcamu, 2019: 19). The ALM struggles with high sectoral unemployment and lack of financial resources for the development of necessary infrastructure and for addressing social and environmental difficulties (Munzhedzi and Makwembere, 2019: 7). The lack of sufficient financial resources is usually a result of a weak economy combined with inappropriate management of existing resources. Lack of sufficient funds is a significant limitation for developing necessary infrastructure such as transport and communication facilities, environmental protection services, the general built environment, and social amenities (Motubatse, Ngwakwe and Sebola, 2017: 25).

Present rural management approaches and mechanisms employed by rural municipalities fail in certain instances to deal effectively with the abovementioned challenges. It is becoming increasingly apparent that new approaches and mechanisms are needed to address the existing problems more effectively and comprehensively. Most of the difficulties arise from an inability to cope effectively with the consequences of global and local changes and the extreme complexity of rural and regional systems (Zantsi, Greyling and Vink, 2019: 19).

The ALM is a rural local municipality, as confirmed by Statistics South Africa (2017) and the ALM 2022/23-2026/27 Integrated Development Plan of Amahlathi Local Municipality (2022), characterised by most of the geographical areas classified as rural and semi-urban, respectively. To this end, ALM's planning and performance (service provision) is located within the context of the unique challenges it faces including a massive infrastructure backlog that urgently requires extraordinary measures in terms of funding and delivery capacity (Zantsi, Greyling and Vink, 2019: 21). The Municipality has a developmental mandate as enshrined in the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (South Africa, 1996) and further articulated in the White Paper on Local Government of South Africa. Department of Provincial Affairs and Constitutional Development 1998). However, several challenges are hampering the attainment of ALM's goals, jeopardising its reputation.

The following subsection discusses corporate reputation and factors associated with the reputation management of ALM.

### **2.3 Factors affecting Amahlathi Local Municipality's reputation**

It is common knowledge that government investment in service provision sustainability needs to be focus-driven and benefit the intended recipients. The success or failure of that investment to help the intended recipients influences the reputation of the one who was supposed to deliver the service. South African municipalities, as stewards of local communities and channels through which government investment reaches citizens, have a variety of reputations and a plethora of reasons contributing to this variation. The following subsections assess the factors influencing the reputation of ALM to gauge whether the reputation is positive or negative. If the reputation is positive, then the study's findings will be instrumental in reinforcing that reputation, but if the reputation is negative, then the findings of this study can be used for damage control in enhancing the reputation of the Municipality.

South African municipalities have seen an increase in service delivery protests in recent years (Ngcamu, 2019: 22). The sudden increase in these protests has been blamed on various factors, including a lack of jobs, a lack of employment opportunities, and a lack of contact between municipalities and their residents (Mawela, Ochara and Twinomurinzi, 2017: 25).

The ALM is one of the ANC-led municipalities whose residents have lost confidence in their municipality and the municipalities' efforts to repair this have failed (Hendrik, 2020: 185). According to Maleho (2016: 23), citizens often view public institutions as inefficient, incompetent, and corrupt, as well as having an atmosphere where cronyism and nepotism are rampant. As a result of these views of the public sector, the public sector can be portrayed negatively, affecting its image. Enhancing the ALM's and the local government system's efforts to strengthen service delivery at all levels would undoubtedly benefit from a better understanding of problem areas, identification of possibilities, and the creation of creative and innovative interventions (Zantsi, Greyling and Vink, 2019). Among the many factors influencing the Municipality's reputation, the main ones are poor service delivery and a lack of regard for employees.

### **2.3.1 Poor service delivery**

Globally local municipal authorities play a significant role in community development and ensuring that essential services are provided. Recently, municipalities have been heavily criticised for poor service delivery, particularly in South Africa (Mawela, Ochara and Twinomurinzi, 2017: 8). The critique is not only from the communities and academics but also from the central government since they prompt service delivery protests which sometimes result in mass destruction of state infrastructure as well as private property. Broken sewage drains, uncollected rubbish, and disintegrating roads plague Stutterheim, for instance, the administrative centre of the ALM in the Eastern Cape (Ngcamu, 2019: 13). Residents have for years been protesting about municipal failures. In 2018, youths angered by unemployment and nepotism took to the streets and burnt down the municipal offices, a local clinic, and the newly built Mlungisi Mall (Munzhedzi and Makwembere, 2019: 12).

Poor service delivery in ALM has been the result of poor leadership which has not handled the municipal finances well (Motubatse, Ngwakwe and Sebola, 2017: 9). The leadership of the municipalities, including that of the ALM, are generally politically appointed which results in leaders tending to politicise the operation and having myopic knowledge of management principles which affects the provision of services (Ndevu and Muller, 2017). Consequences of political appointments include conflict between the political and administrative interface, the poor ability of councillors to cope with local government demands in service delivery and incomplete separation of powers between the municipality and political parties.

In terms of finances, ALM's financial woes go back to 2014 when municipal allowances were introduced, including the provision of travel allowances to junior managers worth as much as 30% of their salaries, costing the Municipality R4 million a year (Motubatse, Ngwakwe and Sebola, 2017: 10). The introduction of travel allowances seems to have been self serving because all the managers who decided to introduce them were office-based. Thus, a travel allowance could have served no purpose to them other than to milk the Municipality of its scarce resources (Motubatse, Ngwakwe and Sebola, 2017: 11). Between 2014 and 2016, the Municipality irregularly procured plant equipment for road construction — known as the yellow fleet contract — amounting to

R92-million, yet the promised equipment never materialised (Motubatse, Ngwakwe and Sebola, 2017: 11).

Financial data published on Municipal Money, a web-based initiative by National Treasury, as reported by Eyewitness News (2022) reveals that Amahlathi has a history of poor financial management. The amount of money held in the Municipality's bank account, its cash balance, decreased from R100 million in 2016 to around R10 million in 2019. In the 2018/19 financial year (the latest available on the site), Amahlathi overspent its operating budget by 31%. The operating budget is used to pay day-to-day operating expenses, such as salaries, and a 15% over-expenditure is considered high risk (Zantsi, Greyling and Vink, 2019: 19). At the same time, the capital budget, which is used to finance new infrastructure such as housing, sewage, and water reticulation, was underspent by 21%.

According to Zantsi, Greyling and Vink (2019: 19), the National Treasury noted that underspending the capital budget by 15% is "a clear warning sign". Compounding the impact on service delivery, nothing was spent on repairs and maintenance. In 2018/19 R62.3-million (32% of ALM's budget) was used on fruitless and wasteful expenditure (Zantsi, Greyling and Vink, 2019: 19).

According to Eyewitness News (2022), the Auditor-General reported that Amahlathi's irregular, fruitless and wasteful and unauthorised expenditure in the 2019/2020-year totalled R67.3-million. Of this, R4.3 million was interest paid on bills not settled within 30 days.

Further to that the Municipality received an unqualified audit opinion during the 2020/21 (2022) and 2021/22 (2023) financial years, where the Auditor-General raised several issues among others: (1) the failure to take reasonable measures to prevent fruitless and wasteful expenditure that amounted to 2 million, (2) the failure to take reasonable measures to prevent unauthorised expenses totalling R49.1 million, (3) the inability to pay creditors on time, and (4) material deficits arising from debtors who owe the municipality a total of R7.5 million.

The inability of ALM to deliver much-needed services paid for by taxpayers' money due to its bad leadership and mismanagement of funds, has earned the Municipality a bad

name among residents, the media and members of opposing political parties. ALM's bad name translates to a bad reputation, hence the need for local government reputation management strategies. Such strategies do not happen in isolation; they need to arise from internal and external stakeholders. For this reason, the organisation must pay close attention to its financial control and measures, pay attention to the needs of its employees and various stakeholders and strategic partners as all of these are the backbone of an organisation's success (Englert, Koch, and Wüstemann, 2020).

### **2.3.2 Lack of regard for employees**

Successful companies know and value their staff. They know that employees are essential to any organisation's success and, thus, work diligently to provide good pay, satisfying benefits, and positive work environments. However, ALM has a bad reputation because of its lack of regard for employees (Zantsi, Greyling and Vink, 2019: 25).

ANC-led ALM has been cash-strapped to the point of not considering its employees' welfare, which has already contributed considerably to the organisation's bad reputation (Ngcamu, 2019: 23). As of February 2022, ALM has not been able to pay its employees' salaries. Instead, the Municipality has worked out a deal with Pick 'n Pay to give employees food vouchers. The disregard of employees by ALM has resulted in legal action by the workers' council, and ALM employees have started using social media to protest their treatment.

Employee interactions and customer-generated content can threaten ALM since customers take an increasingly active role as market players through social media and can reach a broad audience. Hence, ALM employees can spread rumours or complaints about ALM easily and quickly, which means that the organisation has less time to respond to attacks (Ngcamu, 2019: 22).

Other factors affecting the reputation of ALM include inadequate reputation management strategies and the reports presented by various media houses about the Municipality. In 2020, News24 (2020) reported that residents of the area raised issues with the Eastern Cape Premier Oscar Mabuyane, highlighting how officials had asked for sex and R5000 bribes in exchange for jobs within the Municipality. For an organisation such as News24 to bring such a report to light shows how bad the

Municipality's reputation is and how media reports are instrumental in reputation management. The facts presented here bring to light the need for ALM not only to change its approach but also to adopt new strategies to manage its reputation, hence this study regarding a sustainable strategy for local government reputation management.

The lack of regard for employees at ALM can significantly impact the Municipality's reputation management. Firstly, unhappy employees are more likely to spread negative word-of-mouth, both to the public and within the Municipality. This can result in decreased public trust and a negative perception of the Municipality. Secondly, neglecting employee well-being and not addressing their grievances can lead to high turnover rates, making it difficult for the Municipality to maintain a stable and skilled workforce. This can result in inefficiency and a decrease in service quality, further damaging the Municipality's reputation.

Thirdly, failing to provide a positive work environment can result in low morale and decreased employee productivity. This can lead to a lack of motivation and a decrease in the level of commitment to the Municipality, which can affect its ability to provide high-quality services. Thus, the lack of regard for employees at ALM can significantly impact the Municipality's reputation management. Addressing employee well-being and providing a positive work environment is crucial for maintaining a positive reputation and ensuring the long-term success of the Municipality.

## **2.4 Organisational reputation**

While ALM is a public sector organisation, there is no doubt that it falls under the banner of a corporate organisation, bearing in mind the definition of a corporation being an organisation—usually a group of people or a company—authorised by the state to act as a single entity.

There is currently no general agreement on the "core meaning and exact building blocks of corporate reputation" (Veh, Göbel and Vogel, 2019: 19). However, there is widespread agreement that a good corporate reputation is valuable and has several positive consequences (Becker and Lee, 2019; Aula and Mantere, 2020; Zraková, Kubina and Koman, 2017; Pérez-Cornejo, de Quevedo-Puente and Delgado-García 2019; Gwebu, Wang and Wang, 2018; Wei, Ouyang and Chen 2017).

Reputation is embedded in stakeholders' combined thoughts, feelings, and perceptions of the organisation (Ramos and Casado-Molina, 2021; García-Madariaga and Rodríguez-Rivera, 2017; Pérez-Cornejo, de Quevedo-Puente and Wilson, 2022). On the other hand, other schools of thought, and is earned as a result of interactions between an organisation and its stakeholders over time, considering the organisation's past actions and prospects (Comyns and Franklin-Johnson, 2018; Carroll and Olegario, 2020; Christensen and Gornitzka, 2017; Schaarschmidt and Walsh 2020).

Researchers (Money *et al.*, 2017; Weng and Chen, 2017; Christensen and Lodge 2018; Christensen and Gornitzka, 2019) and business leaders have become increasingly interested in understanding and measuring corporate reputation over the last decade. This is related to the recognition among investors, clients, analysts, and other stakeholders, that a bad reputation harms the long-term viability of businesses (Christensen and Lægreid, 2020: 27). Thus, entities must manage and monitor this intangible asset appropriately. Because an organisation's reputation reflects how its various stakeholders perceive it, this reputational stance can assist organisations in gaining trust and credibility in their respective communities, which directly aids the organisations in achieving their objectives and goals (Picci, 2020; Boon, Verhoest and Wynen 2020; Christensen, Lægreid and Rykkja 2018; Aula and Mantere, 2020).

The role of businesses In society”has 'lifted from profit-oriented to society-centric, which, in the age of globalisation, has made it more difficult for organisations to be sole managers (Mokaeane, 2017). Accountability and reduced privacy for organisations have necessitated the development of a proactive strategy to prevent damage to its image and reputation (Wæraas and Dahle, 2020: 15). According to Foreman and Argenti (2005: 254), maintaining a positive reputation is critical because it helps to minimise challenges in the hostile world in which these organisations operate. This can be seen as goodwill when coping with emergencies, and it also acts as a mechanism for attracting top talent and ensuring their loyalty (Mokaeane, Moloï and Oksiutycz-Munyawiri, 2017: 22).

Reputation has three components: a) brand reputation, which is concerned with how people perceive the brand, b) organisational reputation, which is concerned with how people perceive the organisation; and c) stakeholder reputation, which is concerned with how people perceive the brand or the organisation with which they are dealing

(Farzanah, 2021; Shiraev, *et al.* 2021). According to Davis (2007: 09)“ reputation is defined as the total value that stakeholders attribute to a company based on their perception and interpretation of the image that the company portrays over time”. Thus, corporate reputation can be viewed as a multi-dimensional process that has drawn much attention over time.

Reputation is the primary tool that a market economy uses to deal with consumer ignorance (Hinterleitner and Sager, 2019: 45). Fombrun (1996:15) summarises reputation as an overall assessment of the organisation’s stakeholder assessment. The author observes that these perceptions are aggregated and evaluate the organisation’s ability to meet their expectations, regardless of whether these stakeholders are interested in purchasing the company’s products or services, working for the company, or investing in the company’s stock. Organisations should manage and maintain their good reputation by following basic principles of integrity and fairness to build enduring reputations (Jabeen *et al.*, 2018: 19). CEOs and organisation leaders in the private and public sector are seen to undervalue the importance of reputation as a driver of an organisation’s management structure (Jabeen *et al.*, 2018: 19).

**Table 2.1: Classification of the definition of reputation**

<b>Term</b>	<b>Question</b>
<b>Identity</b>	Who are you?
<b>Corporate Brand</b>	Who do you say you are and want to be?
<b>Image</b>	What do stakeholders think of who you are and who you tell them you are?
<b>Reputation</b>	What do all the stakeholders think of who you tell them you are and what you have done?

Source: Argenti and Druckenmiller (2004: 369)

The primary (and significant) distinction between image and reputation is that reputation is a two-way symmetric relationship with stakeholders that allows for managerial intervention“ Identities concern how an organisation looks to internal stakeholders such as municipal employees, community members, provincial, and local government departments” (García-Madariaga and Rodríguez-Rivera, 2017: 25-26).

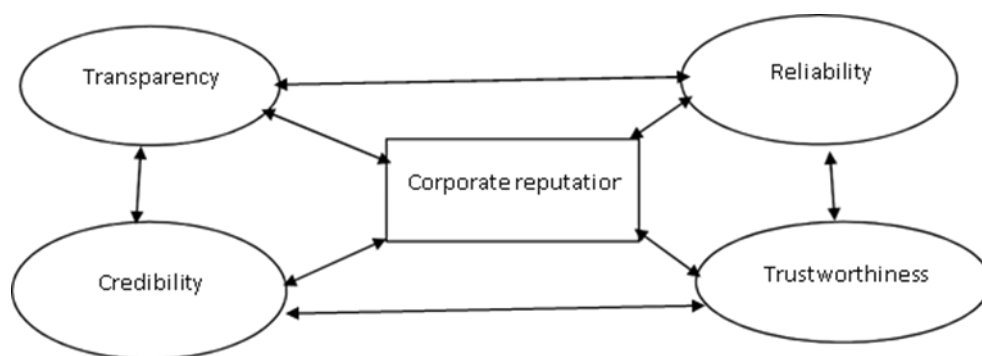
Drawing from the above views, this study defines corporate reputation as the overall perception of an organisation by internal and external stakeholders, based on past and

present actions. Such actions resonate with the stakeholder group in identifying the organisation's overall performance. With a clear view of corporate or organisational reputation, it is justifiable to look at the factors influencing ALM's reputation. Assessing these factors can determine whether the reputation is positive or negative. Therefore, it is crucial for organisations to have a comprehension of their reputation strengths and weaknesses, as emphasised by Argenti and Druckenmiller (2004: 369) and attain an understanding of the perceptions others hold of them. Once an organisation has taken note of these perceptions, it can leverage them to enhance and solidify its position in the marketplace and in the minds of consumers.

## 2.5 Conceptual factors influencing public sector reputation

The below sub-section underpins the theoretical concepts of credibility, transparency, reliability, and trustworthiness, which, according to

This section focuses on the theoretical concepts of transparency, credibility, reliability, and trustworthiness, which, which, according to Fombrun (1996), help companies build strong and positive reputations. Figure 2.1 depicts the theoretical concepts that contribute to a good reputation.



**Figure 2.1: Element of good organisation reputation**

Source: Fombrun (1996)

The concepts discussed below serve as a theoretical barometer for stakeholder perceptions of an organisation's reputation and a lens through which organisational challenges can be discussed.

### 2.5.1 Transparency

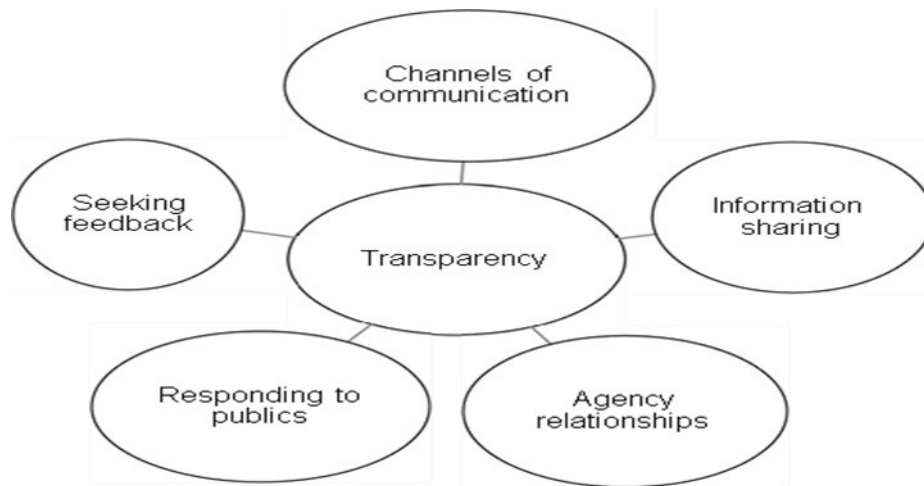
The literature has focused heavily on transparency (Schnackenberg, Tomlinson, and Coen, 2021; Matheus, Janssen, and Janowski 2021; Harris and Neely, 2021). To

Arnold and Fulmer (2018: 12), transparency is the availability of information of public importance, people's ability to engage in political decisions, and government responsibility to public opinion or legal processes. The difficulty with Arnold and Fulmer's idea is that it restricts openness to the realm of the government. Transparency is defined by Moreno-Albarracn et al. (2021: 7) as the outcome of cooperation between internal and external stakeholders, or corporate management and firm stakeholders.

Rutherford and Wightman (2021: 45) state that when corporate leaders are transparent in how they conduct the company's affairs, an excellent corporate reputation develops. These authors emphasise that transparency necessitates frequent communications delivered in the spirit of "full disclosure". They continue by stating that when businesses make more and better information about themselves available to the public, the public considers them more credible and accountable, hence boosting their reputation.

The constant occurrence of service delivery protests in South Africa has been attributed mainly to citizen's lack of information on issues that affect them. Citizen's fundamental right to information about issues affecting their lives may be jeopardised because of communication asymmetry (Schnackenberg, Tomlinson and Coen 2021). In this context, Elisa and Ladisalao (2012) caution that the decision to reveal information must be taken proactively by the issuer and must respond to the recipients' expectations, getting to know them and tailoring the information released as much as feasible.

As such lack of transparency from business leaders may indicate a failure to contribute to the development of corporate reputation (Harris and Neely 2021: 17). The Anti Corruption Resource Centre, 4U, (2011: 115) in Maropo (2014: 7) highlighted this in the South African context, noting that scandals of lack of accountability involving public officials and representatives have raised global attention, resulting in deteriorating ethical behaviour and malpractice. In this, the governments' legitimacy may be questioned because of a perceived lack of openness, resulting in a negative influence on its reputation.



**Figure 2.2: Transparency model of government communication**

Source: Fairbanks, Plowman and Rawlins (2007)

The transparency paradigm encourages communicators to embrace methods that facilitate open information exchange. These include strengthening agency relationships with the people they serve by responding to their needs, soliciting and incorporating feedback, and disseminating information through various channels (Fairbanks, Plowman, and Rawlins, 2007).

Without transparency, the government risks public cynicism and disillusionment, which will inevitably damage its reputation (Arnold and Fulmer, 2018). Figure 2.2 summarises the critical features of transparency as a foundation for reputation. Poorly perceived transparency will invariably have an impact on interactions with stakeholders, which will have an impact on the formation of the organisations' reputation (MorenoAlbarracn et al., 2021). Transparency is a major determinant of reputation management in the public sector, and a transparent organisation is invariably trustworthy and reliable. Transparency and the concept of credibility have a tight theoretical link, which is discussed more below.

### **2.5.2 Credibility**

The relationship between credibility and corporate reputation concepts in the public sector has received relatively little attention in organisational literature (Frasca and Edwards 2017: 21). Jahn, Eichhorn and Brühl (2020: 12) contend that a good reputation boosts credibility, making people more confident that they will receive what

they have been promised. Credibility can be established by either a credible source or a credible commitment (Frasca and Edwards, 2017: 21). Credibility is determined by the 'suppliers' attitude toward companies; to be recognised as credible, businesses must maintain a close and cooperative relationship with their stakeholders (Holland *et al.*, 2018).

It is worth noting Fairbanks, Plowman and Rawlins's (2007) research findings, that governments must communicate with their constituents in an open, honest, and timely manner without manipulating the information. Similarly, Bourgoin and Harvey (2018: 34) contend that suppliers expect companies to be credible and to act in good faith when dealing with placing orders with suppliers. Fombrun (1996) posits that suppliers require companies to communicate the risks of their strategies, provide warnings of impending problems, and disclose material facts that may influence the suppliers' assessment of their performance.

A credible organisation will enjoy public trust, which is closely related to reliability, as discussed in the following section.

### **2.5.3 Reliability**

Customers expect companies to be reliable, and they also expect the products of companies they respect to be of higher quality and more reliable than those of lesser known competitors, even if they are sold at the same price (Campiranon, 2010). Customers expect quality services from organisations that provide services and products. The same can be said of the public sector, which provides citizens with public goods, and citizens invariably expect quality services that meet their socioeconomic needs. According to Nakra (2000), successful global leaders build a reputation for dependability among customers and suppliers by ensuring service quality and innovation.

The recent wave of community service delivery protests in South Africa can be interpreted as a sign of deteriorating government dependability. Luke and Heyns (2013) state that "the recent spate of service delivery protests in South Africa would appear to indicate that the government is out of touch with the opinions of South African citizens".

Similarly, Kaggwa (2009) points out that the gap between the expected level of services and the essential services provided by the government has contributed significantly to service delivery protests in South Africa. There is a growing disparity between what communities expect and what the government can provide. In this regard, Jain (2010: 13) offers a caveat:

Improving the effectiveness of communication with communities concerning development issues and progress on the delivery of services can help combat the alienation protesters often feel toward local government, the belief that there is little other outlet for public participation than violent uprisings. Moreover, it can help change the perception that government officials are corrupt or somehow complicit in withholding services from their communities.

However, solving a problem of this magnitude will take time and much effort.

It is clear that the public sector is increasingly under public scrutiny and must be perceived as reliable to enhance its legitimacy. The following section examines trustworthiness as a driver of corporate reputation.

#### **2.5.4 Trustworthiness**

Van der Merwe and Puth (2014) define trustworthiness as an objective characteristic of an organisation that makes it deserving of the trust of its stakeholders. The literature has paid close attention to the relationship between trustworthiness and reputation, both in the private (Mayer, Davis, and Schoorman, 1995; Schanz, 2009) and public sectors (Blind, 2007; Chingwete, 2016; Edwards, 2015). According to Konieczna (2010), the highest evaluation an organisation can receive from its satisfied stakeholders is their trust, highlighting the critical role of trustworthiness. Stakeholders must have faith in the organisation's ability to keep its promises. Being open and accountable is the best way for public sector organisations to gain the trust of stakeholders.

Trust, in Fombrun's view (1996), is a sign of increasing managerial professionalism. Employers are typically trusted by their employees. Campiranon (2012) and Da Silva and Batista (2007) observe that a company's relationship with its employees is crucial in creating a trustworthy perception of the company. To be more customer-focused, accountable, and responsive to the taxpayers they serve, the government should become more customer-focused.

The central argument is that how employees perceive their organisations may influence how they interact with customers and, thus, how customers perceive the organisation. According to Luomah-aho (2008), one factor influencing a company's image of trustworthiness is the customer's perception of companies. Consistent public policies, for example, and neutral, trustworthy behaviour create a reserve of consistent behaviour that contributes to a reputation of trustworthiness.

Although the concepts of trust and trustworthiness are frequently used interchangeably in the literature, Van der Merwe and Puth (2014) caution that they are not the same, despite their close relationship, with the former relying on an expectation of the latter. The authors describe trust as a trustor's subjective conviction in the trustee, whereas trustworthiness is an objective attribute of the trustee that makes him/her/it deserving of the trust.

## **2.6 Reputation management**

The preceding subsection highlighted factors influencing the reputation of ALM, leading to the observation that ALM has a bad or negative reputation. This warrants reputation management.

What makes an organisation unique and distinct is central to the perceptions held by its direct and indirect stakeholders. An organisation's reputation is a collective assessment of its historical ability to provide valued outcomes to a representative group of stakeholders who have an impact on the organisation or on whom the organisation can eventually have an impact (Boon, Salomonsen and Verhoest, 2021; Zhang, 2018; Zheng, Liu and Davison, 2018).

Reputation consists of two major components: (1) perception of how all stakeholders perceive the company; and (2) reality – the truth about a company's policies, practices, procedures, systems, and performance (Peterson, 2018: 21). Truth, in this instance, is the property of being in accord with fact or reality. As a result, perception is closely related to the image that an institution or organisation projects. Reputation has always been, and will continue to be, extremely important to organisations, whether commercial, governmental, or not-for-profit (Weng and Chen, 2017: 54). By paving the way for recognition and approval from stakeholders, a strong reputation helps organisations accomplish their goals, stay competitive and thrive (Schaarschmidt and

Walsh, 2020: 19). Organisations can face several challenges in their efforts to establish a positive image because they must adhere to core principles, be accountable for their decisions, provide high-quality products and services, treat employees well, and provide fair value to shareholders (Esenyel, 2020: 23). Perception is associated with the image that an organisation projects to society in this regard. Furthermore, PérezCornejo, de Quevedo-Puente and Wilson (2022: 33) contend that such perception develops attitudes based on the stakeholder's experience with the organisation.

One of the most important components of any organisation is its reputation and a damaged reputation for an organisation is equivalent to moving backwards two steps. The risk of loss in many ways must be protected effectively (Comyns and Franklin-Johnson, 2018: 17). Loss of reputation for social development institutions such as municipalities have serious ramifications. In the private sector, a bad reputation is linked to more significant hiring and retention expenses, lowering operational margins, and preventing more significant returns. Meeting the expectations of multiple stakeholders and competing for reputation status in local governance is critical in transforming community economies (Christensen and Gornitzka, 2017: 19). Thus, citizen satisfaction and responsiveness to issues of interest play an essential role in driving satisfaction and service quality.

Reputation management aims to create a shared interest with stakeholders (Schaarschmidt and Walsh, 2020: 70). Internationally, reputation management is used as the best strategy for managing organisational reputation (Zheng, Liu and Davison, 2018: 28). Municipalities across Africa are currently facing a variety of pressures and demands, including service delivery protests. South Africa is no exception, with ALM being a local example. The ALM faces various challenges that negatively impact the provision of essential services and fuel unrest in their communities, media coverage, and political interference.

Over the years, South Africa's local government system has earned a bad reputation. It has been "heavily criticised for its poor service delivery, resulting in service delivery protests emanating from every corner of the country, particularly among previously disadvantaged communities" (Mokaeane, Moloji and Oksiutycz-Munyawiri, 2017: 381).

According to Brand (2018), South Africans believe that the government is insensitive to their needs, that the local government is dysfunctional, and that service delivery is inadequate.

Watson and Kitchen (2010) attribute poor reputations to a lack of stakeholder engagement and ethical performance. According to the South African Government News Agency (2018) and Mokaeane, Moloï and Oksiutycz-Munyawiri (2017), there appears to be a lack of consultation and dialogue between local government and communities, which leads to a lack of understanding of people's needs. As a result, service delivery is subpar, and information is not disseminated effectively to these communities. Mokaeane says that local municipalities do not appear capable of providing services critical to uplifting society, which negatively impacts their reputation (Mokaeane, Moloï and Oksiutycz-Munyawiri, 2017). On the same note, a reputation that took 30 years to develop can be shattered in two seconds.

A reputation management study by Koehler (2017: 66) diagnosed an institution's reputation by building public perceptions consistent with the organisation's goals. Reputation is the backbone of an organisation's corporate sustainability and the road map for organisational performance (Pérez-Cornejo, de Quevedo-Puente and Wilson, 2019: 44).

Thus, reputation management is the effort to influence what and how people think of a brand or person when they see it online or interact with others, as well as how the organisation lives up to its commitments to various stakeholders (Ramos and CasadoMolina, 2021: 13). All organisations, whether good or bad, have a reputation. According to SABC News (2018), the youth of Stutterheim (an ALM town) caused chaos and demanded that the municipal leadership be disbanded due to nepotism and a failure to provide community service delivery. Moreover, in 2019 Mahlangu and Madisa (2019) of the *Sowetan* newspaper reported that the Municipality was struggling to pay its employees, which resulted in unrest within the Municipality.

An organisation is known by the perception it generates through its reputation (GarcíaMadariaga and Rodríguez-Rivera 2017: 34). Reputation is a directional effect in the form of a perception directed toward a focal organisation by several stakeholders. The perception is derived or transferred from effective perceptions of performances by the focal act, statuses, or qualities in the act (Zraková, Kubina and

Koman, 2017: 21). Reputation is a social construct based on observations of both the consequences of actions and the guides used to generate the actions (Veh, Göbel and Vogel, 2019: 14).

Political dynamics shape every sphere of government in any polity. Decisions on policy, projects, programmes, and service delivery are made in democratic settings through a web of ideas derived from multi-stakeholder consultation and the influence of local, national, and supra-national politics and political entities, and the influence of these on urban governance is no exception in South Africa.

