

Assessing e-Government readiness in South African municipalities:

A case of the Sol Plaatje Municipality

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2022152454

**MASTER'S DEGREE IN GOVERNANCE AND
POLITICAL TRANSFORMATION**

**FACULTY OF HUMANITIES
UNIVERSITY OF THE FREE STATE**

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DECLARATION

As the author of this dissertation, I, Naledi Portia Gaosekwe, declare that this work is entirely my own effort and has not been submitted for any other academic qualification. All sources used in this dissertation have been properly acknowledged and cited. Any assistance received during the research process has been duly acknowledged in the acknowledgements section. I affirm that this dissertation represents my original work and reflects my own opinions and interpretations. Additionally, I understand the academic integrity policies of the University of the Free State and affirm that this dissertation complies with those policies.

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I, Margaret Linström, hereby confirm that I language edited the Master's mini-dissertation entitled *Assessing e-Government readiness in South African municipalities: A case of the Sol Plaatje Municipality* by Naledi Portia Gaosekwe.

The editing was done electronically, using Track Changes, to enable the candidate to accept or reject the suggested changes.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to all those who have contributed to the completion of this dissertation.

First and foremost, I extend my heartfelt appreciation to my supervisor, Dr. Ina Gouws, for her invaluable guidance, support, and encouragement throughout the entire research process. Her expertise, constructive feedback, and unwavering commitment have been instrumental in shaping this dissertation.

I am also deeply thankful to the faculty members and staff of the University of the Free State, whose resources and facilities provided an enriching academic environment for conducting this research.

I am forever indebted to my employer, the Office of the Premier in the Northern Cape, for the support and for creating an environment conducive enough for learning, my boss and colleagues have been supportive.

Lastly, I am grateful to all the authors whose works I have cited and consulted throughout this dissertation. Their research has significantly contributed to the depth and breadth of this study.

Thank you to everyone who has played a role, no matter how small, in the completion of this dissertation. Your contributions are deeply appreciated.

DEDICATION

I could not have done this without our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, who sits at the right hand of the father and intercedes for us all. I give him all the praise and the honour.

I dedicate this dissertation to my mother, whose unwavering love for her daughters, love for education, support, and encouragement have been the cornerstone of my academic journey. Her many sacrifices and guidance have been instrumental in shaping my path, and I am forever grateful for her belief in me. This dissertation is also dedicated to my Partner who has offered guidance, inspiration, and support along the way, I absolutely appreciate this, your wisdom and encouragement have been invaluable throughout this journey. Finally, I dedicate this work to the resilient people of the Sol Plaatje Municipality, whose lived experiences and stories have inspired this research. May this dissertation contribute in some small way to the improvement of public service delivery and governance in their community.

ABSTRACT

This dissertation examines the e-Government readiness of the Sol Plaatje Municipality in South Africa, aiming to identify factors facilitating or hindering the implementation of e-Government initiatives. Through a comprehensive review of literature, policy documents, and empirical evidence, the study explores the intricate dynamics of e-Government, considering its potential to enhance public service delivery and governance transparency. The research employs theoretical frameworks such as the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) and the United Nations E-Government Development Index (UN-EGDI) to assess the Municipality's readiness for digital transformation. Findings reveal persistent challenges in technological infrastructure, digital literacy, and citizen awareness, particularly highlighting disparities between urban and rural areas. The study proposes recommendations for infrastructure enhancement, digital literacy programmes, comprehensive awareness campaigns, collaboration with telecom providers, and mobile optimization to bridge these gaps. Ultimately, this research underscores the importance of addressing multi-dimensional challenges to foster effective e-Government implementation, offering insights with broader implications for enhancing governance in South Africa and other developing nations.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

1.1 Introduction

The transformative potential of the digital age cannot be overstated as it permeates every aspect of our lives, including the manner in which governments function and deliver public services. e-Government, defined as the use of information and communication technology (ICT) to improve the effectiveness of the government, has emerged as a significant facet of modern governance. It promises increased efficiency, transparency, and accountability, enabling a better interface between government and citizens.

This study sets out to assess the readiness for e-Government implementation in the Sol Plaatje Municipality in South Africa. While the value of e-Government is well-established, its implementation is fraught with challenges. This is especially true in the context of developing countries where issues such as inadequate infrastructure, limited technological literacy, and financial constraints can impede the transition.

The Sol Plaatje Municipality provides an intriguing case study with its unique blend of urban and rural communities and varying levels of development. By examining the e-Government readiness of this municipality, this study aims to understand the particular challenges at play, identify potential solutions, and highlight the potential benefits that full e-Government implementation can bring about.

The subsequent sections in this chapter delineate the objectives of the study and underline the study's significance. The objectives provide a roadmap for the research, guiding its progression and giving structure to the findings. Furthermore, a discussion on the significance of the study underlines the potential contributions it could make to the academic literature on e-Government readiness, and its broader implications for local governance in South Africa and other developing countries.

Concluding this chapter, a brief preview of the expected outcomes of the study sets the stage for the subsequent chapters, providing a comprehensive understanding of what this

study sets out to accomplish, and the potential impact it may have on e-Government implementation in the Sol Plaatje Municipality and beyond.

1.2 Background to the study

South Africa, a young democracy, has been grappling with significant challenges in effectively and efficiently delivering public services. According to (Sarantis & Tsoukalas,2021: 74), supported by (Singh, 2019: 2), in recent years, there has been an increasing acknowledgement of the potential of e-Government initiatives to improve public service delivery and enhance government administration. e-Government involves the transformation of traditional government services into digital formats, enabling citizens to access services online, anytime and anywhere.(Chinyemba & Manda,2020: 3) argue that this transformation allows citizens to interact with the government in a more efficient and effective manner, with greater transparency and accountability. (Heeks,2003: 1) asserts that e-Government can make a valuable contribution towards development.

However, implementing e-Government initiatives in developing countries like South Africa is often characterised by challenges such as limited resources, infrastructure, and technical expertise (Maphalala & Phiri, 2019: 27). In addition to this, (Khan&Islam 2020:89) argue that there is a lack of consensus on what constitutes e-Government readiness and how to effectively measure it.

South Africa's journey from apartheid to democracy provides a unique backdrop for its e-Government initiatives. The post-apartheid era, characterised by democratic reforms and an emphasis on public service delivery, views e-Government as a means to further democratise governance and enhance service delivery (Buntz & Cronje, 2018). However, the nation grapples with a pronounced digital divide: while cities like Johannesburg and Cape Town are rapidly digitising, rural areas face challenges in technology access, affordability, and literacy (Maphalala & Phiri, 2019).

Despite the Department of Communications and Digital Technologies' commendable efforts to push e-Government, infrastructural issues, such as sporadic power outages and limited broadband penetration, impede consistent implementation (Khan & Islam, 2020).

Additionally, while e-Government is championed as a tool against corruption, ensuring its transparent and efficient deployment across South Africa's diverse ethnic and linguistic landscape remains a challenge (Mnyandu, 2020).

The Sol Plaatje Municipality, situated in the Northern Cape province of South Africa, is one of the municipalities that has faced significant challenges in delivering public services effectively and efficiently. The Municipality has a population of approximately 248 000 people and also houses 20% of the population of the province, making it the largest urban formation in the province. It is responsible for providing various services, including water and sanitation, waste management, and electricity (Sol Plaatje Municipality, n.d.). The Municipality, in its Integrated Development Plan, dated 2017 to 2022, adopted a vision that speaks to becoming a leading and modern city. The Municipality stands as a microcosm of the broader challenges and aspirations that many South African municipalities face in the realm of public service delivery.

There are numerous reasons why the Sol Plaatje Municipality is a compelling case study for research on e-Government readiness. Firstly, its stature as the largest urban formation in the province suggests that its successes or failures in e-Government implementation could potentially serve as a model or a cautionary tale for other municipalities in the region and beyond. Secondly, its aspirational vision of modernity reflects an inherent recognition of the importance of digital transformation in contemporary governance, making it a timely subject of study. Lastly, given the Municipality's challenges in efficient public service delivery, understanding its e-Government readiness is not merely academic but carries real-world implications for enhancing the quality of life for its residents. Thus, examining the e-Government readiness of the Sol Plaatje Municipality offers insights that could have broader applicability to other similar urban centres in South Africa and other developing nations, making it a pertinent choice for this research.

Considering the potential of e-Government initiatives to enhance public service delivery and improve the functioning of government administration, there is a need to assess e-Government readiness in the Sol Plaatje Municipality and identify the barriers and success factors associated with implementing e-Government initiatives in the Municipality. This research aims to address this gap in the literature and to provide

insights into the challenges and opportunities associated with e-Government implementation in developing countries like South Africa.

1.3 Problem statement

Local governance in South Africa finds itself at a critical juncture. While the post-apartheid democratic ethos emphasises equal access to public services for all citizens, the on-ground reality paints a different picture. As outlined by (Chaka,2021: 103) and (Kavanagh 2022: 58), significant challenges in delivering public services efficiently and effectively have not only resulted in operational inefficiencies but have also led to a rising wave of discontent among the populace. This prevailing dissatisfaction was further exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, which exposed the systemic vulnerabilities of the existing framework, emphasising the need for innovative and adaptive measures to ensure continuous essential service delivery in the face of unforeseen challenges (Mnyandu, 2020: 26).

Within this context, e-Government emerges as a beacon of hope. Its promises, encompassing efficient service delivery, enhanced transparency, and heightened citizen engagement, are particularly compelling for nations like South Africa that are grappling with governance deficits (Makau & More, 2021: 112). However, the allure of e-Government is not devoid of complexities. A recurring impediment to its full realisation, as indicated by (Akamavi, 2020: 78), is a limited understanding of what constitutes e-Government readiness, especially in developing nations. This ambiguity often results in ill-conceived projects that, due to a lack of preparation, are doomed from their inception, leading to wasted resources and a further erosion of public trust (Sulayman et al., 2021: 35).

The Sol Plaatje Municipality presents an apt microcosm to explore these broader issues. As the largest urban formation in the Northern Cape, the Municipality's experiences, challenges, and aspirations in relation to e-Government readiness can provide valuable insights. This is not just for its own diverse citizenry but it could also serve as a template or a cautionary tale for other municipalities embarking on similar developmental trajectories. Thus, a pivotal inquiry emerges: How ready is the Sol Plaatje Municipality for

e-Government implementation, and what underlying factors influence its readiness or lack thereof? Addressing this central question can pave the way for actionable insights, potentially catalysing effective e-Government adoption and enhancing the quality of public services, which remains the bedrock of democratic and participative governance.

1.4 Aim of the study

The aim of this study is to assess the e-Government readiness of the Sol Plaatje Municipality in South Africa and to identify the factors that facilitate or hinder the implementation of e-Government initiatives.

1.5 Research objectives

1. To explain e-Government and e-Government readiness;
2. To discuss e-Government frameworks and theories relating to e-Government, specifically the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) and the United Nations E-Government Development Index (UN-EGDI);
3. To evaluate the current state of e-Government readiness in the Sol Plaatje Municipality;
4. To identify the factors that facilitate or hinder the implementation of e-Government initiatives in the Sol Plaatje Municipality; and
5. To propose recommendations for improving e-Government readiness and implementation in the Sol Plaatje Municipality.

1.6 Research questions

1. What is e-Government and what constitutes e-Government readiness?
2. How do the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) and the United Nations E-Government Development Index (UN-EGDI) relate to e-Government, and what insights can they provide in the context of the Sol Plaatje Municipality?
3. What is the current state of e-Government readiness in the Sol Plaatje Municipality?
4. What factors facilitate or hinder the implementation of e-Government initiatives in the Sol Plaatje Municipality?

5. What recommendations can be proposed to improve e-Government readiness and implementation in the Sol Plaatje Municipality?

1.7 Research methodology

In the pursuit of understanding the e-Government readiness of the Sol Plaatje Municipality, a desktop study approach was adopted. This approach allows for the collation, examination, and synthesis of existing academic literature, government reports, policy documents, and other pertinent sources that offer insights into the topic of study. By leveraging this method, the research aims to provide a comprehensive overview of the current state of e-Government readiness, drawing from both international best practices and localised experiences.

Two theoretical frameworks have been identified as particularly salient for this study:

The Technology Acceptance Model (TAM): The TAM postulates that the perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use determine an individual's intention to use a system. By examining the Municipality's e-Government initiatives through the TAM lens, the study seeks to understand how citizens perceive these digital interventions and what factors might influence their adoption. This model can give insights into whether technological interventions align with user expectations and, if not, where the discrepancies lie.

The United Nations E-Government Development Index (UN-EGDI): The UN-EGDI offers a holistic framework to assess a country's e-Government readiness, focusing on three primary dimensions: Online Service Index (OSI), Telecommunication Infrastructure Index (TII), and Human Capital Index (HCI). Given the model's comprehensive nature, it can be an invaluable tool to evaluate the infrastructure, human capital, and actual online services of the Sol Plaatje Municipality, providing a nuanced understanding of where the Municipality stands and what gaps need to be addressed.

The decision to employ a desktop study stems from the recognition that substantial research, data, and insights already exist on the topic. Instead of reinventing the wheel, this research aims to draw from the existing body of knowledge, juxtaposing international

experiences with the specific context of the Sol Plaatje Municipality. Through this method, the study endeavours to offer a layered understanding of the Municipality's e-Government readiness, highlighting both the unique challenges it faces and the broader issues that might resonate with other municipalities and developing regions globally.

1.8 Rationale of the study

The rationale for this study lies in the need to address the challenges facing the delivery of public services in the Sol Plaatje Municipality and South Africa at large. While e-Government has been identified as a potential solution to these challenges, there is limited knowledge on the readiness of local governments in developing countries to adopt and implement e-Government initiatives effectively. This knowledge gap is particularly relevant in South Africa, where there is a need to improve the delivery of public services, bridge the digital divide, and ensure that the country works towards narrowing the trust deficit between its citizens and the government.

This study aims to bridge this knowledge gap by assessing the e-Government readiness of the Sol Plaatje Municipality in South Africa, which will provide insights into the factors that facilitate or hinder the implementation of e-Government initiatives. The study will also propose recommendations for improving e-Government readiness and implementation in the Sol Plaatje Municipality to enhance the quality of services provided to its inhabitants, companies, and constituency. The findings of this study will contribute to the existing literature on e-Government readiness and implementation in developing countries, particularly in South Africa, and provide practical recommendations for local governments seeking to adopt e-Government initiatives.

1.9 Study organisation

This study is organised into five chapters, each addressing specific facets of e-Government readiness within the Sol Plaatje Municipality.

Chapter One: Introduction and background

This opening chapter lays the foundation for the study, introducing readers to the context of e-Government within the Sol Plaatje Municipality. It delineates the background, poses the problem statement, enumerates the research aims, objectives and questions, and sheds light on the study's rationale. This establishes the groundwork for delving deeper into the complexities of e-Government implementation.

Chapter Two: Literature review

Chapter Two delves into existing academic and professional literature about e-Government. By exploring concepts like the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) and the United Nations E-Government Development Index (UN-EGDI), this chapter positions the study within the broader academic discourse. It discerns existing knowledge, highlights the benefits and challenges of e-Government, and underscores the areas that require further exploration.

Chapter Three: E-Government readiness in South Africa

Instead of a general methodology chapter, the third chapter is a deep dive into South Africa's e-Government landscape. It retraces the historical trajectory of e-Government in South Africa, applies TAM to the South African context, and incorporates insights from the UN-EGDI. By comparing South Africa to neighbouring countries and detailing factors influencing e-Government readiness, this chapter offers a national perspective that contextualises the Sol Plaatje Municipality's situation.

Chapter Four: Findings and discussions

This critical chapter unfolds the primary data of the study. The findings concerning the e-Government readiness of the Sol Plaatje Municipality are showcased, followed by an in-depth discussion. It revolves around themes like citizen awareness, technological infrastructure, digital literacy, and comparisons with other municipalities or regions. The chapter resonates with the research questions and objectives, providing readers with comprehensive insights and analyses.

Chapter Five: Conclusions and recommendations

The concluding chapter synthesises the entire study. It revisits the primary findings, offering clear conclusions that derive from the research. Beyond merely concluding, it

extends actionable recommendations tailored for the Sol Plaatje Municipality. Suggestions for infrastructure enhancement, digital literacy programmes, awareness campaigns, and collaboration strategies are proposed. Additionally, it charts out potential directions for future research, urging scholars and practitioners alike to continue exploring this vital domain.

1.10 Chapter conclusion

Chapter One firmly rooted the study within the broader narrative of e-Government readiness, particularly highlighting its relevance in the context of the Sol Plaatje Municipality in South Africa. Emphasis was placed on the transformative potential e-Government initiatives hold for enhancing public service delivery, while also acknowledging the multifaceted challenges that might obstruct their full realisation, especially in developing nations' local governance landscape.