A public sector's reputation as perceived by various stakeholders is critical, as it influences stakeholder attitudes toward the municipality/organisation (Becker and Lee, 2019: 41). As a result, the value and significance of reputation in the realm of local government cannot be overstated. Local governments or municipalities are held accountable for their decisions and actions that harm their communities (Gwebu, Wang and Wang, 2018: 12). Decision outcomes are the basis for contested opinions in democratic politics, which influence the power structure within an organisation (Ramos and Casado-Molina, 2021: 31). As a result, organisations must prioritise participatory communication and reputation to gain the trust of their stakeholders. Fombrun, Gardberg, and Sever (2013: 243) suggest that reputation management represents an organisation's ability to provide valuable results to stakeholders. As a result, it helps to reduce uncertainty, which allows for lower transaction costs. Argenti and Druckemiller (2004: 369) proposed a question taxonomy that clarifies the distinctions between these terms (Table 2.1).

In a nutshell, reputation management refers to the process of monitoring, maintaining, and creating the reputation of an individual or a brand in the public eye; in this case, protecting the brand of a public sector organisation, ALM. Reputation management is a continuous process, as it allows one to stay on top of a brand's public perception and address possible damaging situations as soon as they occur. Brand reputation management is monitoring how consumers perceive one's business and taking strategic action to improve one's brand image.

## **2.7 Reputation management and local governance**

It is clear from the preceding that the public and private sectors are not only distinct but also should be. In this context, it is understandable that there is limited literature that strengthens the public sector's reputation and thus remains a neglected public sector resource (Becker and Lee 2019: 37). "Despite this, a new era of understanding the benefits of reputation in the public sector has begun" (Becker and Lee 2019: 39). Thus, despite the fundamental differences between the public and private sectors, reputation and its management are relevant to the public sector and are essential in the provision of both the quality and quantity services (Veh, Göbel and Vogel 2019: 37).

The pressure on governments to provide services more promptly and effectively is currently immense (Pérez-Cornejo, de Quevedo-Puente, and Wilson 2019: 201). Surprisingly, there has not been much academic study on the value of public sector company reputation and management given the significance of the public sector to the economy and the amount of financing available. According to Gwebu, Wang, and Wang (2018), corporate reputation for the public sector is a crucial field of research because the reputation of public sector organisations depends on how stakeholders perceive their services. Therefore, it is crucial to empirically evaluate popular attitudes when determining the legitimacy of the government.

The status of citizens has recently changed; citizens have become more than just taxpayers; they have become clients of public sector organisations and users of their services (Wei, Ouyang and Chen, 2017: 69). Reputation is a powerful perspective on public organisations that are based on classic scholarship and considers organisational literature on the basis for organisational survival (Zraková, Kubina and Koman 2017; Pérez-Cornejo, de Quevedo-Puente and Wilson 2019; Wei, Ouyang and Chen 2017). Paying attention to public organisations and their culture (public) helps in strategising how to prevent attacks from the outside world (Carroll and Olegario 2020: 45).

According to reputation scholarship, to understand organisational behaviour, one must first examine the environment in which it exists: "when attempting to account for a regulator's behaviour, look at the audience, and look at the threats" (Carpenter, 2010: 832). In agreement with the preceding author, Horak (2006: 33) observed that

municipalities are held accountable for decisions and actions that harm their communities. As a result, the value and significance of reputation in local government cannot be overstated. Horak (2006: 33) adds that local governments' legislative mandate is to serve their constituents' interests and prevent harm wherever possible.

The Local Government Association's *New Reputation Guide* (2009: 15) asserts that reputation in local government is built on three components: (1) what people say about you, (2) what you say about yourself, and (3) how your actions and behaviours reflect what you stand for. Organisations must also be transparent about what they stand for, how they should act, and how they express their vision. In this respect, the municipality's good leadership must fight for the organisation's vision and missions (Local Government Association [LGA], 2009: 15).

As stated in Chapter 1, municipalities worldwide face various pressures and demands, such as service delivery protests. As a result, a lack of service delivery, continuous communication between local governments and their constituents, a lack of understanding of community concerns, and insufficient dissemination of relevant information to communities, have all become causes for concern. According to Schultz and Werner (2005: 4), the goals of reputation management consulting are to:

- Boost and expand the organization's goodwill and reputation.
- Establish proper standards, methods, protocols, and policies to safeguard the organization's reputation from damaging outside influences.
- Establish procedures for dealing with circumstances that could harm the organisation's reputation. Additionally, top management needs guidance and advice on how to fully take on the responsibility of managing the organisation's reputation.

Koma (2010: 116) asserts and warns that a single incident or occurrence can rarely jeopardise an organisation's credibility, but one that occurs often over time can be catastrophic. A company's reputation provides a competitive advantage. The benefits of a positive reputation are apparent: a positive reputation leads to increased favourability, better relationships with the media, and better support during a crisis. Fourie (2014: 155–156) asserts that an organisation might gain the following particular advantages from cultivating a favourable reputation in the eyes of stakeholders:

- Draws in employees, clients, suppliers, and investors.
- Increases tolerance among all parties involved.
- May support improved margins and a higher share price; • May motivate staff to put in more effort.
- Expands strategic possibilities, including alliances; • Influences public opinion and the media.

A company's good reputation provides a basis for competitive advantage in responding to a crisis (Schnietz and Epstein, 2005: 327). Furthermore, Roper and Fill (2012: 11) argue that service institutions should limit and reduce friction with stakeholders to maintain a good reputation. If the ALM can maintain its reputation in the face of negativity and create a positive impression among stakeholders through excellent service delivery, it will strengthen its position in the community.

The primary level has the most significant impact, but it is minor compared to information provided by secondary and tertiary-level sources. Consider how society perceives service delivery at municipalities/local governments in South Africa; these perceptions are typically based on information from others and the mass media. According to Bromley (2000: 235), trust gained from communities will play a significant role in an organisation's reputation building, which is dependent on the information transmission method. Information can be gathered through direct interaction, secondhand knowledge from a third party who may be more knowledgeable, or perceived information from the media. As a result, the overall stock of information about an organisation forms its reputation (Bromley, 2000: 249).

Municipal leaders should not doubt the importance of this foundation of reputation in their organisations. However, leadership entails not only being clear about what the organisation's reputation is built on but also being seen to be committed to it and inspiring employees to behave consistently in ways that support what they stand for (LGA, 2009: 15). According to the Local Government Association (2009: 15), municipal leadership is undergoing unprecedented change – both as a country and as organisations. In the ALM, the expenses scandal has added to the public's scepticism of politicians. The impending change brought about by the financial crisis will necessitate fundamental changes in what they do and how they do it. As a result, it is

assumed for this study that the first point of departure in ensuring a good reputation is a good communication with stakeholders and suitable public relations activities to improve the Municipality's reputation.

## **2.8 The media and its impact on an organisation's reputation**

The media is frequently blamed for practically everything that goes wrong. A medium used to transmit a message to a broad, anonymous, diversified audience is referred to as media (Pearce, 2009: 624). Organisations frequently complain that the media focuses solely on their negative characteristics. The media is a key medium through which information flows. After the legislature, executive, and judiciary, the media is referred to as the fourth state in South Africa.

Through a medium intended for that purpose, mass communication conveys information, ideas, and attitudes to a large and diverse audience (Steinberg and Angelopulo, 2015: 251). The mass media include the technological and social structures, such as newspapers, radio, television, and the Internet, that are responsible for collecting, producing, and disseminating messages to vast audiences. The media shapes public discourse in South Africa by routinely delivering information regarding the local government system (Steinberg and Angelopulo, 2015: 251),

According to Deephouse (2000: 1097), a firm's media reputation is defined as the entire evaluation of a firm portrayed in the media. This assessment is the consequence of the organisation's media coverage. Because the media affects our social, political, economic, and cultural systems, it is critical to understand how the media works and how audiences respond to media messages (Steinberg and Angelopulo, 2015: 251). As a result, the effects of mass media have an impact on an audience's behaviour, emotions, attitudes, and cognition.

Governments worldwide are grappling with the challenges of meeting citizens' ever increasing socioeconomic expectations. Organisations value media visibility because it affects their reputation, public legitimacy, and stakeholder relations (Wonneberger and Jacobs, 2017). The media has seized on the significance of these trends as the foundation for newsworthy items, framing their stories about governments accordingly (Hanson and Stuart, 2001).

According to the reviewed literature, the media typically serves as an oversight (watchdog) role for the government by providing checks and balances on what is happening within the state. According to Agbo and Chukwuma (2017), the media's watchdog function is pivotal in holding government accountable and check government's activities with the core goal of engendering good governance. Coombs (2000) adds that the majority of information that stakeholders gather about their organisation comes from the media, which is why the author noted the importance of reputation management in an organisation's operations. Gumedede (2014) echoes the sentiments of the preceding authors by stating that the media provides a social space for criticising, questioning, and pressuring leaders to be responsive and accountable to citizens. Erlich *et al.* (2021) contends that the media plays an important role in holding power accountable and exposing corruption.

In South Africa, for example, the media has brought to light corruption-related issues that would otherwise have gone ignored by the general population. The media has frequently functioned as a watchdog, exposing corruption and misconduct in government.

According to Di Tella and Franceschelli (2011), the media is critical in modern democracies. For example, it offers a significant amount of the information utilised by policymakers and voters to make decisions, and editorial content may affect the judgments of potential voters. As a result, media coverage shapes public discourse (Rindova, Petkova, and Kotha 2007), and media attention is likely to contribute to reputation creation by focusing on the organisation, in this case, a provincial government. Significantly, many stakeholders rely on corporate news stories since the media is seen as a reputable and trustworthy source of company performance information (Meadows and Meadows, 2016).

The media has the power to affect social and governmental change, which is why it is so essential in society. As a dominant social system, the media plays a critical role in defining an organisation's image and influencing its credibility (Gergen, 1999: 19).

Organisations need to understand that reputation is earned rather than created. A reputation can create a brand and an image, but whether that image is positive or negative will depend on what the organisation does. The media, through which information is disseminated to the public, is essential to forming a reputation. The

media plays a critical role in society, with the ability to influence social and governmental change (Gergen, 1999: 19). In South Africa, adverse media reports have troubled the ALM. Maape (2017: 1) points out that because of the frequent media reports regarding corruption, unethical behaviour, failure to provide community service, lack of internal contact with employees, and inability to pay wages for internal workers, the negative image of the local government system in South Africa has been compounded and hinders the credibility of the system. This media frenzy has significantly impacted the corporate reputation of the ALM and local government sectors.

According to Warin et al. (2015), a company reputation is now a valuable asset that must be publicised and safeguarded. The ALM must discover out how to use the media to promote great service delivery and portray a positive image in its region. According to Argenti and Druckemiller (2004: 101), the media serves as both a constituency and a channel for stakeholders to obtain information about and create opinions about a corporation. Many people have expressed concerns about the effects of various media on society and individuals as a result of the rise of social media and the rapid growth of mass media, according to Hanson (2015: 48).

Media reports can significantly impact the reputation management of organisations, including ALM. Negative media coverage can lead to loss of trust, negative public perception, and decreased reputation, whereas positive media coverage can help enhance an organisation's reputation and increase public trust.

In the case of ALM, negative media coverage could highlight issues such as corruption, mismanagement of funds, poor service delivery, and inadequate infrastructure, among others. This could lead to a decrease in public trust, lower voter support, and a negative image in the eyes of the public, stakeholders, and investors.

On the other hand, positive media coverage can showcase the Municipality's efforts in delivering quality services, engaging with communities, and implementing initiatives to improve its residents' quality of life. This could help enhance the Municipality's reputation, increase public trust, and promote a positive image. Therefore, it is crucial for the ALM or government to proactively monitor and manage its reputation through effective communication strategies and media relations. This includes addressing adverse media reports, promoting positive initiatives and engaging with stakeholders

to ensure a positive perception and reputation. While the media can make or break an organisation's reputation, it is also an essential tool for promoting democracy, as discussed briefly in the following section.

## **2.9 Reputation management strategies**

Gainey (2009: 273) points out that best practices in crisis management and public relations are standard across organisations:

- Ensure executive support for incorporating crisis management into local government systems and the ALM strategic planning process. The crisis plan should not be viewed as a separate entity, but rather as an integral part of the public organisation's day-to-day operations and consciousness.
- Create and maintain a crisis management plan.
- Using vulnerability audits, identify potential risks or weaknesses within the local government and the ALM, as well as potential threats or weaknesses outside.
- Assemble and train a crisis-management team at the local public organisation to lead planning efforts for the local government and ALM's response in an actual crisis.
- Develop a healthy relationship with the media.
- Pay close attention to the role of leadership in a crisis. Leaders' frame the meaning of a crisis event, expressing appropriate concern and support, overseeing mitigation, coordinating support, and facilitating timely, open communication.

The advantages of comprehensive, proactive, and systematic reputation crisis management, according to Yilmaz and Kucuk (2010: 235), include:

- Establishes stakeholder trust and confidence while maintaining a license to operate.
- Encourages investment and increases customer and supplier loyalty.
- Reduces the need for regulatory action.
- Allows for the recruitment and retention of the best.

Written crisis plans, strategies to stakeholder engagement and the creation of web based communication are all constructive measures toward enhancing connections and communication prior to a crisis (Gainey, 2009: 273). The internet is developing as a crucial tool for organisations to successfully communicate during a crisis (Taylor and

Perry, 2005: 209). Online communication has developed into a crucial strategy for crisis management in any organisation. Nowadays, almost every organisation has a web presence to promote its name, reputation, goods, and services. The fact that the internet is a regulated medium allows organizations to express their message directly without passing through media-imposed filters, which is one of its most important benefits (Taylor and Kent 2007: 140).

Government leaders in departments and local governments must employ and include web-based crisis plans and traditional crisis management strategies. The benefit of merging traditional crisis methods into online replies is that these tactics have already been approved and are ready for widespread distribution. Taylor and Kent (2007: 14 propose the following tactics:

- Upload traditional techniques to the website - in crisis communication, the use of transcripts of news conferences, news releases, fact sheets, question and answer formats, memos/letters to the relevant public, and transcripts of interviews with organisational leaders appears with different frequency.
- Using new approaches - the internet offers a two-way, interactive communication feature, linking links, real-time monitoring, and video/audio effects, allowing the organisation to solicit comments from the public in order to respond to an issue and foster conversation.
- Organisations can deliver more complete crisis communication by combining old and emerging communication strategies.
- The organisation can use its website to tell its side of the crisis.
- Work with the government during the crisis

In this backdrop the local government system must ensure that local municipalities are prepared to meet new and ongoing challenges to deliver services to their constituents successfully. As public distrust grows, the public sector realises the need to "take matters into their own hands by adopting image-building concepts such as reputation and brand management" (Waeraas and Byrkjeflot, 2012: 02). As a result, communication and stakeholder management foster positive relationships that can be used to influence attitudes and behaviours in the broader environment and should be supported by institutions.

Organisations must ensure that there is no misalignment between what the organisation says to the outside world and what people believe within the organisation. According to Harris and de Chernatony (2001: 441) and Davies and Chun (2002: 147), if employees express negative views about their organisation or if what they say does not reflect the image the organisation is attempting to project through its advertising, friends will believe the employees rather than the public. Employees, according to Mastal (2001: 58), are "brand ambassadors", and reputation management efforts will succeed only if they "live the brand". Mastal (2001: 58) and HR Focus (2002: 26) emphasise that over the last 20 years, senior executives have become more acutely aware of the importance of developing and maintaining a positive corporate reputation in generating corporate competitive advantage.

Organisations are now more aware of employees' role in this process. Employees must project consistent and positive images of the organisation to internal and external stakeholders in this more sophisticated refinement of their roles. In best-practice organisations, vital internal communications programmes that build understanding and buy-in of the organisation's position are critical. Employee involvement influences an organisation's reputation, for better or worse, according to Ettorre (1996: 36), and Post and Griffin in Gotsi and Wilson (2001: 99), and Kennedy in Harris and de Chernatony (2001: 441). From the top down, every employee in the organisation is a reputation manager. Senior leadership attitudes and organisational design are critical to successful implementation. Employee satisfaction will increase if brand value and employee value are aligned.

The theoretical framework constructed to explain, forecast, and understand phenomena and challenge and extend current knowledge within the bounds of crucial bounding assumptions is discussed in the following sections. The theoretical framework is the framework that supports and holds the study's theory.

## **2.10 Theoretical framework**

This subsection explores the theories that the researcher has adopted in understanding reputation management with particular interest to ALM. The theories explored include the stakeholder theory and systems theory.

### 2.10.1 Stakeholder theory

Over the last several decades, stakeholder theory has emerged as a new narrative for comprehending and resolving the complexities of interconnected business problems (Parmar *et al.*, 2010: 440). According to Savage *et al.* (2010: 98), stakeholder theory evolved as an alternative firm theory, with the organisation as the focal point for stakeholder relationships. According to Padamo (2014), citing Freeman (1984: 321) set the foundation for the theory's growth, and the notion describes organisational structures and how they should be conceptualised. However, there is considerable disagreement about what type of organisation "stakeholder theory" is.

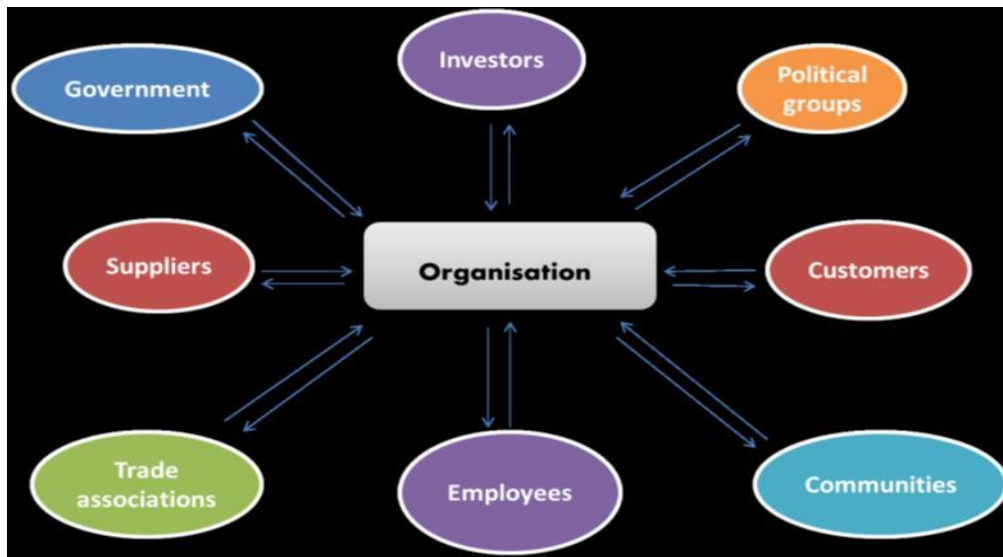
Academics argue this is not a "theory" because theories are a collection of testable propositions linked. Some argue that the definition of the central term is too ambiguous. Stakeholder theory, critics argue, has limitations in terms of theory building features such as causal laws and context that explain the processes of interest, as well as specific theory logic of how publics are formed (Harrison and Wicks, 2013). According to Savage *et al.* (2010: 98), stakeholders are those groups that are critical to the corporation's survival and success. As a result, the theory has evolved to emphasise the importance of involving stakeholders in long-term value creation. Stakeholder theory implies, at the very least, managing and attending to the needs and well-being of these stakeholders (Harrison, Bosse and Phillips, 2010: 58).

According to Steurer (2006: 55), the stakeholder theory overemphasises the organisation's role and oversimplifies the chaotic and complex corporate environment. As a result of the unstable economy and uncertain future, corporations are finding it difficult to predict how future changes will affect their stakeholders. According to the stakeholder management perspective, the organisation serves as the hub of a network of relationships with various stakeholders. It is an institution's responsibility to consider the overall system effects of its decisions and actions.

According to stakeholder theory, managing stakeholders entails, at the very least, attending to the interests and well-being of these stakeholders (Harrison, Bosse and Phillips, 2010: 58). A local municipality serves diverse communities with various vocal and competing interests (Simmons, 2014: 314). According to Ihlen (2008: 136), an organisation is viewed as being dependent on various stakeholders for the critical resources that enable it to operate; thus, its success is dependent on how it manages

its relationships with key stakeholder groups such as consumers, employees, suppliers, communities, politicians, and others.

Freeman (1984) proposed a graphically modelled definition of stakeholders as influencing actors on the firm and on whom the firm has an impact (Figure 2.3).



**Figure 2.3: Stakeholder model of strategic management**

Source: Padamo (2014)

The stakeholder model makes the assumption that every person or group having a legal stake in the organisation works to reap rewards and that no particular set of interests or rewards is preferred over another. The connections between the organisation and its stakeholders are bidirectional. The model recognises the interdependencies between the organisation and the many stakeholder groups, which are influenced by the operations of the organisation but can also have an impact on it, how it operates, and how well it performs (Padamo, 2014). Stakeholder management can enhance transactions with stakeholders and help a company maintain its reputation.

According to Padamo (2014), one stakeholder group can readily affect the perceptions of other stakeholder groups through producing reputational benefits. Even if the interests of different stakeholder groups are extremely varied and occasionally at odds with one another, it is crucial that an organisation gives each group specialised information and establishes a solid reputation through interactions with various stakeholders (Padamo 2014). The need of developing cooperative and trustworthy

connections with stakeholders is emphasised by the stakeholder model (Jones, 1995: 425). It offers frameworks for describing how businesses manage, weigh, and address the demands of numerous stakeholders at once (Rowley, 1997: 907). Ulmer (2001: 610) asserts that an organisation's beliefs and perceptions of the behaviour of its stakeholders influence the efficacy of its crisis management efforts.

Stakeholder theory provides a framework for understanding how organisations interact with and are impacted by various stakeholders. In this study, stakeholder theory is relevant because it considers the views and interests of multiple groups, including employees, customers, communities, and government regulators, who may be affected by a municipality's reputation. This framework can help to identify the key stakeholders, their motivations, and the impact of their municipality's reputation management strategies on their relationships. Additionally, stakeholder theory can provide insights into the trade-offs that the municipality may need to make in managing its reputation and the ethical considerations involved in these decisions.

### **2.10.2 Limitations of stakeholder theory**

According to Neville, Bell and Menguc (2005: 1186), while theorists claim that the relationship between organisations and stakeholders is mutually crucial in terms of benefit and harm or rights and obligations, it has also been observed that stakeholders have a more significant impact on organisations than organisations can have on stakeholders. As a result of this interdependence, stakeholders play an essential role in corporate reputation. The stakeholder theory fails to emphasise and value the effect and impact that stakeholders have on the organisation's reputation. Furthermore, while the model acknowledges the mutual dependencies between the organisation and the various stakeholder groups, it does not emphasise feedback loops in the communication process. The AML must establish effective feedback loops with stakeholders because they significantly impact the reputation of this local municipality.

Stakeholder theory has been criticised for its lack of a clear definition, which can lead to confusion and misinterpretation in its application. The theory also has inadequate consideration of power dynamics. The theory may fail to fully consider the power dynamics between stakeholders, how they can impact decision-making and the distribution of benefits and costs. While the theory is very sound, there is limited

empirical evidence. There is limited empirical evidence to support the effectiveness of stakeholder theory in practice, which can limit its usefulness in a study exploring reputation management.

The theory poses a difficulty in balancing stakeholder interests. Stakeholder theory may be difficult to implement in practice, as it can be challenging to balance the interests of different stakeholders, particularly when their interests' conflict. Another significant limitation of the theory is its focus on stakeholder engagement. The theory primarily focuses on stakeholder engagement and consultation rather than concrete actions and outcomes, which can limit its usefulness in a study exploring reputation management. It is arguably true that there is limited guidance on implementation. The theory provides limited guidance on implementing stakeholder theory in practice, making it difficult to operationalise in a study exploring reputation management at ALM.

### **2.10.3 Justification of stakeholder and systems theory**

The use of stakeholder and systems theory in this study is justified by their applicability and relevance to understanding and addressing reputation management challenges in local government settings. Stakeholder theory emphasises the importance of considering the interests and expectations of various stakeholder groups when making decisions and implementing policies (Freeman, 1984). In the context of local government reputation management, stakeholders include residents, business owners, municipal employees, and other community members. Applying stakeholder theory in this study allows for a comprehensive analysis of the ALM's reputation from multiple perspectives, helping to identify areas where the local government may need to focus its efforts to meet stakeholder expectations and enhance its reputation (Mitchell, Agle, and Wood, 1997).

Systems theory, on the other hand, offers a holistic approach to understanding complex organisational dynamics and interdependencies (Von Bertalanffy, 1968). In the context of this study, systems theory provides a framework for examining how different factors, such as media reports, stakeholder expectations, and municipal performance, interact and influence the overall reputation of the ALM. By adopting a systems perspective, the study can identify key leverage points and strategies for managing the Municipality's reputation in a more integrated and effective manner (Skyttner, 2006).

In summary, the use of stakeholder and systems theory in this study is justified by their ability to provide a comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the reputation management challenges faced by the ALM. These theoretical frameworks not only enhance the study's analytical depth but also contribute to the development of more effective and sustainable reputation management strategies for local governments.

## **2.11 Chapter summary**

As has been stated and supported with evidence, reputation is essential to any organisation and reputation management plays a critical role in ensuring that organisations retain their clientele. This chapter has presented an overview of ALM, bringing to light issues affecting the organisation. A critical discussion on organisational reputation followed this, and this discussion has enabled an understanding of why studying the reputation of ALM is essential. The chapter has also provided conceptual factors that influence public sector organisations' reputation, which provided a basis upon which factors influencing the reputation of ALM can be understood. The study has also provided a discussion on the theoretical framework, these being the lenses through which one can understand the problem under investigation.

The following chapter discusses the methodology chosen for this study.

## **CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

### **3.1 Introduction**

This methodology chapter presents the research design and methods used in exploring reputation management at ALM. The study employs the research onion framework to provide a systematic approach to understanding the context and factors affecting reputation management at the Municipality. The chapter outlines the research stages, including selecting the research philosophy, research design, data collection methods, data analysis techniques, and ethical considerations. The chapter concludes by highlighting the strengths and limitations of the chosen methodology and how these impact the validity and reliability of the results.

### **3.2 Research philosophy**

To conduct research effectively, one must first understand the fundamental theories and philosophies of the field. Understanding the different ideas allows the researcher to provide a tangible basis for an educated and applicable approach to their analysis, as theories vary, and paradigms change over time. Existing philosophies in research are often characterised by epistemology and ontology. In research, ontology refers to the branch of philosophy that deals with the nature of being and existence whereas epistemology refers to the philosophical study of the nature of human knowledge, origins, and limits (Queirós, Faria and Almeida, 2017). According to Bryman and Bell (2015: 10) and Creswell (2014: 294), there are more than three philosophies to research, but the most common are positivism, constructivism/interpretivism, and pragmatism.

According to Ponterotto (2005) and Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2016), the terms 'research philosophy' and 'research paradigm' refer to a broad perspective on the development of knowledge and the nature of that knowledge. The research philosophy contains critical assumptions about the researcher's worldview. Thus, these assumptions support a study's research strategy, tools, instruments, and methods.

This study used the pragmatic paradigm which takes various forms depending on the research context and is best suited for social science research using a mixed-method approach, as is the case in this study (Creswell, 2009; Revez and Borges 2018: 583;

Johnson and Onwuegbuzie, 2004: 18). By developing a meaningful connection between both worldviews, the paradigm focuses on shared meanings and bridges the gap between the positivist paradigm (which is solely for quantitative research) and the constructivist paradigm (which is exclusively for constructive analysis) (Ajayi, 2021: Biesta, 2015; Morgan, 2007: 67; Shannon-Baker, 2015).

The pragmatic paradigm was thus appropriate because this study required qualitative and quantitative methods to address the research questions, and none of the other paradigms fully encapsulated this study's nature and research questions. The chosen philosophy concludes that consequences can be used to judge truth (Queirós, Faria and Almeida 2017). As such, Creswell (2014: 294) defines pragmatism as:

[a] worldview or philosophy [which] arises from actions, situations, and consequences rather than antecedent conditions (post-positivism). There is a concern with applications – what works – and solutions to problems. Instead of focusing on methods, researchers emphasise the research problem and use all approaches available to understand it.

Pragmatism is a worldview that is concerned with problem implementations and solutions. It is oriented toward 'what works'. As a result, pragmatism can be described as a philosophical belief that the truth or usefulness of a theory (for example, reputation) is determined by its practical utility. As such, reputation management, which is the focus of this research, has consequences on the performance of local governments; hence, this philosophy is the best approach for this study. A pragmatist ontology proposes that reality changes as people interact with their context, so it is based on experience and practicalities. A pragmatist epistemology uses whatever research methods help to solve the problem (not sticking to just one method).

Pragmatism is a fundamental philosophical approach that can be effectively utilised in a study exploring reputation management at ALM. This approach emphasises the practical application of knowledge and ideas, which is crucial in studying reputation management in a real-world scenario such as ALM.

Firstly, pragmatism values the utility of ideas and approaches, which is critical in reputation management. In the context of ALM, reputation management is crucial for maintaining positive public perception and trust in the Municipality. Pragmatism will

help to assess the practicality and efficacy of reputation management strategies and tactics that can be implemented to achieve these goals.

Secondly, pragmatism emphasises the importance of experience and experimentation, which is crucial in studying reputation management. In order to effectively manage its reputation, ALM must understand the experiences of its stakeholders and experiment with different strategies and tactics to determine the most effective approach. Pragmatism will provide a framework for incorporating the experiences and insights of stakeholders into the reputation management strategy and continuously refining and improving it through experimentation.

Lastly, pragmatism is a flexible philosophical approach that can adapt to changing circumstances, which is essential in the dynamic field of reputation management. In the context of ALM, the Municipality must be prepared to adapt to changing public perceptions and stakeholder experiences, and pragmatism will provide a flexible framework for doing so.

### **3.3 Approaches to theory development**

A theory is defined in a variety of ways and is based on various philosophical perspectives, as it is a systematic set of claims about a common performance or structure that is anticipated to be grasped through a variety of detailed examples. In other words, it is a hypotheses network of progress to be conceptualised and explained on a particular social or natural spectacle. As the foundation of theories, each hypothesis provides a proclamation regarding the relationship between two or more variables (Gill and Johnson, 2002; Pathirage *et al.*, 2008). Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2016) differentiate three core approaches to theory development which are inductive, deductive, and abductive.

Deduction is the process of identification of an unidentified element, deduced from its similarity to a set of identified evidence (Rothchild, 2006) by means of testing a hypothesis, which starts with a traditional concept and checks if this can be applied to the case. Accordingly, Hyde (2000), Pathirage *et al.* (2008), Soiferman (2010) and Bergdahl and Berterö (2015) assert that deductive research starts with the general and finishes with the specific, proceeding from theory to data. Hence, the deductive

approach involves conceptual or theoretical structure development by applying practical observation (Ali and Birley 1999; Pathirage *et al.*, 2008).

Induction is a constructing process, initiated with case observations, and looking to establish generalisations related to the phenomenon under examination (Hyde 2000). Thus, inductive research starts from data and proceeds to theory, or from the specific to the general (Pathirage *et al.* 2008; Soiferman 2010; Bergdahl and Berterö 2015). Induction mainly uses qualitative methods (Kovács and Spens 2005), from observations to generalisations (Butnaru, 2015). The inductive method creates theories instantaneously; hence it cannot rationalise knowledge and be used in theories and hypothesis formulation (Haig, 2005; Hibbert, Siedlok, and Beech 2014; Bergdahl and Berterö, 2015).