The trajectory of the study was delineated, outlining the objectives and research queries the researcher intends to address. With the intent to enrich the current literature on e-Government readiness in developing regions and to offer actionable insights, this study is anchored in the critical need to alleviate public service delivery challenges endemic to South Africa.

To offer a structured examination, an overview of the study's structured five-chapter format was provided. Each subsequent chapter builds upon the prior, methodically adding depth and nuance to the understanding of e-Government readiness in the Sol Plaatje Municipality.

Laying this foundational groundwork in Chapter One paves the way for the subsequent deep dive into e-Government literature in Chapter Two, as the researcher further unpacks its complexities and nuances within the South African milieu.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

E-Government, an integral aspect of modern governance, is increasingly influencing the ways in which public services are delivered and how governments interact with their citizens. With the rapid growth of technology and the digital age, the necessity to understand and implement e-Government effectively becomes more significant than ever. This literature review is undertaken to shed light on this phenomenon by exploring its foundational concepts, tracing its evolution, and analysing the theories and frameworks that underpin it.

At its core, e-Government revolves around the use of electronic means to facilitate efficient and effective communication between government and its stakeholders, primarily its citizens. It promises increased transparency, convenience, and improved service delivery, all of which are essential in a world where citizens are becoming more tech-savvy and expect seamless digital experiences. However, beyond its surface-level understanding, e-Government's intricacies involve an array of components that need careful examination.

One of the primary considerations in this regard is the concept of e-Government readiness. This essentially pertains to the preparedness of a government or a governing body to implement e-Government initiatives successfully. Readiness is not merely technological; it also encompasses the socio-cultural, economic, and political dimensions that can affect the uptake and efficiency of e-Government services. Understanding this readiness provides a roadmap to identifying gaps and opportunities in e-Government implementation.

In addition to the above, there exists a plethora of frameworks and theories that have been formulated to provide a structured approach to understanding e-Government. These theories, such as the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) and the United Nations E-

Government Development Index (UN-EGDI), provide analytical tools to gauge factors like user acceptance and the global comparative performance of e-Government initiatives. By diving deep into these theories, this chapter aims to demystify the mechanics of e-Government and its various influences.

Of course, the successful implementation of e-Government is not devoid of challenges. Numerous factors, both facilitative and obstructive, play a role in determining the success or failure of such initiatives. These range from technological infrastructure and the digital literacy of the populace, to the political will and strategic direction of the governing bodies. This literature review seeks to identify, categorise, and elaborate on these influential factors, offering a holistic perspective on the dynamics of e-Government.

In summary, this chapter is not just a compilation of existing knowledge on e-Government, but is a comprehensive exploration designed to provide clarity, insight, and direction. By juxtaposing foundational concepts with contemporary theories, and by analysing the myriad factors that influence e-Government, this literature review aspires to create a robust understanding that will be instrumental in guiding e-Government initiatives, both in the Sol Plaatje Municipality and beyond.

2.2 Conceptualisation of e-Government

2.2.1 Definition and overview

E-Government fundamentally represents the marriage of public administration and digital innovation. It signifies the use of information and communication technologies (ICTs), notably the internet, by government bodies to enhance public service delivery (Smith & Patel, 2019: 104). This broad umbrella term covers a spectrum of electronic interfaces that can be observed between the government, its citizens, the private sector, and even inter-governmental agencies. Beyond mere service delivery, e-Government promises a reimagined approach to governance, citizenry engagement, and the broader democratic framework (Harris, 2020: 15).

Historically, the e-Government journey finds its roots in the computerisation endeavours of the 1960s and 1970s. This era marked the advent of governments experimenting with computer systems, predominantly focusing on internal operations, such as finance and human resources (Adams & Bell, 2018: 78). The 1990s, strengthened by the rise of the World Wide Web, catapulted e-Government to its next evolutionary phase. Governments globally recognised the transformative prowess of the internet, not just as a tool for internal augmentation, but as a potent instrument for public service metamorphosis (Chen & Lee, 2017: 55).

While the first steps were largely about hosting static web content, the landscape swiftly transitioned by the early 2000s. Governments moved from one-dimensional communication to fostering dynamic citizen interactions. Today, e-Government is not just about service delivery; it is a vibrant ecosystem encouraging citizens to share feedback, apply online, and even participate in digital democracy initiatives (Turner, 2021: 33).

A pronounced shift in e-Government's role within governance has been its resolute focus on the citizen. Initial phases, although revolutionary, were technology-driven. Today, there is a global impetus to ensure that technological adoption is aligned with citizen needs, thereby pivoting e-Government platforms from being tech-centric to citizen-centric (Nguyen & Johnson, 2020: 202).

Complementing this is the global surge in open government initiatives, leveraging e-Government as a transparency champion. By making data accessible, governments are not only promoting transparency, but also nurturing an informed and participative citizenry (Robinson & Tan, 2019: 119).

In essence, e-Government's journey, from its nascent stages of digitalising paper-based processes to its contemporary avatar as an enabler of effective governance, underscores its centrality in the digital epoch. Its transformative potential, as evidenced by its global trajectory, promises a future where governments are more accountable, transparent, and citizen-responsive (Kumar & Rahman, 2021: 45).

2.2.2 Benefits and challenges

e-Government's spread in the modern digital era is testament to its transformative potential in reshaping governmental operations and redefining citizen engagement (Smith, 2019: 45). Central to its appeal is its promise of heightened administrative efficiency. By incorporating technology in their fabric, government agencies have the means to reduce paperwork substantially, automate a multitude of processes, and ultimately streamline operations, leading to expedited governmental services (Patel & Jones, 2018: 12).

Open data initiatives, which are becoming integral to e-Government platforms, have heralded an age of unprecedented transparency. Citizens are now empowered, more than ever, with access to pivotal information, ranging from budgets to intricate decision-making processes; thus, ensuring that governments remain accountable in an age of information (Chen, 2020: 78).

Yet another irrefutable benefit is the financial savings e-Government potentially offers. Transitioning to digital mechanisms, governments can potentially slash overheads, primarily stemming from reduced reliance on physical infrastructure and diminishing paper-based processes (Liu & Wang, 2017: 132). Moreover, this paradigm shift invariably amplifies service delivery quality, ensuring services are not just efficient but equitably accessible (Wu, 2018: 89).

This digitisation journey does however present inherent challenges. A significant concern is the ever-present digital divide. While digital platforms aim to democratise access, the stark disparities in technological accessibility mean that not all citizens stand to benefit equally. Such disparities could inadvertently widen existing societal chasms (Patel & Jones, 2018: 156). Data security, given the online transition, is another salient concern. The vast swaths of personal data stored digitally raise legitimate concerns over potential breaches and the accompanying erosion of personal privacy (Chen, 2020: 103).

Internally, government agencies often confront resistance to this transformative shift. Whether it is rooted in technological unfamiliarity, potential job displacement apprehensions, or an intrinsic inertia against change, these barriers can be significant (Wu, 2018: 112). The logistical challenges, from procuring funding to deploying

appropriate technological solutions, are significant, underscoring the multifaceted nature of e-Government implementation (Smith, 2019: 67).

In summary, while e-Government's potential is undeniable, realising its full potential necessitates a strategy that is not just technologically sound, but also socio-economically inclusive. The overarching goal should be a digital governance model that is robust, inclusive, and fundamentally citizen-centric (Liu & Wang, 2017: 145).

2.3 E-Government readiness

2.3.1 Definition

e-Government readiness refers to a government's preparedness to implement digital governance tools and strategies. It gauges the capacity of the public sector to launch, sustain, and develop digital initiatives over time. Fundamentally, it encompasses several dimensions that collectively paint a comprehensive picture of a government's readiness. This includes technological infrastructure, human capital, legal and regulatory frameworks, and social factors, such as digital literacy and cultural acceptance (Johnson & Turner, 2018: 32).

At its core, e-Government readiness does not merely focus on technology. Instead, it integrates both technological and non-technological facets, underscoring that while infrastructure is pivotal, other elements like training, legislation, and societal willingness are equally cardinal. Furthermore, it acknowledges the dynamism inherent to technology and strives to ascertain whether governments possess the adaptability to incorporate future technological shifts into their governance model (Kumar & Sharma, 2019: 27).

The role of e-Government readiness in predicting the success of e-Government projects is paramount. It acts as a litmus test, evaluating whether the necessary conditions for successful e-Government deployment are in place. A high readiness score indicates not only the availability of the necessary resources but also an environment conducive to digital transformation. Conversely, a low score pinpoints areas of potential improvement, ensuring that governments can address deficiencies proactively before embarking on e-

Government initiatives. By offering this pre-emptive assessment, e-Government readiness reduces the likelihood of project failures, misallocated resources, and inefficient implementation strategies (Anderson & Brown, 2020: 50).

In essence, e-Government readiness stands as a barometer for digital governance potential. It provides governments with actionable insights, allowing them to optimise their strategies, ensuring that e-Government initiatives are not only technologically advanced, but also socio-culturally relevant and feasible (Lee & Kim, 2021: 41).

2.3.2 Components of e-Government readiness

E-Government readiness is an intricate construct, embedded within multiple layers of society and governance. It is essential to grasp its multifaceted nature to genuinely understand the depth and breadth of preparedness required for a successful e-Government venture. The various dimensions – technological, human, institutional, and legal – are interwoven and interdependent, each playing a critical role in the overarching readiness paradigm.

The technological dimension refers to the infrastructural and technical elements vital for the rollout of e-Government services. It encompasses the hardware (like servers, computers, and network devices) and software (applications, platforms, and systems) required to facilitate digital governance (Singh & Sahu, 2018: 144). Beyond mere availability, this dimension also considers the reliability, scalability, and security of the technology, recognising that the technological foundation must be both robust and adaptable to the evolving digital landscape.

Next, the human dimension zeroes in on the capacity of both government personnel and the citizenry to interact with and leverage e-Government platforms effectively. This encapsulates digital literacy, training, and the general ability to use digital tools proficiently. Equally significant is the propensity for change management, ensuring that the human component of governance can adapt to technological changes without resistance (Olawale & Jacobs, 2020: 78). Essentially, even the most advanced

technological systems would falter without a digitally literate and receptive human element to operate and engage with them.

The institutional dimension delves into the organisational structures and processes that underpin the implementation of e-Government. This entails the internal dynamics of governmental institutions, including leadership commitment, strategic planning, inter-agency collaboration, and the general institutional culture surrounding digital transformation (Chen & Goh, 2019: 159). A receptive institutional environment, characterised by open communication, clear digital strategies, and proactive leadership, can significantly accelerate e-Government initiatives.

Lastly, the legal dimension focuses on the legislative and regulatory frameworks that either facilitate or impede e-Government development. A comprehensive legal framework addresses concerns like data privacy, digital rights, cybersecurity, and digital transaction authentication. Furthermore, it establishes clear guidelines for e-Government processes, ensuring that digital governance does not inadvertently infringe upon citizens' rights or compromise national security (Dlamini & Peters, 2021: 202).

In sum, the multifaceted nature of e-Government readiness underscores the comprehensive approach required to navigate the digital governance terrain. Each dimension, while distinct in its focus, is inextricably linked to the others, emphasising that a truly 'ready' government is one that strikes a balance across all these facets, harmonising technology with humanity, and institutional strategy with legal foresight (Garcia & Thompson, 2022: 115).

2.4 e-Government frameworks and theories

2.4.1 Technology Acceptance Model (TAM)

The Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) has emerged as a cornerstone theoretical framework within the domain of information systems research, particularly in gauging the acceptance and use of various technologies. Initially proposed by Davis in the late 1980s, the TAM has since undergone refinements and expansions. Despite its evolutionary

trajectory, the Model's core premise remains rooted in understanding the factors influencing users' acceptance of technology (Davis & Venkatesh, 2017: 334).

Central to the TAM are two primary constructs: Perceived Usefulness (PU) and Perceived Ease of Use (PEOU). PU pertains to the degree to which a user believes that a particular technology will enhance job performance, while PEOU relates to the extent a user perceives the technology to be free of effort (Hossain & Dwivedi, 2019: 429). These constructs, according to the TAM, determine an individual's Attitude Toward Using (ATU) a technology, which in turn influences the Behavioural Intention to Use (BIU) the technology. Ultimately, this behavioural intention predicts the actual system use.

In the context of e-Government, the TAM provides a lens to understand both the challenges and motivators that shape public perceptions and their consequent interactions with digital government platforms. e-Government systems, like any technology, must meet user expectations in terms of utility and user-friendliness to gain wide acceptance (Nkohkwo & Islam, 2020: 282). By examining citizens' perceived usefulness and ease of use of e-Government services, policymakers and system developers can glean insights into potential adoption rates and areas of the system that might require refinements.

Furthermore, the TAM's relevance in the e-Government landscape extends to readiness assessment. An e-Government initiative's success hinges not just on the technological robustness or the institutional frameworks in place, but significantly on how receptive the public is to the digital transition. By leveraging the TAM, governments can gauge their populace's digital readiness by understanding their predispositions towards new e-Government platforms. Such insights can aid in tailoring more effective communication strategies, training programmes, and user-centric system designs to foster higher adoption rates (Lee & Lehto, 2018: 514).

In essence, while the TAM is just one of many frameworks available, its user-centric approach and empirical robustness make it an invaluable tool in the e-Government researcher's arsenal, illuminating the interplay between technology perceptions and the behavioural intentions of the public in a digital governance scenario (Peterson & Reber, 2021:107).

2.4.2 United Nations E-Government Development Index (UN-EGDI)

The United Nations E-Government Development Index (UN-EGDI) stands as one of the most influential and comprehensive metrics for evaluating e-Government readiness on an international scale. Developed by the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA), the UN-EGDI provides a holistic view of the state and development progress of e-Government services in countries across the world. The Index serves as a bellwether for national governments and policymakers, offering insights into their digital governance capabilities and identifying areas of potential improvement (Kumar & Sachan, 2018: 45).

At its core, the UN-EGDI is derived from a composite of three key sub-indices:

Online Service Index (OSI): This measures the quality, robustness, and accessibility of online government services. It evaluates how effectively a government uses its online presence to deliver essential services to its citizens, thereby enhancing public sector efficiency (Chen et al., 2019: 238).

Telecommunication Infrastructure Index (TII): Recognising the foundational role of infrastructure in enabling e-Government initiatives, the TII examines various parameters such as broadband connectivity, mobile subscription rates, and internet usage statistics. This sub-index provides a snapshot of the technological backbone supporting e-Government services (Malik & Dwivedi, 2020: 512).

Human Capital Index (HCI): Going beyond technology and infrastructure, the HCI places emphasis on the human aspect of digital readiness. It factors in education levels, digital literacy rates, and workforce skills, acknowledging that a well-educated and digitally proficient populace is crucial for the successful adoption of e-Government platforms (Adebayo & Gumbo, 2017: 323).

The UN-EGDI thus offers a comprehensive view, factoring in both the supply-side (government provisions and infrastructure) and the demand-side (citizen capacity and

engagement) of e-Government readiness. Countries are then ranked based on their scores, providing a comparative view of global e-Government maturity.

In the grand tapestry of e-Government research and policy planning, the UN-EGDI holds significant importance. Firstly, it establishes a standard yardstick, allowing nations to compare their progress with global best practices and peers. Such comparative analysis can guide countries in benchmarking their efforts, adapting successful strategies from higher-ranked nations, and understanding the gaps in their own e-Government ecosystem (Singh & Hussain, 2019: 389). In addition, the periodic publication of the UN-EGDI rankings provides impetus for nations to continually innovate and improve their e-Government services, fostering a competitive spirit in the realm of digital governance (Verma & Bhattacharya, 2021: 126).

In conclusion, the UN-EGDI is not just a metric; it is a compass that directs nations on their digital governance journey, ensuring they remain aligned with global best practices and that they are well equipped to harness the innumerable benefits of e-Government for their citizenry.

2.4.3 Theoretical linkages

The expansive domain of e-Government has seen the incorporation of various theories and models to comprehend its dynamics and guide its implementation. Among these, the TAM and the UN-EGDI hold significant positions. While they originate from different academic and practical backgrounds, the interconnections, relevance, and manifestations of the TAM and the UN-EGDI in the context of e-Government are profound.

The TAM, with its primary focus on user acceptance and the factors driving it, presents a lens to understand the behaviour of individuals in adopting e-Government services. Two core components of the TAM, perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use, serve as pivotal determinants in this model. Drawing from real-world contexts, when a local municipality introduces an online taxation system, the success of this platform does not solely rely on its technological sophistication. Instead, if citizens perceive the system as

beneficial (perceived usefulness) and find it easy to navigate (perceived ease of use), there is a higher likelihood of its successful adoption (Nguyen, 2020: 104).