Brandt and Timmermans (2021) propose abduction as an alternative to scientific implication judgment. It is the process of developing a descriptive proposal based on a novel notion (Tan *et al.* 2018), a review of an existing theory, or the construction of a new theory (Brandt and Timmermans, 2021). The abductive approach rises from the vision that the most outstanding science progresses followed neither the deduction nor induction path (Kovács and Spens 2005). Hence, it generates a hypothetical proposal which is then explained by deduction and empirically proved through induction by means of continuous review of the deduction and induction process (Kaiser, Presmeg, and Suurtamm 2014; Tan *et al.* 2018). Abduction begins with an unexpected, irregular, or unanticipated observation in the light of current theories and then governs the implications of the finding (Haig, 2005; Brandt and Timmermans, 2021). In summary, conception integration is an important part of abduction since it does not occur in the setting of a consistent language because the new hypothesis generation is related to the new theoretical development (Yu, 2006).

The inductive approach is a research method based on data collection and analysis, followed by the development of a theory or conclusion. This approach was regarded as suitable for exploring reputation management at ALM because it allows for exploring the issue's complexities and for creating a tailored solution.

One reason to use an inductive approach is that it allows for the exploration of the issue systematically and thoroughly. Through data collection and analysis of patterns, researchers can gain a deeper understanding of the factors affecting reputation

management at ALM. This understanding can then be used to create a tailored solution that addresses the Municipality's unique challenges. Another reason the inductive approach is beneficial in this context is that it allows for the incorporation of the perspectives of multiple stakeholders. By collecting data from various sources, such as employees, residents, and other stakeholders, the researcher can deeply understand the issues affecting reputation management at ALM. This can lead to a more inclusive and effective solution.

Additionally, the inductive approach is flexible and adaptable, which is essential when exploring complex issues like reputation management. As new information is gathered, the initial conclusion can be modified to better reflect the current understanding of the issue. This iterative process leads to a more robust solution, considering a range of perspectives and data. As such, the inductive approach is ideal for exploring reputation management at ALM. It allows for a thorough exploration of the issue, incorporates the perspectives of multiple stakeholders, and is flexible and adaptable. These benefits make the inductive approach a valuable tool in creating an effective solution to the challenges facing the Municipality's reputation management.

### **3.4 Methodological choice**

Qualitative research originates from social and cultural anthropology, history, psychology, philosophy, and sociology (Haradhan, 2018). It is designated as a naturalistic or explanatory approach (Mogensen, Henriksen and Kampmann, 1998). Hence, qualitative research has been a distinctive approach in social science as it offers a clear realisation of human behaviour, feeling, attitudes, and capabilities. The positivist, interpretivism, and critical paradigms are aligned with the qualitative research approach (Haradhan, 2018; Bowen, Groundwater-Smith and Meiers 2017; O'Cathain 2019). Its nature is inductive, and its hypotheses arise from data analysis instead of being stated at the outset (Mogensen, Henriksen and Kampmann 1998; Haradhan 2018). Qualitative research contains an extensive variety of methods.

(Mogensen, Henriksen and Kampmann 1998) concerned with 'what', 'why' and 'how' questions for an in-depth interpretation. Hence, observational, semi-structured, indepth interviews, focus groups, logic, ethnography, comparative study, and openended questionnaires are used (Mogensen, Henriksen and Kampmann 1998; Polkinghorne, 2005; Njie and Asimiran, 2014; Haradhan, 2018; Vizcarguenaga-

Aguirre and López-Robles, 2020). On the other hand, quantitative research explains a phenomenon issue by data gathering in numerical form and analysing with mathematical systems, particularly statistics (Apuke, 2017).

Quantitative research is designed with allocated variables and hypotheses. The collected data supports or rejects the allocated paradigms (Maxwell, 2004). It also demonstrates which tool is more effective for the study's goal of proposing rules and facts that can stand on their own regardless of whether they are true or not (Daniel, 2016). Cohen (2011) observes that quantitative research is used in epistemology and ontology regarding human behaviour, which can be controlled (Yap and Wong, 2007). Accordingly, quantitative approaches use theory to generate data (Daniel, 2016). Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2016) delimit research selections to the quantitative and qualitative research methods, in addition to the simple or complex mix of both or mono methods used (Melnikovas, 2018). The mono method is chosen when the research is dedicated to either qualitative or quantitative data gathering (Melnikovas 2018), while mixed methods have been crossbred and combined (Bowen, Groundwater-Smith and Meiers 2017); mixed methods are chosen when quantitative and qualitative methods are utilised in the same research to attain different aims and offset the mono method limitations. It can be either a mixed-method or mixed-model design (Jorgenson and Vesaas, 1962; Mik-Meyer, 2020).

In contrast, a multi-method approach uses qualitative or quantitative methods, although the research is focused on one of them (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2007; Melnikovas, 2018). This study adopted the use of sequential mixed methods. Sequential mixed methods is a research approach that combines qualitative and quantitative methods in a specific order, starting with qualitative or quantitative data collection and analysis, followed by the other. This approach can provide a comprehensive understanding of the research problem and helps address the limitations of single-method approaches.

Through integrating qualitative and quantitative methods, mixed methods research can provide a comprehensive and in-depth understanding of complex research problems. In a study exploring reputation management at ALM, a mixed methods approach can provide a balanced view of the phenomena under investigation and strengthen the reliability and validity of the study results.

Firstly, qualitative methods can provide in-depth information about the attitudes, beliefs, and perceptions of key stakeholders, such as employees and residents, regarding reputation management at the Municipality. This information can be obtained through focus groups, in-depth interviews, and content analysis of relevant documents.

Secondly, quantitative methods can provide a systematic and objective assessment of the Municipality's reputation using data from surveys and reputation indexes. This information can be used to test theories and hypotheses about reputation management and provide generalisable results about the state of reputation management in the Municipality.

By combining qualitative and quantitative methods, the study can triangulate findings, meaning that the same phenomenon can be studied from different angles, strengthening the validity and reliability of the results. Furthermore, the results from each method can inform and complement each other, providing a more comprehensive understanding of the issue under investigation.

In summation, using a mixed methods approach in the study exploring reputation management at ALM is justified as it provides a comprehensive understanding of the issue by combining the strengths of both qualitative and quantitative methods. The study's results can provide valuable insights into stakeholders' attitudes, beliefs, and perceptions and the state of reputation management at the Municipality, ultimately contributing to the development of effective reputation management strategies.

### **3.5 Research strategies**

Research strategies collect data systems from research projects or either practical or hypothetical research (Hernández, Fernández and Baptista 2016). Each one can be used for investigative, explanatory, and descriptive research. It may also be used for either the deductive or inductive approaches (Yin, 2003). Several methods and techniques can be adopted according to the research problem and objectives (Kapur, 2018). According to Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2016), research strategies include experiments, surveys, archival data, anthropology, action research, grounded theory, and narrative inquiry. The present study adopted the case study as a strategy.

### **3.6 Case study**

The case study approach has been used extensively in the social sciences (Starman 2013). It is used to explore practical phenomena in real-life situations. It can describe and explain compound fundamental relations in real-life involvements. (Starman, 2013; Starman 2013; Hernández, Fernández and Baptista 2016). It is also limited to a solo setting, subject, or occasion. Accordingly, there are diverse types of case studies: life history case studies, interview case studies, observational case studies, organisational case studies, and multi-site and relative case studies (Kapur, 2018).

The case study approach is an effective research method that is well-suited for exploring complex real-world problems in a specific context. This subsection justifies using a case study approach in a study exploring reputation management at ALM. The case study approach allows for a comprehensive and in-depth examination of a particular case, in this case, the reputation management practices at ALM. It provides an opportunity to explore the problem in its natural setting and understand how reputation management is managed within the Municipality. This contextualised understanding is crucial for understanding the complexities of the problem and its interrelated factors.

Case study research allows the researcher to take a holistic approach to the study, examining the problem from multiple perspectives, including those of the stakeholders involved. This approach enables a more comprehensive understanding of the issue, including its impact on different groups and their strategies for managing it. The case study approach enables the collection of rich and varied data from multiple sources, including interviews, observation, and documents. This rich data helps provide a more in-depth and nuanced understanding of the problem and the strategies used to manage it.

The case study approach provides an opportunity to develop a theory based on the study's findings. The insights gained from the study can be used to inform and enhance the existing body of knowledge on reputation management and contribute to the development of new theories in the field. The case study findings can have practical implications for reputation management practices in other organisations, including other local municipalities. The insights gained can inform decision-making and guide the development of effective reputation management strategies in other organisations.

In summary, the use of a case study approach in a study exploring reputation management at ALM is justified due to its ability to provide a contextualised understanding of the problem, its holistic approach, its potential for rich data collection, its ability to inform theoretical development, and its practical relevance.

### **3.7 Convergent Design for Comprehensive Insight**

The present study seeks a full understanding of reputation management of ALM via the use of a convergent research technique. This method combines the tenacity of quantitative and qualitative data strands, allowing for a thorough study and validation of the findings.

Focus groups, in-depth interviews, and content analysis are examples of qualitative methodologies used to investigate the numerous dimensions of stakeholders' attitudes, beliefs, and perceptions of the Municipality's reputation management. These strategies give in-depth, situation-specific insights into the problem's intricacies. Quantitative tools, such as reputation indexes and surveys, on the other hand, give a thorough and unbiased assessment of ALM's position. This numerical data enables statistical analysis, hypothesis testing, and generalizable findings.

Yin (2003) argues that the convergent design facilitates triangulation—the comparison and integration of data from qualitative and quantitative methodologies. According to Kapur (2018), triangulation examines the same phenomenon from many perspectives, increasing the validity and reliability of the conclusions. It is feasible, for example, to validate and compare the insights gained from qualitative stakeholder interviews with quantitative survey data.

Furthermore, the convergent design allows for a more in-depth investigation of the study issue. The statistical rigour of quantitative data complements the complete understanding of qualitative techniques. Patterns, correlations, and trends may not always be obvious when employing many methodologies. However, this synergy assists in their discovery (Kapur, 2018).

As a result of using a convergent design, this study is able to synthesise both qualitative and quantitative data, resulting in a more thorough and nuanced understanding of reputation management at ALM. This tactic is consistent with the

study's goal of providing a comprehensive knowledge that transcends the restrictions of a particular research technique.

### **3.8 Time horizon**

Research time horizons mean the periods to be studied or sequential horizons of changing extent. The research time horizon design is independent of the research strategy or method. Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2007) distinguish two essential time horizons: cross-sectional and longitudinal. Cross-sectional research usually uses the survey strategy.

A cross-sectional time horizon is a valuable tool for exploring reputation management at ALM because it offers a snapshot view of the Municipality's reputation at a specific time. This approach can provide valuable insights into the Municipality's reputation as it exists today and its strengths and weaknesses. One of the main advantages of a cross-sectional time horizon is its simplicity and ease of implementation. A cross-sectional study is relatively straightforward to design, execute and analyse so that the results can be obtained quickly. This can be especially important when exploring a timely issue like reputation management, as time is often of the essence in this situation.

Another advantage of a cross-sectional time horizon is that it allows the researcher to collect data from a representative sample of stakeholders. This can provide a more comprehensive and accurate picture of the Municipality's reputation. For example, the study can include data from residents, businesses, community organisations and representatives from other government agencies and civil society groups. In addition, a cross-sectional time horizon allows for the analysis of both quantitative and qualitative data. For example, the study could use a survey to collect quantitative data on residents' perceptions of a municipality's reputation and conduct in-depth interviews with community leaders to collect qualitative data on the same topic. This combination of data sources can provide a more nuanced and in-depth understanding of that municipality's reputation.

Finally, a cross-sectional time horizon can be an excellent starting point for further, more in-depth research. For example, the study could be followed up with a longitudinal study, allowing the researcher to track changes in the Municipality's

reputation over time. In summation, a cross-sectional time horizon is an effective and efficient approach for exploring reputation management at ALM. It offers a simple way to collect data from a representative sample of stakeholders, analyses both quantitative and qualitative data, and provides a starting point for further research.

### **3.9 Techniques and procedures**

Techniques and procedures include data collection and analysis, primary or secondary data, selecting samples, designing a questionnaire, interviews, etc.

#### **3.9.1 Study population**

The element from which a study sample is drawn is called a population (Edmonds and Kennedy, 2016). A study population is identified based on the characteristics that they share (Bergin, 2018). The population of this study consisted of 383 ALM citizens, 10 ALM employees, and 5 provincial local government office (Eastern Cape Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs [GOGTA]) personnel.

#### **3.9.2 Study sampling**

The mixed-method approach uses probability and non-probability sampling. Non-probability sampling means that not every member of the population has an equal chance of being chosen as one of the subjects (Welman, Kruger and Mitchell, 2006).

For the collection of quantitative data, simple random sampling is commonly used, therefore was used in this research study as well. Each person in the population has the same probability of getting picked when using this sampling procedure (Taguchi, 2018). This approach has high internal and external validity levels (Portney and Watkins, 2014:155). This sampling method was chosen because the researcher had a limited population that could easily be sampled.

Non-probability purposive and snowballing sampling strategies were used for the qualitative part of the study. Purposive sampling depends on the researcher's judgement when selecting members of the population to include in the study. Participants are deliberately selected for the critical information they can provide (Teddlie and Yu, 2007). On this basis, the researcher picked three participants who met the inclusion criteria to participate in the study. The researcher then applied the snowball method, in which the researcher elicits recommendations from the current

subject to reach the desired sample size. Thus, the three participants purposively selected assisted the researcher to identify other suitable participants to include in the study.

Furthermore, according to Sekaran and Bougie (2013: 296), sample sizes greater than 30 but less than 500 are appropriate for research to meet the study's objectives. The population was 1378 303 people. There were 383 people in the quantitative sample. The sample size was sufficient to yield correct mean values with negligible margin errors, which is unattainable with smaller samples (Coy, 2019).

The qualitative sample size was 17 and consisted of 10 municipality employees and five provincial and local government employees. A sample of 17 participants was chosen because it is more practical to interview fewer people than many people (Adams, Loach and Szomszor, 2016).

**Table 3.1: Summary of the study methodology**

<b>Population</b>	<b>Sample size</b>	<b>Categories of qualitative participants</b>	<b>Sampling</b>	<b>Data collection instruments</b>	<b>Data analysis</b>	<b>Objective addressed</b>
<b>Municipal employees</b>	12	Manager, Communications, Community Service, Engineering and Infrastructure and four political leaders form part of the majority in the Municipality. Participants had pseudonyms: <b>Participant 1 to Participant 10</b>	Purposive	In-depth interviews	Thematic analysis	1, 2, 3 and 4
<b>Provincial government</b>	5	Municipal Governance and Support (municipal infrastructure grant)	Purposive	In-depth interviews	Thematic analysis	1, 3, 4
		(Senior Manager), Communications, (Office of the MEC), Manager in the Office of HOD, District Director/ district coordination (under which ALM falls) Participants in this category were named as <b>Participant 11 to Participant 15</b>				

<b>Local Citizens</b>	383	-	Simple random	Questionnaires	SPSS with Microsoft Excel	1, 2, 3
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>398</b>					

### 3.9.3 Data collection method

Denscombe (2007: 133) states that four main methods are used for data collection in social research, namely, questionnaires, interviews, observation, and documents. For this study, semi-structured interviews and a questionnaire were used:

#### 3.9.3.1 Qualitative data collection method

The study made use of semi-structured interviews (Appendix 4a) in exploring reputation management at ALM. Semi-structured interviews are a qualitative research method characterised using a pre-determined set of open-ended questions which serve as a flexible guide for the interview process (DiCicco-Bloom and Crabtree 2006). This approach allows researchers to explore participants' perspectives and experiences in depth, while also providing the flexibility to probe further into specific topics or follow up on emerging themes during the interview (Galletta, 2013).

The use of semi-structured interviews in this study was justified for several reasons. Semi-structured interviews enabled the researcher to collect rich and detailed data on stakeholders' perceptions, expectations, and experiences related to the ALM's reputation (DiCicco-Bloom and Crabtree 2006). This depth of insight is critical to understanding the nuances of reputation management in a local government context. The open-ended nature of the questions allowed the participants to express their thoughts and opinions freely, while also giving the researcher the flexibility to delve deeper into specific areas of interest or explore new themes that emerged during the interview process (Galletta, 2013).

Semi-structured interviews can be adapted to accommodate a diverse range of stakeholders, including residents, Eastern Cape Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs representatives, and municipal employees. This adaptability ensured that the study captured a broad and representative sample of perspectives on the ALM's reputation (Creswell and Creswell, 2017).

### **3.9.3.2 Quantitative data collection method**

According to Polit and Hungler (1997: 466), a questionnaire is "a method of gathering information from respondents about attitudes, knowledge, beliefs, and feelings". The questionnaire was personally administered by the researcher to the sample of citizens of ALM (Appendix 4b).

In a study exploring reputation management at ALM, the use of a survey is a justifiable method for several reasons.

- **Representativeness:** Surveys allow for a representative sample of residents to be included in the study. This is important in ensuring that the opinions gathered are a true reflection of the population being studied.
- **Cost-effective:** Surveys are a cost-effective way of gathering data compared to other methods like focus groups or in-depth interviews. This is because they reach a larger sample of people in a shorter time and with fewer resources.
- **Convenience:** Surveys can be administered online, by mail or through personal interviews, making it convenient for respondents to participate in the study. This increases the response rate and the validity of the data collected.
- **Standardised data:** Surveys ensure a standardised way of collecting data from respondents. This helps reduce bias and ensure the data collected is comparable across respondents.
- **Flexibility:** Surveys can be designed to collect a wide range of information, including both quantitative and qualitative data. This makes them a flexible tool for exploring complex topics like reputation management. See attached questionnaire (Appendix 4b).

In conclusion, using a survey in a study exploring reputation management at ALM is justifiable due to its representativeness, cost-effectiveness, convenience, standardised collection of data, and flexibility. These features made surveys an efficient and reliable method of gathering opinions and data from residents in the Municipality.

### **3.9.4 Pilot study**

Before initiating the main study, a pilot study was conducted with 50 participants to test the feasibility and reliability of the original questionnaire. The pilot study aimed to

identify any potential issues with the questionnaire's design, content, and structure, ensuring that the data collection instrument was valid and reliable for the main study.

The following steps were taken in conducting the pilot study:

1. Selection of participants: A diverse sample of 50 participants was chosen, representing various stakeholder groups, including residents, and municipal employees, to ensure that the pilot study captured a range of perspectives on the ALM's reputation. The data from these participants were not included in the data analysed to produce the findings of the study.
2. Administration of the questionnaire: Participants were provided with the original questionnaire either in-person, through email, or via an online survey platform. Clear instructions were given on how to complete the questionnaire, and participants were encouraged to provide feedback on any issues or concerns they encountered.
3. Collection of feedback: Upon completion of the pilot study, participants were asked to provide feedback on the questionnaire's clarity, relevance, and comprehensibility. This feedback was essential in identifying potential issues or areas for improvement in the questionnaire.
4. Data analysis: The pilot study data was analysed to assess the reliability and validity of the questionnaire, as well as to identify any potential patterns or trends in the responses. This analysis provided valuable insights into the overall effectiveness of the questionnaire and informed subsequent modifications.
5. Modification of the questionnaire: Based on the feedback and data analysis from the pilot study, the original questionnaire was altered to address identified issues and improve its overall validity and reliability. Modifications included rewording ambiguous questions, clarifying instructions, removing redundant items, and adding new questions to capture emerging themes or better address the research objectives.

The pilot study played a crucial role in refining the questionnaire for the main study, ensuring that the data collection instrument was both reliable and valid. By identifying and addressing potential issues in the questionnaire's design and content, the pilot study contributed to the overall rigour and trustworthiness of the research findings.

In the qualitative phase of this pilot study, in-depth interviews were conducted with five participants to identify gaps related to the semi-structured questions. Some of the questions were restructured so that they were simple and understandable to achieve the success and effectiveness of the research study. The responses of the five participants were not included in the findings.

### **3.9.5 Data analysis**

There are varying methods of analysing raw data collected in a study. The selection of techniques employed during data analysis is informed by the research objectives, population sample, and data collection instrument (Dickerson *et al.* 2020). When there is an amalgamation of methods in data collection, there is a need for a merger in data analysis (Barnes 2018). Due to the nature of the study following an exploratory sequential mixed methods research design, data analysis started with qualitative, then quantitative, and triangulation.

#### **3.9.5.1 Qualitative data analysis**

To conduct the qualitative process, a thematic analysis and NVivo was used. In qualitative research, thematic analysis and Nvivo are regarded as the most widely used analysis tools (Braun and Clarke, 2006; Guest, MacQueen and Namey, 2012: 13). Thematic analysis is a form of inductive qualitative data analysis that can use various analytic techniques (Guest, MacQueen and Namey, 2012: 4). It necessitates a greater level of participation and understanding on the part of the researcher (Guest, MacQueen and Namey, 2012: 13; Braun and Clarke, 2006). In this study, thematic analysis was used, which entails the researcher identifying a small number of themes that adequately represent their textual data. If the analysis is accurate, the researcher must be familiar with the results; therefore, data familiarisation (as with other qualitative methods) is the key to meaningful thematic analysis. On the other hand, NVivo helps qualitative researchers to organise, analyse and find insights in unstructured or qualitative data like interviews, open-ended survey responses, journal articles, social media and web content, where deep levels of analysis on small or large volumes of data are required. The qualitative analysis techniques that formed part of the NVivo included word cloud, treemap, cluster analysis, hierarchy chart and word trees. In conclusion, thematic analysis is an effective method for exploring reputation management at ALM. Its ability to handle complex and rich data, adaptability to

different research questions, and systematic and transparent approach to data analysis make it an ideal tool for uncovering patterns and themes in the perceptions of stakeholders regarding the reputation of the Municipality.

### **3.9.5.2 Quantitative data analysis**

The quantitative data in this study was analysed through the use of SPSS. SPSS is short for Statistical Package for the Social Sciences, and various researchers use it for complex statistical data analysis. The SPSS software package was created for the management and statistical analysis of social science data. It was initially launched in 1968 by SPSS Inc. and was later acquired by IBM in 2009. It is widely used to analyse data and make predictions based on specific data collections. This method of data analysis was chosen because the implications of the results are relatively evident and statistically valid, and using the software one can conduct a series of studies quickly and effectively.

The first step of data analysis using SPSS was loading the data into Excel. The second step was importing the data into SPSS. Once the importation of the data was completed, SPSS analysed it. Based on the study's objectives, the researcher entered the desired commands per SPSS's requirements. The results from SPSS were provided efficiently and accurately, thus enabling the researcher to have a better idea of appropriate future studies and direction for moving forward.

Statistical software such as SPSS is essential in conducting research and analysing data in various fields. In a study exploring reputation management at ALM, the use of SPSS is justified for several reasons.

Firstly, SPSS is a user-friendly software that makes data analysis easy and quick. The software provides a platform for data management, cleaning, and preparation, which is crucial in a study with a large volume of data. It also offers various statistical tools and techniques for analysing data, including descriptive statistics, inferential statistics, and regression analysis.

Secondly, SPSS offers reliability and accuracy in data analysis. The software is equipped with various features and tools that help to detect and correct errors in the data, ensuring that the results obtained are trustworthy and accurate. This is essential

in a study exploring reputation management, where accurate data analysis is critical in understanding the Municipality's reputation and making informed decisions.

Thirdly, SPSS provides a platform for collaboration and sharing of data. Researchers can collaborate on a project and share data and results quickly and efficiently. This is beneficial in a study exploring reputation management, where multiple perspectives and inputs are required to understand a municipality's reputation comprehensively.

### **3.10 Data reliability and validity**

Reliability and validity are both about how well a method measures something. Reliability refers to the consistency of a measure (whether the results can be reproduced under the same conditions). Validity refers to the accuracy of a measure (whether the results represent what they are supposed to measure). The following subsections discuss the reliability and validity of this study through the various constructs of validity and reliability.

#### **3.10.1 Reliability of data**

The ability to reproduce results is called reliability (Hochbein and Smeaton, 2018). To ensure a consistent measurement, an instrument should be error-free (reliable) across time (Queirós, Faria and Almeida, 2017). Data from this study were checked for consistency and stability through reliability analysis using Cronbach's alpha.

#### **3.10.2 Reliability of analysis**

The relationship of items in a group, also known as internal consistency, is measured by means of Cronbach's alpha (McLaughlin, Bush and Zeeman, 2016). Cronbach's alpha value is often used to check the reliability of internal consistency (Queirós, Faria and Almeida, 2017). In various research situations, the acceptable reliability coefficient is 0.70 (Tran, 2016). In this study, the Likert-scale reliability analysis for internal consistency was found to be 0.964 after several items had been discarded. Using Cronbach's alpha test, the Likert scale was considered internally consistent.

#### **3.10.3 Validity**

Face validity is a subjective judgement that the instrument is relevant as it calculates what it is intended for (Tran, 2016). Uncertainties were eliminated using appropriate

terminology to improve clarity and coherence during the development of the questionnaire. The instrument was examined by the supervisor, who has experience in research and developing research instruments. A thorough assessment of the literature about reputation management was done, which aided in the questionnaire's development.

### **3.11 Research trustworthiness**

In this study, research trustworthiness was achieved by implementing various strategies to ensure credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability, as outlined by Lincoln and Guba (1985). These strategies ensured that the findings were an accurate reflection of the stakeholders' perspectives and experiences related to the ALM's reputation.

To ensure credibility, the study employed a range of data collection methods, including semi-structured interviews, surveys, and content analysis of media reports. This methodological triangulation allowed for a comprehensive understanding of the research topic and helped to corroborate findings using different data sources (Creswell and Creswell 2017). Additionally, member checking was conducted by sharing the preliminary findings with participants to confirm the accuracy and validity of the interpretations (Birt *et al.* 2016). This feedback enabled the researcher to refine and adjust the findings, ensuring that they accurately represented the participants' perspectives.

To enhance transferability, the study provided a rich and detailed description of the research context, methodology, and findings (Creswell and Poth 2016). This thorough documentation enabled readers to understand the research process and assess the applicability of the findings to other local government settings. Furthermore, the use of a diverse sample representing various stakeholder groups allowed for a broader understanding of the ALM's reputation, increasing the potential for the transferability of the findings to similar contexts.

Dependability was achieved through the use of a well-documented and transparent research process (Elo *et al.* 2014). An audit trail detailing the research steps, decisions, and rationale was maintained, providing a clear account of the study's progression. This transparency will enable external reviewers to assess the

consistency and reliability of the research process. Moreover, the pilot study played a vital role in refining the data collection instruments, contributing to the overall dependability of the study.

Confirmability was established by maintaining reflexivity and objectivity throughout the research process (Shenton 2004). The researcher kept a reflexive journal to record personal thoughts, biases, and assumptions, ensuring that the findings were grounded in the data and not influenced by personal beliefs. Additionally, the use of direct quotations from participants in the presentation of the findings allowed readers to evaluate the interpretations and conclusions drawn by the researcher.

By employing these strategies, the study achieved research trustworthiness, ensuring that the findings were a reliable, accurate, and trustworthy representation of the stakeholders' perspectives on the ALM's reputation.

### **3.11.1 Credibility**

Guba and Lincoln (1985) claimed that the credibility of a study is determined when coresearchers or readers are presented with an experience they can recognise. Credibility addresses the “fit” between respondents' views and the researcher's representation of them (Tobin and Begley 2004). Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggested several techniques addressing credibility, including activities such as prolonged engagement, persistent observation, data collection, and researcher triangulation. They also recommended peer debriefing to provide an external check on the research process, which may increase credibility and examine referential adequacy as a means to check preliminary findings and interpretations against the raw data. Credibility can also be operationalised through member checking to test the findings and interpretations with the participants (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). In this study, the researcher had a debriefing session with the study participants so that they could confirm that the items the researcher had documented reflected their genuine opinions and that there was no misrepresentation.

### **3.11.2 Transferability**

Transferability refers to the generalizability of the inquiry. In qualitative research, this concerns only to case-to-case transfer (Tobin and Begley, 2004). The researcher cannot know the sites that may wish to transfer the findings; however, the researcher

is responsible for providing thick descriptions so that those who seek to transfer the findings to their site can judge transferability (Lincoln and Guba 1985). The present study provided as much description of every step of the research process as possible to ensure transferability.

### **3.11.3 Dependability**

To achieve dependability, researchers can ensure the research process is logical, traceable, and documented (Tobin and Begley 2004). When readers can examine the research process, they can better judge the dependability of the research (Lincoln and Guba 1985). One way a research study may demonstrate dependability is for there to be an audit trail (Koch 1994), which will be discussed in detail below.

### **3.11.4 Confirmability**

Confirmability is concerned with establishing that the researcher's interpretations and findings are derived from the data, requiring the researcher to demonstrate how conclusions and interpretations have been reached (Tobin and Begley 2004). According to Guba and Lincoln (1989), confirmability is established when credibility, transferability, and dependability are achieved. In this study, the researcher included the reasons for theoretical, methodological, and analytical choices throughout the study so that others could understand how and why decisions were made.

### **3.11.5 Audit trails**

An audit trail provides readers with evidence of the decisions and choices made by the researcher regarding theoretical and methodological issues throughout the study (Koch, 1994). Sandelowski (1986) stated that a study and its findings are auditable when another researcher can follow the decision trail. Furthermore, Koch (1994) argued that another researcher with the same data, perspective, and situation could arrive at the same or comparable, and not contradictory, conclusions. Keeping records of the raw data, field notes, transcripts, and a reflexive journal helped the researcher systemize, relate, and cross-reference data and ease the reporting of the research process.

### **3.11.6 Reflexive journal**

Researchers are encouraged to keep a self-critical account of the research process, including their internal and external dialogue (Tobin and Begley, 2004). The researcher used a reflexive journal to record the daily logistics of the research, methodological decisions, and rationales and to record the researcher's reflections on their values, interests, and insights about self.

### **3.12 Ethical considerations**

The Eastern Cape Co-operative Governance and Traditional Affairs (ECCOGTA) and ALM provided the researcher with gatekeeper letters (Appendix A2 and A1). The researcher presented official letters to ALM and ECCOGTA seeking permission to conduct the investigation and help identify employees that could participate in the study (Appendix B1 and B2). Each participant was briefed on the aim of the research, followed by the requirements to sign the informed consent form. No one was given money or any reward to manipulate the study participants into participating in this study. Study participants were assured that their opinions in the survey would not be used to source any funding to further the agendas of the researcher. Pseudonyms for participants were used to ensure confidentiality and their identity. A letter of information and consent was supplied to the study participants (Appendix B5a, B5b and Appendix 6). To be inclusive and use the language participants will understand Appendix 7 and 7.1 were a translation of Appendix B5a and B5b.

In addition to the above ethical considerations the following were also prioritised by the researcher:

#### Ethical Clearance

The University's Institutional Research Ethics Committee (IREC) granted ethical approval for the study to be conducted with human subjects (Appendix 1).