Conversely, the UN-EGDI focuses more on the supply side, encompassing a broader perspective that integrates technological infrastructure, online service quality, and human capital. However, its practical application goes beyond mere rankings. For instance, a country scoring high on the Telecommunication Infrastructure Index (TII), but lower on the Human Capital Index (HCI) might possess the technological prowess but lack the skilled populace to effectively utilise e-Government services. This discrepancy underscores the need for balanced development in both infrastructure and human capital, as was witnessed in Estonia's e-Government initiatives where robust IT infrastructure was complemented with extensive digital literacy campaigns (Lopez & Karim, 2019: 58).

A fascinating intersection of the TAM and the UN-EGDI emerges when we consider their combined insights. For e-Government projects to thrive, there is an inherent need for both – an enabling environment (as outlined by the UN-EGDI) and a receptive user base (as illuminated by the TAM). A case in point is Singapore's e-Gov 2020 strategy. Singapore, having a high UN-EGDI rank, invested in public campaigns emphasising the usefulness and simplicity of its digital services. The resultant success can be attributed as much to the country's infrastructural strength as to the citizenry's positive perceptions of e-Government platforms (Tan & Goonawardene, 2018: 141).

Another realm of intersection is the feedback loop mechanism. Feedback from users, potentially derived from TAM-driven studies, can significantly inform a country's UN-EGDI components. For example, if users find an e-service platform cumbersome, it reflects on the quality metric of the Online Service Index (OSI). Consequently, iterative improvements based on user feedback can enhance a country's OSI score and overall UN-EGDI ranking.

In essence, while the TAM offers a micro-level understanding focusing on individual adoption behaviours, the UN-EGDI provides a macro-level view encapsulating national e-Government readiness. The symbiosis between these two can offer invaluable insights to policymakers, enabling them to strategise and execute e-Government initiatives that are both technologically advanced and user-centric.

2.5 Factors influencing e-Government readiness and implementation

2.5.1 Facilitators of e-Government

e-Government initiatives, although promising in transforming public service delivery, require a conducive environment to thrive. Several factors function as facilitators, promoting and driving the successful adoption and implementation of e-Government projects. Each of these facilitators serves as a cornerstone, building a robust foundation for e-Government strategies.

Robust technological infrastructure: An efficient e-Government framework hinges upon a strong technological backbone. Without stable and reliable infrastructure, including high-speed internet, data centres, and digital security mechanisms, e-Government platforms might face operational hitches; thus, eroding public trust. A vivid example is seen in nations like South Korea, where comprehensive broadband networks laid the groundwork for advanced e-services, enabling swift service delivery to citizens (Choi, 2019: 72).

Skilled workforce: e-Government is more than mere technology; it is about people, processes, and change management. A skilled workforce, adept in both technological and administrative domains, ensures the effective design, deployment, and maintenance of e-Government platforms. Continuous training and professional development opportunities play a pivotal role here. For instance, the European Union's digital literacy campaigns have significantly enhanced the abilities of public sector employees to adapt to and manage digital transformations (Andersson & Grönlund, 2018: 115).

Political will: The role of leadership cannot be overstated. Commitment at the highest levels of governance provides the necessary momentum for e-Government initiatives. Policy directives, resource allocations, and a vision for digital governance, emanating from the top, can galvanise entire departments and agencies into action. New Zealand's rapid digitisation of public services in the last decade bears testament to how political determination can drive e-Government agendas (Martin & Reddington, 2017: 89).

Public awareness: Citizens are the primary stakeholders of e-Government. Hence, ensuring they are aware of the available e-services is vitally important. Public awareness campaigns, workshops, and outreach programmes can foster familiarity with digital platforms. When citizens are informed about the benefits of e-Government services, such as convenience, transparency, and speed, they are more inclined to adopt and utilise them (Vashisth & Gupta, 2019: 132).

Citizen participation: Beyond awareness, e-Government also thrives on active citizen participation. Feedback loops, where citizens can voice concerns, suggest improvements, or even co-create solutions, enrich e-Government projects. Platforms that allow citizens to contribute to policymaking or engage in public debates democratise governance and solidify public trust in e-Government systems. Participatory budgeting in Brazilian cities, facilitated through online platforms, epitomises how citizen involvement can lead to more accountable and efficient governance (Silva, 2020: 48).

In conclusion, while the allure of digitising governance might lie predominantly in technology, the human and institutional facets remain equally vital. A comprehensive approach, encompassing the technological, human, and institutional enablers, can ensure e-Government projects achieve their envisaged potential and truly revolutionise public service delivery.

2.5.2 Barriers to e-Government

While e-Government projects promise transformative public service delivery mechanisms, they also encounter multifaceted challenges. Recognising and addressing these barriers is key for the smooth transition to and the effectiveness of e-Government platforms.

Resource constraints: The implementation of e-Government initiatives demands significant financial investments, particularly in developing nations. From setting up the requisite technological infrastructure to training personnel, the initial costs can be high. For countries grappling with economic constraints, diverting resources to e-Government can pose tough budgetary decisions. As highlighted by Rajan and Patkar (2018: 103),

many developing countries often face dilemmas between infrastructural developments and digital governance initiatives.

Digital divide: Not every citizen has equal access to digital technologies. Disparities based on income, location (urban vs. rural), age, and education can exacerbate inequalities in e-Government access. For instance, rural areas, especially in developing countries, may suffer from limited internet access, making e-services practically inaccessible for a segment of the population (Kumar & Sinha, 2017: 156).

Issues of trust: Trust plays a crucial role in the adoption of e-Government services. If citizens believe that digital platforms are unreliable or susceptible to breaches, they will hesitate to engage. A study by (Ngai & Wat, 2019: 119) found that concerns over system reliability and security significantly influenced public apprehension about e-Government services.

Privacy concerns: The digital era, while bringing convenience, has also heightened privacy concerns. Citizens worry about how their data, once shared with e-Government platforms, will be used or potentially misused. Data leaks, unauthorised access, or even the possibility of surveillance can deter citizens from adopting e-Government services (Chen & Sharma, 2020: 87).

Potential corruption in e-Government projects: Digital governance initiatives, like all public projects, are not immune to corruption. There can be irregularities in awarding contracts for building e-Government platforms, the mismanagement of funds, or even digital corruption, such as the manipulation of online records. Such incidents not only drain resources, but also erode public trust in e-Government initiatives (Lee & Kim, 2019: 134).

Addressing these barriers requires concerted efforts from policymakers, technologists, and civil society. By ensuring that e-Government projects are inclusive, transparent, and built on robust security and privacy foundations, the challenges can be mitigated. Moreover, continuous dialogue with stakeholders, including citizens, can help in adapting e-Government projects to local contexts, ensuring they remain relevant and effective.

2.6 Comparative e-Government readiness in global municipalities

2.6.1 Overview of comparative e-Government Readiness in global municipalities

E-Government readiness assessments, undertaken in a multitude of municipalities globally, offer invaluable insights into the adoption and integration levels of digital governance. By examining these assessments, policymakers can gain a broader perspective on their municipality's position in the global digital governance landscape.

In a global context, the preparedness for e-Government varies considerably. Advanced economies, particularly those in North America, Europe, and parts of Asia, generally demonstrate higher readiness levels (Tan & Goh, 2018: 521). The reasons are manifold: robust technological infrastructure, a higher degree of internet penetration, well-informed citizenry, and often, previous experiences with digital services.

Scandinavian countries, for instance, have been the frontrunners in e-Government integration. Municipalities in countries like Sweden, Denmark, and Norway boast some of the world's most sophisticated e-Government platforms, offering a range of services from tax payments to permit applications online (Johansson & Grönlund, 2019: 245).

Similarly, Asian economies like Singapore and South Korea are emblematic of rapid e-Government adoption. With a strong emphasis on technology and innovation, these municipalities have developed comprehensive e-Government services that span multiple sectors, backed by extensive public awareness campaigns (Lim & Tang, 2020: 289).

However, readiness is not uniformly high everywhere. Many municipalities in developing nations, especially in parts of Africa, South Asia, and Latin America, face challenges in achieving e-Government readiness. Infrastructure deficits, lower literacy rates, and the digital divide are among the pressing concerns (Mkude & Wimmer, 2019: 130).

Yet, even within these challenging contexts, success stories emerge. For example, some municipalities in Kenya and India have made strides in incorporating e-Government,

primarily driven by mobile technology, which has a broader reach than traditional internet connectivity (Ochieng & Silvius, 2017: 110).

Benchmarks from global municipalities offer essential lessons:

- **User-centricity:** Municipalities that have succeeded in their e-Government initiatives prioritised user experience. A user-friendly interface, multi-language support, and accessibility features can enhance citizens' experience (Nasir & Sahibuddin, 2018: 157).
- **Inclusivity:** Reaching out to marginalised communities, which ensures that they are not left behind in the digital transition, is crucial. Initiatives like mobile service vans, community training sessions, and public internet kiosks can make a difference (Gupta & Jha, 2019: 212).
- **Feedback mechanisms:** Proactive municipalities have instituted feedback channels where citizens can report issues, suggest improvements, or propose new e-services, making the platforms iterative and responsive (Hussein & Al-Rawi, 2020: 90).

In conclusion, e-Government readiness, while varying across municipalities, exhibits a common thread: the aspiration to harness digital tools for more effective governance. Global benchmarks and best practices, when contextualised, can guide municipalities on their e-Government journey, ensuring they deliver value to their citizens.

2.6.2 Lessons learned from international municipalities' e-Government experiences

As municipalities across the globe embrace e-Government, their experiences, both their triumphs and tribulations, serve as a rich repository of lessons for others embarking on similar journeys. Analysing these experiences allows us to identify key insights that could resonate with South African municipalities as they too navigate the digital governance landscape.

1. **Prioritising infrastructure development:** In many cities, like Barcelona and Seoul, the foundational success of e-Government was underpinned by robust technological

infrastructure. High-speed internet, widespread broadband accessibility, and a reliable power supply ensured that services were uninterrupted and accessible to the majority of residents (Lee & Kwak, 2019: 120). South African municipalities must evaluate their infrastructure's readiness as a fundamental step.

2. Capacity building is critical: Beyond the technological aspect, the human element is vital. Municipalities in Canada and Australia invested in comprehensive training programmes, equipping their staff with the skills required to manage and operate digital platforms (McDonald & Norris, 2020: 335). This emphasises the importance of continuous learning and adaptation in the e-Government landscape.

3. Public engagement is non-negotiable: Tokyo's e-Government model stands out for its extensive citizen engagement. Regular consultations, surveys, and town hall meetings ensured that the public's voice was central to the development of e-services (Yamamoto & Tanaka, 2018: 442). It underscores the need for municipalities to create e-Government solutions that resonate with the citizens' needs and expectations.

4. Addressing digital divide concerns: Many municipalities in developing nations grappled with the challenge of the digital divide. In parts of Brazil and Indonesia, while urban centres saw rapid e-Government adoption, rural areas lagged behind due to infrastructural and literacy challenges (Santoso & Wiratmadja, 2019: 156). This highlights the importance of inclusive strategies that cater to all demographics, ensuring no section of the population is left behind.

5. Ensuring data protection: European municipalities, especially post-GDPR, offer valuable lessons in safeguarding citizen data. Transparent data usage policies, stringent cybersecurity measures, and citizen control over their data became hallmarks of successful e-Government platforms (Schneider & Von Bismarck, 2020: 287). Given the increasing concerns over data privacy, this remains a crucial consideration for South African municipalities.

6. Flexibility in the face of challenges: While many e-Government projects in African nations like Nigeria and Ghana faced initial setbacks due to resistance, corruption, or resource constraints, their resilience yielded positive outcomes. They adapted strategies,

sought international partnerships, and progressively built trust with their citizenry (Adenuga & Ayeni, 2019: 95). It is a testament to the fact that while challenges are inevitable, flexibility and determination can overcome them.

Drawing parallels between these international experiences and South African municipalities, it is evident that while the context might differ, the overarching principles remain consistent. Emphasising infrastructure, human capital, public engagement, inclusivity, data protection, and adaptability will serve South African municipalities well as they stride forward in their e-Government journey.

2.7 Synthesis: Theories, concepts, and practical implications

E-Government, as an evolving concept, has transcended from mere digitisation of public services to a tool for empowerment, inclusivity, and heightened efficiency. The adoption and integration of e-Government in municipal setups worldwide rests on various factors, both theoretical and practical. At the intersection of these is where the TAM and the UN-EGDI lie. Their synergy, as well as their implications on the broader e-Government narrative, is critical for an exhaustive understanding.

The TAM in the e-Government landscape: At its core, the TAM propounds that the adoption of any technological system is heavily influenced by its perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use (Davis et al., 2019: 543). Applied to e-Government, the TAM becomes instrumental in anticipating the acceptance level of e-Government services by both officials and the public.

For instance, if a newly introduced e-Government service is perceived as highly beneficial (e.g., it slashes processing times significantly), but it is cumbersome to use, its adoption might still be stifled. Conversely, a straightforward system that does not significantly enhance public service delivery might also face resistance. Understanding this delicate balance aids municipalities in designing services that are both user-friendly and tangibly beneficial.

UN-EGDI: A metric for e-Government efficacy: going beyond just acceptance and use, the UN-EGDI offers a comprehensive measure of a nation's readiness and capacity to employ e-Government services (United Nations, 2021: 32). By assessing parameters like infrastructure, human capital, and online service, the UN-EGDI gives a multi-faceted view of e-Government readiness and efficacy. For municipalities, this serves as a roadmap, highlighting strengths and illuminating areas of improvement.

Practically, a municipality might possess a robust technological framework, but if it lacks the human capital (as indicated by a low UN-EGDI score in this component), its e-Government initiatives might remain under-optimised. Similarly, a high online service score might indicate a wide array of digital services, but without complementary infrastructure and human capacity, the service delivery might be hindered.

Holistic implications: Bridging the TAM and the UN-EGDI provides a well-rounded perspective. While the TAM forecasts potential adoption, the UN-EGDI gauges the current scenario. Their combined insights ensure that e-Government initiatives are not only developed with an eye on enhanced acceptance, but also grounded in the present realities of infrastructure, human capacity, and online service reach.

For instance, in scenarios where the TAM insights indicate potential resistance due to perceived complexity, municipalities can invest in training and awareness campaigns. Similarly, if the UN-EGDI scores flag infrastructural deficiencies, municipalities can prioritise these areas, ensuring that when e-services are rolled out, they function optimally.

In wrapping up, understanding the interplay between the TAM and the UN-EGDI is of cardinal importance for any municipality venturing into or optimising e-Government. They serve as theoretical guideposts that are deeply entrenched in the practicalities of e-Government service delivery. As we move forward into the research methodology and analysis, this synthesised understanding will provide a sturdy framework, ensuring that the study is both grounded in theory and that it is practical in its implications.

2.8 Conclusion

Chapter Two meticulously navigated the vast landscape of e-Government, unearthing both its transformative possibilities and the challenges buried therein. Theoretical frameworks like the TAM and the UN-EGDI offered lenses through which we viewed e-Government adoption and readiness. These insights, complemented by a broader understanding of both facilitative and obstructive elements to e-Government integration, provided a holistic picture of the global e-Government arena. Yet, as the discourse deepens in Chapter Three, we transition from a broad vantage point to a focused examination, centring our narrative on South Africa. Here, we attempt to interlace the generic concepts and theories with South Africa's distinct socio-political and technological nuances. Such a contextual immersion is pivotal as we strive to understand and assess e-Government readiness and its prospective trajectory in South African municipalities.

CHAPTER THREE

E-GOVERNMENT READINESS IN SOUTH AFRICA

3.1 Introduction

The digital era has ushered in new paradigms of operation, communication, and service delivery across all sectors, including governance. e-Government, as a pivotal component of this digital revolution, offers the promise of more efficient, transparent, and participatory governance. As nations globally embrace this shift, the degree to which they are prepared to make this transformation becomes a central concern. In the context of South Africa, a nation characterised by its diverse socio-economic landscape and unique political history, the challenge and opportunities presented by e-Government readiness is especially pertinent.

This chapter seeks to delve into the landscape of e-Government readiness in South Africa. It endeavours to contextualise the importance of e-Government against the nation's socio-political backdrop, highlighting both the opportunities it presents and the challenges it throws up. Through a comprehensive exploration, this chapter aims to chart South Africa's journey in the domain of e-Government, appraising its current state and anticipating its future trajectory.

Assessing e-Government readiness is not a mere academic exercise. In a nation like South Africa, where the legacy of apartheid continues to influence socio-economic divisions, and where there is an urgent need to bridge disparities, understanding e-Government readiness can offer critical insights. It can inform policy decisions, guide resource allocations, and most importantly, empower the government to leverage technology in fulfilling its commitment to its citizens. As South Africa continues its journey of democratisation and development, e-Government stands as a potential tool to accelerate progress, enhance public trust, and fortify the nation's democratic foundations. Hence, this assessment is not just timely but imperative.

3.2 Historical overview of e-Government in South Africa

Charting the evolution of e-Government initiatives:

South Africa's tryst with e-Government can be traced back to the early 2000s, following the global trend where nations began to realise the transformative potential of integrating technology into governance. The commitment towards this integration was first formalised with the launch of the "e-Government for Citizens" (e4C) strategy in 2001 (Smith & Malinga, 2002: 45). Aimed at improving service delivery and ensuring broader citizen participation, this was South Africa's preliminary step in acknowledging the significance of digital tools in governance.

A key motivation driving South Africa's early e-Government initiatives was the stark recognition of service delivery gaps, particularly in marginalised and previously disadvantaged communities (Johnson & Naidoo, 2005: 32). The e4C strategy, therefore, not only envisioned streamlining administrative processes, but also emphasised the need to democratise access to essential services. The subsequent years saw the rollout of various pilot projects, from online service portals to e-learning platforms, each aimed at bridging the service delivery chasm (Mkhize, 2004: 78).

Key milestones in the integration of technology into governance:

One of the early successes was the establishment of the South African State Information Technology Agency (SITA) in 1999, which played a pivotal role in strategising and executing e-Government projects (Van der Walt & Mbanga, 2003: 51). Their efforts, in collaboration with other governmental departments, led to the launch of the Batho Pele Gateway portal in 2002, South Africa's official online hub for public services. This portal, which marked a significant leap in the nation's e-Government journey, offered citizens a centralised platform to access a wide range of governmental services, from tax payments to license renewals (Chigona & Licker, 2008: 61).

Another notable milestone was the introduction of the Government Wide Enterprise Architecture (GWEA) Framework in 2007 (Moyo & Chawanda, 2009: 103). This framework laid down comprehensive guidelines for harmonising and optimising ICT operations across government departments. It marked a shift from isolated, siloed e-

Government projects to a more integrated, holistic approach, recognising that the true potential of e-Government could only be realised through interoperability and inter-departmental collaboration (Pillay & Maharaj, 2010: 85).

However, the journey was not devoid of hurdles. While urban centres like Johannesburg and Cape Town indicated rapid advancements in e-Government integration, many rural areas grappled with fundamental infrastructural and accessibility issues, rendering many e-initiatives ineffective in those regions (Zulu & Ayo, 2011: 112). Yet, despite these obstacles, South Africa's commitment to e-Government remained unwavering. By the end of the first decade of the 2000s, numerous e-service platforms, like the eHealth initiative and eProcurement systems, were operational, each catering to a specific domain of public service (Madzimure & Maharaj, 2012: 49).

In conclusion, although punctuated with challenges, South Africa's e-Government evolution shows a nation's steadfast commitment to harnessing technology for public good. Through strategic planning, continuous adaptation, and an undeterred vision, South Africa has steadily integrated digital tools into its governance model, setting the foundation for a more connected, transparent, and participative future (Rabali & Mearns, 2013: 74).

3.3 Application of the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) to South Africa

Perceived usefulness: How the government and citizens view the usefulness of e-Government services:

The TAM, with its emphasis on perceived usefulness, provides a valuable lens to analyse South Africa's journey with e-Government. The South African government has always underscored the importance of integrating technology to enhance service delivery. With projects like the Batho Pele Gateway portal and the eHealth initiative, the authorities have been keen to show the direct benefits of e-services to citizens (Kgathi & Heeks, 2003: 36).

Citizens' perspective, however, offers a nuanced view. While urban populations, especially in economic hubs such as Johannesburg, expressed satisfaction with the speed and efficiency of e-services, the perception varied in rural regions (Moloi & Mutula,

2005: 52). The promise of instantaneous services, 24/7 availability, and transparent processes undoubtedly appeal to a broad segment. Yet, for a significant portion of the population, especially those grappling with digital illiteracy or infrastructural constraints, the perceived usefulness is intertwined with accessibility challenges (Dlamini & Mavetera, 2008: 67).

Perceived ease of use: Analysing the user-friendliness of current e-Government platforms:

The efficacy of e-Government services is not just determined by their availability and usability. The TAM emphasises that for technology to be widely adopted, its ease of use is key. In South Africa, efforts have been consistently made to ensure that e-Government platforms are intuitive and user-friendly (Phahlamohlaka & Lotriet, 2006: 41). Initiatives such as user experience workshops and feedback loops have been implemented to understand citizens' navigation challenges and rectify them.

However, the digital divide cannot be overlooked. While younger, tech-savvy demographics might find the platforms straightforward, older generations or those unfamiliar with digital interfaces might find them daunting (Sebola & Tsheola, 2010: 55). Additionally, language barriers can impede the perceived ease of use, especially in a nation as linguistically diverse as South Africa. Recognising this, multi-language support has been integrated into many platforms, ensuring broader accessibility (Van Belle & Heeks, 2012: 73).

3.3.1 Introduction to the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM)

The TAM, a pivotal paradigm in the information systems sphere, emerged in the 1980s and was crafted by Fred Davis (Davis, 1989). Designed to comprehend and anticipate technology acceptance in users, TAM's genesis was rooted in the need to elucidate the user adoption process of new technological systems, especially within organisational environments.

Central to the TAM are two determinants:

Perceived Usefulness (PU): Davis (1989) defines this as the user's subjective probability that utilising a specific application system will amplify his/her job performance. When

shifted to the e-Government backdrop, PU delves into citizens' beliefs about how such digital mechanisms could simplify and enrich their governmental dealings.

Perceived Ease of Use (PEOU): This concept, as described by (Davis 1989), pertains to the degree a person believes that using a particular system would be effortless. In the realm of e-Government, this encapsulates the accessibility and intuitive design of online portals and interfaces.

The TAM theorises that these foundational factors mould the user's attitude, leading to an intention to use, which eventually culminates in the actual usage of the technology.

3.3.2 Origins and evolution of the TAM

3.4 Attitude towards use: Public and governmental attitude towards e-Government

The South African government's attitude towards e-Government is palpably positive, viewing it as an indispensable tool for improved governance and service delivery (Chigona & Metfula, 2009: 44). There is consensus at the bureaucratic and administrative levels about the transformative potential of digitising public services, reflected in budgetary allocations, policy documents, and strategic roadmaps.

Public attitude, however, varies. As with any transformation, there is a spectrum of responses. A sizeable chunk of the population, especially in urban centres, is enthusiastic, appreciating the reduction in bureaucratic red tape, speedier service delivery, and the convenience e-Government offers (Twizeyimana & Andersson, 2011: 49). Digital natives, in particular, are more predisposed to using these platforms, given their inherent comfort with technology.

On the other end, there is scepticism and resistance, often rooted in concerns about data privacy, the potential misuse of personal information, or simply a lack of trust in digital transactions (Mutula & Mostert, 2010: 62). Such attitudes are not uncommon, especially when transitioning from traditional governance models to digital ones. Efforts to address these concerns through public awareness campaigns, digital literacy programmes, and stringent data protection policies have been initiated, showing the government's

commitment to fostering a positive attitude toward e-Government adoption (Nkwe, 2012: 51).

Applying the TAM to South Africa's e-Government scenario paints a picture of optimism interspersed with challenges. While the trajectory is undoubtedly positive, with the government and a significant portion of the public aligned in their vision for a digitised governance model, there is a continued need for inclusivity, accessibility, and trust-building (Dzidonu, 2013: 46).

3.5 Insights from the United Nations E-Government Development Index (UN-EGDI)

3.5.1 South Africa's rank and performance over the years

The UN-EGDI offers a global benchmark assessing the digital governance capabilities of countries. For South Africa, tracking its performance on this index provides a holistic view of its e-Government maturity and international standing.

Historically, South Africa has demonstrated a progressive trend in the UN-EGDI. From its initial forays into e-Government in the early 2000s, South Africa has seen a steady climb in its ranking, signalling a commitment to digital transformation in governance. As per the latest available data, South Africa's ranking reflects its aspirations to not just catch up with global standards, but also potentially set benchmarks for the African continent (UN E-Government Survey, 2020: 24).

3.5.2 Comparison with neighbouring countries or similar economies

Comparing South Africa's UN-EGDI performance with neighbouring nations and economies of a similar scale offers intriguing insights. Among the BRICS nations, for instance, South Africa's digital governance efforts align closely with Brazil and India, indicating the challenges and opportunities emerging economies face in this domain (UN E-Government Survey, 2018: 32).

When juxtaposed against neighbouring nations in the Southern African Development Community (SADC), South Africa emerges as one of the frontrunners. This leadership

position in the region underscores South Africa's role as a pivotal player in influencing e-Government practices in its region (Moyo, 2017: 45). However, countries like Mauritius have also shown significant strides in the UN-EGDI, indicating a healthy competitive spirit in the region (UN E-Government Survey, 2019: 29).

3.5.3 Key areas of improvement as highlighted by the UN-EGDI

While South Africa's progress in e-Government is commendable, the UN-EGDI also points out areas where focused efforts can drive further improvement. One significant area is citizen participation. While the nation boasts robust e-Government infrastructure, active citizen engagement in the digital governance process remains an area of concern (UN E-Government Survey, 2020: 38).

Moreover, service integration across various government domains is another sphere needing attention. While isolated departments have made remarkable digital strides, a unified, cohesive approach to e-services is a key milestone South Africa is still navigating towards (Bwalya & Healy, 2016: 53).

Lastly, the UN-EGDI underscores the importance of digital inclusivity. Ensuring that e-Government services are universally accessible, especially to marginalised communities, those with disabilities, and those in remote regions, remains challenging. South Africa's commitment to bridging this digital divide, while evident, needs sustained and strategic effort to align with the best global practices (UN E-Government Survey, 2021: 42).

In concluding, the UN-EGDI offers a panoramic view of South Africa's e-Government journey, highlighting its achievements, its positioning in the global and regional context, and its areas of improvement. Embracing these insights, South Africa is poised to chart a forward-looking path in digital governance, making e-services more integrated, inclusive, and impactful for all its citizens.

3.6 Factors influencing e-Government readiness in South Africa

3.6.1 Infrastructural challenges

South Africa, with its diverse landscape and socio-economic complexities, has been striving hard to realise the promise of e-Government fully. The foundation of any digital governance initiative is robust and widespread infrastructure. However, infrastructural challenges, both in terms of physical hardware and network connectivity, have posed significant hurdles.

The issue of uneven internet penetration is a poignant reminder of the existing disparities. While metropolitan hubs like Johannesburg and Cape Town possess advanced digital infrastructure, the story is starkly different in other parts. These cities, being the economic powerhouses, have always been at the forefront of technological adoption, with businesses and households enjoying high-speed internet connectivity (Smith, 2019: 157). In contrast, rural regions, particularly areas in the Northern Cape and parts of the Eastern Cape, lag behind. Not only is internet connectivity sporadic in these regions, but the speed and reliability are also far from ideal (Mkhize, 2016: 142).

The reasons for this digital disparity are manifold. Geographical challenges, such as the vast and often rugged terrain of the Northern Cape, make laying fibre-optic cables or setting up towers for wireless connectivity difficult (Ntuli, 2017: 110). In addition, from an economic perspective, service providers might be hesitant to invest in areas with lower population densities, fearing lower returns on their investment. As a result, many rural inhabitants still rely on outdated technologies for connectivity, which are not conducive to accessing modern e-Government platforms (Maluleke, 2020: 89).

Furthermore, the issue of infrastructure is not limited only to internet connectivity. The availability of digital equipment – computers, tablets, and smartphones – is crucial in ensuring that citizens can access e-Government services. Public spaces like schools, libraries, and community centres often function as bridges in this digital divide, offering people without personal devices a chance to tap into the digital world (Jones & Pillay, 2018: 104). However, the distribution of such equipment is inconsistent. While urban

schools might have dedicated computer laboratories with high-speed internet, schools in impoverished areas might struggle with even basic digital infrastructure (Dlamini, 2019: 128).

It is worth noting that infrastructure is not only about hardware and connectivity. Software infrastructure, which includes user-friendly applications, secure databases, and reliable cloud services, also plays a pivotal role in the success of e-Government initiatives. However, with limited budgets and expertise, many local governments face challenges setting up and maintaining such software systems, resulting in less efficient service delivery (Zulu, 2018: 134).

In conclusion, for South Africa to fully harness the potential of e-Government, addressing these infrastructural challenges is important. The disparity in digital infrastructure reflects deeper socio-economic divisions, and bridging this gap is not just about enhancing service delivery but also about ensuring equity, inclusivity, and social justice in the digital age. The journey is challenging, but the rewards, in terms of increased transparency, efficiency, and citizen empowerment, make it a pursuit worth undertaking.

3.6.2 Skillset and literacy

The digital era has undeniably reshaped the contours of modern governance. Yet, the fruits of this transformation can only be realised when a population is equipped with the requisite skills to navigate the digital landscape. Digital literacy, therefore, is not merely a supplementary skill, but a cornerstone of e-Government readiness. South Africa's tryst with cultivating digital skills has been marked by significant achievements and glaring gaps.

The country's education system, one of the pillars of its post-apartheid transformation, has witnessed considerable advancements over the years. Urban centres, with their cosmopolitan populace and better resources, have managed to integrate IT education into the curriculum; thereby, preparing the younger generation for the digital future (Mkhize, 2017: 76). These urban schools, with dedicated computer laboratories and specialised teachers, provide students with a solid foundation in digital skills.

However, as one moves away from these urban pockets to more rural or semi-urban locales, the narrative shifts. Schools in these areas, already grappling with challenges such as underfunding, outdated infrastructure, and shortages of teachers, find it challenging to incorporate comprehensive IT education. The result is a digital skills gap between students from different socio-economic backgrounds, perpetuating existing inequalities in the digital realm (Van der Merwe, 2018: 98).

For many adults, particularly those who completed their education before the IT boom, the challenge is even more pronounced. They find themselves in a world that is rapidly digitising, and without the necessary skills, there is a palpable sense of being left behind. While some manage to acquire skills informally, perhaps through younger family members or self-learning, many remain digitally illiterate, reliant on traditional modes of accessing government services (Khosa, 2019: 115).

Recognising this challenge, the South African government has rolled out various initiatives aimed at bridging the digital divide. The "e-Skills Institute," for instance, was conceptualised to address this very lacuna. Through a series of workshops, training programmes, and seminars, the initiative aims to empower the South African populace with digital skills (Nkosi & Mekuria, 2016: 132). However, while the intent is commendable, the outreach remains limited. Many rural inhabitants, due to logistical and awareness challenges, remain oblivious to such opportunities.

Moreover, digital literacy is not just about operating a computer or accessing the internet. It encompasses a broader range of skills, from discerning credible from non-credible online information, and understanding the basics of digital security and privacy, to leveraging digital platforms for socio-economic betterment. An integrated approach to digital literacy, therefore, requires not just skills-based training but also cultivating a mindset of curiosity, caution, and creativity in the digital realm (Petersen, 2020: 121).

In conclusion, the journey towards a digitally literate South Africa is a challenging yet vitally important one. While infrastructural developments form the bedrock of e-Government, it is the digital skills of the populace that will determine the efficacy and reach of such initiatives. To truly democratise digital governance, a concerted, multi-

pronged strategy targeting different demographics and addressing varied skill levels is key.

3.6.3 Socio-cultural factors

South Africa's rich tapestry of cultures, languages, and traditions makes it a vibrant nation. However, this diversity, while being a strength, also presents unique challenges in the realm of e-Government. To understand the intricacies of these challenges, one must delve deeper into the socio-cultural fabric of the country.

Language, in many ways, is the first point of contact for any user accessing a digital platform. South Africa's linguistic diversity, with eleven official languages, presents a unique challenge for e-Government platforms. While major languages like English and Afrikaans are often catered for, indigenous languages such as Zulu, Xhosa, Sotho, and others might not receive the same attention. For a Xhosa speaker in the Eastern Cape or a Zulu speaker in KwaZulu-Natal, accessing a platform exclusively in English can be a daunting task. This linguistic barrier inadvertently marginalises these communities from the benefits of e-Government (Dlamini, 2019: 89).

However, the challenges are not just linguistic. Cultural nuances often dictate the way people perceive and engage with technology. In many rural communities, where traditional norms and practices still hold sway, there is a deep-seated reverence for established ways of doing things. The switch from visiting a government office in person, interacting with officials face-to-face, to clicking buttons on a screen is not merely a logistical shift but a cultural one. Such transitions can sometimes be met with apprehension or even resistance. The underlying fear is often about losing the personal touch or misplacing trust in an impersonal digital entity (Van der Walt & Van Belle, 2015: 115).

Furthermore, the history of South Africa, marked by apartheid and subsequent struggles for equality, has engendered a deep sense of community among various ethnic groups. The sense of communal identity often transcends individual choices. If a community

leader or an influential figure shows scepticism towards e-Government platforms, it might lead to a collective reluctance among community members.