#### Informed consent and voluntary participation

One of the essential considerations in research is obtaining permission from respondents to include them in the study. It is unethical to collect information without participants' knowledge and their expressed willingness and informed consent" (Kumar, 2011: 220). As a result, it is critical to inform respondents about the purpose

and nature of the research, who is conducting it, who is funding it, the likely duration of the investigation, and the potential outcomes. In this study, the researcher explained the nature and purpose of the survey to all participants. It was also stressed that their participation in the study was entirely voluntary and that they could opt out at any time. Participants signed an informed consent form (Appendix 6 and Appendix 7) to indicate that they knew the study's purpose and were willing participants.

#### Privacy, confidentiality, and no harm

According to Ritchie and Lewis (2003: 67), confidentiality refers to “avoiding the attribution of remarks in publications or presentations to designated participants”. In contrast, anonymity refers to “the identity of those participating not being recognised outside the study team”. Direct attribution (comments linked to a name or a particular position of participants) and indirect attribution (a reference to a list of characteristics that could help identify participants) were avoided for this study to protect the respondents’ anonymity. Anonymity was maintained by using pseudonyms instead of real names to describe the participants.

#### No harm

The researcher took precautions in this study to ensure that the participants were safe from any damage, whether this was mental, physical, or psychological. The questions for both the interviews and the surveys were carefully designed with this in mind. Certain safeguards were implemented to ensure that participants were not affected by their involvement in the research, including refraining from asking questions with sexual overtones and refraining from using language that some would find offensive.

### **3.12 Chapter summary**

This chapter detailed the research methodology. The researcher explicitly stated the research philosophy guiding data collection and analysis. In this instance, the research philosophy was pragmatism because it incorporates both qualitative and quantitative approaches. The study also highlighted the approach to theory development, answering the question of whether the study was deductive or inductive. In this instance, the use of mixed methods made it possible for the study to be inductive and deductive, creating a balance between qualitative and quantitative data. Under the research strategy section, the chapter pointed out that a case study strategy was

adopted because the present study focused on one specific organisation, ALM. In terms of time horizon, the chapter highlighted that due to the limited time available to conduct this research, the time horizon was cross-sectional. Other sections of importance discussed in this chapter include the techniques and procedures for data collection and the sampling method, data collection method and data analysis. The next chapter presents the data collection and analysis thereof.

## **CHAPTER 4: RESULTS PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION**

### **4.1 Introduction**

Chapter 4 presents the results of a sequential mixed methods study exploring reputation management at ALM. The study combined quantitative and qualitative research methods to understand the Municipality's reputation management practices and perceptions. The chapter provides a detailed analysis of the data collected through surveys (Appendix 4b) and interviews (Appendix 4a) with stakeholders, including employees and residents, to provide insights into the current state of reputation management at ALM. The results of this study will contribute to the advancement of knowledge in the field of reputation management, as well as provide recommendations for improving the reputation management practices at ALM.

### **4.2 Quantitative data analysis**

The questionnaire was developed following the study's objectives and distributed to 328 citizens in the ALM which is 85,64% of the planned 383 participants (this means of the 383 distributed questionnaire, 328 were received and recorded). The survey questionnaire was classified into three categories: A: Respondent profile or demographic information, B: Reputation management, and C: open-ended questions.

#### 4.2.1 Age of the respondents

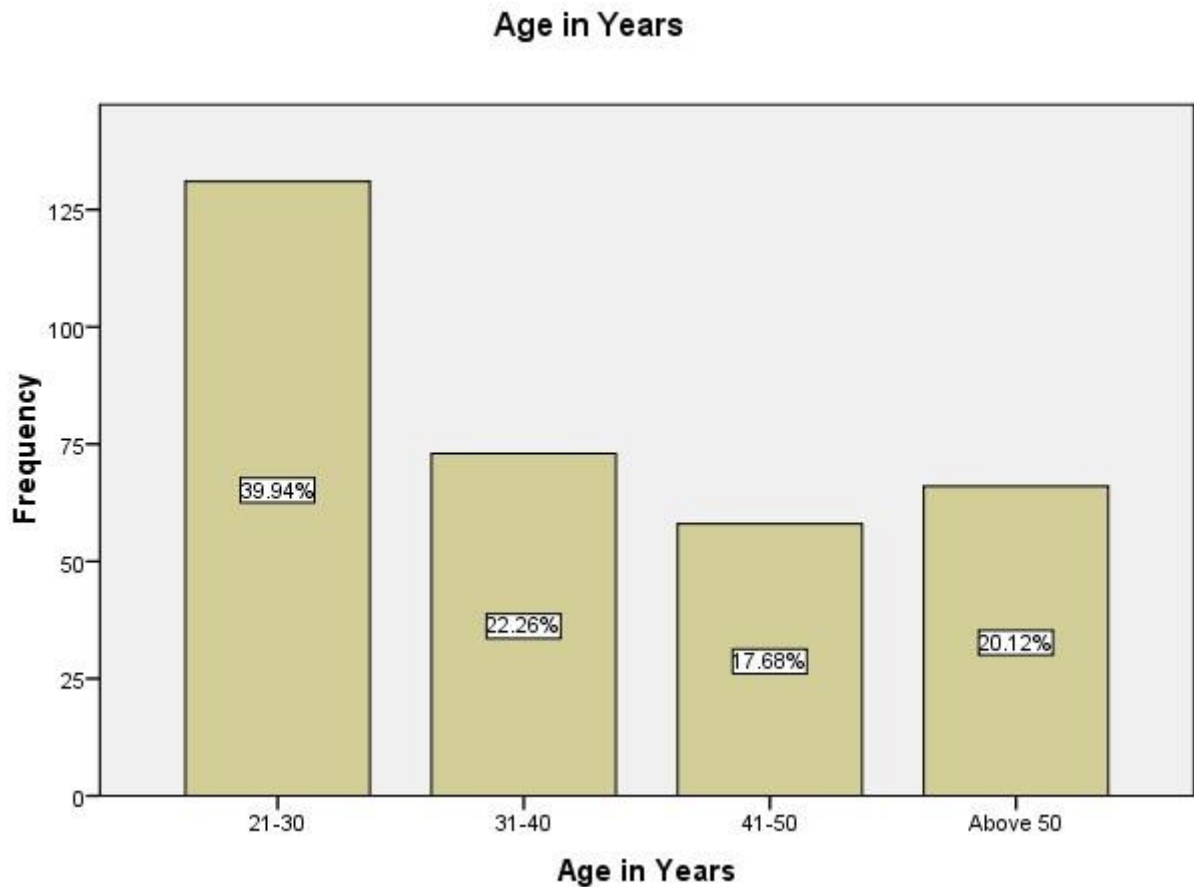
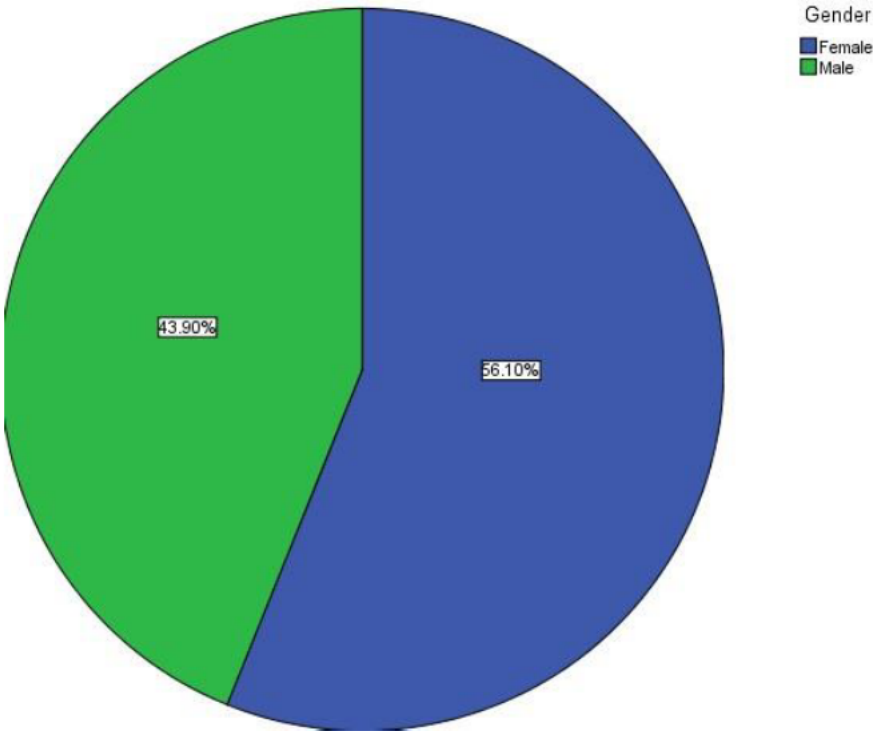


Figure 4.1: Age in years

Figure 4.1 shows that respondents' ages ranged from 21 years to above 50 years. The 21 to 30 age group constituted the majority of respondents (39.94%,  $n = 131$ ), followed by the 31 to 40 age group, which comprised 22.26% ( $n = 73$ ). The 41 to 50 age group (17.68%,  $n = 58$ ) constituted the minority of respondents, while the above-50 age group was the smallest (20.12%,  $n = 66$ ).

**4.2.2 Gender of the respondents**



**Figure 4.2: Gender**

Figure 4.2 shows that more females (56.1%, n = 184) than males (43.9%, n = 144) participated in the study.

**4.2.3 Number of Years living in ALM**

**Table 4.1: Years living in ALM**

Time in ALM	Total
Born here	201
1 – 10 years	42
11 – 20 years	32
21 – 30 years	32
>30 years	21
<b>Total</b>	<b>328</b>

According to Table 4.1, the majority of respondents (61,28%, n = 201) were born in the ALM, followed by 42 who lived in the area between 1 and 10 years, 32 who lived in the area between 11 and 30 years, and 21 who lived in the area for 30 years or more.

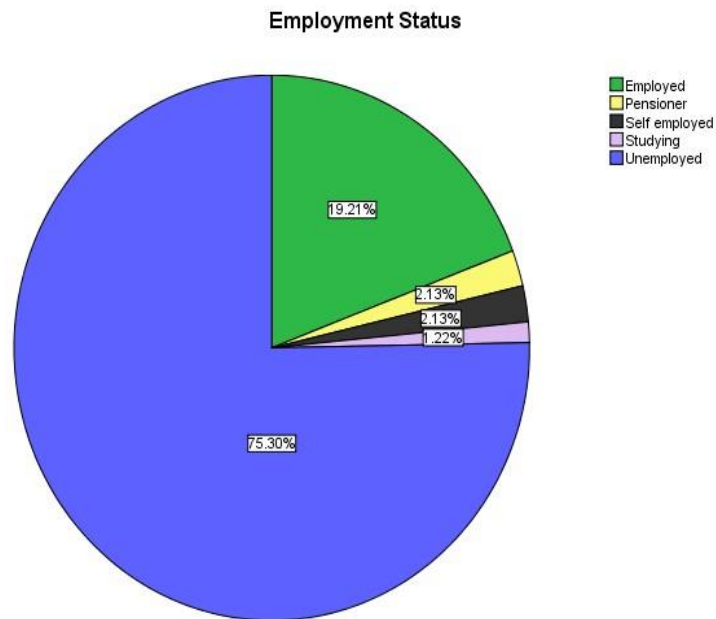
#### 4.2.4 Level of education

**Table 4.2: Level of education**

	Frequency	Per cent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Degree/Honours	44	13.4	13.4	13.4
Masters	1	.3	.3	13.7
Matric	133	40.5	40.5	54.3
None of the above	150	45.7	45.7	100.0
Total	328	100.0	100.0	

Table 4.2 shows that 40.5% of respondents reported that their highest level of education was matric, 13.4% reported that they had honours degrees, and those with master's degrees were in the minority with 0.3% of respondents. The majority (45.7%) of respondents reported having an educational level lower than matric.

## 4.2.5 Employment status



**Figure 4.3: Employment status**

Figure 4.3 shows that the majority of respondents, 75.3%, (n = 241), reported being unemployed, 19.21% (n = 63) were employed, 1.22% (n = 4), were studying, and 2.13% (n = 7) were either self-employed or pensioners.

A cross-tabulation of the level of education and employment status revealed that a single participant holding a Master's degree was employed, and of the 44 participants who held Honours degrees, 22 were employed, two were self-employed, and 22 were unemployed. The cross-tabulation also showed that most participants with matric were unemployed (n = 104), while 22 were employed, two were pensioners, and one was self-employed. The majority of participants who did not have the indicated levels of education were unemployed (n = 121), 20 were employed, five were pensioners, and four were self-employed. A Chi-square test run to find the association between the level of education and employment status revealed a significant association between the two variables ( $X^2(12) = 38.275, p = 0.01$ ) (Tables 4.3 and 4.4).

**Table 4.3: Employment status \* Level of education cross tabulation**

	Level of Education				Total
	Degree/Honours	Masters	Matric	None of the above	
Employment Status Employed	20	1	22	20	63
Pensioner	0	0	2	5	7
Self-employed	2	0	1	4	7
Studying	0	0	4	0	4
Unemployed	22	0	104	121	247
Total	44	1	133	150	328

**Table 4.4: Employment status and Level of education chi-square test**

	Value	Df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	38.275 <sup>a</sup>	12	.000
Likelihood Ratio	36.041	12	.000
N of Valid Cases	328		

a. 14 cells (70.0%) have an expected count of less than 5. The minimum expected count is .01.

### 4.3 Quantitative results and discussions

#### 4.3.1 Question 1: In general, would you say you trust the local government or cannot trust it?

**Table 4.5: Trust of local government**

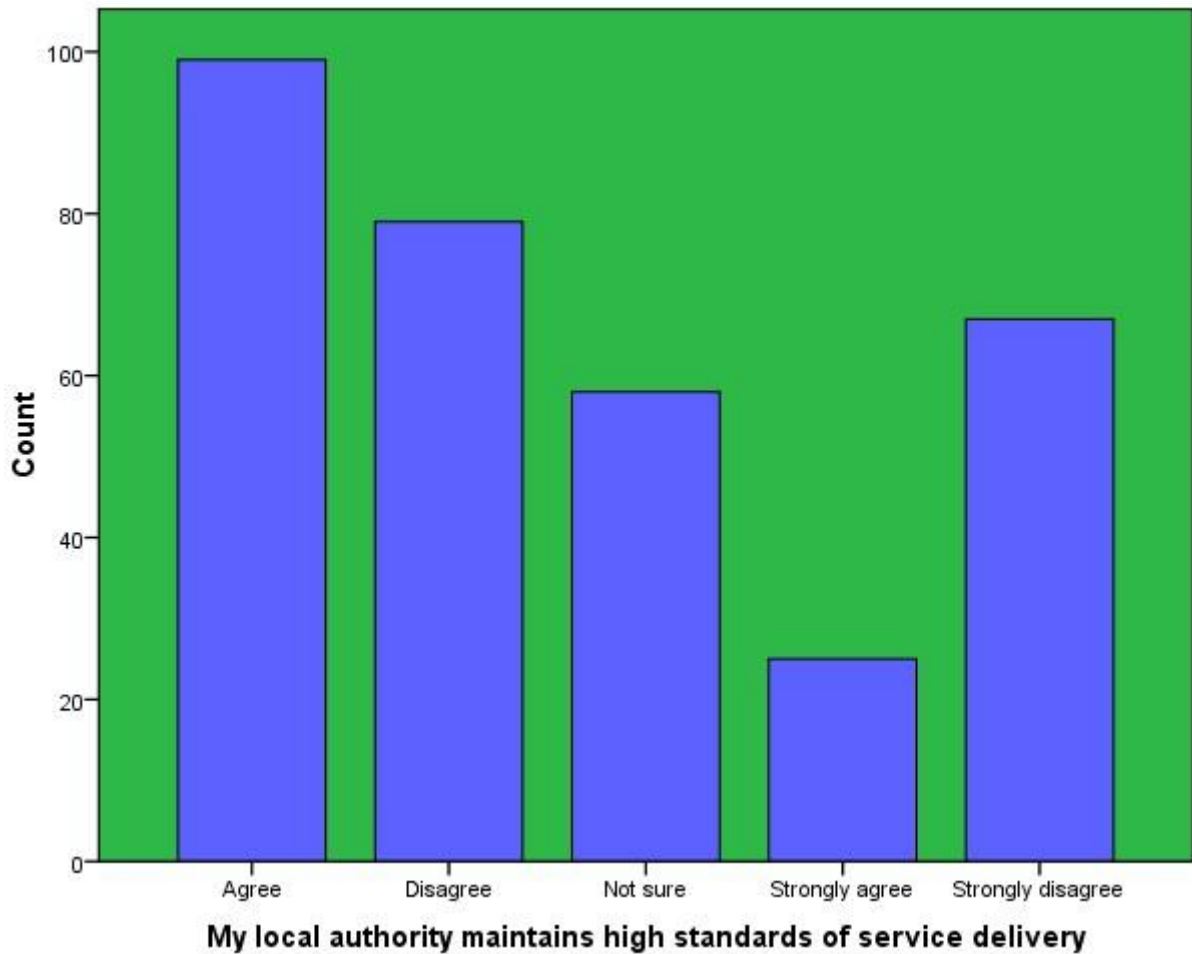
	Frequency	Per cent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid I do not trust the local government	195	59.5	59.5	59.5
	133	40.5	40.5	100.0

I do trust the local government	328	100.0	100.0	
Total				

Table 4.5 shows that the local authority had a negative reputation, with most respondents reporting that they did not trust the Municipality. Those who reported these sentiments constituted 59.9% (n = 195) of respondents, while those who trusted the local government authority constituted 40.5% (n = 133).

Yang and Holzer (2006) suggest that the reputation of local government institutions is crucial in shaping public trust and confidence, however from the above it is evident that participants do not trust local government. Recent media reports (Dayimani 2022;) and scholarly research (Meyer *et al.* 2021) reveal a growing concern among stakeholders about the ALM's reputation, with issues such as perceived corruption, lack of transparency, and inadequate service delivery being raised. The literature and empirical data identify a strong reputation as a necessary basis for positive stakeholder relationships, one that encourages civic engagement and ultimately supports effective service delivery (Grimmelikhuijsen *et al.* 2013).

#### **4.3.2 Local Authority's Commitment to High Service Standards**



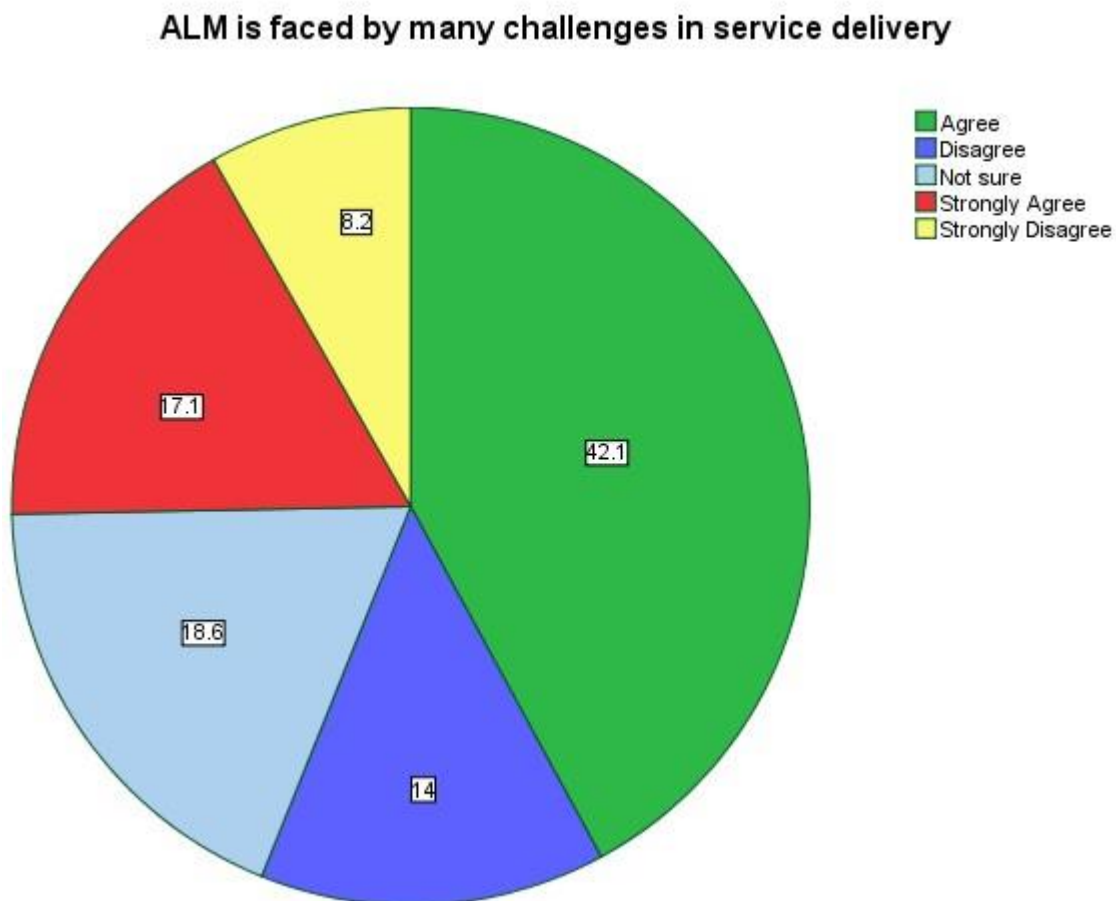
**Figure 4.4: Standards of service delivery**

Figure 4.4 shows that the highest percentage (30.2%) of respondents agreed that ALM maintains high standards of service delivery, and the lowest percentage (7.6%) strongly agreed, which amounts to 37.8% of agreement overall. Respondents who strongly disagreed or disagreed constituted 20.4% and 24.1% respectively, amounting to 44.5%. A small portion, 17.7%, were not sure if the local authority maintained high standards of service delivery. Thus, those who disagreed outnumbered those who agreed, a proportion which grows in size if you consider that “Not sure” is not agreement too. This shows that the local authority is not perceived to be maintaining high service delivery standards.

According to media sources, many people believe that the ALM is one of the worst performing municipalities in South Africa in terms of financial mismanagement, lack of monitoring and responsibility, and failure to provide services to its population (Piliso and Maliti, 2020: 1). Findings clearly demonstrate that the general public views the

ALM negatively and believes it is incapable of achieving the expectations of ALM citizens. Furthermore “Stutterheim, the administrative centre of the ALM in the Eastern Cape, is plagued with broken sewage drains, uncollected garbage, and crumbling roadways” (Ngcamu, 2019: 13).

#### 4.3.3 Service Delivery Challenges in ALM



**Figure 4.5: The extent of service delivery challenges**

Figure 4.5 shows that respondents perceived that ALM faces many service delivery challenges. Those who strongly agreed or agreed constituted 17.1% and 42.1% respectively, translating to a cumulative percentage of 59.2%. Respondents who were unsure if ALM faced many service delivery challenges constituted 18.6%. Those who disagreed or strongly disagreed constituted 14% and 8.2% respectively, amounting to 22.2%.

According to Hendrik (2018: 4, 2020: 3), Dayimani (2018: 4), and DispatchLIVE (2019: 6), negative public emotions that appear within municipalities are the outcome of a

high level of service delivery protests. Nkomo (2017) agrees with the preceding writers but adds that protesters frequently point out a lack of accountability and lack of public involvement which contributes to service delivery difficulties. Failure by organisations to incorporate stakeholder feedback into their operations leads to dysfunctionality in service delivery excellence.

#### 4.3.4 Understanding ALM Programmes

I receive adequate information about the ALM programmes

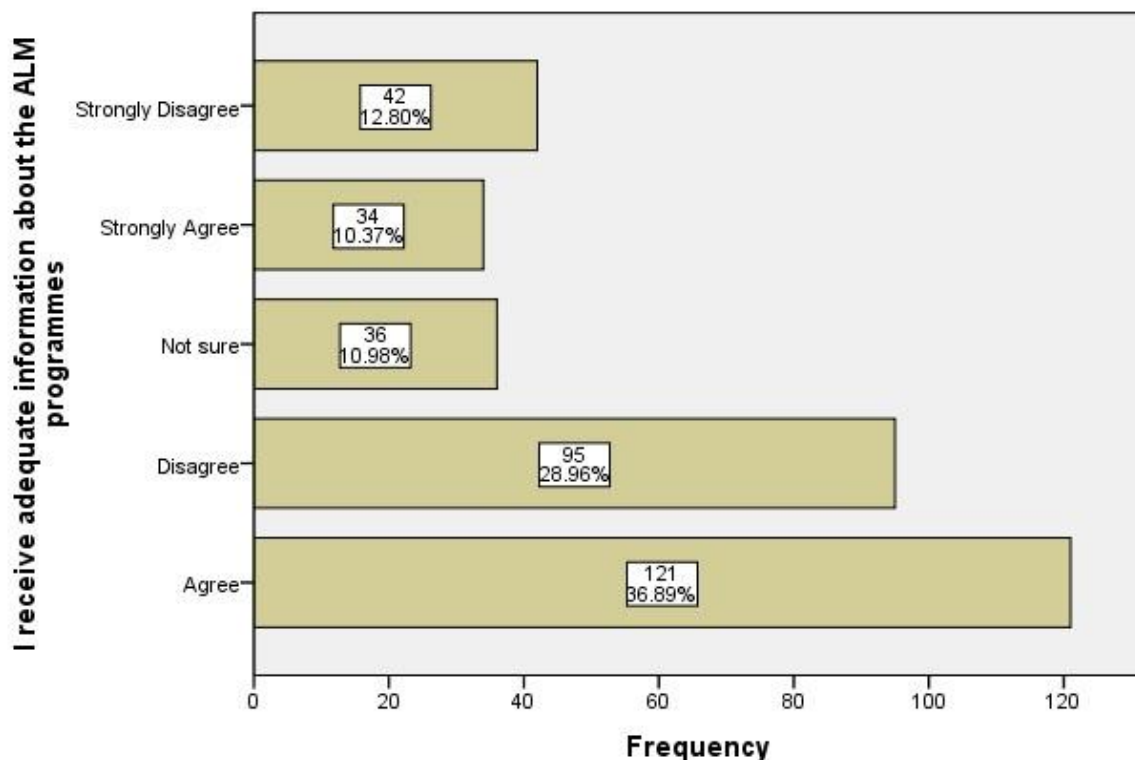


Figure 4.6: Adequacy of information about ALM programmes

The bar chart in Figure 4.6 shows that most respondents were satisfied that they received adequate information about ALM through various media, with 36.9% (n = 121) and 10.4%(n = 34) agreeing and strongly agreeing, with 29%(n = 95) and 12.8% (n = 42) either disagreeing or strongly disagreeing. A few respondents were unsure if they received adequate information about the ALM programmes.

Respondents' overall satisfaction regarding receiving adequate information about ALM through various media can be attributed to several factors. Firstly, the availability of information through multiple channels, such as websites, social media, and forums,

has made it easier for individuals to access and understand the concept of ALM. This increases ALM's visibility and ensures that the information is readily available to all.

Secondly, using different media, such as videos, podcasts, and infographics, caters to a diverse audience and their preferred learning style. This diversity in media helps individuals retain information better, as they can choose the best method.

Thirdly, the presence of experts in the field who use these media to disseminate information about ALM has also been crucial in ensuring that the information is accurate and up to date. Using expert opinions and real-life examples helps bring the concept to life and makes it easier to understand and apply.

Fourthly, the interactive nature of some media, such as social media and forums, allows individuals to engage with others and ask questions. This helps clarify any doubts they may have and provides a platform for individuals to share their experiences and best practices.

According to Harris and Neely (2021: 17), transparency contributes to the development of a good business reputation. By the same token, a lack of transparency can lead to questioning of the legitimacy of the government, resulting in a negative impact on its reputation. The results are contradicting 4.3.2 in which respondents were asked whether their Municipality maintains a higher level of service delivery.

#### 4.3.5 Perception of Corruption within ALM

Table 4.6: Perception of ALM as corrupt

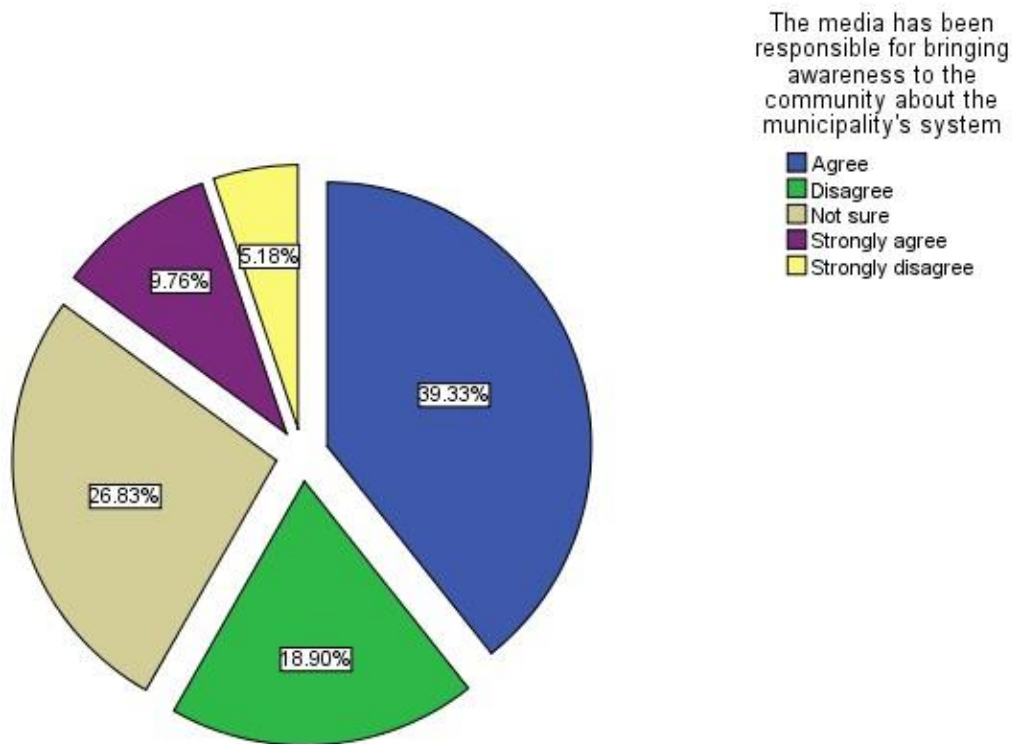
	Responses	Frequency	Per cent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Agree	150	45.7	45.7	45.7
	Disagree	20	6.1	6.1	51.8
	Not sure	63	19.2	19.2	71.0
	Strongly agree	83	25.3	25.3	96.3
	Strongly disagree	12	3.7	3.7	100.0
	Total	328	100.0	100.0	

Table 4.6 shows that 45.7% (n = 150) and 25.3% (n = 83) of the respondents agreed and strongly agreed with the perception that ALM is corrupt. On the other hand, only 3.7% (n = 12) and 6.1% (n = 20) strongly disagreed or disagreed with the perception. Unsure respondents amounted to 19.2% (n = 63). These figures indicate that most respondents perceived ALM as a corrupt local government authority. Maleho (2016: 23), citing literature, observed that citizens frequently perceive public institutions as inefficient, incompetent, and corrupt, as well as having an atmosphere of cronyism and nepotism. Youths enraged by unemployment and nepotism came to the streets in 2018 and set fire to municipal buildings, a local clinic, and the newly constructed Mlungisi mall (Munzhedzi and Makwembere 2019: 12).

Empirical evidence that corruption and bribery within the ALM have occurred has been reported. This includes the use of public funds for personal gain and the misuse of power for personal benefit. This negative image of ALM has been perpetuated by the media, which has reported extensively on these scandals, further contributing to the public perception of corruption. Supporting the above statement, Under the theme "not much to go around, yet not the right hands at the till", the Auditor-General of South Africa (2020: 162) portrayed a negative image of wasteful, irregular, and unauthorised expenditures. In the 2020 local government general report, the Auditor-General paints an unfavourable picture of billions of rands provided to municipalities being administered "in ways contradictory to the prescripts and recognised accounting norms".

The lack of practical consequences for those involved in corrupt practices within ALM has also contributed to the perception of corruption. Despite numerous reports of corruption and bribery, very few individuals have been held accountable for their actions. This lack of consequences sends a message to the public that corrupt behaviour is tolerated within ALM which contributes to the perception of corruption.

### 4.3.6 Media's Role in Community Awareness of Municipality Systems



**Figure 4.7: The role of media in bringing awareness about ALM's system**

Figure 4.7 shows that the majority of participants agreed with this statement. This is evidenced by the figure of 49.1% of those who either agreed or strongly agreed with the statement. Those who were not sure if the media was responsible for bringing awareness to the community about the Municipality's system constituted 26.8%. Minorities disagreed or strongly disagreed, with a combined percentage of 24.1%. Although the responses were mixed, a more significant proportion of respondents viewed media as pivotal in bringing awareness about the Municipality's system. The above response can be deduced from the fact that the media has played a crucial role in shaping public opinion and bringing awareness to the community about the Municipality's system.

According to Di Tella and Franceschelli (2011), the media is crucial in modern democracies. It, for example, provides a considerable amount of the information required by policymakers and voters to make decisions, as well as analytical editorial content that may influence the decisions of future voters. As a result, media coverage sets the agenda for public discourse (Rindova, Petkova, and Kotha, 2007), and media

coverage is likely to help develop a reputation by focusing on the organization, in this example, a provincial administration.

Media can reach a large audience in a short amount of time, making it an effective tool for spreading awareness. Through various platforms such as television, newspapers, and social media, the media can disseminate information to many people, which would be difficult to achieve through other means. This allows a municipality to reach a wider audience and improve its reputation by providing accurate and timely information about its operations.

In summary, the most significant proportion of respondents agreed that the media has been responsible for bringing awareness to the community about the Municipality's system because of its ability to reach a large audience, provide impartial information, and bring attention to any issues or concerns. The media is essential in shaping public opinion and improving the Municipality's reputation.

#### 4.3.7 Media's Alignment with ALM Realities

**Table 4.7: The media's narrative about ALM**

	Frequency	Per cent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Agree	140	42.7	42.7	42.7
Disagree	50	15.2	15.2	57.9
Not sure	79	24.1	24.1	82.0
Strongly Agree	38	11.6	11.6	93.6
Strongly Disagree	21	6.4	6.4	100.0
Total	328	100.0	100.0	

Table 4.7 shows that the most significant proportion of respondents agreed that the media's narrative is closer to reality, while the lowest proportion strongly disagreed (42.7% [n = 140] and 6.4% [n = 21], respectively). 15.2% (n = 50) disagreed, 11.6% (n = 38) strongly agreed, and 24.1% (n = 79) were unsure. This information shows that most respondents either agreed or strongly agreed that media reports are closer to what they experienced.

This can be attributed to several reasons. Firstly, the media often has access to a wide range of information sources, including official statements, eyewitness accounts, and expert opinions. This allows them to present a more comprehensive and accurate picture of events and issues. Additionally, the media often has resources and expertise, such as investigative teams, that can help verify the information and uncover the truth.

Secondly, the media operates in a competitive environment, where credibility and accuracy are crucial for attracting and retaining an audience. This incentivises media organisations to strive for accuracy and fairness in their reporting and to correct any mistakes or misinformation in a timely manner.

Finally, the media is vital in holding those in power accountable, including government agencies and corporations. By presenting a clear and objective picture of events and issues, the media helps to ensure that these organisations are transparent and responsible in their actions and decisions. Supporting this statement, empirical data points to the media as a critical watchdog exposing government malfeasance in ALM.

In contrast, reputation management efforts by organisations often have a more limited scope and may be driven by a desire to present a particular image or message rather than the truth. These efforts can also be influenced by various factors, such as financial incentives or political pressure, which can compromise their accuracy and objectivity.

In summary, the most significant proportion of respondents in the study agreed that the media's narrative is closer to reality due to its comprehensive and accurate reporting, competitive environment, and role in accountability. These factors contribute to the media's credibility and reliability, making it a trusted source of information for the public.

#### 4.3.8 ALM's Reputation at Stake: Challenges in Service Delivery

**Table 4.8: The challenges to service delivery and reputation**

Responses	Frequency	Per cent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Agree	172	52.4	52.4	52.4
Disagree	31		9.5	61.9

Not sure	53	9.5	16.2	78.0
Strongly Agree		16.2		
Strongly Disagree	59	18.0	18.0	96.0
Total	13	4.0	4.0	100.0
	328	100.0	100.0	

Table 4.8 shows that most respondents supported the view that challenges in service delivery experienced by ALM were hurting its reputation. This majority comprised 18% (n = 59) who strongly agreed and 52.4% (n = 172) who agreed with the statement. 16.2% (n = 53) of the respondents were not sure whether service delivery challenges were hurting the reputation of ALM. A combined minority of 13.5% (n = 44) did not agree that challenges in service delivery were hurting ALM's reputation; 9.5% (n= 31) disagreed, and 4% (n = 13) strongly disagreed with the statement. Therefore, the above responses show that the service delivery by ALM was hurting its reputation.

The delivery of services is a critical aspect of any business, and the same goes for ALM, which is why most respondents supported the view that challenges in service delivery were hurting its reputation. The reasons for this perception can be attributed to several factors, including poor service delivery, corruption, nepotism, and lack of communication, among others. Governments around the world are under intense pressure to provide services more swiftly and efficiently (Pérez-Cornejo, de QuevedoPuentes and Wilson 2019: 201). It is surprising that so little academic study has been done on the value of public sector business reputation and management given the relevance of the public sector to the economy and the amount of funding available. According to Gwebu, Wang, and Wang (2018), corporate reputation for the public sector is a crucial area of study because the reputation of public sector organizations depends on how stakeholders perceive their services. Therefore, it is essential to empirically measure public perception when assessing the legitimacy of the government.

#### **4.3.9 Strategic Approaches for Enhancing ALM's Reputation**

**Table 4.9: Implementation of reputation strategies**

	Frequency	Per cent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Agree	158	48.2	48.2	48.2
Disagree	31	9.5	9.5	57.6
Not sure	66	20.1	20.1	77.7
Strongly Agree	62	18.9	18.9	96.6
Strongly Disagree	11	3.4	3.4	100.0
Total	328	100.0	100.0	

Table 4.9 shows that 48.2% (n = 158) of participants agreed that there is a need for the ALM to re-imagine and implement reputational strategies to promote its image to the public, and 18.9% (n = 62) strongly agreed. A minority of respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed with this recommendation (9.5 [n =31] and 3.4 [n = 11], respectively), while 20.1% (n = 42) were not sure of this recommendation.

As public scepticism rises, the government recognises the need to "take matters into their own hands by implementing image-building concepts such as reputation and brand management" (Waeraas and Byrkjeflot, 2012: 02). As a result, communication and stakeholder management generate beneficial relationships that can be leveraged to influence attitudes and behaviours in the larger environment, and institutions should support these efforts.

#### **4.3.10 Innovation in ALM's Service Delivery Enhancement Efforts**

**Table 4.10: ALM is innovative**

	Frequency	Per cent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Agree	116	35.4	35.4	35.4
Disagree	84	25.6	25.6	61.0
Not sure	77	23.5	23.5	84.5
Strongly agree	29	8.8	8.8	93.3
Strongly disagree	22		6.7	100.0

	328	6.7	100.0	
		100.0		

Table 4.10 shows that a combined 44.2% (n = 145) of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that ALM is innovative in its endeavours to enhance its service delivery programme. This constitutes the majority of participants. The respondents who disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement were a combined 32.3% (n = 106), while those who were not sure about the innovativeness of ALM constituted 23.5% (n = 75). These figures show that a more significant proportion of the respondents were not satisfied that ALM is innovative in it trying to enhance service delivery.

#### 4.3.11 Media Spotlight on Municipality System Strengths

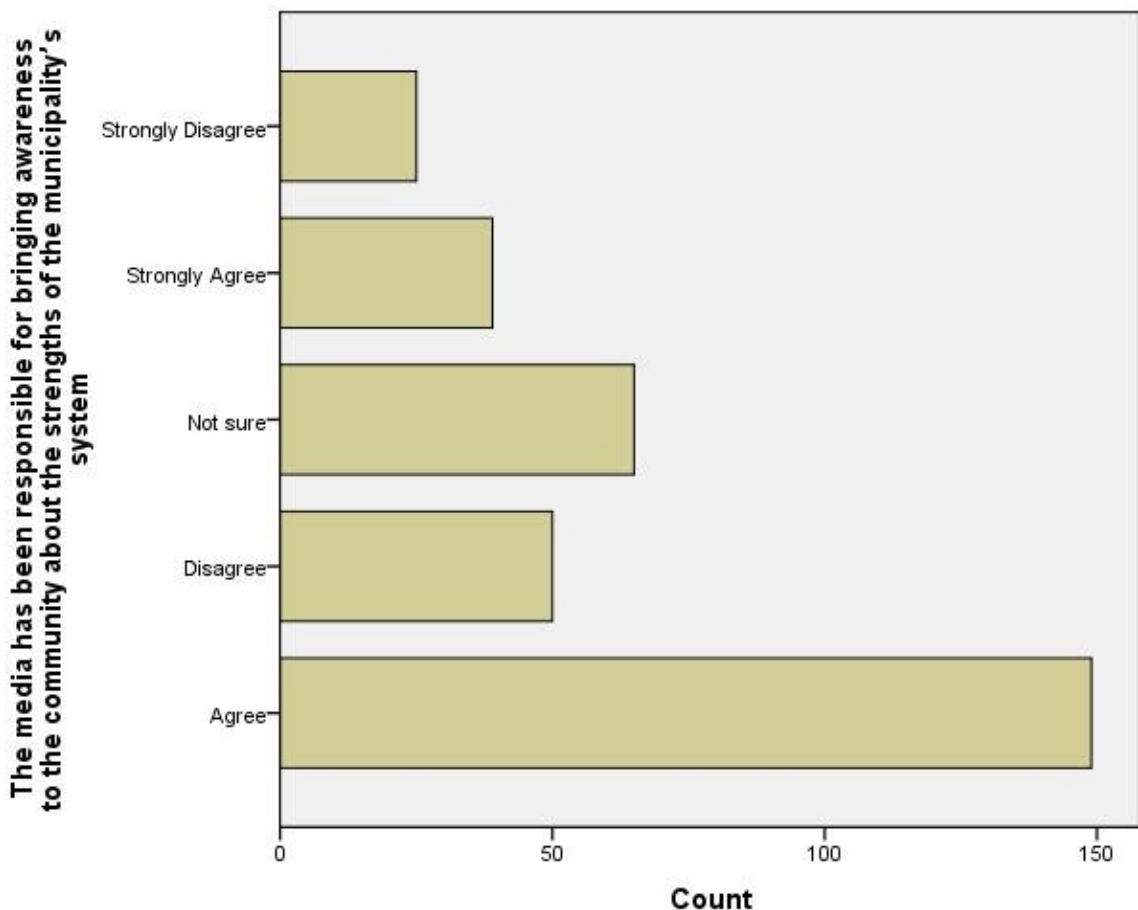


Figure 4.8: The media is raising awareness about the strengths of ALM's system

Figure 4.8 shows the highest percentage of people agreed with this statement 45%, followed by those who were not sure 19.8%, those who disagreed 15.2%, those who strongly agreed 11.9% and lastly, those who strongly disagreed 7.6%. Thus, the majority of respondents supported the statement, with a combined percentage of 57.3%. The ones who did not support this view formed a combined 22.8%. This shows that the majority of respondents appreciated the role of the media in raising awareness of the strengths of the Municipality's system.

#### **4.3.12 Open ended questions**

The researcher also posed three open ended questions to community members to understand the key concerns they have about the ALM, how the participants can assist to build the reputation of the ALM, and whether the media has negatively affected their trust in local government.

The findings of the open ended questions are that people are extremely dissatisfied with the Municipality's performance, especially as it pertains to the delivery of basic services. Over 195 respondents (59,45%) registered that their key concerns with the Municipality were: (a) they do not communicate with the community, (b) there is no accountability, (c) unemployment is high and the Municipality does not create opportunities for youth, people with disability and women, (d) no proper infrastructure, water, sanitation and (e) as reported in the media, the Municipality employs those they know (nepotism and cronyism being at the centre). The above concerns can be translated to a lack of service delivery to the people coupled with no stakeholder engagement and consultation in the work of the Municipality.

In order to build or re-build its reputation, community members noted that the Municipality should not underestimate community members but should at all times work closely with them on the delivery of services to ensure sharing of ideas and issues of strategic importance with the community so that solutions can be reached. One of the participants even said *“Unxibelelwano yinjini eqhuba imibutho, ngoko ke ukuba abanxibelelani nabahlali, abeendaba baya kunxibelelana nabo nathi”*. The majority further advises that the Municipality should be on the ground and listen to the people and not talk only when they want votes.

According to the remarks above, the Municipality is experiencing massive underperformance and mismanagement, as well as corruption, and as a result, citizen trust in the Municipality has declined significantly. Furthermore, the data demonstrate that the reputation of the Municipality has been aggravated by the government's and councillors' unfulfilled political promises, abuse of authority, and lack of accountability to the public.

While the Municipality has accepted the Batho Pele principles (South Africa. Department of Public Service and Administration 2003) as a fundamental service delivery model, actual data indicates that there is a lack of adherence to the concept's principles.

Data also shows that the media outlets have diligently sought to provide a voice to the voiceless by persistently looking into and exposing huge inefficiencies and citizen neglect in ALM.

The study's open-ended section showed that citizens have a negative attitude toward the ALM. There is widespread dissatisfaction with the ALM. The major issues that citizens are dissatisfied with are ALM's service delivery failures and public servant ineptitude. The study results also revealed a high perception that the ALM's public workers are corrupt and untrustworthy, do not communicate effectively and efficiently, and the Municipality faces service delivery issues.

#### **4.4 Qualitative data analysis**

The present study utilised a sequential mixed methods approach to explore the topic of reputation management in ALM. As part of this research, qualitative data was gathered through semi-structured interviews (Appendix 4a) with employees of ALM and ECCOGTA management. The purpose of the qualitative component was to gain a deeper understanding of the experiences, perspectives, and opinions of employees with regard to reputation management in the organisation and how the provincial government as the funder and overseer of the Municipality understood the challenges the Municipality faced regarding their reputation. The following section summarises the findings from the qualitative analysis of the interview data. A total of 17 participants were interviewed which was two more than planned, but this is because of interest and a request from those participants to participate.

The participants were categorised as follows:

1. Participants 1 – 12: employees and political heads from the ALM.
2. Participants 13 – 17: ECCOGTA employees (management staff).

The above are named as such to protect their identity and protect their information as required according to ethical standards.

#### 4.4.1 Gender of Participants

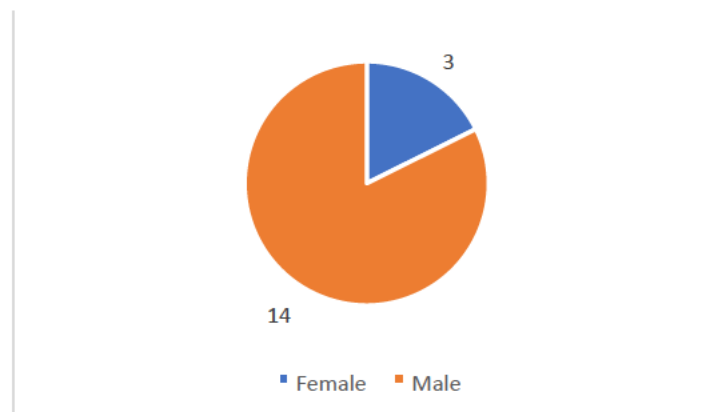


Figure 4.9: Gender

Figure 4.9 shows that there were 14 males and three females interviewed. This shows more male than female representation and possibly male domination in positions at the specific municipality.

#### 4.4.2 Age of Participants

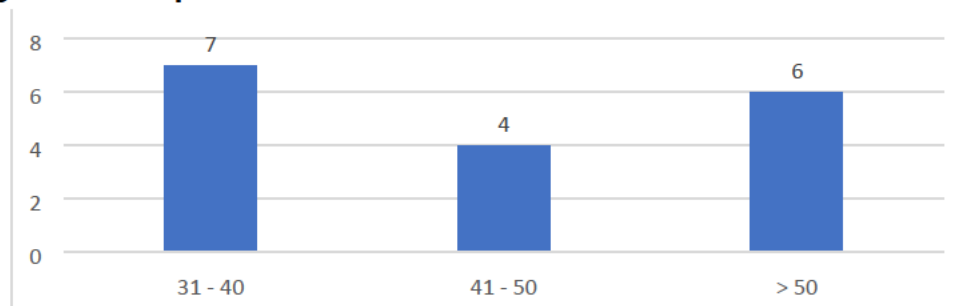
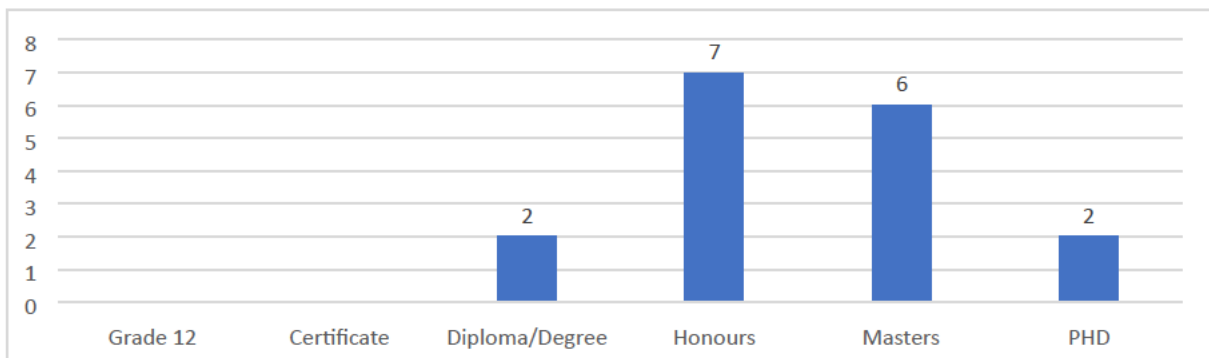


Figure 4.10: Age

Figure 4.10 shows that all the respondents were above 30 years of age, with the largest group of respondents being the group between 31 and 40 years of age. Individuals over the age of 30 are likely to have more work experience and, thus, a

better understanding of reputation management practices in the workplace, therefore providing more insightful and nuanced perspectives on the topic. Individuals over 30 are likely to have advanced in their careers and may have had more opportunities to observe and manage their reputations. They may also better understand how reputation management impacts career progression. The study's focus on reputation management in the workplace makes it particularly relevant to participants over 30 who have had more time to develop and manage their professional reputations.

#### 4.4.3 Level of education

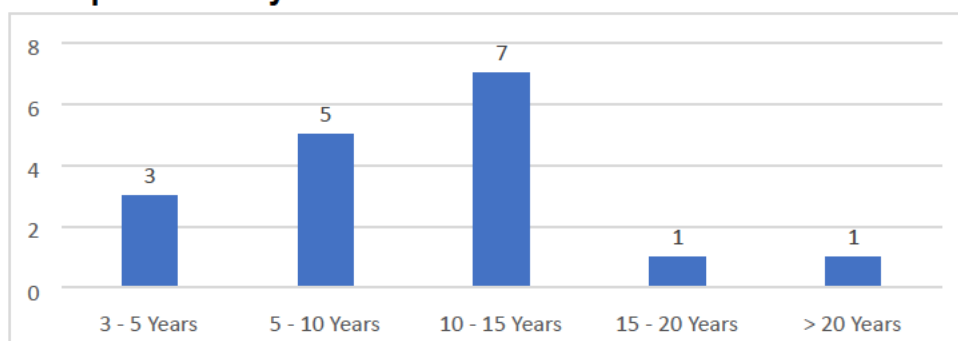


**Figure 4.11: Level of education**

Figure 4.11 shows that respondents were highly educated, with most having postgraduate degrees. The study exploring reputation management at ALM showed that most respondents had at least a degree.

In summary, the high level of education among the respondents in the study exploring reputation management at ALM can be attributed to the technical and complex nature of the field, the critical role that local government officials play in managing their communities' reputation, and the commitment of the Municipality to providing quality services.

#### 4.4.4 Work experience in years



#### **Figure 4.12: Work experience in years**

Figure 4.12 shows that most respondents had over ten years of experience, indicating very high experience levels. For several reasons, employees with over 10 years of experience at the ALM were interviewed in a study exploring reputation management. The benefit of interviewing individuals with extensive tenure at the Municipality is, firstly, that they are well-acquainted with the organisation's inner workings, including its policies and procedures. This familiarity with the workings of the Municipality made them ideal participants for a study on reputation management, as they were in a position to provide insight into the impact of the Municipality's reputation on its stakeholders, as well as the actions it has taken to manage its reputation.

Secondly, long-serving employees are often seen as the organisation's institutional memory. They have seen how the Municipality has evolved and responded to various challenges and opportunities, including reputation management. This historical perspective is valuable in understanding the Municipality's reputation and strategies to maintain or enhance it.

Finally, employees with over ten years of experience are typically more senior in the organisation and hold more influential positions. As such, they are well-positioned to provide insight into the organisational culture and how it affects the Municipality's reputation. Their perspectives can also shed light on the effectiveness of current reputation management practices and whether there is room for improvement.

#### 4.4.5 Positions in ALM and ECCOGTA

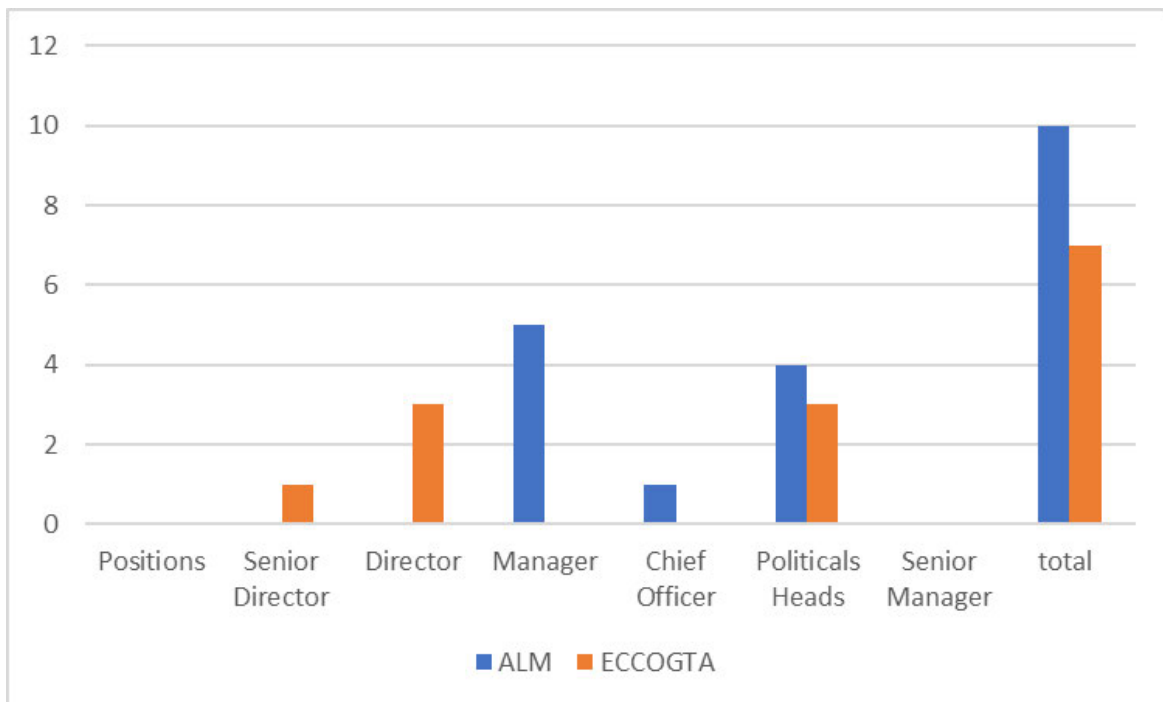


Figure 4.13: Positions in ALM and in ECCOGTA

Figure 4.13 indicates that there was a good distribution of senior staff from various managerial and leadership positions, indicating a diverse and rich response from a strategic and political level. A good distribution of senior staff from various managerial and leadership positions at ALM and the ECCOGTA was crucial in exploring reputation management as this provided a comprehensive and diverse perspective of the organisation's reputation management strategies and challenges. The researcher was able to gain an overview and insight into how reputation management practice is implemented across the organisation and how different stakeholders in and outside of the Municipality assist in promoting better reputation management and political will to support its implementation.

The distribution of positions held by respondents, with varying levels of authority and responsibilities in the organisation, offered a range of insights into the challenges and opportunities in reputation management. For example, a department head may have a different perspective on reputation management than a division manager or an executive director and political head. These perspectives provide a more nuanced understanding of the organisation's reputation management challenges and opportunities.

## **4.5 Thematic analysis and discussion of qualitative findings**

In this section, the researcher discusses the research findings derived from the data gathered in the qualitative phase of this research study. The findings and analysis are based on participant responses as well as scholarly research. Each theme is addressed separately so that participants' responses can be clarified and supported by relevant literature. The following are the themes that emerged from the qualitative analysis:

- † **Community needs and inputs**
- † **ALM reputation as untrustworthy**
- † **Adverse media reports**
- † **Brand visibility and stakeholder engagement**

### **4.5.1 Community needs and inputs**

This primary theme examined how community needs were addressed, and how their inputs were considered. Subthemes that informed it were: community inputs into the municipal Integrated Development Planning (IDP) and lack of implementation thereof.

#### **4.5.1.1 Community inputs and integration into the Municipality IDP**

This subtheme determined how community inputs were integrated into the Municipality IDP. There was an engagement between the municipal and community stakeholders. Various IDP roadshows were set up to engage with the community at ground level. This allowed for their inputs to be gauged and captured.

*Nevertheless, the Municipality has a consultation process with the community members, and the Mayor leads IDP roadshows where needs and expectations are tabled and views from community members are captured for implementation, but financial issues make things difficult. Participant 1*

*As we speak, the Mayor is doing IDP roadshows. Participant 5*

*IDP roadshows and process plans where the mayor engages communities to collect community needs and invite them when the budget is concluded and approved for a year to start. Participant 3*

Various meetings and imbizos were also held, which the community was invited to.

*This is difficult to answer as due to financial constraints, meetings are held, and mayoral imbizos are held, but no implementation due to budget issues.*

Participant 2

*Public participation programmes mayoral imbizos, IDP roadshows and Annual Report meetings held by MPAC to all wards are some ways to respond.*

Participant 7

*Meetings are being held with communities and the relevant forums of the Municipality, and the issue becomes difficult when financial commitments need to be made due to an unfunded budget.* Participant 4

The Municipality also made efforts to go to ground level, including mayoral visits.

*However, with the Municipality, it is currently on the ground to get the views and inputs of the communities.* Participant 17

*Community needs are collected through visits to wards by the Mayor, and after that, a priority list is drawn from those roadshows. An IDP representative meeting is called to ensure that all ward's needs are correctly captured, where everybody from all wards and stakeholders meets under one roof to agree on the processes further legislating the process for every municipality.* Participant 9

Community inputs had to be done comprehensively, which meant that various stakeholders needed to be identified, including public servants, pensioners and ruralbased citizens, through relevant platforms to ensure communities were engaged.

*The IDP is quite comprehensive in that it considers all (or most) of the inputs received from stakeholders. Programmes and projects (funded or not) planned for the community are also included, though the challenge is when implementation needs to occur. The IDP is further assessed through the provincial department to ensure that it covers all the community's material areas.* Participant 9

*The IDP is the annual two-fold process of engaging the public and, therefore, not a platform for an open, ongoing and across-the-board platform to cover all community and public queries and needs. An operational platform of available and working public servants, managed customer engagement platforms, responsive public servants and diverse channels to engage ALL of the public,*

*including pensioners and rural-based citizens, is required to ensure communities are adequately engaged and serviced.* Participant 6

The views of participants provide insight on the stages necessary in incorporating community input into the Municipality's Integrated Development Plan (IDP). A variety of activities, including as IDP roadshows, meetings, imbizos, and mayoral visits, illustrate municipal and community stakeholders' engagement.

The IDP roadshows are an important way of communicating with the community at the local level. These initiatives allow for the collection of community expectations, needs, and input. Nonetheless, funding constraints restrict the usefulness of these collaborations, making it impossible to carry out indicated requests.

The mayor's participation in the roadshows demonstrates their commitment to including the community in decision-making. Participants, on the other hand, often perceive money issues as a key impediment to translating community recommendations into effective activities. The problem arises when funding constraints prohibit the implementation of priority activities.

Despite the challenges, the Municipality continues to make efforts to gain ground, such as via mayoral visits and extensive contact with a variety of stakeholders. There is a significant emphasis on inclusiveness, with efforts made to discover and incorporate citizens from rural regions, the elderly, and governmental employees in the process.

The IDP is presented as a comprehensive document that incorporates comments from a wide variety of stakeholders and addresses community projects and initiatives, whether or not they are funded. The constant problem of fiscal constraints, on the other hand, offers a continual impediment to the actual implementation of these aims.

Public participation programmes, such as IDP roadshows and mayoral imbizos, are obviously important components of the engagement strategy. Although advantageous, the IDP process's annual format is noted for not providing a continuous, universal platform to answer all community questions and issues.

The above sentiments by participants on the efforts of the Municipality to include the citizens in the process of decision-making through imbizo's and mayoral road shows is supported by Savage *et al.* (2010: 98) who suggests that stakeholder theory is

necessary for an organisation's survival and success. The authors further suggest that the theory has evolved to emphasise the importance of involving stakeholders in long-term value creation. Stakeholder theory implies, at the very least, managing and attending to the needs and well-being of these stakeholders (Harrison, Bosse and Phillips 2010: 58).