To address these socio-cultural challenges, a multi-dimensional approach is required. Translation of e-services into multiple languages is just the tip of the iceberg. True inclusivity demands localised content, imagery, and design that resonate with different cultural groups. For instance, featuring local landmarks, symbols, or idioms can make a platform more relatable (Moyo & Chigona, 2020: 143).

Moreover, community engagement is important. Hosting workshops, awareness campaigns, and interactive sessions in local languages, helmed by trusted community figures, can alleviate fears and misconceptions about e-Government services. By involving community leaders and influencers in the advocacy of digital platforms, the government can create ambassadors who bridge the cultural gap between tradition and technology.

In essence, South Africa's journey towards e-Government readiness is not just about technological advancement; it is about cultural harmony. To make e-Government truly effective, it must be embedded in the socio-cultural ethos of the nation, respecting its diversity and leveraging it to build a more inclusive digital future.

3.6.4 Policy and regulation

Government policies and regulations play a decisive role in shaping e-Government readiness. On the one hand, South Africa has been proactive in drafting policies, like the "e-Government Strategy and Roadmap", which aim to accelerate digital transformation in governance (Department of Public Service and Administration, 2017: 23). However, on the other hand, bureaucratic hurdles, outdated regulations, and a lack of coherent policy implementation can hinder the rollout of e-Government initiatives. Furthermore, the absence of stringent data protection laws, until the advent of the Protection of Personal Information Act (POPIA), raised concerns about data security and citizen privacy in e-Government portals (Van Wyk, 2018: 142).

In conclusion, while South Africa's journey towards e-Government readiness is paved with potential, tangible challenges exist that span infrastructure, skills, culture, and policy. Addressing these in an integrated manner will be pivotal for the nation to harness the benefits of digital governance fully.

3.7 Success stories and model initiatives

3.7.1 Highlighting municipalities or departments in South Africa that have successfully integrated e-Government

South Africa's journey in e-Government has witnessed notable success stories, with some municipalities and departments outshining others in their digital endeavours. The Western Cape, for instance, has consistently been at the forefront. The launch of the e-portal by the Western Cape Education Department (WCED) is a shining example. This initiative offers a one-stop platform for students, educators, and parents, providing resources, online content, and essential school-related information, all accessible through a single portal (Khumalo, 2017: 48).

Another commendable initiative is the Gauteng province's e-gauteng strategy. This comprehensive approach integrates various governmental functions into a unified digital framework. From online housing applications to renewing vehicle licenses, Gauteng has been instrumental in leveraging technology to simplify governance for its residents (Sibanda, 2018: 60).

The City of Cape Town's SmartCape initiative deserves special mention. Aimed at narrowing the digital divide, SmartCape provides free internet access in public libraries. Residents can use computers, access e-Government services, and gain digital literacy, making it a crucial step toward comprehensive e-Government readiness (Naidoo, 2016: 113).

3.7.2 Best practices that can be emulated by other regions

3.7.2.1 User-centric design

User-centric design, as the term suggests, places the user at the centre of the entire design process, ensuring that the platform or service is tailored to the user's needs, preferences, and experiences. South Africa, in its pursuit of establishing robust e-Government platforms, has begun to recognise the crucial importance of this principle.

The WCED e-portal is proof of the effectiveness of user-centric designs in e-Government. The platform is not just an aggregation of services or a digital interface. Instead, it mirrors the needs and expectations of its core users: students and educators. Understanding that these users seek information and resources in an intuitive way, the e-portal eliminates unnecessary complexities, employs familiar terminologies, and uses visuals that resonate with an academic audience. Thus, this reduces the learning curve and ensures that students and educators find the platform not only helpful, but engaging (Mabaso, 2019: 135).

Moreover, platforms that adopt user-centric design principles tend to see higher user satisfaction rates. This leads to increased adoption, frequent usage, and, often, positive word-of-mouth referrals. When users feel that a platform understands and caters to their unique needs, they are more likely to trust it, rely on it, and recommend it to their peers (Khuzwayo, 2018: 78).

But it is not just about the initial design. Continuous feedback mechanisms are integral. Platforms need to evolve based on user feedback, ensuring that as user needs change, the platform adapts. The WCED e-portal's success lies not just in its initial launch, but in its commitment to evolve, iterate, and improve, always keeping the user's experience at the forefront (Zulu, 2020: 211).

3.7.2.2 Regular training and skill development

Technology is only as good as its users. Even the most advanced, intuitive platforms can fail if users are unsure of how to navigate them or if they do not see their inherent value. This is where training and skill development play a pivotal role.

Gauteng, one of South Africa's most urbanised provinces, offers a glimpse into how regular training programmes can elevate the success of e-Government initiatives. Instead of merely rolling out e-services, the province goes a step further. By providing regular training to government employees, Gauteng ensures that the people responsible for managing, updating, and troubleshooting the platform are equipped with the latest skills and knowledge. Such training means fewer errors, quicker issue resolutions, and overall, a more efficient e-Government service (Lekota, 2017: 90).

But it does not stop with government employees. The public, the end-users of these platforms, also needs to understand how to navigate them. Gauteng's proactive approach extends to the public. Regular workshops, online tutorials, and helplines ensure the public is not left grappling with unfamiliar interfaces. Instead, they are educated, empowered, and encouraged to make the most of the e-services available to them (Vilakazi, 2018: 103).

Moreover, as the technological landscape evolves, so do the threats associated with it. Regular training sessions also play a crucial role in cybersecurity. By educating government employees about the latest cyber threats and safe online practices, Gauteng safeguards its e-Government platforms against potential breaches; thus, fostering public trust (Mkhize, 2019: 142).

3.7.2.3 Integrative approach

The rapid rise of digital technologies has given governments worldwide the opportunity to provide services more efficiently, but it also presents the risk of fragmenting services across multiple platforms. South Africa, like many nations, has been exploring the digital sphere, and it is evident that an integrative approach yields the most benefits.

The e-gauteng strategy is a prime example of how amalgamating various digital solutions into one unified platform can drastically improve service delivery. This strategy does not merely involve digitising existing services. It is about understanding the interconnectedness of these services and weaving them together to provide a holistic e-Government experience (Madonsela, 2018: 77).

There are multiple benefits to this approach. First, from the perspective of government resources, there is better resource utilisation. Maintaining one robust platform is more efficient than scattering resources across multiple disjointed initiatives. It leads to economies of scale, streamlined maintenance, and consistent upgrades (Moloi, 2019: 82).

Secondly, for citizens, a unified platform means simplicity. Instead of navigating multiple sites or apps for different services, they have a one-stop solution. It enhances user experience, reduces the chances of confusion, and accelerates service delivery. When citizens understand that they can access many services through one gateway, their trust and reliance on e-Government initiatives grow (Tshabalala, 2020: 116).

Lastly, this integrative approach can foster cross-departmental collaboration. Different government departments, often working in silos, can come together under a unified digital strategy. Sharing data, resources, and insights leads to better governance and paves the way for innovative solutions that cater to multifaceted challenges (Sisulu, 2017: 98).

3.7.2.4 Inclusion and accessibility

In the world of digital governance, merely rolling out platforms is not enough. Ensuring these platforms are accessible and beneficial to all citizens, irrespective of their socio-economic backgrounds, is important.

Initiatives like SmartCape stand out as beacons of inclusivity in the realm of e-Government. Recognising the digital divide – a chasm where certain sections of society are left out of the digital revolution due to various constraints – SmartCape aimed to bridge this gap. By providing free internet access, particularly in regions where such luxuries are

hard to come by, the initiative ensured that the benefits of e-Government were not restricted to the urban elite (Phakathi, 2016: 105).

Inclusivity in e-Government goes beyond mere service delivery. It is about empowering citizens. In a country like South Africa, with its diverse demographic and economic landscapes, ensuring everyone has a fair shot at leveraging digital governance is a cornerstone of democratic principles (Moyo, 2017: 119).

Furthermore, accessibility is not just about physical access. It is about ensuring that once online, the platforms cater to everyone. This means having platforms in multiple languages, ensuring they are user-friendly, and accommodating those with disabilities. Features like voice commands, screen readers, and easy-to-understand graphics ensure everyone, including the differently abled, can make the most of e-Government services (Nkosi, 2019: 132).

In summary, the core of e-Government is not technology. It is the people it serves. South Africa, through initiatives like SmartCape, has displayed its commitment to ensure that the digital future it is building leaves no one behind. The road ahead, filled with possibilities, will undoubtedly be shaped by these principles of inclusivity and accessibility.

To conclude, South Africa, despite its challenges in e-Government readiness, has pockets of excellence that offer a roadmap for broader success. By learning from these model initiatives and best practices, there is the potential for holistic digital transformation across the nation's governance structures.

3.8 Challenges and limitations

3.8.1 Identifying the current roadblocks to e-Government readiness

The aspiration to fully realise e-Government in South Africa, while promising, is plagued by several challenges. Infrastructure remains a pivotal concern. Many rural areas still lack reliable internet connectivity, rendering e-services inaccessible to a significant portion of the population (Dlamini, 2019: 32). The digital divide is not merely geographical;

socioeconomic disparities also result in uneven access to the necessary technology, such as computers and smartphones (Mokoena, 2017: 75).

Cybersecurity is another pressing issue. With the increasing digitisation of services, there is a heightened risk of cyberattacks, data breaches, and threats to personal privacy. While there have been efforts to bolster cybersecurity measures, concerns persist about the robustness of these systems in the face of evolving cyber threats (Zungu, 2018: 118).

In addition, the bureaucratic structure of the government often slows down the efficient rollout of e-Government initiatives. Red tape, coupled with resistance to change among certain factions in the government machinery, poses significant roadblocks (Sithole, 2017: 141).

Furthermore, while initiatives like the SmartCape project aim to address the digital literacy gap, a significant portion of the population, particularly the elderly, remains unfamiliar with or apprehensive about using digital platforms. This translates to lower adoption rates for e-Government services, even when they are available (Mhlanga, 2018: 52).

3.8.2 Potential future challenges and areas of concern

Looking forward, the rapid pace of technological evolution might pose a challenge. E-Government platforms need constant updating to remain relevant and effective. This requires continuous funding, a skilled workforce, and an agile approach to governance – all of which can be challenging for bureaucratic entities (Nkosi, 2020: 160).

Data management and privacy will emerge as a paramount concern. As e-Government platforms collect vast amounts of user data, ensuring its secure storage and ethical use becomes vital. Stringent regulations will be needed to prevent misuse and uphold citizen trust (Molefe, 2019: 178).

Moreover, as the world becomes more interconnected, there is a growing need for interoperability – the ability of e-Government systems to communicate and integrate with international platforms. This requires standardisation, another potential area of concern,

given the diversity of e-Government platforms in use in South Africa (Tshabalala, 2020: 105).

Lastly, sociocultural factors will continue to play a role. In certain communities, traditional methods of governance and communication are deeply rooted, and e-Government might be perceived as an imposition or an alien concept. Tailored community outreach and education will be essential to address these concerns (Van Wyk, 2017: 97).

In conclusion, while the trajectory towards complete e-Government readiness in South Africa is filled with potential, it is equally fraught with challenges. Acknowledging and proactively addressing these concerns is crucial for the successful implementation and acceptance of digital governance.

3.9 Conclusion

This chapter has thoroughly explored South Africa's readiness for e-Government, covering historical contexts, models of technology acceptance, insights from international assessments, local success stories, and the numerous challenges faced. Despite commendable progress in certain municipalities and departments, South Africa encounters multifaceted barriers, including infrastructural gaps, digital literacy divides, cybersecurity concerns, bureaucratic inertia, and the need for policies and regulations to evolve with the digital environment. Sociocultural dimensions also significantly influence the acceptance and integration of e-Government initiatives.

Concluding the discussion, this comprehensive overview underscores South Africa's journey towards e-Government readiness, revealing a landscape marked by challenges and abundant potential. It emphasizes the critical need for strategic interventions and collaborative initiatives to harness governance efficiency, empower citizens, and enhance South Africa's global standing. As the narrative progresses, we shift focus in Chapter Four to a detailed analysis of empirical findings from the Sol Plaatje Municipality. These insights will delve deeper into the region's e-Government integration, offering a nuanced understanding and context-specific recommendations for future advancement.

CHAPTER FOUR

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

4.1 Introduction

The primary objective of this study has been to assess the e-Government readiness of the Sol Plaatje Municipality within the broader South African context, with the aim of identifying factors that facilitate or hinder the implementation of e-Government initiatives. This exploration seeks to bridge the knowledge gap surrounding the readiness of local governments in developing countries to adopt and effectively deploy e-Government solutions.

Chapter Four delves deeply into the heart of the research, presenting the empirical findings gathered from a desktop study. Through a systematic presentation and analysis, this chapter unveils crucial insights concerning the Municipality's current state of e-Government preparedness, the citizens' perceptions, and the underlying challenges or opportunities that influence e-Government initiatives. By comparing and contrasting these findings with established theoretical frameworks and with other regions, the researcher aims to paint a comprehensive picture of e-Government readiness in the Sol Plaatje Municipality.

4.2 Overview of data collection

Data for this study was amassed using a desktop research approach, a method deemed most suitable given the rich repository of pre-existing resources on the subject. This involved a thorough examination of academic literature, government reports, policy documents, and other pertinent sources that offered insights into the e-Government readiness of the Sol Plaatje Municipality. The key instruments employed in collecting this data were online databases, institutional repositories, and e-Government assessment tools provided by reputable organisations, among others.

While this approach offered extensive insights, it was not devoid of challenges. Given the vast amount of available information, sifting through to identify the most relevant and up-

to-date data required meticulous scrutiny. Moreover, some potential sources contained information that was either outdated or lacked depth in terms of local context. Accessibility to certain proprietary databases or reports also posed minor hurdles. Despite these challenges, the adopted methodology ensured that the data collected was both comprehensive and relevant, offering a solid foundation upon which the analysis is based.

4.3 Presentation of findings

4.3.1 Research question/objective 1

Research question: How do the citizens of the Sol Plaatje Municipality perceive the digital interventions introduced in the realm of e-Government, and what factors might influence their adoption?

To unravel the intricate tapestry of perceptions surrounding e-Government digital interventions in Sol Plaatje Municipality, a dive into multiple sources was necessitated. Such a dive not only highlights awareness levels but also delves deep into adoption rates, demographic trends, and associated challenges.

Central to our understanding was the awareness matrix (Smith et al., 2021: 153), which conducted a comprehensive survey that served as a litmus test for gauging the general consciousness concerning e-Government services. About 68% of the Municipality's respondents were not just aware but also demonstrated a preliminary interest in these services. While this number was encouraging, a deeper layer needed to be peeled back to comprehend if this awareness was mere passive knowledge or an active precursor to tangible action.

Breaking down the numbers, it was apparent that not all e-Government initiatives were perceived or adopted uniformly. E-services, by their nature, vary in their applicability and relevance. Online tax portals, which garnered a 59% usage rate (Jones & Moyo, 2022: 89), stood testament to services that resonate with immediate citizen needs. Conversely, platforms like e-learning, which lagged at 32%, hinted at potential gaps in perceived value or accessibility barriers.

This gap in adoption rates was given a theoretical scaffold with the integration of the TAM. (Osei & Dube's, 2022: 177) rendition of the TAM in their seminal work delineated the framework's two pillars: perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use. For Sol Plaatje Municipality, services that pragmatically streamlined tasks, like tax payments, naturally leaned into the 'perceived usefulness' bracket, explaining their higher uptake.

Yet, the narrative was not uniformly positive across all demographic swaths. (Patel & Kumar's, 2021: 245) incisive analysis of neighbouring municipalities shed light on significant demographic stratifications. Younger cohorts, especially those fortified with tertiary education, were not just more aware but also more amenable to adopting e-services. For the Sol Plaatje Municipality, understanding these demographic undercurrents is not just an academic exercise; it is a potential blueprint for e-Government promotional strategies.

However, challenges, both overt and nuanced, punctuated the e-Government narrative. The term 'digital divide' is often bandied about in tech discourses, but for the Sol Plaatje Municipality, it was a tangible reality. Urban pockets within the Municipality brimmed with optimism and showed impressive e-service adoption. Yet, rural realms painted a starkly different picture. (Williams et al., 2023: 202) astutely highlight this divide, emphasising the crippling lack of technological infrastructure and the ripple effect of limited digital literacy in these areas.

One cannot bypass the psychological dimensions either. The edifice of any e-Government initiative is trust, and this was in precarious balance in the Municipality. (Anderson & Khumalo, 2022: 300) delve into the psyche of the residents, unearthing substantial trust issues. The apprehensions spanned concerns over privacy, potential data misuse, and nagging doubts about the security of digital transactions. These intangible, yet deeply rooted fears, might pose significant impediments, potentially overshadowing the sheer utility or functionality of e-services.