As seen on the above accounts the Municipality is perceived by the Municipality itself to be on the ground communicating their plans with the community. This is however contradicted by the sentiments of the participant who said “*Unxibelelwano yinjini eqhuba imibutho, ngoko ke ukuba abanxibelelani nabahlali, abeendaba baya kunxibelelana nabo nathi*”. This directly translates as “communication is the basis for development, therefore as the Municipality do not communicate, the media will communicate”. The majority of respondents in the qualitative phase further advised that the Municipality should be on the ground and listen to the people and not just talk when they want votes.

#### **4.5.1.2 Lack of implementation**

Findings indicate that inputs captured were not implemented. This was mainly due to limited budgets. This is one of the main things that leads to community dissatisfaction and unrest.

*Generally, the IDPs are set up well, but I doubt if it is fully implemented. You see through the unrest in different communities.* Participant 11

*In my view, the inputs of the community could be captured in the IDP, but the challenge is that they cannot be fully delivered because the Municipality has a limited budget to deliver on them.* Participant 12

*The assurance that community inputs are included in municipalities' IDPs. Moreover, for ALM, we do that exactly, but the implementation becomes a problem. As we speak, the Mayor is busy with IDP roadshows.* Participant 13

*My input can be considered when the IPD programme is implemented during the five-year plan of IDP. In this case, somehow, ALM's IDP is inclusive; however, due to the financial situation of the Municipality, it becomes difficult to implement.* Participant 5

The budget cannot match the community issues raised to resolve such issues.

*Community needs are well reflected in the IDP; however, there is not enough budget to resolve them. Participant 12*

*In terms of our IDP process. I would say they are adequate, and we make a point that we cover all areas when we prioritise needs identification. The IDP we have is a true reflection of the needs; the only challenge is the financial challenges on whether we can fulfil those as the Municipality. Participant 1*

The community needs to outweigh the allocated budgets, leading to unfulfilled needs. While the needs are incorporated into the plans, the budgets cannot satisfy them. Furthermore, the budget that is there, is affected by poor cashflows and not enough incoming revenue.

*To the limits of the available budget, which is not enough compared to the expectations of the communities. Participant 9*

*The needs are integrated into municipal plans without the necessary financial resources that can carry such needs. Participant 7*

*Our financial muscle as the Municipality directly impacts us, fulfilling the needs and aspirations of the citizens of ALM. Participant 15*

*Due to poor cash flows, the Municipality does not meet the needs and expectations. Participant 17*

*As a small municipality, we rely on grants from the Provincial government. The revenue generated by a municipality is not sufficient to fulfil community requirements, but at times provincial and national departments do come to our rescue in the project under one programme, such as CWP and EPWP, for temporary employment. Participant 1*

*To some extent, essential services are rendered. Due to service delivery, some of the services to the people are not implemented due to financial constraints. Participant 16*

*Partly some of the needs are provided by the Municipality, but because the Municipality does not have enough revenue, it does not address all of the needs of the communities, thus leaving its residents not satisfied with the services of the Municipality. Participant 4*

The communities are neglected due to poor service delivery. Internal politics, lack of communication and corruption affect service delivery and result in neglect of the community. This point is supported by the sentiments of community members when they responded to the statement “*My local municipality maintains a higher standard of service delivery to its community*”. The majority of responses disagreed with this statement (44.5% versus 37.8 %). This shows that the local authority is not maintaining high service delivery standards.

*With financial constraints in the Municipality, issues of nepotism, and lack of communication, the stakeholders (community members) feel neglected by the Municipality.* Participant 5

*Because of this, even though the Eastern Cape is endowed with vast resources, the vast majority remain undeveloped. This administration is committed to growth, but it is plagued by pervasive corruption, inefficiencies, and an inept workforce.* Participant 3

*It must be noted that key to its mandate the Municipality is expected to deliver on basic services such as refuse removal, electricity provision and roads – the Municipality does not efficiently deliver on these services once more due to its limited funding.* Participant 2

There is also a lack of equality in terms of service delivery. Suburban areas get more service than townships.

*It saddens me how our government has consistently failed our people to meet their expectations in delivering quality services. It is more than 25 years since they came to power, but the Municipality is still struggling to provide essential services to our people, and you still have a considerable number of people that live on social grants due to high poverty levels.* Participant 1

*Some of the basic needs are fulfilled, albeit on unequal terms. For example, the level of service delivery in townships is far less than that received in suburban areas.* Participant 13

Financial issues are a contributing factor to not fulfilling the needs of the community. This impacts service delivery, roads, refuse, sanitation and other infrastructural issues.

*With financial crises in this municipality, it is even difficult for me to understand the community members' expectations and needs. It is difficult, and no communication is given to the community on how they can solve the issues.*

Participant 9

*We have vast and material infrastructure backlogs; we have infrastructure that was destroyed through protests that we are not able to recover or replay, which is critical to the well-being of any municipality, and it all relates to the financial well-being of the Municipality because if you do not have the financial muscle, there is no way that you will be able to build all the roads that you need to build, no way you will be able to collect all the refuse that you have to collect timeously as per the expectations of the citizens.*

Participant 14

*Non-responsive, as its financial instability is not allowing it to respond to the aspiration of its citizens.*

Participant 4

*The Municipality tries to be responsive; however, it is mainly hamstrung by cashflow issues to respond to service delivery issues.*

Participant 13

The level of complaints the community raises formally and informally shows clear evidence of community discontent.

*The Municipality is not fully / effectively responsive in the sense that firstly some of the services that are needed by communities are not a function of the Municipality, i.e., provision of water and sanitation is a function of Amathole District, not the Municipality, so the district itself is not delivering correctly on this service thus making the citizens complain to this municipality, and in turn, the Municipality does not hold the district accountable for this.*

Participant 11

*Here too, empirical evidence and what we see within this municipality (ALM) displays a citizenry's discontent and dissatisfaction regarding their unfulfilled needs and that the Municipality is incapable of living up to the task.*

Participant 1

The comments of the participants highlight the Municipality's chronic issue of failing to adopt community proposals. The fundamental difficulty is a lack of implementation, mostly due to budgetary restrictions, which leads to community unhappiness and dissatisfaction.

Many participants point out the disparity between implementation money and community requirements as outlined in the Integrated Development Plan (IDP). Even if the IDP is well-structured, the continuous issue of money constraints makes meeting the goals challenging. Participants emphasise that, although the Municipality struggles to provide enough resources for implementation, community feedback is included throughout the planning phase.

Financial restrictions are a typical impediment to satisfying community expectations. Participants remark that financial allocations often fail to meet the community's various expectations, resulting in unfulfilled needs and unhappiness. The Municipality has no influence over the inability to fulfil obligations owing to bad financial flows and inadequate income.

The Municipality confronts a complex set of difficulties, including external ones such as dependency on provincial government financing and variances in service provision among townships and suburban regions. The incorrect supply of critical services such as power, garbage collection, and road maintenance adds to the neighborhood's unhappiness.

The remarks also address the influence of internal problems such as internal politics, poor communication, and corruption on service delivery. When it comes to problem-solving, a lack of communication exacerbates the community's issues. According to data, suburban regions get greater attention than townships in terms of service delivery.

Participants expressed dissatisfaction with the government's inability to meet community expectations after more than 25 years in control. Financial insecurity expresses itself in a variety of ways, including infrastructure backlogs, infrastructure destruction caused by demonstrations, and a general failure to react effectively to community demands.

Systems theory is a comprehensive approach that views organisations, such as the ALM as complex systems comprising interrelated components that must be integrated and balanced to achieve a harmonious whole. This approach emphasises that the system's success depends on integrating all its components, including community needs and inputs.

In the context of reputation management at ALM, incorporating community needs and inputs is crucial in ensuring the success and sustainability of the system. Community input provides valuable insights into the expectations and perceptions of residents, which is crucial in developing effective reputation management strategies.

Furthermore, integrating community needs and inputs into the reputation management system at ALM promotes accountability and transparency. The Municipality can demonstrate its commitment to community engagement and responsiveness, enhancing its reputation and building trust with residents. This can contribute to a more stable and sustainable community, which is essential for long-term success.

Therefore, systems theory provides a strong justification for including community needs and inputs in studying reputation management at ALM. The integration of these components ensures that the reputation management system is balanced, accountable, and responsive to the community's needs. This can ultimately lead to a more sustainable and prosperous municipality.

#### **4.5.2 ALM reputation as untrustworthy**

This was a critical theme that examined the reputational impact on the Municipality. Several subthemes were developed from this theme. These were: revenue management, poor service delivery, demonstrations, historical good, financial difficulties, non-payment of salaries, financial and audit, revenue management, political and protest, not acknowledging past indignities, challenges faced in terms of municipality reputation, corruption and political infighting.

Each of the above-mentioned subthemes can be like a ticking bomb about to explode as far reputation management of the ALM is concerned. "Poor reputation management results in civic unhappiness and disengagement, as well as negative attitudes, such as the widely held perception that government policies and public officials are incompetent and corrupt" (Da Silva and Batista, 2007: 27).

These sentiments are supported by the fact that negative public sentiment manifests itself in a variety of ways; for example, the Municipality has experienced a high level of service delivery protest (Hendrik, 2018: 4, 2020:3; Dayimani, 2018: 4 ; DispatchLIVE 2019: 6). Protesters typically pointed to municipal authorities' lack of accountability and

public participation as factors aggravating their service delivery issues (Nkomo, 2017). This confirms that all the sub-themes mentioned could be a result of the untrustworthiness of ALM in the eyes of its citizens.

#### **4.5.2.1 Revenue management**

Findings indicate that there are revenue constraints that have led to a poor reputation due to corruption, fruitless and unaccounted for expenditure, and financial mismanagement.

*We are viewed by all our stakeholders, not in a perfect light. Since we had some negative coverage over the past 3 to 4 years, and most of them have been around, we cannot pay salaries.* Participant 9

*Poor revenue collection remains a challenge as this hinders the development and rendering of services.* Participant 17

*Local government finances are under severe pressure and are not being managed as they should.* Participant 5

*Credible financial statements are crucial to enable accountability and transparency, but municipalities are failing in this area.* Participant 3

#### **4.5.2.2 Poor service delivery**

Relating to the above, the lack of revenue management impacts service delivery. Poor service delivery is the critical factor in the poor reputation of the Municipality from the community point of view. This has led to the Municipality being continuously painted in a poor light.

*Again, this solely depends on that municipality's service delivery track record. If residents feel that their municipality is providing the services they need and require, that municipality's reputation score (if I may call it) will undoubtedly be positive. Nevertheless, it will be the opposite if residents see a negative side to this. NB, in any municipality, there will never be 100% satisfaction from residents.* Participant 12

*The negative public views manifest in various forms; for example, in the Municipality, we have experienced higher levels of service delivery protests compared to other provinces or local municipalities. As such, the reputation in*

*Amahlathi is that we do not deliver service. We have many things that people are unhappy about. Participant 5*

*Community, likewise, the negative publicity that we have received, cuts a very negative doubt around the issue of whether we can deliver quality services to them. Participant 7*

*The reputation is not looking good due to many general challenges related to service delivery and some perceived political instability. Participant 8*

*Municipalities are known for poor service delivery, this is the same with the ALM, its citizens (community members) feel like the Municipality is not giving the best services to them; this will then differ from the service providers as they may have a different view altogether. Participant 3*

#### **4.5.2.3 Demonstrations**

Demonstrations in the form of violent community unrest due to their dissatisfaction indicates their loss of faith in the Municipality. This impacted further the reputation of the Municipality.

*The reputation of the Municipality is not good at all. The rampant unrest and violent protests are common across the Municipality prove that. Participant 2*

*In 2018, the municipal offices in Stutterheim were burnt to the ground, and municipal buildings across the small towns making up Amahlathi were also torched. After the 2018 burning, the community has received a bad reputation as most services remain unrendered by the LM. Participant 1*

*Based on the increase of service delivery protests and sometimes violent protests throughout the ALM, it is fair to state that ALM is failing dismally in its endeavour to proactively respond to the needs and expectations of citizens, which I predict will intensify. Participant 12*

The image of the Municipality among existing staff was tarnished.

*Our reputation is the lowest. Internally, employees are demoralised because we think the Municipality is not doing well. Our reputation is at the lowest even with employees. Participant 13*

*Since we had negative coverage over the past 3 to 4 years, and most of them have been around, we cannot pay salaries. Participant 15*

Two respondents believed that the Municipality's reputation depended on the specific angle from which one looked at it. If stakeholders received good service, they would paint the Municipality in a good light, but those that received poor service would do the contrary. The governmental sector promoted the Municipality positively, but the private and community sectors disagreed.

*From a South African perspective, it depends on who these stakeholders are; we cannot put all stakeholders (public or private) in one hat as they have different aims and objectives and work differently. If a particular municipality is happy with its stakeholder, then all will be good. However, if it is the opposite, then that municipality's reputation regarding that particular stakeholder will also be different. Participant 1*

*In this case, for the ALM, there will be mixed emotions or views regarding this, as some will be happy and some will not but in most cases, experience shows that some and most were not happy at all. Participant 5*

*The reputation of local municipalities, particularly Amahlathi Local Municipality, among their customer, generally differs because of the way the local authorities deliver service to their stakeholders. For example, some areas in the Municipality have better services than others. Where the Municipality provides better service delivery, there is tremendous satisfaction from the customer. In general, the stakeholders are criticising the local authorities for lack of better service, and in this municipality, it is even worse as most of the areas are crying because of non-service delivery in their communities. Participant 11*

*Firstly, it is essential to dissect the different stakeholder groups to have a better understanding of the levels and influencing factors and thus draw an informed conclusion on positive or negative reputation and determining factors, e.g. in a highly political environment where political influence is high and controlling, certain factors such as allegiance influence reputation. To easily understand, one could say there is a public, client, or community group of stakeholders, while there are also government stakeholders where politics has influence. Participant 16*

*Reputation is generally seen as good since the nature of work done across government aligns with the ruling party's manifesto of principles and objectives. Government officials and work are thus primarily influenced by this. Participant 13*

*Besides government and other stakeholders, the private sector is about profit, and to achieve that target, the provision of uncompromising services and value is a must. On the other hand, the government should have the same philosophy, but it operates differently – no accountability for delivering poor services. Generally, no recourse on misappropriation of funds, payment regardless of low work ethic, etc. This is just what is happening in the Municipality. Participant 7*

#### **4.5.2.4 Historically good reputation**

Findings indicate that the reputation of the Municipality was historically good and won many awards. However, many changes and financial issues have led to a negative reputation over the years.

*Historically the Municipality has had a good reputation from VUNA awardwinning and being a Municipality for learning and sharing worldwide ... Participant 5*

*Before October 2018, Amahlathi municipality was the best performing, a referral for good practices in governance known for a clean audit. Media relations were sound, but beyond 2018 a tainted municipality emerged. Currently, relations are improving from it because the council is new as well. Participant 2*

*In the past or historically, this municipality was among the best-performing municipalities. It used to deliver quality and good services and was financially viable and had cash reserves. This came to an end when the municipal council succumbed to a wrongful demand from employees of having standardisation on salaries and absorbed contract workers. Participant 9*

*The Municipality has a bloated organogram that is not fit for purpose and consumes lots of its equitable share to the extent that the Municipality cannot afford its salary bill. What is currently portrayed in the media about the Municipality is an actual state of affairs. Participant 1*

#### **4.5.2.5 Financial difficulties**

Qualitative findings of the study indicate that the media often portray financial difficulties in the following ways.

##### **Non-payment of salaries**

The non-payment of staff salaries and staff being forced to use meal vouchers at respective stores made media headlines.

*In the last few months, the Municipality could not pay salaries, which was picked up by the media and made a mockery of the Municipality.* Participant 5

*The Municipality is known as one that cannot pay employees salaries, and employees get paid by getting groceries from Pick n Pay. Non-payment of salaries resulting in employees using vouchers in retail shops.* Participant 12

*There has been a lot of adverse reporting about the Municipality regarding late payment of salaries, third parties and creditors.* Participant 13

#### **4.5.2.6 Financial and audit**

Municipality audits and financial mismanagement are always portrayed in a negative light by the media.

*Municipalities are negatively portrayed in the media. Municipalities are dogged by negative issues from qualified audits, fruitless and wasteful expenditure, theft from the public purse, and failure to comply with procurement processes and Municipal Finance Management Act (MFMA) guidelines.* Participant 10

Eyewitness News (2022) reports that financial data published on Municipal Money, a web-based initiative by National Treasury, reveals ALM has a history of poor financial management. The amount of money held in the Municipality's bank account, its cash balance, decreased from R100 million in 2016 to R10 million in 2019. In the 2018/19 financial year (the latest available on the site), ALM overspent its operating budget by 31%. The operating budget is used to pay day-to-day operating expenses, such as salaries, and a 15% over-expenditure is considered high risk (Zantsi, Greyling and Vink, 2019: 19). At the same time, the capital budget, which is used to finance new infrastructure such as housing, sewage, and water reticulation, was underspent by

21%. National Treasury notes that underspending the capital budget by 15% is "a clear warning sign".

#### **4.5.2.7 Political and protests**

The political and protest sagas continue to be covered by the media, thereby promoting more negative coverage and negatively impacting the Municipality's reputation. Poor service delivery in ALM has resulted from poor leadership which has not been handling the finances of the organisation responsibly (Motubatse, Ngwakwe and Sebola 2017: 9). The leadership of municipalities and local authorities, including that of the ALM, are generally politically appointed which results in leaders tending to politicise the operation and having 'myopic' knowledge of management principles, which then affect the provision of services (Ndevu and Muller 2017). These include conflicts between the political and administrative interface, the poor ability of councillors to cope with local government demands in service delivery and incomplete separation of powers between the municipality and political parties (Ndevu and Muller 2017).

*There has been so much negative coverage owing to violent protests.*

Participant 14

*ALM has always been portrayed negatively in media. Previously it was due to the political unrest and infighting within the council. That led to an outburst of protests in the communities.* Participant 10

*There had been reports about political instability and violence that resulted in the torching of municipal assets on more than one occasion.* Participant 17

#### **4.5.2.8 Not acknowledging past indignities**

The Municipality did not acknowledge the past indignities during the apartheid days when African communities were not serviced, and only white suburbs were given priority and services. The current government inherited problems that were never adequately resolved prior to them taking over.

*Historically, the media also presented a single story in the sense that while the local government in the apartheid system wholly failed to address the needs of the black majority of the South African population, pitifully so, such news remained unknown to most of the white population.* Participant 3

*Historically, essential services were segregated, and communities did not receive basic services; the current municipalities inherited an apartheid legacy, and the media demonstrates the level of inequalities that still exist. Participant 8*

The media was also very one-sided, and their reports were based primarily on communities and not on the Municipality's side. They also based their coverage on a lack of hard facts or evidence.

*Historically it has not been good at all and all that has been reported at times is a reality, and pockets of others are not a total reflection or opinions from the municipal side. Participant 10*

*The media impact is damaging to the Municipality as what is reported is the only version communities have, and the side of the Municipality is not reported. Participant 16*

*I would also say that most things are not a true reflection of what is happening in the Municipality, and it is essential to formulate your conclusion based on valid information. As such, for me, the investigative side of the media is lacking. So, if the media listens without facts or research, then the media is failing. Participant 6*

*In post-apartheid, democratic South Africa, the media's portrayal of local government presents a comprehensive picture of events to the population. There is much more transparency and equality in shared news. For ALM, we, however, still see that we are less reported and our views are not fully incorporated. Participant 10*

#### **4.5.2.9 Challenges faced in terms of municipality reputation**

This subtheme established the critical challenges faced in terms of municipality reputation. The lack of controls further compounded the matter. The challenges that emerged in this theme included corruption and political infighting. Internal controls need to be improved to improve accountability and processes.

*The lapse in oversight and lack of controls relating to compliance is evident in several areas, including supply chain management. Participant 12*

*The state of internal controls is still not improving. Participant 14*

*The root causes of the poor state of local government continues to be a slow response to our call to strengthen internal controls, vacancies and instability that hamper progress, and a lack of consequences for accountability failures.*

Participant 10

The Municipality faced a mammoth challenge of lack of electricity, water, road and infrastructure for the community.

*Many rural areas still struggle to access essential services such as water, electricity, and good roads.* Participant 13

*I am shocked that we still have so many mud schools, roads and no water in the Municipality after 25 years of democracy.* Participant 15

*Electricity crisis and instability issues track back to 2018 when the Municipality was burnt.* Participant 10

*Service delivery issues in terms of dilapidated electricity infrastructure, and road infrastructure.* Participant 1

#### **4.5.2.10 Corruption**

Corruption was rampant. There were many corruption-related cases. This included not only financial corruption but also social corruption.

*Additionally, the Municipality is experiencing a lot of corruption-related cases. Development is moving so slowly in the Eastern Cape and in this municipality due to the inefficiencies and corruption of government officials. This government is very unethical. For example, it is concerning to hear that before you can be employed in some government departments and municipalities, you must first pay or give sexual favours if you are a woman. It is common knowledge that if you are not connected to anyone within a particular department, you will never be considered for a job; you must know and be known by someone for you to be considered.* Participant 1

#### **4.5.2.11 Political infighting**

The political infighting led to added instability and ineffectiveness. In addition, some managers were appointed for political reasons rather than competency reasons.

*Levels of political infighting are very high; it is primarily a political agenda that is pushed, which also is a failed one. Municipal managers are also generally politically appointed, with no skills or expertise whatsoever. Participant 10*

#### **4.5.2.12 Adverse media reports**

The media has painted a poor picture of ALM in terms of poor stakeholder management. Literature can confirm that the media has been a watchdog; affording ALM a chance to account and giving a voice to account and ALM residents. Recent media reports (Dayimani, 2022;) and scholarly research (Meyer *et al.* 2021) indicate that stakeholders are becoming increasingly concerned about the ALM's reputation, with issues such as perceived corruption, lack of transparency, and inadequate service delivery being raised. This condition may compromise the Municipality's ability to meet its residents' expectations and requirements, potentially impeding social and economic development in the region (Van Ryzin, 2011). In 2018, youths angered by unemployment and nepotism took to the streets and burnt down the municipal offices, a local clinic, and the newly built Mlungisi mall (Munzhedzi and Makwembere, 2019: 12).

*Internal and some stakeholders are somehow a cause of how we are viewed, as their decisions are somehow not backed by evidence. Employees were interviewed by SABC, saying the Municipality can get revenue from the grazing lands, but we are not going to generate millions from such a place, and this would not even give you R50 000 on this revenue source. So, this kind of reporting is not covered, and this is a challenge we are facing. Part of the reasons and one of the challenges is around the issue of negative coverage, but more importantly, for me, is our internal stakeholders aiding a situation where we receive negative media coverage (people blowing hot air that is not even factual) – they have a very negative bearing on how we are viewed by the media and communities which is nonfactual. Participant 2*

Scholars like Lu and Wang (2016) and Fan, Geddes, and Flory (2011) identify media as the primary conduit via which stakeholders form perceptions. Similarly, Andrews and Caren (2010) indicate in their study that the news media can influence public opinion, authorities, and elites to create the public agenda. With the expansion of news media and internet media, members of the public are exposed to a plethora of sources about what happens in each organization,

which may shape their impressions. According to Shamma and Hassan's (2009) research findings, the mass media is the primary medium via which the general public generates perceptions regarding business reputation. According to Di Tella and Franceschelli (2011), the media has an essential impact in modern democracy.

#### **4.5.2.13 Exposing issues**

The media did serve a positive role in exposing the rampant issues. This included corruption, poor service delivery, mismanagement, and salary-related issues. This could serve to expose and mitigate such weaknesses.

*Media badly taints local government for various reasons. Corrupt tendencies are common in local government. Participant 10*

*Lots of funds are spent at the local level, and bribes are common and are exposed by the media. Participant 11*

*Harmful in so far as the torching of the municipal buildings is concerned, including the inability to pay its employees' salaries. Participant 13*

*The media reports the real issues that are happening in the Municipality, i.e., months when the Municipality cannot afford to pay the salaries of its employees. Participant 17*

*Eskom is cutting the electricity from the Municipality due to the municipality not paying its debt; all of these create a trust deficit between the Municipality and its stakeholders. Participant 9*

#### **Voices of the people**

The media captured the community's voice when the Municipality was not fulfilling their needs. However, this was sometimes subjective and unclear.

*In most cases, the media often portrays the voice of the people; hence, (I am subjected to be corrected) whatever they say is, in most cases, drawn from the ground through what citizens are saying about that municipality. Participant 11*

*Internal and some stakeholders are somehow a cause of how we are viewed, as their decisions are somehow not backed by evidence. Employees were interviewed by SABC, saying the Municipality can get revenue from the grazing*

*lands, but we are not going to generate millions from such a place, and this would not even give you R50 000 on this revenue source.* Participant 3

#### **4.5.2.14 Distrust**

Distrust was highly ranked. It was evident via multiple responses that the media's impact was associated with distrust among stakeholders towards local government. Such stakeholders include the communities, suppliers, employees and other government and private sector stakeholders. This is especially when people lose their lives in demonstrations caused by poor service delivery. This also affects stakeholder collaboration.

*It impacts what has been reported, changes and turns how people trust the Municipality. This is not only a community thing but also how employees react. They become bored and not interested in working. They want to serve their people but hay shame kuyenyukela.* Participant 10

*Generally, we get bad reports on local government relating to social ill, lack or limited service delivery, community protests etc. This then leads to compromised trust by stakeholders because there is information that would be seen as biased or selective.* Participant 1

*Some community members are killed while protesting for essential services, and the media demonstrates that ours is a democracy without a human face. So, this alone is making us not trust the government or the Municipality.* Participant 11

*Where stakeholder trust has political affiliation and collaboration, it will differ from the private sector and customer trust based on having fulfilled their needs and no other attached strings.* Participant 4

*The media often shapes the opinions of citizens. Thus, once the media coverage of municipalities is negative, citizens lose trust in local municipalities.* Participant 3

Empirical data suggests that there seems to be a lack of communication and dialogue between local government and communities, which results in a lack of knowledge of people's concerns (South African Government News Agency, 2018; Mokaeane, Moloi and Oksiutycz-Munyawiri 2017). Service delivery suffers as a result, and information

is not efficiently shared with these populations. According to Mokaeane, Moloji and Oksiutycz-Munyawiri (2017), local governments' reputation suffers since they don't seem capable of providing services essential to improving society. In the same vein, Brent (2009) asserts that all it takes is one incident to ruin a reputation that has been cultivated over decades.

#### **4.5.2.15      Dependant on stakeholder position**

One respondent mentioned that it was dependent on stakeholder position. If stakeholders are gaining from the Municipality, they will have a good relationship, whereas those who are receiving bad service will eventually lose trust and confidence.

*I assume that it could create negative perceptions if you look at national media, but this depends on which stakeholder you are and which area you live in.*

*Some areas are more developed than others. Participant 14*

*The media, however, can always emphasise either a particular perspective (a single-story) or a full-rounded viewpoint. The latter is mainly dependent on whose interest the media is serving. Nevertheless, if, for example, a citizen has been without water for several weeks, lost their household income due to COVID-19, walks to a nearby Home Affairs office for the fifth day in a row to obtain a birth certificate and is told to go home because the system is offline due to load shedding, no amount of media coverage can be more substantial than that citizen's lived experience when s/he needs to decide on their level of trust in their local authority. Participant 1*

Systems theory asserts that organisations can be viewed as complex systems of interdependent parts that influence each other. In the study context, the ALM municipality can be viewed as a system with different components, such as residents, employees, media, and other stakeholders. The Municipality's reputation is a crucial aspect of the system, as it influences the perceptions and actions of all its components.

The study found that poor service delivery, corruption, and lack of transparency negatively impacted the Municipality's reputation. These factors had a cascading effect on the system, causing a decline in resident satisfaction and trust and decreased employee morale.

The systems theory perspective can help to explain the reputational impact of these factors by highlighting the interconnectedness of the components of the system. For example, a decrease in resident satisfaction can lead to negative media coverage, which can further harm the Municipality's reputation. Similarly, low employee morale can lead to decreased productivity, which can impact the quality of service delivery and further harm the reputation.

Systems theory provides a valuable framework for understanding the reputational impact of various factors in studying reputation management at ALM. It highlights the importance of considering the interconnectedness of the components of the system and how they influence each other. The study's findings demonstrate the need for organisations to adopt a systems perspective in managing their reputation to ensure that they can effectively address challenges and maintain a positive image.

#### **4.5.3 Brand visibility and stakeholder engagement**

This primary theme examines brand visibility and stakeholder engagement as strategic recommendations to manage the Municipality's reputation among its stakeholders. The sub-themes discussed are Current measures and strategies in place to manage reputation, social media, radio interviews, community forums, private sector, measurements lacking, reputation management, publicise achievements, local authority strategies, economic development, IDP investor relations and service delivery. This list of sub-themes is wide-ranging but this is necessary in order to understand the complexity of the situation and recommend suitable strategies for reputation management.

Gainey (2009: 273) points out that best practices in crisis management and public relations are standard across organisations:

- a) Ensure executive support for incorporating crisis management into local government systems and the ALM strategic planning process. The crisis plan should not be viewed as a separate entity, but rather as an integral part of the public organisation's day-to-day operations and consciousness.
- b) Create and maintain a crisis management plan.

- c) Using vulnerability audits, identify potential risks or weaknesses within the local government and the ALM, as well as potential threats or weaknesses outside.
- d) Assemble and train a crisis-management team at the local public organisation to lead planning efforts for the local government and ALM's response in an actual crisis.
- e) Develop a healthy relationship with the media.
- f) Pay close attention to the role of leadership in a crisis. Leaders frame the meaning of a crisis event, expressing appropriate concern and support, overseeing mitigation, coordinating support, and facilitating timely, open communication.

Yilmaz and Kucuk (2010: 235) suggest that in addition to the above best practice items, holistic, proactive, and systematic reputation crisis management:

- Establishes stakeholder trust and confidence while maintaining a license to operate.
- Encourages investment and increases customer and supplier loyalty.
- Reduces the need for regulatory action.
- Allows for the recruitment and retention of the best.

The preceding literature serves as a guide for an organisation's service to its people to preserve a positive reputation among internal and external stakeholders. According to Padamo (2014), one stakeholder group provides reputational benefits that are easily transferable and may affect the perceptions of other stakeholder groups. While stakeholders' interests are intricately varied and often contradictory, it is vital that an organisation delivers specialised information to each stakeholder group and creates a solid reputation through interactions with these stakeholders (Padamo, 2014).

The current measures and strategies in place to manage reputation include the following.

#### **4.5.3.1 Social media**

Social media platforms such as Facebook interact with the community and provide a platform to post relevant information and publicise achievements.

*The Municipality's communication strategy will include social media and reputational issues.* Participant 3

*I created a Facebook page to post service delivery achievements.* Participant 5

*There has been an increased use of social media to publicise municipal programmes.* Participant 9

*There is a Facebook page for Amahlathi municipality to inform the community of Amahlathi programmes, where they send comments to assess our performance.* Participant 16

*There is also a Facebook page which is interactive and assists in collecting some of the grievances the community has. Moreover, media/social media platforms promote their image as citizen-centred.* Participant 8

#### **4.5.3.2 Radio interviews**

Radio interviews have been conducted to share information and the state of affairs of the Municipality.