In essence, the canvas of e-Government perceptions in the Sol Plaatje Municipality is both rich and varied. While the bedrock of enthusiasm and awareness is firmly in place, overlaying this are layers of demographic trends, infrastructural disparities, and

psychological barriers. Navigating this labyrinth requires not just technological prowess but also a keen understanding of these multifaceted dynamics.

4.3.2 Research objective/question 2

Research question: How do the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) and the United Nations E-Government Development Index (UN-EGDI) relate to e-Government, and what insights can they provide in the context of the Sol Plaatje Municipality?

E-Government, as an evolving paradigm, is multifaceted in its nature and scope. For a robust analysis of its adoption and implementation, leveraging theoretical frameworks is indispensable. Two such tools are the TAM and the UN-EGDI, each offering distinctive but complementary insights.

Initiated by (Davis, 1989: 24), the TAM was developed to demystify the user acceptance of information systems. Its dual pillars – perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use – provide a profound understanding of the motivations behind technology adoption. In Sol Plaatje Municipality's milieu, the tangible and direct benefits that citizens could accrue from digital government services define perceived usefulness. Whether it is the convenience of online tax submissions or the swift access to municipal resources, tangible benefits play a pivotal role in driving citizen engagement (Nkomo & Botha, 2022: 56).

However, the bridge between service availability and adoption is the user interface. The TAM's perceived ease of use underscores this very aspect – the intuitiveness, user-friendliness, and overall navigational experience of digital platforms. (Nkomo & Botha, 2022: 60) spotlight mixed perceptions in Sol Plaatje Municipality, signalling a need for more streamlined interfaces and efficient user support mechanisms.

In contrast to the user-centric lens of the TAM, the UN-EGDI furnishes a holistic view of e-Government readiness. A composite of the Online Service Index (OSI), the Telecommunication Infrastructure Index (TII), and the Human Capital Index (HCI), the UN-EGDI paints a panoramic picture of e-Government's infrastructure, services, and the populace's capabilities.

The OSI evaluates the breadth and depth of online services. For Sol Plaatje Municipality, this translates to an assessment of the array of e-services and their efficiency. Preliminary studies like that of (Khumalo & Van der Walt ,2023: 8) illustrate an impressive palette of services, spotlighting the Municipality's commitment to digital governance.

Yet, the road to digital governance is punctuated with challenges. The TII component of the UN-EGDI is a barometer of a region's technological infrastructure. In the context of Sol Plaatje Municipality, while urban cores boasted robust infrastructure, the rural peripheries presented a different tale. The infrastructural disparities, as highlighted by (Khumalo & Van der Walt, 2023: 102), underscore the need for equitable technological investments.

Furthermore, the HCI, emphasising digital literacy and educational attainments, is the keystone for e-Government's success. A digitally literate populace is not just an end-user, but also a collaborator, providing feedback and co-creating solutions. In Sol Plaatje Municipality, while urban areas indicated promising HCI scores, there is still considerable scope for targeted digital literacy initiatives, especially in the hinterlands.

In conclusion, the juxtaposition of the TAM and the UN-EGDI provides a nuanced and layered understanding of e-Government in Sol Plaatje Municipality. While the TAM deciphers individual motivations and barriers, the UN-EGDI zooms out to furnish a holistic view of infrastructure, services, and human capital. Together, these frameworks illuminate the path for the Municipality, offering actionable insights for policy fine-tuning, strategic investments, and user-centric design paradigms.

4.3.3 Research objective/question 3

Research question: What is the current state of e-Government readiness in the Sol Plaatje Municipality?

e-Government readiness is not merely a measure of available technological resources but a comprehensive gauge of how well a region is poised to fully realise the potential of digital governance. The Sol Plaatje Municipality's readiness is best understood by

evaluating both the tangible technological advancements and the more intangible aspects of user perceptions and experiences.

On the technological front, the framework of internet connectivity forms the backbone of any e-Government initiative. (Mthembu & Sibanda's, 2022: 32) comprehensive report elucidates this very facet in the Sol Plaatje Municipality. The urban clusters of the Municipality are nearly on par with global standards, boasting an impressive 85% connectivity rate. This robust connectivity bodes well for urban inhabitants, ensuring smooth access to e-Government platforms. However, the narrative shifts when the lens turns towards the rural expanse. With connectivity lagging at 45%, rural inhabitants are palpably disadvantaged (Mthembu & Sibanda, 2022: 35). This digital chasm not only limits service accessibility, but could potentially marginalise a significant segment of the Municipality's populace.

Recognising this digital divide, the Municipality's strategic implementation of digital service kiosks emerges as a notable intervention. Positioned strategically in public spaces, these kiosks are designed to democratise access to e-Government services, catering especially to those who might lack personal internet access (Mthembu & Sibanda, 2022: 40). It is a tangible testament to the Municipality's commitment to inclusivity in its digital journey.

Diving deeper into the actual e-service platforms, usability emerges as a cornerstone. (Singh & Pillay's, 2023: 47) detailed usability analysis provides critical insights. The overall intuitiveness of the Sol Plaatje Municipality's e-Government portal is evident, with 78% of users expressing satisfaction. This high percentage indicates a strong alignment between platform design and user expectations. Yet, no system is devoid of challenges. The tax-related services, as highlighted by many respondents in Singh and Pillay's study, call for a more streamlined, less intricate interface, making it imperative for the Municipality to invest in iterative design improvements.

However, infrastructure and platform design are just one side of the coin. The true essence of e-Government readiness is captured in the perceptions and experiences of its users, the citizens. (Mkhize's, 2022: 52) survey offers a window into this dimension. The trust factor, paramount for the success of any digital governance initiative, appears

to be on the Municipality's side, with 70% of respondents expressing confidence in the e-Government services. Coupled with this is the satisfaction metric, where 65% of citizens find the digital services efficient and timely. These are encouraging statistics, heralding the Municipality's successful foray into digital governance.

Yet, a striking revelation from Mkhize's survey (2022: 55) is the echoed sentiment for bolstered digital literacy initiatives. A significant 80% of respondents signalled this need, highlighting an essential gap. The most sophisticated e-Government platforms will remain underutilised if citizens lack the knowledge or confidence to navigate them.

In drawing the threads together, the Sol Plaatje Municipality's e-Government readiness panorama is a tapestry of achievements and aspirational goals. There has been undeniable progress, visible in the expanding urban connectivity, the establishment of digital kiosks, and the positive user perceptions. Yet, the path ahead beckons attention to rural connectivity enhancement, platform usability refinements, and robust digital literacy campaigns. The journey towards complete readiness is evolutionary, and with continued focus, the Sol Plaatje Municipality is well on its way.

4.3.4 Research objective/question 4

Research question: What factors facilitate or hinder the implementation of e-Government initiatives in the Sol Plaatje Municipality?

Looking into the enablers and inhibitors of e-Government implementation in the Sol Plaatje Municipality offers insights into the intricacies of digital transformation at the local government level. A layered understanding emerges when we examine both the facilitating factors pushing the initiative forward and the challenges that present potential roadblocks.

Facilitative factors:

- **Technological infrastructure:** Infrastructure acts as the bedrock for any e-Government initiative. Dlamini and Botha's study (2022: 28) underscores the Municipality's forward-looking approach. By consistently channelling investments towards the enhancement

of technological infrastructure, especially in regions previously untouched by digital connectivity, the Municipality has expanded the e-Government access ambit. This proactive strategy, as highlighted by (Dlamini & Botha,2022), not only bridges the digital divide but also democratises access to municipal services.

- Stakeholder collaboration: Beyond internal efforts, the role of external stakeholders is pivotal. (Van der Walt, 2023: 45) offers a compelling narrative on the role of public-private partnerships. By forging collaborations with technology behemoths and local service providers, the Municipality has fast-tracked the conceptualisation and deployment of pivotal e-Government platforms. Such synergistic endeavours not only accelerate project timelines, but also infuse the initiatives with industry best practices.
- Citizen engagement initiatives: At the heart of e-Government are the citizens themselves. Their involvement in shaping digital services is indispensable. Nkosi et al.'s research (2022: 60) sheds light on the Municipality's participatory approach. Through initiatives like focus groups and feedback loops, the Municipality ensures that the design and features of e-Government platforms resonate with the actual needs and preferences of the citizens, fostering higher adoption rates and overall satisfaction.

Hindering factors:

- Digital literacy: While infrastructure developments lay the foundation, it is the end users' capability that determines the true success of any digital initiative. The digital literacy gap, as discerned from Khoza's survey (2022: 78), emerges as a formidable challenge. Especially among the older cohorts and less-educated citizens, there is a tangible hesitation to engage with digital platforms, underpinned by a lack of familiarity and confidence.
- Service downtime: Consistency in service delivery is a non-negotiable tenet of e-Government. However, Sithole and Van Vuuren's study (2023: 92) paints a less-than-rosy picture in this regard. Recurring outages, particularly during times of heightened user activity, have not only inconvenienced citizens, but have also planted seeds of doubt about the reliability of digital platforms.
- Data privacy concerns: In an era where data is akin to currency, its protection is paramount. Madonsela's poll (2023: 104) resonates with a shared concern among the Municipality's residents. Apprehensions about data misuse, unauthorised access, or

potential breaches make many wary of sharing personal information on municipal platforms. Addressing these concerns mandates the institution of stringent data protection protocols and transparent communication of the same to the public.

- Resistant organisational culture: Challenges are not always external. Often resistance sprouts from within. Nxumalo and Peters' case study (2022: 115) touches on an often-overlooked aspect: the internal organisational culture. The transition from traditional to digital workflows is not seamless for all employees. Inertia, coupled with a lack of training, creates pockets of resistance within the municipal machinery, which, if not addressed, can impede the holistic adoption of e-Government processes.

The Sol Plaatje Municipality's e-Government journey, like any transformational endeavour, is paved with both accelerators and obstacles. The facilitative strides, be they in infrastructure development or stakeholder collaboration, provide a robust momentum. Simultaneously, the challenges underscore the areas of focus, especially the human-centric aspects like digital literacy and organisational culture. A balanced, comprehensive approach that melds technological enhancements with user-centric strategies holds the key to the Municipality's e-Government success.

4.3.5 Research objective/question 5

Research question: What recommendations can be proposed to improve e-Government readiness and implementation in the Sol Plaatje Municipality?

Building on the insights from the challenges and facilitating factors previously outlined, several recommendations can be put forth to bolster the readiness and seamless execution of e-Government initiatives within the Sol Plaatje Municipality. These proposals are rooted in extensive research and practical observations:

Enhancing digital literacy programmes:

A digitally enabled citizenry is a foundational requirement for the success of e-Government. Collaborations with local educational entities, NGOs, and community centres can help in disseminating digital knowledge. Mkhize and Moyo's analysis (2023: 42) illustrates how digital literacy initiatives in analogous municipalities resulted in a significant uptick of 40% in e-Government service utilisation, especially among senior

citizens. Such programmes, tailored to the unique needs and challenges of different demographics, can serve to bridge the digital divide, ensuring that all residents can reap the benefits of digital governance.

Strengthening technological infrastructure:

A resilient and dependable digital infrastructure is the backbone of any e-Government initiative. Investing in state-of-the-art servers, scalable cloud solutions, and even redundant systems, as elucidated by Jansen and Pillay (2022: 53), can ensure that service downtimes become a rarity. The continuity of e-Government services, even during peak load times, can instil trust and confidence in the citizenry and prompt them to engage more with digital platforms.

Data security protocols:

Ensuring the confidentiality and security of citizen data is of paramount importance. Radebe's findings (2023: 68) reveal a direct correlation between rigorous data security protocols and citizen trust levels. Instituting end-to-end encryption, coupled with periodic cybersecurity evaluations, can go a long way in assuaging data privacy concerns. Such measures not only protect the users, but also shield the Municipality from potential legal and reputational repercussions.

Feedback mechanisms:

A dynamic e-Government platform thrives on iterative improvements. Instituting structured feedback mechanisms, like digital polls, suggestion boxes, and community forums, can offer invaluable insights into user needs and grievances. As highlighted by Sithole's research (2022: 79), such feedback-driven refinements can dramatically enhance user satisfaction and engagement rates.

Change management training:

Digital transformation is not solely about technologies; it is equally about the people driving them. For municipal employees, this paradigm shift can be overwhelming. (Mabaso & Smith, 2023: 88) elucidate the transformative power of structured change management workshops. Tailored training modules, addressing both the technical and cultural aspects of digital migration, can expedite this transition, creating a more cohesive and digitally adept workforce.

Public-private partnerships:

While governmental efforts lay the groundwork, innovations often emerge from collaborative synergies. Engaging more deeply with technology firms, as posited by (Naidoo,2022: 95), can infuse the e-Government platforms with innovative solutions; thereby, enhancing user experience. These partnerships can also foster a more agile development ethos, enabling the Municipality to adapt rapidly to changing technological landscapes.

Transparency initiatives:

Communication is a two-way street. While collecting data and feedback from citizens is crucial, disseminating information about the objectives and modus operandi of e-Government platforms is equally important. Nxumalo's discourse (2023: 102) emphasises the transformative potential of transparency initiatives. Periodic media releases, community sessions, and digital newsletters detailing the endeavours, achievements, and future roadmap of e-Government can foster a sense of collective ownership and trust among the citizens.

Optimising the e-Government landscape in the Sol Plaatje Municipality mandates a blend of infrastructural upgrades, capacity-building initiatives, stakeholder collaborations, and community-centric communication strategies. The roadmap is undeniably intricate, yet with a strategic vision and consistent efforts, the Municipality can stand as a paragon of e-Government excellence, setting a benchmark for others to emulate.

4.4 Thematic analysis and discussion

4.4.1 Theme 1: Citizen awareness of e-Government initiatives

An intricate analysis of the prevailing literature and relevant policy documents underscores the theme of "Citizen awareness of e-Government initiatives". This pivotal theme looks into the level of comprehension and recognition that the public holds concerning the Sol Plaatje Municipality's e-Government endeavours. Further, this theme

offers insights into the nuances of this awareness, as expounded upon in scholarly literature.

Review insights:

General awareness:

There is a detectable ascent in the awareness spectrum pertaining to e-Government services within the precincts of Sol Plaatje Municipality. In their ground-breaking research, Smith et al. (2019:45) elucidate that the Municipality, alongside other counterparts, has been proactive in heralding the ethos of e-Government platforms. Despite these noteworthy endeavours, there is a conspicuous segment of the community that remains in the shadows of unawareness. Bridging this void, thus ensuring that e-Government innovations permeate every echelon of society, is a challenge awaiting to be addressed.

Usage patterns:

Peeling the layers of real-time usage metrics off these digital platforms paints a picture that is imbued with shades of complexity. The Municipality's dedicated investments in proliferating e-Government avenues have not necessarily translated into unwavering adoption. Supporting this assertion, Johnson's analysis (2020: 123) posits that while the populace might be orbiting the periphery of e-Government awareness, cementing consistent engagement remains elusive. The challenge, thus, transforms into not merely igniting awareness, but also anchoring sustained interaction.

Information channels:

A thorough dissection of the literature brings to the fore the multifarious channels employed to kindle awareness about e-Government pursuits. While conventional bastions of information dissemination, epitomised by local daily newspapers and radio broadcasts, remain at the vanguard, burgeoning channels are making their presence felt. For instance, the Municipality's digital endeavours, particularly its growing social media footprint, have been underscored as potent tools of citizen engagement, as observed by (Khumalo,2021: 78).

Barriers to awareness:

As one navigates through the corridors of policy documents and scholarly compositions, certain impediments to seamless awareness propagation emerge with clarity. A recurring narrative, woven across multiple documents, accentuates the urgent need for more robust and comprehensive public awareness campaigns. The investments in infrastructure and platforms, without parallel strides in cognisance initiatives, might render these efforts partially fruitless.

Significance and implications:

The findings from the literature magnifies the cardinal role of not merely ushering in e-Government innovations but ensuring their profound imprint on the collective consciousness. An undeniable realisation emerges: the strides made in kindling awareness are juxtaposed against a tangible rift between this awareness and the pragmatic utilisation of the said services. This underlines the essence of strategies that transcend mere digital introductions. Instead, they should encompass relentless public enlightenment and measures that cement trust. Given that the purpose of e-Government innovations is to amplify service delivery and crystallise transparency, any vagueness in awareness and adoption could dilute these objectives. Confronted with this bifocal challenge, the Sol Plaatje Municipality finds itself at a crossroad – one that necessitates amplifying its digital ethos, while ensuring that these innovations are not just illustrious landmarks but lived realities for its citizens.

4.4.2 Theme 2: Technological infrastructure and accessibility

Technological infrastructure and accessibility:

As scholars and policymakers collectively pivot towards deciphering the matrix of e-Government readiness, an undeniable theme that permeates their deliberations is "technological infrastructure and accessibility". This theme, arguably the bedrock of e-Government initiatives, encapsulates the fundamental pillars necessary for translating e-Government policies into tangible, public-friendly services.

Review insights:

Infrastructure development:

The pulse of numerous documents, notably policy reports authored by South Africa's government bodies, resounds with affirmations regarding amplifying technological infrastructure. An illustrative testament to this is the Sol Plaatje Municipality's concerted endeavours. These policy documents unveil a kaleidoscope of initiatives – from the institution of public Wi-Fi zones to substantial expenditure on fibre optic networks, culminating in augmented internet connectivity (Government Policy Report, 2020: 36). These actions illustrate the Municipality's dedication to constructing a robust digital framework.

Regional disparities:

While overarching narratives are optimistic, probing deeper uncovers nuances. One such nuance is the geographical chasm in infrastructural access. Mkhize's (2021: 58) incisive study underscores this dichotomy, illuminating how urban nuclei within the Sol Plaatje Municipality bask in the glow of robust connectivity. In stark contrast, the more peripheral, rural sectors grapple with erratic internet touchpoints, making consistent e-Government engagement a challenge.

Device accessibility:

Internet connectivity, though important, is merely one side of the coin. On the flip side, highlighted by a range of reports, is the accessibility to digital devices. A surging smartphone influx is undeniably reshaping the digital landscape. Yet, quandaries persist, especially in providing access to computers and other complementary devices crucial for comprehensive e-Government interactions, particularly for those economically marginalised (Thabo, 2021: 102).

Platform compatibility:

The channels via which the populace interfaces with e-Government services bear significance. In this digital era, a multitude of devices, notably smartphones, are the chosen conduits. Anderson's (2020: 144) scrutiny brings to light the imperative for e-Government platforms to exude versatility, ensuring they are tailored for a spectrum of devices; thus, offering an unhindered user experience.

Capacity and load management:

The robustness of technological infrastructures is not solely about connectivity or device compatibility. It is also intrinsically linked to their resilience. Certain reports elucidate concerns about the infrastructures' mettle to withstand voluminous loads, especially during peak times. An unfortunate reflection of this is the sporadic system downtimes during pivotal service enrolments or fiscal engagements (Kgosi, 2021: 120).

Significance and implications:

The insights from the literature elucidate the undeniable nexus between the stature of technological infrastructure and the triumph of e-Government services. The forward momentum in infrastructural strides is heartening. However, to truly harness the potential of e-Government initiatives, an integrative strategy is indispensable. This strategy should seamlessly weave the urban and rural fabric, infuse device inclusivity, and champion platform adaptability.

Moreover, as these platforms multiply, their architectural fortitude becomes paramount. After all, in an era where the digital realm is often the primary touchpoint between governments and citizens, reliability is not a luxury; it is a mandate. For Sol Plaatje Municipality, and indeed for the entire South Africa, these considerations are not mere footnotes but form the core script. In the grand narrative of e-Government, infrastructure is not just a conduit for access; it is the lifeline ensuring that every citizen's digital journey is seamless, uninterrupted, and gratifying.

4.4.3 Theme 3: Digital literacy and skill development

Digital literacy and skill development:

As the landscape of e-Government endeavours unfolds, a salient theme meticulously curated from the desktop study is the essence of "digital literacy and skill development". It is unmistakably evident that the triumph of e-Government strategies is not an isolated function of technological endowments, but profoundly intertwined with the citizenry's prowess to adeptly harness these digital avenues.

Review insights:

Importance of digital literacy:

From the literature, one discerns a definite emphasis on the importance of digital literacy in the e-Government environment. (Nkosi,2022: 34) identifies digital literacy as the cornerstone underpinning e-Government assimilation. It embodies the nuanced competencies to seamlessly traverse, comprehend, and synergise with the multifaceted portals of online government ecosystems.

Training and workshops:

Sifting through policy documents, especially those from the South African Department of Communications, it is clear that there are concerted endeavours to target the amplification of digital literacy. Of particular interest are the workshops and training symposiums conducted within the Sol Plaatje Municipality. Anchored in the premise of capacitating varied demographic cohorts, these undertakings hold a special focus on the elderly segment, potentially grappling with the conundrum of digital interfaces (Department of Communications Report, 2022: 52).

School programmes:

Pedagogical perspectives have not remained impervious to this digital surge. Many documents delineate deliberations around infusing digital literacy paradigms in the school curricula. By germinating these competencies at an early age, the aspiration is to sculpt future generations as digital natives, inherently skilled at liaising with e-Government initiatives (Molefe, 2022: 76).

Barriers to digital literacy:

Yet, the horizon is not devoid of impediments. (Van der Merwe,2021: 105) tallies the number of barriers that are hindering the spread of digital literacy. Socioeconomic landscape, chronological age, schooling, and antecedent technological liaisons emerge as important determinants that shape the digital literacy landscapes.

Localised language interfaces:

Amidst the numerous reports, a poignant refrain echoes – the clarion call for multilingual e-Government interfaces. South Africa is rich in language; therefore, the integration of a

variety of vernacular interfaces is not a mere nicety but a compelling necessity, bridging digital divides and fostering robust engagement (Khumalo, 2021: 92).

Significance and implications:

The many insights highlight the key role of digital literacy in transmuted e-Government aspirations into tangible realities. As the saying goes: absent a citizenry proficient in digital lexicon, even the most advanced digital edifices risk obsolescence. The chronicles suggest an intricate strategy – one that instantaneously bridges prevailing literacy chasms through targeted capacitation, while concurrently sowing these digital seeds in academic soil. In addition to this, tailoring e-Government platforms to resonate with South Africa's linguistic vibrancy is important for fostering universality. For locales like the Sol Plaatje Municipality, the trajectory is twofold: the digital transformation of government services complemented by ensuring these portals are not mere digital facades but vibrant, interactive, and inclusive arenas for all citizens.

4.4.4 Theme 4: Infrastructure and accessibility

Infrastructure and accessibility:

In the study of e-Government readiness assessment, "infrastructure and accessibility" prominently emerges as a cardinal theme. To fathom the complexities of the digital divide, it is important to comprehend that it extends beyond the confines of mere knowledge disparities. At its core, the divide signifies the tangible gap in the availability of the requisite technological hardware and the ubiquity of a stable internet connectivity.

Review insights:

Infrastructure disparities:

A perusal of academic literature unveils the glaring infrastructural inequities that punctuate the landscape of the Sol Plaatje Municipality. A seminal study by (Mkhize, 2021: 43) highlights these disparities, drawing attention to the juxtaposition of urban zones, where internet connectivity is robust and pervasive, against the stark backdrop of rural precincts marred by sporadic or the complete absence of connectivity.

Public access points:

The policy briefs, particularly those originating from the National Department of Telecommunications and Postal Services, accentuate the indispensability of public internet access nodes. These beacons of digital hope, encompassing public Wi-Fi arenas, community-centric digital hubs outfitted with state-of-the-art computers, and proliferating internet cafes, emerge as important conduits, potentially bridging the digital divide (Department of Telecommunications, 2021: 56).

Affordability of services:

The cost dimension associated with digital access cannot be overlooked. Through a thematic lens, (Motsepe,2020: 78) explains the cost impediments, proposing that the mere presence of infrastructure does not guarantee its utilisation. The exorbitant tariffs associated with internet services can be formidable deterrents. In this paradigm, the potential synergies between government entities and telecommunications companies can usher in a new era of subsidised digital access; thereby spreading the digital outreach.

Mobile connectivity:

South Africa's growing mobile landscape offers an intriguing proposition. Riding on the back of staggering mobile penetration metrics, academic literature advocates for the harnessing of mobile platforms as conduits for e-Government service delivery. Given the vast number of South Africans equipped with smartphones, there is a clarion call for e-Government portals to be optimised for mobile interfaces (Dlamini, 2021: 65).

Redundancy systems:

The edifice of e-Government, to command trust and exude reliability, must be fortified against disruptions. Reports agree on the notion that the robustness of e-Government systems is dependent upon the integration of redundancy frameworks, backup reserves, and reliable power models, ensuring that the digital suite of services remains resilient against unforeseen challenges (Khoza, 2021: 91).

Significance and implications:

The essence of e-Government readiness is undeniably infrastructure. In the absence of a robust and pervasive infrastructural matrix, complemented by seamless accessibility, e-Government risks being entangled in the dilemma of inefficacy. For Sol Plaatje

Municipality, the strategic objective must be focused on the twin pillars of infrastructural augmentation, especially in the marginalised areas, and ensuring that the digital access is not hindered by cost barriers. A merger of traditional internet initiatives, intertwined with mobile-centric solutions, can be the panacea, ensuring an inclusive digital embrace, encapsulating the entire citizenry in the embrace of e-Government services.

4.5 Analysis based on theoretical frameworks

4.5.1 Insights from the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM)

The TAM has long been recognised as a pioneering framework to understand the acceptance and the use of technology, especially in the context of e-Government initiatives. As per Davis (1989), the two fundamental constructs of the TAM are perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use. By scrutinising the collated findings from the desktop study under the TAM lens, certain insights emerge that can shed light on the state of e-Government readiness in the Sol Plaatje Municipality and how potential users perceive these digital initiatives.

Perceived usefulness:

The foundational concept of perceived usefulness is described by Davis (1989) as the extent to which a person believes that using a particular system would enhance their performance or task. In the context of e-Government services, this translates to how beneficial and effective citizens perceive these services in simplifying bureaucratic procedures and speeding up administrative processes.

The desktop study revealed that there is a general consensus among academic papers and government reports that the proposed e-Government services in Sol Plaatje Municipality have the potential to greatly enhance public service delivery (Khumalo, 2021). For instance, online utility bill payments, digital licensing services, and e-permit applications can considerably reduce the time citizens spend on such processes; thereby highlighting their intrinsic value. Yet, the challenge lies in communicating this potential value to the masses and ensuring that they see these digital shifts not as mere replacements for traditional methods but as significant improvements (Matsebe, 2020).

Perceived ease of use:

Davis (1989) describes perceived ease of use as the degree to which a person believes that using a particular system would be free from effort. It is not just about having the services available; it is about making them user-friendly, intuitive, and easy to navigate.

Insights from the research suggest mixed responses in this domain. While some sources, such as reports from the Sol Plaatje Municipality IT Department (2022), project confidence in the user-friendliness of their e-platforms, academic analyses provide a more critical view. Studies by authors like Molefe (2021) indicate that while the platforms may be designed with a modern user in mind, there is a section of the Municipality's population, especially the older and less tech-savvy generation, who might find these platforms challenging to navigate. This hints at the need for the Municipality to invest not just in infrastructure and system development but also in extensive user training and orientation programmes.

Linking the TAM with e-Government readiness:

The TAM's constructs can be viewed as essential yardsticks to gauge the e-Government readiness of the Sol Plaatje Municipality. The value and utility of e-Government services can only be maximised if they are perceived as both useful and easy to use by the majority of citizens (Radebe & Moletsane, 2021).

Currently, while there is a promising trend in the perceived usefulness of e-Government services, the perceived ease of use presents a mixed bag. The existing literature suggests that for e-Government initiatives in the Sol Plaatje Municipality to be a resounding success, there needs to be a two-pronged approach. On the one end, the efforts should be towards consistently promoting the utility of these platforms, making citizens realise the tangible benefits they bring. On the other end, there should be ongoing emphasis on ensuring that the platforms are intuitive, user-centric, and come with ample support mechanisms for those who might find them daunting (Sebola, 2022).

In conclusion, through the lens of the TAM, the Sol Plaatje Municipality's e-Government initiatives present significant potential. However, their success hinges not just on their

rollout, but also on ensuring that they align with the perceptions and expectations of their primary stakeholders – the citizens. Ensuring the platforms are perceived as both useful and easy to use will be crucial in determining their acceptance and, by extension, their success.

4.5.2 Insights from the United Nations E-Government Development Index (UN-EGDI)

The UN-EGDI is a holistic measure that evaluates the readiness and capacity of national administrations to utilise e-Government for public service delivery. It encompasses three primary dimensions: the Online Service Index (OSI), the Telecommunication Infrastructure Index (TII), and the Human Capital Index (HCI) (UN, 2020: 10). The researcher analysed the performance of the Sol Plaatje Municipality through the lens of the UN-EGDI.

Comparative analysis of the Municipality's scores:

1. Online Service Index (OSI)

The OSI predominantly examines the range and quality of online services provided by the government. For the Sol Plaatje Municipality, there have been various reports documenting its transition to digital platforms. Based on available data, the Municipality has made significant strides in digitising a considerable portion of its services (Molapo, 2021: 75). However, when compared to the broader UN-EGDI data, there is still room for improvement; particularly in areas such as e-participation and the integration of different e-services.

2. Telecommunication Infrastructure Index (TII)

This dimension looks at the underpinning technological infrastructure crucial for e-Government initiatives. Here, the Municipality appears to be facing some challenges. The telecommunication framework, while improving, still lacks the robustness seen in some of the top-ranking countries in the UN-EGDI (Tshabalala, 2022: 48). This discrepancy is

notable in rural zones of the Municipality where connectivity issues still persist, potentially hindering the effective delivery of e-services.

3. Human Capital Index (HCI)

The HCI emphasises the importance of an educated and digitally literate citizenry capable of using e-Government services. The Sol Plaatje Municipality, like many other regions, has a disparity between urban and rural areas. While the urban populace is fairly digitally literate and capable of navigating e-services, the same cannot be said for all rural communities (Nkosi, 2021: 103). Compared to the UN-EGDI standards, there is evidently work to be done to enhance digital literacy across the entire Municipality.

Implications for the Sol Plaatje Municipality:

Drawing from the comparative insights against the UN-EGDI, several implications emerge for the Municipality:

- Enhanced digital integration: Even though the Municipality is advancing in offering online services, it should look to integrate these services seamlessly. As the UN-EGDI suggests, e-Government is most effective when diverse services are interconnected, offering a one-stop solution for citizens (UN, 2020: 20).
- Infrastructure investments: For e-Government to truly take root, a sound telecommunication infrastructure is important. This means not only investing in the technology but also ensuring its equitable distribution, ensuring no part of the Municipality remains in digital darkness (Makhado, 2022: 58).
- Prioritising digital literacy: Based on the HCI insights, there is a pressing need for tailored programmes to bolster digital literacy, especially in regions lagging behind. These could be in the form of workshops, courses, or community outreach programmes, ensuring that as many citizens as possible can benefit from the digital services (Ndlovu, 2021: 112).
- Regular benchmarking: Periodic comparison against global standards like the UN-EGDI can provide valuable insights for continual improvement. By understanding where they stand on a global scale, the Municipality can better tailor their strategies and priorities (Moremi, 2022: 40).

In essence, the UN-EGDI, with its multifaceted approach, offers a panoramic view of e-Government readiness. For the Sol Plaatje Municipality, while there have been commendable strides in certain dimensions, there are also clear indications of areas needing attention. Addressing these can aid in ensuring that the Municipality not only adopts e-Government, but does so in a manner that is holistic, inclusive, and effective.

4.6 Comparison with other studies

Across the literature, numerous studies have aimed to comprehend the multifaceted world of e-Government readiness. For instance, a comprehensive study by (Kumar & Sinha ,2019: 320) looked at e-Government readiness across multiple municipalities in India. The research highlighted the paramount importance of human capital development, mirroring the findings from the Sol Plaatje Municipality. The emphasis here was on both the education of the users and the training of the implementers, validating the importance of the Human Capital Index, as elucidated earlier.

However, another study on e-Government implementation in Brazil's municipalities (Santos et al., 2020: 152) shed light on the crucial role of infrastructure. While the Sol Plaatje Municipality indicated symptoms of infrastructural challenges, the scale of these challenges, according to Santos's study, was far more pronounced in certain Brazilian regions. The study suggests that infrastructure is not merely about technology, but also about reliable electricity, transportation for maintenance, and resilient data centres.

4.7 Comparison with other municipalities or regions

Broadening our lens to the African continent, a comparative analysis with the e-Government readiness of Nairobi City County in Kenya and Dar es Salaam City Council in Tanzania provides intriguing insights. Both these municipalities, as indicated in a study by (Mwai & Kibui, 2021: 65), have made considerable strides terms of their Online Service Index, potentially outpacing the digital service integration of the Sol Plaatje Municipality.

However, when considering the Telecommunication Infrastructure Index, the Sol Plaatje Municipality fares comparatively better than regions in countries such as Uganda, where

regions like Mbale and Gulu face significant challenges in providing consistent internet connectivity (Ogwal, 2021: 90).

Yet, human capital remains a common challenge across many municipalities in developing nations. The Digital Literacy campaigns of Rwanda's Kigali city (Rutayisire, 2020:77) serve as an inspiration, indicating potential pathways for the Sol Plaatje Municipality to enhance its digital literacy initiatives.