*The Mayor conducts radio interviews to share the state of affairs in the Municipality.* Participant 5

*Sound works with Fort Hare community radio to communicate municipal programmes to cut costs.* Participant 8

*Currently, the institution is making use of communicating through the community radio station (Fort Hare Radio).* Participant 6

#### **4.5.3.3 Community forums**

A variety of community forums incorporate relevant stakeholders. Forums in place include the Aids Council, Youth Forum, Moral Regeneration Movement, ward committees, Farmers' Association, Business Forum and others.

*There is a need for the establishment of Public participation forums such as (local Aids councils, Youth forums, Moral Regeneration Movements, ward committees, Farmer's associations, Business forums and other formations.*  
Participant 4

*There are community forums like ratepayers associations, farmers' associations and imbizos for their programmes and planned activities. Participant 11*

*ALM has various forms of citizen engagement, such as IDPs, izimbizos, and road shows. Participant 6*

#### **4.5.3.4 Private sector**

The Municipality has also tried to enter into partnerships with the private sector to gain confidence and financial investment.

*With the assistance of the Department of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs, the Municipality has entered into a partnership with the private sector, like NBI, intending to rebuild its confidence and allow private investors to invest in the Municipality. This will assist in rebuilding the image of the Municipality and allow for economic activities that will also assist in job opportunities, thus reducing unemployment and the number of households in the Indigent Register. Participant 3*

#### **4.5.3.5 Measurements lacking**

However, some respondents felt that there was a lack of measurement. No policy governs media use, inclusive of social media. There was also a lack of control over who said what on various media platforms. Furthermore, the communication plan seemed unclear.

*We do not have measures in place to manage the reputation. We should have a social media policy because people go on Facebook and say whatever they want ... we have an incident of one employee suspended for posting on Facebook. We do not have a policy at all, but I think the policy will be our first step. Participant 9*

*Our communication strategy is basically close to non-existent now because there is really no control in terms of who speaks to the media and who is authorised. In terms of developmental strategies, there are, but again, due to financial issues, it becomes even an issue to conduct youth activities or initiatives that will showcase our care as the Municipality. Participant 5*

*None that can fully be pinpointed as their communication strategy is close to non-existent; however, there are pockets of recovery plans in place. Participant 10*

#### **4.5.3.6 Reputation management**

A media strategy was needed as a critical strategy for reputation management. This strategy must serve to address bad publicity and attract investment.

*A media strategy is required to coordinate and structure the use of media by the Municipality. Participant 4*

*Concerning reputation management in local government, recommendations in terms of added strategy are that: municipalities first and foremost have to get the implementation of their strategies and IDPs right; the statements made by the Auditor-General have to be effected efficiently; eradicate corruption; and institute consequence management. A respected reputation will follow. Participant 13*

#### **4.5.3.7 Publicise achievements**

The media strategy must publicise all achievements using relevant platforms and positively promote an image.

*The Municipality needs to erect billboards to publish achievements. This is not done owing to financial constraints. Participant 14*

*We need a communications strategy that proactively aims to profile municipal projects, work services and interventions. Such strategies are, however, nothing without the budget to publicise internal municipal departments. Participant 15*

#### **4.5.3.8 IDP-investor relations**

A stakeholder strategy will help attract investors as they will receive adequate and correct information to inform their investment.

*These are important for investors because they will not come if they do not know what you have planned for the future; for example, if I want to put a manufacturing plant in Stutterheim, I should know that the spatial some is in the IDP and gazetted and that the Municipality has the bulk infrastructure planned.*

*If these are not checked, the IDP will be sitting with no document and the investor will not come. Participant 7*

#### **4.5.3.9 The local authorities' strategies**

This strategy is crucial as its prime focus will be on the local authorities and community. This is important in building community-municipality relations and mitigating corruption, violence and unrest.

*The local authorities' strategies will be to reduce the mismanagement of funds and implement a better mechanism to reduce corruption in the local government. Provide quality service to the consumer who pays government taxes every month. Participant 5*

*The local authorities must become effective and efficient and improve the image of local government by changing the bad attitude which still goes on across the country in terms of poor service delivery championed by the ANC government. Participant 8*

#### **4.5.3.10 Economic development**

Economic development is crucial in South Africa. Hence rural areas must be developed and adequate sanitation and infrastructure provided. Employment opportunities must also be provided to alleviate poverty.

*The IDP are specific plans the Municipality needs to have, which I think are lacking. For example, your local economic development strategies, which have been last reviewed a couple of years ago. Your spatial planning strategy document needs to be finalised, indicating what the land use plans are going forward, which would assist investors in our plans. Participant 5*

*Economic development enhancement that links rural economy to urban and town economy. Amahlathi is a rural municipality; the majority of people migrate towards the township to develop informal settlements closest to the road network to access towns quickly and enjoy all those benefits accessible to people living in the township. Participant 8*

#### **4.5.3.11 Service delivery**

Good service delivery also promotes the development of any area. Hence sustainable service delivery must become the mantra of the Municipality. This can improve community relations, boost the Municipality's image, and instil confidence.

*Consistency in service delivery as our communications should essentially be around that core mandate of providing sustainable services with consistency – unwavering.* Participant 17

*The emphasis of ALM should be on improved service delivery. When clients are satisfied, the company's reputation improves. Communication if service cannot be provided.* Participant 9

According to systems theory, organisations are complex systems made up of interdependent parts interacting with each other and the environment to achieve their goals. In the ALM context, the parts can be understood as stakeholders, such as citizens, employees, and local businesses, who contribute to the Municipality's reputation through their interactions with the system.

One critical insight from systems theory is that changes in one part of the system can have cascading effects on other parts. This is particularly relevant in reputation management, where a negative incident in one area can harm the Municipality's reputation across all stakeholders. For example, a significant service delivery failure could result in a loss of trust among citizens, leading to a loss of support from local businesses and employees.

Based on this understanding of systems theory, the study provides several recommendations for managing the Municipality's reputation. Firstly, the study highlights the importance of considering all stakeholders and their interactions with the Municipality when developing reputation management strategies. By taking a holistic approach, the Municipality can address any potential negative impacts on its reputation and ensure that all stakeholders are aligned in their perceptions of the Municipality.

Secondly, the study recommends proactively managing the Municipality's reputation through open and transparent communication with stakeholders. This includes actively seeking feedback from citizens, responding to concerns promptly, and regularly

updating stakeholders on the municipality's activities and plans. The Municipality can build trust and maintain positive relationships with its stakeholders by engaging in open and transparent communication.

Finally, the study highlights the importance of continuous monitoring and adaptation in reputation management. Systems theory recognises that organisations are constantly changing and adapting in response to their environment, and the same is true for the ALM's reputation.

By regularly monitoring its reputation and adapting its strategies accordingly, the Municipality can ensure its reputation remains positive and aligns with its goals. In a nutshell, systems theory provides a valuable framework for understanding the complex dynamics of reputation management at the ALM. By considering all stakeholders, engaging in open and transparent communication, and continuously monitoring and adapting its strategies, the Municipality can ensure its reputation remains positive and supports its goals.

#### **4.6 Mixed method discussion of the findings (integration)**

The results of the research objectives developed by the researcher for this study are addressed in this section. A of the literature, theories embedded in the literature, and empirical findings as reflected in interviews and participant questionnaire data are used to address the results.

The findings revealed that the reputation of ALM among its stakeholders was generally perceived as suboptimal. Stakeholders expressed concerns about the efficiency and effectiveness of service delivery (Van Ryzin, 2004), transparency (Grimmelikhuijsen *et al.*, 2013), and communication (Vigoda-Gadot, 2007). They also identified the need for the Municipality to improve its responsiveness to community needs (Lukensmeyer and Brigham, 2002), and enhance stakeholder engagement (Bovaird, 2007).

Regarding stakeholder expectations, the study found that stakeholders expected the Municipality to demonstrate accountability (Romzek and Dubnick, 1987), transparency (Hood 2006), and good governance (Graham, Haidt and Nosek, 2003). They also sought improved service delivery (Van Ryzin 2004), timely communication (VigodaGadot, 2007), and the active involvement of community members in decision-making processes (Fung, 2006). The data demonstrate that individuals are generally

dissatisfied with the ALM's failure to provide services. These findings are consistent with Fourie and Poggenpoel's (2017) contention that citizens' perceptions of government include incompetent public servants, a lack of accountability, poor human resource practices, inadequate procurement practices, and a lack of leadership. Cahill, Batista, and Kawalek's (2004) study supports the conclusions of this study by demonstrating that wider society constantly discusses, analyses, and debates government problems, with the majority perceiving it unfavourably or without concern (neutral).

Similarly, Managa (2012) observes that many South Africans have limited faith in the government's efficiency, efficacy, and responsiveness, as evidenced by their protests. The author also claims that underperformance and incompetence in municipalities, combined with corruption, have contributed to communities losing faith in local government. Furthermore, unfulfilled political promises, abuse of authority, and a lack of accountability to the public by councillors and government officials exacerbate the situation.

The authors go on to say that the costs of a permissive culture toward corruption include a loss of revenue, a loss of trust, a loss of values, a loss of credibility and legitimacy, and a loss of the democratic ethos and impulse within institutions and organizations. People in the Eastern Cape and particular the ALM people have limited access to new technical developments, forcing them to rely increasingly on public personnel for services. However, the findings of this study demonstrate that the performance of the South African public sector has not met residents' expectations, resulting in a variety of service delivery problems that are an expression of angry citizens and low stakeholder engagement and trust.

On the other side, reputation is critical in establishing and maintaining an organization's credibility within its stakeholder loop. It serves as a strategic platform for maintaining ties with a wide range of stakeholders. According to Lü et al. (2014), stakeholders may have different expectations of a company; as a result, many firms must use different strategic tools to meet various stakeholders' expectations in order to establish a favourable corporate image and, as a result, a good corporate reputation. Similarly, Brnn and Brnn (2015) believe that a firm's reputation is its most valuable asset, and hence one that should be protected.

The study's findings demonstrate that the ALM's reputation is badly managed, and all of the people interviewed in the study expressed a negative assessment of the ALM's reputation management. The empirical facts demonstrate that ties between citizens and the ALM have deteriorated significantly, putting the local government (ALM) legitimacy at risk. According to the findings, residents in the ALM are usually dissatisfied with the municipality due to its perceived failure to keep commitments and satisfy citizens' expectations.

Valentine (2013) corroborates these findings, arguing that public sector organizations face more difficulties than corporations in managing their reputations because they struggle to emotionally connect with their audiences, present themselves as unique, and communicate as coherent organizations. Waeraas and Byrkjeflot (2012), on the other hand, say that reputation management is a promising strategy for many public organizations that deal with a negative image connected to rule-orientation, bureaucracy, and inefficiency. The ALM must make a deliberate effort to control its reputation in order to maintain popular support and increase its legitimacy and trust.

In summary, the study sheds light on the reputation of ALM and the expectations of its stakeholders. The findings provide valuable insights that can be used to develop and implement sustainable reputation management strategies for the Municipality, ultimately contributing to better governance (Graham, Haidt and Nosek, 2003) and improved stakeholder relations (Bovaird, 2007).

#### **4.7 Chapter summary**

The study aimed to explore reputation management at ALM. A sequential mixed methods design was used to gather qualitative and quantitative data to understand the topic comprehensively. The results chapter provides a summary of the findings from the study. Quantitative data was collected through a survey questionnaire administered to a sample of residents of ALM. The results indicate that the residents generally had a negative view of the Municipality's reputation management practices, with over 70% of the respondents agreeing that the Municipality was failing to manage its reputation. However, a small proportion (20%) of respondents felt the Municipality could improve its reputation management efforts.

The qualitative data, collected through in-depth interviews with key employees of ALM, provided further insights into the reputation management practices at the Municipality. The interviews revealed that the Municipality had a reactive approach to reputation management and failed to implement strategies to enhance its reputation, including regular communication with stakeholders, community engagement initiatives, and social media monitoring. The results also showed that the Municipality faced challenges in managing its reputation, including negative perceptions from some community members and limited resources to implement reputation management strategies effectively. Despite these challenges, the Municipality is committed to improving its reputation and is taking steps to address these challenges.

In summary, the study provides a comprehensive overview of the reputation management practices at ALM. The results suggest that the Municipality is generally perceived negatively by its employees and residents and has made some efforts to implement various strategies to enhance its reputation. However, the Municipality faces some challenges in managing its reputation and will need to continue its efforts to address these challenges and improve its reputation management practices.

## **CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **5.1 Introduction**

The concluding chapter of this sequential mixed methods study exploring reputation management at ALM provides insights into the effectiveness of the Municipality's reputation management strategies. The study involved qualitative and quantitative methods, starting with collecting qualitative data through semi-structured interviews (Appendix 4a) and survey questionnaire (Appendix 4b). This was followed by a survey to quantify the findings from the qualitative phase. The study's results revealed that ALM's reputation management efforts were generally perceived as ineffective by its stakeholders. The Municipality's communication strategies were found to be insufficient, with many stakeholders feeling that they were not adequately informed about the municipality's activities and decisions. Additionally, the Municipality's efforts to engage with stakeholders were seen as inadequate, with stakeholders feeling that their input and feedback were not considered in decision-making processes.

The findings of this study provide important insights into the challenges faced by ALM in managing its reputation. The results highlight the need for the Municipality to reevaluate its communication and engagement strategies and to implement more effective methods for managing its reputation. The study provides recommendations for improving the Municipality's reputation management efforts, including increasing transparency, improving communication, and actively involving stakeholders in decision-making processes.

### **5.2 Summary of research and findings**

The present study was premised on the following objectives:

- To explore Amahlathi Local Municipality's reputation among its stakeholders;
- To explore how media reports reflect the opinion of Amahlathi community members in terms of reputation;
- To explore stakeholders' expectations of Amahlathi Local Municipality; and
- To identify sustainable strategies to manage Amahlathi Local Municipality's reputation.

### **5.2.1 ALM's reputation among its stakeholders**

The ALM is located in the Eastern Cape Province of South Africa and serves over 100,000 residents. The Municipality has faced numerous challenges in recent years, including allegations of corruption, poor service delivery, and a lack of transparency. These challenges have significantly impacted the reputation of ALM among its stakeholders, including residents, business owners, and civil society organisations.

One major factor contributing to the Municipality's poor reputation is the perception of corruption and mismanagement. Residents and businesses have made allegations of corruption within the Municipality, eroding trust in the Municipality's leadership and administration. Additionally, there have been reports of mismanagement of funds, which has further fuelled the perception of corruption and raised questions about the Municipality's accountability and transparency.

Another factor that has negatively impacted the reputation of ALM is its inadequate service delivery. The Municipality has been criticised for its inability to provide residents with essential water, electricity, and waste management services. This has led to widespread complaints from residents and businesses, who feel that the Municipality is not adequately addressing their needs.

### **5.2.2 Media reports and the opinions of ALM community members in terms of reputation**

The relationship between media reports and the opinions of community members plays a crucial role in shaping the reputation of a particular entity. This is particularly true in the case of the ALM, where the media's reporting significantly impacts the opinions and perceptions of the community members. In this study, the researcher explored the relationship between media reports and the opinions of the ALM community members in terms of reputation.

Media reports can have a profound effect on public perception and opinion, particularly in the context of a local municipality like Amahlathi. News stories and articles published in the media can shape public opinion by providing information and highlighting certain aspects of a situation. In the case of ALM, media reports can impact the community's perceptions of the Municipality's reputation by presenting either a positive or negative image of its activities and operations.

Personal experiences and interactions with the Municipality also influence the opinions of community members. The study exploring reputation management at ALM found that community members' opinions are heavily influenced by the services provided by the Municipality and the level of responsiveness and accountability demonstrated by its officials. The study also found that community members' opinions were positively influenced by the Municipality's efforts to engage with the community and address their needs and concerns.

However, it is also important to note that media reports can sometimes be biased or misleading, leading to the dissemination of false information. In such cases, the opinions of community members can be distorted, leading to negative perceptions and a damaged reputation. Therefore, the ALM must manage its reputation effectively by ensuring that media reports accurately reflect its activities and operations and by engaging with the community to address their concerns and perceptions.

In summation, the relationship between media reports and the opinions of community members is complex and dynamic, particularly in the context of reputation management at ALM. Media reports can significantly impact public perception and opinion, while personal experiences and interactions with the Municipality influence community members' opinions. To effectively manage its reputation, the ALM must ensure that media reports are accurate and engage with the community to address their perceptions and concerns.

### **5.2.3 Stakeholders' expectations of ALM**

Stakeholders play a vital role in shaping an organisation's reputation, and their expectations and perceptions greatly influence how the organisation is perceived in the public eye. The ALM is no exception. In a study exploring reputation management at the Municipality, it is essential to understand the expectations and perceptions of stakeholders, as they are critical drivers of the Municipality's reputation.

The primary stakeholders of the ALM include residents, local businesses, non-profit organisations, and other community groups. These stakeholders expect the Municipality to provide essential services such as clean water, sanitation, waste management, effective road maintenance, public safety, and emergency services.

They also expect the municipality to be transparent, accountable in its decision-making processes, and responsive to their needs and concerns.

Residents expect the Municipality to provide essential services and maintain their communities' infrastructure efficiently. They also expect the Municipality to create a safe and secure environment that supports economic growth and development. Furthermore, they expect the Municipality to be transparent and accountable in its decision-making processes and responsive to their needs and concerns.

Local businesses expect the Municipality to create a business-friendly environment that encourages economic growth and development. They also expect the Municipality to provide reliable and efficient infrastructure and access to resources and services that support business operations. Additionally, they expect the Municipality to be transparent and accountable in its decision-making processes and responsive to their needs and concerns.

Non-profit organisations and community groups expect the Municipality to support their initiatives and programmes and access resources and services that help them achieve their goals. They also expect the Municipality to be transparent, accountable in its decision-making processes, and responsive to their needs and concerns. Thus, stakeholders' expectations of the ALM are diverse and encompass a range of issues, including the provision of essential services, transparency and accountability, economic growth and development, and responsiveness to the needs and concerns of the community. Understanding these expectations and perceptions is essential for effective reputation management at the Municipality.

#### **5.2.4 Sustainable strategies to manage ALM's reputation**

Reputation management is crucial for any organisation, especially in the public sector, where a municipality's reputation directly impacts its citizens. In the case of ALM, ensuring a positive reputation is crucial to its success and the well-being of its citizens. This subsection explores sustainable strategies for managing the reputation of ALM.

Transparency and accountability are critical elements in building a positive reputation for a municipality. ALM should adopt open and transparent communication with its citizens and stakeholders to increase trust and credibility. The Municipality can share information about its decision-making processes, budgets, and performance results.

In addition, the Municipality should have an effective grievance mechanism for citizens to raise concerns and receive feedback. This will create an environment of accountability, where the Municipality is held responsible for its actions and decisions.

Another effective strategy for managing the reputation of ALM is community engagement. By involving citizens in the decision-making processes of the municipality, the Municipality can ensure that its actions align with its citizens' needs and expectations. The Municipality can also use community engagement to understand better the challenges its citizens face and build trust with them. The Municipality can achieve this through regular public meetings, town hall events, and community-based initiatives.

Service delivery excellence is critical to maintaining a positive reputation for a municipality. ALM should strive to provide efficient and effective services to its citizens. This can be achieved by investing in technology, training its employees, and improving processes and systems. The Municipality should also monitor its performance regularly and make improvements where necessary. This will help build the Municipality's reputation as a provider of high-quality services and improve the overall well-being of its citizens.

Stakeholder management is another important aspect of reputation management. ALM should engage with its stakeholders, including local businesses, civil society organisations, and government agencies, to build strong relationships and ensure its actions align with their needs and expectations. The Municipality can achieve this through regular stakeholder engagement events, workshops, and forums.

### **5.3 Limitations of the study**

A sequential mixed methods study exploring reputation management at ALM has several limitations that must be acknowledged in relation to the interpretation of the findings and conclusions of the study. The study relied on a convenience sample of participants, which raises the possibility of selection bias. This can affect the representativeness and generalizability of the findings to the population of interest. The study has a small sample size, which may not be representative of the larger population. This can limit the validity of the findings and reduce the power of the

statistical tests. The study focuses on reputation management at ALM without considering the broader context of the organisation and its operations. This can lead to a limited understanding of the factors affecting reputation management.

#### **5.4 Suggestions and implications for future research**

This sequential mixed methods study exploring reputation management at ALM provides valuable insights into the challenges faced by the Municipality in managing its reputation. However, there are several areas where future research can build on the findings of this study. The study focused only on ALM, and further research can expand the scope to other municipalities to see if the findings can be replicated. The study identifies the factors affecting reputation management but does not delve into the details. Further research can explore these factors in-depth to understand the causes better. This study was conducted at a single point in time, and a longitudinal study can provide a better understanding of the evolution of reputation management practices over time. The study focused on the Municipality's perspective but did not incorporate stakeholders' views, such as residents, businesses, and organisations. Future research can include their perspectives to get a more comprehensive understanding of reputation management practices. The study did not explore the role of technology in reputation management. Future research can explore how technology can be used to enhance reputation management practices at the Municipality. In summary, the findings of the sequential mixed methods study exploring reputation management at ALM provide a starting point for future research. By exploring the factors affecting reputation management in-depth, incorporating the views of stakeholders, and exploring the role of technology, future research can provide valuable insights into effective reputation management practices.

#### **5.5 Conclusions from the study**

The sequential mixed methods study exploring reputation management at the ALM highlights the importance of considering qualitative and quantitative data in understanding reputation management practices. The findings show that the Municipality's reputation is positively impacted by effective communication and transparency with stakeholders but negatively impacted by corruption and poor service delivery.

Quantitative data from the survey revealed that a majority of stakeholders have a negative perception of the municipality's reputation. Qualitative data from the interviews provided a more in-depth understanding of the challenges faced by the Municipality in maintaining a positive reputation and the strategies used to overcome these challenges. The study highlights the need for the Municipality to focus on increasing transparency and communication with stakeholders, as well as addressing issues related to corruption and service delivery. This can be achieved by implementing measures such as regular stakeholder engagement sessions, proactive communication strategies, and effective internal control systems to prevent corruption.

In conclusion, the study highlights the importance of considering qualitative and quantitative data to understand reputation management practices. The findings can inform the development of effective reputation management strategies by the municipality and help to maintain a positive reputation, which is essential for building trust and credibility with stakeholders.

## **5.6 Recommendations arising from the study**

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are made:

- ALM needs to move from a fragmented approach to managing corporate reputation drivers such as corporate image, branding, and corporate social responsibility, which have been proven by literature to be inadequate (Carvahlo 2006; Romenti 2010), to a more integrated corporate reputation management strategy.
- There is a need for ALM to re-evaluate its reputation risk perception, given that this is becoming the number 1 risk for most organisations at the global level, as indicated by Deloitte (2014).
- Reputation as a risk needs to be managed at a strategic level with the General Manager being overall accountable given the proven association between the top executive's reputation and the organisation's reputation (Kitchen and Laurence 2003).
- As an organisation within the public sector, ALM needs to improve corporate reputation management as this is important in improving people's confidence and loyalty to them, as proven in a study by Andreassen (1994).

- Because corporate reputation management in the public sector is often impeded by budget cuts and political interference (Luoma-aho, 2007), there is a need for government policy change, which facilitates increased investment in corporate reputation management in the public sector organisation.
- Based on this understanding of systems theory, the study provides several recommendations for managing the Municipality's reputation. Firstly, the study highlights the importance of considering all stakeholders and their interactions with the Municipality when developing reputation management strategies. By taking a holistic approach, the Municipality can address any potential negative impacts on its reputation and ensure that all stakeholders are aligned in their perceptions of the Municipality.
- To address these concerns and manage the Municipality's reputation, the study proposes several sustainable strategies. These include establishing transparent communication channels (Grimmelikhuijsen et al., 2013), improving service delivery (Van Ryzin, 2004), fostering a culture of accountability (Romzek and Dubnick, 1987), and involving stakeholders in decision-making processes (Fung, 2006). The researcher also recommends that the Municipality invests in staff training and development (Bryson, Crosby and Bloomberg, 2016), infrastructure improvement (Siemiatycki, 2011), and continuous monitoring and evaluation of its reputation management strategies (Wæraas and Maor, 2015).

## **5.7 Conclusion**

Reputation management or branding is increasingly important for public organisations. It has much to do with social accountability, meaning that an organisation, often without a formal obligation to do so, tries to provide information and justify its actions to various audiences. The point of departure in this study was to investigate ALM and the factors that affect how it manages its reputation. Research has shown that corporate reputation management is a critical business issue in most organisations worldwide. However, much research on the significance of corporate reputation management has been done within the private sector, with limited research on its impact on the public sector, particularly in the developing world.

Moreover, most public sector organisations are characterised by a persistently negative reputation. The results reveal that the management of reputation is a

multifaceted concept. Hence, corporate social responsibility, emotional appeal, financial performance, products and services, vision and leadership and workplace environment all feature, but it is unlikely that the participants perceive reputation as separate from image and identity as they use the terms synonymously. The responses reveal that a systems view of an organisation, being social in a social system, indicates that the various components in the internal environment cannot be separated from the external environment as they are continuously and dynamically interacting with one another with corporate communication acting as a 'glue', which holds them together. Corporate communication is thus an essential part of the system as it aligns the organisation's vision, culture and image that people have of an organisation.

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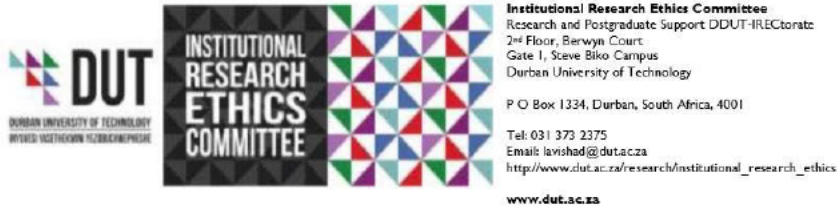
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# APPENDICES

## Appendix 1: Ethical clearance



31 October 2022

Mr P Qaba  
32 Jubase Street  
Umtata  
Eastern Cape

Dear Mr Qaba

**Reputation management at local government level: A case study of Amahlathi Local Municipality**  
**Ethical Clearance number IREC 145/22**

The DUT-Institutional Research Ethics Committee acknowledges receipt of your final data collection tool for review.

We are pleased to inform you that the data collection tool has been approved. Kindly ensure that participants used for the pilot study are not part of the main study.

In addition, the DUT-IREC acknowledges receipt of your gatekeeper permission letters.

Please note that **FULL APPROVAL** is granted to your research proposal. You may proceed with data collection.

Any adverse events [serious or minor] which occur in connection with this study and/or which may alter its ethical consideration must be reported to the DUT-IREC according to the DUT-IREC Standard Operating Procedures (SOP's).

Please note that any deviations from the approved proposal require the approval of the DUT-IREC as outlined in the DUT-IREC SOP's.

Yours Sincerely



Prof J K Adam  
Chairperson: DUT-IREC

## Appendix 2: Letter of information and consent form – questionnaire

### Appendix B5a: Letter of information



### LETTER OF INFORMATION

**Title of the Research Study:** Reputation Management at local government level: A case study of Amahlathi Local Municipality

**Principal Investigator/s/researcher:** Pikolomzi Qaba

**Co-Investigator/s/supervisor/s:** Prof B I Dlamini

**Brief Introduction and Purpose of the Study:**

The actions of any employee, business unit, or department influence the corporate reputation of the organisation and how it is perceived by external stakeholders (community). Yet little is known about how to manage reputation in the public sector and the central building blocks of reputation in such environments. The proposed study seeks to explore reputation management at the Amahlathi Local Municipality (ALM) in the Eastern Cape. A profound exploration of sustainable strategies is envisaged to provide a panacea for ALM and an opportunity to promote its experience of its positive tenets to its community members amid incessant public protests that germane to poor municipal service delivery.

.....  
Good day,

I hope this letter finds you well. I am currently registered for a master's degree at the Durban University of technology. As part of this study, I am conducting research on Reputation Management at local government level: A case study of Amahlathi Local Municipality. The aim of this research is to explore sustainable strategies that will build reputation management of Amahlathi local municipality.

I would like to invite you to participate in the research. Would you be willing to participate in a one-hour interview (qualitative participants) and complete a questionnaire (quantitative participants)? Upon your approval, please provide written consent for the interview and questionnaire by completing and returning the response and consent form (Appendix 4c) attached. The researcher would like to draw your attention to the fact that your participation in the study is entirely voluntary, and you are free to leave at any time. All interview guides, questionnaires, and scripts will be shredded to ensure strict confidentiality. The information you provide will only be used for research purposes, and your identity and personal information will be kept completely confidential.

Your assistance will be much appreciated.

**Outline of the Procedures:**

9 June 2022

Service delivery protests in many parts of South Africa have become more violent over the last decade. For government organisations, reputation is a significant factor. The general public has negative views of the Amahlathi Local Municipality and believes that it is incapable of meeting the local citizens expectations. Given this poor reputation and given that we now live in a "reputation society" where decision-making is defined by an increasing dependence on track records, it is important to establish sustainable strategies for reputation management. An investigation into the Amahlathi Local Municipality's reputation is required to establish how it might be effectively harnessed to improve the municipality's performance and contribute to its goals. While public-sector reputation management is becoming more prominent in the public debate, it has garnered little attention in the scholarly literature. According to Waeraas and Byrkjeflot (2012:185), this lack of attention is despite the fact that, internationally, most public sector organisations have had persistently negative reputations stemming from poor service delivery, mismanagement, and ethical misconduct, among other allegations. The theoretical approach of this work is underpinned by stakeholder theory, which is applicable to reputation management. This theory suggests that stakeholder relationships are important to maintain local government reputations. The study will seek to explore sustainable strategies that will build reputation management of Amahlathi local municipality.

The research objectives are:

1. To explore Amahlathi Local Municipality's reputation among its stakeholders.
2. To establish how media reports reflect Amahlathi community members' opinions regarding the reputation of their municipality.
3. To examine stakeholders' expectations of Amahlathi Local Municipality.
4. To identify sustainable strategies to manage Amahlathi Local Municipality's reputation.

The research will be conducted using a mixed-method, qualitative-quantitative sequential approach. Semi-structured interviews will be conducted with 10 Amahlathi local municipality (ALM) employees and 5 representatives from the Eastern Cape Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs (ECCOGTA). Further to that 10 media sources on reputation and expectations from News24, GroundUp, Daily Dispatch and Daily Maverick between 2018 – 2021 will be chosen because they report on service delivery, citizen expectations and the reputation of the municipality. A maximum of 10 articles from these newspapers inclusively will be drawn. Quantitative data will be collected from 383 ALM residents via questionnaires. The research will use thematic content analysis to analyse qualitative data. SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Sciences) 20.0 and Microsoft Excel will be utilised for quantitative data analysis.

**Risks or Discomforts to the Participant:** No risks are envisioned to the participants.

**Explain to the participant the reasons he/she may be withdraw from the Study:** participation is voluntary; therefore, participants may withdraw at any given time if they feel that the research circumstances are non-compliant, illness, adverse reaction etc.