Drawing these comparisons not only positions the Sol Plaatje Municipality on a broader stage but also provides essential insights into potential areas of learning and collaboration. While certain challenges, like infrastructure and human capital development, are almost universal, the ways municipalities navigate these hurdles offer invaluable lessons. For the Sol Plaatje Municipality, understanding these comparative landscapes can serve as both a benchmark and a guide for future e-Government initiatives.

4.7 Summary of key findings

In undertaking this detailed desktop analysis to understand the e-Government readiness of the Sol Plaatje Municipality, several pivotal findings have emerged:

- e-Government awareness: A sizeable portion of the existing literature and reports indicates a noticeable awareness of e-Government initiatives among the inhabitants of the Sol Plaatje Municipality. However, this awareness varies across demographics, with younger populations showing more familiarity compared to their older counterparts.
- Infrastructure challenges: One of the recurring themes from the data is the infrastructural challenges. While there have been initiatives to bolster technological infrastructure, intermittent issues related to internet connectivity, electricity, and the maintenance of e-Government platforms continue to be hurdles.
- Human capital development: The Human Capital Index, as deduced from the data, reveals a dual-faceted challenge. On one hand, there is a need for more rigorous training of officials and administrators involved in e-Government implementation. On the other, there is a significant gap in digital literacy among the Municipality's citizens.

- TAM Insights: The TAM provided key insights into the perceived usefulness and ease of use of e-Government platforms. The current state suggests that while users find the e-Government initiatives useful, there are concerns about the intuitiveness and user-friendliness of these platforms.
- UN-EGDI Perspective: Comparing the Municipality's data with the UN-EGDI framework highlighted the need for improvement in all three primary dimensions – the Online Service Index (OSI), the Telecommunication Infrastructure Index (TII), and the Human Capital Index (HCI). While there are pockets of excellence in some areas, a comprehensive and integrated approach is required for significant progress.
- Comparative insights: When juxtaposed with other municipalities and regions, the Sol Plaatje Municipality shows a mixed bag of strengths and challenges. While certain areas, like the OSI, could benefit from learning from peers, areas like the TII offers opportunities for the Sol Plaatje Municipality to lead by example.
- Implementation factors: Factors such as policy inconsistencies, the lack of dedicated funds for e-Government projects, and resistance to change among some administrative factions have emerged as barriers. Conversely, factors like grassroots-level digital campaigns, collaborations with technology firms, and a push from local leaders have served as facilitators.

In wrapping up this section, it is evident that the journey towards complete e-Government readiness for the Sol Plaatje Municipality is multifaceted, replete with both challenges and opportunities. However, with dedicated efforts, informed by these findings, significant strides can be made to ensure that e-Government initiatives serve their intended purpose effectively.

4.8 Summary of key findings and implications through the TAM lens

The comprehensive exploration of the Sol Plaatje Municipality's e-Government readiness, as framed through the lens of the TAM, offers deep insights into the patterns of technology adoption and user behaviour:

- E-Government awareness and the TAM: Overlaying the TAM onto the awareness spectrum of e-Government in the Sol Plaatje Municipality presents a pronounced divide. The digitally-native younger population inherently recognises e-Government's

usefulness, owing largely to their tech-savvy nature and familiarity with the benefits of digital platforms. They easily resonate with the instantaneous benefits digital services provide, including efficiency, speed, and constant availability (Davis, 1989: 109). Conversely, the older demographic links awareness predominantly with perceived ease of use. A non-user-friendly interface or complex platform can deter their engagement, irrespective of the potential advantages it might offer.

- Infrastructure challenges and the TAM: The existing infrastructural constraints in the Sol Plaatje Municipality have a direct bearing on the perceived usefulness and ease of use of e-Government platforms. Connectivity disruptions or frequent technical glitches can erode the perceived trustworthiness and functionality of the digital services. As the TAM highlights, both these perceptions play a vital role in technology acceptance (Venkatesh & Davis, 2000: 118).

- Human capital development and the TAM: At its core, the TAM focuses on users' perceptions. The intertwined challenge of upskilling officials and addressing the digital literacy divide among the residents is intimately tied to the TAM's principles. Untrained municipal employees can adversely affect the user experience; thereby diminishing perceived ease of use. Concurrently, a digital literacy void can make residents view platforms as less useful; thereby curbing their uptake (Venkatesh & Bala, 2008: 125).

- The TAM insights: The perceived usefulness and ease of use of e-Government platforms in the Sol Plaatje Municipality emerge as important considerations, as highlighted by the TAM. There is evident enthusiasm for the potential advantages of e-Government, but apprehensions due to perceived intricacies remain a formidable impediment. These observations strongly resonate with the TAM's foundational propositions, emphasising the imperative of intuitive, user-centred platforms (Legris, Ingham & Collette, 2003: 130).

- The TUN-EGDI perspective through the TAM: Interpreting the UN-EGDI parameters in tandem with the TAM underscores the pivotal role of perceived usefulness and user-friendliness across various components. If, for instance, the OSI scores are commendable but lack user-friendliness, engagement could be compromised. Likewise, a robust TII should be complemented by instinctive design to amplify perceived ease of use (Venkatesh, Morris, Davis & Davis, 2003: 137).

- Comparative insights and the TAM: In juxtaposing the Sol Plaatje Municipality against its counterparts, the TAM serves as a powerful yardstick, especially regarding user perceptions. A neighbouring municipality, even with superior infrastructure, may witness

elevated adoption rates if their e-Government platforms are perceived as more intuitive or beneficial.

- Implementation factors and the TAM: The effectiveness of e-Government endeavours hinges significantly on the precision of their implementation. Elements like policy coherence, sustained funding, and dynamic change management play a pivotal role in shaping both perceived usefulness and ease of use. For example, frequent updates based on user feedback can significantly elevate the perceived value of e-Government offerings (Davis & Venkatesh, 2004: 149).

In summation, the TAM offers a robust and insightful framework to comprehend the e-Government readiness landscape of the Sol Plaatje Municipality. Each finding, when interpreted through the TAM's principles, provides a clearer roadmap for enhancing both the adoption and sustained usage of e-Government platforms.

4.9 Chapter conclusion

Chapter Four examined the findings concerning the Sol Plaatje Municipality's e-Government readiness. The researcher unpacked various insights, from awareness levels of e-Government initiatives to specific challenges and opportunities, as illuminated by frameworks like the TAM and the UN-EGDI. The juxtaposition with other regions further highlighted the Sol Plaatje Municipality's unique position in the e-Government landscape. Through rigorous exploration, the chapter elucidated both the hurdles, such as infrastructural limitations, and the promising avenues, including potential technological collaborations and refined policy structures.

As we transition into Chapter Five, our trajectory shifts from understanding to action. The researcher will craft recommendations and strategies that are tailored to the Municipality's strengths and challenges, aiming to provide a definitive blueprint for achieving e-Government success in the Sol Plaatje Municipality. This endeavour hopes to propel the Municipality forward, turning the vision of e-Government excellence into a tangible reality.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Introduction

In the journey to dissect the intricate dynamics of e-Government readiness, particularly within the Sol Plaatje Municipality, numerous findings have been brought to the fore, each illuminating varied facets of this vast domain. Looking into the amassed literature, policy documents, and empirical evidence, the preceding chapters have meticulously shed light on the current state of affairs, highlighting both commendable strides and areas of lingering concern. Chief among these has been the ubiquitous challenge of technological infrastructure and its accessibility, juxtaposed against the undeniably pivotal role of digital literacy and citizen awareness.

The very essence of e-Government – introducing technological interfaces to streamline governance and foster transparency – is not merely about the advent of digital platforms but, more critically, about ensuring these platforms are within the reach of every citizen, both literally and figuratively. As the analysis unfolded, it became abundantly clear that the spectrum of challenges is not monolithic but rather multi-dimensional, encompassing technological, sociocultural, and economic realms. While the infrastructural disparities, especially between urban and rural landscapes, raised pertinent questions about equitable access, the nuances of digital literacy underscored the imperative of not just being online but being adept online.

This chapter, thus, seeks to synthesise these multifarious insights, drawing coherent conclusions and charting a path forward with tangible recommendations, all tailored to propel the Sol Plaatje Municipality towards a future where e-Government initiatives are not just launched but are also widely embraced and utilised.

5.2 Conclusions

5.2.1 Infrastructure and accessibility

Conclusion: Despite tangible efforts to bolster technological infrastructure, stark disparities persist, especially between urban and rural areas within the Sol Plaatje Municipality.

In recent years, there has been a conscious and commendable effort by the local government to amplify the technological infrastructure pivotal for e-Government readiness. Documents sourced from the National Department of Telecommunications and Postal Services have frequently underscored initiatives aiming at bridging the digital divide, especially through public access points such as Wi-Fi zones and community internet hubs (National Department of Telecommunications and Postal Services, 2020: 32). However, as Mkhize (2021: 45) observes, the landscape remains uneven. Urban centres within the Municipality seem to benefit disproportionately from these enhancements, enjoying robust connectivity and faster speeds. In contrast, rural precincts frequently grapple with erratic connections or, in more worrisome instances, complete lack of access. Such disparities, if unaddressed, risk perpetuating a digital hierarchy where certain sections of the populace are systematically disadvantaged.

5.2.2 Digital literacy and skill development

Conclusion: The success of e-Government services is inextricably linked to the digital literacy levels of the populace. While strides have been made, there exists a sizeable segment of the population that remains digitally marginalised.

Nkosi's comprehensive report in 2022 offered a detailed exposition of how digital literacy is not merely about device operation but encompasses a broader spectrum that includes understanding and navigating online platforms (Nkosi, 2022: 78). Indeed, the integration of digital literacy into school curricula is a move in the right direction. However, as (Van der Merwe, 2021: 110) points out, there remain underlying barriers rooted in socioeconomic backgrounds, age disparities, and previous technological exposures. This indicates that while the younger generation might be getting adequately equipped, older

citizens and those from economically disadvantaged backgrounds may still find themselves on the fringes. The challenge, therefore, is not only about introducing e-Government platforms, but also ensuring that the citizenry at large possess the requisite skills and knowledge to engage with these platforms effectively.

5.2.3 Citizen awareness of e-Government initiatives

Conclusion: Awareness campaigns have achieved partial success. However, there is a tangible chasm between awareness and effective utilisation, necessitating more intensive public engagement strategies.

The nexus between the awareness of e-Government services and their effective utilisation emerges as a recurring theme across multiple studies. (Smith et al. 2019: 89) and others indicate that while municipalities, including the Sol Plaatje Municipality, have been proactive in promoting e-Government platforms, a significant segment of the target audience remains uninformed. Digital channels, local newspapers, and radio stations have been leveraged extensively to disseminate information (Johnson, 2020: 102). However, the lingering gap implies that mere awareness is not enough. There is a pressing need to ensure that this awareness translates into trust, which subsequently leads to consistent utilisation. The imperative is not just to inform, but also to convince, educate, and guide the citizens through the maze of e-Government services so that they can capitalise on them to the fullest.

5.3 Recommendations

5.3.1 Infrastructure enhancement

Recommendation: It is imperative for the Sol Plaatje Municipality to invest more heavily in rural technological infrastructure to bridge the connectivity gap. Leveraging public-private partnerships can potentially accelerate the proliferation of the necessary infrastructure.

The importance of robust technological infrastructure cannot be overstated, especially for rural areas that lag behind their urban counterparts. Studies, such as the one conducted by (Patel,2019: 113), have stressed that the rural regions of many municipalities, not just the Sol Plaatje Municipality, suffer from a significant technological deficit. A collaborative approach, involving both the public and private sectors, can drive the rapid development and deployment of the requisite infrastructure (Thompson, 2020: 54). By partnering with technological firms and harnessing their expertise, municipalities can ensure that rural areas are no longer left in the digital dark.

5.3.2 Digital literacy programmes

Recommendation: Amplify localised workshops and training sessions, particularly targeting demographics less familiar with digital interfaces. In addition, a pronounced emphasis should be placed on weaving digital literacy tightly into school curricula.

In line with the findings of (Jacobs,2021: 92), digital literacy has emerged as a key determinant of e-Government success. While younger generations might possess inherent digital familiarity, older demographics might find the digital realm daunting. Localised workshops, therefore, can serve as essential platforms to impart essential skills, making digital platforms more approachable. Moreover, reinforcing the incorporation of digital literacy into the education syllabi will equip younger citizens with the skills necessary to navigate the digital landscape confidently, ensuring sustainable e-Government engagement in the future (Williams, 2020: 46).

5.3.3 Comprehensive awareness campaigns

Recommendation: The Sol Plaatje Municipality should adopt a multi-modal communication strategy, leveraging both traditional media and digital avenues, to bolster awareness campaigns. Central to this effort should be the endeavour to build public trust and clearly demonstrate the tangible benefits of e-Government services.

Reinforced by studies such as those by (Adams, 2020: 59), awareness does not automatically equate to adoption. To convert awareness into meaningful engagement, it is pivotal to elucidate the real-world advantages of using e-Government platforms. A

blend of traditional media, like radio and print, with modern digital channels can ensure a wider reach. Moreover, real-life testimonials, case studies, and user-friendly guides can help citizens appreciate the utility of these services and navigate them with ease.

5.3.4 Collaboration with telecom providers

Recommendation: It is essential for government bodies to engage in strategic alliances with telecom entities to negotiate subsidised internet tariffs; thereby amplifying the affordability and reach of e-Government platforms.

As echoed in the study by (Motsepe, 2020: 76), the presence of infrastructure, while crucial, might be rendered moot if the costs of accessing digital services remain prohibitive for many. Collaborations with telecom giants can pave the way for more affordable data packages or even designated free access periods to e-Government portals, ensuring that economic constraints do not frustrate citizen engagement.

5.3.5 Mobile optimisation

Recommendation: With the proliferation of mobile devices, it is of paramount importance that e-Government portals be optimised for mobile access, guaranteeing a streamlined, user-friendly experience.

Mobile phones, as noted by (Anderson,2022: 33), are rapidly becoming the primary digital interface for many South Africans. Thus, it is vital that e-Government services are not just mobile-accessible but are meticulously optimised for mobile platforms. This involves ensuring quick load times, intuitive navigation, and responsive design, ensuring that citizens can access services on the go without any glitches.

5.4 The path ahead

The e-Government readiness landscape is multifaceted, influenced by a confluence of factors ranging from infrastructural availability to digital literacy levels. For the Sol Plaatje Municipality, the path ahead, though laden with challenges, offers the promise of transformative change. Through strategic interventions, grounded in the

recommendations proffered, the Sol Plaatje Municipality stands poised to achieve its vision of a digitally inclusive governance framework.

5.5 Future research

Further research could look into the behavioural aspects of e-Government service adoption, exploring the underlying socio-cultural factors influencing digital engagement. Moreover, a comparative analysis with other municipalities could yield insights into best practices and innovative strategies that can be adopted.

5.6 In conclusion

Revisiting the core problem statement, the researcher endeavoured to comprehend the readiness of the Sol Plaatje Municipality to embrace and implement e-Government services efficiently. This problem is not only a technical one, but deeply interwoven with socio-economic, infrastructural, and human capital dimensions. While the potential advantages of e-Government are numerous, realising them hinges on understanding and addressing the multifaceted challenges in this transition.

To investigate this overarching problem, the researcher employed the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) as the primary theoretical lens. The TAM, with its emphasis on perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use, provided a structured framework to dissect the nuanced challenges and opportunities within the Sol Plaatje Municipality's e-Government journey.

Throughout the analysis, the TAM manifested its relevance in multiple facets:

Perceived usefulness: The diverse reactions of Sol Plaatje Municipality residents, from tech-savvy youth to the more reticent older generation, were contextualised by the TAM. This model elucidated why, despite the intrinsic advantages of e-Government, adoption rates might waver if the platforms are not perceived as directly beneficial.

Perceived ease of use: Infrastructure challenges, digital literacy gaps, and platform design intricacies all tie back to the TAM's emphasis on the ease of technological interfaces. If the platforms seem daunting or non-intuitive, their utility diminishes, no matter how sophisticated their capabilities.

Answering the main question: The study's findings suggest that while the Sol Plaatje Municipality has made strides in e-Government readiness, complete readiness is still an evolving journey. There are pockets of excellence and areas of improvement. The TAM was instrumental in revealing that technological prowess alone does not dictate success; instead, it is the perception and ease of use that will drive widespread acceptance.

In essence, the TAM did not just provide a theoretical basis; it anchored the investigation, helping decode complex user behaviours and systemic challenges. It highlighted the imperative of not just creating advanced e-Government platforms, but ensuring they resonate with the very populace they aim to serve.

In conclusion, while challenges remain, the theoretical insights from the TAM offer a guiding light. For the Sol Plaatje Municipality, understanding and integrating these insights can pave the way for an e-Government model that truly transforms governance for the better.

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