**Benefits:** N/A to this research study.

**Remuneration:** Research participants will not receive any remuneration for their participation.

**Costs of the Study:** No cost attached.

**Confidentiality:** The identity will not be required on both interviews and questionnaires. Unless stated otherwise the participant will be advised and permission and consent sought. For example, if the organisation is small and there is one communications manager, then if they wish to remain anonymous in their response, they will only be referred as such unless permission and consent are received to refer to them with their

9 June 2022

position.

**Results:** The results will be disseminated in the form of publication of the dissertation.

**Research-related Injury:** No research-related injury or adverse reaction are envisioned.

**Storage of all electronic and hard copies including tape recordings:** The research study upon completion will be handed to the university for further processing and storing. During the study, the researcher will keep data in a laptop that is password protected where access to the document is only for the researcher and the supervisor (for guidance purposes). The documentation will also have password protection.

**Persons to contact in the Event of Any Problems or Queries:**

<b>Researcher:</b> Mr. Pikolomzi Qaba Cell: 0837686100 <a href="mailto:pphikoe@gmail.com">pphikoe@gmail.com</a> / <a href="mailto:21618320@dut4life.ac.za">21618320@dut4life.ac.za</a>	<b>Institutional Ethics Administrator</b> Ms. Lavisha Deonarian Tel: 031 373 2375 Email: <a href="mailto:lavishad@dut.ac.za">lavishad@dut.ac.za</a>
<b>Supervisor:</b> Prof B I Dlamini Tel: 033 845 8831 Email: <a href="mailto:daminibi@dut.ac.za">daminibi@dut.ac.za</a>	Direct complaints to: <b>Acting Director: Research and Postgraduate Support</b> Prof K Motaung Tel: 031 373 2577 Email: <a href="mailto:TtiDirector@dut.ac.za">TtiDirector@dut.ac.za</a>

9 June 2022

## Appendix B5b: Letter of information and consent



### CONSENT

#### Full Title of the Study:

**Reputation Management at local government level: A case study of Amahlathi Local Municipality**

**Names of Researcher/s: Pikolomzi Qaba (Mr)**

#### Statement of Agreement to Participate in the Research Study:

- I hereby confirm that I have been informed by the researcher, Pikolomzi Qaba (name of researcher), about the nature, conduct, benefits and risks of this study - Research Ethics Clearance Number: \_\_\_\_\_,
- I have also received, read and understood the above written information (Participant Letter of Information) regarding the study.
- I am aware that the results of the study, including personal details regarding my sex, age, date of birth, initials and diagnosis will be anonymously processed into a study report.
- In view of the requirements of research, I agree that the data collected during this study can be processed in a computerised system by the researcher.
- I may, at any stage, without prejudice, withdraw my consent and participation in the study.
- I have had sufficient opportunity to ask questions and (of my own free will) declare myself prepared to participate in the study.
- I understand that significant new findings developed during the course of this research which may relate to my participation will be made available to me.

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

I, Pikolomzi Qaba (name of researcher) herewith confirm that the above participant has been fully informed about the nature, conduct and risks of the above study.

Pikolomzi Qaba  
**Full Name of Researcher**                      **Date**                      **Signature**

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

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Full Name of Legal Guardian (If applicable)** **Date**                      **Signature**

9 June 2022

***Please note the following:***

Research details must be provided in a clear, simple and culturally appropriate manner and prospective participants should be helped to arrive at an informed decision by use of appropriate language (grade 10 level- use Flesch Reading Ease Scores on Microsoft Word), selecting of a non-threatening environment for interaction and the availability of peer counselling (Department of Health, 2004).

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

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

***References:***

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

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

9 June 2022

## Appendix :

### 3 Consent form IsiXhosa

#### Appendix 7: Ingxelo yolwazi kuye nesivumelwano ngothatho-nxaxheba kuPhando (consent)



#### Full Title of the Study:

#### ***Uphononongo lokulolonga isidima solawulo koomasipala beengingqi: ngokugxile kumasipala -Amahlathi local municipality***

#### Ingxelo yeSivumelwano sokuThatha iNxaxheba kuPhononongo loPhando:

• Ndiyaqinisekisa ukuba ndazisiwe ngumphandi, uPikolomzi Qaba (igama lomphandi), malunga nobume, ukuziphatha, iinzuzo kunye nemingcipheko yolu phononongo - UkuCwangciswa kweeNqobo zoPhando

Inani: \_\_,

• Ndikwafumene, ndafunda kwaye ndayiqonda le ngcaciso ibhaliweyo ingentla (Ileta yoMthathi-nxaxheba Ulwazi) malunga nophononongo.

• Ndiyazi ukuba iziphumo zophononongo, kuqulwa neenkukacha zobuqu malunga nesini sam, ubudala, umhla wokuzalwa, amagama aqalayo kunye noxilongo ziya kuqwalaselwa ngokungaziwayo zibe yingxelo yophononongo.

• Ngokubhekiselele kwiimfuno zophando, ndiyavuma ukuba idatha eqokelelwe ngexesha lolu phononongo inokusetyenzwa kwinkqubo yekhompyutha ngumphandi.

• Ndingathi, nakweliphi na inqanaba, ngaphandle kokukhetha, ndiyirhoxise imvume yam kunye nokuthatha inxaxheba kuphononongo.

• Ndibe nethuba elaneleyo lokubuza imibuzo kwaye (ngokuzithandela kwam) ndizixelele ukuba ndikulungele ukuthatha inxaxheba kuphononongo.

• Ndiyaqonda ukuba izinto ezintsha ezifunyanisiweyo ezibalulekileyo eziphuhlisiwe ngexesha lolu phando ezinokuthi

enxulumene nokuthatha kwam inxaxheba iya kwenziwa ifumaneke kum.

Mna....., ngokwenjenje ndiyaqinisekisa ukuba ndazisiwe ngumphandi, uPikolomzi Qaba malunga nophando nokuba ndilufundile olu xwebhu ngokupheleleyo, kwaye ndikuqondile elikuqulathileyo. Apho ndibe nemibuzo khona okanye ukungaqondi, oku kucacisiwe kum ngokwaneleyo ngu Pikolomzi Qaba.

Ngaphezulu, ndiyaqonda ngokupheleleyo ukuba ndingarhoxa kolu phando nanini na kungabikho miphumela mibi, kwaye ukhathalelo lwempilo yam kwixesha elizayo aluyi kuphazamiseka. Ngoko ke, ndiyavuma ngokukhululekileyo ukuthatha inxaxheba kolu phando.

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Igama elipheleleyo  
loMthathi-nxaxheba**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Umhla**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Ixesha**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Usayino-gama**

9 June 2022

## Appendix :

### Ubhontsi wasekunene

Mna Pikolomzi Qaba, ngokwenjenje ndiyaqinisekisa ukuba aba bathathi-nxaxheba bangasesentla bazisiwe ngokupheleleyo malunga nohlobo, ukwenziwa nomngcipheko onokuvela ngolu phando lungentla.

---

#### Igama elipheleleyo loMphandi

---

#### Umhla

---

#### Usayino-gama

#### Nceda uqaphele oku kulandelayo:

Iinkcukacha zophando kufuneka zinikwe ngendlela ecacileyo, elula nefanelekileyo ngokwenkcubeko kwaye abo baza kuthathwa inxaxheba kufuneka bancedwe ukuba bafikelele kwisigqibo esifanelekileyo ngokusebenzisa ulwimi olufanelekileyo (ibakala le-10 le-Flesch Reading Ease Scores kwi-Microsoft Word), kukhethwe abangengabo. -imeko esongelayo yokusebenzisana kunye nokufumaneka kweengcebiso zoontanga (iSebe lezeMpilo, i-2004).

Ukuba umthathi-nxaxheba onokubakho akakwazi ukufunda/ukungakwazi ukufunda, ngoko ke kufuneka ubhontsi wasekunene kunye nengqina elingakhethi cala, elifundayo nelimaziyo umthathi-nxaxheba umz. umzali, umntakwenu, umhlobo, umfundisi, njl. njl. kufuneka baqinisekise ngembalelwano, basayine ngokufanelekileyo ukuba kufunyenwe invume yomlomo enolwazi (iSebe lezeMpilo, 2004).

Ukuba nabani na wenza impazamo ngokugqibezela olu xwebhu umz. umhla ongalunganga okanye impazamo yopelo, uxwebhu olutsha kufuneka lugqitywe. Uxwebhu lwentsusa olungaphelelanga kufuneka lugcinwe kwifayile yomthathi-nxaxheba kwaye lungaphoswa, kwaye iikopi zalo kufuneka zinikezelwe kumthathi-nxaxheba.

#### IiReferensi:

ISebe lezeMpilo: ngo-2004. Iinqobo zokuziphatha kuPhando lwezeMpilo: IMithetho-siseko, uLwakhiwo kunye neNkqubo <http://www.doh.gov.za/docs/factsheets/guidelines/ethnics/>

ISebe lezeMpilo. 2006. IziKhokelo zokuSebenza ngoNyango oluLungileyo eMzantsi Afrika. 2nd Ed. Iyafumaneka apha: [http://www.nhrec.org.za/?page\\_id=14](http://www.nhrec.org.za/?page_id=14)

9 June 2022

## 4 Consent form isiXhosa

### Appendix 7: Ingxelo yolwazi kuye nesivumelwano ngothatho-nxaxheba kuPhando (consent)



#### Full Title of the Study:

***Uphononongo lokulolonga isidima solawulo koomasipala beengingqi: ngokugxile kumasipala -Amahlathi local municipality***

Mna....., ngokwenjenje ndiyaqinisekisa ukuba ndazisiwe ngumphandi, uPikolomzi Qaba malunga nophando nokuba ndilufundile olu xwebhu ngokupheleleyo, kwaye ndikuqondile elikuqulathileyo. Apho ndibe nemibuzo khona okanye ukungaqondi, oku kucacisiwe kum ngokwaneleyo ngu Pikolomzi Qaba.

Ngaphezulu, ndiyaqonda ngokupheleleyo ukuba ndingarhoxa kolu phando nanini na kungabikho miphumela mibi, kwaye ukhathalelo lwempilo yam kwixesha elizayo aluyi kuphazamiseka. Ngoko ke, ndiyavuma ngokukhululekileyo ukuthatha inxaxheba kolu phando.

---

**Igama elipheleleyo loMthathi-nxaxheba**

---

**Umhla**

---

**Ixesha**

---

**Usayino-gama**

#### **Ubhontsi wasekunene**

Mna Pikolomzi Qaba, ngokwenjenje ndiyaqinisekisa ukuba aba bathathi-nxaxheba bangasesentla bazisiwe ngokupheleleyo malunga nohlobo, ukwenziwa nomngcipheko onokuvela ngolu phando lungentla.

---

**Igama elipheleleyo loMphandi**

---

**Umhla**

---

**Usayino-gama**

9 June 2022

**Appendix :**

**5 Interview guide – English**

Interview guide

Appendix 4a: Interview guide

Reputation Management at local government level: A case study of Amahlathi Local Municipality (ALM)

Section A1: Demographic Data

Age: (Apply an X on your answer)

21-30	31-40	41-50	Above 50
-------	-------	-------	----------

Gender: (Apply an X on your answer)

Female	Male	Other
--------	------	-------

Years of service in the organisation: (Apply an X on your answer)

1-3	3-5	5-10	10-15	15-20	More than 20 years
-----	-----	------	-------	-------	--------------------

Level of Education: (Apply an X on your answer)

Matric	Certificate	Degree/diploma	Honours	Masters	Ph.D.	None of the above
--------	-------------	----------------	---------	---------	-------	-------------------

Position..... (e.g., Director/manager/office/executive/political leader etc.) **NB! PLEASE DO NOT WRITE YOUR EXACT POSITION.**

Section A2: Reputation

1. What in your view, is the overall Amahlathi Local Municipality (ALM) Reputation amongst its stakeholders?
2. What are the key challenges that the ALM faces in terms of its reputation?

Section B: Expectations

3. How responsive is the ALM to its citizenry's needs and expectations?
4. To what extent are the citizenry needs fulfilled by the ALM?
5. In your view, how are community and your inputs adequately integrated into the municipality's IDP?

Section C: Media

6. How would you describe the historical and current portrayal of ALM in the media?
7. What is the impact of the media (tv, radio, and newspaper) on stakeholder's trust in local government?  
Elaborate

Section D: Sustainable Strategies

8. What are the current measures/strategies that ALM has in place to manage its reputation?
9. What do you recommend in terms of added strategy development in this area?

**Appendix :**

**6 Interview consent form – English**

**APPENDIX 6**

**Interview response and consent form for Interview participants**

To: Pikolomzi Qaba

32 Jubase Street

Mthatha

5100

Re: Participation in research

Thank you for inviting me to participate in semi-structured interview for the study that aimed to explore sustainable strategies that will build reputation management of Amahlathi local municipality. A profound exploration of reputation management is envisaged to provide a panacea for ALM in the promotion of positive tenets based on the experience of its community members.

I understand that the information will be treated confidentially and that I participate freely and voluntarily and may withdraw from the interview at any time without prejudice.

Date of interview.....

Time of interview.....

Venue..... (Online/physical)

I have carefully read and understood this agreement, and I freely and voluntarily consent and agree to be interviewed.

NAME -----

SIGNATURE -----

DATE -----

**Appendix 7: Questionnaire – English**

## Appendix :

### Appendix 4b: Questionnaire

Reputation Management at local government level: A case study of Amahlathi Local Municipality (ALM)

#### Section A: Demographic Data

Age: (Apply an X on your answer)

21-30	31-40	41-50	Above 50
-------	-------	-------	----------

Gender.....

Years living in ALM and in which local area .....

Level of Education: (Apply an X on your answer)

Matric	Degree/diploma	Honours	Masters	Phd	None of the above
--------	----------------	---------	---------	-----	-------------------

Employment status.....

#### Section B: Reputation Management (Tick your answer)

In general, would you say you have trust in local government, or that you cannot trust it?

I do trust local government	I do not trust local government
-----------------------------	---------------------------------

My local municipality maintains high-standard service delivery to its community.

Strongly agree	Agree	Not Sure	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
----------------	-------	----------	----------	-------------------

ALM is faced with many service delivery challenges.

Strongly agree	Agree	Not Sure	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
----------------	-------	----------	----------	-------------------

I receive adequate information about the ALM programmes

Strongly agree	Agree	Not Sure	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
----------------	-------	----------	----------	-------------------

I perceive ALM as corrupt.

Strongly agree	Agree	Not Sure	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
----------------	-------	----------	----------	-------------------

The media has been responsible for bringing awareness to the community about the municipality's system.

Strongly agree	Agree	Not Sure	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
----------------	-------	----------	----------	-------------------

The media's narrative about ALM is closer to reality (what I experience).

Strongly agree	Agree	Not Sure	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
----------------	-------	----------	----------	-------------------

The challenges to service delivery experienced by ALM are hurting its reputation.

Strongly agree	Agree	Not Sure	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
----------------	-------	----------	----------	-------------------



There is a need for ALM to implement reputation strategies.

Strongly agree	Agree	Not Sure	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
----------------	-------	----------	----------	-------------------

The ALM is innovative in its endeavours to enhance its service delivery programme.

Strongly agree	Agree	Not Sure	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
----------------	-------	----------	----------	-------------------

The media has been responsible for bringing awareness to the community about the strengths of the municipality's system.

Strongly agree	Agree	Not Sure	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
----------------	-------	----------	----------	-------------------

Open-ended questions

What are your key concerns about the ALM?

.....  
.....  
.....

How do you think the community can assist in building the reputation of ALM?

.....  
.....  
.....

Is the media (radio, newspaper and tv) detrimental to your trust in local government?

.....  
.....  
.....

## Appendix 8: Questionnaire – isiXhosa

### Uyilo lwemibuzo

#### Isihlomelo 4b: Imibuzo

Uphando lophononongo lwendlela abacinga ngayo abantu ngorhulumente wengingqi:  
ngokubhekiselele ku-Amahlathi Local Municipality

#### Icandelo A: Iinkcukacha ngabantu

Ubudala ..... Isini .....

Iminyaka uhlala eALM, kweyiphi ingingqi.....

Umgangatho wemfundo .....

Ubume engqeshweni .....

#### Icandelo B: Ulawulo lwendlela amabacinge ngayo abantu ngeALM

Ngokubanzi, unokuthi uthembele kurhulumente wasemakhaya, okanye awukwazi ukumthemba?

Ndiyamthemba urhulumente wasemakhaya

Andimthembi urhulumente wasemakhaya

Umasipala wam wengingqi ugcina unikezelo lwenkonzo olukumgangatho ophezulu kuluntu lwakhe.

Ndivuma kakhulu

Ndiyavuma

Andiqinisekanga

Andivumi

Andivumi kakhulu

I-ALM ijongene neningeni emininzi yokunikezelwa kweenkonzo

Ndivuma kakhulu

Ndiyavuma

Andiqinisekanga

Andivumi

Ndifumana ulwazi olwaneleyo malunga neenkqubo ze-ALM

- Ndivuma kakhulu**
- Ndiyavuma**
- Andiqinisekanga**
- Andivumi**
- Andivumi kakhulu**

Ndibona I ALM ingathi inorhwaphilizo

- Ndivuma kakhulu**
- Ndiyavuma**
- Andiqinisekanga**
- Andivumi**
- Andivumi kakhulu**

Amajelo eendaba anoxanduva lokuzisa ulwazi eluntwini malunga nenkqubo kamasipala

- Ndivuma kakhulu**
- Ndiyavuma**
- Andiqinisekanga**
- Andivumi**
- Andivumi kakhulu**

Ingxelo yamajelo eendaba malunga ne-ALM isondele kwinyani (into endiyivayo)

- Ndivuma kakhulu**
- Ndiyavuma**
- Andiqinisekanga**
- Andivumi**
- Andivumi kakhulu**

Imingeni kunikezelo lweenkonzo efunyanwa yi-ALM iyonakalisa isidima sayo.

- Ndivuma kakhulu**
- Ndiyavuma**
- Andiqinisekanga**
- Andivumi**
- Andivumi kakhulu**

Kukho imfuneko yokuba i-ALM imilisele amacebo okubuyisela isidima

- Ndivuma kakhulu**

- Ndiyavuma**
- Andiqinisekanga**
- Andivumi**
- Andivumi kakhulu**

I-ALM yenza izinto ezintsha kwiinzame zayo zokuphucula inkqubo yonikezelo lweenkonzo.

- Ndivuma kakhulu**
- Ndiyavuma**
- Andiqinisekanga**
- Andivumi**
- Andivumi kakhulu**

Amajelo eendaba anoxanduva lokuzisa ulwazi eluntwini malunga namandla enkqubo kamasipala

- Ndivuma kakhulu**
- Ndiyavuma**
- Andiqinisekanga**
- Andivumi**
- Andivumi kakhulu**

Imibuzo evulelekileyo

1. Ziziphi izinto ezikuxhalabisayo nge-ALM?

.....

2. Ucinga ukuba uluntu lungancedisa njani ekwakheni isidima se ALM?

.....

3. Ngaba amajelo eendaba (unomathotholo, iphephandaba kunye nomabonakude) ayonakalisa intembeko yakho kurhulumente wasekhaya?



24 October 2022

**To whom it may concern:**

**Subject:** Piloting of the data collection tool: **Reputation management at local government level: A case study of Amahlathi Local Municipality**

**Dear Sir or Madam**

This missive serves to confirm that Mr. Pikolomzi Qaba student No 21618320 is a Masters student at the Durban University of Technology under my supervision (Prof B.I Dlamini) has piloted the data collection tools. This was done to assess the reliability of the study; both the questionnaire and interview guide were administered to a target group with similar characteristics as the selected sample.

The following are a result of the pilot study:

- The questionnaire was randomly distributed to 50 possible respondents (ALM residents). These respondents were not sampled for the main **quantitative study**. The respondents were asked to complete the questionnaire and then to provide their comments on the clarity and content of the questionnaire. A total of 35 completed questionnaires were collected and checked to see whether they had been completed appropriately. It was found that all parts of the questionnaire were completed satisfactorily. With 13 indicating that they would prefer a Xhosa version of the questionnaire as it would make things easy for them. No further amendments were affixed to the questionnaire.
- In the **qualitative study** of this study, in-depth interviews were conducted with five (5) participants who will not participate in the study in order to identify gaps from the semi-structured questions. Some of the questions were restructured so that they are simple and understandable in order to achieve the success and effectiveness of the research study. The following questions were refined and restructured:

Old questions	Refined/restructured questions
Reputation refers to the stakeholders' collective views about an organisation (Suh & Houston, 2010:744). What are your general views about the Amahlathi Local Municipality (ALM)?	What in your view, is the overall Amahlathi Local Municipality (ALM) Reputation amongst its stakeholders? (Theory removed from the previous question)
What challenges if any, do you think the ALM faces that can affect its reputation?	What are the key challenges that the ALM faces in terms of its reputation?
How responsive is the Provincial Government (COGTA)/ALM to the immediate citizenry's needs and expectations, and to what extent?	How responsive is ALM to its citizenry's needs and expectations?

	To what extent are the citizenry needs fulfilled by the ALM? (new question added breaking the previous old question into two)
In your view, do you think the community and your inputs made during the Integrated Development Plan (IDP) forums are adequately integrated into the municipality's IDP?	In your view, how are community and your inputs adequately integrated into the municipality's IDP?
How would you describe the portrayal of ALM in the media?	How would you describe the historical and current portrayal of ALM in the media?
To what extent is the media (tv, radio, and newspaper) detrimental to your trust in local government? Elaborate	What is the impact of the media (tv, radio, and newspaper) on stakeholder's trust in local government? Elaborate
In your knowledge, do you think ALM has measures/strategies in place to manage its reputation? What are they? Or what should they be?	What are the current measures/strategies that ALM has in place to manage its reputation?
	What do you recommend in terms of added strategy development in this area? (new question added to break the above previous old question into two).

The purpose of the pilot study is ensuring effectiveness of the study, considering also the comments during the actual interviews. Data collection instruments such as digital recorder/cellular phones were prohibited by the interviewees citing that due to their political space it is rather advisable to do it face to face and not record anything. This assisted in checking the effectiveness and success of the instruments and the safety and anonymity of the participants, and they gave valuable inputs that led to some of the alterations to the tool. The pilot study was a valuable exercise because it ratified the concerns of the researcher. After the above interview guide was rectified the proved to be clearer and more proved acceptable and understandable by the participants.

With Sincere thanks,



**Prof B.I Dlamini**  
**Study Supervisor and HOD**  
**Applied Management**  
**Durban University of Technology**

Pikolomzi Qaba  
 Researcher (Student)  
 Applied Management  
 Durban University of Technology



## Appendix 10: Request for permission – Amahlathi Local Municipality

### ANNEXURE B1

32 Jubase Street,  
Ikwezi Location  
Mthatha  
Email: pphikoe@gmail.com/  
21618320@dut4life.ac.za  
Cell: 0837686100  
11 May 2022

The Municipal Manager  
Amahlathi Local Municipality  
Private Bag X2, Stutterheim  
EC, South Africa 4930

**REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO CONDUCT A RESEARCH STUDY ON:  
Reputation Management at local government level: A case study of Amahlathi Local  
Municipality**

Dear Mrs Ivy Sikhulu-Nqwena,

My name is Pikolomzi Qaba. I am conducting research as part of my Master of Management Sciences specialising in Public Relations and Communication Management degree that I have registered for with the Durban University of Technology. The research I wish to conduct for my master's dissertation involves exploring reputation management in local governments: the case of Amahlathi local municipality.

The purpose of this research is to explore sustainable strategies that would build reputation management of Amahlathi local municipality (ALM). A profound exploration of reputation management is envisaged to provide a panacea for ALM in the promotion of positive tenets based on the experience of its community members.

I am writing to request your permission and support to conduct a research study on the above-mentioned research topic with Amahlathi Local Municipality staff (10) and community members (200). The study's findings will be presented to you once it is completed. This study is not meant to have an impact on your resources. My expected start date is in June 2022, the date and the platform are to be communicated to the relevant participants.

Staff sample/category of the research participants needed:

1. Manager
2. Communications
3. Community Services
4. Development, Planning, and Infrastructure (x2)
5. Political Heads (2x ANC, 1x DA, 1x EFF, and 1x APC)

I have provided you with a copy of letter of information which briefly explain the research and its process thereof.

If you require any further information, please do not hesitate to contact me at the number and email address above. Thank you for your time and consideration in this matter.

Your consent will be highly appreciated.

Yours sincerely,  
Pikolomzi Qaba  
Durban University of Technology



## Appendix 11: Permission granted – Amahlathi Local Municipality

### Amahlathi Local Municipality



OFFICE OF THE MUNICIPAL MANAGER  
12 Maclean Street  
Private Bag X4002, Stutterheim, 4930  
Tel: 043 683 5024 Fax: 043 683 1127  
Website: www.amahlathi.gov.za

Date	Person dealing with the matter	Reference
13 June 2022	Ms. T Ndlamhlaba	

Mr P Qaba  
32 Jubase Street  
Ikhwezi  
Umtata, 5100  
Eastern Cape

Dear Sir

**RE: PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH: YOURSELF**

This letter serves to confirm that the Amahlathi Local Municipality has granted you permission to conduct your Master of Management Science academic research within the confines of your topic.

You are requested to comply with Covid-19 regulations of the municipality and also conduct all your dealings with employees in a professional manner, with strict adherence to the POPI Act and Confidentiality clauses that govern your academic institution and those of Amahlathi Local Municipality.

For any enquiries in this regard please contact Ms T Ndlamhlaba on: **043 4921268 / 073 926 4034 / 082 359 0064**

Yours Sincerely

  
**I SIRHDLU NQWENA [MRS]**  
**MUNICIPAL MANAGER**

**AM AHLATHI LOCAL MUNICIPALITY**  
"Together for Prosperity"

## Appendix 12: Request for permission – Eastern Cape Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs

### ANNEXURE B2

32 Jubase Street,  
Ikwezi Location  
Mthatha  
Email: pphikoe@gmail.com/  
21618320@dut4life.ac.za  
Cell: 0837686100  
11 May 2022

Head of Department  
Eastern Cape Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs  
Phalo Ave, Bisho Central,  
Bisho, 5605  
Email: [andile.fani@eccogta.gov.za](mailto:andile.fani@eccogta.gov.za)

**REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO CONDUCT A RESEARCH STUDY ON:  
Reputation Management at local government level: A case study of Amahlathi Local  
Municipality**

Dear Mr. Andile Fani,

My name is Pikolomzi Qaba. I am conducting research as part of my Master of Management Sciences specialising in Public Relations and Communication Management degree that I have registered for with the Durban University of Technology. The research I wish to conduct for my master's dissertation involves exploring reputation management in local governments: the case of Amahlathi local municipality.

The purpose of this research is to explore sustainable strategies that will build reputation management of Amahlathi local municipality. A profound exploration of reputation management is envisaged to provide a panacea for ALM in the promotion of positive tenets based on the experience of its community members.

I am writing to request your permission and support to conduct a research study on the above-mentioned research topic with the five provincial department staff members. The study's findings will be presented to you once it is completed. This study is not meant to have an impact on your resources. My expected start date is in June 2022, the date and the platform are to be communicated to the relevant participants.

Sample/category of the research participants needed:

1. Municipal Governance and support (municipal infrastructure grant) (Senior Manager)
2. Communications
3. Office of the MEC
4. Manager in the Office of HOD
5. District Director/ district coordination (under which Amahlathi Local Municipality fall)

I have provided you with a copy of letter of information which briefly explain the research and its process thereof.

If you require any further information, please do not hesitate to contact me at the number and email address above. Thank you for your time and consideration in this matter.

Your consent will be highly appreciated.

Yours sincerely,  
Pikolomzi Qaba  
Durban University of Technology



## Appendix 13: Permission granted – Eastern Cape Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs



Province of the  
**EASTERN CAPE**  
COOPERATIVE GOVERNANCE  
& TRADITIONAL AFFAIRS

**Office of the Head of Department**

Tyamazshe Building | Civic Square | Bisho | 5605  
P/Bag X0035 | Civic Square | Bisho | 5605  
Tel: +27 (0)40 9407687/7194 | Fax: +27 (0)40 639 2135  
Website: [www.ecprov.gov.za/igta/](http://www.ecprov.gov.za/igta/)

32 Jubase Street  
Ikwezi Location  
Mthatha5100

Dear Mr Phikolomzi Qaba

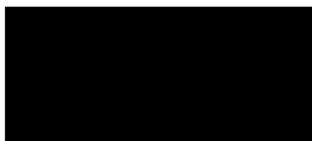
**PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH: REPUTATION MANAGEMENT AT LOCAL GOVERNMENT LEVEL: A CASE STUDY OF AMAHLATHI LOCAL MUNICIPALITY**

We hereby acknowledge receipt of your e-mail correspondence requesting to undertake a research study on: Reputation Management at local government level: A case study of Amahlathi Local Municipality

You are hereby granted permission to conduct the research.

We would like to take this opportunity and wish you all the best in your studies.

Yours in corporative governance,



MR A A FANI

HEAD OF DEPARTMENT: COOPERATIVE GOVERNANCE AND TRADITIONAL AFFAIRS

13/06/2022  
DATE

SERVING OUR COMMUNITIES BETTER



## Appendix 14: Editing certificate

### **DR RICHARD STEELE**

BA HDE MTech(Hom)

#### **HOMEOPATH**

Registration No. A07309 HM

Practice No. 0807524

#### **Freelance academic editor**

Associate member: Professional Editors'  
Guild, South Africa

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Gxarha [Morgan Bay]  
5292  
Eastern Cape

082-928-6208  
rsteele@vodamail.co.za  
rsteele201@outlook.com

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### **EDITING CERTIFICATE**

Re: **PIKOLOMZI QABA**

Master's dissertation DUT: **REPUTATION MANAGEMENT AT  
LOCAL GOVERNMENT LEVEL: A CASE STUDY OF  
AMAHLATHI LOCAL MUNICIPALITY**

I confirm that I have edited this dissertation and the references for clarity, language and layout. I returned the document to the author with track changes so correct implementation of the changes and clarifications requested in the text and references is the responsibility of the author. The intellectual content of the document is the responsibility of the author. I am a freelance editor specialising in proofreading and editing academic documents. My original tertiary degree which I obtained at the University of Cape Town was a B.A. with English as a major and I went on to complete an H.D.E. (P.G.) Sec. with English as my teaching subject. I was a part-time lecturer in the Department of Homoeopathy at the Durban University of Technology for 13 years and supervised many master's degree dissertations during that period.

Dr Richard Steele

**22 April 2023**

*per email*

## Appendix 15: Turnitin report

Pikolomzi Qaba dissertation:  
Reputation Management in  
Local government - A case  
study of Amahlathi Local  
Municipality  
*by Pikolomzi Qaba*

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**Submission date:** 28-Apr-2023 08:38PM (UTC+0200)

**Submission ID:** 2007915477

**File name:** kolomzi\_Qaba\_P\_First\_Final\_Draft\_M\_EDITED\_2023-04-24\_Clean.docx (4.47M)

**Word count:** 43451

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## Pikolomzi Qaba dissertation: Reputation Management in Local government - A case study of Amahlathi Local Municipality

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